



**Vietnam Veterans of America
Oregon State Council
Vietnam Veterans Memorial Highway Committee
Post Office Box 2127
Terrebonne, Oregon 97760
TEL: 541-604-0963
Email: jackdiamondback@gmail.com**

State Council Officers

Ron Morgan – President
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Oregon Senate
The Chair and Members of the Senate Veterans and
Emergency Preparedness Committee.
State House
Salem, Oregon 97301

**Testimony on SB 461 of Stuart A. Steinberg,
Vietnam Veterans of America, Oregon State Council,
Vietnam Veterans Memorial Highway Committee**

Legislators, Witnesses and Other Attending the Hearing:

My name is Stuart A. Steinberg. I am the Co-chairman of the committee that seeks to have the bill before you—SB 461—become law and part of Oregon’s great tradition of honoring its veterans. I served in the Army from 1966 – 1971, and was in Vietnam for eighteen months in 1968 -1970. I volunteered to go and then volunteered to extend my tour. In this regard, I was no different than most of the men I was honored to serve with.

I was an Explosive Ordnance Disposal operator and was wounded twice. I have the Bronze Star with “V” Device for heroism in ground combat and a second Bronze Star and two Army Commendation Medals Star for meritorious achievement in ground operations against hostile forces. I went to college and law school on the G.I. Bill. Since 1978, I have been an accredited service officer for Vietnam Veterans of America and, over the past 34 years, have assisted at least 2,000 of my fellow veterans, their widows and children, with their claims for benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs. I am proud to say that I am a co-founder of Central Oregon Veterans Outreach in Bend, one of Oregon’s premier non-profit organizations that delivers comprehensive services to the homeless, disabled and disadvantaged veterans of Central Oregon.

I am asking that this bill be passed as a way to further honor those Oregonians who served in Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos. In fact, any veteran of the Vietnam War will know that they are being honored, no matter what state he or she lives in, if they travel down Interstate 84 in Oregon. Even though our closest held memories of our time in Southeast Asia concern the men we served with in close, and often brutal, quarters, we share a bond with all Vietnam veterans and often say, when we meet another one of us, “Welcome, home.” I do not have to go into detail about how often many of these men and women who served in the Vietnam theater were shabbily treated upon their return from what had become an unpopular war. That said, it is apparent that for the past eleven years, ever since we began to send our best young people to Afghanistan and, two years later, into Iraq, people have come to better understand what it means when a young person goes off to war in the name of the United States. As a result, Vietnam veterans have now been given their just due, from our very personal national memorial—*The Wall*—to the many state memorials, like Oregon’s own, to highways being named in our honor, and even to small town memorials like the one we have, here, in Bend.

Because of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the country now has a clearer picture of the impact of extreme combat trauma on many of our soldiers. Many of the men and women who served in Vietnam have, for years, been dealing with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and the murderous diseases many of us suffer and die from that were caused by exposure to herbicides. It took us many years—too many, from my perspective as a service officer—to be justly recognized for these problems. However, I think that one of the major issues that kept many of us from seeking help, or from even admitting we were having problems, has been solved by the country’s newfound understanding of what it means to go to war, survive things very few have experienced and then come home and return to civilian life. There is no question in my mind that recognition of our sacrifices by our fellow citizens, and honoring those who served in Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos with remembrances such as the proposed *Vietnam Veterans Memorial Highway*, helps those in need to further the process of coming all the way home.

I thank you all for your time and energy in making SB 461 the law of the State.