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Written Testimony in Opposition to
House Bill-2160 Appropriating \$1, 101,334
For Campus Veterans Service Officers
House Veterans' Services and Emergency Preparedness Committee
February 21, 2013

This written testimony consists of the following paragraphs, plus the written testimony submitted during the 2009 session in opposition to the establishment and funding of the CVSO program . The primary aim of that 2009 testimony was and is to show there are a plethora of publicly funded VSOs accessible to veterans, on and off campuses, even without the CVSOs. That testimony applies equally to the current effort to fund the CVSO program to the tune of \$1,101,344 per fiscal biennium. (See below commencing on page 3: COMMENTS IN OPPOSITION TO HB-2178 CAMPUS VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS)

Since the 2009 legislative session events have strengthened my opposition to the CVSO program. The most recent event being the issuance of the President's **Executive Order 13607, Establishing Principles of Excellence for Educational Institutions Serving Service Members, Veterans, Spouses, and Other Family Members**. The institutions that agree to the guidelines of the EO shall, among other things, provide students with a personalized form covering the total cost of an education program; designate a point of contact for academic and financial counseling; provide educational plans for all individuals using veterans educational benefits that detail how they will fulfill requirements necessary to graduate and the expected timeline of completion; .designate a point of contact for academic and financial advising (including access to disability counseling) to assist veteran students and their families with the successful completion of their studies and with their job search. As I understand them, these Principles for all practical purposes make CVSOs redundant as far as GI Bill educational benefits are concerned.

As far as I can determine the following nine (9) Oregon Universities and community colleges have agreed to and are implementing or have implemented the Principles of Excellence: Central Oregon CC, Klamath CC, Linn Benton CC, Oregon State University, Portland State University, Southern Oregon University, Southwestern Oregon CC, Umpqua CC, and Western Oregon University. As I read the Executive Order and the enforcement provisions , eventually all educational institutions receiving federal funds will be required to comply with the Principles of Excellence. Thus I suggest the other Oregon public colleges and universities will soon be following the lead of the aforementioned institutions. Thus, if I am correct in my reading of the Principles of Excellence, it doesn't make sense to now fund any of the CVSOs as they will

become redundant on all campuses. . (This is not to concede they were anything more than an unaffordable convenience on any campus in the first place.)

The Principle of Excellence requirements placed on the institutions have been more than paid for via the GI Bill. Senator Wyden first made widely known to the public the exorbitant increase in college/university tuition since the 1980s. If I recall he said tuition had increased by over 400%, compared to just over 100% for the consumer price index. This is confirmed by internet sites one of which cites the figures 486% for tuition vs 115% for the CPI. It has been the functions of public colleges and universities to advise and counsel, academically and financially, to process matriculation documents, to process education benefits documents to the VA, to certify attendance and academic standing to VA, etc. since the first WWII GI Bill in 1944. (And all evidence indicates these functions have been performed well, even absent CVSOs, which represent a relatively recent effort to expand the public bureaucracy.) As indicated these functions have been more than paid for for veterans by the taxpayer via the inflation of tuition paid by the GI Bill. Those who advocate placing CVSOs on campuses to perform many of the functions of the colleges and universities contribute to this abuse of the taxpayers who pays GI Bill costs.

A year or so ago this Committee held a hearing related to recruiting of veterans as GI Bill college and university students. This was prompted, I believe, by the ODVA report that as of 2008 only a small percentage of eligible Oregon veterans were using their GI Bill educational benefits. (This was in comparison to the national average of 70 to 75 percent usage reported by the VA.) In any event I listened to the testimony of the representative of the Oregon University System and to a representative of one or more community college. I understood them to testify that they were conducting outreach efforts to recruit veterans as students, that any eligible veteran showing at the registrar's office would be enrolled, counseled by academic and financial aid counselors, signed up for his or her GI Bill educational benefits, and certified to the VA, as timely and appropriate, by the institution's Certifying Officer, the only official who may certify a GI Bill educational claim. In other words veterans were treated with TLC as GI Bill students, totally without the services of a VSO, campus or otherwise. There has been no showing whatsoever that one veteran showing up at a registrar's office and enrolling has been denied GI Bill benefits. Again confirming that CSVOs are at best a convenience, a convenience that if funded deny funds to higher priority requirements. During that hearing and since I have not seen or heard of one scintilla of evidence showing that a veteran has not received all benefits due, education or otherwise. The only complaint I have heard in my numerous contacts with veterans is the slowness of VA in processing claims, plus complaints when the VA disapproves an individual's claims. We pay the VA to review claims and to reject when not supported by the evidence. I resent my tax dollars paying another public bureaucrat to challenge decisions of the VA.

Here one might ask, What higher priorities could be funded by the funds proposed for the CVSO program.. K-12 education, for one. Anyone following events in Oregon knows that K-12 education is grossly underfunded. These are our children and grand children –our future.

Another example, directly related to veterans, is funding for Veterans Courts. Only four or five of the 27 judicial districts operate a Veterans Court. The VA indicates that for every \$1 invested in a Veterans Court, \$3.26 are saved. The Office of the Court Administrator and the Chief Justice of the Supreme advises current lack of funds precludes establishment of additional Veterans Courts, but they are seeking additional funds this legislative session.

Additionally, in relation to above, reportedly there are over 2,000 self-reported veterans locked in Oregon state prisons, at a cost of \$85 per day per prisoner, \$31, 025 per annum per prisoner. Anyone of those saved from prison by a Veterans Court would have been accost-avoidance savings of \$31, 025 per annum. Or one of those prisoners now released by a kind of a type pardon and parole board would be a savings, plus a second chance for a veteran who but for answering the nation's call to arms might not have got crosswise with the law.

In addition to information and help available from the 70 or so VSOs and claims offices , from the hundred or more service officers of VFW and other veterans organizations, student veterans organization on most or all campuses, information and help is available from DoD Transition Assistance Program, from Oregon's Reintegration Program, VA online assistance, VA online claims program. And last but not least is ODVA's excellent VETERAN BENEFITS magazine, which when coupled with the VA's pamphlet on the same subject, provides the literate veteran all the information he or she may need or want re veterans benefits. Rather than hiring additional VSOs for campuses, efforts ought to be made to make the system more efficient by reducing the numbered of paid VSOs. A start would be to ask the Secretary of State's auditors to conduct an audit of the system.

This testimony is informed by personal experience as a student immediately post-Korean War in universities in Tokyo on the GI Bill and a monetary scholarship from the Japanese Ministry of Education, as a student in US universities in the US and abroad, from dealing with universities in connection with management of Army's employee development programs. From this experience I know what it is like to be a GI Bill student, what is necessary to apply for and receive GI Bill benefits, and what universities can and will do for their students, GI Bill and otherwise.

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COMMENTS IN OPPOSITION TO HB-2178 CAMPUS VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS

The proponent of a program requiring public funding should bear the burden of proving its necessity and utility. The program to place a Veterans Service Officer (VSO) on each Oregon university and community college campus flows from the report of Governor's Task Force on Veterans' Services. (hereinafter, report.) That report contains not one shred of credible

evidence that there is a need for a VSO on each or any one of the university or college campuses.

The basic function of a VSO is to advise veterans and their families on rights and entitlements, and to assist in obtaining such. The report states a VSO is needed on each campus to “assist veterans in realizing the new GI Bill.” (pg 7 of report)

Every campus already has academic as well as financial aid counselors, several as a matter of fact. These professional counselors are equally concerned that veterans receive their federal financial aid, i.e., realize the GI Bill, because that is a source of revenue for the institution also. However, if there is evidence that such counseling is deficient, take corrective action. Train or replace, don't abuse the taxpayer by unnecessarily duplicating staff. These counselors are also state employees and are just as deserving of training as would be the VSOs which Section 3, HB-2178 requires be trained.

Legislators may satisfy themselves that on-campus financial aid counseling is available to veterans by logging on the internet. To reach a counselor on a community college campus log on www.oregon.gov/CCWD/ccdirectory.shtml and click on college of choice. Home pages vary but you can usually find veterans services by entering “veterans” in the search box or through the registrar. For a university campus log on www.osu.edu and click on campus of choice and enter “veterans” in search box.

I do not argue that the campus counselors are qualified to counsel on matters other than academics and financial aid such as GI Bill. However, as shown below there are counselors trained in the other matters easily accessible to every campus.

First, according to their web sites (counted on 8 March 2009) there are 41 county VSOs(Clackamas, Multnomah and Washington counties employed 3 to 5 VSOs) . And as of the same date, same source, there are 12 VSOs and/or support staff in two ODVA Claims and Counseling offices; one in Portland and one in Salem. Thus the state and counties employ a total of 53 individuals to advise, assist and serve basically as intermediaries between veterans and the VA which administers/decides most of benefit claims here involved.

In addition to the foregoing, the VA has four so-called Veterans Centers, one each in Grants Pass, Eugene, Salem and in Portland out on Sandy Boulevard with a total staff of 20, per internet count as of 8 March 2009. These vet centers perform basically the same counseling/advising functions as the VSOs and also assist in assembling/submitting claims. (In earlier e-mail I mistakenly identified the Eugene and Grants Pass centers with ODVA.)

Thus in addition to the VA Regional Office in downtown Portland, the ODVA in Salem, and the on-campus academic and financial aid counselors, there are over seventy (70) off-campus VSOs or VA claims officers located in every county throughout Oregon to advise and assist veterans on their benefits. Unquestionably there is a VSO or VA claims officer within easy

reach of each and every campus in the state of Oregon. I have no doubt whatsoever that veterans can find their way off campus to consult with one of these VSOs or VA Claims officers should they find a need to do so.

However, should it be determined that an on-campus VSO is essential for the non-academic, non-financial aid matters, efficient management would dictate that a nearby county or state VSO schedule time on the campus where such need has been determined essential.

Is the VSO workload such as to preclude such scheduling? No workload data has been presented in the report. However, to get a idea of what kind of wait might be involved in obtaining an appointment with a VSO, and thus an idea of workload backlog, I called the Portland Claims and Counseling office, the VA's Portland Vets Center, and a few of the county VSOs. With the exception of two county VSOs, without indicating any sense of urgency, I could have had an appointment the same day I called. With respect to the two county VSOs, I understood I could have had an appointment within a day or two.

It seems clear that there is not a large backlog or such an inordinately heavy workload as to preclude current VSO staff to get out of offices and perform scheduled visits to campuses. It would take leadership and coordination but it could be done. As good business managers know, it is good business to have an efficient backlog. Apparently in this instance there is little or no backlog.

The report brags on Oregon's outperforming most other states in terms of benefits received by veterans. The report having drawn this comparison, let's compare Oregon with another state with respect to VSO coverage. Oklahoma seems to employ far fewer VSOs than Oregon. VSOs cover the state on itinerant schedules. Log on www.ok.gov/ODVA , click on Veterans Service Representatives.

Oklahoma is geographically about same size as Oregon, has 56, 262 disabled veterans compared to Oregon's 42, 658, and provides nursing and domiciliary care to 1400 veterans as compared to Oregon's 150. In citing these numbers I do not intend to imply that Oklahoma takes better care of its veterans than Oregon . I cite them simply to show that Oklahoma also takes care of its veterans, and apparently in a more efficient manner when it comes to VSOs. (The Task Force report would have had a bit more credibility with this veteran had it had a bit less "self-congratulatory" propaganda.)

Now to the report itself. In finding number 1, page 7, the report states: "Oregon has outperformed most other states in terms of VA benefit assistance . In 2006 Oregon ranked 3rd in VA pension (\$751 million); 6th in VA compensation (\$937 million) received. The state/county Veteran Service Officer (VSO) outreach network yields incontestable value."

There is not one scintilla of evidence to connect amount of pensions or VA compensation to VSOs. For example, I fall in both categories. I received by claims submitted

directly to the VA. I had never heard of a VSO. Likewise with the several veteran acquaintances. One can assume, but it is only an assumption, that VSOs probably helped many of the beneficiaries. Another question, of course, were the VSOs essential to the receipt, or would the veterans have gotten the benefits anyway by dealing directly with the VA? That VSOs may have helped many veteran claimants does not in any way justify hiring an additional 24 or 25 VSOs, one for each university and community college campus.

Page 48 of the report states, "During multiple town halls, the Task Force also heard the theme of veterans seeking information, often false, from one another, this was particularly true at college campuses."

I attended the Beaverton/Hillsboro town hall. There were five or six of the Task Force members present. There was not a large number in attendance. Not one word was said at that town hall to support the above quote. Certainly nothing was said about needing VSOs on college campuses. Issues raised by veterans at that town hall involved health care, transport to health care facilities, Tri-care, and jobs.

The record indicates members of the Task Force visited three campuses: Portland State University (PSU), Clackamas Community College and Oregon Southern. Not a very wide sampling upon which to base a significant and costly management decision. Oregon Southern is not listed on the internet among the 17 Oregon community colleges. Three, assuming three were visited, is not a very wide sampling from 25 campuses. Be that as it may be, let's examine that assertion.

The question here is must veterans rely on fellow veterans for information regarding benefits. Let's take PSU first. What is available on campus? To review what PSU offers, google on Portland State University, click on Financial Aid, then Types of Aid, Veterans Benefits. Or if physically on campus one may go to the Office of Veterans Services or go to see the Veterans Certification Officer, 104 Neuberger Hall.

Also to be found on both Portland State University and Clackamas is an on-going student organization. Google Student Veterans Organization of America, click on Chapter Info, Chapter Locator, Browse by Zip and enter 97007. You'll find contacts for the student veterans organization at PSU, Clackamas and Clark. While at that web page open Resource Library. You will find a more comprehensive library and links to more official "helping" organizations than you will find on the ODVA web site.

The report refers to the "veterans' landscape." The veterans attending colleges and universities are not potted plants on that landscape. As a general rule they are computer and internet literate, have access to both, and use both. VA, Small Business Administration, US Office of Personnel Management, Department of Labor Employment and Training Service and so on all have web sites. Veterans attending college know how to find, read and apply. They are not stuck with relying on misinformation from any source.

However, if one were to assume a veteran couldn't find assistance on the PSU campus, PSU is located only a few city blocks from the federal building at 1220 SW 3rd, Portland. In that building is the VA regional office with a score or more of claims officers ready, willing and able to assist. Moreover, ODVA's Portland Claims and Counseling office is located in that building. Finally, each of the major veterans organizations such as VFW, DAV and American Legion have VSOs located in that building. A plethora of assistance is available to the veteran student at PSU, on campus or within walking distance. It is absurd to hold that now an additional campus VSO is required.

Page 11 of the report states: "The ODVA trialed a VSO on the campus of Portland State University with impressive results." (underscoring added)

Page 48 of the report discusses those alleged impressive results. "Many of the more than 100 veterans the VSO met did not know they had GI Bill eligibility, disability compensation benefits, or access to vocational rehabilitation. With the passage of the new GI Bill, VSOs on campus would ensure that post 9/11 veterans understood and maximized this benefit, bringing federal education dollars to Oregon." (underscoring added)

That a veteran who honorably served and is attending a university would not know he or she is eligible for the GI Bill, if in fact eligible, is unbelievable. Probably the most famous piece of social legislation in the history of this nation. Many, if not most, enlist with the aim of eventually attending college on the GI Bill. It is a recruitment incentive widely used. Service members are given intensive pre-separation orientations these days. The GI Bill is emphasized. The separating service member leaves with literature on all the benefits. Log on Turbo Tap.

Assuming these many veterans did not get it during separation orientation, it is unbelievable that they enrolled in PSU without identifying themselves as veterans, and did not have the initiative to ask about financial assistance. No curiosity at all! And with the many sources of veterans benefits information available to PSU veteran student, as indicated above, and no one mentioned GI Bill. Unbelievable! And I don't believe it! This incredible assertion reflects on the credibility of all written in the report about the need for VSOs on college campuses.

The report has not submitted any credible evidence whatsoever in support of spending public funds to hire VSOs for university and college campuses. I believe it has been shown above that such would serve no useful purpose. They would, in essence, duplicate services already readily and easily accessible to veterans and their families.

Moreover, even if the VSOs could be of benefit to a few on-campus veterans, it is abundantly clear this is not a priority need. There are many higher priorities relating to health care alone, for example. The public coffers are not bottomless. To fund this program and other

non-essential programs is to deny funds for more critical needs, such as care for the severely disabled, mentally and physically.

At the state level, we read every day that K-12 education and public safety is underfunded. Again all the government revenue comes from the same pockets. To fund non-essential programs such as under discussion is to deny funds to more critical unmet needs.

Request the committee disapprove HB-2178.