


## A tale of two bills

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### Tuition equity on fast track; similar bill for veterans stalls

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Oregon's 2013 legislative session has been under way for a little more than a month at the state capitol in Salem. That may not seem like long, but it's already enough time to see which bills are on the fast track to passage and how that process compares with that used for bills less favored by key constituencies.

Naturally, partisan politics plays a big part in which bills advance and which ones do not. Legislators prioritize the bills that are most important to them and the voters that they represent. Other bills are assigned to certain committees, never to be heard from again.

Among the bills on its way to passage is House Bill 2787. That measure is referred to as the "tuition equity" bill, and would allow students who are not citizens or lawful permanent residents to pay in-state tuition at Oregon colleges.

HB 2787 has been identified as a legislative priority for many groups, and its support is widespread and diverse. Thus far, HB 2787 has had a fairly easy time navigating the legislative process.

The first reading of the bill was conducted on Feb. 6, shortly after the start of the session. It was referred to the desk of House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland and made its way to the House Higher Education and Workforce Development Committee.

A public hearing was held on Feb. 13, with two work sessions following immediately afterward. HB 2787 was passed out of the committee Feb. 19 with a do-pass recommendation. A second reading was held on the House floor the next day, with a third reading on Feb. 22.

Tuition equity was passed by the House on a 38-18 vote, with all of the opposition coming from Republicans. The bill then made its way over to the Senate, where a first reading was held Feb. 26. It was then referred to the desk of Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem. He is one of the bill's chief sponsors.

From there, HB 2787 was referred to the Senate Education and Workforce Development Committee, which is chaired by Sen. Mark Hass, D-Washington County.

Like Courtney, Hass also is a sponsor of the bill.

HB 2787 is set for a public hearing and work session in that committee on March 19.

Along the way, HB 2787 has been publicly supported by many entities throughout the state. Jim Francensconi, director of the state board of higher education, the Oregon Business Association, the presidents of all six schools in the Oregon University System, Associated Oregon Industries, the City of Portland, Oregon Association of Nurseries, SEIU, ACLU of Oregon and others have provided testimony in favor of HB 2787.

A similar bill, HB 2158, would allow non-resident veterans discharged under other than dishonorable conditions to pay tuition and fees at Oregon resident rates.

Another bill, HB 2162, would remove the 12-month residency requirement for admission as residents to community colleges and public universities for persons who are members of specific uniformed services and their spouses and dependents.

Military veterans are a group whose support is typically courted by politicians. But despite that, neither of those bills appears to be advancing anywhere nearly as rapidly as HB 2787.

HB 2158 and HB 2162 were both filed pre-session at the request of the House Interim Committee on Veterans Affairs. First readings both those bills were held Jan. 14 and they were referred to the Veterans and Emergency Preparedness Committee, with subsequent referral to the budget-writing Ways and Means Committee.

## Pamplin Media Group - A tale of two bills

Public hearings on both bills were held Feb. 26, but no action has been taken since. And many of the groups that have spoken up in favor of HB 2787 have not yet done so with regards with HB 2158 and HB 2162.

Rep. Bill Kenemer, R-Oregon City, represents Estacada in the House. He voted against 2787, and said that the disparity between how that bill and the veterans bills are being handled is "starting to raise eyebrows."

"Politics is driving the solution," Kenemer said. "What about equal treatment? If we're going to treat people special, vets should be among those. For veterans who are returning, it would be nice if they would settle here and find jobs here. Vets make good students, employees and citizens."

Particularly concerning to Kenemer is the approach that the non-partisan Legislative Fiscal Office has taken to all of these bills.

An impact statement for HB 2787 dated Feb. 14 states that the bill would bring \$334,820 into the state during the 2013-15 biennium and \$1.5 million for 2015-17. The OUS estimates that 38 students statewide would take advantage of the in-state tuition opportunity in 2013-15 and 80 would in 2015-17, with those students spread out evenly across all six campuses within the university system.

To compile those numbers, OUS looked at figures from Washington, Kansas, New Mexico, Texas and Wisconsin after they adopted tuition equity measures.

But when it comes to HB 2158 and HB 2162, the legislative website states that both measures "may have a fiscal impact, but no statement yet issued" as of Friday, March 8.

Kenemer questions why different standards are being applied to both sets of constituencies, especially since many veterans over the years have used the G.I. Bill to pay for their tuition.

"The universities have been clear that one program would add costs, but the other one didn't add costs," he said.

The LFO was created with the idea of preparing objective information for legislators to consider, Kenemer said, "but this makes it pretty clear that doesn't always work." He adds that political pressure may be playing a part.

"I suspect that has a lot of heavy weight," Kenemer said. "This wouldn't be the first instance of favoritism I've seen, but they're usually more even-handed."

Sen. Alan Olsen, R-Canby, represents Estacada in that chamber.

Olsen is a veteran and a member of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee. He said he feels very strongly about passing HB 2158.

"It's a good bill," he said. "Why shouldn't non-resident veterans who are honorably discharged get in-state tuition? They fight for the protection of the entire United States, which we are a part of."

Kenemer said that the discrepancies between how the sets of bills are being handled reflect poorly on the LFO.



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**Linda McKenney Narup** · John Bapst Memorial High School

I agree with Sen. Alan Olsen, non resident veterans who are honorably discharged should get in-state tuition.

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