

**TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 2036**

**“Relating to veterans memorial highways”**

**To**

**OREGON HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS’ SERVICES  
AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS**

**By**

**LTC (RET) DICK TOBIASON  
CHAIRMAN, BEND HEROES FOUNDATION**

**FEBRUARY 5, 2015**

Testimony of LTC (Retired) Allan R. "Dick" Tobiason before the Oregon House Committee on Veterans' Services and Emergency Preparedness.

Chairman Lively and Distinguished Members.

I am Dick Tobiason, Chairman of the Bend Heroes Foundation, a non profit 501(c)(3) organization in Bend honoring veterans. I am a retired Army Lieutenant Colonel and a 2 tour Vietnam veteran. I am a member of the American Legion, Military Officers Association of America, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Veterans of Foreign Wars and Vietnam Veterans of America.

Bend Heroes Foundation's contact information is 1900 NE 3<sup>rd</sup> St, Suite 106 #205, Bend, OR 97701, 541 388-5591.

I am accompanied by Robert Lee Walker III, an Army Veteran who served in Kosovo and Iraq as a Specialist 4. Mr. Walker is a Director and web master for Bend Heroes Foundation.

I invited Joel Dulashanti to join us as he is an Army Veteran who served in Afghanistan with the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division. Sergeant Dulashanti was wounded severely during combat. He lives in Portland and is a member of the Military Order of the Purple Heart.

Joining us is Keegan Hodges, a Navy Gulf War Veteran and Second Vice Commander, American Legion Department of Oregon and Dennis Guthrie, an Army Vietnam War Veteran and Chairman of the Oregon Department of Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Legislation Committee.

It is an honor for us to testify to you in support of HB 2036 today.

Beginning in 2008, Bend Heroes Foundation requested legislation designating 2 border to border highways in Oregon honoring WWII and Vietnam War veterans on US 97 (WWII) and Interstate 84 (Vietnam). The Foundation raised the funds and managed the installation of 18 WWII Veterans Historic Highway signs on US 97. The Foundation and Oregon State Council, Vietnam Veterans of America raised funds and installed 16 Vietnam Veterans Memorial Highway signs on Interstate 84.

Many County Commissions along the highways donated on behalf of their citizens honoring these war veterans.

On both highway projects we enjoyed an outstanding relationship with Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) Region 4 designing and installing the signs. We paid ODOT to install the signs when volunteer contractors were not available.

WWII and Vietnam Veterans sincerely appreciate their new highway signs. We hope to see that repeated on Interstate 5 and US 101 soon. There are no surviving WWI Veterans to enjoy their signs on US 395.  
(slides 1, 2)

We thank Representative John Huffman for his leadership with the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Highway legislation and HB 2036. Representative Huffman was the keynote speaker for the dedication of the 377 mile Vietnam Veterans Memorial Highway on Memorial Day last year.

Bend Heroes Foundation requested HB 2036 and enthusiastically supports it now before this Committee. If enacted into law, HB 2036 will accomplish our vision of honoring all Oregon veterans who served during 5 major wars around the globe from WWI to the present – 98 years. That would be accomplished with prominent ODOT- approved signs installed along 1,343 miles of 4 new border-to-border highways in Oregon.

The 4 border to border highways total 1,343 miles:

US 395/ WWI:	389 miles
I-5/Korean War:	308 miles
I-5/Purple Heart Trail	308 miles
US 101/Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, Iraq Wars:	338 miles

(slides 3,4,5)

All together Oregon would have 6 border to border veterans' highways totaling 2,115 miles including the 70 mile "Sunset Highway" section of US 26 between Portland and its intersection with US 101. The Sunset Highway honors Oregon's 41<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division.

(slide 6)

The 4 proposed honorary highways are highly visible means of honoring these war veterans:

WWI Veterans: 44,166 served, 2,866 casualties. None living  
Korean War Veterans: 74,000 served, 941 casualties, 29,356 living

Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, Iraq War Veterans: 89,812 served, 790 casualties, 85,923 living  
Totals for 3 wars: 207,978 served, 4,597 casualties, 115,279 living

By designating these 3 highways in their honor, Oregon will join many other states honoring their war veterans – those who served, those who died, those wounded and those living.

The Purple Heart medal is a combat decoration and it is our nation's oldest military medal. It was created by General George Washington in 1782 and was known as the Badge of Military Merit. The Badge of Military Merit was made of cloth and it is the predecessor of the Purple Heart medal.

The Purple Heart is awarded to members of the U.S. armed forces who are wounded by the enemy and posthumously to the next of kin of those who were killed in action (KIA) or die of wounds received in action (WIA). The heritage it represents is sacred to those who understand the price paid to wear it.

The purpose of the Purple Heart Trail is to create a symbolic and honorary system of roads, highways and bridges that pay tribute to the 1.8 million men and women who have been awarded the Purple Heart medal since 1932.

The Purple Heart Trail accomplishes this honorary goal by creating a visual reminder to those who use the road system that others have paid a high price for their freedom to travel and live in a free society.

Designating I-5 also as a Purple Heart Trail will honor Oregon's 6,022 war dead and the estimated 15,051 combat wounded veterans. The Purple Heart Trail will also honor recipients who live in Oregon and who earned the medal while residents of other states.

Oregon DMV has issued 2,321 Purple Heart license plates. Almost 500 Purple Heart recipients from Oregon are enrolled in the little known National Purple Heart Hall of Honor in New York. Locally Purple Heart recipients are honored in 6 Purple Heart Cities in Oregon – Albany, Medford, Redmond, Bend, Prineville and La Pine with Albany and Medford located on I-5.

As a Purple Heart Trail, Oregon's I-5 would link Purple Heart Trails on I-5 in California and Washington becoming the first continuous Purple Heart Trail between Canada and Mexico. There are Purple Heart Trails in 45 states and none spanning our nation according to the Military Order of the Purple Heart.

(slide 7)

While all of Oregon's 21,000 war casualties and their counterparts from other states living in Oregon probably did not receive the Purple Heart Medal, they would be honored by the Oregon Purple Heart Trail on the heavily traveled 1,381 mile Interstate 5 highway between our nation's borders with Canada and Mexico.

HB 2036 like the WWII and Vietnam highways already designated by SB 449 and SB 461 would require Oregon Department of Transportation to install and maintain suitable markers along each highway and allow ODOT to accept moneys from and enter into agreements with veterans groups to create, install and maintain the highway signs. ODOT would not be allowed to use public funds.

Some of the highways have multiple names. Those names and associated information on maps would not be changed by HB 2036. There is no limit on how many names or honorary designations a highway can have. All of the new veterans highways would be honorary designations just as the WWII and Vietnam Veterans highways were designated.

With HB 2036 enacted into law, all Oregon veterans who served during 5 major wars over the last 98 years would be honored. This would include the 479,762 who served, the 6,022 who died, the 15,051 who were wounded and the 257,152 living war veterans in Oregon.

(slide 8)

About 78% of Oregon's 331,600 living veterans served during the 5 wars with about 800 still deployed in Afghanistan. The honorific signs will be seen by many veterans as a meaningful tribute by fellow Oregonians for their service and sacrifice during war.

There are almost 100 Congressionally chartered veterans groups (American Legion, AMVETS, DAV, KWVA, MOPH, VFW, VVA) located along US 395, I-5 and US 101. HB 2036 enacted into law will provide them

new opportunities to honor their veterans, raise funds for the new signs and attract more members to their groups – especially younger veterans.  
(slide 9)

Twelve veterans whose homes of record were along US 101 made the ultimate sacrifice in Iraq and Afghanistan. They represent 11% of Oregon's war dead from those wars. It would be a grand tribute to honor them with signs near their cities and on THEIR highway. There are between 1 and 4 veterans groups (American Legion, AMVETS, DAV, VVA) located in the 6 "Gold Star" cities located on US 101.  
(slide 5 repeat)

Congress chartered the non-profit Korean War Veterans Association (KWVA) and Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH) to represent their specific veterans group. There is no such organization in Oregon representing our nation's oldest war veterans – WWI and youngest – Persian Gulf, Afghanistan and Iraq. That is why we should speak for them now as we did for WWII Veterans on US Highway 97. There are no surviving WWI Veterans in the world. And we should not wait decades to honor Oregon's youngest war veterans as was the case for their predecessors.

Two of these highways were selected based on war memorials on or near the highways or the proximity of similar highways in adjoining states:

I-5: Oregon Korean War Memorial at Wilsonville created by Korean War Veterans.  
(slide 10)

US 101: American Veterans and Desert Storm Memorial, Lincoln City, created by Mr. Mark S. Hemstreet, founder and owner of Shilo Inns Suites Hotels.  
(slide 11)

I-5: California and Washington Purple Heart Trails on I-5.

Mr. Robert D. Maxwell, a Director of Bend Heroes Foundation and at 94 years old, is our nation's oldest Medal of Honor recipient and recipient of 2 Purple Heart Medals during WWII. Mr. Maxwell is very pleased with HB 2036, especially as it ensures our now departed WWI Veterans will not be

forgotten and Oregon's youngest combat veterans are honored now while most are living among us.

Bend Heroes Foundation wholeheartedly supports HB 2036 because the honorific signs it would allow will instill pride and appreciation in war veterans, educate the traveling public about the service and sacrifice of Oregon's war veterans over the last 98 years, and complete the 5 war veterans' war highways and Purple Heart Trail we requested.

Mr. Hodges and Mr. Guthrie have comments to offer on HB 2036.

Specialist Walker and Sergeant Dulashanti might wish to comment on the significance of the proposed Purple Heart Trail on I-5 and the Persian Gulf/Afghanistan/Iraq Veterans Highway on US 101.

We thank the Committee for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 2036.

We would be pleased to respond to questions the Committee may have.

DT 2/3/2015 2050