

Stop lawmakers' attack on veterans' preference (OPINION)

capitol.JPG

The Oregon Capitol in Salem. *(Michelle Brence/Staff)*

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on April 24, 2015 at 3:00 PM, updated April 24, 2015 at 3:01 PM

By Sean Riddell

In 1780, to appease the officers of the American Revolutionary Army, Congress promised the officers a lifetime pension at half pay and all back pay owed, if they remained in uniform and continued to prosecute the War of Independence without compensation. In 1783, with independence in sight, Congress determined that the fledgling country could not afford to honor their earlier promises. Debate and lobbying ensued to deny the veterans the promised back pay and pensions.

Upon hearing of the debate, the officers of the Revolutionary Army, stationed in Newburgh, N.Y., met in a church to discuss mass mutiny and desertion in protest of Congress' actions. General George Washington, hearing of the meeting, invited himself and gave what historians call the "Newburgh Address." Gen. Washington begged his officers to remain at their posts despite Congress' actions. He went on to promise that he would do everything in his power and call in every favor to ensure Congress made good on their earlier promises. It is reported that when he was done there was not a dry eye present. The officers did not abandon their posts.

Currently in Salem, a group of nameless and faceless elected officials and bureaucrats are following in the tradition of the 1783 Congress. Senate Bill 87 is a bill without a sponsor, but it is quietly and slowly finding its way to the floor for a vote. Its sole purpose is to gut Oregon's veterans' preference in public employment law. Under the existing law, a public employer must provide a qualified veteran and qualified disabled veteran with a numerical preference at each stage of a hiring or promotion process. The preference exists because it is often difficult to quantify how an applicant's military experience and training apply to a civilian employer. It is also recognition that the years of volunteer military service and years out of the civilian workforce may place the veteran at a disadvantage. Finally, the law is an acknowledgement that the modern day veteran is a member of the first all-volunteer force this country possessed since the Revolutionary War.

Senate Bill 87 seeks to remove the guarantee of recognition and afford bureaucrats and elected officials with the sole discretion in determining when to recognize a veteran's service. The bill's most offensive provision requires the veteran to provide proof and an argument regarding why their respective military service is worthy of a preference, and how their skills are transferable to their current employer. Adding insult to injury, the "public employer" has "sole discretion" when determining if the veteran is worthy of preference.

A few have testified in favor of the bill, but none have mentioned how a jury recently awarded a veteran \$260,000 when the city of Portland did not comply the current veteran's preference law, or that the Multnomah

County Sheriff's Office was recently fined \$50,000 by the Bureau of Labor and Industry for failing to provide preference to a disabled veteran during a promotion process. Furthermore, none mentioned that the working group that authored Senate Bill 87 contained representatives from the city of Portland and Multnomah County.

We as Americans have many traditions. Most are proud. Our tradition to forget the sacrifices of our veterans at the conclusion of hostilities dates back to 1783 and appears to be alive and well today. I ask all to contact your state representative and senator urge a "no" vote on Senate Bill 87. In the alternative, I invite the nameless sponsors of the bill to an open and public debate at the time and place of their choosing.

Sean Riddell, a disabled veteran, is a lawyer in Portland who serves the legal needs of veterans and law enforcement officers.

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Sean Riddle, Esq, is a former Deputy Attorney General in the Oregon Department of Justice, a serving senior Marine Corps Reserve officer, and lawyer in private practice. Mr. Riddell who was fully aware of SB 87 based on his private law practice but did not testify or submit public testimony at the two public hearing on Senate Bill 87 on 3/17/15 and 4/21/15.