

TESTIMONY

On

HB 2100A2, HCR 1-2, HCR 9, HCR 10

OREGON SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' SERVICES
AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

By

DICK TOBIASON
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CHAIRMAN, BEND HEROES FOUNDATION

April 25, 2017

Chair Boquist and Distinguished Committee Members.

I am Dick Tobiason, Chairman of the Bend Heroes Foundation, a non profit 501(c)(3) organization in Bend honoring veterans and first responders. I am a retired Army Lieutenant Colonel, Master Army Aviator, a 2 tour Vietnam veteran and 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.

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Mr. Robert D. "Bob" Maxwell, a Director of Bend Heroes Foundation and at 96 years young is our nation's oldest living Medal of Honor recipient had planned to testify today. He cannot be with us today as his health requires him to continue physical rehabilitation following surgery. He respectfully requests this Committee to pass all pieces of legislation subject to today's hearing. Let's pray Mr. Maxwell will be able to attend the Senate floor vote.

It is an honor for me to testify to you today in support of HB 2100A2 designating US Highway 20 as the "Oregon Medal of Honor Highway", HCR 1-2 designating 12 Oregon cities and communities as "Medal of Honor City/Community" and HCRs 9 and 10 honoring Mr. Robert D. Maxwell and commending Bend Heroes Foundation.

On February 16, 2017 I testified to the House Rules Committee on HCR 1 which would designate 12 Oregon cities as "**Medal of Honor City or Community**". HB 2100A2 is the vehicle which would require ODOT to install signs on US Highway 20 and markers in or near the 12 Medal of Honor Cities defined in HCR 1-2 and HB 2100A2. HCR 9 honors Mr. Robert D. Maxwell and HCR 10 commends Bend Heroes Foundation. HCR 1, HCR 9 and HCR 10 were approved by unanimous vote of the House of Representatives on March 2.

I testified to the House Veterans and Emergency Preparedness Committee on Feb. 16 on the original HB 2100 that would have designated almost all of Interstate 5 and all of I-205 as the Oregon Medal of Honor Highway. At the conclusion of that hearing it was agreed by all that US Highway 20 in Oregon would replace I-5/I-205 as I-5 had already been designated the Korean War Veterans Memorial Highway and Purple Heart Trail (HB 2036)

and the signs had been installed. HB 2100, HCR 9 and HCR 10 were passed by the House Veterans and Emergency Preparedness Committee on February 16. HCR 1 was passed by the House Rules Committee on February 16. HB 2100, HCR 1, HCR 9 and HCR 10 were passed by the House vote on March 2. All voting was unanimous.

We thank Representative John Huffman, Representative Gene Whisnant and Senator Tim Knopp for their leadership sponsoring HB 2100A2 and HCR 1-2 and previous legislation honoring veterans with memorial highways across Oregon.

We thank this Committee for adopting several revisions to HB 2100A and HCR 1 that we requested.

Two years ago on April 28, 2015, I testified to this committee in support of HB 2036 designating 3 more border to border highways honoring more of Oregon's war veterans on US Highway 101, US Highway 395 and Interstate 5. Bend Heroes Foundation requested that legislation and this Committee unanimously supported it as did your counterpart committee in the House and the full Oregon House and Senate.

I am very pleased to tell you that HB 2036 has been fully implemented with the installation of 32 signs along these highways at a cost of about \$28,000 – all raised by veterans. Thank you Chair Boquist for your very kind letter of January 6, 2016 to me on the dedication of the Persian Gulf/Afghanistan/Iraq Veterans Memorial Highway sign.
(Slide 2):

Thus, our vision of honoring Oregon's nearly one-half million veterans who served, the 6,022 who died and the 15,000 who were wounded during 5 major wars over the last 100 years has been accomplished with the installation of 67 signs on 5 major border-to-border highways across Oregon. Note that the signs were installed along the highways and the Purple Heart Trail signs displayed the Purple Heart Medal.
(Slides 3 – 8):

All together we raised about \$70,100 to fund 67 signs on the 5 highways.

We enjoyed an outstanding relationship with Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) installing the signs. ODOT designated a project

manager to work with us across its many Districts for the 3 highways. That precedent could be applied again to the “**Oregon Medal of Honor Highway**” crossing many ODOT Regions and Districts along the 450 mile US Highway 20.

Bend Heroes Foundation requested HB 2100 and HCR 1 to complete the concept we envisioned 12 years ago that would honor Oregon’s nearly half million war veterans and Oregon’s 26 recipients of the Medal of Honor, our nation’s highest award for military valor above and beyond the call of duty. To receive this award, the recipient had to have risked his or her life to save others during war. Almost 60% of our nation’s 2,603 recipients since WWI died as a result of their unselfish and courageous act of heroism saving others.

Mr. Robert D. Maxwell of Bend was awarded the Medal of Honor for heroism during WWII when he saved his 3 comrades from certain death by throwing himself on a German hand grenade thrown into their midst on September 7, 1944 in Besancon, France. He also received 2 Silver Stars, a Bronze Star, 2 Purple Hearts, French Croix de Guerre and French Legion of Honor during WWII.

At 96, Mr. Maxwell is the oldest of 76 living Medal of Honor recipients of all wars living in our nation. In our view, he represents all 3,498 recipients of our nation’s highest award for military valor. He is also a Director of Bend Heroes Foundation.

Medal of Honor recipients are awarded one of three different medals according to their military service: Army, Navy, Marines, Coast Guard and Air Force.

(Slide 9)

Oregon’s 26 Medal of Honor recipients earned the medal during 8 wars in 10 countries over 108 years beginning with the Civil War and ending with the Vietnam War.

(Slide 10):

The honors to these war heroes, future recipients connected with Oregon and Medal of Honor recipients from other states traveling in Oregon would be accomplished with the installation of ODOT- approved “**Oregon Medal of Honor Highway**” signs on 450 miles of US Highway 20 between

Newport Oregon where the 3,365 mile US Highway 20 across America begins and Oregon's border with Idaho (HB 2100A2). Oregon's 26 recipients will be honored by name and war/campaign on "**Medal of Honor City**" or "**Community**" markers in or near 12 cities across Oregon (HCR 1-2).

(Slides 11-18)

Among other features, city markers for individual recipients in 12 cities would include the image of the recipient's Medal of Honor, image of the recipient or grave, citation, name of war or campaign, burial location and QR code. Markers for multiple recipients from the same city would display the appropriate medals, recipient names, military service, names of wars and quick response code (QR) of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society. The QR code will allow viewers to find more information on each recipient, history of the Medal of Honor etc.

US 20 passes through 2 Medal of Honor Cities – Corvallis (Capt. Edward C. Allworth/WWI) and Bend (Tech. 5th Grade Robert D. Maxwell/WWII). US 20 also passes through Lebanon where the Oregon Veterans Home named for Edward C. Allworth is located.

While at least 12 states have Medal of Honor highways, they are short in length and were dedicated to a few of the State's MOH recipients – not all of the state's recipients or border to border in length as we proposed in HB 2100A. Thus, Oregon would be setting another first in the nation precedent honoring veterans.

The 12 "**Medal of Honor City/Community**" cities were selected on the basis of where the Medal of Honor recipient entered military service, lived after receipt of the award or where they were laid to rest.

The following cities in Oregon meet that criteria:

Agness, Bend, Corvallis, Eugene, Hood River, Jordan Valley, Medford, Oakridge, Richland, Portland, Salem and The Dalles. Some of the markers would display more than one name –

1 name: Agness, Bend, Corvallis, Eugene, Hood River, Medford, Oakridge, Richland, Jordan Valley, The Dalles

2 names: Salem, The Dalles

12 names: Portland

We have found only 1 city in our nation that was designated Medal of Honor City – Gainesville, Texas.

Idaho, where Mr. Maxwell was born 96 years ago has installed 4 Medal of Honor Highway signs along its 118 mile State Highway 3. That highway was designated by the legislature as the “**North Idaho Medal of Honor Highway**”. To date that is thought to be the longest Medal of Honor Highway in the nation. Two large signs were posted near the ends of the highway at turnouts and 2 smaller signs were placed along the highway in between. The large signs on the “North Idaho Medal of Honor Highway” display all 3 Medal of Honor medals, the names of 13 recipients, their wars, hometown and military service (Army, Marines, etc.). That highway is not a border to border highway nor does it honor all 46 recipients connected with Idaho. However, that precedent is a fine example for markers placed in selected rest areas and turnouts on the Oregon Medal of Honor Highway. (Slide 19, 20)

The signs along US 20 in Oregon will display the 3 versions of the Medal of Honor and “**Oregon Medal of Honor Highway**”

It would be appropriate to place some of the highway signs in rest areas and turnouts as recommended by ODOT. Those signs would display the 3 medals, names of all 26 recipients, associated wars, military service, text describing the Medal of Honor and the QR code for the Congressional Medal of Honor Society. Those markers would be lower to the ground to allow reading and taking of photographs and be ADA accessible. (Slide 13)

Legislatures in 8 other states have designated “Medal of Honor Highways” honoring individual Medal of Honor recipients. Four (Alabama, Idaho, Michigan and Texas) states display the medal. It is apparent that the DOTs in those states were able to get approvals from federal counterparts to display the medals just as 10 states including Oregon did with Purple Heart medals on their Purple Heart Trail signs. (Slide 21)

Since Bend Heroes Foundation will be raising the funds to implement HB 2100A2 and HCR 1-2 and working with ODOT, HB 2100A2 should include provisions for Bend Heroes Foundation to use entities other than ODOT to design, fabricate and install Medal of Honor city/community markers when ODOT does not have the capability. For example, assuming we will have approvals from property owners, we envision installing engraved granite or metallic markers at or near veterans' memorials in some of the 12 cities.

If enacted into law, HB 2100A2 and HCR 1-2 together will honor Oregon's 26 Medal of Honor recipients and create two more firsts in our nation: a 450 mile border to border highway honoring all of the State's Medal of Honor recipients, any future recipients, any recipients traveling on US 20 and a Medal of Honor City or Community for every Medal of Honor recipient connected with Oregon now and in the future.

Sixteen (45%) of Oregon's 36 counties are included in the 12 Medal of Honor cities and the 450 mile Oregon Medal of Honor Highway along U.S. Highway 20.

At 3,365 miles long, US 20 is the longest highway in our nation and passes through 12 states home to 56% of all 3,498 Medal of Honor recipients. Mr. Maxwell and I urge the Oregon legislature and ODOT to set a very high standard with the first border to border Medal of Honor Highway in our nation. By doing so, other states might want to follow our precedent either on US Highway 20 "Across America" or elsewhere just as we in Oregon by creating the first Purple Heart Trail across our nation and the first border to border Persian Gulf, Afghanistan and Iraq Veterans Memorial Highway in our nation (HB 2036).

I have informed the Congressional Medal of Honor Foundation and Congressional Medal of Honor Society of HB 2100A2 and HCR 1-2 so they can "spread the word" to their membership.

Beyond honoring Medal of Honor recipients, our objective in the 2 measures is to educate the public on the history and uniqueness of the Medal of Honor as the medal is indeed a very rare award and seen by very few. As there are only 76 Medal of Honor recipients from all wars living in our nation today including Mr. Maxwell, it is rare indeed that the public will ever personally meet a recipient.

Thousands of students have met Medal of Honor recipients during annual Congressional Medal of Honor Society conventions and during “Character Development Program” classes. Of the 42 million veterans who have served our nation, only 1 in 12,000 were awarded the Medal of Honor.

As we did for the 5 veterans memorial highways and Purple Heart Trail, we will work with ODOT on the design and locations of the highway signs and city markers. In some cases we will seek approval from property owners to install “**Medal of Honor City or Community**” markers at certain veterans’ memorials, e.g., Willamette National Cemetery (12 recipients), Oregon State University (Edward Allworth), Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs memorial park in Salem (Henry Schauer and Lewis Phife), Oregon Veterans Home in The Dalles (Stanley Adams), VA Clinic in The Dalles (Loren Kaufman), City of Medford’s Veterans Memorial Park (Frank High), City of Oakridge’s Greenwaters Park (Maximo Yabes), etc.

As in the past, we would raise the necessary funds – about \$25,000 - \$30,000 to implement HB 2100A2 and HCR 1-2.

If enacted into law, HB 2100A2 and its companion HCR 1-2 will educate the traveling public, historians and especially students about the service and sacrifice of Oregon’s most highly decorated war heroes over 100 plus years and complete our 12 years of work on an integrated Oregon veterans’ memorial highway system.

In conclusion, Bend Heroes Foundation supports HB 2100A2 and HCR 1-2 and respectfully requests this Committee to approve them.

We also support HCR 9 honoring Mr. Maxwell as he has been a long time Director of Bend Heroes Foundation and inspired all who meet him to support and honor our veterans, the flag of our nation, and educate our youth on American history.

We also support HCR 10 commending Bend Heroes Foundation for its many veterans and first responders projects over many years. All members of the Foundation serve enthusiastically and without pay. I have submitted a report of the Foundation’s 35 projects valued at almost \$900,000.

I thank the Committee for this opportunity to testify today.

I would be pleased to respond to your comments and questions.

POWER POINT SLIDES

1. Title page
2. Map of Oregon's 5 Veterans highways
- 3–8. Photos of signs on 5 Veterans highways
9. 3 Medals
10. Spreadsheet of Medal of Honor recipients by wars
11. Map of Oregon Medal of Honor Highway
12. Oregon Medal of Honor Highway sign
13. Medal of Honor marker at rest areas, turnouts
14. Map of US 20 across United States
15. Map of 12 Medal of Honor Cities/Community
16. Medal of Honor City marker
17. Portland Medal of Honor City marker
18. Map of Oregon Medal of Honor Highway and 12 MOH Cities
- 19, 20. Idaho Medal of Honor sign on SR 3
21. Medal of Honor highways signs in 4 states

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