

# *Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States*

FOUNDED 1899



— HEADQUARTERS —

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25 April 2017

Joint Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development.  
900 Court St. NE, H178  
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Co-Chairs Johnson and Gomberg,

Thank you for taking the time to consider written testimony from the Department of Oregon, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW) concerning funding for Veterans Services to all Oregon veterans and their families.

In our February 15, 2017 testimony to the Committee we emphasized that when the Oregon voters passed Measure 96 by 84%, the largest margin of any measure in the history of our state, they did so with the understanding that 1.5% of the lottery funds would supplement the current amount from the General Fund, not replace those funds. Our testimony also provided detailed information on the Veterans of Foreign Wars Service Office currently serving all veterans who request assistance. The funding requested in our February testimony is essential to maintain the VFW Service Office as a viable option for the thousands of Veterans that chose to have the VFW assist them with their VA claims. The funding needed and requested from lottery proceeds is significantly greater than the token amount previously allocated from the general fund.

Only one in three of our veterans access their earned benefits. Although there is a percentage of these veterans that will never access their benefits, there are thousands that will. Many of these veterans do not know they are entitled to a benefit and many others have been frustrated by the VA claims process. The most effective way for veterans to access their earned benefits is with the assistance of well trained, competent accredited Service Officers. It is essential that there is a statewide network of services offices able to provide competent and timely assistance to Veterans. These Service Offices must be staffed at a level that allows for outreach to those veterans that are unaware of their benefits or are unable to travel to a Service Office.

The Veterans of Foreign Wars Service Office and our 96 volunteer Post and District Service Officers are a small but important part of this Service Office network. We know that our Service Office cannot meet the demand placed on it by Veterans requesting the VFW to represent them in their claims process. Counties and other Veterans Service Organizations have provided testimony that there is a need for additional accredited Service Officers. It is essential that this network of County, Veterans Service Organization and ODVA Service Officers be fully funded. It is not only the right thing to do for our veterans, it is a fiscally sound policy to enable our veterans to receive the VA services that they have rightfully earned serving our great Republic. Every dollar invested in Veterans Service Officers returns many times that in earned benefits from the VA to veterans in the State. Not only will these hundreds of millions of

dollars contribute to the economic vitality of the State, those veterans receiving earned benefits are less likely to place demands on State and County services.

In addition to necessary funding for Veterans Service Offices, there are demonstrated needs for increased funding for: the Van Transportation Network that transports Veterans to VA medical facilities; ODVA Emergency Assistance Fund; suicide prevention hotline staffed by qualified counselors; Veterans Transitional Housing and Veterans Educational Aid program.

Based on the immediate needs for increased veteran's services, the Department of Oregon, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States strongly advocate the faithful implementation of the will of the voters and our membership to fully fund the 2017-18 Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs (ODVA) budget, including approximately \$10 million of previously allocated general funds and the estimated \$18.5 million in lottery funds.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard Halverson", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Richard Halverson  
Commander  
Department of Oregon  
Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States