

2017

Testimony on HJM-6

Good afternoon, Chair Boquist and Veterans Committee members.

For the record, my name is Mike Sullivan. I am the Oregon Political Director for the Association of Western Pulp and Paper Workers, commonly known as AWPPW. I am here today as a Veteran as well.

Before I begin my testimony, I would like to thank Representative Esquivel and Jan, the Representative's wife and Chief of Staff for saving the day for me by making sure this memorial made it here today. I also want to thank this Committee for its efforts on Veterans Affairs.

If I may, Chair Boquist, I would like to share with this committee a little history of the House Veteran Affairs as I know it. When I started to work for AWPPW in 2005, I went to all the Veterans Committee meetings as I could. What I found out was that the Veterans Affairs Committee hadn't met in roughly 50 years!

During the 2013 session I went to the Legislative Library to see if I could find the exact year. I went to the Legislative Library, which then was staffed by the Oregon State Library and their value is without question. I talked with an Oregon State Librarian named Rob who dug right in and found out by searching records that the last Veterans Committee had met in 1963. Not until 42 years later (2005) would the committee meet again. So much needed to be done - not much was done in regard to the Vietnam War Veterans!!!

It is important to know about the 42 year disconnect because it explains why Chair Donna Nelson was trying to push through 156 Veterans bills in 2005. Two committee members then Dave Hunt and then Representative (now Senator) Brian Boquist were called upon to par down the number of bills because the cost per bill was \$1000. I am sure Chair Boquist remembers the 156 bills very well.

Chair Nelson would always begin the meetings by asking all the veterans in the room to stand up, and then with the committee standing she would ask for applause from the audience. It was after one of these committee meetings that Steve Lanning, then with the afl-CIO, told me he had never been thanked for serving his country during the Vietnam War. I too was serving in the Navy at that time and concurred with his comment.

In 2003, I had read an article in the *Disabled American Veterans (DAV)* about the funding of Veterans Health Care (VHC). The article stated that the budget for VHC was discretionary spending, meaning the VA must annually ask for a budget. Sadly, today it is still that way.

I took that article to Chair Nelson. She had a committee bill drafted from that article which became HJM-18. Now in 2017 it is HJM-6.

The 2017 HJM-6 would make veterans' health care mandatory with direct funding. Mandated and direct funding would allow the VA to project out further their needs, and allow them to know what is needed to retain doctors and nurses (**by the way the average age of a nurse nationally is 56**) as one example. This type of mandatory funding would make the future of the VA more secure for employees than the present year-to-year basis.

In the 2011 session, this memorial was again titled HJM-18. It had successfully passed through the House and was in the Senate Veterans Committee. I made testimony, and Vice-Chair Monnes-Anderson asked me if I had heard anything back from the federal government. My answer then was no, and it is no today. I haven't heard a word.

The 'Monnes-Anderson question' stayed with me. So, in 2011 I wrote a letter (which I have submitted in committee materials along with the Adams letter and a list of the memorials dealing with VHC) to the National Service and Legislative Officer of the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), Denel Adams, and asked him the 'Monnes-Anderson question'. Like the federal government, he never responded.

When this country enters into a war, young people join-up and take-up arms to support the efforts of this country's needs. As the DAV slogan goes "all gave some, some gave all". I would add - all of them gave some of the best years of their lives for this country. I think it is only fair and proper to have the best health care for those who choose to stand up for their country when there is a need to do so.

In closing, considering the lack of the federal government to respond at all and assuming that HJM-6 passes unanimously through both chambers this session, it would make it the seventh session in a row.

I am asking today that if this does happen in 2017, that you, Chair Boquist and your counterpart House Veterans Committee Chair Evans co-author a letter to accompany the filing of HJM-6 with the Oregon Secretary of State. Perhaps with the addition of the two Chairs' names on the letter, we then could get an answer to the 'Monnes-Anderson question'.

Personally, with 17 years of endless war at a cost of almost \$4 trillion, **certainly** the federal government has to do better for Veterans – it is shameful to me!!!!

Again, I want to thank-you Chair Boquist and your Committee for your fine work and allowing me this time today. I will try to answer any questions there might be for me.

May 5, 2011

Denel D. Adams
National Service and Legislative Officer
Disabled American Veterans (DAV)

My name is Mike Sullivan. I am a proud member of the Disabled American Veterans since 2003. It was around that time, when reading the DAV magazine, I came upon an article that stated it was high time the Veterans' Health Care be funded on a permanent basis, not annually. Although this idea stayed with me, I didn't really know how to help it become a reality.

In 2005, I began lobbying in Oregon for a union known as the Association of Western Pulp and Paper Workers (AWPPW). Every session (every other year in Oregon) thus far, I have been successful in finding a willing sponsor to introduce a memorial with the DAV language suggesting we need to have permanent funding for Veterans' Health Care. As a matter of fact, in the last three sessions, a House Joint Memorial has been passed through both chambers and signed by the Secretary of State of Oregon to urge the U.S. Congress to do just that. Currently, HJM-18 (Please see attached) has gone through the Oregon House 59-0 with 1 excused. I just made testimony this week before the Senate Veterans Committee. It was then that Senator and Veteran Laurie Monnes-Anderson, who serves on this committee, asked if I have heard from the federal government on this important issue. My answer was no, I have not heard anything at all.

This is why I am writing you, Denvel. Do you know of any movement on permanent funding of Veterans' Health Care? I feel safe in saying that I don't think HJM-18 is in any trouble. It should pass out of committee with a do pass, and the full Senate should pass it as well. That being said, I hope you will answer Senator Laurie Monnes-Anderson's question. We get it here in Oregon, but it's been going on now for four sessions (eight years). It would be nice to hear something positive.

I appreciate all your hard work for Disabled American Veterans. Thank you!

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House Joint Memorials that have dealt with changing federal spending on veterans' health care from discretionary spending to a mandatory and direct entitlement.

2005	HJM-18
2007	HJM-19
2009	HJM-21
2011	HJM-18
2013	HJM-9
2015	HJM-18
2017	HJM-6