

## Legislative Testimony:

Chair Olson, Vice Chair Anderson, and members of the committee, my name is Shawna Fenison the proud mother of PFC Ryan J Hill who is the only resident of Keizer killed in action. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today in support of HCR 13 to honor an American hero from the great state of Oregon and the city of Keizer, PFC Ryan J Hill. I also want to thank Representatives Post and Fahey for sponsoring this legislation, which will allow for a highway to be designated in my sons honor and serve as a reminder to all, of those who made the ultimate sacrifice in defending and protecting the freedoms that we enjoy. I also want to give a very special thank you to Senator Thatcher who has been a blessing to this proud mama in all her support from the beginning of this chapter in my life and who has been a champion at supporting and honoring PFC Ryan J Hill.

Before I go into the events that have brought me here today, I would like to put a face to the name and give you a quick glimpse of who Ryan was. Three words describe Ryan. Faith, Family, and Fun (actually I think his name should have been Ryan "let's have some fun" Hill).

On April 26, 1986 God entrusted me with one of His most precious treasures Ryan J Hill. As a single mom it was up to me teach and guide him. Little did I know that in the end, I would discover that it was him who would be the one to teach and guide me.

After Ryan died, with all of my interactions with so many that he had an impact on, I came to the realization that while I was beating people over the head with my Bible and legalistic rules, he loved them as they were, without judgement, and allowed them to grow and become the best they could be, by simply loving them and giving them grace. While I would like to say this is the path that I follow, it's obvious that I am still learning to emulate his example.

Ryan had a compassionate heart from the beginning. He was always drawn to the underdog. I didn't want him to be the outsider as I had been growing up so I really tried to help him be cool and hang out with the "right" people. One of the first insights into his character was when he was 4...After church the kids would go play at each others houses in between services. Ryan was invited to a few of the cool kids house although he already had plans to go over to one of his other friends who would be classed as a little "dorky" I proceed to persuade Ryan that it was in his best interest (actually mine) for him to hang out with the cool kids. He looked at me with those big brown eyes and said "but mama hes my friend"; a few months later my mom and I got into a heated discussion about women's right to choose and my pro life support. Ryan asked her "grandma are you glad my mother didn't have an abortion?" Yes even at early age Ryan was able to put you in your place.

Ryan was sharp and a quick learner. I should have known when he came home from the first day of school in second grade at Keizer Elementary and I asked "how was school" and he said "stupid"... when asking him why, he said because we did 2+2, and I did 2+2 last year. This would be his philosophy "I've already done it once now it's time to move on". When he attended McNary High School my biggest concern again was would he fit in. High school can sometimes be brutal socially. Little did i know he would ace the social aspects. But given his view in the first grade of "I've already done that so why should I waste my time

on homework” his academics left a little to be desired. He made a decision to go to the Oregon National Guard Youth Challenge Program, a boot camp style high school. He originally went to make up credits so he could graduate on time, but he ended up completing 2 1/2 years in 5 months with an A-minus average. It was obvious that he excelled in this environment. Of course true to his name of “let’s have fun” his nickname was... “make me do push ups please”. He would also return the following session to mentor the cadets through the challenge phase of the program.

In July 2005 he would leave for Ft Benning where he would attend Boot Camp And AIT and would go on to be assigned to the 1/26th Infantry Division (Big Red One) in Schweinfurt Germany. When he was in boot camp the drill sgt said as Ryan reached for a piece of cake, “Hill you eat that cake, you’re gonna do push-ups”; Ryan's smirked as he gave his response “I’m gonna do push ups anyway” so he reached for a second piece. In the service they have a practice called “smoking” which is a form of discipline. I’m told that he was no fun to smoke because he enjoyed it. And it was as much punishment for the person smoking him. In July 2006 I got the call from Ryan that they were deploying to Iraq into a very bad area. He said to me “Mom if I come home, God has more for me to do. If I don’t then I’ve finished my job”.

On Friday January 19th a little after 8pm the earth stood still... I got the dreaded knock on the door. I looked out the peep hole and there they were 2 officers in uniform. Knowing what this meant I opened the door and told them they weren't supposed to be there. Shortly after midnight in Baghdad, Ryan's group would be making their final patrol of the night. An IED that was command wire detonated by cowardly insurgents hiding in the shadows would steal a great man. The unit would come under several hours of heavy fire and Ryan would be the only KIA for Charlie Company that night although Ryan was the first among many killed on the deadliest day. Ryan had finished his job. God Almighty said okay you've had enough and allowed him to go home. See several of Ryan's fellow soldiers had already been killed and he took each loss personally just like his job here was to protect his family and friends, he viewed his job there as to protect his fellow brothers. In fact he always wanted to be in the lead vehicle which was most likely to be attacked. So when there was a loss he felt like he had failed. I believe he was spared from events that were to come as the attacks got more severe as the unit found ways to mitigate the insurgents actions causing the cowards to escalate the type of attacks they would use. In 2007 Charlie Company would receive an award at the US embassy from special forces with Ryan's name on it for the work that was done on January 20th.

The Blue Spader Task force is considered the hardest hit since Vietnam. The commanders were continually asking for help but the requests seemed to go unanswered until July 2007 where the 110 who patrolled Adhimayah were replaced with a unit of over 1000. All in all the task force had 34 soldiers KIA and 122 wounded. Charlie Company suffered the most with fourteen men killed, 9 of which were from Ryan's second platoon.

In 2012 Unit Received the Presidential Unit Citation for extraordinary heroism against an armed enemy

One of my son’s biggest fears is that he would be forgotten. And by passing HCR 13 you will send a message that we remember. I remember getting a phone call from him after one of his brothers had been killed. It was during election time and he was struggling from all the negative news reports about the war. He said “Mom my friends are dying for people who don’t give a rip; all they care about is did the barista get my coffee right, oh did you know Brittney Spears is bald, Lindsey Lohan has drug problem, what in the world am I fixing for

dinner meanwhile my buddies are dying and not only do people not know who they are they don't care".

During the tumultuous times in this country the last few years and when I begin to have my own little pity party, I myself wonder is it worth it? Is this country and state worth the sacrifice that has been paid for the freedom that many unwittingly take for granted? Does anyone really care? As you drive up and down the freeway and see my license plate that says gold star family does anyone know what that means? When people pass by the memorial highway signs do they really understand the price that has been paid? These are symbols and hopefully reminders to think about your freedom, the price that has been paid for it, and not take it for granted. For anyone to truly understand means they would have to experience it and that is a hell I wouldn't wish upon anyone. Imagine your child or grandchild one day stolen from you, not just them but all of their hopes and dreams, their future, the children that you will never know. Perhaps their son or daughter would have been the one to walk on mars, or discover the cure for cancer, or be the next brilliant president. Or perhaps they would have been just like Ryan and been one of the most kind, funniest, loving person you ever met whose goal in life was to protect his family and friends and to make a difference.

On October 5, 2006 Ryan sent a small group of us this email:

"2 days ago one of my good friend was lost for doing his duty for our country. He was shot by a sniper and didn't get a chance to shoot back. He was doing what was asked of him regardless of the risks at hand. I ask that as you read this you hold a moment of silence within yourself for another of America's finest that lost the battle he was told to fight. I ask that you remember your freedoms and that we willingly gave ours up to protect our loved ones back home... that you keep us in your thoughts and prayers in good times and in bad. Because to tell you the truth all we wanted was a better life for us and our loved ones. Some of us won't make it back from this place and we shall never forget them. The rest of us who are here will keep fighting for you and those you love. Thank you for reading my thoughts and the few minutes it took out of your lives...."

So one thing I ask is that as you drive around going about your day being a productive member of your community, pause for a moment when you see that glorious flag flying or one of the memorial highway signs, just whisper thank you. Thank you PFC Ryan J Hill you're the best of the best.

I appreciate the time that you have allowed me to give you a glimpse not in just a great American hero, but my hero PFC Ryan J Hill In closing a quote from Ryan's my space, that I attempt to make my motto: A True Champion is one who wants to make a difference, never gives up, works hard, and never gives up their dream.

Thank you. Freedom it isn't free.