

Bend Heroes Foundation Testimony: Oregon Gold Star Families Memorial Highway.

I am Dick Tobiason, Chairman, Bend Heroes Foundation. The Foundation is located in Bend, Oregon and designated by the IRS as a non-profit 501c3 entity. We have been active since 2010 with over 30 veterans projects completed valued at over \$2 million.

I served 20 years in the US Army retiring as a Lieutenant Colonel, Master Army Aviator with 2 tours in Vietnam.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify to the House Committee on Veterans and Emergency Management today on my request to designate US Hwy 30 across Oregon as Oregon Gold Star Families Memorial Highway.

Background:

Almost one half million Oregonians have served in 5 major wars since WWI: 6,000 perished, 15,000 were wounded, 2,000 became POWs and MIAs, and 29 veterans connected with Oregon have received the Medal of Honor – our nation's highest award for valor during war. Attached is a spreadsheet showing casualties by war.

Since 2009 the Legislature and 3 Governors have unanimously approved Bend Heroes Foundation's requests to designate 8 border to border war veterans highways across Oregon honoring 479,600 war veterans. We are extremely grateful for that outstanding support! The highways are:

WWI Veterans Memorial Highway on US Hwy 395

WWII Veterans Historic Highway on US Hwy 97* and since extended into Washington

Korean War Veterans Memorial Highway on I-5

Vietnam Veterans Memorial Highway on I-84* and since extended through Idaho and Utah

Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, and Iraq Veterans Memorial Highway on US 101*

Purple Heart Trail on I-5

Oregon Medal of Honor Highway on US Hwy 20* and since extended as state Medal of Honor Highways to Boston, MA

POW/MIA Memorial Highway on US Hwy 26* and since extended through Idaho

Attached is a summary of the relevant House and Senate bills spanning 13 years (2009 – 2022)

Also attached is fact sheet describing the 8 veterans memorial highways (length and number of signs) and a map of the highways across Oregon.

Over 90 signs have been installed along the 8 veterans highways totaling almost 3,000 miles within Oregon with 5 highways being first of a kind in our nation noted above by *.

Photos of signs along the 8 highways are included in the fact sheet

Bend Heroes Foundation raised over \$100,000 to pay ODOT and others to fabricate and install the signs. The replacement cost today is about \$200,000.

On average, travelers across Oregon will see a sign about every 60 miles or about once an hour.

So one could wonder how “peacetime” veterans are honored across Oregon. The Oregon Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc has partnered with ODOT for decades dedicating 86 Blue Star Memorial Highway signs honoring both wartime and peacetime veterans. A photo of a typical Blue Star Memorial Highway sign is included in the fact sheet. Such signs are already displayed along US Hwy 30.

Oregon’s 6,000 war dead left 6,000 families behind. They are called Gold Star Families. There could be as many as 15,000 Oregon Gold Star family members.

Now that all wartime and peacetime veterans have been honored with highway signs, it is time to honor the Gold Star Families left behind by honoring them on the 477 mile US Hwy 30, the longest highway in Oregon. It is the last available border to border highway to honor them. Oregon has not yet honored Gold Star Families with a dedicated highway. I know of no other border to border Gold Star Families Memorial Highway within our nation.

US Hwy 30 underlies 377 miles of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Highway on I-84. In fact there are US Hwy 20 signs installed along I-84 as well as within 7 cities located along I-84: Hood River, The Dalles, La Grande, Pendleton, Powder River, Baker City, Ontario.

If the Oregon Gold Star Families Memorial Highway is so designated, we would ask ODOT to locate signs away from Vietnam signs, within the cities served by US Hwy 30 and at the ends of US Hwy 30. Attached is a draft version of the sign. The total length of the 9 border to border highways would equal about 3,400 miles the longest driving distance across our nation from Blaine, WA to Miami, FL.

Such a designation would be another first of a kind in our nation and like the Oregon Medal of Honor could be extended across the USA from the Oregon/Idaho border to Atlantic City, NJ.

After we dedicated 12 Oregon Medal of Honor Highway signs across Oregon, Bend Heroes Foundation initiated the Medal of Honor Highway Across America on the 3,365 mile US Hwy 20, the longest highway in our nation. I am delighted to report that after 5 years managing creation of that highway and as of November 17, 2022 all 11 states east of Oregon have adopted the Oregon Medal of Honor Highway model. We now have a Medal of Honor Highway spanning our nation from sea to shining sea – Newport, OR to Boston, MA. I was born in Boston 1 mile from the end of that highway almost 88 years ago. I believe it is the first, if not the longest veterans highway across the USA. Attached is a map of the informally named Medal of Honor Highway Across America.

US Hwy 30 also crosses America from sea to shining sea: Astoria, Oregon to Atlantic City, New Jersey a distance of 3,073 miles crossing 12 states. See attached map,

As there are Congressionally chartered non-profit Gold Star Mothers and Wives organizations located across America, I would think they would want to extend “their” highway across our nation as Bend Heroes Foundation has done for Medal of Honor recipients. In fact I shared my proposal with Oregon’s Gold Star Mothers and Wives organizations on Gold Star Mothers and Families Day – September 25 a day designated by American Presidents.

As in the past, veterans and others offer to pay ODOT to fabricate and install signs along US Hwy 30.

Again, our proposal provides for the preservation of all existing signs and highway designations across US Hwy 30.

I have not seen the latest LC 2906 document but hope my comments on the draft sent to staff were reviewed.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify to this Committee today. I look forward to your hearings in the upcoming session

I will try to respond to any questions committee members may have.

Respectfully,

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Chairman, Bend Heroes Foundation
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OREGON VETERANS WAR CASUALTIES 1917 – PRESENT: 105 YEARS

WAR	SERVED	DIED	ESTIMATED WOUNDED	TOTAL CASUALTIES	LIVING 2020
WWI	44,166	1,066	1,800	2,866	0
WWII	152,000	3,772	9,900	13,672	5,790
KOREA	74,000	269	672	941	18,968
VIETNAM	119,784	803	2,000	2,803	100,990
GWOT	89,812	112	679	791	93,590
TOTAL (includes 71,314 Peacetime)	479,762	6,022	15,051	21,073	284,141

LEGISLATION FOR 8 BORDER TO BORDER
OREGON VETERANS' HIGHWAYS

2009: SB 449: WWII Veterans Hwy US Hwy 97
2013: SB 461: Vietnam Veterans Hwy I -84
2015: HB 2036: WWI, Korea, Purple Heart, GWOT:
US 395, I-5, US Hwy 101
2017: HB 2100: Medal of Honor U.S. Hwy 20
HCR 1: 12 Medal of Honor Cities
2019: HB 3452: POW/MIA Memorial Hwy
US Hwy 26
2022: SB 1509: WWII Nisei Veterans Memorial Hwy
SR 35 (1 of 3 requestors)



DRAFT DESIGN OREGON GOLD STAR FAMILIES MEMORIAL HIGHWAY SIGN