

Bend Heroes Foundation Testimony: HB 2146 Oregon Gold Star Families Memorial Highway
on U.S. Hwy 30
January 19, 2023

Thank you Chair Grayber and committee members for this opportunity to testify to the House Committee on Emergency Management, General Government and Veterans today on HB 2146 reflecting my request to designate US Hwy 30 across Oregon as Oregon Gold Star Families Memorial Highway. I have submitted this testimony and a fact sheet to the Committee's exhibit files.

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 and 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. I am a Combat Wounded Veteran.

Background:

Almost one half million Oregonians have served in 5 major wars since WWI: 6,000 made the ultimate sacrifice, 15,000 were wounded, nearly 2,000 became POWs and MIAs, and 29 veterans connected with Oregon received the Medal of Honor – our nation's highest award for valor during war. Below 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 479,800 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 11 more state Medal of Honor Highways across our nation to Boston, MA

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

Attached is fact sheet describing the 8 veterans memorial highways (length and number of signs) and a map of the highways across Oregon. Five highways are first of a kind in our nation as noted above by *.

Over 90 signs have been installed along the 8 veterans highways totaling almost 3,000 miles within Oregon.

Bend Heroes Foundation raised over \$110,000 to pay the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) and others to fabricate and install the signs. The replacement cost today is about \$200,000.

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

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

One might wonder how “peacetime” veterans are honored across Oregon. The Oregon Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc has partnered with ODOT for decades dedicating nearly 90 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 U.S. Hwy 30.

Oregon’s 6,000 war dead left 6,000 families behind. They are called Gold Star Families with some named as Gold Star Mothers and Gold Star Wives by Congress. There could be as many as 15,000 Oregon Gold Star family members including parents, siblings, spouses, sons, and daughters.

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 U.S. Hwy 30, the longest highway in Oregon. It is the last border to border highway available to honor them.

Note that the Oregon Gold Star Families Memorial Highway intersects all 5 war highways along Oregon’s northern border. Those junctures connect Gold Star Families with their loved ones.

The Oregon Gold Star Families Memorial Highway would show Oregon will not forget its Gold Star Families and help provide closure to the families.

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.

U.S. Hwy 30 underlies some of the 377 mile Vietnam Veterans Memorial Highway on I-84. There are U.S. Hwy 30 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, and Ontario.

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

If the Oregon Gold Star Families Memorial Highway is so designated by the Legislature and Governor, we would ask ODOT to locate signs away from Vietnam signs, within the cities served by U.S. Hwy 30 and at the ends of U.S. Hwy 30. Attached is a draft version of the highway sign.

The total length of the 9 border to border highways within Oregon would then equal about 3,400 miles or the longest driving distance across our nation from Blaine, WA to Miami, FL.

After we dedicated 12 Oregon Medal of Honor Highway signs across Oregon, Bend Heroes Foundation initiated the Medal of Honor Highway Across America project on the 3,365 mile U.S. 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 believe it is the first veterans highway on the longest highway across the United States. A map of the informally named Medal of Honor Highway Across America is attached to the fact sheet.

U.S. Hwy 30 is the third longest highway in our nation and also crosses America from sea to shining sea: Astoria, Oregon to Atlantic City, New Jersey a distance of 3,073 miles crossing 12 states.

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 and its partners have done for Medal of Honor recipients. I shared my proposal with Oregon’s Gold Star Mothers and Wives organizations on Gold Star Mothers and Families Day – September 25 and requested they testify on HB 2146.

Related to the Oregon Gold Star Families Memorial Highway, Bend Heroes dedicated Blue Star and Gold Star Memorial Markers at Bend Heroes Memorial on Sept. 25, 2022 – Gold Star Mothers and Families Day. We purchased the markers from the National Garden Clubs, Inc. Since then, the Foundation and Oregon State Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc. have worked with veterans’ groups across Oregon to order 8 more sets of markers to be installed at veterans’ memorials and cemeteries participating in the national Wreaths Across America program.

I recommend HB 2146 be amended to include the possibility of a coast to coast Gold Star Families Memorial Highway on U.S. Hwy 30 as envisioned in HB 2100 that created the Oregon Medal of Honor Highway:

Page 1, after line 21 :

“Whereas designating U.S. Highway 30 in Oregon as the Oregon Gold Star Families Memorial Highway would set a precedent for creating a “Gold Star Families Memorial Highway Across America” as Bend Heroes Foundation and its partners have accomplished with the Oregon Medal of Honor Highway and Medal of Honor Highway Across America on U.S. Hwy 20.”

As in previous veteran’s highway bills, HB 2146 requires veterans and others to pay ODOT to fabricate and install signs along U.S. Hwy 30.

HB 2146 also provides for the preservation of all existing highway designations on U.S. Hwy 30 by the words “shall also be known as”.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify on HB 2146 to this Committee today.

I urge the Committee to recommend a unanimous Do Pass vote.

I will try to respond to any questions the Committee may have.

Respectfully,

Dick Tobiason
LTC US Army, Retired
Chairman, Bend Heroes Foundation
541 390 9932

**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 Peacetim e)	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)

