

Bend Heroes Foundation Testimony: HB 2144

March 22, 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 2144.

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.

HB 2144 simply removes the former requirement that remains of Oregon's MIAs be returned to Oregon and as I requested in previous testimony. This change now allows the Brockett family to request a roadside marker that was not possible in the past as Pvt. Norvin Brockett's remains were not returned to Oregon. There may be more situations like that.

I thank Vice Chair Rick Lewis for advocating this amendment.

Oregon is home to almost 1,000 MIAs from all wars and services. Over the last 40 years, The remains of 43 Oregon MIAs have recovered, identified, and returned to families for final disposition:

WWII	21 (not including 8 Wake Island Civilians)
Korea	5
Vietnam	17 (including 2 civilians and 1 civilian POW)
Cold War	1 (civilian)

The rate of recovery is about 4% meaning very few MIA families will apply for roadside markers.

To qualify for a roadside marker, previous legislation required the remains of a recovered and identified MIA to be returned to Oregon. I testified in support of that legislation noting that the remains of Army Private Norvin Brockett, a recovered and identified Korean War MIA from Bend was in the process of being returned to family and the remains would probably be flown directly from Hawaii to the east coast for burial at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia. His remains would not be flown to Oregon so his family would not be eligible for a roadside marker. I requested the measure be amended to cover that condition which actually happened. There may be more situations like that.

I also requested the measure include civilians as 4 Oregonians became MIAs in southeast Asia during the Vietnam War and Cold War. Thirty two (32) Oregon civilians who were US Navy contractors were captured at Wake Island by Japanese forces during WWII and died as POWs. The remains of 8 POWs were returned to families in Oregon for burials.

Vice Chair Rick Lewis then agreed that an amendment was needed to cover the Brockett scenario. I thank Rep. Lewis for advocating the amendment now before this Committee. Rep. Lewis also agreed that a future amendment is necessary to cover certain civilians.

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency is responsible for locating, recovering, identifying, and returning remains of MIAs to families including remains of civilians. I plan to advise DPAA of the Oregon

roadside marker program so its Casualty Assistance Officers could in turn advise families of this fine and largely unknown honors program.

I respectfully request this Committee to adopt the amendment with a Do Pass recommendation.

If the amendment is adopted as law, I will inform the Brockett family.

I look forward to a future amendment covering certain civilians.

As this Committee helped me create the Oregon Medal of Honor Highway, I have since managed creation of the Medal of Honor Highway Across America on US Hwy 20. Now that all 11 states east of Oregon have followed the Oregon precedent honoring their Medal of Honor recipients, I requested Senator Ron Wyden to sponsor legislation in the US Senate that would designate the 3,365 mile US Hwy 20 from Newport, OR to Boston, MA as the National Medal of Honor Highway. Senator Wyden has agreed to introducing a bill very soon.

I also thank Patrick Brennan for keeping me up to date on measures and amendments.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify.

I would be pleased to respond to any questions.

Respectfully,