

March 27, 2025

COL (ret) Ron Smith PA-C, MMSc.

Testimony in support of HB 5006 to provide funding for repairs and upgrades to the Salvage Chief (LSM380).

Chairs Lieber and Sanchez, Vice Chairs Girod, Gomberg, and Smith, and members of the Committee.

I greatly appreciate the opportunity to provide my enthusiastic support for HB 5006. I am a medical advisor to the Salvage Chief Foundation and have over 28 years' experience as a physician assistant working in emergency medicine and orthopedic trauma surgery. I recently retired as the senior PA in the Oregon Army National Guard serving as a Colonel at the Medical Command in Salem. In that capacity, I have been involved in planning for Cascadia Event response.

The Salvage Chief is uniquely suited to provide disaster relief and life-saving medical aid in the aftermath of a catastrophic Cascadia Event. The funding provided in HB 5006 is critical to the Chief's ability to fulfill that mission. During my deployment to New Orleans in response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005, I saw first-hand the devastation inflicted on a populace in the wake of a natural disaster. The scale of a Cascadia earthquake and tsunami would dwarf the destruction of Hurricane Katrina by several orders of magnitude. It is understood that coastal communities would be isolated and effectively cut off from aid for an extended period. The casualties from such an event are estimated in the thousands of dead and injured. In the days and weeks after a disaster of this scale many more people would die if medical assistance was not forthcoming. Fortunately, we have the Chief. The Chief's ability to consistently produce over 3,000 gallons of clean drinking water could mean the difference between life and death to victims in town where the water supply has been contaminated or destroyed. The cargo capacity of the Chief could allow us to bring over 100 tons of critically needed medical supplies and equipment to communities that will otherwise be inaccessible. The ship-to-shore power generation capabilities of the Chief could easily supply the electrical needs of an on shore medical facility. The layout of the Salvage Chief would lend itself to the addition of currently available modular medical treatment systems. These could be fitted to the deck of the Chief to provide a floating emergency treatment facility. In addition, the upgrades to the Chief's emergency communications capabilities would provide essential coordination with those responding to the relief efforts. The costs of a military airlift response to provide the emergency relief equal to the capabilities of the Chief would far outweigh the proposed funding considered in HB 5006. The cost to retrofit and provide the needed repairs to the Salvage Chief are pennies on the dollar compared to creating equivalent resources from scratch. Funding for the Chief would unleash a powerful resource in the inevitable natural disaster response needed for the citizens of Oregon.

The Salvage Chief has proven herself time and time again in both wartime and during decades of salvage operations around the world. I firmly believe she has another vital mission to fulfill in coming to the aid of our fellow citizens in the inevitable event of catastrophic natural disaster. I appreciate your consideration of this legislation and strongly encourage support for the efforts to Ready The Chief.

Sincerely,

COL (ret) Ron Smith PA-C, MMSc.

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