

Dick Tobiason, Chairman  
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RE: HCR 23: "Recognizes and honors Oregon civilians who served the United States on Wake Island during World War II. Commends individuals who have increased public awareness of the service and sacrifice of these civilians."

Thank you, Chair Manning, Vice Chair Thatcher and distinguished committee members for this opportunity to testify to the Senate Committee on Veterans, Emergency Management, Federal and World Affairs in support of HCR 23.

I am Dick Tobiason, Chairman, Bend Heroes Foundation, a retired US Army Lieutenant Colonel and combat wounded Vietnam veteran.

Before I comment on HCR 23. I would like to thank this Committee for supporting my initiatives over the years to honor 480,000 war veterans and 6,000 Gold Star Families with 9 border to border highways across Oregon totaling 3,447 miles with 101 highway signs dedicated.

You will recall this committee approved my request to honor Oregon's 29 Medal of Honor recipients by designating the 451 mile U.S. Hwy 20 across Oregon as the "Oregon Medal of Honor Highway" – HB 2100 (2017, 79<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly). Since then, I initiated the 3,365 mile National Medal of Honor Highway on U.S. Hwy 20 from Newport, Oregon to Boston, Massachusetts honoring all of our nation's 3,526 Medal of Honor recipients and all future recipients. I am pleased to tell you that at my request, Oregon Senator Ron Wyden sponsored legislation which was passed by Congress with President Biden signing it into law on December 17, 2024. I briefed Medal of Honor recipients on their new highway at National Medal of Honor Day ceremonies in Washington, DC on March 25 - National Medal of Honor Day. It all started with this Committee 8 years ago – thank you.

HCR 23 seeks to recognize and honor Oregon's 134 civilians who served and the 31 WWII civilians who died defending Wake Island and who were captured at Wake Island and subsequently died at the hands of the Japanese. None of the military deaths at Wake Island include Oregonians.

This Committee can help make HCR 23 reality because Wake Island Historian and Author Bonita "Bonnie" Gilbert made it possible. Bonnie's father Theodore Olson survived as a Wake Island POW. Bonnie's outstanding credentials are included in HCR 23. Bonnie helped me dedicate the Oregon POW/MIA Memorial Highway so I requested her help again in drafting HCR 23 and testifying. . .

Here we are nearly 80 years after the end of WWII and 11 years after dedicating the Oregon WWII Memorial – a mere 150 yards from your hearing room requesting the

Legislature through HCR 23 to honor the 134 Oregon civilians who served during WWII and the 31 who died under brutal conditions just as their military counterparts experienced over 3 years and 9 months at the hands of the Japanese during WWII.

In summary, Oregon's Wake Island civilians were involved throughout all of WWII which began with the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 propelling our nation into WWII to the Japanese surrender almost 4 years later ending WWII on September 4, 1945.

Noteworthy is the fact that Wake Island civilians were recognized by the US Navy for their valor with awards of the Navy Cross, Purple Hearts, and Bronze Stars. The Navy Cross award to the civilian doctor is the only Navy Cross award ever presented to a civilian.

In 1981, the Department of Defense gave Wake Island civilians and others veterans status.

Our collective objectives are to raise public awareness of Oregon's Wake Island civilians through HCR 23 and create a public document compiled by Bonnie Gilbert listing the names of the 134 who served, including the 31 who perished. The names and circumstances were submitted to your counterpart Committee in the House.

Oregon's 31 Wake Island war dead civilians are honored at Wake Island with a plaque (11 Oregonians of 98 executed), the "98 Rock", Soto Dam in Sasebo, Japan plaque (12 Oregonians of 53 POWs), and at the National Cemetery of the Pacific in Hawaii massive slab (17 Oregonians of 178 total). They are not yet similarly honored in Oregon.

Each Memorial Day, the US Navy holds ceremonies at the Soto Dam memorial. To my knowledge there are no such ceremonies in Oregon.

I will ask Oregon's Veterans Service Organizations to publish the 134 names and 73 burial locations across Oregon so Oregon's veterans will know about them and honor them just as they do for veterans on Memorial Day and National Wreaths Across America Day.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify in support of HCR 23.

We are indebted to Bonnie Gilbert for her many years of historical research now available to the Legislature.

I would be pleased to respond to your questions.

I respectfully urge a Do Pass recommendation.