



NO ONE DOES MORE FOR VETERANS.

Oregon

Veterans of Foreign Wars Department of Oregon Veteran Service Office needs

Presented by Bert W. Key
VFW National Council Member from Oregon
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My name is Bert Key. I have been a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States for 39 years. My qualification for membership in the VFW comes from service in Viet Nam, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Korean Defense Service and Afghanistan. Between active duty and reserve I had the honor of serving in uniform for 41 years in defense of the Constitution of the United States of America. In addition to that I am retired from teaching secondary education for 31 years in public schools in Oregon. I now have the honor of representing the Commander of the Department of Oregon VFW, Rick Higgins, and all of the members of our organization, and to collectively thank you for this opportunity.

As you know, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, the oldest combat veterans' organization in this country, and perhaps the world, has been working to establish and maintain benefits for our veterans for 120 years. A major part of that work has been developing and implementing a highly trained and professional system of Veteran Service Officers. The VSO is the king pin in matching up the veteran with the

benefits his and her government promised to them. In Oregon we are in need of funds to continue with our number one mission, that of taking care of our Veterans. Our current staffing levels are one full-time Service Officer, one full-time Assistant Service Officer, one part-time Assistant Service Officer and one full-time Administrative Assistant.

Specifically, how would the Veterans of Foreign Wars Department of Oregon (VFW) utilize an increase in funding as proposed in the Governor's Budget? Our budget is currently subsidized annually with \$30,000 in ODVA pass through funding and \$70,000 in VFW National and Department of Oregon funding. This \$100,000 is the budget we currently use to fund one full-time Veteran Service Officer (VSO), one part-time Veteran Service Officer, one full-time Assistant Veteran Service Officer, and one full time Administrative Assistant. Our VFW VSO has been compensated at about 50% of the rate paid to the average VSO in the state. As you can see, our employees are grossly underpaid and once they are fully trained, often move to better paying jobs offered by ODVA, or other

veteran service offices. Low compensation levels have made it difficult to hire and retain qualified personnel.

VFW Service Officers have routinely handled more than twice the number of claims (480) as average (180) for Service Officers state wide.

Here is a small peek into the window of the VFW's Service Office activity: October, November, and December 2018 numbers clearly showed they were able to obtain federal monies for disability claims in the amount of \$9,184,841.43; and in January 2019 they obtained \$1,622,339.96 for our veterans who have earned this benefit because of their service to our country. Many of these veterans and their families need this money to live on. Veterans receive \$200 of earned benefits for every dollar that is invested in VFW VSO's. This is a great investment in the veteran and the state because this is Federal monies being spent in Oregon.

Our goal ultimately is to increase our Service Office to four VSOs, one Administrative Assistant and one part time Administrative Assistant. One of the four Service Officers will be primarily used for outreach, for

example roving to the 80 plus VFW Posts in the 14 Districts around the state and to augment the volunteer Post and District Service Officers in preparation for cases to be filed by the VSO.

Assuming the proposed increase would split the funding between the Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion and Disabled American Veterans, each organization would receive approximately \$133,300 annually. This proposed increase to our budget, plus our annual \$70,000 through the VFW, would allow us to bring the pay of our current VSO more in line with the state VSOs. The increase will allow us to retain our current staff and work on increasing staffing. Training for VFW Service Officers provided by VFW National Service Office is considered among the best in the Nation. The Department of Oregon Veterans of Foreign Wars provides funding to the VFW VA Volunteer Services.

Staffing level of the Department of Oregon Veterans of Foreign Wars Service Office needs to be increased to four Service Officers and two Administrative Assistant positions (one full time and one half time) to

provide the expected level of service to the veterans requesting service from this office. In order to hire and retain qualified service officers to meet required staffing levels, compensation must be increased to levels closer to that paid to service officers throughout the state.

We appreciate your support regarding our VSO program, and it is deeply appreciated by the many veterans in our state who want to work with a veteran service organization to obtain their benefits. As you might imagine, and perhaps because of our 15,000 + membership, a lot of our veterans prefer to work with a VFW Service Officer.

Thank you for your time here today, and thank you for everything you do for the citizens of the great State of Oregon.