

February 2, 2021

Dear Committee Members,

I would like to take a few minutes to offer written testimony for **House Concurrent Resolution 13**, concerning an in Memoria recognition for George Ira Fenton, Jr., a life-long resident of Oregon

- George served the state as an educator for more than 30 years. To earn a BA in Education he leveraged his GI benefits (Honorable Discharge in 1953) to attend Eastern Oregon State College, where he graduated in 1957. Both of his parents had passed away, so he had to stop and start his studies several times in order to work full-time to pay for college. He believed in the power of education to change lives.
- During his career, George worked in small school districts, serving residents in eastern Oregon. He began his career in the classroom, but soon became a principal to help guide the unification of the Pine Valley and Eagle school districts. He worked for Pine Eagle from 1957-1978 as the high school principal. He helped students to earn scholarships and years later, grateful Pine-Eagle students would stop by his house to thank him for their college experiences and careers.
- In 1978, the family moved to Umatilla Oregon, where he served as Junior-Senior High Principal. During 18 years in Umatilla, he advanced to the district office, retiring in 1996 as the Umatilla School District Superintendent. During his career he believed in the power of small schools to build communities. He was a charter member of the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators and a member of the Oregon Association of Secondary School Administrators. He was a life-long learner, continuing his education at COSA workshops, often focusing on small schools.
- In 1996 when he “retired” from education, he began a new passion, serving on the Umatilla City Council for the next 20 years. He worked on budgets and enjoyed meetings with members of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation to find common cause on developing the old Umatilla townsite. He worked with other council members to create a Veteran’s Memorial, a project near to his heart. George was particularly proud of the sound finances that allowed the city to build a new City Hall and public library. He served on the Council until 2015, including several terms as mayor *pro tem* and council chair.
- George cared about his community and looked for ways to give others a helping hand. He belonged to the Kiwanis Club, Elks Club, Lions Club and VFW. Through these groups he raised money for community projects, provided scholarship assistance and proved how one person, living a life of service, can be a change-maker. He was a devoted husband, father and grandfather, photographing hours of activities starring his grandsons.

Thank you for considering this written testimony. When my father, George Fenton, passed away a week before Thanksgiving in 2019, we had to hold the funeral the Friday after Thanksgiving. We feared with holiday conflicts and 20+ years since he had “retired” that few people would be able to come to the service. It was so gratifying to see the sanctuary filled with people from Umatilla, who told us that he made the school district a family. For a man who lost his parents while he was still a teenager, he built a big family through his caring for a community.

Sincerely,
Jonnie Fenton