

Bend Heroes Foundation
1900 NE 3rd St., Ste 106, #205
Bend , OR 97701

February 10, 2021

Senator James Manning Jr.
Chair, Senate Committee on Veterans and Emergency Preparedness
900 Court St. NE, S-205
Salem. OR 97301

Dear Senator Manning.

Re: SB 441 Relating to memorial highways;

SB 441 like HB 2700 complements the newly dedicated Oregon POW/MIA Memorial Highway (HB 3452) across Oregon on US Hwy 26 honoring Oregon's over 900 Prisoners of War (POW) and almost 1,000 veterans and civilians who still remain Missing in Action (MIA) from all wars since WWI.

During 6 nearly simultaneous ceremonies we dedicated that 471 mile highway on Sept. 18, 2020 – National POW/MIA Recognition Day. Participating were Senators Tim Kopp and Dennis Linthicum and Representatives Cheri Helt, Daniel Bonham, Jack Zika and Vikki Breese Iverson, many veterans and 2 dozen family members related to local POWs and MIAs. The families and other attendees learned Oregon will never forget its POWs and MIAs. I was honored to request the highway legislation and emcee 2 dedication ceremonies. I am pleased to report Idaho is introducing legislation designating its 401 mile US Hwy 26 across Idaho as POW/MIA Memorial Highway.

Over the last 30 years, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) has returned the remains of 43 Oregonians who were previously MIA (Unaccounted For): WWII/19, Korea/5, Vietnam/Southeast Asia/17, Cold War/2. The overall rate of return of MIAs is about 4%.

There are 3 federal agencies involved in accounting for and honoring our nation's Armed Forces war casualties. The **National Archives Research Administration** (NARA) lists POW names by state, detaining power, location of internment, causes of death while in captivity and date of return of surviving POWs to friendly forces. NARA does not list MIAs. **DPAA** searches for veterans Missing in Action (MIA), recovers and identifies remains and returns remains to families. DPAA does not list POWs. MIAs who are returned are named "Accounted For" by DPAA and MIAs not recovered are termed "Unaccounted For". The **American Battle Monuments Commission** operates national cemeteries overseas where America's war dead are buried and MIAs are memorialized with names on plaques and tablets.

SB 441 and HB 2700 relate solely to members of the Armed Forces. The purpose of SB 441 is to "*recognize and honor those who were killed in action or who died as a results of wounds received in action while serving in the Armed Forces of the United States.*" SB 441 should be revised to also include Oregon's civilians who were working under US Navy contract building Navy facilities in the Pacific and who became POW and MIA during WWII. Two additional civilians employed by the CIA during the Cold War and Vietnam War should also be included.

SB 441 defines the requirements to be met: "**The individual killed in the line of duty was formerly designated as either a prisoner of war or unaccounted for by the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency**

and the remains of the individual have been recovered, identified and returned to Oregon.” If those requirements are met, the Legislature would not be required to adopt a concurrent resolution for each individual as is now the case for road markers known as Fallen Hero Memorial Highway signs.

Oregon is home to 884 WWII “Unaccounted For” veterans according to DPAA. DPAA states half of our nation’s 72,000 WWII MIAs will not be recovered because they were lost or buried at sea. That could mean over 400 WWII Oregon MIAs would be eligible for roadside markers if their remains were or will be recovered, identified and returned to Oregon.

The situation for:

WWI: 21 Oregon veterans remain MIA. DPAA does not include WWI Veterans in its program.

Korean War: 56 Oregon veterans remain MIA and 5 have been accounted for by DPAA.

Vietnam War: 34 Oregon veterans remain MIA and 18 have been accounted for by DPAA.

Cold War: 2 Oregon veterans remain MIA and 1 has been accounted for by DPAA.

Using DPAA information one could determine if those “Accounted For” were in fact returned to Oregon making them eligible for roadside markers. Their families could help determine that.

The Navy’s WWII civilian construction contractors at Wake Island operated under the name “Contractors Pacific Naval Air Bases” (CPNAB). The Secretary of Defense designated “**Civilian employees of Pacific Naval Air Bases who actively participated in Defense of Wake Island during WWII**” as “**having performed active military service**” during WWII (Federal Register, page 4823 January 30, 2004).

According to Bonnie Gilbert, historian, author, educator and daughter of Theodore Olson/Portland a Wake Island survivor, 1,145 civilian construction workers were employed at Wake Island when the Japanese Navy attacked and eventually captured Wake Island beginning on Dec. 8, 1941 - 133 were Oregonians. About 33 Oregonians died while defending Wake Island or subsequently as POW slave laborers at Wake Island and at several POW camps elsewhere – mostly Sasebo, Japan.

Twelve (12) Oregon civilians were among the 98 civilian POWs brutally executed by the Japanese at Wake Island on October 7, 1943. One Oregonian was lost at sea during the attack and remains MIA. Sixteen civilian POWs were laid to rest in a mass grave at DVA’s National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific (Punchbowl). Only 1 (lost at sea) of the 133 Oregon civilian POWs is listed on the DPAA website. Bonnie Gilbert’s “**Building For War: The Epic Saga of the Civilian Contractors and Marines of Wake Island in WWII**” is an excellent resource on the civilians employed at Wake Island.

Bonnie Gilbert also reports the remains of 8 civilian Wake Island POWs were returned to Oregon for burial in 4 Oregon cities: Portland (4), Canyon City (2), Canby (1) and Newburg (1). The remains were identified and returned to families by predecessors of DPAA. I recommend SB 441 (and HB 2700) be revised to designate those civilians as eligible for roadside markers.

DPAA does not list Oregon’s WWII Wake Island POWs and MIAs although DPAA lists the names of 874 “Unaccounted For” WWII civilians including the 1 Oregonian lost at sea. NARA lists only 9 of the 133 civilian POWS. Therefore we must depend on Bonnie Gilbert’s thorough research and be thankful for it.

I have requested the Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs to honor Oregon's 33 WWII civilian POWs who died in captivity by engraving their names on the Oregon WWII Memorial on the state Capital grounds.

DPAA also lists recovered and returned civilian MIAs from the Cold War and Vietnam War. The remains of Robert Snoddy (Cold War) and Edward Weissenbach (Vietnam War) were identified and returned to Oregon by DPAA. Mr. Snoddy was laid to rest in Eugene. Mr. Weissenbach's funeral was held in Eagle Point on July 5, 2020 according to DPAA. As both were employed by the CIA, a federal government agency, they too should be eligible for roadside markers in a revised SB 441. Both served as veterans during war (Snoddy/WWII, Weissenbach/Vietnam) before their service with the CIA.

The National Archives lists 770 WWII POWs from Oregon with 159 dying or executed as POWs. Fifty nine (59) are still MIA/Unaccounted For according to DPAA. As SB 441 and HB 2700 envision, any of the 59 "Unaccounted For" who are recovered, identified and returned to Oregon would be eligible for roadside markers.

I thank this committee for the opportunity to testify on SB 441. I will respond to any questions the Committee might have.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dick Tobiason". The signature is written in a cursive style with a light blue background behind the text.

Dick Tobiason
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cc: Chair Paul Evans, BHF, Bonnie Gilbert