

BEND HEROES FOUNDATION
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Bend Heroes Foundation Testimony: HB 2146A Oregon Gold Star Families Memorial Highway
on U.S. Hwy 30
to
Senate Committee on Veterans, Emergency Management, Federal and World Affairs
April 20, 2023

Thank you, Chair Manning, Vice-Chair Thatcher and committee members, for this opportunity to testify to the Senate Committee on Veterans, Emergency Management, Federal and World Affairs today in support of HB 2146A.

I am Dick Tobiason, Chairman, Bend Heroes Foundation. The Foundation is located in Bend, Oregon and designated by the IRS as a non-profit 501c3 entity. We have been active since 2010 with over 30 Veterans projects completed valued at over \$2 million. I served 20 years in the US Army retiring as a Lieutenant Colonel, Master Army Aviator with 2 tours in Vietnam. I am a combat wounded veteran.

If HB 2146A becomes law, U.S. Hwy 30 across Oregon would be designated as the **Oregon Gold Star Families Memorial Highway** honoring over 6,000 Oregon Gold Star families. I drafted and requested the legislation.

The Gold Star banner had its origins in WWI when families displayed Blue Star banners in windows of their homes signifying a son or daughter was serving during wartime. Families replaced the Blue Star with a Gold Star when their son or daughter died during the Great War. That practice continues.

Almost one half million Oregonians have served in 5 major wars since WWI: 6,022 made the ultimate sacrifice, about 15,000 veterans were wounded, over 900 veterans became POWs, 997 veterans still remain Missing in action (MIA), and 29 veterans connected with Oregon received the Medal of Honor – our nation's highest award for valor during war.

Attached is a spreadsheet showing Oregon's casualties by war. **Oregon's 6,022 war dead left 6,022 families behind.** They are called Gold Star Families with some named as Gold Star Mothers and Gold Star Wives by the U.S. Congress. **There could be as many as 15,000 Oregon Gold Star family members including parents, siblings, spouses, sons, and daughters.**

Presidents issue Gold Star Mother's and Family's Day proclamations annually for the last Sunday in September. I have drafted similar proclamations for Oregon Governors and Bend Mayors.

Since 2009 the Legislature and 3 Governors have unanimously approved Bend Heroes Foundation's requests to designate 8 veterans highways across Oregon honoring 479,800 war veterans. We are extremely grateful for that outstanding support! The highways are:

WWI Veterans Memorial Highway on U.S. Hwy 395

WWII Veterans Historic Highway on U.S. Hwy 97* and since extended into Washington.

Korean War Veterans Memorial Highway on I-5

Vietnam Veterans Memorial Highway on I-84* and since extended through Idaho and Utah

Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, and Iraq Veterans Memorial Highway on U.S. 101*

Purple Heart Trail on I-5

Oregon Medal of Honor Highway on U.S. Hwy 20* and since extended as 11 more state Medal of Honor Highways across our nation to Boston, MA

POW/MIA Memorial Highway on U.S. Hwy 26* and since extended through Idaho

Five highways are first of a kind in our nation as noted above by *. Ninety three (93) signs have been installed along 2,970 miles of Oregon highways.

A 9th border to border highway proposed as the **Oregon Gold Star Families Memorial Highway** on the 477 mile U.S. Hwy 30 is shown in purple on this map.



The Oregon Gold Star Families Memorial Highway intersects all 5 war highways along Oregon's northern border. Those junctures connect Gold Star Families with their loved ones who made the ultimate sacrifice during 5 major wars beginning 106 years ago.

I have submitted a fact sheet describing the 8 veterans memorial highways (length and number of signs). Photos of signs along the 8 highways are included in the fact sheet. The Purple Heart Trail, POW/MIA Memorial Highway and Oregon Medal of Honor Highway signs display images of the Purple Heart and Medal of Honor Medals and POW/MIA emblem – all familiar to the public. We would like to continue that practice on the **Oregon Gold Star Families Memorial Highway** with display of the Gold Star banner on all highway signs.

Now that all Oregon wartime have been honored with highway signs, **it is time to honor the Gold Star Families left behind by honoring them on the 477 mile U.S. Hwy 30, the longest highway in Oregon. Oregon has not yet honored them with a border to border highway. It is the last border to border highway available to honor them.** I know of no other border to border Gold Star Families Memorial Highway within our nation.

Designating the **Oregon Gold Star Families Memorial Highway** would demonstrate **Oregon will not forget its Gold Star Families** and hopefully help provide closure to families and friends.

Such a designation would also be another first of a kind in our nation and like the **Oregon Medal of Honor Highway** could be extended as state Gold Star Families Memorial Highways across our nation from the Oregon/Idaho border to Atlantic City, NJ.

If the **Oregon Gold Star Families Memorial Highway** is so designated by the Legislature and Governor, we would request ODOT to install signs away from Vietnam Highway signs on I-84, within the cities served by U.S. Hwy 30 and at the ends of U.S. Hwy 30.

This is our proposed version of the highway sign displaying the familiar Gold Star banner.



PROPOSED 4 FT. X 8 FT. OREGON GOLD STAR FAMILIES MEMORIAL HIGHWAY SIGN

After we dedicated 12 **Oregon Medal of Honor Highway** signs across Oregon on U.S. Hwy 20, Bend Heroes Foundation initiated the **Medal of Honor Highway Across America** project on the 3,365 mile U.S. Hwy 20, the longest highway in our nation.

I am delighted to report that after 5 years managing creation of that highway and as of November 17, 2022, all 11 states east of Oregon have adopted the **Oregon Medal of Honor Highway** model. We now have a Medal of Honor Highway spanning our nation from sea to shining sea – Newport, OR to Boston, MA. It is the first veterans highway on the longest continuous highway across the United States. A map of the informally named Medal of Honor Highway Across America is attached to the fact sheet. It all began in Oregon with HB 2100 thanks to your support!

U.S. Hwy 30 is the third longest highway in our nation and also crosses America from sea to shining sea: Astoria, Oregon to Atlantic City, New Jersey a distance of 3,073 miles crossing 11 states. It parallels the coast to coast Lincoln and Eisenhower highways.



**U.S. HIGHWAY 30 ACROSS AMERICA: 11 STATES, 3,073 MILES, THIRD LONGEST HIGHWAY IN USA
COAST TO COAST: ASTORIA, OREGON TO ATLANTIC CITY, NEW JERSEY**

As there are Congressionally chartered non-profit Gold Star Mothers and Gold Star Wives organizations and other Gold Star organizations located across America, I would think they would want to extend “their” highway across our nation as Bend Heroes Foundation and its partners have successfully done for our nation’s 3,516 Medal of Honor recipients.

Since WWI, about 620,000 members of our nation’s Armed Forces including Oregon’s 6,022 have made the ultimate sacrifice during war justifying a coast to coast Gold Star Families Memorial Highway. There could be as many as 2.4 million Gold Star family members (parents, siblings, spouses, sons and daughters).

I shared my proposal with Oregon’s Gold Star Mothers and Wives organizations on Gold Star Mother’s and Family’s Day – September 25, 2022 and requested they testify on HB 2146. I have informed the national leaders of the Oregon legislation.

Related to Gold Star families, Bend Heroes Foundation, Project Recover and Oregon State Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc. and several Blue Star and Gold Star families dedicated 12 inch by 20 inch Blue Star and Gold Star Memorial Markers at Bend Heroes Memorial on Sept. 25, 2022 – Gold Star Mother’s and Family’s Day. We purchased the markers from the National Garden Clubs, Inc. The Foundation and Oregon Garden Clubs have since expanded that program to 7 other cities across Oregon.

Oregon Garden Clubs is donating 2 large Gold Star Memorial markers to be installed in veterans related facilities near each end of the Oregon Gold Star Families Memorial Highway.



BLUE STAR AND GOLD STAR MEMORIALS AT BEND HEROES MEMORIAL



CLOSE UP GOLD STAR MEMORIAL AT BEND HEROES MEMORIAL



Oregon's Gold Star Mothers, Gold Star Wives and Blue Star Mothers are raising \$100,000 to dedicate a "Woody" Williams **Gold Star Families Memorial Monument** at Willamette National Cemetery. While Oregon is the last state to dedicate a "Woody" Williams memorial monument, **Oregon could be the first state to dedicate a border to border Gold Star Families Memorial Highway.** Of the 190 plus Williams monuments already dedicated or in process, almost 30% are located in the 11 states along US Hwy 30.



Oregon's Gold Star families will thus have new opportunities to honor their loved ones at Willamette National Cemetery and wherever the small and large Gold Star Memorial Markers are installed near them. **The highway signs would add to that experience as well as educating the traveling public.**

As in previous veteran's highway bills, HB 2146 requires veterans and others to pay ODOT to fabricate and install signs along U.S. Hwy 30.

HB 2146 also provides for the preservation of all existing highway designations and signs on U.S. Hwy 30.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of HB 2146A to this Committee today.

I urge the Committee to recommend a Do Pass vote as the Committee has done for 8 veterans' highways over the last 14 years.

I would be pleased to respond to any questions the Committee may have.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dick Tobiason". The signature is written in a cursive style with a clear, legible font.

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4-17-23

**OREGON VETERANS WAR CASUALTIES
1917 – PRESENT: 105 YEARS**

WAR	SERVED	DIED	ESTIMATED WOUNDED	TOTAL CASUALTIES	LIVING 2020
WWI	44,166	1,066	1,800	2,866	0
WWII	152,000	3,772	9,900	13,672	5,790
KOREA	74,000	269	672	941	18,968
VIETNAM	119,784	803	2,000	2,803	100,990
GWOT	89,812	112	679	791	93,590
TOTAL (includes 71,314 Peacetim e)	479,762	6,022	15,051	21,073	284,141

Prepared by Dick Tobiason