

Department of Oregon Military Order of the Purple Heart Testimony: HB 2146 Oregon Gold Star Families
Memorial Highway on U.S. Hwy 30
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 designating US Hwy 30 across Oregon as **Oregon Gold Star Families Memorial Highway**.

I am Keith Wittnebel, Commander of the Department of Oregon Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH). Our Department consists of over 500 members in 4 chapters across Oregon.

I served four years in the US Navy, as a Petty Officer 2nd class with one tour in Vietnam. I am a Purple Heart recipient.

The Purple Heart award was initiated by George Washington, then Commander In Chief, Continental Army in 1782. It is our nation's oldest military award and awarded to members of the Armed Forces who were killed or wounded in action by an enemy of the United States. About 1.8 million awards have been made since WWI.

Over the years, the Oregon Legislature and Governor designated I-5 as a **Purple Heart Trail** and Oregon as a **Purple Heart State** and for that we are most grateful.

Almost one half million Oregonians have served in 5 major wars since WWI: 6,022 made the ultimate sacrifice and about 15,000 veterans were wounded for a total of 21,000 war casualties.

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

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 with WWI 106 years ago.

Oregon's 6,022 war dead left 6,022 families behind. There could be as many as 15,000 Oregon Gold Star family members including parents, siblings, spouses, sons, and daughters.

Now that all of Oregon's wartime veterans 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. It is the last border to border highway available to honor them. Oregon has not yet honored Gold Star Families with a dedicated highway.

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

Related to the **Oregon Gold Star Families Memorial Highway**, all 4 Oregon MOPH Chapters are in the process of dedicating 12 inch by 20 inch Blue Star and Gold Star Memorial Markers within their cities. We purchased the markers from the National Garden Clubs, Inc. through the Oregon State Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc.

In summary, the Oregon Department of the Military Order of the Purple Heart is extremely proud of its several recent Gold Star actions: donation to the Gold Star Families Memorial Monument at Willamette National Cemetery, dedication of Blue Star and Gold Star Memorial Markers across Oregon and endorsing the Oregon Gold Star Families Memorial Highway legislation.

I urge the Committee to recommend a Do Pass vote.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify on HB 2146A to this Committee today.

Respectfully,

/signed/

Keith Wittnebel

Commander,

Department of Oregon

Military Order of the Purple Heart