

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

May 9, 2023

Re: Testimony HB 2144A

Thank you Chair Manning and committee members for this opportunity to testify to the Senate Committee on Veterans, Emergency Management, Federal and World Affairs today on HB 2144A.

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.

Oregon is home to almost 1,000 MIAs from all wars and services. Over the last 40 years, The remains of 44 Oregon MIAs have recovered, identified, and returned to families for final disposition:

WWII	21 (not including 8 Wake Island Civilians)
Korea	5
Vietnam	17 (including 2 civilians and 1 civilian POW)
Cold War	1 (civilian)

The rate of recovery is about 4% meaning very few MIA families will apply for roadside markers.

To qualify for a roadside marker, previous legislation required the remains of a recovered and identified MIA to be returned to Oregon. I testified in support of that legislation noting that the remains of Army Corporal Norvin D. Brockett, a recovered and identified Korean War MIA from Powell Butte was in the process of being returned to family and the remains would probably be flown directly from Hawaii to the east coast for burial at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia. His remains would not be flown to Oregon so his family would not be eligible for a roadside marker. I requested the measure be amended to cover that condition which actually happened. There may be more situations like that.

This is a photo of CPL Brockett at about age 18 when he became MIA in North Korea:



You may recall, I requested legislation designating US Hwy 26 across Oregon as the POW/MIA Memorial Highway (HB 3452, 2019 Session). This is a photo of the Brockett family attending dedication of 1 of 10 signs in Prineville near Powell Butte where CPL Brockett was born and raised:



FAMILY OF CPL NORVIN BROCKETT HONORED AT DEDICATION OF POW/MIA MEMORIAL HIGHWAY
(Brockett family on left)

This is a photo of the caisson at Arlington National Cemetery carrying the remains of CPL Brockett to his grave site on July 21, 2021.



I also requested the measure include civilians as 4 Oregonians became MIAs in southeast Asia during the Vietnam War and Cold War. Thirty two (32) Oregon civilians who were US Navy contractors were captured at Wake Island by Japanese forces during WWII and died as POWs. The remains of 8 POWs were returned to families in Oregon for burials.

Vice Chair Rick Lewis then agreed that an amendment was needed to cover the Brockett case. I thank Rep. Lewis for advocating the amendment now before this Committee. Rep. Lewis also agreed that a future amendment would be required to cover certain wartime civilians.

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency is responsible for locating, recovering, identifying, and returning remains of MIAs to families including remains of civilians. I plan to advise DPAA of the Oregon roadside marker program so its Casualty Assistance Officers could in turn advise families of this fine and largely unknown Oregon honors program.

Your counterpart committee in the House unanimously voted Aye for HB 2144 as did the House of Representatives.

If HB 2144A is adopted as law, I will inform the Brockett family so they can apply to ODOT for a roadside marker using HB 2144A as the authority.

I look forward to a future amendment covering certain civilians.

I respectfully request this Committee to adopt the amendment with a Do Pass recommendation.

As this Committee helped me create the Oregon Medal of Honor Highway, I have since managed creation of the Medal of Honor Highway Across America on US Hwy 20. Now that all 11 states east of Oregon have followed the Oregon precedent honoring their Medal of Honor recipients, I requested Oregon Senator Ron Wyden to sponsor legislation in the US Senate that would designate the 3,365 mile US Hwy 20 from Newport, OR to Boston, MA as the **National Medal of Honor Highway**. Senator Wyden has agreed to introducing a bill very soon.

I also thank Patrick Brennan for keeping me up to date on measures during this session.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify.

I would be pleased to respond to any questions.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dick Tolson". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.