

In Support of SB 667: "Defend the Guard"

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To: Oregon State Committee on Veterans, Emergency Management, Federal and World Affairs

My name is Matthew Hoh. I am the Associate Director of the Eisenhower Media Network. I was a Marine Corps officer for ten years and a political officer with the State Department. I participated in the Iraq War twice and the Afghan War once. I am a 100% disabled combat veteran.

I support SB 667.

The wars to which the federal government has deployed the National Guard have been never-ending, counter-productive and failed, as well as undeclared and constitutionally illegal. In addition, National Guard units have been deployed to defend and support foreign powers and private interests.

To illustrate how these wars have been counter-productive, consider just two simple facts: In the years before the US invasion in 2001, Afghanistan and Pakistan were home to four international terror groups. By the time the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan, according to Pentagon information, that number had grown to 20 groups. Secondly, when the US first invaded Afghanistan, according to CIA and FBI estimates, al-Qaeda counted between 200 and 400 total members worldwide. Al-Qaeda has since spawned branches and off-shoots—including the Islamic State—in dozens of countries, with membership in the tens of thousands, and have, at times, controlled entire cities in multiple countries.

Additionally, these wars have been based and sustained upon lies. While our Congress has not had a sense of responsibility for their duties, the United Kingdom's Parliament has held formal inquiries that have confirmed both the wars in Iraq and Libya were built on lies. At the same time, in December 2019, *The Washington Post* published hundreds of official testimonies from US military and government officials confirming the war in Afghanistan had been a deliberate and concerted program of systemic lying.

Seventeen members of the Oregon National Guard were killed in Iraq and Afghanistan, and nearly 150 were wounded. An unknown amount suffers from the signature invisible wounds of those wars: traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder. Can you justify those sacrifices? If allowed today to vote on sending Oregon National Guard members to another Iraq or Afghanistan War, what would you do? What if the federal government ordered the Oregon National Guard to deploy to Gaza or Ukraine? Would you tell your constituents you could do nothing about such a deployment?

When National Guard units are deployed to these wars, their communities and states are often left without help. Most infamous is the example of the Louisiana National Guard, which was in Iraq when Hurricane Katrina hit. There have been numerous examples across multiple states of the National Guard not being available for their neighbors and communities when needed. As you know, in 2020, when record wildfires devastated Oregon, the National Guard helicopters required to fight the wildfires were not in Oregon but in Afghanistan.

Today, National Guard units provide the bulk of US forces in Iraq and Syria. Primarily, these Guardsmen are occupying and protecting oil fields in eastern Syria. The Oregon National Guard is deployed in that role right now. I suspect most Oregon citizens did not know the purpose of their Guard's deployments. There certainly was not a US congressional debate to authorize such a use of your state's citizens and resources. If Oregon National Guard soldiers are killed protecting Syria's oil fields for the benefit of private companies and foreign interests, can you justify that to the Oregon public?

Our elected representatives in Washington, DC, are unwilling to fulfill their constitutional duties. This includes ensuring the men and women who step forward to defend, protect and help their neighbors and communities by joining the National Guard are not deployed to failed, counter-productive and constitutionally unapproved wars or to war zones to serve the interests of foreign powers and private corporations. The men and women of the Oregon National Guard are being abused and betrayed.

I ask you to do what our members of Congress in Washington, DC, will not do and pass the Defend the Guard Act. The men and women of the Guard deserve the same level of courage and integrity in their elected leaders as they themselves demonstrate. Please pass SB 667, Defend the Guard.

Sincerely,

Matthew Hoh