

Dick Tobiason, Chairman
Bend Heroes Foundation
1900 NE 3rd Ft., Ste 106, #205
Bend, OR 97701

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RE: HCR 23: "Recognizes and honors Oregon civilians who served the United States on Wake Island during World War II. Commends individuals who have increased public awareness of the service and sacrifice of these civilians."

Thank you, Chair Tran, Vice Chair Grayber, Vice Chair Lewis and distinguished committee members for this opportunity to testify to the House Committee on Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans in support of HCR 23.

I am Dick Tobiason, Chairman, Bend Heroes Foundation, a retired US Army Lieutenant Colonel and combat wounded Vietnam veteran. .

Before I comment on HCR 23. I would like to thank this Committee for supporting my initiatives over the years to honor 480,000 war veterans and 6,000 Gold Star Families with 9 border to border highways across Oregon totaling 3,447 miles with 101 highway signs dedicated.

You will recall this committee approved my request to honor Oregon's 29 Medal of Honor recipients by designating the 451 mile U.S. Hwy 20 across Oregon as the "Oregon Medal of Honor Highway" – HB 2100 (2017, 79th Legislative Assembly). Since then, I initiated the 3,365 mile National Medal of Honor Highway on U.S. Hwy 20 from Newport, Oregon to Boston, Massachusetts honoring all of our nation's 3,526 Medal of Honor recipients and all future recipients. I am pleased to tell you that at my request, Oregon Senator Ron Wyden sponsored legislation which was passed by Congress with President Biden signing it into law on December 17, 2024. I will be briefing Medal of Honor recipients on their new highway at National Medal of Honor Day ceremonies in Washington, DC on March 25 - National Medal of Honor Day. It all started with this Committee 8 years ago – thank you.

Based in part on those 10 Oregon and National veterans highways totaling almost 7,000 miles, this Committee honored me with HCR 202 last session. I am deeply appreciative of your tribute. Likewise, I was inducted into the Oregon Military Hall of Fame last year.

I thank Vice Chair Lewis for encouraging me to honor the "lost to history" Oregon's Wake Island civilians.

HCR 23 seeks to recognize and honor Oregon's 134 civilians who served and the 31 WWII civilians who died defending Wake Island and who were captured at Wake Island and subsequently died at the hands of the Japanese. None of the military deaths at Wake Island include Oregonians.

HCR 23 includes much information on the siege and capture of Wake Island, their heroic efforts to defeat the enemy, and deaths of 31 Oregon civilians so I need not repeat that.

This Committee can make HCR 23 reality because Wake Island Historian and Author Bonita “Bonnie” Gilbert made it possible. Bonnie’s father Theodore Olson survived as a Wake Island POW. Bonnie’s outstanding credentials are included in HCR 23. Bonnie helped me dedicate the Oregon POW/MIA Memorial Highway so I requested her help again in drafting HCR 23 and testifying. Like Vice Chair Lewis, I learned a lot from Bonnie’s book referenced in HCR 23.

A map of Wake Island is included in my submitted testimony.

Here we are nearly 80 years after the end of WWII and 11 years after dedicating the Oregon WWII Memorial – a mere 150 yards from your hearing room requesting the Legislature through HCR 23 to honor the 134 Oregon civilians who served during WWII and the 31 who died under brutal conditions just as their military counterparts experienced over 3 years and 9 months at the hands of the Japanese during WWII.

The Oregon WWII Memorial on the Capitol grounds does not honor civilians notwithstanding my repeated requests to the Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs to do so. HB 2344 limits the honors to “service members” only, Therefore I requested Vice Chair Lewis to sponsor this legislation so the Wake Island civilians will be honored and never be forgotten. Thank you, Vice Chair Lewis.

In summary, Oregon’s Wake Island civilians were involved throughout all of WWII which began with the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 propelling our nation into WWII to the Japanese surrender almost 4 years later ending WWII on September 4, 1945.

Noteworthy is the fact that Wake Island civilians were recognized by the US Navy for their valor with awards of the Navy Cross, Purple Hearts, and Bronze Stars. The Navy Cross award to the civilian doctor is the only Navy Cross award ever presented to a civilian.

Our objectives are to raise public awareness of Oregon’s Wake Island civilians through HCR 23 and create a public document listing the names of the 134 who served, including the 31 who perished and compiled by Bonnie Gilbert.

If approved by the Legislature, HCR 23 and the names listings could also be used to create a memorial on the Capitol grounds and included in the “educational tool” proposed by ODVA in HB 2344. .

As part of our testimonies, Bonnie Gilbert and I have submitted the names of all 134 Oregonians which includes the 31 who perished at the hands of the enemy. The names of the war dead are listed by the 16 day siege and final battle (2), executions (11), and at POW camps (18). The names of 103 civilians who survived WWII are also listed.

Over the last 3 years I have requested ODVA to add 165 names to the WWII Memorial. That includes the 31 Wake Island civilian war dead. I am pleased that HB 2344 will review

the remaining 134 names for possible inclusion of new names to be added. I plan to testify on HB 2344 to this Committee as there are several issues within HB 2344 needing attention.

Oregon's 31 Wake Island war dead civilians are honored at Wake Island with a plaque (11 Oregonians of 98 executed), the "98 Rock", Soto Dam, Sasebo, Japan plaque (12 Oregonians of 53 POWs), and at the National Cemetery of the Pacific in Hawaii massive slab (17 Oregonians of 178). Each Memorial Day, the US Navy holds ceremonies at the Soto Dam memorial. To my knowledge there are no such ceremonies in Oregon. I have submitted photos of those 3 memorials as part of my testimony.

Oregon's 31 Wake Island civilians are not yet honored in Oregon with a memorial. I am optimistic they will soon be honored.

It appears ODVA does not intend to honor civilians on the Oregon WWII Memorial as HB 2344 is restricted to "service members" notwithstanding my several requests to do so. The 31 names could be engraved on the WWII Memorial if HB 2344 is amended by the Oregon Legislature to include qualifying civilians.

However, the 31 names and the circumstances surrounding their deaths should be included in the ODVA "educational tool" proposed in HB 2344 as I have requested over the last 3 years.

Bonnie Gilbert and I would offer our services to create the Wake Island content for the "educational tool" and update the "Non Battle Losses" plaque at the memorial which includes Wake Island. That plaque is an inaccurate accounting of Oregon's Wake Island civilians and can be corrected by a new plaque and QR code on the existing plaque and the "educational tool" on the internet.

The Oregon State Capitol Foundation has honored my request to honor Medal of Honor recipients with a plaque listing 16 MOH recipients connected with Oregon but excluded from the Oregon Medal of Honor Memorial at the Capitol. Rep. Evans participated in the dedication of that plaque. Now the Foundation has agreed to my request to add "lost to history" WWII Medal of Honor recipient Elmer E. Fryar who was Killed in Action in the Philippines and who still remains Missing in Action.

My visit to the Clair Maybelle Phillips memorial dedicated by the Capitol Foundation near the WWII Memorial inspired me to ask the Foundation to consider a similar memorial for Oregon's 31 Wake Island civilians. I understand the Foundation's Executive Committee will discuss my request next week.

I will ask Oregon's Veterans Service Organizations to publish the 134 names and 73 burial locations across Oregon so Oregon's veterans will know about them and honor them just as they do for veterans on Memorial Day and National Wreaths Across America Day.

I will also request veterans in Idaho to ask the Idaho Legislature to similarly honor Idaho's WWII Wake Island civilians as there were almost twice as many WWII Wake Island

civilians in Idaho as in Oregon. Like Oregon, Idaho does not have a memorial listing the names of its Wake Island war dead. Bonnie Gilbert says she is ready to help fellow Idahoans.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify in support of HCR 23.

I would be pleased to respond to your questions.

I respectfully urge a Do Pass recommendation.

Dick Tobiason

Bend, Oregon 3-5-25 1900