



OREGON HOUSE REPUBLICAN OFFICE

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Lawmakers vote to extend tuition benefits to Oregon National Guard members *Oregon is only state in the nation that does not provide tuition assistance to Guard members*

Salem, Ore. - The Oregon House today unanimously approved legislation extending tuition benefits to Oregon National Guard members. Chief sponsored by House Republican Leader Mike McLane (R-Powell Butte) and Representative Gene Whisnant (R-Sunriver), HB 4035 would align Oregon with the 49 other states that already provide some form of tuition assistance to Guard members.

"Members of our National Guard represent the best of us," said Rep. McLane. "They protect our communities from wildfires, they are there when floodwaters are threatening homes and businesses, they stand ready to protect us in emergency situations and they always stand ready to defend our country overseas."

"Unfortunately, with a declining unemployment rate, a decline in eligible population and a benefits package that is not competitive with service programs in other states, enrollment in the Oregon National Guard has declined significantly in recent years. Extending tuition benefits to new recruits will help bolster enrollment and, in turn, strengthen our National Guard. Our service members deserve our support, and Oregon needs a healthy National Guard."

According to testimony presented by the Oregon Military Department, Oregon is the only state in the nation that does not provide some form of tuition assistance to Guard members. The Military Department also presented statistics which show Oregon's Army National Guard Strength Ranking has slipped from a high of #15 in the nation to #50 in 2018. The decline can be attributed in part to a decline in enrollment by new Guard members.

The Oregon Military Department also wrote, "New recruits from the Army National Guard and Army Reserve are enlisting in the Military to better their future prospects and to seek opportunities that will help them work toward their future goals. Most new recruits are joining to pay for education and to gain experience/work skills..."

"Passing this bill is the right thing to do for our Guard Members and for ensuring that Oregonians have a world class military that is ready to support and defend them when disaster strikes or when called upon to serve overseas," said Rep. Whisnant. "I am pleased to see this bill moving forward before the end of this session."

HB 4035 passed the House unanimously. The legislation now heads to the Senate for further consideration.

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