



SENATE MAJORITY OFFICE

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CONTACT: Molly Woon (503) 986-1074
molly.woon@state.or.us

Two bills helping veterans identify benefits and services pass in Senate
*One will create comprehensive benefits website; another creates
service officer program on Oregon's college campuses*

SALEM –Veterans scored two more wins this afternoon as the Senate passed a pair of House bills that will help Oregon's returning service members access and identify services and benefits. House Bill 2178 will assist veterans enrolled at Oregon's public colleges and universities take advantage of the GI Bill by creating the Campus Veterans' Service Officer Program in the Department of Veterans' Affairs. House Bill 3104 requires the Department to establish a website that allows veterans to enter contact information and request information about benefits and services.

"Oftentimes an absence of information can create a major barrier to a veteran who wants to access services," said Senator Martha Schrader (D-Canby). "It's not enough to just provide services. We need to make sure our men and women in uniform know that what is out there and how to apply."

Both bills were inspired by the report of the Governor's Task Force on Veterans' Services completed in December 2008. HB 2178, creating the Campus Veterans' Service Officer Program, is in response to the underutilization of the GI Bill on many Oregon campuses. The Task Force found that approximately 5,800 Oregon veterans were receiving educational benefits available under the Post 9/11 GI Bill – only a small percentage of those eligible.

"This legislation will help increase the number of Oregon veterans who take advantage of their GI Bill benefits and are able to participate in post-secondary education," said Senator Rod Monroe (D-Portland), who carried the bill on the floor. "This is a major benefit for our veterans, our local communities, and the diversity of Oregon campuses."

HB 3104 was prompted by Task Force findings that substantial amounts of federal aid are consistently underutilized because of a systemic failure of state, regional, and local public agencies to inquire about a person's veteran status. In Oregon, only 22 percent of veterans are identified through the U.S. Census by the state's system, resulting in approximately \$4 billion in lost revenue to the state from federal reimbursements.

"We're doing a disservice to our veterans and our communities by not identifying the federal resources that should be flowing into Oregon," said Deputy Senate Majority Leader Laurie Monnes Anderson (D-

Gresham). “Something as simple as establishing a website will help Oregon veterans take advantage of these missed opportunities.”

Both bills will now go to the Governor’s desk for his approval.

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