



from the office of

Sen. Kim Thatcher

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 12, 2017

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"Brown AWOL on veterans issues"

Thatcher adviser, combat veteran Justin Brecht speaks out on Brown snubbing Medal of Honor recipient Leroy Petry

SALEM, Ore.—According to veterans advocates, the governor snubbed [Medal of Honor recipient Leroy Petry](#), during his visit for the [Veterans First rally urging lawmakers to lift restrictions on mental health care access](#). Petry was granted his Medal of Honor for valor in Afghanistan by then-President Barack Obama. Senate Republican Whip Dennis Linthicum, of Klamath Falls, and state Sen. James Manning, D-Eugene, recognized Petry's service on the Senate Floor this morning.

Combat veteran Justin Brecht, chief adviser to Republican state Sen. Kim Thatcher, of Keizer, recently spoke at the Veterans First press conference about losing many friends to post traumatic stress. Brecht fought in Operation Phantom Fury, in Fallujah, Iraq, the largest battle since the battle in Hue City Vietnam War. According to the [Washington Post](#), 82 of the estimated 12,000 U.S. troops who took part in the battle were killed, and another 600 were wounded.

Brecht released the following statement:

"As someone who has worked in the Capitol as an adviser to a senator, and as a combat veteran who has lost loved ones to post traumatic stress, it disturbs me that we can't get passed this critical legislation to expand access to veterans and their families. I've seen people lost in combat and I've seen people lost here at home. I'm outraged the governor seems to be

so exploitative with veterans. She snaps photographs with veterans while she defunds them in her budget? She orders flags to half-mast for Memorial Day, while she ignores the outcry on this issue? This is wrong, and every Oregonian must know the truth about what's happening in this building. The governor is totally AWOL on helping lift the restrictions on veterans mental health care issues."

The snub occurred as Petry was in Salem promoting legislation to lift restrictions on mental health access for veterans and their families. The refusal came after the governor's staff had Petry come to her office. Petry lost his right hand while throwing a live grenade away from his fellow Rangers.

No reason was given but critics have pointed out Brown's administration has ignored the fact that Oregon ranks 49th in the nation for mental health, and that Oregon has the highest suicide rate in the overall National Guard system.

Apparently, Brown is the first sitting governor in recent times to refuse to meet with a living Medal of Honor recipient.

Petry has awards and decorations including the Ranger Tab, the Combat Infantryman's Badge, Expert Infantryman's Badge, Senior Parachutist Badge, the Parachutist Badge and Canadian Jump Wings.

He has also been awarded two Bronze Star Medals, a Purple Heart, three Army Commendation Medals, two Army Achievement Medals, Valorous Unit Award, three Army Good Conduct Medals, National Defense Service Medal, Afghanistan Campaign Medal with Combat Star, Iraq Campaign Medal with Combat Star, Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, Non-commissioned Officer Professional Development Ribbon with numeral 3, Overseas Service Ribbon and the Army Service Ribbon.

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BACKGROUND

Recently, *The Portland Mercury* [reported](#) on Oregon's unmet need for inpatient psychiatric beds and its perpetuated problems with patient boarding.

The 300,000 veterans living in Oregon, and their families, are being used as pawns by bureaucrats, Republicans say. Nearly 30,000 of the veterans in Oregon fought in Iraq or Afghanistan. Hundreds are homeless, and while veterans make up 8.7 percent of Oregon's population, they account for over 20 percent of suicides. Nearly one in four active duty members show signs of a mental health condition. Twenty percent of veterans who served in Iraq or Afghanistan suffer from post-traumatic stress and/or depression and 50 percent of post-traumatic stress is not treated.

The highly unpopular [Oregon Health Authority \(OHA\) has been under fire for holding hostages and collecting ransom payments from providers](#), by lawmakers and veterans, with some questioning [how many veterans have to die before Oregon will act](#).

[Republicans have denounced the OHA certificate of need process, the go-ahead hospitals need from government before they build new facilities, calling it a form of bureaucratic terrorism](#). A bipartisan solution has been proposed, though. Senate Bill 1054 is one way of addressing address the worsening crisis by waiving costly and unneeded roadblocks to providing mental health care services to veterans and their families.

[The application fee alone for a facility going through the "certificate of need" process is tens of thousands of dollars](#). For a \$1.5 million facility that fee nears \$35,000. And for a larger facility it could be more than \$70,000. In addition to the application fee, though, a facility must own the property where it will build the new psychiatric unit, hire architects and others to complete the application and then go through an often years-long certificate process.

"The passage of SB 1054 would help provide a variety of needed mental health services. The bill will help service members, like myself, make a full and meaningful recovery. As this bill moves through the Oregon Legislature, I encourage our elected officials to vote yes to allow new facilities to add to Oregon's supply of mental health services," [wrote Kyle Shields in *The Lund Report*](#).

Despite the [clear need, the facts](#), the advocates and the providers, and the passage of SB 1054 out of the Senate Veterans Committee, the bill has not yet been brought to the Floor for a vote.

For follow-up commentary please contact Thatcher spokesman Jonathan Lockwood at 971-645-2140, or Jonathan.Lockwood@OregonLegislature.gov.