

An Open Letter to Governor John A. Kitzhaber, MD

December 29, 2011

Governor John A. Kitzhaber, MD
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Governor Kitzhaber:

Happy New Year! This letter should reach you sometime during the first week of 2012, and I hope it finds you well. In fact, I hope this holiday season brought joy and peace to your family and friends. I recognize, indeed respect, the awesome price public service exacts upon the individual and the family that sustains them. For you, your family, and friends, this past year was a humdinger - and 2012 promises to be little easier. That said, I sincerely wish you the opportunities to recover and rest whenever circumstances permit: Oregon needs you at your best.

As you know, 2011 brought an unexpected gift to military families throughout the nation. Once the Iraqi Government determined that immunity for US forces was not something they were prepared to offer, President Obama accelerated the pace of the redeployment of forces from the Iraq War. Last week, the Iraq War came to an end. The greatest benefactors of this policy decision were the children, spouses, and parents of our military members. From our discussions in the past - from your comments on the issue - you are acutely aware of the impact of military service upon a family and its future.

Over the past several years Oregon has been an innovator on veterans' policy. Our unique circumstances required us to adjust existing programming and at times invent new. It is hard to fathom how Oregon - a state with no active duty bases - is home to 2% of the total KIA casualties of the Iraq War - when we are less than 1% of the US population. The answer, and you know this only too well, is that our National Guard and Reserves units have been fully engaged partners in the war/s. Oregon has done "our" part - in fact more than our part, our men and women have fulfilled their duty. And as a result, as these wars conclude, we will have at least an equal number of returning soldiers coming home, seeking to redefine their place and purpose.

I write this letter to ask you to help our veterans - of Afghanistan, Iraq, and the wars that came before. I ask you to champion a proposal that veterans across Oregon will be advocating for action during the 2013 Legislative Session: a ballot measure (referral) setting aside 2% of Lottery funds for veterans' programming. We will approach this effort in a collaborative, open, and rational manner. We chose not to approach the 2012 Legislative Session because of respect for the scale and scope of its function. However, many of us will be talking openly about this effort during the 2012 Session and beyond - with the expressed purpose of assuring its passage in 2013.

If past is prelude, awareness of the sacrifice of talent, time, and treasure demanded during these wars will be soon forgotten. Our nation and state has done a splendid job in focusing upon the military members - separate from the policies that sent them into Harm's Way. However, as we transition out of those conflicts we need a dedicated funding stream to sustain the programming that will only be more important in the next few years ahead. Oregon has lead the way on so many other policy issues, it is our hope that Oregon can - and will - continue to lead the way on veterans' services. With Cameron Smith, Jim Willis, Tom Mann, and the ODVA Advisory Board at your side, this measure can be an opportunity to educate about public service as well as execute sound policy.

From our past conversations I believe that you believe government exists to provide an environment for progress. You have spent much of your life building systems that sustain rational outcomes. As Governor of Oregon - a state nationally recognized for its model veterans' services - you have an opportunity to secure the funding required for continued progress. This latest generation of soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines did not take Normandy - nor island hop through the Pacific. But their commitment to our nation, state, and community deserves the same level of support as they did. This is our chance to learn from the mistakes made in the shadow of Vietnam: we lost a generation of veterans because we allowed ourselves to "forget" their sacrifice.

This moment - this brief window of opportunity - is ours. If we learn from the past, if we seek to develop a plan for the future we can do our part for those that have done theirs. We spent nearly a decade relearning old truths about veterans and care: let us lock in what we have done and move forward. Unlike many other states we have options: we do not need to cut services, or raise revenues to help our veterans. I hope you can support this effort. As your friend, as an Oregonian, and as a veteran - I offer an open line of communication as we begin to navigate this journey.

With a little amount of money - none of it General Fund - we can sustain the gains made, and increase the number of campus-based veterans' service officers, housing opportunities, and small business enterprises. Studies showcase how veterans' programming facilitate economic growth and safety-net expansion for veterans and families. This effort could help the other, larger, public service enterprises. Please consider this proposal and let me know your decision when your schedule permits.

Sincerely,



Paul L. Evans
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