

MINUTES
SENATE STATE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

DATE: Monday, February 15, 2016

TIME: 8:00 A.M.

PLACE: Room WW55

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman McKenzie, Vice Chairman Lodge, Senators Davis, Hill, Winder, Siddoway, Lakey, Stennett and Buckner-Webb

ABSENT/ EXCUSED: None

NOTE: The sign-in sheet, testimonies and other related materials will be retained with the minutes in the committee's office until the end of the session and will then be located on file with the minutes in the Legislative Services Library.

CONVENED: **Chairman McKenzie** called the Senate State Affairs Committee (Committee) to order at 8:00 a.m. with a quorum present.

RS 24494 STATING THE FINDINGS OF THE LEGISLATURE and endorsing the need for a second veterans' cemetery in Eastern Idaho.

Senator Mortimer, District 30, stated that he was appearing before the Committee representing veterans' and cosponsor Senator Hagedorn. This legislation establishes the State's commitment to request a federal grant to construct and fund a second veterans' cemetery in Eastern Idaho. This commitment is necessary for the Idaho Division of Veterans' Services (Division) to proceed with an application for a federal grant from the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide 100 percent of the allowable construction cost for the cemetery. There has been a considerable amount of work already accomplished including reviewing 30 sites and reducing that number down to three. There is no fiscal impact at this time. The federal government will be responsible for 100 percent of the costs, but the Division is responsible for 10 percent until the construction is complete. That is approximately \$2 million, which is expected to come from the Veterans' Recognition Fund. Although no General Fund money will be used for construction costs, the Division will require about \$150,000 per year from the General Fund for ongoing maintenance and operations.

Senator Stennett asked about the process involved to apply for funds from the Veterans' Recognition Fund. **Senator Mortimer** explained that the process starts with reviewing sites and reducing them to an appropriate level. The next step is to provide support through this resolution. After that support is shown, the application is sent to the Department of Veterans' Affairs, Federal Grants Affairs where it will be on a prioritized list. Idaho would rate fairly high because of the number of veterans who are underserved/unserved within a geographic area. Upon approval, the construction of the cemetery could proceed.

Senator Stennett asked if the geographical area is Eastern Idaho would a cemetery serve parts of Montana or Wyoming? **Senator Mortimer** stated that Montana has four veterans' cemeteries and Wyoming has one or two. The primary focus would be on Eastern Idaho but it is open to all veterans.

Senator Buckner-Webb asked how many sites have been vetted. **Senator Mortimer** answered that they had vetted 30 sites and reduced the number to three. One site is in Blackfoot and two are in Idaho Falls. **Senator Buckner-Webb** asked who did the vetting? **Senator Mortimer** said that he was involved with the two sites in Idaho Falls, along with a much larger citizens group.

MOTION: **Senator Buckner-Webb** moved to send **RS 24494** to print. **Senator Lakey** seconded the motion.

Senator Siddoway asked who would provide the funding for the ongoing maintenance of the cemetery. **Senator Mortimer** said that ongoing maintenance would be paid for by the State from the General Fund at approximately \$150,000 per year.

Senator Davis commented that if the veterans' cemetery maps are reviewed, they would show that there are large areas that are underserved or not served at all. The area selected meets the federal definition and standards for need. There are many Idaho veterans who are excited about this possibility. It will also serve portions of Southern Montana and portions of Western Wyoming. The principle draw will be in Eastern Idaho.

The motion carried by **voice vote**.

RS 24490 STATING THE FINDINGS OF THE LEGISLATURE designating the State of Idaho as a Purple Heart State and that August 7 is Purple Heart Day in Idaho.

Senator Hagedorn, District 14, explained that this RS recognizes the approximately 3700 Purple Heart recipients in the State. I-90 in Northern Idaho has been designated as a Purple Heart Byway; there is a Purple Heart plate for recipients; and there are 4 Purple Heart cities within the State. This legislation is allowing Idaho to do what 14 other states have done, designating themselves as a Purple Heart State. **RS 24490** also provides that August 7 be recognized as Purple Heart Day in Idaho. There is no cost to the State.

Senator Winder thanked Senator Hagedorn for all the work he does for veterans and for his service. Why August 7? **Senator Hagedorn** stated that the Military Order of the Purple Heart picked August 7 and he will have that information should this go to the floor.

Senator Stennett asked if there is anything extra that happens in addition to the declaration. **Senator Hagedorn** said that there wasn't. It allows the Military Order of the Purple Heart local chapters to have a day of celebration and recognition.

Senator Davis said that on August 7, 1782, President George Washington issued an order establishing the Badge of Military Merit that eventually became known as the Purple Heart. That is the reason for the August 7 date.

MOTION: **Senator Stennett** moved to send **RS 24490** to print. **Senator Lodge** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

ADJOURNED: There being no further business, **Chairman McKenzie** adjourned the meeting at 8:15 a.m.

Senator McKenzie
Chair

Twyla Melton
Secretary