

A-Engrossed
House Concurrent Resolution 23

Ordered by the Senate April 16
Including Senate Amendments dated April 16

Sponsored by Representatives LEWIS, HELFRICH, BOICE; Representatives BREESE-IVERSON, DIEHL, EVANS,
GRAYBER, SKARLATOS, Senators MANNING JR, MEEK, SMITH DB, THATCHER

SUMMARY

The following summary is not prepared by the sponsors of the measure and is not a part of the body thereof subject to consideration by the Legislative Assembly. It is an editor's brief statement of the essential features of the measure. The statement includes a measure digest written in compliance with applicable readability standards.

Digest: Honors certain Oregonians who were not members of the armed forces for their World War II service. (Flesch Readability Score: 60.1).

Recognizes and honors Oregon civilians who served the United States on Wake Island during World War II.

Commends individuals who have increased public awareness of the service and sacrifice of these civilians.

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

1
2 Whereas the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941, which propelled
3 the United States into World War II, was followed five hours later and 2,000 miles to the west by
4 an attack on Wake Island; and

5 Whereas on Wake Island, civilian contractors were building a vital United States Navy (USN)
6 base and refueling facility that the Japanese also needed in order to expand their operations in the
7 Pacific Theater; and

8 Whereas Morrison-Knudsen Company, a member of the Contractors Pacific Naval Air Bases
9 consortium, was employing more than 1,100 American civilians who were skilled in heavy con-
10 struction to build the naval base on Wake Island, including 134 civilians with Oregon connections;
11 and

12 Whereas many of the civilian contractors on Wake Island abandoned their tools and heavy
13 construction equipment to aid the United States Marine Corps detachment during the 16-day siege
14 and final battle against Japanese forces, during which 49 U.S. military personnel and 34 civilians
15 were killed, including two Oregonians; and

16 Whereas a USN task force was dispatched from Pearl Harbor to rescue and reinforce the em-
17 battled civilian and military personnel on Wake Island, but it was ordered to abort shortly after
18 Japanese forces landed on the island, leaving the Americans on their own and without hope of res-
19 cue; and

20 Whereas Japanese forces eventually captured Wake Island and took all surviving Americans as
21 prisoners of war (POWs), transporting more than 1,000 civilian and military POWs to Japan and
22 China, and forcing 98 POWs to remain on Wake Island and perform construction work for Japan,
23 now the enemy of the United States; and

24 Whereas 11 Oregonians were among the 98 civilian contractor POWs who were brutally exe-
25 cuted on Wake Island by the Japanese on October 7, 1943, nearly two years after their capture and

NOTE: Matter in **boldfaced** type in an amended section is new; matter [*italic and bracketed*] is existing law to be omitted.
New sections are in **boldfaced** type.

1 forced labor; and

2 Whereas 18 Oregon civilian contractors died as slave prisoners of war in Japanese POW camps
3 in China and Japan during the remaining years of the war; and

4 Whereas the Japanese forces on Wake Island surrendered to U.S. forces on September 4, 1945;
5 and

6 Whereas in 1981 the United States Department of Defense recognized the civilians who con-
7 tributed to the defense of Wake Island during World War II as eligible for military discharge, medals
8 and veterans' benefits; and

9 Whereas 17 Oregon civilians were laid to rest in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific
10 ("Punchbowl") in Hawaii, and 73 were laid to rest in Oregon or their ashes were scattered at sea;
11 and

12 Whereas 103 Oregonians who worked as Wake Island civilian contractors survived World War
13 II, but all have since passed away; and

14 Whereas Bonita Gilbert, daughter of Wake Island civilian POW and survivor Theodore B. Olson
15 of Portland, Oregon, is a graduate of the University of Oregon with B.A. and M.A. degrees in history
16 and the author of *Building for War: The Epic Saga of the Civilian Contractors and Marines of Wake*
17 *Island in World War II*; and

18 Whereas Bonita Gilbert has visited Wake Island and interviewed Wake Island survivors and
19 families, and she is an authority on the history of Wake Island in World War II; and

20 Whereas although the World War II Memorial on the State Capitol grounds in Salem honors
21 Oregon's nearly 4,000 veterans who made the ultimate sacrifice during the war, it does not honor
22 Oregon's 31 civilians who made the same sacrifice during combat or as POWs while also serving our
23 nation; and

24 Whereas the "nonbattle losses" plaque at the World War II Memorial does not adequately de-
25 scribe the combat role Oregon's civilians played during the Japanese capture of Wake Island and
26 their deaths at the hands of the enemy during the battle, from executions on Wake Island or in
27 Japanese POW camps; and

28 Whereas Oregon's 31 World War II civilians who perished under combat and POW conditions
29 have few individuals left to honor them and no organization available to pursue their recognition,
30 and they are not honored elsewhere in Oregon, even nearly 80 years after World War II ended; and

31 Whereas in 2017, the Oregon State Capitol Foundation dedicated a memorial near the World
32 War II Memorial to the late and highly decorated Claire Maybelle Phillips, a civilian spy and
33 humanitarian from Oregon who worked behind enemy lines in the Japanese-occupied Philippines
34 during World War II, was sentenced to death by the Japanese occupiers and yet survived the war;
35 and

36 Whereas Bonita Gilbert and Bend Heroes Foundation Chairman Dick Tobiason, the sources of
37 the information in this resolution, have increased public awareness of the service and sacrifice of
38 otherwise unknown Oregon civilians; now, therefore,

39 **Be It Resolved by the Legislative Assembly of the State of Oregon:**

40 That we, the members of the Eighty-third Legislative Assembly, recognize and honor the sacri-
41 fice and faithful service to our country on Wake Island during World War II of Oregon's 134 civil-
42 ians, 31 of whom lost their lives as a result of their service; and be it further

43 Resolved, That we thank Bonita Gilbert and Dick Tobiason for their research and diligence in
44 preserving the memory of these heroic civilians.

45