

Awards banquet slated Friday, Sept. 28 in Vancouver

VANCOUVER, Wash. — The 17th annual Labor Award Banquet will be held Friday, Sept. 28, at the Vancouver Hilton Hotel, 301 West 6th Street. The banquet is sponsored by the Labor Roundtable of Southwest Washington and features guest speakers, door prizes

and awards to union leaders, locals and political and community allies.

The cost of the dinner is \$50 per person. A no-host bar opens at 6 p.m. with dinner served at 7 p.m.

For more information, call Philip Parker at 360-687-5611.

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Ken Allen (center) executive director of AFSCME Oregon Council 75, appears at press conference supporting a bill to boost investment in health care and job training for war veterans. With him are Nathan Hepper (left), an Army veteran who served in Iraq, and Eugene Rosolie, president of Veterans in Action.

Veterans and union urge Sen. Smith to back vets bill

Oregon veterans and their supporters held a press conference in Portland last month to urge Oregon U.S. Sen. Gordon Smith to support a bill that would boost investment in health care and job training for veterans.

A study released in early August showed Army suicides at a 26-year high. That report prompted Oregon veterans groups to call on Smith to vote for the Labor, Health & Human Services, Education appropriations bill, which funds critical suicide prevention programs, as well as job training and homelessness prevention services.

Among other highlights, the bill includes \$3.4 billion for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, \$228 million for veterans' employment and training programs, \$23.6 million for the Homeless Veterans Program and \$10 million earmarked toward traumatic brain injuries.

President Bush has threatened to veto the bill.

"We left our families, friends and careers to serve our country — and we'd gladly do it again," said Nathan Hepper, an Army vet who returned from Iraq in 2005 after serving as a squad leader in Operation Iraqi Freedom. "All we ask is that Sen. Smith respect our sacrifice by investing in job training, health services and other needs we face when we return home from war. We need Sen. Smith to stand at our side and oppose President Bush's threatened veto."

Ken Allen, executive director of American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Oregon Council 75, spoke at the press conference. He was there representing the Emergency Campaign for America's Priorities, a coalition of labor organizations and other human needs activists.

"Whatever you think of the Iraq War, surely we can all agree that providing our veterans with the services they need when they return home ought to be a priority," Allen said. "And so we respectfully disagree with the president on this issue — and we hope Sen. Smith will, too."

Allen said AFSCME represents mental health workers throughout Oregon, and he hears from members "the need that exists for these brave veterans. 'War is hell. And it's difficult for any of us to imagine what veterans see and go through while they are overseas."

"The problem is," Allen continued, "it follows them when they return home. Too many service members are afflicted with post-traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injuries — and they don't even know it. We must not let our vets suffer in silence when they return home. Some in Congress oppose this bill, saying it costs too much. But we're spending billions on the war in Iraq, so we must disagree when the president and others say we can't afford to take care of our veterans when they return home."

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