



Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #645

Missing In Action Recovery and Identification Project (UW System)

[LFB 2021-23 Budget Summary: Page 610, #17]

CURRENT LAW

The UW MIA recovery and identification project (the MIA project) consists of a multidisciplinary team of researchers, students, veterans, alumni, and volunteers working on furthering the recovery and identification of missing-in-action American service members. Founded in 2015 at the UW-Madison Biotechnology Center, the project utilizes a team of UW-System faculty, staff, and student volunteers across multiple academic disciplines including archeology, forensic anthropology, history, business and operations management, archeology and biology (genetic analysis) to perform site surveys and assist in the discovery, careful exhumation, identification, and repatriation of remains. Recoveries are currently funded through in-kind contributions from base resources, volunteer work, and moneys for specific missions from the Department of Defense.

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. In the 2019-20 Legislative session, Assembly Bill 452 and a companion bill, Senate Bill 446, would have provided \$180,000 GPR of annual funding for the MIA project. AB 452 was recommended for passage by the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities on a vote of 15-0. On January 21, 2020, SB 446 passed the Senate on a vote of 33-0. The Assembly amended the bill on February 20, 2020, and passed the bill, as amended, by a vote of 98-0. This bill, however, failed to be enacted pursuant to SJR 1.

2. The 2021-23 budget proposal would provide \$360,000 GPR in 2021-22 in a new, continuing appropriation for the MIA project. Under the proposal, the Board of Regents would be required to provide funding from this appropriation for the MIA project to perform a mission for the recovery and identification of Wisconsin veterans who are missing in action.

3. The UW MIA project partners with the U.S. Department of Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), the agency responsible for identifying and repatriating the remains of U.S. service members. The UW MIA project was the first academic institution to partner with DPAA. With the UW MIA project as a model, the DPAA now partners with over 50 academic and non-profit institutions for MIA identifications.

4. According to the project, there are over 82,000 missing-in-action American service members currently unaccounted for as a result of conflicts since the Pearl Harbor attack on December 7, 1941, including over 1,500 Wisconsin service members. The DPAA assigns missing-in-action recovery cases and provides informational and logistical support to aid in recovery efforts. During the academic year, the UW MIA project team conducts research about missing service members, uses mapping sites to identify possible locations, and contacts and interviews potential witnesses in order to find a site where the remains of an MIA service member may be located. The UW MIA project then sends field recovery teams to sites assigned by the DPAA during the summer field season. These recovery teams typically consist of 10 to 20 instructors and students, with about half of the team consisting of students. Multiple UW-System campuses have been involved in field missions including UW-Madison, UW-Milwaukee, UW-Milwaukee at Waukesha, UW-Oshkosh, and UW-Oshkosh Fox Cities. Artifacts and human remains at search sites are turned over by the UW team to the federal police within that nation to have the remains transported to UW-Madison for forensic analysis and DNA testing. UW MIA project communicates with DPAA throughout the process and the honors and burial are performed and supported by DPAA.

5. Past field efforts have focused on the European theater of World War II. For example, in the summers of 2016 and 2017, the team led the successful recovery of First Lieutenant Frank Fazekas, a P-47 Thunderbolt fighter pilot who was shot down and killed in action on May 22nd, 1944, in France. 1LT. Fazekas was later buried with full honors in Arlington National Cemetery. In summer 2018, the team successfully recovered the remains of Second Lieutenant Walter B. Stone, a P-47 Thunderbolt fighter pilot who was shot down and killed in action on October 22nd, 1943, in France. 2LT Stone was buried in his hometown of Andalusia, Alabama, next to his family. In summer 2019, the team executed a recovery mission of a WWII American service member in Northern Europe, with efforts currently ongoing in 2021.

6. If \$360,000 of funding would be provided, the project would focus on expanding efforts to identify and recover missing Wisconsin service members, in addition to continuing their DPAA assigned work. This funding would cover the following: (a) recovery costs including a scientific recovery expert salary and fringe benefits, emergency medical coverage, scouting analysis, metal detection, field supplies and landowner compensation; (b) research costs including genealogist/archival expert salary and fringe benefits, historical research supplies, and travel and lodging costs; (c) project logistics including the team leader's salary and fringe costs; project assistant salary and fringe costs, student stipends, supplies, and travel and lodging costs; and (d) biological costs associated with testing recovered materials.

7. Providing funding in the first year of the biennium in a continuing appropriation would allow the UW MIA project to utilize any funds remaining in the appropriation at the end of

fiscal year 2021-22 in future years, but would not establish an ongoing base funding level for the program. An option would be to provide the same overall level of funding but with \$180,000 of funding in each year of the 2021-23 biennium.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Provide \$360,000 in 2021-22 in a new, continuing appropriation for the UW MIA recovery and identification project. Require the Board of Regents to provide funding from this appropriation for the MIA project to perform a mission for the recovery and identification of Wisconsin veterans who are missing in action. At the conclusion of the mission, require the MIA project, through its representative, to submit a report on the mission's findings and an accounting of expenditures for the mission to the Governor, Joint Committee on Finance, Board of Regents, the standing committees of each house of the Legislature dealing with veterans matters, and the Departments of Veteran's Affairs, Military Affairs.

ALT 1	Change to Base
GPR	\$360,000

2. Provide \$180,000 annually in a new, continuing appropriation for the UW MIA recovery and identification project. Require the Board of Regents to provide funding from this appropriation for the MIA project to perform a mission for the recovery and identification of Wisconsin veterans who are missing in action. At the conclusion of each year's mission, require the MIA project, through its representative, to submit a report on the mission's findings and an accounting of expenditures for the mission in that fiscal year to the Governor, Joint Committee on Finance, Board of Regents, the standing committees of each house of the Legislature dealing with veterans matters, and the Departments of Veteran's Affairs, Military Affairs.

ALT 2	Change to Base
GPR	\$360,000

3. Take no action.

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