

**From:** [Angela J Linn](#)  
**To:** [House State Affairs](#)  
**Subject:** Support for SB144  
**Date:** Thursday, February 20, 2020 10:02:00 AM

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Dear Members of the House State Affairs Committee.

For the past 21 years I've been the Senior Collections Manager of Ethnology & History at the University of Alaska Museum of the North. I'm writing to you today on my own behalf, to ask for your support for Senate Bill 144, to establish June 7 as Walter Harper Day.

In 2013 I had the honor of serving as the guest curator for the UAMN special exhibit "Denali Legacy: 100 Years on the Mountain", which commemorated the centennial of the first ascent of Denali by what has come to be known as the Stuck-Karstens expedition. The four men on that historic climb included Hudson Stuck, the well-known Episcopal Priest, Harry Karstens who came to be the first superintendent of Mt. McKinley National Park, now known as Denali National Park and Preserve, Robert Tatum, a young theology student from Tennessee who was based in Nenana, and Walter Harper, the young Alaskan who was serving as a guide, translator, and understudy to Hudson Stuck. In addition, John Fredson and Esias George, young Athabascan boys, provided support to keep the basecamp and help with dogs. On that expedition and in the climb diaries we brought together in our exhibit for the first time in 100 years, we saw from every expedition member how beloved Walter Harper was, how his unending work ethic, calm demeanor, ability to learn about the western-based technology and equipment, and his intimate knowledge of the Alaskan landscape helped to ground all the members of the team even in their most challenging situations. It was fitting that he was the first to ascend the summit on June 7, 1913.

During the work of curating that exhibit, our team reached out to the living descendants of all the expedition team members, including those of Walter Harper. It was clear through those interactions that this young man, whose life was tragically cut short in the sinking of the Princess Sophia, served as a role model for so many in the extended Harper family. Despite his importance to the family, Walter's historic role in the climb has been overshadowed by the charismatic Hudson Stuck who wrote the book on the climb and promoted it through societies upper circles in Explorers Clubs across the world. Only recently thru the work of authors like Tom Walker in the biography of Harry Karstens, and Mary Ehrlander, in the biography of Walter Harper, as well as the behind-the-scenes work of our exhibit and people like Ken Karstens, the grandson of Harry Karstens, have the more nuanced versions of the climb story been brought to the public.

Creating a Walter Harper Day on June 7 would ensure that the legacy of this young Alaskan will continue to be shared with future generations. Through the re-telling of that climb story and Walter's exceptional experiences, Walter Harper can stand as a role model for countless young people, particularly young Alaska Native people, who often grapple with finding a balance between their Alaska Native heritage and traditions and the challenges of working

within the dominant society.

Thank you committee members for your service in the legislature and for hearing my comments today.

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