

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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Senate Bill 203 - Sponsor Statement

"An Act designating portions of the Parks, Glenn, Seward, and Sterling Highways as a part of the State's Purple Heart Trail and relating to signage and informational displays for the trail."

The Purple Heart medal is a United States military decoration awarded in the name of the President to those who have been wounded or killed in service to their country. Since 2008, the Alaska and Richardson Highways from the Alaska-Canada Border to Fairbanks have been designated the Purple Heart Trail in honor and recognition of the sacrifices of these service men and women. SB 203 seeks to complete what was begun in 2008 by extending the Purple Heart Trail so that it will run continuously from the Alaska-Canada Border to the End of the Road in Homer.

The Purple Heart Trail is a national project to designate portions of the interstate highway system as "The Purple Heart Trail System," reminding Americans of the sacrifices made by their country-men and women in uniform. The original Purple Heart Trail was established in 1992 in the Commonwealth of Virginia at Mr. Vernon and runs the length of the Virginia Highway. Today, Purple Heart Trails extend across the nation, including from the Alaska-Canada Border to Fairbanks.

Signage drawing attention to the designation is placed at appropriate intervals along the highways to stimulate thought and discussion among adults and children alike about the history of our nation and those who have made significant sacrifices for it.

Alaska's has a strong military tradition; we have an estimated 65,000 resident veterans, approximately 21,000 active-duty military, and more residents who serve in the National Guard. Throughout our history, many returning Alaskan soldiers have been honored with the Purple Heart Medal and the Purple Heart Trail designation serves as a reminder to each of them that Alaska is grateful for their service.

Senate Bill 203 will extend the Purple Heart Trail highway designation by ~662 miles from Fairbanks to the End of the Road in Homer. Doing so will complete a continuous 900 mile stretch of Purple Heart Trail from the Alaska-Canada Border to the End of the Road and connect the Purple Heart Cities of North Pole, Fairbanks, Wasilla, Soldotna, and Homer.

SB 203 and the extension of the Purple Heart Trail in Alaska serve as a tangible demonstration of Alaska's appreciation for the sacrifices made by our wounded and fallen soldiers and a reminder to visitors and residents alike of those who have paid the price for our freedom.