

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

February 7, 2013

1:02 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Neal Foster, Co-Chair  
Representative Gabrielle LeDoux, Co-Chair  
Representative Pete Higgins  
Representative Shelley Hughes  
Representative Lora Reinbold  
Representative Dan Saddler  
Representative Max Gruenberg

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HOUSE BILL NO. 67

"An Act establishing March 29 of each year as Vietnam Veterans Day."

- MOVED CSHB 67(MLV) OUT OF COMMITTEE

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HB 67

SHORT TITLE: VIETNAM VETERANS DAY

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) THOMPSON

01/16/13	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/16/13	(H)	MLV
02/07/13	(H)	MLV AT 1:00 PM CAPITOL 120

**WITNESS REGISTER**

REPRESENTATIVE STEVE THOMPSON

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented HB 67 as the sponsor.

BRODIE ANDERSON, Staff

Representative Steve Thompson

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** During hearing of HB 67, answered questions.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

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**CO-CHAIR GABRIELLE LEDOUX** called the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting to order at 1:02 p.m. Representatives Foster, Higgins, Hughes, Saddler, Reinbold, Gruenberg, and LeDoux were present at the call to order.

**HB 67-VIETNAM VETERANS DAY**

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**CO-CHAIR LEDOUX** announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 67, "An Act establishing March 29 of each year as Vietnam Veterans Day."

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**REPRESENTATIVE STEVE THOMPSON**, Alaska State Legislature, speaking as the sponsor of HB 67, related that HB 67 would designate March 29th of each year as Vietnam Veterans Day. In 2012, the U.S. Senate and the President designated March 29th as Vietnam Veterans Day. March 29, 1973, was when all U.S. troops withdrew from Vietnam and President Nixon named the day Vietnam Veterans Day. Representative Thompson informed the committee that nearly 30 percent of Alaska citizens are military veterans, with the vast majority being Vietnam veterans. In fact, Representative Thompson related that he is a veteran of the Vietnam era, although he spent all of his time at Fort Wainwright. He then reminded the committee that when Vietnam veterans returned they were ridiculed. Therefore, it's time to recognize that the Vietnam War was a 10-year conflict during which many veterans scarified much. Representative Thompson emphasized that naming March 29th Vietnam Veterans Day is the right thing to do.

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**REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER** asked whether there have been other informal observances or customs associated with March 29 in Alaska or the nation.

REPRESENTATIVE THOMPSON reiterated that in 2012 the President and the U.S. Senate named March 29 Vietnam Veterans Day. He said he didn't have any history with regard to what other states are doing. In further response, Representative Thompson related his assumption that the VFW's, American Legion Posts, and various organizations might have special ceremonies or even parades on the designated date. However, it would be left up to the individual communities and groups to decide whether to observe it or not.

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CO-CHAIR FOSTER asked whether there have been efforts to designate a Vietnam Veterans Day in the past.

REPRESENTATIVE THOMPSON replied yes. In fact, last year similar legislation passed in the House but didn't make it through the entire process.

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REPRESENTATIVE HUGHES, noting that her husband is a Vietnam veteran, thanked the sponsor for introducing HB 67. She noted her husband related stories of how he was not welcomed home when he returned. She then asked the sponsor to repeat the percentage of veterans in the state.

REPRESENTATIVE THOMPSON specified that nearly 30 percent of Alaska's population is a military veteran. In terms of the per capita number of veterans, Alaska is the highest in nation. He said that he didn't know the number of veterans specifically from the Vietnam War.

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REPRESENTATIVE HUGHES expressed interest in the number of Vietnam veterans in the state. She then pointed out that HB 67 doesn't have an effective date, and asked if the sponsor considered getting the legislation passed so that it would be in effect in 2013, which is the 40th anniversary of the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam.

REPRESENTATIVE THOMPSON told the committee that the Veterans Caucus discussed that this morning; the hope is for HB 67 to move through the process such that the governor can sign it into law on March 29.

REPRESENTATIVE HUGHES remarked that the aforementioned is a good idea that she hopes happens.

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REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD indicated her support of passing the legislation in enough time to recognize Vietnam veterans this year. She then inquired as to the feeling amongst Vietnam veterans about this proposal.

REPRESENTATIVE THOMPSON responded that the Vietnam veterans he has spoken with consider HB 67 to be a great idea.

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BRODIE ANDERSON, Staff, Representative Steve Thompson, Alaska State Legislature, related that he spoke the with Alaska Veterans Advisory Council (AVAC), which expressed support for HB 67 and indicated it may provide a resolution or letter of support.

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REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER pointed out that supporting documents in the committee packet make a distinction between March 29 and March 30.

MR. ANDERSON explained that early on, states that passed Vietnam recognition days did so with a Welcome Home Vietnam Vets movement designating March 30 as the day of recognition. The idea was that the veterans left Vietnam on March 29 and would arrive home on March 30. Unfortunately, it became apparent that March 30 wasn't the best day to recognize Vietnam veterans because March 30, 1972, was the first day the North Vietnamese Army violated the Paris Peace Accords and invaded South Vietnam. Furthermore, March 30, 1975, Da Nang fell to the North Vietnamese Army. At that point, there was a shift to recognize the actual day troops were withdrawn as is the case with other such days.

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REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG pointed out that an effective date is necessary for HB 67 to be effective this year. Therefore, he expressed the need for the committee to adopt conceptually a

title change and insert a Section 2 with an immediate effective date.

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REPRESENTATIVE THOMPSON opined that Representative Gruenberg's proposal is an excellent idea that would ensure that the day would be recognized this year.

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REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG moved that the committee adopt Conceptual Amendment 1, such that an immediate effective date would be inserted. There being no objection, Conceptual Amendment 1 was adopted.

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REPRESENTATIVE HUGHES asked who are the members of the Veterans Caucus and asked if they are veterans as well.

REPRESENTATIVE THOMPSON explained that the Veterans Caucus consists of House and Senate legislators who are veterans.

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REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER related his understanding that ceremonies and traditions of the military are important. Although it has been a long time since the Vietnam War, the gesture and sentiments are important and he looks forward to voting for this legislation.

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REPRESENTATIVE FOSTER pointed out that this day of recognition is special for the families as well, particularly in remembering those lost.

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CO-CHAIR LEDOUX commented that this legislation is long overdue. She then reflected on the wars since the Vietnam War, from which she opined that people have learned to respect veterans.

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CO-CHAIR LEDOUX invited public testimony. Upon determining no one wished to testify, closed public testimony.

1:20:00 PM

REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG moved to report HB 67, as amended, out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, CSHB 67(MLV) was reported from the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs.

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**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting was adjourned at 1:20 p.m.