

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

April 4, 2017

1:09 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Chris Tuck, Chair
Representative Gabrielle LeDoux, Vice Chair
Representative Justin Parish
Representative Ivy Spohnholz
Representative Lora Reinbold
Representative Dan Saddler

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative George Rauscher

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 152

"An Act relating to the organized militia; and relating to the authority of the adjutant general."

- MOVED CSHB 152(MLV) OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL NO. 178

"An Act relating to recognition of individual veterans along certain veterans' memorial roads and on certain veterans' memorial bridges."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 125

"An Act relating to a veteran's designation on an identification card or a driver's license for Hmong veterans and Lao veterans."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 152

SHORT TITLE: ORGANIZED MILITIA; AK ST. DEFENSE FORCE

SPONSOR(s): MILITARY & VETERANS' AFFAIRS

03/06/17	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/06/17	(H)	MLV, STA

03/14/17 (H) MLV AT 1:00 PM GRUENBERG 120
03/14/17 (H) -- MEETING CANCELED --
03/23/17 (H) MLV AT 1:00 PM GRUENBERG 120
03/23/17 (H) Heard & Held
03/23/17 (H) MINUTE(MLV)
03/30/17 (H) MLV AT 1:00 PM GRUENBERG 120
03/30/17 (H) Heard & Held
03/30/17 (H) MINUTE(MLV)
04/04/17 (H) MLV AT 1:00 PM GRUENBERG 120

BILL: HB 178

SHORT TITLE: NAMING PORTIONS OF VETERANS HIGHWAYS

SPONSOR(s): EASTMAN

03/14/17 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/14/17 (H) MLV, TRA
04/04/17 (H) MLV AT 1:00 PM GRUENBERG 120

BILL: HB 125

SHORT TITLE: LAO/HMONG VETERAN DRIVER'S LIC. & ID CAR

SPONSOR(s): TARR

02/15/17 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/15/17 (H) MLV, STA
04/04/17 (H) MLV AT 1:00 PM GRUENBERG 120

WITNESS REGISTER

REPRESENTATIVE DAVID EASTMAN

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Speaking as the sponsor, introduced HB 178 and answered questions.

YUKON DON TANNER

Talkeetna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support during the hearing of HB 178.

DAVE GLENN

Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support during the hearing of HB 178.

SUSAN JONES

(No address provided)

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support during the hearing of HB 178.

ROBERT DOEHL, Deputy Commissioner
Office of the Commissioner
Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs
Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of amendments and answered a question during the hearing of HB 178.

MIKE LESMANN, Legislative Liaison
Office of the Commissioner
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions during the hearing of HB 178.

MARK NEIDHOLD, Chief
Design and Construction Standards
Division of Statewide Design and Engineering Services
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions during the hearing of HB 178.

REPRESENTATIVE GERAN TARR
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Speaking as the sponsor, introduced HB 125 and answered questions.

PASERT LEE
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support during the hearing of HB 125.

WILSON VANG
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in Hmong, translated to English by Seng Her, in support during the hearing of HB 125.

XAISHOUA VANG
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in Hmong, translated to English by Seng Her, in support during the hearing of HB 125.

TONGLOU VANG

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in Hmong, translated to English by Seng Her, in support during the hearing of HB 125.

XIAGE VANG

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in Hmong, translated to English by Seng Her, in support during the hearing of HB 125.

MAI XIONG

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support during the hearing of HB 125.

SAIVIT VONGRATSAMY

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in Lao, translated to Hmong by Pasert Lee, then translated to English by Seng Her, in support during the hearing of HB 125.

SAMAK VONGVILAY

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in Lao, translated to Hmong by Pasert Lee, then translated to English by Seng Her, in support during the hearing of HB 125.

ROBERT DOEHL, Deputy Commissioner

Office of the Commissioner

Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs

Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support during the hearing of HB 125 and answered a question.

VERDIE BOWEN, Director

Veterans Affairs

Office of Veteran Affairs

Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support during the hearing of HB 125 and answered questions.

MAI RAMIREZ-XIONG

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Speaking on behalf of her father, testified in support during the hearing of HB 125.

BEDY XIONG

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support during the hearing of HB 125.

ZOUNEE YANG

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support during the hearing of HB 125.

LUCKY XIONG

Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support during the hearing of HB 125.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:09:33 PM](#)

CHAIR CHRIS TUCK called the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting to order at 1:09 p.m. Representatives Tuck, Spohnholz, Reinbold, Saddler, Parish, and LeDoux were present at the call to order.

HB 152-ORGANIZED MILITIA; AK ST. DEFENSE FORCE

[1:10:26 PM](#)

CHAIR TUCK announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 152, "An Act relating to the organized militia; and relating to the authority of the adjutant general."

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD said she was not informed of the deadline for submitting amendments to HB 152.

[1:12:21 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX moved to report HB 152, as amended, out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER objected.

[1:12:46 PM](#)

A roll call vote was taken. Representatives Spohnholz, LeDoux, Parish, and Tuck voted in favor of HB 152. Representatives Saddler and Reinbold voted against it. Therefore, CSHB 152(MLV)

was reported out of the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs by a vote of 4-2.

[1:13:16 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 1:13 p.m. to 1:16 p.m.

HB 178-NAMING PORTIONS OF VETERANS HIGHWAYS

[1:15:44 PM](#)

CHAIR TUCK announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 178, "An Act relating to recognition of individual veterans along certain veterans' memorial roads and on certain veterans' memorial bridges."

[1:16:03 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DAVID EASTMAN, Alaska State Legislature, informed the committee he was approached by local veterans seeking a way to further recognize veterans in each of the six veterans' memorials throughout the state. He directed attention to a document provided in the committee packet which was a picture of the Veterans' Highway memorial in the Matanuska-Susitna region. He described the existing memorial as generic and said the bill would recognize particular veterans for their service. Additional comments on the bill have been heard from local veterans, the Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs (DMVA), and the Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOTPF); a [committee] substitute for HB 178 is forthcoming.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER observed there are over 72,000 veterans living in Alaska and asked why it is more appropriate to name memorials for certain veterans - and thereby exclude others - rather than to honor all veterans by memorial roads or bridges.

REPRESENTATIVE EASTMAN acknowledged there is room for a balance between a generic and an individual recognition of veterans; under this proposal, the names of memorial highways would remain unchanged, but at various points along, or adjacent to, the highway there would be an opportunity for individual recognition for a period of three to five years.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked how the temporary designation would be accomplished.

REPRESENTATIVE EASTMAN explained local and official veterans' organizations would submit names for consideration by the Alaska State Legislature; after legislative commendation, veterans would be eligible for individual recognition. Representative Eastman further explained legislative commendation would occur by a citation passed by the House and Senate, and subsequently DOTPF would implement the placement of markers along veterans' memorials.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER restated his question regarding the temporary designation.

[1:22:41 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ pointed out the sponsor statement indicates the cost of signage would be funded by gifts, donations, and grants received by DOTPF and/or DMVA; however, these departments do not have the capacity to raise funds.

REPRESENTATIVE EASTMAN advised veterans' organizations would collect and solicit donations for the project. [HB 178] would give DOTPF the authority to accept funds and would allow DMVA to direct donors to a certain account managed by DOTPF.

REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ questioned whether [DMVA's] state government web site would direct donors to contribute to a private organization.

REPRESENTATIVE EASTMAN said no. The bill gives DOTPF the authority to collect and receive funds for this specific purpose.

REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ asked whether veterans' organizations have committed their support for the legislation.

REPRESENTATIVE EASTMAN indicated yes, and their testimony is forthcoming.

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH posited a situation in which a veterans' organization raised money for the recognition of a certain veteran; in this case would DMVA direct said funds to the individual, or would the funds go into a "common pot" to be distributed between all the honored veterans.

REPRESENTATIVE EASTMAN stated the intent of the proposed legislation is to allow donors to contribute to "that account," or one of the six current memorials should they choose to do so.

1:26:17 PM

CHAIR TUCK opened public testimony on HB 178.

1:26:55 PM

YUKON DON TANNER informed the committee he is a Navy veteran. Mr. Tanner said HB 178 is another step forward in honoring veterans by placing the names of selected veterans on a signpost in designated [transportation] corridors. Although there are concerns with the bill, he opined all concerns can be addressed in an efficient way and urged for passage of the bill.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked whether Mr. Tanner is aware of any veterans that veterans' organizations seek to nominate for special distinction.

MR. TANNER said he did not at this time. In further response to Representative Saddler regarding his affiliations, Mr. Tanner said he is a life member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), in Talkeetna and a member of [American Legion] Post 35 in Wasilla.

1:29:04 PM

DAVE GLENN informed the committee he is a Vietnam veteran. Mr. Glenn expressed his belief the proposed legislation is an extension of the recognition of veterans that began with the dedication of the Mat-Su Veterans' Highway. He said he is a life member of VFW, a life member of Vietnam Veterans of America, and a member of the [MAT-SU Veterans' Foundation] in Wasilla. Mr. Glenn directed attention to a document from [Deputy Commissioner Robert Doehl, DMVA] [document not provided] and opined the intent of the legislation is to comply with all established rules, policies, and regulations currently in place. In addition, there is precedent for the legislation along the Seward Highway Dowling Road overpass. He affirmed the funding would be on a volunteer basis and provided an example of the availability of funding in this regard. Mr. Glenn listed the names of several veterans whom he suggested should be recognized.

1:32:09 PM

SUSAN JONES informed the committee she and her husband are Army veterans and their son served in the U.S. Air Force. She agreed

with the recognition of veterans in Alaska, noting she has observed veterans who are proud of their military service and are deserving of honor.

[1:33:27 PM](#)

CHAIR TUCK, after ascertaining no one else wished to testify, closed public testimony, noting public testimony may be reopened at a subsequent hearing.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER referred to questions raised by Deputy Commissioner Doehl, in a document dated [4/3/17], which was provided in the committee packet, and asked Representative Eastman to respond.

REPRESENTATIVE EASTMAN said [if HB 178 is enacted] the role of DMVA would be minimal; the bill requests DMVA to accept names from official Alaska veterans' organizations and to forward the names and the sponsoring organizations to the legislature annually. Further, in response to a question from DMVA related to the eligibility of whose honored, he explained a forthcoming version of the bill would clarify an eligible veteran is one who has been a member of the armed forces, the National Guard, the Alaska State Defense Force, or the Alaska Territorial Guard, and who was honorably discharged.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked which veterans' organizations are designated as [IRC 501(c) 19] charitable organizations.

REPRESENTATIVE EASTMAN said at least four organizations in Alaska meet that designation. The aforementioned Internal Revenue Service (IRS) tax exemption is specific to posts or organizations of past or present members of the U.S. Armed Forces.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER surmised the veterans' organizations include VFW and American Legion and asked for the other organizations.

REPRESENTATIVE EASTMAN will provide the requested information.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER questioned whether Representative Eastman would accept an amendment to the legislation which would specify a veterans' organization would need to meet the [IRC 501(c) 19] tax-exempt standard.

REPRESENTATIVE EASTMAN said yes.

1:37:13 PM

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER suggested DMVA seeks further parameters in the bill as to who would be eligible, for example, veterans who were Alaska residents during their service or veterans who are now Alaska residents.

REPRESENTATIVE EASTMAN pointed out the legislation does not direct DMVA to verify eligibility; veterans' organizations would nominate a veteran and the legislature would make the final determination as long as the veteran was honorably discharged.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER expressed his understanding that in passing citations, the legislature does not complete a process of vetting or fact-checking qualifications. He surmised the legislation requires the legislature to assume additional responsibilities.

1:39:45 PM

ROBERT DOEHL, Deputy Commissioner, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs, disclosed he is a member of VFW, American Legion, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, and the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association, all of which are IRC 501(c) 19 organizations. He said DMVA supports an amendment to limit the applications to IRC 501(c) 19 organizations and expressed concerns related to the vetting process and [the lack of] an adequate definition of veterans who are eligible for recognition. In addition, he questioned whether confirming an honorable discharge is a statutory requirement. [DMVA] strongly supports an efficient donation process similar to that currently utilized by the Alaska Department of Fish & Game and a provision to direct undedicated donations to certain veterans. Finally, DMVA requests that veterans would be given a provision to opt-out if the honoree chose not to be recognized as an individual.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked Mr. Doehl to comment on the value of honoring an individual veteran as opposed to honoring all veterans.

MR. DOEHL opined there is value in both forms of recognition.

REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ inquired as to whether the sponsor has determined whether contributions to the state are tax deductible.

REPRESENTATIVE EASTMAN said yes. Currently, the state and each of its subdivisions would be eligible; however, establishing eligibility for a municipality requires payment of a \$150 filing fee with IRS. Therefore, every government entity in Alaska would be eligible, but its status would need to be confirmed.

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH asked about the cost of installing and maintaining signage.

1:44:55 PM

MIKE LESMANN, Legislative Liaison, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, estimated signs cost between \$800-\$1,000 minimum for materials and labor.

1:45:03 PM

MARK NEIDHOLD, Chief, Design and Construction Standards, Division of Statewide Design and Engineering Services, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, explained a sign of the type discussed in the legislation can cost up to \$2,500 each, depending upon location, size, and other factors.

CHAIR TUCK asked whether the signs must stand alone or could be added to an existing road sign.

MR. NEIDHOLD cautioned adding to an existing road sign risks distracting from the message of the existing sign; however, signs are routinely added to light poles.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked which federal highway visibility standards may impact the placement of the signs honoring veterans.

MR. NEIDHOLD said 23 Code of Federal Regulations, in the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices, allows the state to modify the federal standards following the Alaska Traffic Manual Supplement. In further response to Representative Saddler's questions of how big signs can be and if sign locations are limited, he added size depends on the traffic speed along the route and the location of other signs that may be considered more critical; in fact, the manual directs DOTPF to only install signs that are necessary for the operation of the highway, with minor exceptions. He described the hierarchy of signs from the highest order, such as regulatory signs, to the lowest order, such as memorial signs.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER further asked whether a sign that is damaged or vandalized may cost less to replace or the same, and if the state or private individuals would be liable for the replacement cost.

MR. NEIDHOLD advised the cost of repair would depend upon the level of damage.

[1:51:35 PM](#)

CHAIR TUCK announced that HB 178 was held over.

HB 125-LAO/HMONG VETERAN DRIVER'S LIC. & ID CAR

[1:51:50 PM](#)

CHAIR TUCK announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 125, "An Act relating to a veteran's designation on an identification card or a driver's license for Hmong veterans and Lao veterans."

[1:52:21 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GERAN TARR, Alaska State Legislature, sponsor, said HB 125 would recognize Hmong veterans in Alaska for their service to the U.S. by authorizing a designation on their driver's licenses. She informed the committee Hmong veterans served during the time of the Vietnam War in what is now known as the secret war, when intensified war actions were taken in Laos. She noted many Hmong individuals who were recruited to serve the U.S. military were very young, yet more than 50 years later, Hmong veterans have not received the benefits promised to them. Representative Tarr stressed the bill is an opportunity to recognize service by Hmong veterans before it is too late

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER urged for the photos provided in the committee packet to be made available to the public.

REPRESENTATIVE TARR, in response to Chair Tuck's question about the ages of the recruits, said some were as young as 10 years of age.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked what evidence is required to prove one's status as a Hmong or Laos veteran.

REPRESENTATIVE TARR said federal documentation substantiates military service; she deferred the question to Robert Doehl, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER directed attention to the bill on page 1, lines 8-10, and page 2, lines 11-13, which read [in part]:

a Hmong veteran or Lao veteran who served in military operations in support of the United States in the Kingdom of Laos between February 28, 1961, and May 15, 1975.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER pointed out references on page 1, [line] 13 and on page 2, lines 1 and 16, state "a Hmong veteran or Lao veteran," and asked whether all five references are complete.

REPRESENTATIVE TARR said yes. She offered to clarify the aforementioned language with Legislative Legal Services, Legislative Affairs Agency.

[1:59:05 PM](#)

CHAIR TUCK opened public testimony on HB 125.

[1:59:32 PM](#)

PASERT LEE stated his support for HB 125, and noted that during the Vietnam War, from 1961 to 1975, the Hmong and Lao people worked very hard for America. He recognized the vast number of people's lives lost during the war in different parts of Vietnam. He offered to bring evidence to prove the truthfulness of the losses. He stated his hope that the American people would support the bill for the Hmong and Lao veterans' license plates and identification cards. He urged the Senate and House to support the bill.

MR. LEE related after fighting for America he has lived in the U.S. for almost 42 years and [the Hmong people] have not received any [recognition]. He emphasized that HB 125 would recognize the heavy and painful years of 1961-75 for the Hmong and Lao people. He told some of the efforts and actions of the Hmong and Lao soldiers during the war. He explained the Hmong people who fought for the U.S. lost their country, homeland, and much more. He urged the Senate, House, and chair to open their eyes to look at the bill for the Hmong and Lao people.

[2:04:00 PM](#)

WILSON VANG testified in Hmong translated by Seng Her. Mr. Wilson Vang said he served with CIA during the Hmong Veteran secret war from 1961-1975 in North Vietnam. During that time his leaders were John Kennedy and President Nixon. He stated that Hmong veterans lost their land, which caused him to come to America. He offered his support of HB 125 because it helps recognize all the service of Hmong and Lao veterans in the war. He explained that in America, the Hmong people are not recognized, and this bill would help begin that process.

[2:08:16 PM](#)

XAISHOUA VANG testified in Hmong translated by Seng Her. He stated that he was born June 3, 1957 and was requested to join the war from 1968 to 1975 and protect the [Hmong nation] by John Kennedy, President Nixon, General Vang Pao, and others. He said part of the reason why [the Hmong people] have migrated to the U.S. is because of the loss of their country. Right now, their country is not under the control of their people. Mr. Xaishoua Vang offered his impression that [since the war], the Hmong and Lao veterans have not been recognized for their involvement in the war. He remarked, "Today I come here to support HB 125, and ask for the representatives through the chair to support HB 125." He urged the committee members, as leaders of the state, to recognize the importance of HB 125.

[2:13:25 PM](#)

TONGLOU VANG testified in Hmong translated by Seng Her. He said he was born August 10, 1933 and served in the war from 1961-75. While involved in the war in 1965, he received injuries in his chest and left leg. Many lives were lost in the local community because of the Vietnam soldiers. Afterwards in 1975, the Americans and General Vang Pao and leaders departed the area and the surviving Hmong community was left with nothing. He explained that without any leaders, [the Hmong soldiers] had to seek other shelters, which has led to the most recent gorilla war. He noted that during a six-month long training mission away from his family time he lost many relatives and family members. He requested that the state leaders support of HB 125 and recognize the service in this war. He expressed that [the Hmong people] would not forget the committee's actions.

[2:18:40 PM](#)

XIAGE VANG testified in Hmong translated by Seng Her. He detailed that he was born in 1945 and now is 75 years old. He thanked the chair and the committee members for hearing him. He explained that in 1961 President Kennedy and the King of Laos discussed a written declaration of the participation engagement with the Hmong and Lao people; troops were involved in the war to help protect the nation. During that time, troops were given supplies such as a radar to track down and control the war.

[There was a brief discussion in Hmong about radar.]

MR. XIAGE VANG explained that because of the radar given to [the Hmong people], they were better able to identify their situation; unfortunately, the radar was lost. He stated that in that area, bodies have been identified and have not been retrieved, which has caused the Hmong people to migrate to another area. He requested that the chair, the leaders, and everyone recognize HB 125 as something of importance to him and the Hmong and Lao veterans. He asked that the bill be moved forward and presented to the other leaders of the state. He thanked the committee for hearing the bill.

[2:26:55 PM](#)

MAI XIONG testified in support of HB 125 to recognize Hmong and Lao veterans with license plates and IDs. She said the bill would benefit the Hmong people who helped win the war. She explained that the war was very difficult with many casualties and was the reason many Hmong and Lao individuals came to America. She added that she wants more people to know about the efforts of the Hmong people because the generation of veterans is passing. She asked the committee to "pass bill for the Hmong veterans, because that is the only thing we want to get."

[2:28:32 PM](#)

SAIVIT VONGRATSAMY testified in Laos translated to Hmong by Pasert Lee and to English by Seng Her. He noted the need to honor people's commitment, which HB 125 does. He thanked the committee for hearing his testimony.

[2:32:02 PM](#)

SAMAK VONGVILAY testified in Laos translated to Hmong by Pasert Lee and to English by Seng Her. He informed the committee that in the war he was a soldier and a cook for the leaders. He

stated that HB 125 is very important to him and for the recognition of the Hmong and Lao veterans.

2:34:32 PM

ROBERT DOEHL, Deputy Commissioner, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs, stated DMVA's support for HB 125 which recognizes those who have made substantial sacrifices in service to the U.S. and who also brought many American service members to safety. He advised there is an established method to verify a veteran's status.

2:35:44 PM

VERDIE BOWEN, Director, Veterans Affairs, Office of Veteran Affairs, Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs, expressed his support for HB 125. He provided a brief history of the 30,000-member Hmong army that faced 70,000-100,000 soldiers of the North Vietnamese Army along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos, suffering huge losses of life. In response to Representative Saddler's question as to the number of Hmong veterans [in Alaska], he estimated 30-40 veterans would receive veterans' status on their driver's licenses. He said in April 2016, the Alaska Veteran Advisory Council, Office of Veterans Affairs, DMVA, voted in support of individuals receiving the veteran designation, and also related a statement of personal insight into the service of the Hmong veterans.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER restated his intent to use the definition of Hmong veteran and Lao veteran [text previously provided].

MR. BOWEN indicated his agreement.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked whether the federal certification of Hmong or Lao veteran status would suffice for the purposes of the proposed legislation.

MR. BOWEN explained Hmong and Lao veteran status was designated on their entrance visas at the time the veterans entered the U.S.; the Office of Veteran Affairs would utilize a program similar to that utilized for veterans of the Alaska Territorial Guard.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER questioned whether the verification would be an efficient process, given the age of the entrance visas.

MR. BOWEN explained Hmong veterans' groups in Anchorage have already established the service of their members.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER stated his support for [HB 125].

[2:40:41 PM](#)

MAI RAMIREZ-XIONG informed the committee she was speaking on behalf of her father, Lieutenant Colonel Xiong. She spoke of what the Hmong people have done for the country after immigrating. Ms. Ramirez-Xiong related her father has done much for this country and HB 125 would demonstrate some understanding by the American people, because many are unaware of the service of the Hmong people to a country unknown to them. Ms. Ramirez-Xiong said she is a U.S. citizen and urged that her father and other Hmong veterans receive their well-earned recognition.

[2:43:12 PM](#)

BEDY XIONG expressed her strong support of HB 125 because Hmong veterans have not been recognized.

[2:44:45 PM](#)

ZOUNEE YANG said both of her dads served in the Vietnam War at a very young age and she wants HB 125 to pass. The bill is small gratitude for all the Hmong and other tribes involved and would make them happy. Ms. Yang stated she is first generation [U.S. citizen] and wants to be able to teach her children about their grandparents' history of service with the U.S. military, which may not be taught in school.

[2:46:38 PM](#)

LUCKY XIONG said his father served from 1961-1965 and stated his support for HB 125. Mr. Xiong expressed his belief that veterans deserve recognition for their sacrifices, and the bill would clearly identify and respect those who served.

[2:47:41 PM](#)

CHAIR TUCK, after ascertaining no one else wished to testify, closed public testimony on HB 125.

[2:48:40 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TARR stated her intent to provide additional written testimony to the committee.

[HB 125 was held over.]

[2:49:20 PM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting was adjourned at 2:49 p.m.