

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

January 25, 2018

1:45 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

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

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 17

Encouraging the United States Congress to pass legislation giving full military burial rights to Hmong veterans of the Vietnam War.

- HEARD & HELD

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

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HJR 17

SHORT TITLE: HMONG VETERANS MILITARY BURIAL RIGHTS

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) TARR

03/29/17	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/29/17	(H)	MLV
01/25/18	(H)	MLV AT 1:30 PM GRUENBERG 120

BILL: HB 178

SHORT TITLE: NAMING PORTIONS OF VETERANS HIGHWAYS  
SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(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
04/04/17	(H)	Heard & Held
04/04/17	(H)	MINUTE (MLV)
01/25/18	(H)	MLV AT 1:30 PM GRUENBERG 120

**WITNESS REGISTER**

REPRESENTATIVE GERAN TARR  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** As prime sponsor, presented HJR 17 and answered questions.

ROBERT DOEHL, Deputy Commissioner  
Office of the Commissioner/Adjutant General  
Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs  
Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided testimony and answered questions during the hearing of HJR 17.

VERDIE BOWEN, Director of Veterans' Affairs  
Office of Veteran Affairs  
Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided testimony and answered questions during the hearing of HJR 17.

CHARLIE XIONG

(No address provided)

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Due to technical difficulties, Mr. Xiong's testimony was indecipherable.

MAY RAMIREZ-XIONG  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support during the hearing of HJR 17.

MAI XIONG

Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Due to technical difficulties, Ms. Xiong's testimony was indecipherable.

PASERT LEE

Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support during the hearing of HJR 17.

REPRESENTATIVE DAVID EASTMAN

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** As prime sponsor, introduced HB 178 and answered questions.

JERAD MCCLURE, Staff

Representative David Eastman

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** On behalf of Representative Eastman, prime sponsor of HB 178, presented the changes incorporated into the committee substitute, Version M, and answered questions.

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.

MIKE LESMANN, Legislative Liaison

Office of the Commissioner

Department of Transportation and Public Facilities

Juneau, Alaska

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

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[1:45:36 PM](#)

**CHAIR CHRIS TUCK** called the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting to order at 1:45 p.m. Representatives Tuck, Saddler, Reinbold, Spohnholz, LeDoux, and Parish were present at the call to order. Representative Rauscher arrived as the meeting was in progress.

#### **HJR 17-HMONG VETERANS MILITARY BURIAL RIGHTS**

[1:46:36 PM](#)

CHAIR TUCK announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 17, Encouraging the United States Congress to pass legislation giving full military burial rights to Hmong veterans of the Vietnam War.

[1:47:26 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GERAN TARR, Alaska State Legislature, prime sponsor of HJR 17, noted HB 125 - introduced and heard by the committee last year - also addressed honoring the service of Hmong veterans who live in Alaska. She informed the committee during the Vietnam War the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) recruited Hmong people in Laos for their assistance in the U.S. war effort, including fighting alongside American soldiers on the Ho Chi Minh trail and transporting downed pilots to medical treatment. She said the Hmong soldiers fought honorably and it is estimated that 100,000 Hmong soldiers were recruited and trained. Representative Tarr directed the committee to HJR 17 on page 2, line 7, which read:

approximately 40,000 Hmong soldiers lost their lives  
defending democracy

REPRESENTATIVE TARR said after the war ended and the communist regime took power, the Hmong people were no longer welcome in their homeland and many became refugees in Thailand and various other locations, including Alaska. She said she was proud to represent thousands of Hmong/Americans living in her district, and other large populations are represented by several legislative districts in Anchorage. However, the U. S. has not fulfilled its promise to grant Hmong soldiers full veteran recognition.

REPRESENTATIVE TARR again referred to proposed HB 125 which would place a veteran designation on the driver's license of former Hmong soldiers. She said HJR 17 would extend burial rights at Arlington National Cemetery to Hmong veterans, a change that has been supported at the federal level by U.S. Senators Lisa Murkowski, Dan Sullivan, and others. She quoted a living Hmong soldier's statement from an article [document not provided] as follows: "Burial rights would mean getting the respect and the dignity that he and his fellow fighters feel they've earned." Representative Tarr stressed the importance of honoring commitments and said support from the Alaska State Legislature, along with similar resolutions from other states, is needed to urge for federal legislation to extend full military burial rights.

[1:52:34 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked if veteran status for burial rights at Arlington National Cemetery would allow burial rights in Fort Richardson National Cemetery.

REPRESENTATIVE TARR deferred the question to the Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs (DMVA).

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX commented that General Vang Pao, the leader of the Hmong soldiers who died about five or six years ago, asked to be buried at Arlington National Cemetery; however, his request was denied despite intervention from U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski.

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH, in response to Representative Saddler, said his research suggests burial rights would apply at any national cemetery.

REPRESENTATIVE TARR agreed.

[1:55:09 PM](#)

CHAIR TUCK opened public testimony.

[1:55:30 PM](#)

ROBERT DOEHL, Deputy Commissioner, Commissioner's Office, DMVA, stated DMVA and the Alaska Veterans' Advisory Council, Office of Veterans Affairs, DMVA, support HJR 17 and HB 125. He said Hmong were integral in saving downed American aviators during the Vietnam War, and sometimes ten Hmong would perish for every American saved. He said, "In short, Hmong died defending and trying to save American lives; if they died with American lives they should get to rest in the same hallowed ground as those American warriors." Mr. Doehl pointed out 50 years have passed, noting recognition of the Filipinos who served with the U. S. during World War II was also delayed, but for less time. [On 1/24/18] forty-five Alaska Air National Guard airmen in the 210th Rescue Squadron returned home from deployment and he said one of the reasons airmen return home safely is due to the support they receive from the people living in the deployment location, and he restated DMVA's support for HJR 17. In response to Representative Saddler, he confirmed national cemetery eligibility would apply to Fort Richardson National Cemetery.

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX asked why there is reluctance from Congress to address this issue.

MR. DOEHL opined there is concern "the Hmong did not raise their hand and take the same oath to support and defend the United States as U.S. servicemembers do."

[1:57:42 PM](#)

VERDIE BOWEN, Director, Office of Veterans' Affairs, DMVA, said he did not know why there is resistance from Congress on this issue; in fact, the issue is discussed in committee each year but does not receive enough support in the U. S. House and Senate. He agreed the possible reason is that Hmong soldiers did not receive an oath at enlistment. Mr. Bowen recalled the 100,000-member Vietnamese army in Laos was held back by the 30,000-member Hmong army managed by General Powell. Noting Hmong army enlistment, he related children who were tall enough to utilize a M1 Garand or M1 carbine rifle were taken from school and enlisted in the army; thus, there is no way to properly document those who were recruited. The Office of Veterans' Affairs has worked with the Hmong community to identify 25 people who served in the Hmong army. Mr. Bowen advised Arlington National Cemetery has already recognized the service of members of the Hmong army with a memorial dedicated in 1997, which indicates Hmong army members deserve to be interred in national cemeteries. Mr. Bowen pointed out burial rights for members of the Hmong army should not be delayed or the effort will be too late for many, as happened in many cases of Alaska Territorial Guard members. He opined Alaska should provide a reference point for its congressional delegation to take to Congress and ask that this honor be given to those who have served.

REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ asked whether Hmong veterans have been identified by working directly with the Hmong community.

MR. BOWEN said yes; DMVA utilized the same program used to identify Alaska Territorial Guard members, which allows officers who served in the Hmong army to identify others who served. This program was used last year in preparation for the Hmong veteran driver's license designation.

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH postulated children were conscripted into the army, and asked for the difference between conscription and enlistment.

MR. BOWEN said the system was an involuntary draft and some individuals received no training before they were sent to defend or rescue downed pilots.

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH asked whether efforts have been made to extend to the Hmong all of the benefits available to any veteran who voluntarily or involuntarily enters U.S. military service.

MR. BOWEN advised at this time the only two benefits the DMVA has [attempted to] extend are the driver's license designation and burial rights. In further response to Representative Parish, he added Alaska, California, and Minnesota have established Hmong Memorial Day; furthermore, each state supports a national program to allow Hmong soldiers to be interred in national cemeteries.

[2:05:35 PM](#)

MAY RAMIREZ-XIONG testified in support of HJR 17. [Much of her oral testimony was indiscernible, and she was provided with contact information for submitting written testimony.] Her written testimony was received by the committee and it read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Hi, my name is May Ramirez-Xiong.

Today, I called in to make a public testimony on HJR 17, but the connection with my cellular phone was not good, and I was asked to send my testimony in writing to this email. I will try to stay as close as possible to my phone testimony.

I believe I speak not only for myself, but also on behalf of every veteran and civilian, who has any respect and/or understanding of what it is like to have a family member serving our country. That the right thing to do is to honor every veteran who fought for our country as we honored our own veterans. That for the same reason we honored our fallen heroes, the people that served, the ones who fought to protect our country, and for every veteran who paved the way to give our country and our people the life, liberty, freedom and justice for all, that we extend this honor to the Hmong Veterans of the Vietnam War as well.

For the veterans who served the purposed outlined in the Soldier's Creed, to "stand ready to deploy, engage, and destroy, the enemies of the United States of America in close combat." The Hmong Veterans served this purposed for our Country during the Vietnam War.

This war left not only scars in our hearts, it sacrificed our people, and it is a part of American history. A part of me that I knew little about, because this part of history was not taught in schools. It was the "Secret War", and no recognition were given to the Hmong people. The Hmong people fought and continued fighting long after the United States pulled out. The United States of America is my Country. My Country that my father and many Hmong Veterans fought to defend, and many Hmong people died serving our country.

While language barriers have prevented the Hmong Veterans from expressing their concerns about the lack of dignity and respect they have received, the only way to make it right for them is to be their voice, because they fought for mine. Many who fought in The Secret War has already passed away and very few Hmong Veterans of the Vietnam War are still alive today. I do not believe that many Hmong Veterans would consider burial at Arlington due to superstitions of the fengshui considering burials, and many may not considered this an option at all. However, my testimony is not just about the burial of Hmong Veterans of the Vietnam War at Arlington Cemetery, but about the honor, dignity, and respect for those men.

To invalidate the rights that were promised four almost five decades ago demonstrates the kind of people we are. We are perceived to make broken promises, is this how we treat the very people that fought for our country? I am born and raised in the United States of America. I am an American. And, if we are anything that we say we are, we would provide Freedom, Liberty and Justice for all. Dignity and respect should be awarded to all soldiers, even the foreign-born soldier that fought alongside American soldiers, because they served the same purpose.

The United States should extend this right to include the Hmong Veterans of the Secret War. They should be

honored even if they were not born on U.S. soil. Hmong Veterans fought for this land, and their families died for our soil. They may not have sworn with their right hands as American Soldiers do (I was not born during that era, I would not have seen this) but I know they stood by the Soldier's Creed:

I am an American Soldier.

I am a warrior and a member of a team.

I serve the people of the United States, and live the Army Values.

I will always place the mission first.

I will never accept defeat.

I will never quit.

I will never leave a fallen comrade.

I am disciplined, physically and mentally tough, trained and proficient in my warrior tasks and drills.

I always maintain my arms, my equipment and myself.

I am an expert and I am a professional.

I stand ready to deploy, engage, and destroy, the enemies of the United States of America in close combat.

I am a guardian of freedom and the American way of life.

I am an American Soldier.

Because my father was one of the Hmong Veterans who fought this War. They were warriors and members of U.S. teams. They served the people of the U.S., and lived the values. They have put the mission first, and did not accept defeat, they did not quit. They carried fallen comrades to safety; they were the expert and the professional who was ready to deploy, engage, and destroy the enemies of the U.S.A in close combat. They were the guardian of freedom and the American way of

life, they were American Soldiers even before stepping on American soil. We owe it to what remains of the Hmong Veterans of the Vietnam War - The Secret War, to give them what we promised. I'm sad to say that the longer we wait to make a change, the less meaningful it would be for anyone else. It's to show dignity and respect for those who fought. It only matters while they're still alive. Lets not wait until they're all gone, to approve something they were promised decades ago.

CHAIR TUCK handed the gavel to Vice Chair LeDoux.

[2:11:44 PM](#)

CHARLIE XIONG, calling from California, attempted to provide testimony. [Due to technical difficulties Mr. Xiong's testimony was indiscernible.]

To address technical difficulties, a series of at-eases were taken from 2:13 p.m. to 2:19 p.m.

[2:19:22 PM](#)

MAI XIONG attempted to provide testimony. [Due to technical difficulties Ms. Xiong's testimony was indiscernible.]

[2:20:48 PM](#)

PASERT LEE [Much of Mr. Lee's testimony was not discernible; however, the portions of his testimony transcribed here indicate he was in support of HJR 17.] indicated that from 1961-75 the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) recruited Hmong people to rescue American pilots who had been shot down. He said that Hmong people protected Highways 7 and 4, as well as the Ho Chi Minh Trail. He spoke of the 36,000 Hmong soldiers that died during the Vietnam War compared to the relatively fewer 58,000 American soldiers that died there. He said he hopes that HJR 17 passes for the Hmong living in Alaska.

[2:23:28 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR LEDOUX announced that public testimony on HJR 17 would remain open.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER spoke of the urgent need to pass the resolution as soon as public testimony is heard.

VICE CHAIR LEDOUX agreed.

[HJR 17 was held over.]

**HB 178-NAMING PORTIONS OF VETERANS HIGHWAYS**

[2:24:56 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR LEDOUX announced that the final 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."

[2:25:25 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DAVID EASTMAN, Alaska State Legislature, said HB 178 was requested by Alaska veterans and affects the six veterans' memorials that currently exist in Alaska.

[2:26:34 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH moved to adopt the committee substitute (CS) for HB 178, [Version 30-LS0550\M], Bruce, 1/24/18, as a working document. There being no objection, Version M was before the committee.

[2:26:55 PM](#)

JERAD MCCLURE, Staff, Representative David Eastman, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Eastman, sponsor, presented the changes incorporated in Version M. He directed attention to page 1, lines 6-12, and said language was added to ensure the veterans' organizations submitting nominations are recognized under Internal Revenue Code section 501(c)(19). On page 2, lines 1-5, language was added to ensure if a living veteran's name was selected, the Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs (DMVA) would be required to seek permission from the veteran before his/her name could be added to the list of individuals to be honored. Also, on page 2, lines 22-25 require that the signs are funded or the Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOTPF) cannot proceed. Language beginning on page 2, line 31, and continuing to page 3, lines 1-3, establishes the order of priority for the signs. Also, on page 3, lines 7-10 create a more specific definition of "veteran" for the purposes of this legislation, and lines 11-14

clarify DOTPF is the sole department responsible for handling donations, gifts, and grants for funding the signs.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked whether the sponsor considered expanding the definition of veterans in the bill to include Hmong veterans.

MR. MCCLURE responded he did not believe so.

REPRESENTATIVE EASTMAN, speaking as the sponsor, said he was amenable to such an amendment.

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH directed attention to the bill on page 3, [lines 11-14], and asked whether this language expands the sources of revenue that DOTPF can receive.

MR. MCCLURE explained the language grants de minimis authority to accept gifts, grants, and donations so there is no need for DOTPF to receive budget line item funds [for the purposes of HB 178].

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH requested asked an estimate of the funds necessary to post a sign or marker in recognition of a veteran.

MR. MCCLURE deferred to DOTPF.

[2:30:23 PM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease.

[2:31:00 PM](#)

MARK NEIDHOLD, Chief of Design & Construction Standards, Division of Statewide Design and Engineering Services, DOTPF, in response to Representative Parish, said a standalone sign, meeting all necessary requirements to preserve the safety of the traveling public, would cost approximately \$2,500 per installation. He said there could be economies of scale if there is more than one sign, and/or if the sign is attached to a preexisting structure.

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH asked whether additional funds would be needed for the maintenance and/or replacement of signs.

MR. NEIDHOLD opined the bill restricts DOTPF from performing any repair or maintenance unless funds are available. Further, the

cost of a repair would depend upon the condition of the sign and could reach the full replacement cost of \$2,500.

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD observed an existing sign honoring an Alaska State Trooper killed in action is terribly weathered, and she asked for the cost of replacing the sign.

MR. NEIDHOLD was unsure; sign blanks are approximately \$250 per square foot thus the six-square-foot sign mentioned by Representative Reinbold could cost \$1,500.

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD said the sign in question is small and the estimate [for replacement] seems very high.

MR. NEIDHOLD explained his estimate is an amortized cost that includes traffic control, labor, and safety compliance whether installation is by DOTPF staff or is bid out to a contractor. He offered to confirm his estimate.

[2:36:14 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR LEDOUX asked that comments relate directly to HB 178.

[A short discussion unrelated to HB 178 ensued.]

REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER asked whether the bill indicates the size of the signs.

MR. NEIDHOLD advised the size of the sign is not identified in the bill but would be subject to the Alaska Traffic Manual and the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices, Federal Highway Administration. In further response to Representative Rauscher, he said the size of the sign is dependent upon the text, thus a veteran with a long name would require a larger sign.

REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER asked whether remarks other than a veteran's name would be allowed on the sign.

MR. NEIDHOLD said the bill does not specify; however, the bill directs DOTPF to develop "that policy," and he offered to provide more information at a later date.

REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER asked whether more than one name would be allowed on a sign.

MR. NEIDHOLD said the bill is not specific on that, but it directs DOTPF to produce a sign in accordance with the

legislative commendation; the Alaska Traffic Manual and the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices do not prohibit listing more than one name on a sign.

REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER questioned whether a person sponsoring a veteran would provide the \$2,500 for the initial cost of the sign, and additional donations would be needed to cover the cost of repairs if the sign were damaged.

MR. NEIDHOLD said language in Version M of the bill prohibits DOTPF from acting unless funds are available.

REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER restated all of the funds would come from a sponsor.

MR. NEIDHOLD restated the bill restricts DOTPF from any or all of the stated activities - design, post, maintain, or replace - unless funding is present.

[2:41:43 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR LEDOUX directed attention to the bill on page 2, lines 21-23, which read [in part]:

... The Department of Transportation and Public Facilities may not  
(1) design, post, maintain, or replace a sign or other marker unless there is adequate funding through gifts, donations, or grants ...

VICE CHAIR LEDOUX asked whether grants would include grants from the state.

MR. NEIDHOLD was unsure and deferred the question to finance.

VICE CHAIR LEDOUX noted the bill has a zero fiscal note [Fiscal Note Identifier: HB178-DOT-COM-03-31-17] and expressed her concern as to whether the legislature can act on a bill with a zero fiscal note.

MR. NEIDHOLD explained DOTPF attached a zero fiscal note because of the language prohibiting DOTPF from performing any activities unless other funding is provided.

[2:44:22 PM](#)

MIKE LESMANN, Legislative Liaison, Office of the Commissioner, DOTPF, stated DOTPF's understanding that activities related to design, maintenance, posting, or replacing [signs] are prohibited without funding to DOTPF outside of funding from the state or federal government, which is the reason for a zero fiscal note. However, for its Southcoast, Northern, and Central Regions, DOTPF has statutory designated program receipt authority which provides the mechanism for DOTPF to accept gifts and grants. Mr. Lesmann suggested the question about grants should be directed to the bill sponsor. In response to Vice Chair LeDoux's question about [Fiscal Note Identifier: HB178-MVA-OVA-1-19-18], he deferred to the Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs.

[Vice Chair LeDoux returned the gavel to Chair Tuck.]

REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ surmised the intention of Version M is DMVA would work with private nonprofit organizations which support and advance veterans' interests and recognition in order to secure nominations and funding for said memorials.

REPRESENTATIVE EASTMAN remarked:

The intention of the bill comes from the requests from the veterans' organizations themselves who have identified funding for some signs that they would like to go ahead and put on these veterans' memorials. And the, the process and the Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs can certainly speak to their analysis, but the process is such that those, those veterans' organizations have current established relationships with the department. They're already recognized by (indisc.) as veterans' organizations, they already have those relationships, and they simply submit a document with a name. Then that is simply passed on to the legislature by the department.

REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ said from her experience working with veterans' organizations, a veterans' organization interested in recognizing a nominee would put forth a person's name with the understanding that it would likely fund that specific memorial sign.

REPRESENTATIVE EASTMAN said yes.

REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ observed the bill would allow DOTPF to work with DMVA in placing signs at six specific veterans'

memorials in the state; this would be done in collaboration with the private nonprofit veterans' organizations which would fund the projects.

REPRESENTATIVE EASTMAN clarified DMVA would be an intermediary between the veterans' organizations and the legislature, and the legislature would decide whether or not to recognize veterans.

REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ confirmed funding would come from private nonprofit organizations working with DMVA to make recommendations to the legislature regarding memorial signs. If the recommendations are approved, the signs would be installed by DOTPF. She asked for the location of the six veterans' memorials that would be affected.

REPRESENTATIVE EASTMAN said the bill amends AS 35.40.035 which identifies six veterans' memorials designated on portions of highways in Juneau, Eagle River, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, and Fairbanks, and on two bridges. In further response to Representative Spohnholz, he said he would provide the locations of the memorials to the committee.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER said he likes the intent of the bill and that Alaskans would honor a fallen comrade in a self-reliant manner. He asked whether there are any limits to the number of memorials, other than those imposed by the veterans' organizations.

REPRESENTATIVE EASTMAN pointed out the legislature has established the existing memorials and new legislation would be required to change the number of memorials. Further, the legislature would decide on the number and frequency of designated names.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER questioned whether the six existing memorials are identified by a signpost - or encompass a certain area, such as an intersection - so to envision the physical or procedural limitations on the number of individual signs that might be posted.

REPRESENTATIVE EASTMAN said individual veterans' memorials can be unique; therefore, the legislature has allowed DOTPF latitude to determine their location and size, and if more than one person's name would be included.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER surmised the amount of money generated may affect the size of the memorial thus signs may be very large

or very small depending upon the veteran's popularity. Further, he asked where the bill establishes standards on what would qualify a veteran for commendation or recognition.

REPRESENTATIVE EASTMAN said the legislature ultimately decides who is recognized under this program; the bill does not provide criteria to guide the legislature in its decision.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER concluded a recommendation - even though funded by a veterans' organization - could be denied by the legislature.

REPRESENTATIVE EASTMAN explained denial of a recommendation would occur through inaction by the legislature.

[2:55:32 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD acknowledged the value of recognizing veterans, however, DOTPF's primary responsibility is for infrastructure and public safety. Further, she estimated there are 75,000 veterans in Alaska, and asked how [one nomination] would be prioritized as more important than another.

REPRESENTATIVE EASTMAN said veterans' organizations desire to highlight one or more veterans over a certain period of time, but not permanently. He stressed the legislation currently before the committee relates to whether the legislature will respond to that request.

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD expressed her appreciation of veterans' memorials and their purpose. She inquired as to whether there are additional messages of support for the bill, and questioned how the legislature would recognize all of the thousands of veterans in Alaska.

REPRESENTATIVE EASTMAN noted there will be public testimony from veterans in support of the bill.

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH returned to the concern of equity, and pointed out the bill directs the initial placement would be done in the order of the most recent commendation, and if donations have not been linked to a specific veteran, DOTPF could use those funds for others; however, if there were veterans commended by the legislature without funding, and all available funding is associated with other names, there would be a conflict. In addition, if the signs are not meant to be permanent, he surmised [veterans' organizations] would need to

raise funds for their eventual replacement or removal of the signs. He directed attention to the bill on page 2, lines 18 and 19, which read [in part]:

... A donor may request that a gift, donation, or grant be used for a specific veteran's memorial, ...

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH gave an example of a partial donation directed to a specific memorial and asked what the accounting burden would be if DOTPF is expected to hold a donation for a specific veteran and await additional funding.

[3:01:04 PM](#)

CHAIR TUCK announced that HB 178 was held over.

[3:01:09 PM](#)

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting was adjourned at 3:01 p.m.