

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**SENATE TRANSPORTATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 14, 2017

1:30 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Bert Stedman, Chair  
Senator Anna MacKinnon  
Senator Click Bishop  
Senator David Wilson  
Senator Dennis Egan

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

SENATE BILL NO. 33

"An Act naming the state ferries built in Ketchikan and entering Alaska marine highway system service on or after 2017; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 46

"An Act establishing October 25 of each year as African American Soldiers' Contribution to Building the Alaska Highway Day."

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: SB 33

SHORT TITLE: NAME STATE FERRIES: M/V TAZLINA & HUBBARD

SPONSOR(s): RULES BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

01/23/17	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/23/17	(S)	TRA
02/14/17	(S)	TRA AT 1:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: SB 46

SHORT TITLE: OCT 25: AFR-AMER SOLDIERS AK HWY DAY

SPONSOR(s): WILSON

02/01/17 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
02/01/17 (S) TRA, STA  
02/14/17 (S) TRA AT 1:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

**WITNESS REGISTER**

CAPTAIN MIKE NEUSSL, Deputy Commissioner  
Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOTPF)  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented SB 33 on behalf of the administration.

GARY ZEPP, Staff  
Senator David Wilson  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented SB 46 on behalf of the sponsor.

CLAUDIA ROLLINS, representing herself  
Glen Allen, Virginia

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented information related to SB 46.

REGINALD A. BEVERLY, Surveyor  
95th Engineer Regiment  
Glen Allen, Virginia

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in favor of SB 46.

VERDIE BOWEN, Director  
Veterans Affairs  
Department of Military & Veterans Affairs (DMVA)  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in favor of SB 46.

DAVID NEES, representing himself  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 46.

JEAN POLLARD, Chair  
Alaska Highway Memorial Project  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 46.

SHALA DOBSON, Secretary  
Alaska Highway Memorial Project  
Wasilla, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 46.

## **ACTION NARRATIVE**

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**CHAIR BERT STEDMAN** called the Senate Transportation Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. He noted two items on the agenda, SB 33 and SB 46.

### **SB 33-NAME STATE FERRIES: M/V TAZLINA & HUBBARD**

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**CHAIR STEDMAN** announced that the first order of business would be SB 33.

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**CAPTAIN MIKE NEUSSL**, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOTPF), presented SB 33 on behalf of the Governor and Commissioner Luiken. He related that the bill names the two Alaska-class ferries, currently under construction in Ketchikan, the Motor Vessel Tazlina and the Motor Vessel Hubbard. Governor Walker, Lt. Governor Mallott, and DOT Commissioner Luiken sponsored a contest for children in grades 6 - 12 to come up with names for the two new vessels. By statute, Alaska ferries must be named after glaciers in Alaska. There were about 450 essays submitted from which the Governor selected two names.

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**SENATOR EGAN** said he has been receiving emails from constituents suggesting the words "Motor Vessel" not be included in the names of the vessels.

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**CAPTAIN NEUSSEL** responded that he saw that also. He noted it is a technicality and the language conforms to the existing statute. "Motor Vessel" is a description of the vessel and the names are Tazlina and Hubbard.

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**SENATOR EGAN** noted that none of the current ferries say "Motor Vessel."

**CAPTAIN NEUSSEL** assured that "Motor Vessel" is not welded with the name onto the ship's side.

**SENATOR EGAN** asked if it would say "Motor Vessel" if the bill passes.

CAPTAIN NEUSSEL said it would not; it would be the same as the names of rest of the vessels.

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CHAIR STEDMAN provided an example of how "Fishing Vessel" is treated.

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CHAIR STEDMAN opened and then closed public testimony.

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CHAIR STEDMAN requested to know where the ships are in the construction process.

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CAPTAIN NEUSSEL said that the Tazlina and the Hubbard are under construction at the Vigor Shipyard in Ketchikan. The Tazlina is half complete. Several modules to be used on the Hubbard are on site and ready to install. The first vessel should be delivered right around the beginning of 2018. The second vessel should be done a few months later.

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CHAIR STEDMAN held SB 33 in committee.

**SB 46-OCT 25: AFR-AMER SOLDIERS AK HWY DAY**

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CHAIR STEDMAN announced the consideration of SB 46.

SENATOR DAVID WILSON, sponsor of SB 46, Alaska State Legislature, introduced SB 46. He paraphrased from the sponsor statement:

Senate Bill 46 recognizes the contributions of African American Soldiers in building the Alaska Highway and commemorates those extraordinary efforts by establishing October 25th as "African American Soldiers' Contribution to Building the Alaska Highway Day."

Why October 25th? On this day, African American Army troops of the 93rd and 95th regiments constructing the Alaska-Canadian (ALCAN) highway north from Dawson Creek, met the white troops constructing the ALCAN Highway heading south. The troops connected

the two segments on October 25, 1942, at Contact Creek, near Mile Post 590 in the Yukon Territory. It was a "Golden Spike" day.

Four regiments of African American Army Engineers from the 93rd, 95th, and the 97th Engineer General Services Regiments and the 388th Engineer Battalion were deployed to Alaska to assist in building the 1,500 miles of road. The highway cost \$138 million to build at that time. The 10,607 men, of which a third were African American, built the road in eight months and 12 days. This extraordinary accomplishment was compared to the construction of the Panama Canal.

Little recognition has been given to the African American soldiers for their contributions in building the ALCAN Highway. For example, the National Archives contains only a few dozen photos of the African American troops among the hundreds taken of the ALCAN Highway construction; African Americans were edited out of a 1991 National Geographic feature on the ALCAN highway, despite the fact that the magazine obtained interviews of seven men who served building the ALCAN; And, the official 759-page U.S. Army history of the Corps of Engineers covers African Americans' involvement with a one-sentence footnote.

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SENATOR WILSON stated that this year, 2017, marks the 75th anniversary of the ALCAN Highway. He shared a story of how he and his dad did not understand the history of the road. He said SB 46 provides the recognition that is due the men who helped contribute to the construction of the ALCAN Highway.

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GARY ZEPP, Staff, Senator David Wilson, Alaska State Legislature, presented SB 46 on behalf of the sponsor. He set the stage for the presentation by providing the history of the Japanese invasion in Hawaii in 1941 and in Kiska in 1942. America's reaction was to build an overland route across Alaska and Canada in order to support U.S. troops and supplies. The U.S. troops finished the Alaska Highway in eight months, a remarkable feat. Most African American soldiers prior to this were delegated to labor projects, not into battle. That changed after the construction of the Alaska Highway.

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MR. ZEPP showed photos of the crews during the construction of the Alaska Highway in 1942.

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MR. ZEPP said the Alaska Highway is considered one of the biggest and most difficult construction projects ever completed in the U.S.

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He showed a video on the "Alaska Highway - The Road to Civil Rights."

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MR. ZEPP commented on the high quality of the African American regiments, especially in the field of bridge building. Their accomplishments were ignored by the media and the press. It took decades for them to receive recognition for their achievements. He spoke of the discrimination that took place during construction.

He addressed why African American soldiers should be recognized. He described the race relations in 1942 and the impact the soldiers' accomplishments had on improving those relations.

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MR. ZEPP listed the Reconstruction Act of 1867, the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment to the United States in 1870 for the right to vote, and the Civil Rights Act of 1875 forbidding racial segregation. However, in 1896 the Supreme Court upheld Louisiana's requirement for separate, but equal accommodations for white and black railroad passengers. For the next 35 years equity in racial relations was lost and by 1910 segregation was firmly established. In 1954, some progress was made when segregation of schools was banned. In 1964, public segregation was abolished by the Civil Rights Act, however, the American troops remained segregated, including during the construction of the Alaska Highway.

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MR. ZEPP noted that little publicity or notoriety has been given to the African American soldiers for their efforts. He provided examples. In 1948 President Truman signed a desegregation plan for the armed services. In 1992, when Colin Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, happened to be in Fairbanks and viewed Ms. Lael Morgan's exhibit, he said he had no idea Black

men had ever done anything like that. He said they were deserving of recognition. Mr. Zepp provided more quotations of how the highway changed race relations.

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MR. ZEPP commented that the legacy of the African American soldiers wouldn't be known today, nor be officially recognized by the military, if not for the works of many. He thanked the U.S. Park Service, Keith Twitchell, James Eaton, Ted Stevens, Andrew Molly, Colin Powell, Steven Cowen, John Virtue, Mike Dunham, Cornelia Dean, Tim Ellis, Ricky Longfellow, Bill Gifford, Connie Abu, Douglas Prindley, Jean Pollard, and the University of Alaska-Fairbanks Professor Lael Morgan.

He concluded that he was proud to carry this legislation for Senator Wilson.

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SENATOR BISHOP asked if Mr. Zepp had talked to National Geographic during his research to ask why they omitted the report.

MR. ZEPP responded that Lael Morgan's interview of seven African American soldiers was stripped out of the article, so she quit.

SENATOR BISHOP wished for a copy of the article.

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CHAIR STEDMAN opened public testimony.

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CLAUDIA ROLLINS, representing herself, presented information related to SB 46. She said she is the daughter of Sergeant Reginald A. Beverly, who was in the 95th Engineer Regiment in 1942. She said her dad was one of the 4,000-plus soldiers who built the Alaskan section of the highway. These soldiers toiled through inclement weather and other hardships to complete their mission. She said she is very glad that Alaska will be honoring these soldiers by making October 25 officially the Alaska Highway Day. She noted that her dad celebrated his 102nd birthday on January 31, 2017. She thanked the committee and introduced her father.

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REGINALD A. BEVERLY, Surveyor, 95th Engineer Regiment, testified in favor of SB 46. He thanked the committee for honoring the

soldiers who worked on the Alcan Highway by making October 25 Alaska Highway Day.

2:00:28 PM

SENATOR MACKINNON asked Ms. Rollins if she has any photos from the building of the highway.

MS. ROLLINS said she did not.

2:01:13 PM

VERDIE BOWEN, Director, Veterans Affairs, Anchorage, testified in favor of SB 46. He noted the major feat by President Roosevelt to bring 11,000 to work on the Alaska Highway. He described the discrimination and poor conditions the African-American soldiers experienced during the building of the Alaska Highway. He described the amazing feat the men accomplished. They showed the world that the African-American soldier was equal and capable. In 1948, the army was re-integrated due to their accomplishments. He spoke in support of providing a day to celebrate this accomplishment.

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DAVID NEES, representing himself, testified in support of SB 46. He spoke in favor of recognizing these men and their accomplishments made in spite of hardships. He provided additional information about the hardships during the building of the highway.

2:06:15 PM

JEAN POLLARD, Chair, Alaska Highway Memorial Project, testified in support of SB 46. She described how she became interested in this topic and how National Geographic denied Ms. Morgan's story. She gave credit to Ms. Morgan for her important efforts.

MS. POLLARD related that she called Washington, D.C. to discuss the story and was informed that the Alaska Highway was number 16 out of 46 events that promoted civil rights. Because of what those men did, the military became integrated and the Territory of Alaska became a part of the United States.

She told a story about then-Lt. Governor Fran Ulmer stating that without the assistance of Black soldiers, the ALCAN would likely have never been built in such record time. She concluded that it is time to honor these men and she knows of three soldiers still living. She suggested there be a statewide celebration. She thanked the committee.

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SHALA DOBSON, Secretary, Alaska Highway Memorial Project, testified in support of SB 46. She related her interest in the Alaska Highway Project and the decision to provide curriculum to students about this story. Having an Alaska Highway Day will provide an occasion to discuss the story. She thanked the committee.

CHAIR STEDMAN closed public testimony on SB 46.

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SENATOR WILSON thanked the committee.

SENATOR MACKINNON asked if Senator Wilson has reached out to the public to find additional images.

SENATOR WILSON noted that this is a year-long project. He said his staff has not reached out to the public yet.

SENATOR MACKINNON suggested doing an op-ed.

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SENATOR BISHOP also suggested reaching out to the British Columbia Government.

CHAIR STEDMAN held SB 46 in committee.

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There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Stedman adjourned the Senate Transportation Standing Committee at 2:18 p.m.