

HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE  
March 2, 2020  
9:04 a.m.

[9:04:14 AM](#)

CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Johnston called the House Finance Committee meeting to order at 9:04 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Neal Foster, Co-Chair  
Representative Jennifer Johnston, Co-Chair  
Representative Dan Ortiz, Vice-Chair  
Representative Ben Carpenter  
Representative Andy Josephson  
Representative Gary Knopp  
Representative Kelly Merrick (via teleconference)  
Representative Cathy Tilton

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Bart LeBon  
Representative Colleen Sullivan-Leonard  
Representative Adam Wool

ALSO PRESENT

Sara Perman, Staff, Representative Louise Stutes; Matt Walker, State Traffic and Safety Engineer, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities; Representative Laddie Shaw, Sponsor; Josh Walton, Staff, Representative Laddie Shaw.

PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE

Katrina Hoffman, irene Webber's Daughter-In-Law, Cordova

SUMMARY

HB 186 NAMING IRENE WEBBER BRIDGE

HB 186 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

HB 223 NAMING VIETNAM HELI. PILOTS' MEM. BRIDGE

HB 223 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

Co-Chair Johnston reviewed the meeting agenda. She noted that two bills had been removed from the agenda.

#hb186

HOUSE BILL NO. 186

"An Act naming the irene Webber Bridge."

9:05:20 AM

SARA PERMAN, STAFF, REPRESENTATIVE LOUISE STUTES, introduced herself and provided an explanation of the bill. The three line bill renamed an unidentified bridge in Cordova, formally known by the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT) as Bridge 406, Scott Glacier Number 6, to the irene Webber Bridge. irene Webber passed away in 2018, and the bridge would serve to remind Cordovans of the legacy she left behind.

Ms. Perman provided detail about irene Webber. Irene was an Alutiq woman. She was born in Ellemar, Alaska and later moved to Cordova where she raised her family. She and her husband and three children ran a seining operation in Prince William Sound. She elaborated that Ms. Webber was remembered as a runner who began running as an adult and as her daughter Kim [Aspelund] put it, "running empowered and invigorated her." In pursuing her passion, Ms. Webber founded the Cordova Running Club and was integral to the foundation of many running events. She is perhaps best remembered as being the founder and the sole runner of the first Cordova Salmon Run marathon in 1986. She expounded that 33 years later, the run expanded to five different races - the King Salmon Marathon, the Sockeye Half Marathon, Coho 10K, Humpy 5K and the Smooth One Mile Fun Run. She highlighted that over 300 people attend the races annually from around the world.

Ms. Perman continued to provide background information about irene Webber. In addition to her work with the Alaska Salmon Runs, Ms. Webber also was integral in creating the

Cancer 2x2 Walks in 2002. The event has raised more than \$100,000 for Cordovans seeking cancer treatment or screenings. Ms. Webber was also involved in several other philanthropic efforts such as supporting St. Jude's Children's Hospital and the American Cancer Society.

Ms. Perman provided several anecdotes about Ms. Webber shared by her daughter Kim. She detailed that on the boat everyone knew that "Dad may be the captain, but mom was the admiral." She elaborated that participation in the run had started declining, but Ms. Webber started making homemade clam chowder and the attendance soared. She was known in Cordova as grandma irene. She noted that irene was spelled with a lowercase "i."

Ms. Perman detailed that the bridge was located at 9.5 mile on the road between Cordova and its airport. The bridge was used by runners during the marathon and half marathon; it was also near a recreation area used by families. Members' packets included two resolutions from the City of Cordova and the Native Village of Eyak in support of the bill. The bill had a \$9,680 fiscal note from DOT associated with materials costs including signage, posts, and installation materials such as sonotubes and concrete.

Co-Chair Johnston OPENED public testimony. She relayed there was a representative from DOT available for questions.

[9:10:02 AM](#)

AT EASE

[9:10:11 AM](#)

RECONVENED

KATRINA HOFFMAN, IRENE WEBBER'S DAUGHTER IN-LAW, CORDOVA (via teleconference), provided prepared remarks about her mother-in-law irene:

Thanks for allowing me the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of our family. irene spelled her name with a little "i" and she had a diminutive figure but there was nothing little about her accomplishments. She was raised in the village of Ellemar, near Tatitlek. She moved to Cordova and raised a family of three children with her lifelong love Bill Webber Sr, which resulted in ten

grandchildren and many great grandchildren, all of whom either live in Alaska or have deep ties to it. irene was a businesswoman, a good neighbor, a great sourdough cook, and a dotting grandmother. She was the admiral on the family fishing vessel, overseeing multiple generations of our family who together make their living off commercial salmon fishing.

At her memorial service one of her grandsons, Christopher, said he knew his grandmother to be two people - wonderfully loving Grandma i and the formidable deck boss whose word was law out on the water. As my sister-in-law Kim would tell you, irene committed to a practice late in life of running marathons, which was especially important to her after she found her sobriety and maintained it for many years. She was the originator of the Wild Salmon runs that are a key feature of the annual Salmon Jam Summer Festival here in Cordova. That racecourse starts out on the Copper River delta and heads back to town. On that course, if you run the half marathon or marathon you will cross this bridge at mile 9.5.

When we learned that this bridge was available to be named, my husband and son and I drove out to the location and just knew in our hearts this was the right bridge to name after irene. There was abundant fireweed blowing [by] the bridge. You look up the Scott River and can see the Scott Glacier. People recreate in the winter on ice skates and snow machines up this river and in the summer on ATVs and fat tire bikes on the trails that the Forest Service has maintained. Just beyond the bridge is the 9-mile sandpile where families gather for barbeques, birthday parties, water play, dune jumping, sandcastle building, and it's very fitting that a place that brings joy to so many people would be able to be named after irene, who brought joy to many people herself.

When irene would pass you in town she'd say "see you on the road," because people would pass her driving in their cars and she would be out there running. I am happy to speak in favor of House Bill 186 with the support of the Webber family. We would be deeply grateful if you took action to rename Bridge 406 the irene Webber Bridge with a little "i."

Co-Chair Johnston noted that Representative Merrick was online.

Co-Chair Johnston CLOSED public testimony.

Representative Carpenter asked DOT to speak to the cost of the fiscal note. He had seen many signs on bridges, and he did not know whether there was a standard installation method. He wondered if there was something specifying the need to use sonotubes. He asked if the only way to put a sign at the location would cost \$9,000.

MATT WALKER, STATE TRAFFIC AND SAFETY ENGINEER, DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC FACILITIES, answered that he had not personally visited the site and did not know the specific site conditions. He reported that sonotubes were regularly used in the installation of signs, specifically, signs of the size included in the fiscal note. He explained the sign needed to be a certain size because of the speed of the road.

Representative Carpenter asked how the department had determined the size and cost of the signage. He asked if someone had visited the location or whether an assumption had been made based on how the process was always done.

Mr. Walker replied that he had not been involved in the cost breakdown. He reported that the sign would need to be retroreflective. Additionally, letters on the memorial sign needed to be a certain height, which would dictate the size of the sign.

[9:16:38 AM](#)

Representative Knopp asked if there were currently signs at the bridge. He asked if there were sonotubes and posts currently in place.

Mr. Walker replied that he did not know what was currently on site.

Representative Knopp shared that he had success in getting a bill passed that renamed a road. He reported that DOT had submitted fiscal note of about \$1,900. He elaborated that after going through all of the details, the cost had been reduced to approximately \$350 because there had been existing posts and sonotubes. He reasoned that if there

were already existing posts, the fiscal note seemed to be over inflated. He supported the bill but noted the validity of Representative Carpenter's question. He discussed various ways signs could be posted.

Co-Chair Johnston communicated that it would be helpful to have a follow up on the fiscal note prior to the next bill hearing.

HB 186 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

#hb223

HOUSE BILL NO. 223

"An Act naming the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots' Memorial Bridge."

9:18:30 AM

REPRESENTATIVE LADDIE SHAW, SPONSOR, addressed the bill with prepared remarks:

Thank you for taking the time to hear House Bill 223, entitled "An Act naming the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots' Memorial Bridge."

This is a topic that is very close to my heart, as I served two tours in Vietnam.

Representative Shaw shared a framed photograph taken 50 years earlier coming back from an operation in Vietnam. The photograph showed a helicopter dropping off wounded Navy Seals and himself. He was honored to have Tom Studler [staff to Representative Dave Talerico] in the audience, who had been a Vietnam helicopter pilot and had served in the delta at the same time as he had.

Representative Shaw relayed that he was honored to be invited to be an associate member of the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association as a Vietnam veteran and as a certified helicopter pilot. He continued with prepared remarks:

I should note that this bill was the idea of Representative Cathy Tilton. She very graciously offered to have me introduce it and carry it, knowing

my personal connection to the subject. I really appreciate her graciousness.

I would also like to acknowledge the work on this bill done by Representative Tilton's staff, Heath Hilyard. Heath did the bulk of the legwork on this bill, and his work is greatly appreciated.

Lastly, I'd like to express my appreciation of the reception this bill has received so far - particularly that every veteran in the House signed on as a co-sponsor at introduction. I'm deeply honored by that.

With that, I'd like to tell you about my experience, and why I'm so glad to have the opportunity to present this legislation to you..

Representative Shaw continued with prepared remarks:

Vietnam was called the Helicopter War. During the Vietnam War the United States relied on the helicopter as never before. The helicopter's role in combat expanded enormously in this conflict as thousands of choppers rapidly transported personnel throughout the warzone. Heavily armed helicopters offered a fearsome component to ground operations. As close air support, mobility and fire power would be the keys for American operations in Vietnam, and the helicopter provided an abundance of both. But the role of the helicopter in support of activities in the Vietnam War must not be overlooked, as thousands of missions were flown to resupply, reinforce troops on the ground, to evacuate Americans and South Vietnamese wounded, and to offer countless other services in pursuance of the war effort.

The UH-1 or better known as the Huey, was the symbol of the American war in Vietnam. Indeed, the Vietnam War was the Helicopter War. As a side note, there were nearly 12,000 helicopters that flew combat or support missions in Vietnam. Over 5,000 were destroyed. There was a helicopter casualty rate of 45 percent. There are 58,000 names on the wall in Vietnam; 8 percent of those are helicopter pilots and crew. Forty thousand helo pilots served in Vietnam. I'm honored to have flown with them and I very much appreciate your support on this bill.

Representative Shaw asked his staff to review the specifics of the legislation.

[9:22:21 AM](#)

JOSH WALTON, STAFF, REPRESENTATIVE LADDIE SHAW, explained that the bill would name bridge numbers 1124 and 1889 - spanning the Matanuska River northbound and southbound at mile 30.4 of the Glenn Highway - the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots' Memorial Bridge. He noted there were two bridges in close proximity to each other in the area. He elaborated that when heading out of Anchorage towards Mat-Su the first bridge is the Bondsteel Bridge, which the bill would not change. The bill pertained to the second bridge, which was a bit farther north and was currently unnamed. The bill would rename the unnamed bridge the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots' Memorial Bridge.

Mr. Walton noted that members' packets included photos from Google Maps identifying the bridges. He referenced an academic article included in members' packets about the role helicopters served and how the helicopter came of age. The backup materials also included a few contemporary articles illustrating the role pilots served and some of the challenges they had encountered when their accomplishments had been recognized after the Vietnam War.

Mr. Walton highlighted that the bill had the support of Lynn Kile, president of the Alaska chapter of the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association. He noted that Mr. Kile would be available to provide testimony and answer questions if requested at a subsequent hearing on the bill. He relayed that the bill had received a letter of support from the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Commissioner Major General Torrence Saxe. He concluded his remarks and was available for questions and offered to provide a sectional analysis if requested.

[9:25:37 AM](#)

Representative Tilton shared that she was honored and appreciative that Representative Shaw had brought the bill forward. She detailed that she was a daughter, granddaughter, and wife of Vietnam veterans and felt particularly connected to the legislation. She shared that

the location of the bridge was suitable because it spanned where the largest population of Vietnam veterans resided - Mat-Su and Anchorage. She noted that the existing Sargent James Bondsteel Bridge was significant because he was a Vietnam veteran who had earned a medal of honor. She read a statement:

There are brave Alaskans who gave their "last full measure of devotion" flying or serving on helicopters during the Vietnam War (source:virtualwall.com):

- Chief Warrant Officer Lloyd Rainey (Anchorage) - Pilot, age 33
- Warrant Officer William Duncan (Anchorage) - Pilot, age 22
- Chief Warrant Officer William Walters (Anchorage) - Pilot, age 24
- Specialist Richard Bauer (Anchorage) - Crew, age 19
- Warrant Officer David Lape (Cordova) - Pilot, age 23
- Warrant Officer William Childers (Fairbanks) - Pilot, age 21
- Specialist David Ferry (Fairbanks) - Crew, age 24
- Specialist Kurt Int-Hout (Kodiak) - Crew, age 20
- Warrant Officer Frederick Simeonoff (Spenard) - Pilot, age 22

Representative Tilton elaborated that the Alaskan men she had listed gave their lives at very young ages. She believed there was no better way to honor them.

Representative Carpenter noted that there were multiple bills being considered that would rename bridges and the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT) had submitted fiscal notes with different price tags. He requested to hear why there was a cost disparity between the posting of signs included in the two bills heard during the meeting. He noted the cost of \$9,000 in one bill and \$6,000 in the current bill. He did not believe the difference made sense. He supported the bill and believed the bridge naming was well-deserved.

Co-Chair Johnston asked if DOT would like to address the fiscal note.

Representative Carpenter restated his question. He noted that two bridges were shown at \$6,000 and one was \$9,000. He asked why there was a cost disparity.

MATT WALKER, STATE TRAFFIC AND SAFETY ENGINEER, DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC FACILITIES, answered that there were two signs for both directions on the Irene Webber Bridge and two signs for both directions on the Glenn Highway for the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots' Memorial Bridge. There was a cost difference between the two. He speculated that there may be more information available on the site conditions on the Glenn Highway bridge because it was more easily accessible. He did not believe the fiscal notes included cost for labor or installation. He did not know the precise reason for the disparity. He offered to follow up on the question.

Representative Carpenter requested a follow up on the question. He thought \$6,000 to \$9,000 for two signs seemed high.

HB 223 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

Co-Chair Johnston reviewed the agenda for the following day.

#

ADJOURNMENT

[9:31:54 AM](#)

The meeting was adjourned at 9:31 a.m.