

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

March 5, 2019

1:00 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Gabrielle LeDoux, Chair
Representative Chuck Kopp
Representative Geran Tarr
Representative Steve Thompson
Representative Sharon Jackson
Representative George Rauscher

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Chris Tuck, Vice Chair

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 56

"An Act establishing May 15 of each year as Hmong-American Veterans Day."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 56

SHORT TITLE: ESTABLISH HMONG-AMERICAN VETERANS DAY

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) TARR

02/20/19	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/20/19	(H)	MLV, CRA
03/05/19	(H)	MLV AT 1:00 PM GRUENBERG 120

WITNESS REGISTER

REPRESENTATIVE GERAN TARR
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As the prime sponsor, presented HB 56.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:00:58 PM](#)

CHAIR GABRIELLE LEDOUX called the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. Representatives Kopp, Thompson, Jackson, Tarr, Rauscher and LeDoux were present at the call to order.

HB 56-ESTABLISH HMONG-AMERICAN VETERANS DAY

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CHAIR LEDOUX announced that the only order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 56 "An Act establishing May 15 of each year as Hmong-American Veterans Day."

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REPRESENTATIVE GERAN TARR, Alaska State Legislature, introduced HB 56 as prime sponsor. She said efforts to honor Hmong-American veterans remind her of the phrase "a promise made is a promise kept."

REPRESENTATIVE TARR provided background information about the Hmong who fought alongside Americans during the Secret War in Laos. She said the Hmong successfully rescued downed American soldiers and assisted in disrupting enemy supply routes along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. She said tens of thousands of Hmong participated in the war effort and thousands of veterans now reside in the United States. She said the number of Hmong-American veterans in Alaska is relatively small, but highlighted the pride shown by Anchorage's Hmong-American community. She said the community has waited decades for the veterans' service to be acknowledged.

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REPRESENTATIVE TARR recognized other efforts to honor Hmong-American veterans. She referenced House Concurrent Resolution 3 [passed in the Twenty-Eighth Alaska State Legislature] sponsored by Chair LeDoux that proclaimed May 15 to be Hmong-American Veterans Day. She said HB 56 would make that proclamation permanent. Representative Tarr shared efforts to ensure recognition of veteran status on Alaska state driver's licenses, which she said would be very meaningful. She also spoke about efforts to make Hmong-American veterans eligible for military burials.

REPRESENTATIVE TARR explained May 15 was chosen to acknowledge the anniversary of the United States government's first public

recognition of Hmong contributions during the Secret War in Laos. She said HB 56 would enable celebration of and sharing about the Hmong-American veterans' service to the United States.

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REPRESENTATIVE JACKSON praised Representative Tarr and her staff. She recognized that there are Hmong-American Purple Heart recipients and intelligence officials who are not allowed to return to their homeland. She stressed the importance of HB 56.

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REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER asked how many Hmong-American veterans reside in Alaska.

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REPRESENTATIVE TARR answered approximately 65. She clarified these individuals are veterans who qualify as having participated during the years of the war. She noted the youngest of these individuals are now in their late 50s and early 60s. She said the establishment of Hmong-American Veterans Day is important for the veterans' families, especially children and grandchildren. She said the Hmong-American veterans were considered traitors in their homeland and were forced to adopt a new home. She spoke to the importance of understanding and honoring one's family history.

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REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER asked if any other event or holiday occurs on May 15.

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REPRESENTATIVE TARR answered she did not recall any conflicting holiday. She said her office would double-check to be certain.

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REPRESENTATIVE JACKSON said nearly 3,000 members of the Anchorage Hmong community hold an annual celebration on May 15. She noted there has never been a conflict with any other celebration.

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REPRESENTATIVE KOPP stated that the month of May is notable for days of memorial observance. He cited Memorial Day and Police Officer Memorial Week. He said May is the ideal month for a Hmong-American Veterans Day. He said recognition of Hmong sacrifices during the war is overdue.

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REPRESENTATIVE THOMPSON thanked Representative Tarr for introducing HB 56. He recalled House Bill 67 [passed in the Twenty-Eighth Alaska State Legislature], which he sponsored, that established March 26 of each year as Vietnam Veterans Day. He said House Bill 67 was long overdue then, and HB 56 is long overdue now. He mentioned the importance of choosing a meaningful date and noted that March 26 was chosen for Vietnam Veterans Day because it is the anniversary of the last troops and civilian contractors being pulled out of Vietnam.

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REPRESENTATIVE TARR praised the Ken Burns documentary series "The Vietnam War" for its telling of the Hmong-American veterans' story. She echoed that recognition for the group is long overdue.

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REPRESENTATIVE THOMPSON mentioned that "welcome home" certificates were issued to Vietnam veterans after the passage of House Bill 56. He said he received more feedback from those certificates than anything else he has done as a representative. He recalled wives of veterans telling him the certificates meant a great deal to their husbands.

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CHAIR LEDOUX said similar certificates were presented to Hmong-American veterans after the passage of House Concurrent Resolution 3. She shared her regret that the State of Alaska can only do so much on its own to honor Hmong-American veterans. She said promises were made to the Hmong in Laos by the United States military and the CIA representatives. She said they were promised they would be treated as veterans if they fought with the United States. She mentioned it took over a generation for promises made to Filipino veterans of World War II to be

honored. She said it was her hope that Hmong-American veterans will still be alive when the federal government finally honors its commitment to them. She said she is hopeful, "but the wheels of justice go exceedingly slowly."

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CHAIR LEDOUX said HB 56 would be held over. She said the committee would hear public testimony on the bill on Thursday, March 7, 2019, and that she expected to move HB 56 out of committee that day.

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ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting was adjourned at 1:18 P.M.