

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE TRANSPORTATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 6, 2020

1:33 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Louise Stutes, Chair
Representative Bryce Edgmon
Representative Matt Claman
Representative Harriet Drummond
Representative Andi Story
Representative Dave Talerico

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Mel Gillis

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 186

"An Act naming the irene Webber Bridge."

- MOVED HB 186 OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL NO. 208

"An Act renaming College Road in Soldotna as Alan Boraas Road."

- FAILED TO MOVE OUT OF COMMITTEE

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 186

SHORT TITLE: NAMING IRENE WEBBER BRIDGE

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) STUTES

01/21/20	(H)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/10/20
01/21/20	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/21/20	(H)	TRA
02/06/20	(H)	TRA AT 1:30 PM BARNES 124

BILL: HB 208

SHORT TITLE: RENAMING COLLEGE RD AS ALAN BORAAS RD

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) KNOPP

01/21/20	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/21/20	(H)	TRA

WITNESS REGISTER

SARA PERMAN, Staff
Representative Louise Stutes
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented HB 186 on behalf of Representative Stutes, prime sponsor.

KIM ASPELUND
Cordova, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As the daughter of Irene Webber, testified in support of HB 186.

KATRINA HOFFMAN
Cordova, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As the daughter-in-law of Irene Webber, testified in support of HB 186.

PETE HOEPHNER
Petersburg, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 186.

JERRY MCCUNE
Cordova, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 186.

REPRESENTATIVE GARY KNOPP
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As prime sponsor, introduced HB 208.

INTIMAYO HARBISON, Staff
Representative Gary Knopp
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Offered information during the hearing on HB 208 on behalf of Representative Knopp, prime sponsor.

DANIEL BALDWIN, Member
Kenaitze Indian Tribe
No address provided

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 208, with a recommended change.

GARY TURNER, Director
Kenai Peninsula College
Soldotna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 208.

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided information and answered questions during the hearing of HB 208.

MATT WALKER, Engineer
Division of Statewide Design and Engineer Services
Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOTPF)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided information and answered questions during the hearing on HB 208.

LISA PARKER
Soldotna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 208.

JOEL ISAAK
No address provided

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 208.

KAREN TOLLACKSON, Elder Member
Kenaitze Indian Tribe
Spokane, Washington

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 208.

SHARON ISAAK, Elder Member
Kenaitze Indian Tribe
Soldotna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 208

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:33:55 PM](#)

CHAIR LOUISE STUTES called the House Transportation Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:33 p.m. Representatives Claman, Talerico, Edgmon, Story and Stutes were present at the call to order. Representative Drummond arrived as the meeting was in progress.

HB 186-NAMING IRENE WEBBER BRIDGE

[1:35:16 PM](#)

CHAIR STUTES announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 186, "An Act naming the irene Webber Bridge."

[1:35:15 PM](#)

SARA PERMAN, Staff, Representative Louise Stutes, Alaska State Legislature, presented HB 186 on behalf of Representative Stutes, prime sponsor. She noted that the three-line HB 186 is quite simple: a bridge formerly known to the Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOTPF) as "Bridge 406, Scott Glacier Number 6 Bridge" would be renamed "irene Webber Bridge." Ms. Webber passed away in 2018 and this bridge, if renamed, would serve to remind Cordovans of the legacy she leaves behind.

MS. PERMAN stated that Ms. Webber was an Alutiiq woman born in Cordova, where she and her husband of 61 years raised their three children. She added that Ms. Webber took up running as a way to overcome alcohol dependency issues and will be remembered as the original founder of the Cordova Running Club and Salmon Run Marathon, even making clam chowder at her house for race committees to help attract more attendees when the entrant list was low. Ms. Perman stated that 'irene' is not a typo; the family wishes her to be remembered with a lower case 'i'.

MS. PERMAN related that Ms. Webber was an involved philanthropist, having volunteered for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital as well as lending her help with Cordova's Bike-a-Thon and the Cordova 2x2 Cancer Walk, the latter of which has raised over \$100,000 for cancer patients in Cordova. The City of Cordova and the Native Village of Eyak have included letters supporting the renaming. The bridge is located at mile 9.5 from Cordova City Center. During the Salmon Runs Ms. Webber founded, runners use this bridge.

[1:40:29 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CLAMAN asked which creek or river the bridge goes over.

[1:40:30 PM](#)

MS. PERMAN said she wasn't sure.

1:40:41 PM

CHAIR STUTES said that perhaps one of Ms. Webber's daughters would know. She then opened invited testimony on HB 186.

1:41:01 PM

KIM ASPELUND, daughter of Irene Webber, related that her mother was an inspiration to the people of Cordova, having impressively overcome many obstacles in her life. Having had a drinking problem for a very short time, Ms. Webber ended with 37 years' sobriety. Running became her needed outlet; even when she was out salmon fishing, she would ask to be dropped off on the beach to run her requisite miles for training. She was a highly dedicated person, not only to herself but also to the community, even taking the time to encourage runners she drove past in her vehicle. Ms. Aspelund related that her mother helped people in Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and in the running club alike, as well as through her role as a boundless volunteer whose legacy will be upheld by her children.

1:44:30 PM

REPRESENTATIVE CLAMAN asked which creek or river the bridge goes over.

1:44:35 PM

CHAIR STUTES surmised that it may be the Scott River. She then thanked Ms. Aspelund for her emotional testimony.

1:45:10 PM

KATRINA HOFFMAN, Irene Webber's daughter-in-law, said she believes that the bridge does indeed go over a branch of the Scott River. She went on to relate that although Ms. Webber spelled her name with a lower case 'i,' there was nothing diminutive about her accomplishments. She was raised in the village of Ellamar near Tatitlek, and later moved to Cordova to raise her three children with her lifelong love, Bill Webber. That resulted in 10 grandchildren and "about as many" great-grandchildren, all of whom have very deep ties to Alaska and Cordova. Ms. Hoffman imparted to the committee that Ms. Webber was a businesswoman in the community, a good neighbor, a great sourdough cook, a dotting grandmother, and the admiral on the family fishing vessel, having overseen multiple generations of family members make their living off commercial salmon fishing.

MS. HOFFMAN related that at Ms. Webber's memorial service, the deceased's grandson Christopher said he knew his grandmother to be two people: a wonderfully loving grandma and a formidable deck boss whose word was law on the water. Ms. Webber's Salmon Run has become a key feature of the Copper River Salmon Jam summer festival in Cordova. The bridge in question is enjoyed in all seasons by outdoor recreators, and from it one can even view the "9-mile sand pile," where families gather for joy and fun.

[1:48:42 PM](#)

CHAIR STUTES opened public testimony on HB 186.

PETE HOEPHNER stated that Irene Webber has increased the health and well-being of Cordovans, and that "just seeing her made people smile," as seeing her name on the bridge would likely do as well. Mr. Hoephner echoed the testimony of Ms. Aspelund and Ms. Hoffman when he spoke of Webber's dedication to her family as well as her dedication to volunteering in the community.

[1:50:13 PM](#)

JERRY MCCUNE related to the committee that Irene Webber taught him how to make fried bread while waiting months for herring. He also related that, before the fishing season opened, the Webbers would stop and talk to each fisherman and make sure he was going to be safe for the season.

[1:51:15 PM](#)

CHAIR STUTES, after ascertaining that no one else which to testify, closed public testimony.

[1:51:28 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON thanked testifiers and let listeners know that hearing the stories of Ms. Webber brought to his mind some pillars of the community in his own home of Dillingham. He urged the committee to take swift action on HB 186.

[1:52:08 PM](#)

CHAIR STUTES echoed Representative Edgmon's remarks by saying that when she mentioned HB 186 in Cordova, she received extremely positive feedback from the community.

[1:53:00 PM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease at 1:53 p.m.

[1:53:18 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CLAMAN moved to report HB 186 out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, HB 186 was reported out of the House Transportation Standing Committee.

[1:53:39 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 1:53 p.m. to 1:56 p.m.

HB 208-RENAMING COLLEGE RD AS ALAN BORAAS RD

[1:56:54 PM](#)

CHAIR STUTES announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 208, "An Act renaming College Road in Soldotna as Alan Boraas Road."

[1:56:55 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARY KNOPP, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor of HB 208, opened by bringing the committee's awareness to the fact that [Alan Boraas, PhD] has done so much for the [Kenai] community and that naming after influential members is a longstanding practice; the highway [College Road] is named after Peter Kalifornsky.

[1:57:47 PM](#)

INTIMAYO HARBISON, Staff, Representative Gary Knopp, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Knopp, prime sponsor of HB 208, began by letting the committee know that College Road connects Kalifornsky Beach Road to East Poppy Lane and terminates at Kenai Peninsula College (KPC). He also noted that the stretch of road does not contain any structures, so the changing of addresses would not be necessary. He informed the committee that the request to change the name of the road came from members of the University of Alaska (UA) as well as from the local community. He imparted that Dr. Boraas is credited with helping to locate numerous Dena'ina heritage and historical sites along what is currently known as College Road, that he was

a major proponent in the preservation and teaching of the Dena'ina language, and that he was awarded honorary membership in the Kenaitze Indian Tribe for his work. Changing the name to Alan Boraas Road is a way to honor the impact Dr. Boraas had on the Kenai Peninsula as well as on the state of Alaska.

[1:59:07 PM](#)

CHAIR STUTES opened public testimony on HB 208.

[1:59:13 PM](#)

DANIEL BALDWIN spoke in support of honoring Dr. Boraas but suggested changing the word "road" in the road sign to the Dena'ina word "tinitun," meaning "path" or "road." As Dr. Boraas was a Dena'ina speaker and a Dena'ina language teacher, Mr. Baldwin expressed his opinion that it would be fitting to use the Dena'ina word to honor him.

[2:00:38 PM](#)

GARY TURNER, Director, Kenai Peninsula College, spoke to the life of Dr. Boraas, who was known across the state and world for his groundbreaking work with Native language revitalization, cultural research in Southcentral and Southwest Alaska, and numerous archeological digs. Dr. Boraas served as a KPC faculty member for 46 years. Mr. Turner told the committee that KPC sits on 309 acres on the Kenai River, all of which is Dena'ina land. Mr. Turner elaborated on Dr. Boraas' findings: the latter located numerous underground storage pits where ancient Dena'ina stored salmon; he also located six prehistoric houses and took hundreds of students and community members on field trips through the Dena'ina land which the road in question cuts, explaining the significance of the Dena'ina and of the salmon to the particular area. As Dr. Boraas was recently named Professor Emeritus posthumously, his family was presented with a resolution from the UA Board of Regents. The celebration of his life was attended by more than 250 people and was livestreamed to hundreds more.

[2:03:18 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked Mr. Turner his thoughts regarding changing 'road' to the Dena'ina word for "pathway" as Mr. Baldwin had suggested.

[2:03:37 PM](#)

MR. TURNER said that it would be okay as far as he knew, but that he would be curious as to the Department of Transportation & Public Facilities requirements. He suggested the possible allowance as something to be looked at by the committee.

[2:04:34 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY, also speaking on behalf of the Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council, said she would like to see more use of original language, and asked what the borough and the sponsor thought.

[2:05:31 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KNOPP said that he had not discussed it with the borough and personally would not support the change. He added that, after speaking with members of the community, his idea was to honor the man who spent his lifetime preserving the heritage of the Kenaitze and Dena'ina, and that very few people can read, much less speak, Dena'ina, and implied that very few would understand.

[2:06:40 PM](#)

CHAIR STUTES introduced the next testifier, whom she said could potentially make the committee aware of the specific parameters regarding signage.

[2:07:00 PM](#)

MIKE LESMANN, Legislative Liaison, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOTPF), made the committee aware of DOTPF's guide for traffic signs and all traffic control devices, the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), developed by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), in which he said the answer would lie. Mr. Lesmann introduced the next testifier in hopes he would be able to address the question in greater detail.

[2:08:43 PM](#)

MATT WALKER, Engineer, Division of Statewide Design and Engineer Services, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOTPF), answered that the MUTCD does limit use to English for commonly used words such as "road" and "street." He posited that if the name of a place was in a Native language that that

may be able to be used, but for street signs the language must be uniform across the traffic system.

[2:09:55 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CLAMAN looked to clarify Mr. Walker's answer by asking if he could name a street "Agua Street" instead of "Water Street. "

[2:10:31 PM](#)

MR. WALKER said he thought that would be fine since "street" would still be in English.

[2:11:04 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked Mr. Walker a follow-up question: if the sponsor did want to include the language, since Dr. Boraas' life's work was language, he would say "Alan Boraas Tinutin Road," and it would have to be a long sign.

[2:11:24 PM](#)

MR. WALKER said he believed that was correct, but that he would also need to confer with the Alaska division of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

[2:11:48 PM](#)

CHAIR STUTES thanked Mr. Walker and moved on with additional invited testimony.

[2:12:00 PM](#)

LISA PARKER serves on the University of Alaska Board of Regents, which recently passed a resolution in recognition of the life, career, and accomplishments of Dr. Boraas. She also noted that the Kenai Peninsula Borough Assembly unanimously passed a resolution supporting HB 208. Ms. Parker informed committee members that she met Dr. Boraas when she worked for former state Senator and borough Mayor Donald E. Gilman and was approached by the former regarding the obtainment of a trail easement on borough land. Ms. Parker went on to impart that Dr. Boraas' engagement with the community was far-reaching, especially with regard to his work in cultural, historical, and archeological preservation of the Cook Inlet Region and preservation of Dena'ina language. Ms. Parker urged committee members to be

mindful of the other bridges and roads that were named after those who are part of Alaska's history.

[2:15:00 PM](#)

JOEL ISAAK told the committee that the Dena'ina language is one of the most well-documented languages in the world in part due to the work of Dr. Boraas, whose work was contingent upon working with elders. Mr. Isaak echoed others' comments about Dr. Boraas' deep connection to place and his deep commitment to not only the preservation of language, but also the ability to use it in perpetuity. He also let committee members know that Dr. Boraas' name translates to "the one who is breaking trail" or "trailbreaker," and related Dr. Boraas' having been given honorary membership to the tribe as not something to be taken lightly as it doesn't happen often in the Kenaitze or even in the United States.

[2:19:25 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CLAMAN asked whether there was another Kenaitze word which could be added to the sign that would dispel some of the confusing discussion over the redundancy of "road."

[2:19:57 PM](#)

MR. ISAAK suggested "Ti'qutsex," which would "integrate the noun information of trail into the verb."

[2:20:41 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CLAMAN asked whether "Ti'qutsex" is the name Dr. Boraas was given.

[2:20:48 PM](#)

MR. TURNER confirmed that "Ti'qutsex" is the name Dr. Boraas was given by the tribe.

[2:20:59 PM](#)

KAREN TOLLACKSON, Elder Member, Kenaitze Indian Tribe, testified in support of renaming the road after Dr. Boraas and agreed with Mr. Isaak that including the name he was given by the tribe seemed fitting, so that the sign would read Alan (Ti'qutsex) Boraas Road.

[2:22:20 PM](#)

SHARON ISAAK, an Elder Member of the Kenaitze Indian Tribe, stated that she lives off Community College Drive, so having counted those letters, knows "we can make signs longer." Ms. Isaak echoed what others have said and mentioned that it would be "more than fitting" to honor Dr. Boraas' legacy with the name which was given to him by the Kenaitze Indian Tribe.

[2:24:47 PM](#)

CHAIR STUTES closed public testimony on HB 208.

[2:25:00 PM](#)

MR. WALKER said in response to Ms. Isaak's counting of letters on her street that it is still something that would need to be evaluated.

[2:25:50 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KNOPP stated that, having had no calls requesting a name change, he must stand his position on HB 208. He asked callers in support of a name change to petition the borough assembly. He said that proceeding with HB 208 as it stood would be his preference.

[2:27:11 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CLAMAN looked to confirm that if it does happen the committee's preference is to have Representative Knopp go back and communicate with folks in his community to determine their perspective on adding the name Dr. Boraas was given, that Representative Knopp would have no problem doing that.

[2:27:40 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KNOPP pointed out that due to time constraints and how much is involved, there is 'a good chance' it wouldn't happen this year, but that if that is the committee's desire, he would be glad to do so. He then added that he would be reluctant to not move HB 208 forward.

[2:28:39 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CLAMAN expressed that, when he hears the difficulties that Alaska communities have in preserving Native

languages and how those are disappearing, while he hears DOTPF's concern and understands the interest of time, he also acknowledges the interest of getting it right. He added that he would like to hear the community so affected by Dr. Boraas say "It took them a little longer, but they got it right."

[2:29:25 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KNOPP said that the goal never was the preservation of the language, but instead honoring a man who did spend his life doing so. He added that Dr. Boraas is known as Alan Boraas and not by his Kenaitze name, by 90-95% of the community.

[2:30:00 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked, if HB 208 is moved out of committee, and then the community desired to amend the name, whether there would be a place to do that.

[2:30:25 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KNOPP said the first step would be to confer with DOTPF and determine the maximum size of the sign to find out if it were doable before reaching out to the community.

[2:30:53 PM](#)

CHAIR STUTES stated that she would go with the will of the committee but that she personally had no problem moving HB 208 out because there would be opportunity to amend.

[2:31:15 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CLAMAN said he would prefer to hear back from DOTPF, and as bills are often heard twice, that he saw no reason to push HB 208 through.

[2:31:25 PM](#)

CHAIR STUTES said that if it was the will of the committee to hold HB 208, it would be held.

[2:31:34 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TALERICO said he would like to move the bill as there "might be a window of opportunity to check on that, and we do have the ability to amend."

[2:32:04 PM](#)

CHAIR STUTES said she presumed that Representative Claman had an objection.

[2:32:22 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CLAMAN confirmed that he did object and responded to Representative Talerico's comments that when something is on the [House] floor with amendments it is often asked why the work wasn't done in the committee. He continued by noting that it was still early in the session and there was plenty of time to get the answers.

[2:32:54 PM](#)

CHAIR STUTES asked for a motion.

[2:33:07 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TALERICO moved to report HB 208 out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes.

[2:33:27 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CLAMAN objected.

[2:33:38 PM](#)

A roll call vote was taken. Representatives Talerico and Stutes voted in favor of the motion to report HB 208 out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. Representatives Story, Drummond, and Claman voted against it. Therefore, HB 208 failed to be reported out of the House Transportation Standing Committee by a vote of 2-3.

[2:34:15 PM](#)

CHAIR STUTES said that HB 208 would be held, and that the committee would be happy to hear HB 208 after Representative Knopp did his "legwork."

2:34:37 PM

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Transportation Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at [2:34] p.m.