

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE TRANSPORTATION STANDING COMMITTEE

February 26, 2019

1:30 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Shelley Hughes, Chair
Senator Mike Shower, Vice Chair
Senator David Wilson
Senator Peter Micciche
Senator Jesse Kiehl

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 4

"An Act naming the Scott Johnson Memorial Bridge."

- MOVED SB 4 OUT OF COMMITTEE

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 4

SHORT TITLE: NAMING SCOTT JOHNSON MEMORIAL BRIDGE

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) COGHILL

01/16/19	(S)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/7/19
01/16/19	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/16/19	(S)	TRA, FIN
02/26/19	(S)	TRA AT 1:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

WITNESS REGISTER

SENATOR JOHN COGHILL
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of SB 4.

RADAMES MERCADO, Intern
Senator John Coghill
Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided an overview of SB 4.

LIEUTENANT JESS CARSON

Alaska State Troopers

Department of Public Safety

Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 4.

BRANDY JOHNSON, representing self

Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Stated support for SB 4 to rename the Tok River Bridge to the Scott Johnson Memorial Bridge with the caveat that there must be broad-spread community support.

SERGEANT JOSHUA MOORE

Alaska State Troopers

Department of Public Safety

Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 4.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:30:27 PM](#)

CHAIR SHELLEY HUGHES called the Senate Transportation Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Wilson, Kiehl, Shower, and Chair Hughes. Senator Micciche arrived soon thereafter.

SB 4-NAMING SCOTT JOHNSON MEMORIAL BRIDGE

[1:30:51 PM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES announced the consideration of SB 4, "An Act naming the Scott Johnson Memorial Bridge."

[1:31:15 PM](#)

SENATOR JOHN COGHILL, Alaska State Legislature, sponsor of SB 4, explained that members of the public safety community from Fairbanks have asked that the new bridge in the Tok area be named in honor of Sergeant Scott Johnson. He grew up in the Tok area and served the state with distinction before being tragically killed in the line of duty. He shared that after burying his father a few days ago, he's come to realize how much one individual can mean to the people of Alaska. Thus it is fitting to honor this man who left such a huge legacy in Alaska. He deferred further introduction to his intern, Radames Mercado.

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SENATOR MICCICHE joined the committee meeting

[1:33:57 PM](#)

RADAMES MERCADO, Intern, Senator John Coghill, Alaska State Legislature, shared that he was surprised to learn that legislation is required to rename a bridge. "It is very interesting to see how this is all working out," he said.

He explained that the Tok River Bridge will be renamed the "Scott Johnson Memorial Bridge" to honor his name, legacy, and ultimate sacrifice as an Alaska State Trooper. Mr. Mercado noted that Sergeant Johnson is survived by his wife and three daughters. He was actively interested in wrestling and spent many years encouraging youth to embrace wrestling and counseling them to become better leaders. Renaming the bridge acknowledges Sergeant Johnson's contributions to his community and state and honors his sacrifice.

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CHAIR HUGHES noted that becoming an Alaska State Trooper was a goal Sergeant Johnson had since he was a young boy living in Tok.

SENATOR COGHILL related that honoring Sergeant Johnson in this way is in keeping with past practice in the Fairbanks North Pole area. It is a small reminder of the men and women who have made this country what it is, he said.

CHAIR HUGHES asked why the fiscal note was zero when new signage would be required.

MR. MERCADO explained the cost of signage was built into the project, thus the zero fiscal note.

SENATOR COGHILL added clarification that the old bridge was being dismantled and replaced with this new bridge "as we speak."

CHAIR HUGHES asked when she could expect to see the new sign.

MR. MERCADO answered that the project should be finished in October 2019.

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CHAIR HUGHES opened public testimony on SB 4.

1:39:09 PM

JESS CARSON, Lieutenant, Alaska State Troopers, Department of Public Safety, Fairbanks, said he grew up with Sergeant Johnson in Tok. He said Scott was one of the few athletes from Tok to compete collegially. This made him a local hero and the person all young athletes wanted to be like, regardless of the sport. It was his dedication and hard work that made him the best and inspired the town. He was very successful in college, and while he was ranked number 1 in the nation going into his senior year, he chose to skip that year to pursue his dream by taking a job with the North Pole Police Department. When he joined the Alaska State Troopers, he was a mentor to many.

LIEUTENANT CARSON said he and Sergeant Johnson were workout partners and the sergeant would never leave the gym without doing a pullup for every fallen officer. "That's just how he lived his life." Nothing will bring Scott back, he said, but it will mean a lot to preserve his memory in this way.

CHAIR HUGHES commented that his testimony was particularly powerful because he understands what troopers face every day.

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BRANDY JOHNSON, surviving spouse, thanked Senator Coghill for inviting her input in drafting SB 4. She related that she was advised of the renaming after the fact. She shared that she is thinking about this policy change beyond herself and what change it may bring to others. She likes that the Tok River Bridge is named as it is. It's held that name for many years and she and Scott "have floated that river from dawn to dusk, hunting moose from the Glenn Highway to the Alcan Highway ending at the Tok River Bridge." She said while floating that section, he told her stories of camping with his family as a boy. She said that for 18 years she and Scott crossed that bridge going to and from Eagle on moose hunting trips.

MS JOHNSON said she'd appreciate hearing supportive testimony from community residents in the area of the Tok River Bridge. She continued:

Testimony from just family, friends, and coworkers limits the space for community participation and tailors the policy to a few individuals. Through public deliberation across all factions, community members will voice their respect for change or no change. Not everybody likes change. Change shouldn't

be based on tradition, personal or political gain of groups or individuals. Allowing and encouraging such involvement can be realized in a way that allows ... community representatives to become more active members in the policy making process.

After Scott was murdered, I was asked if I was interested in naming the bridge after Scott and [indisc.] I was not, based on the location of the bridge. I don't want to drive past the sign of Scott's name and see it's been shot up with bullets and spray-painted. The disrespect and hurt is terrible. What is going through my child's mind when they see this vandalism. As much as I appreciate the thoughtfulness of the honor, none of these honors take away the pain and loss. If anything, they make it worse for me. This is where I must look beyond myself for others. Scott's job was that of a public servant and now I have found that his death, for many, will always be remembered by his job and not the person he was.

In conclusion, I support the renaming of the Tok River Bridge to the Scott Johnson Memorial Bridge if there is broad-spread community support of the centralized area of the bridge. How our lawmakers measure that support, I will leave to them.

CHAIR HUGHES thanked Ms. Johnson and assured her that as the bill goes through the process, the hope is to hear from community members.

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SERGEANT JOSHUA MOORE, Alaska State Troopers, Department of Public Safety, Fairbanks, said he knew Scott as both a state trooper and as a family member when the Johnson family accepted him in that capacity. He shared that Sergeant Johnson was a legend both inside and outside of work. He was playful and lots of fun outside work, whereas on the job he was the "go to" who solved problems and made things right.

SERGEANT MOORE shared that when he's traveled around the nation and seen bridges named after officers, he researches the names and stories, and appreciates the sacrifices the people made. He said he appreciates that this will be the Scott Johnson Memorial Bridge rather than defining him through the job he did for the state. "The appreciation is there from the public and the legislative branch in regard to what we do, but it's not who we

are and what we leave behind. He left a family and a lot of friends behind," he said.

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CHAIR HUGHES found no one else who wished to comment and closed public testimony on SB 4. She asked the will of the committee.

[1:47:45 PM](#)

SENATOR SHOWER moved to report SB 4, work order 31-LS0098\M, from committee with individual recommendations and attached zero fiscal note.

[1:48:05 PM](#)

SENATOR MICCICHE objected to explain that he was signing no recommendation on the bill based on Ms. Johnson's desire to gage public support for this name change. Her comments about wanting the policy to be one Alaskans support, not just recognize her husband, demonstrates a level of integrity that is rare these days, he said. "I think that is pretty amazing."

CHAIR HUGHES said she understands that, and for herself it was good to hear Sergeant Moore's testimony about Scott being a fun-loving person.

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SENATOR MICCICHE removed his objection.

[1:49:19 PM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES found no further objection and SB 4 moved from the Senate Transportation Standing Committee.

[1:49:22 PM](#)

At ease.

[1:50:25 PM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES reconvened the meeting and discussed the schedule for the next meeting.

[1:50:56 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Hughes adjourned the Senate Transportation Standing Committee meeting at 1:50 p.m.