

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE

February 25, 2025

3:30 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Scott Kawasaki, Chair
Senator Jesse Bjorkman, Vice Chair
Senator Bill Wielechowski
Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson
Senator Robert Yundt

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 43

"An Act establishing the month of March as Women's History Month."

- MOVED SB 43 OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL NO. 40

"An Act establishing the period between September 15 and October 15 of each year as Hispanic Heritage Month."

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 6

Supporting the admittance of Washington, D.C., into the Union as a state of the United States of America.

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 10

Encouraging the United States Congress to award Hmong veterans of the Vietnam War the Congressional Gold Medal.

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 43

SHORT TITLE: WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH
SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) GRAY-JACKSON

01/17/25 (S) PREFILE RELEASED 1/17/25
01/22/25 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/25 (S) STA
02/18/25 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
02/18/25 (S) Heard & Held
02/18/25 (S) MINUTE(STA)
02/25/25 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: SB 40

SHORT TITLE: HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH
SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) GRAY-JACKSON

01/17/25 (S) PREFILE RELEASED 1/17/25
01/22/25 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/25 (S) STA
02/25/25 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: SJR 6

SHORT TITLE: WASHINGTON D.C. STATEHOOD
SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) TOBIN

01/24/25 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/24/25 (S) STA, JUD
02/25/25 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: SJR 10

SHORT TITLE: HMONG VETERANS; CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL
SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) WIELECHOWSKI

02/20/25 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/20/25 (S) STA
02/25/25 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

WITNESS REGISTER

DEIRDRE GOINS, Staff
Senator Gray-Jackson
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided the sectional analysis for SB 43.

DORA WILSON, Member
Anchorage School Board
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SB 40.

JOAN RYAN ESTAY, Vice President
Enlaces Alaska
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 40.

FELIX RIVERA, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 40.

MAGGIE GRENIER, Staff
Senator Loki Tobin
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-introduced SJR 6 on behalf of the sponsor.

MIKE MASON, Staff
Senator Loki Tobin
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-introduced SJR 6 on behalf of the sponsor.

SUE SHERIF, Board Member,
League of Women Voters of Alaska
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SJR 6.

JOSHUA MCHOES, Staff
Senator Bill Wielechowski
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided a presentation on SJR 10.

MAY RAMIREZ, CEO
Hmong Empowering Advocating Reforming Together (H.E.A.R.T)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SJR 10.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:30:31 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI called the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:30 p.m. Present at the call to

order were Senators Bjorkman, Wielechowski, Gray-Jackson, Yundt, and Chair Kawasaki.

SB 43-WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

[3:31:40 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 43 "An Act establishing the month of March as Women's History Month."

[3:32:12 PM](#)

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON presented a brief recap of SB 43 as follows:

[Original punctuation provided.]

As we approach another Women's History Month, it is imperative that we formally recognize this important celebration in state statute. With more women serving in the legislature than ever before, we have a responsibility to uphold and expand this representation. By doing so, we ensure that our daughters and granddaughters can see themselves as vital contributors to Alaska's future. Honoring Women's History Month in law reaffirms our commitment to equality, empowerment, and the enduring impact of women in our state.

[3:33:10 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI opened public testimony on SB 43; finding none, he closed public testimony.

[3:33:34 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI solicited the will of the committee.

[3:33:36 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN moved to report SB 43, work order 34-LS0081\A, from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note(s).

[3:33:52 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI found no objection and SB 43 was reported from the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee.

SB 40-HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

[3:34:09 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 40 "An Act establishing the period between September 15 and October 15 of each year as Hispanic Heritage Month."

[3:34:33 PM](#)

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON speaking as sponsor, introduced SB 40 in Spanish and continued with the rest of the introduction as follows:

[Original punctuation provided.]

SB 40 seeks to formally establish the period between September 15 and October 15 of each year as Hispanic Heritage Month in Alaska. This recognition aligns with the federal observance of Hispanic Heritage Month, a time dedicated to honoring and celebrating the rich histories, cultures, and contributions of Hispanic Americans.

Hispanic and Latino communities have played an essential role in shaping our state and our nation. Their contributions span across industries—business, education, public service, science, and the arts—enriching our communities and strengthening our economy. By designating this month in state law, we affirm the importance of recognizing and celebrating these contributions in a meaningful and consistent way.

SB 40 does not impose any mandates but encourages schools, community groups, and public and private organizations to engage in educational and cultural activities that highlight the achievements and history of Hispanic Americans.

By passing this bill, we send a clear message that Alaska values diversity, inclusivity, and the recognition of the many communities that contribute to our shared success. I respectfully ask for your support in advancing SB 40.

[3:36:31 PM](#)

DEIRDRE GOINS, Staff, Senator Gray-Jackson, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, provided the sectional analysis for SB 43.

[Original punctuation provided.]

SB 40: Hispanic Heritage Month

Sectional Analysis - Version N

Section 1- Adds a new section to AS 44.12.

Section 44.12.183. *Hispanic Heritage Month*

This new section establishes the period between September 15 and October 15 of each year as Hispanic Heritage Month. Hispanic Heritage Month may be observed by schools, community groups, and other public and private agencies and individuals with appropriate activities to honor and recognize the contributions that Hispanic Americans have made in the history and culture of Alaska and the United States.

[3:37:32 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI announced invited testimony on SB 40.

[3:38:03 PM](#)

DORA WILSON, Member, Anchorage School Board, Anchorage, Alaska, testified by invitation on SB 40 as follows:

[Original punctuation provided.]

I have lived, worked and raised my three beautiful children in Alaska. I have been a therapeutic foster parent for the past 21 years, where my husband and I have had over 50 youth come through our home in that time. I am a Community Outreach Manager. I have served in many volunteer roles as well as on multiple non-profit boards. I am also an elected member of the Anchorage School Board.

I am taking the time to share a few of my accomplishments because my married name is Wilson, but my maiden name is Garcia.

To my knowledge, I am the first Latina Americana that has been elected to the Anchorage School Board.

[3:38:55 PM](#)

MS. WILSON continued:

I am only one of the many Hispanics in Alaska that are working every day to advocate for our community and inspire future generations.

The Hispanic community in Alaska is very diverse, with roots in countries like Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Colombia, Dominican Republic & Puerto Rico. Hispanics make up 7.7 percent of Alaska's population.

The Anchorage School District is one of the most diverse school districts in the nation. Of the over 100 languages spoken by students and families, Spanish ranks in the top 5 languages spoken. Establishing Hispanic Heritage Month in state law encourages schools, community groups and public institutions to educate students and the public about the achievements and traditions of Hispanic Americans.

Hispanic Americans have contributed significantly to Alaska's workforce, particularly in industries such as healthcare, education, construction, fishing and small business development. Recognizing Hispanic Heritage Month highlights the importance of these contributions and encourages greater participation in civic and economic life.

[3:40:51 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI opened public testimony on SB 40.

[3:41:09 PM](#)

JOAN RYAN ESTAY, Vice President, Enlaces Alaska, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 40. She read her testimony as follows:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Hispanic Heritage Month is a vital celebration not just for Latinos, but for all Alaskans, as it offers a unique opportunity to showcase the rich culture, history, and contributions of the Latino community to the state's vibrant identity. In Alaska, Latino businesses are playing an essential role in shaping the local economy and adding to the cultural mosaic of the state.

[3:42:00 PM](#)

MS. ESTAY continued:

Latino-owned businesses are growing throughout Alaska, bringing with them a wealth of tradition, flavors, and expertise. From restaurants offering authentic Mexican, Central and South American dishes, to creative enterprises in fashion, art, and music, Latino businesses are helping to diversify the economy and enrich the local culture. These businesses not only provide goods and services, but they also become cultural hubs where people can experience the heart of Latino traditions and customs.

Recognizing Hispanic Heritage Month in Alaska goes beyond acknowledging Latino culture—it helps everyone appreciate the depth of Latino contributions to society. It's a chance to open doors to new experiences, whether through tasting Latin-inspired dishes, learning about the history and traditions behind them, or simply engaging with a diverse community.

For Latinos, this month serves as a time to share our vibrant customs, history, and flavors with the broader Alaskan population. It's a way to create connection, understanding, and appreciation across different communities. Everyone can embrace this opportunity to learn about cultural practices, whether it's through attending events, trying a new dish, or experiencing Latin dance and music.

Moreover, Hispanic Heritage Month highlights the importance of inclusivity, showing that Alaska's rich cultural fabric is strengthened by every community—Latinos included. It's about ensuring that everyone's voice is heard and everyone's contributions are valued, creating a more cohesive and welcoming state. Latino businesses help to create jobs, support local economies, and foster a sense of community. Whether it's a family-run restaurant, a community organization, or a small retail store, these businesses are integral to the social and economic life of Alaska. They offer opportunities for cross-cultural exchange, where Alaskans of all backgrounds can engage with one another and learn from diverse perspectives.

[3:44:28 PM](#)

MS. ESTAY continued:

To conclude

Hispanic Heritage Month in Alaska is about much more than honoring the Latino community. It's about recognizing how Latino culture enhances the vibrancy and uniqueness of the state. From its flavors to its artistic contributions, Latino businesses are enriching the Alaskan experience for all. By embracing this celebration, we can foster understanding, build stronger communities, and ensure that Alaska remains a place where every culture has the space to shine.

[3:45:12 PM](#)

FELIX RIVERA, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 40. He stated that the Hispanic and Latino Alaskans make up 7.5 percent of Alaska's population, though undercounts suggest the true number of Hispanic and Latino Alaskans is 10 percent, with most residing in Anchorage. He said the community of Latinos has a rich history and culture that deserves recognition through SB 40. He announced the Anchorage Museum is currently hosting an exhibit celebrating Latino and Hispanic Alaskans contributions to the state's political, economic, and social fabric. He stated that SB 40 aims to honor these contributions at the state level, like how the Anchorage Assembly has passed resolutions recognizing Hispanic Heritage Month for many years. He stated that passing SB 40 would strengthen the community's connection to the state.

[3:47:27 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI closed public and invited testimony on SB 40.

[3:47:48 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI held SB 40 in committee.

SJR 6-WASHINGTON D.C. STATEHOOD

[3:48:16 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI announced the consideration of SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 6 Supporting the admittance of Washington, D.C., into the Union as a state of the United States of America.

[3:48:57 PM](#)

MAGGIE GRENIER, Staff, Senator Loki Tobin, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, co-introduced SJR 6 on behalf of the sponsor as follows:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Senate Joint Resolution 6 seeks to put the Alaska State Legislature on record supporting admitting Washington, D.C. as a new state.

- Specifically, SJR 6 calls on the President and Congress to enact legislation granting statehood to the people of Washington, D.C.
- The goal is for that legislation to shrink the size of the current federal District of Columbia to only include federal lands and buildings.
- That would include the main symbols of our shared democracy, including the White House, the Capital Building, the Supreme Court, and the National Mall.
- The new state that is envisioned by SJR 6 would include the residential areas of Washington, D.C. that includes a population of around 712,000.

The current situation by the residents of Washington, D.C. is similar to the situation faced by the people of Alaska prior to statehood.

- To highlight this similarity, I would like to read a quote from a letter of support in your packet from the League of Women Voters of Alaska.
- From 1884 to 1912 Alaska was organized as the District of Alaska.

"Because Alaska's own campaign for statehood is relatively recent, and we still have citizens who remember our territorial status before 1959, when we had federal rule and no voting representation in Congress, it seems appropriate that Alaskans and the Alaska State Legislature should speak up in support of statehood for the citizens of the District of Columbia, who pay federal income taxes and serve in the US military without full representation in Congress." - Excerpt from a letter of support from the League of Women Voters Alaska

[3:51:02 PM](#)

MIKE MASON, Staff, Senator Loki Tobin, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, co-introduced SJR 6 on behalf of the sponsor as follows:

[Original punctuation provided.]

The District of Columbia Elections Act that was approved by Congress in 1970 gave the Washington, D.C. area to send a delegate to the House of Representatives.

- The delegate can participate in debates but cannot vote.
- Additionally, the Washington, D.C. area is not represented in the U.S. Senate.

MR. MASON stated that the District of Columbia is currently represented by an elected 13-member council and elected mayor, with limited powers of local self-government granted in 1973 to ease the burden on Congress. He said Congress and the President have frequently interfered with D.C.'s self-government by disapproving, amending, or repealing actions taken by the local council and mayor. He stated that on multiple occasions, a majority of Washington D.C. voters have expressed support for statehood through initiatives and referrals.

The U.S. Government is facing a lot of challenges and there is little attention paid to the needs and the rights of the residents of Washington, D. C.

- Statehood would give those residents the right of self-determination that is currently lacking under exclusive federal control.

[3:54:54 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI [opened public testimony on SJR 6.]

[3:55:07 PM](#)

SUE SHERIF, Board Member, League of Women Voters of Alaska, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in support of SJR 6. She offered the following testimony:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Although Washington, DC is a large city by Alaska standards, the population of the District itself is only 689.5 thousand people, which would place it as a

state between Alaska and Vermont amongst the five smallest states. It would join the seven states-- Alaska, Wyoming, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont, and Delaware-- that have only one delegate in the House of Representatives. (The district currently has a non-voting representative in the House who can draft legislation but cannot vote.)

The League is nonpartisan and does not support or oppose candidates or parties, but it does take positions on issues after reaching a consensus based on careful study. The League of Women Voters US position states: "The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that citizens of the District of Columbia should be afforded the same rights of self-government and full voting representation in Congress as are all other citizens of the United States."

[3:58:33 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI stated that the District of Columbia would be the smallest state geographically and asked how the state would generate revenue to function.

[3:58:48 PM](#)

MR. MASON answered that the residents of Washington D.C. pay more in federal taxes per capita than any other state. He said Washington D.C has a strong tax base. He stated that Washington D.C. is a major metropolitan area with a large population of visitors, which supports the idea that Washington D.C. would generate enough revenue to sustain itself as a state.

[3:59:27 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI asked if Washington D.C. were to become the 51st state would there be concerns about the imbalance in the United States Senate.

[3:59:45 PM](#)

MR. MASON responded that expanding the number of members in Congress and the Senate is a significant policy decision. He stated there are a lot of good arguments how more representation is beneficial, especially for underrepresented populations. He stated that Washington D.C. currently has a larger population than Wyoming and Vermont.

[4:00:28 PM](#)

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON asked how many states have sent resolutions supporting Washington D.C.'s statehood.

[4:00:43 PM](#)

MR. MASON answered that over the past few years, around 100 resolutions have been filed, with approximately 35 states involved. He emphasized that no other democracy denies the people of its national capital the right to vote in its national legislature. He stated that 700,000 residents of Washington D.C. currently lack a vote in Congress, which is unique among major democracies.

[4:01:36 PM](#)

SENATOR YUNDT asked whether the country has a plan for establishing a new seat of government if Washington, D.C. were to become its own state.

[4:01:51 PM](#)

MR. MASON answered that the seat of government would stay where it is, the District of Columbia would be reduced to include only federal infrastructure, while the new state would encompass the residential areas currently part of Washington D.C.

SENATOR YUNDT stated his concern that it would defeat the purpose of why Washington D.C. was set up in the first place.

MR. MASON stated that there have been concerns to enact the statehood for Washington D.C., the United States would have to have a constitutional amendment because of the 23rd Amendment. He said legal experts suggest that while a federal district can't be enlarged, it can be shrunk. He said the District of Columbia has been reduced before, so the district would be resized to include only federal infrastructure, while the new state would cover the residential areas, giving representation to those currently unrepresented.

[4:03:56 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI held SJR 6 in committee.

SJR 10-HMONG VETERANS; CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL

[4:04:06 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI announced the consideration of SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 10 Encouraging the United States Congress to award Hmong veterans of the Vietnam War the Congressional Gold Medal.

[4:04:35 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI, speaking as sponsor introduced SJR 10. He stated that this resolution is a bipartisan companion to a House bill that honors Hmong veterans of the Vietnam War. In 1960, the CIA recruited tens of thousands Hmong soldiers, some as young as 11. He said the Hmong soldiers supported the U.S. forces through intelligence, combat, and rescue missions, suffering casualties at 10 times the U.S. rate. After the war, the Hmong soldiers faced brutal persecution in Laos, forcing many to flee across the Mekong River, where thousands died. He said Hmong survivors that fled to Thailand lived in refugee camps before being resettled in the U.S., including about 5,000 now in Alaska. SJR 10 urges Congress to recognize their sacrifice with a Congressional Gold Medal.

[4:07:53 PM](#)

JOSHUA MCHOES, Staff, Senator Bill Wielechowski, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, provided a presentation on SJR 10 and moved to slide 3. He stated that the Hmong are an ethnic group from China, Laos, Vietnam, and Thailand who migrated to Southeast Asia centuries ago. During the Vietnam War, the CIA covertly recruited Hmong soldiers to fight North Vietnamese forces in Laos. The Hmong soldiers disrupted supply lines, gathered intelligence, and protected U.S. positions. He said even though the Hmong soldiers were vastly outnumbered, the Hmong soldiers showed remarkable bravery, including rescuing downed American pilots.

[4:08:40 PM](#)

MR. MCHOES moved to slide 4 and said over 3500 Hmong soldiers were killed and thousands wounded. The Hmong soldier deathrate was 10 times higher than the U.S. troops. He said with the high casualty rate, children as young as 12 were recruited to fight.

[4:09:39 PM](#)

MR. MCHOES moved to slide 5 and said after the U.S. withdrew in 1975, the Hmong faced brutal retaliation from the Laos government. He said many Hmong soldiers were executed, sent to camps or forced into the jungle.

[4:10:11 PM](#)

MR. MCHOES moved to slide 6, Hmong Integration into the U.S.

[Original punctuation provided.]

The U.S. accepted Hmong refugees, many of whom settled in Alaska, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and California.

Continued struggles with assimilation and cultural preservation.

[4:10:31 PM](#)

MR. MCHOES moved to slide 7, Recognition and Hmong-American Veterans Day.

[Original punctuation provided.]

1997: U.S. government formally recognized Hmong contributions with the Laos Memorial in Arlington.

2019: Alaska established Hmong American Veterans Day (May 15) to honor their sacrifices.

Ongoing efforts to secure official federal recognition

[4:10:57 PM](#)

MR. MCHOES moved to slide 8, The Push for the Congressional Gold Medal.

[Original punctuation provided.]

U.S. allies, including Filipino WWII veterans, have been honored with the Congressional Gold Medal. U.S. Senator Gary C. Peters introduced S. 3271 - The Hmong Congressional Gold Medal Act in 2023, but it stalled in committee. The medal is the highest civilian honor in the U.S., requiring an act of Congress to be awarded.

[4:11:36 PM](#)

MR. MCHOES moved to slide 10, What is the Congressional Gold Medal.

[Original punctuation provided.]

Oldest civilian honor awarded by Congress.

Recognizes outstanding achievements and contributions to U.S. history.

Each medal is unique and designed by the U.S. Mint.

One medal struck and put on display at location of choice by honoree.

Bronze Replicas for sale by US Mint

[4:12:06 PM](#)

MR. MCHOES moved to slide 11, Congressional Gold Medal Recipients.

[Original punctuation provided.]

Historically awarded to figures such as George Washington and the Wright Brothers.

Recognized foreign allies, including Filipino WWII veterans in 2016.

The Hmong's case is similar—bravery, sacrifice, and an unfulfilled promise from the U.S.

[4:12:30 PM](#)

MR. MCHOES moved to slide 12, Call to Action.

[Original punctuation provided.]

Why it matters: The Hmong veterans fought alongside the U.S. but were never granted a worthy veteran award.

Current status: Advocacy efforts continue to push for Congressional action.

What you can do: Vote to move this resolution out of committee and vote for it when it comes to the floor.

[4:13:02 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI announced invited testimony on SJR 10.

[4:13:37 PM](#)

MAY RAMIREZ-XIONG, Chief Executive Officer CEO, Hmong Empowering Advocating Reforming Together (H.E.A.R.T), Anchorage, Alaska, testified by invitation and in support on SJR 10. She stated her father was Colonel Xiong who served in the Secret War and provided the following testimony:

[Original punctuation provided.]

We call the beautiful State of Alaska our home, and today, I testify before you to advocate for a cause

that is deeply meaningful to the Hmong People: The Resolution urging the U.S. Congress to award the Hmong Veterans of the Vietnam War the Congressional Gold Medal.

[4:14:31 PM](#)

MS. XIONG continued:

The Congressional Gold Medal represents the highest form of national recognition for outstanding achievements and contributions. Each medal honors individuals, institutions, or events that have made a significant impact. While these medals have traditionally been awarded to military leaders, humanitarians, and public servants, I believe it is time to extend this honor to the Hmong veterans who fought courageously alongside American forces.

Reflecting on my high school history classes, I remember learning about the horrors of the Vietnam War and the fear surrounding the draft. However, at that time, I was unaware of the extensive involvement of my people in neighboring countries, fighting to protect those who were afraid to be recruited. The sacrifices made by the Hmong People remain a mystery to many, as the battle they fought in Laos is often referred to as the "Secret War," orchestrated by the CIA - not taught in history classes.

This Resolution honors the brave veterans who bravely fought, but today, I am here to amplify the voices of those who cannot speak for themselves—the mothers, wives, daughters, and children of the courageous men and women who made immense sacrifices.

We owe them our profound gratitude. I often find myself at a loss when it comes to repaying the debt owed to our people who shed their blood in a conflict that was not theirs to begin with. My heart aches for those who lost their families, loved ones, and the very essence of their lives in pursuit of a freedom that was NOT yet known to them. If there's one thing I can do, it's to share their stories and help recognize their efforts. That their stories will not be forgotten, and their sacrifices were NOT for nothing.

[4:16:19 PM](#)

MS. XIONG continued:

The statistics that you read here do not fully capture the suffering endured by the Hmong people in the aftermath of the U.S. withdrawal when the Lao government executed genocide against the Hmong people. Families were hunted like animals, and many were affected by Agent Orange, with children paying the ultimate price. To this day, they continue to plead for assistance, yet their voices would often go unheard.

The story of the Hmong people remains largely untold. The sacrifices made by the Hmong People during the Vietnam War are no less significant than those of other allied forces recognized by Congress. As noted in the Resolution, groups such as the Filipino World War II Veterans have received the Congressional Gold Medal for their bravery and sacrifices. Why should the contributions of the Hmong people be seen as any less important? Failing to pass this Resolution would be both unjust and dismissive of the lives that were lost in service to American soldiers during the Vietnam War.

While this Resolution addresses the events surrounding the sacrifices, it also serves as a reminder of the Hmong People's story and their vital places in American History.

So, if there is one thing you can do today, it's to ask that you join me in advocating for the passage of this Resolution to urge the U.S. Congress to honor the Hmong Veterans of the Vietnam War with the Congressional Gold Medal.

[4:17:55 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI asked how the Alaska government would find all the Hmong veterans.

[4:18:23 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI answered this is not awarding a medal to all Hmong veterans, it's a symbolic medal awarded to the Hmong veterans acknowledging the sacrifices and service the Hmong veterans made on behalf of the United States. He stated his

belief that it wouldn't be hard to find the remaining Hmong veterans in Alaska.

[4:19:06 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI opened public testimony on SJR 10; finding none, he closed public testimony.

[4:19:53 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI held SJR 10 in committee.

[4:20:21 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Kawasaki adjourned the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee meeting at 4:20 p.m.