

Approved: 3-10-97
Date

MINUTES OF THE HOUSE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE.

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Gary K. Hayzlett at 1:30 p.m. on March 5, 1997 in Room 526-S of the Capitol.

All members were present except:

Representative Joe Humerickhouse, excused
Representative Jim Long, excused
Representative Eugene Shore, excused

Committee staff present: Hank Avila, Legislative Research Department
Julian Efird, Legislative Research Department
Bruce Kinzie, Revisor of Statutes
Jackie Buchanan, Committee Secretary

Conferees appearing before the committee:

Senator Donald E. Biggs
John Reichley, Visitor and Guest Speaker Coordinator, Command & General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, KS

Others attending: See attached list

SB 117 - Providing for congressional medal of honor license plates

The Chair opened the hearing on **SB 117**.

Senator Biggs presented testimony as a proponent of this bill. Students from Roncalli Middle School in Pueblo, Colorado, requested the legislation as only four states with resident Medal of Honor recipients did not have distinctive vehicle license plates--Colorado, Kansas, Oregon and Alaska. There are two Medal of Honor recipients who live in Kansas--Roger H.C. Donlon and Charles C. Hagemester. Senator Biggs advised that March 23 is National Medal of Honor Day and he was hopeful this bill, if passed, could be signed by the Governor of Kansas on this date and have these two recipients here on that day. (Attachment 1)

John Reichley, Visitor and Guest Speaker Coordinator, Command & General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, testified in support of **SB 117**. He indicated there are only 168 living recipients of the Medal of Honor and two reside in Kansas. He urged support of the bill. (Attachment 2)

There were no opponents to testify before the committee.

Bruce Kinzie, Staff, advised there would be a cost of approximately \$7,000 to the State to put this bill in effect prior to January, 2001.

Betty McBride, Director, Kansas Division of Vehicles, Department of Revenue, advised committee the cost would be much less if we wait until 2001 and perhaps use a sticker for the Medal of Honor on the generic license plate, and waiting until 2001 is her recommendation.

Hearing was closed on **SB 117**.

Meeting was adjourned at 1:55.

The next meeting is scheduled for March 6, 1997.

DONALD E. BIGGS

SENATOR, 3RD DISTRICT
LEAVENWORTH & JEFFERSON COUNTIES

TOPEKA

SENATE CHAMBER

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(DURING SESSION)

March 5, 1997

LICENSE PLATES FOR RECIPIENTS OF THE CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR
SB117

The impetus for the legislation came from students at Roncalli Middle School in Pueblo, Colorado. It was discovered that only four states with resident Medal of Honor recipients did not have distinctive vehicle license plates. The states are Colorado, Kansas, Oregon and Alaska. With student support, legislation is moving through the Colorado legislature. The students and advisors are working to bring this about in the other three states.

There are two Medal of Honor residents in Kansas:

Roger H. C. Donlon

Charles C. Hagemeister

Both received the award for valor while serving in Vietnam. They retired from the U.S. Army and chose Leavenworth as their home.

While the legislation honors these heroes and rewards them in a small way, it is also giving some of our young people a lesson in government and the legislative process. It is a positive patriotic experience and a lesson in American history and the sacrifices that so many have made for our country.

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Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, it is a great honor for me to play a very small role in something near and dear to my heart: our nation's highest decoration for valor in combat, the Medal of Honor.

I could say that 34 of the 50 states provide a special license plate for Medal of Honor recipients living in those states. And I could say that Wisconsin provides special plates for the Medal of Honor plus 25 other special plates for veterans. And I could say that of the 16 states not providing a Medal of Honor plate, only Kansas and Montana have recipients living in them. And Kansas has twice the number of Medal of Honor recipients as Montana's one resident.

But what I'd rather say is that of the 168 living recipients more than two percent live in Kansas, and when they retired from military service both chose to become citizens of Kansas.

Col. (Ret) Roger Donlon is perhaps the best known recipient of the Vietnam War, as he was the very first one, in 1964. He grew up in New York and retired while living in California. Had he chosen to reside in either of those states, he would have been proudly using Medal of Honor plates since 1988. But he chose Kansas.

Lt.Col. (Ret) Check Hagemeister is a native of Nebraska, the only state contiguous to Kansas that does not provide a Medal of Honor plate. But that is probably because no recipient resides in that state. At least I assume that Senator Bob Kerry of Nebraska resides in Virginia and proudly displays his plate from that

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state. And I'm sure that Col. Hagemeister did not base his choice of where to live based on a plate or no plate.

I am a member of the Medal of Honor Historical Society, a group of civilian and Military members about 180 strong, including Kansas' two recipients, who seek Medal of Honor recipient's graves that do not have the Congressionally authorized Medal of Honor tombstone. We get a stone, and provide a patriotic ceremony for its unveiling.

Cols Donlon, Hagemeister and I have participated in many such ceremonies in Kansas, Nebraska and Missouri, including one with Sen. Bob Dole as the featured speaker. He said he'd like very much to attend more such ceremonies. We hope he can in the future.

At such a ceremony in Emporia, Col. Donlon commented on the way home that he must have had 100 farmers shake his hand, and it had not hurt so much that he could remember. Those farmers, some veterans, some not, were proud to meet one of our nation's top of the line heroes. The colonel's hand hurt for a while, but it was a pain he enjoyed.

I am convinced that most Americans just do not understand what the Medal of Honor is. A famous general was quoted as saying "I would trade my immortal soul for that medal."

He is said to have been both a devout yet profane man at the same time and, if devout, I doubt that Gen. George S. Patton would have offered up his immortal soul. His soul may still be safe, as Gen. Patton died without ever coming close to being a recipient.

A famous Kansan once was quoted as saying "Son, I would rather have that medal than be president of the United States." He

spoke those words as he draped the Medal of Honor around the neck of a Korean War recipient. He was our 34th President, and when he spoke those words, Dwight Eisenhower was the president of the United States, so he certainly knew of what he spoke.

The lyrics to a popular song several years ago went "One hundred men will try today, but only three will win the Green Beret." Even those unbelievable odds of 97 to three were times better than receiving the Medal of Honor, for of every 100 recommendations, one receives the medal.

In every war this century, approximately 70 percent of the awards for this decoration, which requires valor "above and beyond the call of duty," were presented posthumously.

There is even confusion as to the name of our highest decoration. Many of the license plates now made by states call it the Congressional Medal of Honor. It is not. It is, and has always been, simply the Medal of Honor.

Part of the confusion is that in the 1950s Congress passed legislation creating the Congressional Medal of Honor Society, with automatic membership of all living recipients.

The society is Congressionally mandated, and the medal is presented "in the name of Congress," but its name is the Medal of Honor.

Please remember that more than two percent of living recipients chose our state as their state of residence. I would shudder to think that the Cheeseheads of Wisconsin are more patriotic than the residents of the Heartland of the great state of Kansas.

Remember that Cols. Donlon and Hagemeister did not initiate this bill. Both will certainly drive with more pride if it passes and they join virtually all of their brethren who drive their cars with a bit more pride, knowing that their fellow citizens appreciate that they voluntarily went "above and beyond the call of duty" when duty called. I strongly urge the Committee and the House to act favorably on this bill.

And I thank you and Senator Don Biggs for this rare and appreciated opportunity.