

TESTIMONY OF MICHAEL SEITZ

9007 W. 157TH Terrace
Overland Park, KS 66221
January 27, 2015
Re: SB. 5

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity and privilege to speak to you today regarding Senate Bill 5, which would designate a portion of U.S. Highway 69 in Johnson County as the 2nd Lieutenant Justin L. Sisson Memorial Highway. I would also like to thank Senator Melcher for sponsoring this bill and for his continued support.

If you would indulge me for a minute, I think it's important that I put my testimony in context.

Justin Sisson and my son, Ben, were classmates and captains of the wrestling team at Blue Valley West High School for the years 2004-2007. Unfortunately, both were in the same weight class until their last year of high school, when Justin ballooned up by 2 pounds. They were rivals within their own school. They were rivals within their weight class. They wrestled each other every day during practice. They sometimes were rivals over the same girl. Or girls. Kevin, Justin's father, and I cooked breakfast for the team before every match for four years. Justin's mother, Phyllis, and my wife, Deb, spent countless hours in smelly, musty gymnasiums, watching our sons compete, hoping that they would escape without injury. Sometimes, they did. Sometimes, they left the mat limping, or holding an arm in pain. That was the nature of the sport. It was the nature of the competition. They competed out of a desire to be the best.

Frankly, Justin and Ben should not have been friends. Imagine competing every day, in a sport that requires tremendous physical perseverance, with the need to win each and every day, against a friend. Every day, Justin and Ben would roll around on the mats, each trying to break the spirit of the other, physically and emotionally.

But interestingly enough, they were friends. They were friends because of the bond that each created within the other. They fed off of one another.

They also encouraged each other. Each was happy with the other's win and at the end of the day, they were friends because of the spirit that each had, the respect that each felt for the other and the camaraderie that they felt. This was the nature of Justin Sisson. To put aside the little things in favor of a much bigger picture.

Wrestling was, for a long time, a huge part of Justin's life. While he wasn't necessarily the most skilled or the strongest athlete, his work ethic was unparalleled. He wanted to be the best and he maximized his ability. Justin worked hard and his results were rewarded by placing in the state wrestling tournament. This typified Justin – the desire, and effort, to maximize his talent and, to steal a term, to “be the best that he could be”.

Justin demonstrated 5 traits from which we all can learn:

1. **Passion** - The best wrestlers love what they do more than they love winning. They love to train, they love to compete, and they love the grind. Without passion, we will never come close to our potential. Justin had passion for wrestling, for his education and in his military career. And Justin realized his potential.
2. **Confidence** - Great wrestlers are confident in their abilities. They focus on their positives and do not put limits on themselves. Champions have faith in themselves and ignore the naysayers. Successful people believe that they will win. Justin believed that he would win. Always.
3. **Resilience** - Every top wrestler faces setbacks and adversity. It hurts to lose or fall short of a goal. Champions don't give up. They bounce back and use setbacks to make them stronger. This is what makes our state and our nation great. Justin certainly suffered setbacks but what made him a winner was his resilience to walk back to that point of failure and repeatedly challenge his failure until he won.

4. **Vision** - The clearer your vision, the better your chances of fulfilling your potential. Justin's vision as a wrestler was to place in the state championships. He achieved that goal. And his vision later was to serve his country. He certainly did that.

And finally, Justin showed a tremendous amount of courage.

5. **Courage** - The best wrestlers are not afraid to fail. They take risks and make themselves vulnerable to criticism, losing, and failure. Justin Sisson made a decision, at one point, to defer his education in favor of serving his country. This was not a popular decision with some people but in making that decision, he showed a level of courage that many will never exhibit. His decision to join the 101st Airborne and put risk his life in defense of our freedom was the ultimate example of courage.

The world today is a far different place than even a decade ago. Sadly, the news is filled with violence, civil unrest, terrorism and unfortunately, death. Regardless of your view of the events that took Justin Sisson to Afghanistan, I ask you to look at what Justin gave to our community and state. Justin was a leader and a role model. His passion was exceptional, his vision and confidence unsurpassed and his courage unparalleled. Justin exhibited the characteristics and attributes that we want every child to mirror.

I look forward to proudly driving down 2nd Lt. Justin Sisson Memorial Highway and explaining to my grandchildren what Justin stood for, what he meant to our community and how appropriate it is that his memory lives on.

Thank you.