

STATE OF KANSAS



Senator Elaine Bowers
DISTRICT 36

SENATE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 24, 2021

To Chairman Peterson and members of the Senate Transportation Committee:

It is my privilege to speak to you first on SB19 and introduce friends from Senate District #36 to bring forward the bill on behalf of the American Legions, Veterans and constituents of Marshall County. The former Representative Pannbacker and I received a letter signed by both commanders of the American Legions from Blue Rapids and Waterville in November of 2019 with their proposal for naming a portion of a highway connecting the two towns. They have requested a 5-mile stretch of highway on US Highway 77 – west of the city limit of Blue Rapids to the east city limit of Waterville. The name of the highway would be: Cpl. Allen E. Oatney and SP4 Gene A. Myers Memorial Highway. Both were killed in action in Vietnam; Corporal Oatney in 1970 and SP4 Myers in 1969. Funding for the signs will be provided by the American Legions through private donations. As you hear the testimony from the folks with us today, you will see they have a well-thought-out plan to work with the communities and even school students. They are aware of the cost from KDOT for both signs which includes the 50% additional cost to offset a portion of future replacement cost for an estimate of \$4140.00 in total. We also understand this is a carve out of five miles on a previously named highway known as the Prairie Parkway. My intern has researched the history and I have added it below. Signs will still exist at the beginning and end of Prairie Parkway with these two additional signs in Marshall County.

Our Senate Transportation Committee passed SB288 out of committee to the Consent Calendar passed the Senate 38-0 on February 18th and the House Transportation Committee had a hearing on March 11th but due to our early departure was not sent out of committee.

At this point, I am ready for questions however I know our friends from home are eager to speak to you about these two heroes from Marshall County and the significance of this signage to the communities.

Thank you.

Senator Elaine Bowers

**RESEARCH REPORT ON RE-NAMING A PORTION OF
“PRAIRIE PARKWAY” TO “CPL. ALLEN E. OATNEY AND
SP4 GENE A. MYERS MEMORIAL HIGHWAY”**

Upon my research, I discovered that in 1967, the highway of which a section that is seeking to be renamed was officially named the “Prairie Parkway.” This statute was originally part of HB1107. HB1107 also contained statutes to name two other highways: “The Chisholm Trail” and “The Lewis and Clark Trail.” Prairie Parkway has been segmented as so other portions of the highway have been renamed. The Kansas Department of Transportation reports that the signs indicating the end points of Prairie Parkway will not move, allowing for separate and new signs to indicate the end points of the proposed “Cpl. Allen E. Oatney and SP4 Gene A. Myers Memorial Highway.” I attempted to look for committee reports and minutes from 1967 as to discover the intent of and purpose for naming Prairie Parkway. However, no such records remain from that time.

Reported by:

Jeffrey P. Metzler
Legislative Intern - 2020
Room 223-E



Corporal Allen E. Oatney

Corporal Oatney was born on Oct 4, 1949 and graduated from Valley Heights High School in 1969. After graduation he was drafted into the U.S. Army via the Selective Service System and received training at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri and Fort Ord, California. After training, he returned to Waterville to marry his high school sweetheart, Maxine Anderson, on February 21, 1970, before deploying to Vietnam.

He arrived in the Republic of Vietnam on March 10, 1970 leaving behind his wife who was with child. He was assigned to D Company, 5th Battalion, 12th Infantry, 199th Light Infantry Brigade conducting operations in Cambodia when on June 22, 1970 he was killed by hostile enemy small arms fire.

Allen spent most of his life in and around the Manhattan and Waterville communities. He was baptized in the Methodist Church in Waterville in 1952. He loved hunting and fishing and was a member of the 4-H club and football team. He was employed by the COOP elevator in Barnes when he was called up to serve his country.

Funeral services were held on June 30, 1970 at the Methodist Church in Waterville. He was buried in the Riverside Cemetery in Waterville, Kansas with full military honors provided by a honor guard from Fort Riley.

His son, Toby, was born after his father's death.



SP4 Gene A. Myers

Specialist Fourth Class Gene A. Myers was born on May 21, 1948 in Marysville while his parents were living in a farm north of Beattie. As an only child, his family moved to a farm near Barnes where he attended Barnes High School before moving again to Waterville where he graduated from Waterville High School in 1966. After graduation, his family moved to St. Marys where he worked at a local lumber company until he was drafted by the U.S. Army under the Selective Service System leaving for training in April of 1968. He received training at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri and Fort Ord, California and arrived in Vietnam in September of 1968. He was assigned to C Company, 2nd Battalion, 16th Regiment, 1st Infantry Division. Throughout 1969, his unit performed numerous and varied missions. It was during one of these operations on June 9, 1969 that SP4 Myers was killed by hostile enemy small arms fire in the Binh Duong province of South Vietnam.

Gene spent his life in rural Kansas working on the family farm. He was a quiet, devout person who got along with everyone. Affectionally known as "spotty" by his friends he enjoyed being with his family and hunting and fishing. He was a member of the Barnes Christian Church for many years. He played football and basketball. In his last letter home to his parents he remarked "Keep the home fires burning,...I am coming home," having only 88 days left in his tour of duty.

His funeral services were held at the Barnes Christian Church on June 22, 1969. He was buried in Riverside Cemetery in Waterville with full military honors provided by an honor guard from Fort Riley.