

I-69: PEARL HARBOR MEMORIAL HIGHWAY

House Bill 6139 (Substitute H-1) First Analysis (12-5-00)

**Sponsor: Rep. Larry Julian
Committee: Veterans Affairs**

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

Naming highways in Michigan to commemorate wars and other military actions in which American service people have participated has a long history in the state. The Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, was a world-historic event, marking the entry of the United States into World War II.

At the request of the Pearl Harbor Survivors' Association, legislation has been introduced to memorialize that historic event.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would create a new act to name a portion of Interstate Highway 69 (from Exit 105 in Shiawassee County east to Exit 131 in Genesee County) the "Pearl Harbor Memorial Highway." The state Department of Transportation would erect suitable markers indicating the name of the highway only when sufficient private contributions were received to completely cover the cost of erecting the markers.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Pearl Harbor, on the Island of O'ahu, Hawaii (then a territory of the United States) was the permanent base for the U.S. Pacific Fleet, which came into existence on February 1, 1941, when the U.S. Naval Fleet was reorganized into separate Atlantic and Pacific Fleets. On Sunday, December 7, 1941, 353 Japanese airplanes attacked Pearl Harbor in two waves launched from Japanese carriers stationed about 200 miles north of O'ahu. The first wave of 183 airplanes (including "horizontal" high altitude bombers, dive-bombers, torpedo bombers and fighter planes) reached O'ahu shortly before 8:00 a.m. and targeted airfields (to eliminate air opposition) and battleships. The second wave of the attack went for the primary target, the U.S. Pacific Fleet moored at Pearl Harbor. The air raid lasted until 9:45 a.m. There had been no formal declaration of war.

Approximately 100 ships of the U.S. Navy Pacific Fleet were present that morning, consisting of battleships, destroyers, cruisers and various support ships. However, by chance, three of the prime Japanese targets – the three U.S. Pacific Fleet aircraft carriers – that normally would have been at Pearl Harbor that morning were not present; two were at sea on exercises and one was on the U.S. west coast undergoing maintenance.

Eight U.S. battleships were damaged, and five were sunk. Three light cruisers, three destroyers, and three smaller vessels were lost, and over 300 aircraft were destroyed or damaged. The battleship USS Arizona was completely destroyed, and sank, along with over a thousand of its crew members, reportedly the greatest loss of lives on a single ship in U.S. Navy history. The massive destruction to the Arizona resulted when a bomb from a high-level horizontal bomber exploded in one of the ship's gunpowder magazines and ignited a fire that spread to the ship's main gunpowder storage areas, which caused catastrophic explosions. A few U.S. fighters did manage to get into the air, and, along with ground fire from various military installations on O'ahu, shot down nearly 30 Japanese aircraft. Five Japanese midget submarines also were lost in their attempt to penetrate the inner harbor and launch torpedoes.

Nearly 2,500 Americans were killed in the attack, and included both military personnel and civilians. The Navy lost the greatest number of personnel (about 2,000), the Army lost over 200 personnel, and the Marine Corps lost over 100. Another nearly 2,000 U.S. personnel were wounded in the attack.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

According to the House Fiscal Agency, the bill would have no state or local fiscal implications. (11-29-00)

ARGUMENTS:***For:***

December 7, 2000, will mark the 59th anniversary of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor that led to the United States entering World War II, and to the eventual defeat of the “Axis” powers – Germany, Italy, and Japan. Given the historic importance of this event and the subsequent outcome of World War II as a result of the United States’ involvement in the war, it is only fitting that this momentous event be commemorated. One way to do this is to name part of a major highway in memorial to the attack on Pearl Harbor and to the thousands of U.S. citizens who died or were wounded in that attack. The bill would do this, and at a most appropriate time of the year.

POSITIONS:

The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs supports the bill. (11-30-00)

The Pearl Harbor Survivors’ Association supports the bill. (11-30-00)

The Veterans of Foreign Wars supports the bill. (11-30-00)

Analyst: S. Ekstrom

#This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.