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House Bill 4980 (Substitute H-1 as reported without amendment)  
Sponsor: Representative Paul DeWeese  
House Committee: Transportation  
Senate Committee: Transportation and Tourism

Date Completed: 2-4-02

### **RATIONALE**

Periodically, stretches of public highway are renamed by statute to memorialize or honor individuals or organizations who have made a contribution to the State of Michigan. Recent renamings include the Veterans Memorial Highway, the Gary Priess Memorial Highway, and the 94<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Memorial Highway. Under the recently enacted Michigan Memorial Highway Act, all of the statutes that designated a new name for a portion of highway are consolidated in one act.

Because of the contributions of one group of veterans, those who have been awarded the Order of the Purple Heart for Military Merit, some people would like to see a portion of I-69 renamed to honor them. (The Purple Heart is awarded to members of the armed forces of the United States who are wounded by an instrument of war in the hands of the enemy, or awarded posthumously to the next of kin in the name of those who are killed in action or die of wounds received in action.)

### **CONTENT**

The bill would amend the Michigan Memorial Highway Act to rename the portion of I-69 from the intersection of I-69 and U.S. 27 to exit 105 in Shiawassee County the "Purple Heart Highway".

Proposed MCL 250.1065

### **BACKGROUND**

General George Washington created the Order of the Purple Heart for Military Merit, now commonly called The Purple Heart, during the Revolutionary War. General Washington

sought to recognize officers for outstanding valor by rewarding them with additional pay or an advance in rank. When he was ordered to stop because the military could not afford to pay the soldiers, much less the officers, he created the Badge of Military Merit for soldiers who displayed not only "unusual gallantry...but also...extraordinary fidelity and essential service". The medal, he specified, was to be in the form of a heart made from purple cloth or silk, and was to be worn on the left breast. There were three known recipients of the medal during the Revolutionary War.

The Badge of Military Merit lay dormant until 1931, when General Douglas MacArthur revived it for the bicentennial of George Washington's birth. The reissued medal is a gold-plated brass heart, with a bust of Washington in the center and, at the top, the Washington family coat of arms, which contains three red stars and two red horizontal stripes. (This coat of arms is believed to be one inspiration for the American flag.)

In 1932, the War Department announced the award and the revised eligibility criteria for receiving a Purple Heart: During battle with an enemy, recipients must have sustained a wound that necessitated medical treatment. (Therefore, any wound incurred because of the conditions of war, such as trenchfoot or frostbite, would not make a soldier eligible for a Purple Heart.) At the time, the award was limited to the Army. In 1942, President Roosevelt extended the award to the Navy, the Marine Corps, and the Coast Guard beginning December 6, 1941. Later, President Truman retroactively extended the award to cover World War I soldiers. In 1962, President

Kennedy extended eligibility to "any civilian national of the United States who, while serving under competent authority in any capacity with an armed force...has been, or may hereafter be, wounded". President Reagan amended President Kennedy's order in 1984 to include those wounded or killed as a result of an "international terrorist attack". In 1997, under President Clinton, the United States Code was amended again to limit the award to members of the armed forces.

Shortly after the award was reinstituted in 1931, a group of combat wounded veterans in Ansonia, Connecticut, formed the first chapter of a civilian organization for Purple Heart recipients. The organization grew rapidly during and after World War II, and is now known as the Military Order of the Purple Heart.

## **ARGUMENTS**

*(Please note: The arguments contained in this analysis originate from sources outside the Senate Fiscal Agency. The Senate Fiscal Agency neither supports nor opposes legislation.)*

### **Supporting Argument**

The Purple Heart is the oldest military decoration in the world in present use, and the first award made available to a common soldier. Recipients of the award need not be recommended for it—rather, a soldier is entitled to a Purple Heart upon meeting the specific criteria. In these times, it seems fitting to honor Purple Heart veterans with a memorial highway, because they have given their lives or sustained an injury fighting for democracy.

Legislative Analyst: C. Layman

## **FISCAL IMPACT**

The bill would not result in any fiscal impact on the State as the costs of erecting and maintaining suitable markers would be borne entirely by private contributions.

Fiscal Analyst: C. Thiel

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This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan Senate staff for use by the Senate in its deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.