

Legislative Analysis



PFC NICHOLAS H. BLODGETT, CPL ROSS A. SMITH, AND SPC ERIC T. BURRI MEMORIAL HIGHWAYS

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House Bill 6025 as reported from committee
Sponsor: Rep. Tommy Brann
Committee: Transportation and Infrastructure
Complete to 6-6-18

Analysis available at
<http://www.legislature.mi.gov>

(Enacted as Public Act 568 of 2018)

SUMMARY:

House Bill 6025 would amend the Michigan Memorial Highway Act to designate portions of highway US-131 in the city of Wyoming. The portion between exits 78 and 79 would be known as the "SPC Eric T. Burri Memorial Highway," between exits 79 and 80 as the "Cpl Ross A. Smith Memorial Highway," and between exits 80 and 81 as the "PFC Nicholas H. Blodgett Memorial Highway."

Proposed MCL 250.1003b

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Army Specialist 4th Class Eric T. Burri, 21, of Wyoming, Michigan, was killed when an improvised explosive device detonated near his Humvee in Baghdad, Iraq, on Tuesday, June 7, 2005.

Known by his family an "adventurous boy," Eric wanted to see the world, learn languages, and meet different people. His desire to join the Army increased after spending a year in Uruguay as an exchange student. He enlisted in the Army before graduating from high school and was assigned to 623rd Quartermaster Company, 1st Corps Support Command, based at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Touched by the poverty he witnessed in Iraq, family members recall Eric saying that children in Iraq had no shoes and if he could, he would "give them the shoes off my feet." After his death, family members and friends organized a shoe drive for kids in Iraq. On September 11, 2008, the 824th Quartermaster Company held a dedication ceremony renaming building number 8124 on Joint Base Balad the Eric Burri Rigging Facility. The building's new name commemorates the work he did as a parachute rigger on the base. Designating the portion of highway US-131 between exits 78 and 79 as the "SPC Eric T. Burri Memorial Highway" would honor his sacrifice and service to his country, his community, and the state of Michigan.

Marine Corporal Ross A. Smith, 21, of Wyoming, Michigan, was killed on February 9, 2006, by an improvised explosive device while conducting combat operations near Fallujah, Iraq.

Ross Smith was the youngest of three sons in his immediate family. Ross wanted to follow in his older brother's footsteps and become a Marine. Family members would jokingly call him "little GI Joe." He was a 2002 graduate of Park High School who enlisted in the Marines before his senior year. When terrorists struck on September 11, 2001, Sue Smith recalls asking her son to reconsider enlistment in the Marines. He wouldn't hear of it, she said. "He said they needed him even now more than before." He was assigned to the 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine

Regiment, 1st Marine Division, I Marine Expeditionary Force, Camp Pendleton, California, and attached to the 2nd Marine Division, II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward). Corporal Smith was on his third tour of Iraq when he was killed. Designating the portion of highway US-131 between exits 79 and 80 as the “Cpl Ross A. Smith Memorial Highway” would recognize and honor his sacrifice and dedication to his community, the state of Michigan, and to our country.

Army Private First Class Nicholas H. Blodgett, 21, of Wyoming, Michigan, died July 21, 2004, while serving during Operation Iraqi Freedom when his patrol vehicle hit an improvised explosive device in Abdalluyah, Iraq.

At Grand Rapids Central Catholic High School, Nicholas was a quiet leader who played trumpet in the school band and practiced taekwondo, taking lessons with his parents. After graduation, the high school principal remembers Nicholas wanting to stay involved, so he returned to the school the year after his graduation to help with the color guard. When the deli where Nicholas worked went out business, he looked for a job in security but, he said, “they wanted people with military experience.” Family members recall Nicholas saying he wanted to be in the military or a cop. Nicholas enlisted in the Army in May 2003 and was assigned to the 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, Schweinfurt, Germany. He trained first as a driver, then as a dismounted scout, in the unit’s Troop A before the unit deployed to Iraq in February. He joined more than 100 patrols when he and his squad left Forward Operating Base McKenzie, 60 miles north of Baghdad, late night July 20 for a patrol in nearby Abdalluyah. He was driving—filling in for another soldier on R&R leave—when his Bradley fighting vehicle hit a roadside bomb. His troop commander, Capt. Cory Mack, remembered Blodgett as a “highly motivated and disciplined soldier, answering every question with ‘Yes, sir’ or ‘Roger, sergeant.’” Dedicating a portion of Highway US 131 between exits 80 and 81 as the “PFC Nicholas H. Blodgett Memorial Highway” would recognize his sacrifice and honor his commitment to his community, his country, and the state of Michigan.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Section 2 of the Michigan Memorial Highway Act indicates that the state transportation department shall provide for the erection of suitable markers indicating the name of the highway only “when sufficient private contributions are received to completely cover the cost of erecting and maintaining those markers.” As a result, the bill has no state or local fiscal impact.

POSITIONS:

The Michigan Department of Transportation has no position on the bill. (6-5-18)

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