



Representative John M. Rogers

60th House District

Proponent Testimony - House Bill 276

Chairman McColley, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Transportation, Commerce and Workforce Committee, I am writing in support of House Bill 25 and House Bill 26, which were included in House Bill 276.

Patrolman Mathew Mazany Memorial Highway

House Bill 276 contains legislation that would designate a portion of State Route 2 in the Lake County as the "Patrolman Mathew Mazany Memorial Highway".

This legislation is being introduced to honor a Mentor Police Officer killed in the line of duty on June 24, 2018. Officer Mazany, while working the night shift, had responded to, and was providing backup for, a fellow officer who had initiated a traffic stop on State Route 2 in Mentor. Mat, having exited his cruiser, was approaching the scene of the stop when he was struck from behind by a vehicle driven by someone suspected to have been under the influence. The driver of that car sped off without stopping. Officer Mazany perished on the scene as a result of his injuries, prematurely ending a life which included 14 years of service with the Mentor Police Department and to the Mentor Community.

Those of you here today having served in the 132nd General Assembly, will remember House Resolution 536, formerly adopted by the House in November of last year and presented to Officer's Mazany's wife, Lisa and son, Mathew in Chambers last December.

Retired Mentor Police Sgt. Scott Tkach, Mazany's training officer when Mat started with the department, described Officer Mazany, "as an old school cop who was an excellent police officer." Matt, "knew what he was doing and he did it well." Responsible end-of-the-year evaluations for his officers, Sgt. Tkach recalled a conversation with Mat during his last evaluation where Mazany remarked, "Sarge, I love this job, and I love working with these people!"

As civilians, most of us cannot really appreciate the tremendous risks first responders' face on our behalf, risks that exist each and every moment during their careers. While each of us may think about our safety forces and their jobs momentarily, more so when we see a sad news story on television or read about a tragedy in the newspaper, there is nothing that gives us a realistic insight into the inherent dangers of their occupation as much as a line of duty death.

When a police officer or firefighter dies on the job, time stops momentarily for all of us because he or she was engaged in sworn duties to serve and protect all of us and others. Whatever happened seems so untimely and so unfair that it is difficult to ignore. But then as life continues to flow, we slowly move on.

When an officer who falls, is known personally, is loved by many, as in the case of Mathew by his family, those in his Department and within the Lake County community, the nature of the loss is much more powerful and dramatic. Yet few words or actions offer help with handling such a tragedy felt by so many.

The naming of this section of highway, which includes the area where Mat was killed, is but a small token in recognition and honor of Officer Mazany's life and sacrifice, while reminding those travelling through the city of a police officer's life unnecessarily lost in the service to his community.

Let me conclude by advising the Committee that the City of Mentor's Administration, Council, Police Chief and Department together with Mat's family have all indicated their support for this dedication.

Colonel Donald Blakeslee Bridge

Similarly, House Bill 276 also includes legislation designating the bridge extending over the Grand River and into Fairport Harbor as the Colonel Donald Blakeslee Bridge and honoring one of our Nation's most decorated World War II flying aces. This legislation is a re-introduction of HB 687, introduced in the latter period of the 132nd General Assembly.

Col. Donald James Matthew Blakeslee was born in 1917 in Fairport Harbor, a small town of 3,000 residents nestled along the Grand River and Lake Erie shorelines in my district in Lake County. As a young boy, Blakeslee became interested in flying after attending the Cleveland Air Races. In 1938 Blakeslee joined the Army Air Corps Reserve. In 1939, with the onset of World War II in the European Theater, the United States would remain on the sidelines for another 2 years. Eager to fight for the Allies, Blakeslee joined the Royal Canadian Air Force in 1939 and traveled to England.

While serving with the 401st Squadron of the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) during the early stages of the war, Blakeslee would prove himself to be a talented Spitfire pilot and a gifted flight leader, flying a large number of sorties over enemy territory and destroying or damaging multiple enemy aircraft. In August of 1942, Blakeslee became a flying "ace" after a destroying an aircraft

during a raid in France. With the creation of the United States Army Air Force in 1942, Blakeslee decided to leave the RCAF and transfer back into an American unit. Before transferring, Blakeslee was presented with the British Distinguished Flying Cross by King George at Buckingham Palace.

Upon his return, Blakeslee was assigned to the Army Air Force's Fourth Fighter Group. Within two years, Blakeslee would be promoted to group commander, where he was responsible for three squadrons, each consisting of 16 P-51 mustangs.

Under Blakeslee's leadership, the Fourth Fighter group quickly become known for their aggressive style proving to be among the most effective fighter groups of the Eighth Fighter Command. In March of 1944, Col. Blakeslee became first airman to fly over the German capital of Berlin while he and his group escorted a massive formation of B-17 and B-24 bombers on a raid. Then, on April 8, 1944, the Fourth Fighter group set a record for the European theater, shooting down 31 planes in one day. Later in June of that year, Colonel Blakeslee led his fighters on one of their most arduous missions, escorting shuttle-bombers to and from the Russian capital of Moscow, in roughly 7 hours.

By war's end, Blakeslee's Fourth Fighter group was credited with destroying over a thousand German aircraft. Additionally, Col. Blakeslee himself had logged over 1,000 combat flight hours, flying more combat missions against the Luftwaffe than any other American pilot and being credited with 15.5 aerial victories while purportedly attributing other kills to fellow pilots.

Col. Blakeslee, while wearing an American uniform was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross by Dwight D. Eisenhower on the day he flew over Berlin, in addition to earning another subsequent Distinguished Service Cross, 8 Distinguished Flying Crosses, 2 Silver Stars and 8 Air Medals

After the end of the Second World War, Col. Blakeslee would continue to serve our nation in the United States Air Force, leading the 27th Fighter Wing in the Korean War where his awards included the Legion of Merit, an additional Distinguished Flying Cross and four more Air Medals.

After retiring from the Air Force, he moved to Miami Florida, where he met and married his wife Leola Fryer and together had a daughter, Dawn. While Col. Blakeslee's life ended on September 3rd, 2008, his memory as a veteran, father, and husband, lives on. He and his wife are interred in hallow grounds of Arlington National Cemetery.

I respectfully ask this Committee's help with honoring Col. Blakeslee's legacy by supporting this legislation and the naming of the "Colonel Donald James Matthew Blakeslee Memorial Bridge", which serves as the primary entrance and exit way to Donald's birthplace and boyhood hometown, Fairport Harbor.

Conclusion

I respectfully ask each of you for your support of House Bill 26, designating the bridge extending over the Grand River and into Fairport Harbor as the Colonel Donald Blakeslee Bridge

and honoring one of our Nation's most decorated World War II flying aces, as well as House Bill 25, naming the section of state route 2 between route's 615 and 306 in Mentor, as the "Patrolman Mathew Mazany Memorial Highway" in Mat's memory. I would be happy to answer any questions at this time.

Thank you.

