



MIKE ROHRKASTE

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 55TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony on Assembly Bill 9 March 26, 2019

Mr. Chair and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today on behalf of Assembly Bill 9, which honors the life and legacy of the late Sen. Michael G. Ellis by naming the interchange of Interstate 41, US Highway 10, and State Highway 441 in his memory.

Although I did not have the privilege of serving in the Legislature with Senator Ellis, he was a familiar face in the Neenah area, and I often had the opportunity to meet or socialize with him at community events. I never ceased to be impressed by his knowledge of the issues, his passion for serving his constituents, and his dedication to the Wisconsin Senate as an institution. When I ran for the 55th Assembly District – the seat he held for ten years before moving to the Senate – he was a helpful resource.

Senator Ellis was a strong proponent of Highway 441, the Tri-County Expressway that serves the Appleton area. Later on, he supported the expansion project to improve traffic flow on 441 and its connecting highways. The project included the reconstruction of the interchange of 441, Interstate 41, and US Highway 10, and has made a great difference to the Fox Cities. Senator Ellis died shortly after the interchange's ribbon cutting, and I can't think of a better way to honor his memory than to name the interchange for him. For that reason, I hope the committee will vote to recommend AB 9.



ROGER ROTH

PRESIDENT

WISCONSIN STATE SENATE

March 26, 2019

Assembly Committee on Transportation

2019 Assembly Bill 9

Relating to: designating and marking a highway interchange in Winnebago County as the Michael G. Ellis Memorial Interchange

Thank you Chairman Kulp and the Committee on Transportation for holding a public hearing on this legislation today. I would also like to thank Senator Cowles as well as Representatives Rohrka for working with me to recognize a memorable Wisconsin Senator.

Senator Michael Ellis was a respected colleague and a good friend. He was called a legend in Wisconsin politics, for his unmatched personality and dedication to his constituents. His fight to put his district first and politics second, earned him much respect among his peers.

Mike Ellis was born in Neenah, Wisconsin on February 21st, 1941, the same community which he would serve as a state legislator. He was a high school teacher and then spent 44 years in the Legislature — 12 in the Assembly beginning in 1970 and 32 in the Senate beginning in 1982. Senator Ellis served on a number of committees during his tenure in the Senate, but is best known for his role on the Joint Committee on Finance and mastery of the state budget, legislative rules and procedures. After serving in numerous leadership roles, he ended his legislative career in 2014 while serving as Senate President.

He has left a lasting impression on this building and on this state. Senator Ellis served as an inspirational mentor not only to myself, but to countless members of the Wisconsin Legislature. His fiery passion for policy and “taking care of one’s own sidewalks” is the type of community advocacy and commitment we should all strive for.

Despite passing hundreds of bills, Senator Ellis’s proudest achievements was the evolution of Highway 41, or as he called it, the Main Street of the Valley. After Senator Ellis passed away last year, my colleagues and I knew the only way to memorialize him would be to permanently recognize his contribution to that project.

Assembly Bill 9 instructs the Department of Transportation to designate and sign the interchange of I 41, USH 10, and STH 441 as the “Michael G. Ellis Memorial Interchange” upon the sufficient contribution of funds; the bill requires no GPR contribution by the state of Wisconsin.

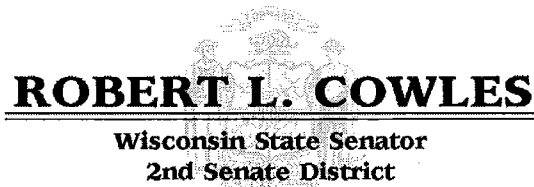
I have said before Senator Ellis wasn’t just the leader of the Senate, he was the Senate. Senator Ellis has left an incomparable impact on not just the state legislature, but on all of Wisconsin. I hope the committee joins me in recognizing a man with no equal, and will leave a permanent reminder of his contribution to his own Main Street.

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JOINT COMMITTEES:
Audit Committee, Co-Chair

Testimony on 2019 Assembly Bill 9

Senator Robert Cowles
Assembly Committee on Transportation – March 26, 2019

Thank you, Chairman Kulp and committee members, for allowing me to testify on 2019 Assembly Bill 9. This bill directs the Department of Transportation to designate and mark the interchange of Interstate 41, U.S. Highway 10, and State Highway 441 in Winnebago County as the ‘Michael G. Ellis Memorial Interchange.’

I served with former Senator Mike Ellis who spent time as Senate President and Majority Leader, and not only was he a colleague, but he was a friend. Around the Capitol, I and so many others knew him to be a larger than life figure whose humor and wit served as a foundation in his leadership and speaking style. When Mike walked into a room, his presence could hold people’s attention captive. He was certainly a once in a generation elected leader for our state.

While he was Senate President, Mike still managed to focus on his district first. I always knew he had an impact in his district, but after his sudden and unexpected passing last year, the outpouring of stories and condolences helped to illustrate truly how large his impact on the Fox Valley was, both personally and professionally.

While not in office anymore, it was fitting that Mike got to see this project finished on-time and under-budget before his passing last year. Given that this interchange was one of the key achievements championed by Senator Ellis during his legislative career, I feel that it is an appropriate honor for a truly great man who dedicated decades of his life towards making the Fox Valley and all of Wisconsin a better place to live, work, and visit. I’m pleased to be joining my colleagues from the Fox Valley area to author this bill.

The passage of this bill would not lead to the expenditure of any state funds, but instead the approximately \$1,400 needed for designating and marking of the -41, USH-10, and STH-441 interchange would be funded privately.