



NANCY VANDERMEER

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 70TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

TO: Honorable Members of the Assembly Committee on Transportation

FROM: State Representative Nancy VanderMeer

DATE: January 30, 2024

SUBJECT: Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 678

Assembly Committee on Transportation colleagues, During World Wars I & II, Code Talkers were American Indian soldiers who utilized their native language as a way to send secret communications on the battlefield. Working in pairs, one Code Talker would translate messages from English to their Native language over portable radios to a fellow Code Talker who would translate it back to English from their native language. These codes were never deciphered by the enemy, a feat so rare that a common myth says accompanying soldiers were to kill Code Talkers rather than allow them to be captured by the enemy.

The U.S. Military (Army, Navy, and Marine Corps) developed policies to train and recruit Native soldiers. The work of the Code Talkers was essential to both the European and Pacific campaigns, assuring the Allied victory in World War II. However, the Department of Defense use of abbreviations and codes are often impossible to decipher on their veterans' discharge certificates, making it difficult to acknowledge their contributions during the war.

Native American soldiers from thirty-three tribes from across the country served as Code Talkers during World War II, one of which is the Ho-Chunk (Hoocąk) Nation. To date, the Department of Defense (DOD) has recognized and listed fourteen World War II Veterans from the Ho-Chunk (Hoocąk) Nation who served as Code Talkers, marking the Ho-Chunk (Hoocąk) Nation and its members as one of the most recognized tribal nations for its Code Talkers.

Preserving the legacy of Code Talkers is crucial to honoring their service to the American people and to the Nation, and their contribution towards preserving the Hoocąk language for future generations. In light of this significant contribution to both the United States and the Ho-Chunk (Hoocąk) Nation, Senator Testin and I introduced this legislation to designate a portion of Interstate Highway 90 from the Wisconsin-Minnesota state line, easterly and westerly, to the intersection with Interstate Highway 94 in Monroe County as the "Ho-Chunk (Hoocąk) World War II Code Talkers Memorial Highway," and we're respectfully asking for your support to move the proposal forward.



PATRICK TESTIN

STATE SENATOR

DATE: January 30, 2024
RE: **Testimony on Assembly Bill 678**
TO: The Assembly Committee on Transportation
FROM: Senator Patrick Testin

Thank you to Chairwoman VanderMeer and Committee Members for hearing my testimony today.

In May, it was my honor to be a guest at the Ho-Chunk Memorial Day Pow-Wow in Black River Falls. It was a great experience and a good opportunity to learn more about the sacrifices Ho-Chunk veterans have made for this country.

One translation of the word Ho-Chunk is “People of the Big Voice”. During World War II, at least fourteen Ho-Chunk servicemen used their voices – and their language – to confuse our enemies and help the Allies win the war. They, along with native people from thirty-two other tribes, were Code Talkers. They used their language to facilitate rapid communication and coordination of wartime plans.

Working in pairs, one Code Talker would translate messages from English to their Native language over portable radios to a fellow Code Talker who would translate it back to English from their native language. These codes were never deciphered by the enemy.

This legislation honors the legacy of the Ho-Chunk Code Talkers by naming the stretch of Interstate Highway 90 from the Wisconsin-Minnesota border to the intersection with Interstate Highway 94 in Tomah the “Ho-Chunk World War II Code Talkers Memorial Highway.” In light of their significant contributions to our country and world, it’s important that we do this.

Before we hear from our next speaker, I’d like to read the names of the fourteen Ho-Chunk Code Talkers who we intend to honor:

Bill Whitebear (Army), Benjamin Winneshiek (Army), Bill Mike (Army), Jesse Mike (Army), Emanuel Thundercloud (Army), Howard Littlejohn (Army), Alvin Blackdeer (Navy), Donald Blackdeer (Army), Irvin Blackdeer (Army), Clifford Blackdeer (Army), George Green (Army), Donald I. Greengrass (Army), Adam Littlebear Jr. (Army), and Alfred O. Stacy (Army).

Thank you for your time today, and thank you for your consideration of this bill.



HO-CHUNK NATION LEGISLATURE
Governing Body of the Ho-Chunk Nation

Assembly Committee on Transportation

**Assembly Bill 678 (Companion Senate Bill 633): Designating and marking I-90 the
Ho-Chunk World War II Code Talkers Memorial Highway**

January 30, 2024

Testimony for Representatives Kristin WhiteEagle and Shelby Visintin, Sandy Winneshiek, and Donald Greengrass

Ho-Chunk World War II Code Talkers:

During wartime, Code Talkers were American soldiers who utilized their native language as a way to send secret communications on the battlefield. Working in pairs, one Code Talker would translate messages from English to their Native language over a portable radio operated by a fellow Code Talker who would translate it back to English from their native language.

The U.S. Military (Army, Navy, and Marine Corp) developed policies to train and recruit Native soldiers to serve during World War II. The work of these Code Talkers was essential to the Allied victory in World War II. However, the Code Talkers' service was classified, difficult to discern, and not recognized in their discharge papers, making it difficult to acknowledge their contributions during the war.

Native American soldiers from thirty-three (33) tribes from across the country, including three from Wisconsin, served as Code Talkers during World War II. To date, the Department of Defense (DOD) has recognized and listed 14 World War II Veterans from the Ho-Chunk Nation who served as Code Talkers, marking the Ho-Chunk Nation and its members as one of the most recognized tribal nations for its Code Talkers.

Recognizing their Contribution and Honoring their Memory:

Assembly Bill 678 designates a portion of Interstate-90 from the Wisconsin-Minnesota state line to the intersection with Interstate-94 in Monroe County as the "Ho-Chunk World War II Code Talkers Memorial Highway." This corridor has the largest number of Ho-Chunk Members near it, in addition to being part of the Nation's ancestral homelands.

Preserving the legacy of the Code Talkers is crucial to honoring their service to the American people and to Nation, and their contribution towards preserving native language for future generations. By designating that portion of I-90 as the Ho-Chunk World War II Code Talkers Memorial Highway, we are honoring their memory and service.

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