

Testimony of Reverend Deacon Thomas J. Davis, Jr.

Transportation Committee Public Hearing

Friday, March 8, 2013 @ 10:00 A.M

Room 2C of the LOB

RE: Raised Bill 6559 - An Act Concerning the Designation of Roads and Bridges in Honor or in Memory of Persons and Organizations

I have asked to take a few moments of your time to express support for Raised Bill 6559, *An Act Concerning the Designation of Roads and Bridges in Honor or in Memory of Persons and Organizations*.

This bill honors many important events and persons. Not least, it designates the Pearl Harbor Memorial Bridge in Watertown, the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Boulevard in New London, and the Private First Class Peter P. Golec Memorial Highway in East Haddam, this last being named after an American hero who was killed in action in Normandy during World War II.

I appear to call special attention to Sec. 12 of the bill, which proposes to designate a portion of Route 137 in Stamford as "U.S. Navy SEAL Brian R. Bill Memorial Highway".

Special Operator Chief Brain Bill was my nephew. He was the youngest child of my sister, Patricia Parry of Stamford and her husband Dr. Michael Parry, chief of infectious disease at Stamford Hospital. I had the honor of being chosen by Brian as his confirmation sponsor when he was emerging from childhood. We could not have imagined then that he would be killed in action in Afghanistan at 31 years of age on August 6, 2011.

Brian believed deeply in his mission protecting the liberty and safety of our nation. He loved his brother SEALS and repeatedly signed up for additional tours of duty because of the bond of brotherhood he felt and his awareness that the times demanded men willing to sacrifice all to defeat a vicious evil confronting civilized society. He understood that victory would cost blood and he was willing to enter the fray at its most dangerous precipice. He was not alone. Sixteen other SEALS from the vaulted Team DEVGRU, otherwise known as SEAL Team Six, and almost twenty other special operators and air crew perished with him nineteen months ago. Many of their comrades had given the full measure before them. Others will follow. They will never relent in their pursuit of those intent on terrorizing free people.

On September 11, 2001 the world changed. Some men recognize the signs of the times and the call to duty that historic moments command. On December 13, 2001 Brian entered Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL Training. After six months of the most grueling and demanding training in the military, he graduated and immediately proceeded to Advanced SEAL Qualification Training.

On June 9, 2003 he was assigned to his SEAL Team and began multiple deployments in the highly specialized missions that characterize the vocation of the world's most elite warriors. In 2007, following a rigorous selection process, he began training with Naval Special Warfare Development Group (NSWDG) or DEVGRU. Nine months later he was selected to be a DEVGRU Special Operator and he continued his numerous deployments around the world in support of the Global War on Terrorism.

Brian was a highly decorated combat veteran with numerous awards, including the Bronze Star Medal with Valor (awarded 4 times, including one for extraordinary heroism), Purple Heart Medal, Defense Meritorious Service Medal, Joint Service Commendation with Valor, Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal, Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal, Combat Action Ribbon (twice), Presidential Unit Citation (twice), Navy Unit Commendation, Afghanistan Campaign Medal, Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, and numerous other personal and unit decorations.

He was a breed apart. He breathed the same air and walked with humility but he was a giant among men. He and his comrades were warriors and such souls serve our nation still. His life is enshrined in the SEAL Ethos of those brave men:

"My Trident is a symbol of honor and heritage, bestowed on me by the heroes that have gone before, it embodies the trust of those I have sworn to protect ... to defend those who are unable to defend themselves ... I voluntarily accept the inherent hazards of my profession, placing the welfare and security of others before my own. I serve with honor on and off the battlefield. ... Uncompromising integrity is my standard. My word is my bond. We expect to lead to be led. In the absence of orders I will take charge, lead my teammates and accomplish the mission. ... I will never quit. My Nation expects me to be physically harder and mentally stronger than my enemies. If knocked down, I will get back up every time. ... We train for war and fight to win. I stand ready to bring the full spectrum of combat power to bear in order to achieve my mission and the goals established by my country. The execution of my duties will be swift and violent when required yet guided by the very principles that I serve to defend. ... Brave men have fought and died building the proud tradition and feared reputation that I am bound to uphold. ... I will not fail."

Brian was an avid mountain climber, beer drinker, civil aviation pilot, motorcycle enthusiast, and future NASA astronaut, the next endeavor he was preparing to undertake. He was kind, honest and respectful. How many of those will you meet in a lifetime? He was the best of the best. He loved his family and his Nation with a quiet intensity that translated to giving his time, his friendship and his life. His mother and his sister, Amy, his father Michael, and his goddaughter Ryder were his pride. His impact on our world was profound but its extent will not be told in our time. It was the nature of his work. He sought and achieved results, not recognition. It was a measure of his impact that our family has received moving letters from President Bush who knew Brian personally and admired him profoundly.

A trident fashioned from the beams of the World Trade Center towers stands in front of the east coast operational base of Brian's command. That is the memory of Brian our family cherishes. And his smile which never faded. He was a happy hero.

Brian was buried at Arlington Nation Cemetery along with twelve of his fellow SEALS. The SEAL commander commented that the hallowed ground where those men's remains rest will be a place of solemn remembrance and inspiration visited by SEALS in the years to come. It will be part of the formation of their character and resolve. SEALS hold contempt for failure and contempt for death. It sounds amazing and unreal, but it is what makes it possible for their breed to still walk among us, without which our peril would be greatly increased.

Brian's own words best describe his conviction that love is worth fighting for. In 2008 he wrote:

"The truth is I want you to live a life of fun and excitement. I want you to travel and to go to music festivals and art shows and all of that fun stuff. I want you to live a life of freedom and spontaneity. That is why I work where I work. That is why I love what I do. I do it because I know that people are out there free enjoying the things they love to do."

So, in the end, it all came down to love. When the beloved is endangered, love does not shy away, not when it is embodied in a man like Brian. Love fights. And for this he lifted his glancing helmet, set aside not honor due but life and days of domestic joys for the one thing worth it – honor given by those one loves.

He speaks to us still through the words of St. Paul to the Philippians:

[W]hatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you. Philippians 4:8-9

The prophet Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord saying "Whom shall I send; who will go for us?" Brian made his answer his own: "Here am I. Send me." Isaiah 6:8.

Thank you for this opportunity to remember Brian and for the honor you bestow on his name and those of his teammates.

Long live the brotherhood.