



SENATOR JANET BEWLEY
WISCONSIN STATE SENATE

Senate Committee on Transportation and Veterans Affairs
Public Hearing on Senate Bill 447
January 30, 2018

Senator Petrowski and Committee Members,

Thank you giving me the opportunity to testify on behalf of Senate Bill 447, which would direct the Department of Transportation to designate the bridge on U.S. Highway 2 across the St. Louis River between the Cities of Superior, Wisconsin and Duluth, Minnesota, as the "Richard I. Bong Memorial Bridge."

Although the bridge is commonly known by that name, it was never designated as such in state law, which means that it cannot be labeled that way on official state maps and other State of Wisconsin publications. SB 447 would remedy that oversight.

Major Richard I. Bong is one of the America's finest flying officers and is known as our "Ace of Ace's". Born in Poplar, Wisconsin, Major Bong fought against the Japanese in the Southwest Pacific during World War II and succeeded in shooting down 40 enemy aircraft. There is already a memorial plaque near the bridge, and the bill specifically prevents any state funds from being expended to put up or maintain any new markers.

Many of us are familiar with the sacrifices Major Bong made to keep our country safe during World War II. Let's honor his memory by passing this bill to officially designate the bridge as the Richard I. Bong Memorial Bridge.

Thank you once again for giving me the opportunity to testify and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.



25th Senate District

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RICHARD I. BONG
Veterans Historical Center

January 26, 2018

Dear Chairman Petrowski and Committee Members:

Thank you so much for allowing me to express our support for Senate Bill 447, the renaming of the Richard I Bong Memorial Bridge to Richard I. Bong Memorial Bridge and Highway.

Richard was born in 1920 and his upbringing epitomized the values and expectations of that era – loyalty to his family and a deep sense of patriotism. Like all farm children, he had chores to perform and was expected to drive farm machinery at an early age. He hunted and fished in the surrounding woods and streams, played on his school athletic teams and sang in his church choir. As a 4H project, he planted an extensive evergreen windbreak on the family farm which is still in the family. At that time he modeled the ideal all-American boy.

He became enamored of flying as a small child, watching planes fly over the farm carrying mail for President Calvin Coolidge's summer White House in Superior. As a college student he learned to fly in the Civilian Pilot Training program; at the age of 20 he became a flying cadet in the US Army Air Corps, in time for the entry of America into World War II. He became America's all-time Ace of Aces, downing 40 enemy planes in the Pacific theater of the war while flying P-38 fighter planes. His many decorations for outstanding skills and extraordinary courage included the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Richard was ordered home for his safety and married his sweetheart, Marge, in Superior. Six months later he was killed test piloting the first jet fighter plane for Lockheed. His death at the age of 24 occurred the same day that the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, yet he received banner headlines in the national newspapers.

Richard was a hero in an era of heroes, representing a generation of young men and women who willingly left their farms, villages, and cities to defend their country's freedom. His story is still inspiring young men and women today as they tour our facility.

We fully support and endorse Senate Bill 447, not only because it helps honor Major Bong's memory but it also confirms the commitment to the legacy left by all veterans in our area.

I appreciate your time in this matter and if you have any further questions, feel free to contact me.

Sincerely

Hayes Scriven
Executive Director