

Date of Hearing: April 15, 2024

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Lori D. Wilson, Chair

AB 2698 (Ta) – As Amended March 21, 2024

SUBJECT: Route 405: Little Saigon Freeway

SUMMARY: Designates a portion of Interstate Route 405 (I-405) from Bolsa Chica Road to Magnolia Street in Orange County to be known and designated as the Little Saigon Freeway.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and provides that the department has full possession and control of all state highways and property and rights in property acquired for state highway purposes. (Streets and Highways Code (SHC) Section 90)
- 2) Designates Route 405 from Route 5 near El Toro to Route 5 near San Fernando. (SHC Section 615)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS: Every year the Legislature hears and passes several resolutions naming state highways or structures. These resolutions require the person being honored to be deceased, have provided an exemplary contribution to the public good, be connected to the area of the structure or highway, the segment of highway be less than five miles in length, and the costs of signs for renaming be done without cost to the state.

This is a policy bill, rather than a resolution, and so departs from standard committee policy. The reason for using a policy process rather than a resolution is, in part, due to last year's effort, ACR 71 (Ta) of 2023, which received local opposition related to "representing the interests of all constituents," and was held in the Senate Transportation Committee.

This bill seeks to name an approximately six mile portion of I-405 within Orange County "Little Saigon Freeway."

Importance of Little Saigon. In April 1975, the capital of South Vietnam, Saigon, fell to the Vietnamese communists, and over the following 48 years, millions of Vietnamese have fled communist oppression in their homeland. More than 2.5 million Vietnamese refugees and immigrants became permanent residents and citizens of the United States, and over 800,000 resettled in California.

In June 1988, Governor George Deukmejian recognized the importance of Little Saigon as a major cultural, social, and commercial center of southern California, and freeway signs officially designating the Vietnamese business district in the Cities of Westminster and Garden Grove as "Little Saigon" were unveiled. The signs gave official status to the title "Little Saigon," recalling the name of the South Vietnamese capital more than a decade after it was changed to Ho Chi Minh City by the communist government. Little Saigon is the largest Vietnamese community outside of Vietnam and is a destination for tourists and refugees from all over the world.

The designation of Little Saigon in the County of Orange represents the very first "Little Saigon" in the United States. One can find all types of services and businesses in Little Saigon, including restaurants, supermarkets, medical clinics and centers, pharmacies, and law offices serving the Vietnamese American community, as well as other local and surrounding area residents in the County of Orange. Têt festivals and parades in Little Saigon celebrating the Vietnamese lunar New Year have attracted thousands of participants.

Vietnamese voters in Little Saigon are now a significant voting bloc, and Vietnamese Americans are political leaders on the city councils of the Cities of Fountain Valley, Garden Grove, Santa Ana, and Westminster, and on the Orange County Board of Supervisors, as well as on the school boards in school districts serving these areas.

The Vietnamese community in Little Saigon pioneered many political movements, demanding freedom in Vietnam and fighting against the oppression and dictatorship carried out by the totalitarian communist regime, whose oppression is the main reason for slow economic growth in Vietnam. The Vietnamese community has launched a campaign demanding the immediate release of all prisoners of conscience, who mainly ask that fundamental human rights be afforded to all of Vietnam's citizens and seek the separation of powers and removal of the one-party system.

According to the author, "After the fall of Saigon, Vietnam, in 1975, more than 2,500,000 Vietnamese refugees and immigrants fled to the United States in search of freedom, with over 800,000 resettling in California. A majority of these refugees settled in Orange County in a community that would later be known as "Little Saigon," which is predominantly located in the cities of Westminster, Garden Grove, Fountain Valley, Santa Ana, and the unincorporated area of Midway City. This quickly became the largest Vietnamese Diaspora community in the world and was officially recognized by Governor George Deukmejian in 1988. AB 2698 commemorates the 35th anniversary of California's official recognition of Little Saigon in Orange County by designating a stretch of Interstate 405 as "Little Saigon Freeway."

Previous legislation. AB 776 (Holden), Chapter 543, Statutes of 2023 requires Caltrans to work with specified organizations including California Indian tribes local to, or historically located along Route 210, to identify an appropriate name for the route and appropriate locations for signs that recognize the tribal lands along the route.

ACR 71 (Ta) of 2023 would have designated the portion of Interstate Highway 405 from Bolsa Chica Road in the County of Orange to Magnolia Street in the County of Orange as the Little Saigon Freeway.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

None on file

Opposition

None on file

Analysis Prepared by: Julia Kingsley / TRANS. / (916) 319-2093