

Date of Hearing: January 10, 2022

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Laura Friedman, Chair

ACR 74 (Salas) – As Introduced April 26, 2021

SUBJECT: Gary Helming Memorial Highway

SUMMARY: Designates the portion of State Highway Route 41 from postmile 8.1 to postmile 3.75 in the County of Kings as the Gary Helming Memorial Highway.

EXISTING LAW: Assigns the Department of Transportation (Caltrans) the responsibility of operating and maintaining state highways. This includes the installation and maintenance of highway signs.

FISCAL EFFECT: Gary Helming was born On April 14, 1970, to parents Gary and Elizabeth “Liz” Helming in El Cajon, California, where he was raised and eventually graduated from Valhalla High School in 1988; and

In 1995, Gary volunteered with the Pine Valley Fire Department and then as a seasonal firefighter in the Cleveland National Forest. Gary served on engines and crews with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in Colorado, Yosemite National Park, and Ridgecrest, California, before accepting the opportunity to have his own engine with the BLM in Grand Junction, Colorado, in 2001.

Over the next 11 years, Gary split his duties between fire suppression and training. In February 2005, Gary and fellow firefighter, Andrea Mohrhusen, whom he met while in Yosemite, joined forces in a beautiful wedding ceremony in Marin County, California.

Gary and Andrea’s lives changed forever with the births of their son, Riley Jackson Helming in 2008 and twins Walker Reef and Nalani Christine in 2016.

After the birth of his first child, Gary continued his training, becoming qualified as an Air Tactical Group Supervisor, as well as having the honor of becoming a proud member of the BLM National Honor Guard, where he became a strong advocate for fallen firefighter organizations.

In 2012, Gary and his family left Colorado and returned to California, with Andrea and himself both being promoted to battalion chiefs for the Los Padres National Forest, putting down roots in Pismo Beach.

Outside of being a firefighter, Gary had many passions in life. Gary honed his swimming and diving skills on family trips to Hawaii and absorbed the aloha spirit with the importance of “ohana” (family).

Gary was a co-owner and off-road racing car driver, racing in many S.C.O.R.E and Baja 1000 events with his teammates as part of the Fire Guys Racing Team.

Gary regularly volunteered in his sons’ Cub Scout Pack 425 out of Arroyo Grande, California. Tony Tooke, chief of the U.S. Forest Service in Washington, D.C. said of Gary, “What I learned

about Gary lets me know he had passion — he had a passion for his family, he had a passion for helping his fellow man, and a passion for public service.”.

In 2017, Gary lost his life while returning from the Railroad Fire near Yosemite, after completing an air attack assignment.

Gary is survived by his loving wife Andrea, his children; sons Riley and Walker and daughter Nalani, parents Gary and Liz Helming of El Cajon; sisters, Leslie McLaughlin (Scott) of Riverside, California; Pam Napier (Chuck) of Bremerton, Washington; Deanna Booiink (Stef) of Visalia, California, and numerous aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, and nephews.

Gary left a large footprint in an extended family within the firefighting community. In recognition of Fire Battalion Chief Gary Helming’s contributions and sacrifice in serving the USDA Forest Service and the citizens of the State of California, it is fitting to designate a portion of State Route 41 the County of Kings in his honor.

Committee Comments: It is the intent of the Assembly Transportation Committee to use the Memorial Highway Naming process to honor deceased Californians who have made significant public service contributions and also to reflect the diversity of our state. Currently, most named highways in California are for fallen male public safety officers, who made the ultimate sacrifice, and for whom we are indebted. However, these names do not fully represent the wide range of types of public service contributions, as well as the gender and racial diversity of California’s communities. The Assembly Transportation Committee is committed to working with the Department of Transportation in the upcoming year to improve the naming process to ensure greater equity and to better represent the diversity of California.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

None on file.

Opposition

None on file

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