

SENATE BILL 2485

By Johnson

AN ACT to name an underpass on Interstate 65 in Williamson County in honor of the late Lance Corporal Benjamin H. Gearheart, United States Marine Corps.

WHEREAS, from time to time, the members of this General Assembly have seen fit to name certain highways and bridges to honor the memory of those courageous members of the United States Armed Forces who gave their lives while serving our nation; and

WHEREAS, no person is more deserving of this honor than the late Lance Corporal Benjamin H. Gearheart, United States Marine Corps, who made the ultimate sacrifice for his country on August 27, 1997, while participating in maneuvers at Camp Pendleton; and

WHEREAS, Lance Corporal Gearheart followed the patriotic tradition for which Williamson County and the Volunteer State are renowned for by serving with distinction in the United States Marine Corps; and

WHEREAS a native of Ohio, Benjamin moved with his family to Franklin in 1992 and attended Page High School where he distinguished himself by helping coach the school's newly formed wrestling team instead of participating as a student-athlete himself; and

WHEREAS, he originally planned to attend film school upon his graduation in 1994, but Benjamin eventually felt a stronger, deeper calling to serve his country and fellow Americans; and

WHEREAS, he officially joined the Marine Corps on September 27, 1994, proudly following in his father's and grandfather's footsteps to become a third-generation Marine; and

WHEREAS, Lance Corporal Benjamin H. Gearheart was assigned to the 1st Marine Division, 1st Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, D Company; a Golden Shellback, he had participated in Operation Vigilant Sentinel and Operation Southern Watch; and

WHEREAS, Lance Corporal Benjamin H. Gearheart's personal service awards include the National Defense Medal, Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, and Overseas Service Ribbon; and

WHEREAS, Benjamin is fondly remembered by his father, Wayne Gearheart, his mother, Brenda Gearheart, and his brothers, Frank, Jeremy, and Brad, for his deep-seated compassion for others, his strongly held belief in justice, his great sense of humor, and his unwavering faith in God and his country; and

WHEREAS, Lance Corporal Benjamin H. Gearheart served with great courage and gallantry, giving his life for his country and for the cause in which he believed, and for that ultimate sacrifice, he deserves proper recognition; and

WHEREAS, Lance Corporal Gearheart's dedication to excellence in the U.S. Marine Corps and his love of his family, his fellow Marines, and his country, exemplified in his sacrifice of life itself in defense of all that he held dear, stand as enduring examples of all the characteristics that have ensured the continued freedom of our nation and the preservation of its ideals over the course of our history; and

WHEREAS, Lance Corporal Benjamin H. Gearheart selflessly gave his life while serving his country, and it is thus most appropriate that a certain bridge on Interstate 65 in his home county should be named to honor his memory; now, therefore,

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary, the underpass on Interstate 65 at Exit 61 (State Route 248/Goose Creek Bypass/Peytonsville Road) in Williamson County is hereby designated the "Lance Corporal Benjamin H. Gearheart Memorial Bridge" in recognition of the life of valor and death in patriotic service of Lance Corporal Benjamin H. Gearheart, United States Marine Corps, one of Tennessee's most heroic citizens.

SECTION 2. The department of transportation is directed to erect suitable signs or to affix suitable markers designating the underpass described in Section 1 as the "Lance Corporal Benjamin H. Gearheart Memorial Bridge". The cost of such signage shall be funded in accordance with Tennessee Code Annotated, § 54-1-133.

SECTION 3. The erection of such signs shall be within the guidelines prescribed by the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices.

SECTION 4. This act shall become operative only if the federal highway administrator advises the commissioner of transportation in writing that the provisions of this act shall not render Tennessee in violation of federal laws and regulations and subject to penalties prescribed therein.

SECTION 5. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.