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THIRD READING

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Bill No: SB 930  
Author: Laird (D)  
Amended: 4/25/24  
Vote: 21

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SENATE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE: 11-4, 4/23/24  
AYES: Cortese, Allen, Archuleta, Blakespear, Dodd, Gonzalez, Laird, Limón,  
Newman, Portantino, Umberg  
NOES: Niello, Dahle, Nguyen, Seyarto

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 5-2, 5/16/24  
AYES: Caballero, Ashby, Becker, Bradford, Wahab  
NOES: Jones, Seyarto

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**SUBJECT:** Memorial highways: Memorial Highway Signage Fund

**SOURCE:** Author

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**DIGEST:** This bill creates a fund in the State Treasury to cover Caltrans costs in erecting signage for memorial highway designations for individuals who have promoted racial and gender equity.

**ANALYSIS:**

Existing law: Assigns the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) the responsibility of operating and maintaining state highways, including the installation and maintenance of highway signs. (SHC §91 and VEH §21400)

This bill:

- 1) Establishes the Memorial Highway Signage Fund in the State Treasury comprised of General Fund appropriations and public or private bequeaths, donations, gifts, or grants.

- 2) Specifies that money from the fund shall be available, upon an appropriation by the Legislature, to Caltrans for their costs in erecting signage for memorial highway designations identified in the appropriation that memorialize individuals who have prompted racial and gender equity.

## COMMENTS:

- 1) *Purpose of bill.* According to the author:

“California is a leader when it comes to promoting diversity, equity, and equality, but who we have chosen to honor through our memorial highways has not been representative of the diversity of our state. While California has a rich history of women who have provided extraordinary public service and made exemplary contributions to the public good, the vast majority of memorial highways are named for men. Senate Bill 930 seeks to address this inequity and promote increased racial and gender representation in memorial highway designations by creating a fund that covers the cost of signage that memorialize individuals who have promoted racial and gender equity.”

- 2) *Gender equity in highway naming.* Every year this committee considers a variety of resolutions used to name stretches of highways or erect signage alongside highways in order to memorialize a person who has provided extraordinary public service or some exemplary contribution to the public good. The large majority of those honored are law enforcement officers, and other common memorials are for military veterans, fire fighters, and construction workers. This concentration of memorials for certain professions is likely due to a combination of danger associated with those jobs and professional organizations capable of providing the money to cover construction of the memorial sign, which is usually ~\$8,000-\$10,000.

Because of historical and current gender imbalances in those professions, the large majority of naming resolutions have been for men. Since 2012, about 90% of the memorial resolutions passed by this committee have been for men.

This bill attempts to address that imbalance by creating a fund to cover some or all of the costs associated with constructing a sign to memorialize someone who has advanced racial or gender equity. Usually the funds for a memorial sign must be provided by the private group that is sponsoring the memorial resolution. By creating a fund to cover those costs, the author hopes to encourage more groups to bring forward a greater diversity of potential

honorees. It is unclear how much of a barrier funding signage has been for bringing forward more diverse nominees to honor through highway memorial naming. It is possible that having such a fund will help ease the barrier to raising up people from other professions and backgrounds through this process. Ultimately, the diversity of honorees is dependent upon who legislators choose to honor through memorial resolutions. Legislators could support this effort by soliciting more diverse sets of potential honorees from their districts.

- 3) *Foundational group.* Several special interest license plate funds are managed by nonprofit organizations. These organizations are able to take on some of the burden of both managing the fund and fundraising for the fund itself. The author may wish to consider identifying a nonprofit organization to host and manage this fund.
- 4) *How do you choose?* This bill does not provide any criteria for what qualifies as someone who has promoted racial and gender equity. It also does not specify how Caltrans is to determine how funds should be distributed from the account if multiple memorial signs are approved. Should the first sign in a year draw from the fund first, the second next, and so on until the fund is emptied or the signs are paid for? Alternatively, should all memorial signs passed in a year be awarded an equal amount, up to the full cost of the sign, from what is available in the fund within a given year?
- 5) *Bill or resolution.* Highway memorials generally are introduced as concurrent resolutions, and thereby do not have the force of law. This is convenient because resolutions operate under different deadlines than actual bills. However to make an appropriation from the fund established under this bill, the memorial naming would require an actual bill. This may create a barrier to utilizing the funds, but will allow members to duly consider whether the person honored truly did advance racial or gender equity as the fund established by this bill would require. Using a bill also means the question of how money should be distributed from the fund in the event of multiple resolutions by a fiscal committee.

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Appropriation: No   Fiscal Com.: Yes   Local: No

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee:

This bill would result in “unknown cost pressures, potentially in excess of \$50,000, to appropriate General Fund revenues into the new special fund.”

**SUPPORT:** (Verified 5/16/2024)

None received

**OPPOSITION:** (Verified 5/16/2024)

None received

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5/17/24 11:56:19

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