

Haine passes legislation dedicating memorial highway to Uhl sisters

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SPRINGFIELD, IL -- Senator Bill Haine (D-Alton) passed a resolution on the Senate floor today dedicating a stretch of Interstate 64 in memory of Jessica and Kelli Uhl, two Collinsville sisters who were killed Thanksgiving weekend in 2007 by former Illinois State Trooper Matt Mitchell, who was convicted of reckless homicide for his involvement in the accident.

"We dedicate this memorial in honor of these two wonderful girls," Haine said. "While we can never heal the wounds inflicted by this tragic loss of innocent life, we can keep the memory of these girls alive for our citizens."

Senate Joint Resolution 40 renames the section of Interstate 64 between Exit 19A at Illinois Route 158 and Exit 23 at Illinois Route 4 as the Jessica and Kelli Uhl Memorial Highway. The resolution provides for appropriate signs or plaques to be erected to display this designation. A temporary memorial has already been placed on Highway 158 in honor of Jessica and Kelli Uhl under the fatal accident memorial marker program. The memorial contains the names of the two girls and states "Reckless Driving Costs Lives," but the marker is not visible from Interstate 64 and would be removed in less than two years without legislative action making the memorial permanent.

"We wanted to fulfill the wishes of the girls' family and hope that this memorial serves as a reminder for drivers to proceed with the utmost caution when behind the wheel of a vehicle. Reckless driving can cause such unspeakable, irreparable devastation," Haine stated. "The mother of these girls, Kim Schlau, has been a tireless advocate on the dangers of distracted driving and her efforts on behalf of her daughters are truly courageous and commendable."

Following the accident, the Illinois State Police ushered in new rules limiting on-duty officers' use of personal cellular phones and implemented a four-tier system of guidelines specifying how fast troopers may travel while responding to emergency calls.

"It is personally distressing that Mitchell wore the uniform of the Illinois State Police," Haine said. "Mitchell's disgraceful, reckless conduct was clearly an aberration and inconsistent with the tradition of excellence of the Illinois State Police."

In the 2011 spring legislative session, Haine passed a bill in response to Mitchell's workers' compensation claim for injuries he sustained during the accident. The bill, Senate Bill 1147, prohibits a person who is injured or killed at work from collecting workers' compensation benefits if the individual's injury, disablement, or death occurs while he or she was committing a forcible felony, an aggravated DUI, or reckless homicide that resulted in the death or injury of another person and the individual is convicted of the offense. Senate Bill 1147 passed both chambers unanimously and was signed into law by Governor Quinn in August.

"We proceeded with a carefully crafted, thoroughly vetted bill in the Senate that ensures such criminally negligent behavior is not rewarded in our workers' compensation system," Haine stated.

The Senate Joint Resolution 40, which was unanimously approved 50-0-0, now heads to the House for consideration.