

**STATE OF KANSAS**



**Senator Elaine Bowers  
District 36**

House Transportation Committee  
in Support of SB410  
March 5, 2024

Thank you Mr. Chairman and Committee for allowing me to testify on SB410 today. SB357 was added to this current version in the Senate Transportation Committee. New Section 2 in SB410 designates a portion of US 81 in north central Kansas as the Merle Miller Memorial Highway from the southern Republic County line to the Nebraska border on US 81.

Friends and family of Merle Miller from Belleville have been working on this project for a number of years. Merle worked tirelessly for over 40 years on upgrading US 81 from a two-lane highway to the four-lane which it is today. He was the owner and editor of the Belleville Telescope. His daughter, Margo, testified in Senate Transportation Committee that as a small-town publisher he took the world's weight upon his shoulders and felt that highways were the answer to growth in Kansas. In fact, the city of Belleville's population grew in the last census and again is over 2000 in population and this increase is the first since 1967.

He was asked once how long he had been interested in highways and he said, "all of his life." His father before him, AQ Miller, was one of the founders of the earliest highways in Kansas, Nebraska, and Missouri. Merle was also president of the Pan American Highway Association and once traveled this route of 16,000 miles from Winnipeg Canada, through the US and Mexico, across Central & South America with the idea of promoting this north-south route as the Pan American Highway as an international highway. He continued his efforts to support the paving and improvements for US 81 which today is all four-lane through Kansas to the Nebraska border. Mr. Miller passed away in 2003 at the age of 88 lived to see his goal of a four-lane highway all the way to York, Nebraska.

I would also like to mention traffic counts are up at the intersection of 81 & 36 at Belleville from near 3,000 in the 90's and now at 8,000 per day.

Funding for the signs are in hand and the community is preparing a sign unveiling and celebration in collaboration with the Kansas Department of Transportation for the Merle Miller Memorial Highway after passage of SB410.

Thank you again and I am open to questions.

Senator Elaine Bowers