

'Benny Benson Kodiak State Airport' One Signature from Reality

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Jay Barrett/KMXT

There was a very slight hiccup in the legislative process to name Kodiak State Airport for Alaska Flag designer Benny Benson. Yesterday on the State House floor, the bill passed unanimously and was transmitted to the Senate for its concurrence, however the House Rules Committee inadvertently deleted the word "Kodiak" from the name, proposing simply "Benny Benson State Airport."

When the bill came up last night in the Senate, it was pointed out that state regulations require the city's name be associated with a memorial airport, and was sent back to the House for amendment.

The move to name the Kodiak airport after Benson comes in the year he would have turned 100.

During the bill's introduction on the House floor yesterday, Kodiak Representative Alan Austerman took the opportunity to remember Benny Benson, who he went to work for just out of high school at Kodiak Airways:

"My first job working for him was to climb into an airplane, get into the belly of it, and hold the hammer while he riveted it. I got to know him real well over time. He loved dandelions — most of us don't, but he loved them, because he picked them and made dandelion wine. And so he lived in a little house just up the street from where we worked and of course we'd sneak up there at lunchtime or after work and help him with his dandelion wine," Austerman said. "And so I got to know him real well. It was sad passing — he was only 58-years-old when he passed away. I think it's remarkable that a place like Kodiak, where he really made his home can now memorialize him with the naming of their airport. So I ask your vote yes."

Representative Beth Kerttula of Juneau also spoke in support of the bill, and recalled seeing Benson's original design for Alaska's flag for the first time last year:

"The thing that touched me the most, and it was just one of those stunning moments when you see something you've heard about your whole life, and it just took my breath away, was Benny Benson's original flag," she said. "And it was just one of those moments when you just felt it was just perfect. It was such a lovely thing. This is just a great way to remember that, and a wonderful person."

The bill, SB31, was sent back to be revisited in the House last night and after revision was returned to the Senate today, where it passed unanimously. It goes now to Governor Sean Parnell for his signature. Introduced by Kodiak Senator Gary Stevens, the bill also will name the runway at the Akhiok airport for late pilots Jim Andie and

Robin Starrett.