

By: Alonzo

H.R. No. 825

R E S O L U T I O N

1           WHEREAS, The year 2008 will mark the 20th year since the  
2 passing of William C. Velasquez, founder of the Southwest Voter  
3 Registration Education Project, and the approach of this solemn  
4 anniversary offers a fitting opportunity to pay tribute to the  
5 achievements of this voting rights pioneer and revered son of the  
6 Lone Star State; and

7           WHEREAS, Born in 1944, Willie Velasquez graduated from  
8 Central Catholic High School in San Antonio and then attended St.  
9 Mary's University; his dedication to furthering the civil rights of  
10 Hispanic Americans was already evident in his college years; he  
11 helped found the Mexican American Youth Organization while at St.  
12 Mary's and also worked as an organizer for the United Farm Workers  
13 Union in 1966 and 1967; and

14           WHEREAS, Prominent in a number of groundbreaking Latino  
15 political organizations of the late 1960s and early 1970s, Mr.  
16 Velasquez helped lay the groundwork for the Raza Unida Party, a  
17 political party championing the rights of Mexican Americans, and  
18 for the National Council of La Raza, which has become an important  
19 civil rights and advocacy group; and

20           WHEREAS, Mr. Velasquez focused on Latino participation in  
21 elections as part of his work for the council, and this led to the  
22 founding of the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project in  
23 1974; uniting behind the slogan *Su Voto es Su Voz*, "Your Vote is  
24 Your Voice," SVREP set out to educate Hispanics about the

1 democratic process and urge them to take part in elections, and this  
2 vital work has continued for more than three decades; by conducting  
3 thousands of nonpartisan voter registration and get-out-the-vote  
4 campaigns, SVREP has helped bring about a dramatic increase in  
5 Latino voters, with the number of registered Hispanics rising from  
6 2.4 million in the year the organization was founded to 9.8 million  
7 in 2006; the number of Latino elected officials has also greatly  
8 increased, with more than 6,000 Hispanics now holding office  
9 throughout the country; and

10 WHEREAS, Willie Velasquez also realized the need for an  
11 organization that could gauge Hispanic public opinion and share  
12 those views with elected leaders; toward that end, he founded the  
13 Southwest Voter Research Institute in 1984; now renamed the William  
14 C. Velasquez Institute, it collects and distributes information on  
15 public policy issues that impact Latino citizens, thereby  
16 amplifying their voice in the dialog of American politics; and

17 WHEREAS, The untimely death of Mr. Velasquez at the age of 44  
18 was a loss deeply felt throughout the country, but his legacy lives  
19 on; in 1995, President Bill Clinton awarded him the Presidential  
20 Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor, and he was  
21 one of the civil rights figures whose names were attached to the  
22 U.S. Senate version of the Voting Rights Act Reauthorization and  
23 Amendments Act of 2006; and

24 WHEREAS, Willie Velasquez is a figure of great importance for  
25 all Americans committed to the concept of representative democracy;  
26 his efforts to expand the electorate and educate the citizens of the  
27 United States about a range of civic issues were a great and

1 influential contribution that continues to benefit the State of  
2 Texas and the other states of the Union; now, therefore, be it

3       RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives of the 80th Texas  
4 Legislature hereby pay tribute to the memory of William C.  
5 Velasquez and commemorate his success in furthering the nation's  
6 democratic tradition; and, be it further

7       RESOLVED, That an official copy of this resolution be  
8 prepared for his family as an expression of high regard by the Texas  
9 House of Representatives.