

By: Ortiz, Jr.

H.R. No. 988

R E S O L U T I O N

1 WHEREAS, The American GI Forum, one of the country's leading
2 civil rights organizations, was founded by Mexican American
3 veterans in the aftermath of World War II; and

4 WHEREAS, Mexican Americans have long served with valor in the
5 armed forces of this country, compiling an exceptional record of
6 heroism; in the Second World War alone, 12 Mexican Americans, 9 of
7 them from Texas, earned the Medal of Honor, becoming the nation's
8 most decorated minority group in that conflict; on returning home,
9 however, many Latino veterans found themselves denied benefits that
10 they had earned under the G.I. Bill of Rights; and

11 WHEREAS, To redress that injustice, 700 Hispanic veterans,
12 led by Dr. Hector P. Garcia, founded the American GI Forum in Corpus
13 Christi on March 26, 1948; successful in its efforts to achieve
14 equitable treatment from the Veterans Administration, the forum
15 turned its attention to other veterans' concerns, such as
16 inadequate hospital care and the lack of Mexican American
17 representation on draft boards; and

18 WHEREAS, The forum demonstrated its effectiveness decisively
19 in 1949, when it intervened to help the family of Private Felix
20 Longoria, a soldier who had been killed on a volunteer mission in
21 the Philippines during World War II; when Private Longoria's body
22 was finally recovered and returned to his home in Three Rivers,
23 Texas, the local funeral home refused his family permission to use
24 its chapel for a service; after the forum sought assistance from

1 members of the Texas congressional delegation, Senator Lyndon
2 Johnson arranged for the soldier's burial in Arlington National
3 Cemetery; and

4 WHEREAS, In the 1950s, the forum began to use the legal system
5 to combat segregation and other discriminatory practices; forum
6 lawyers helped to secure a landmark ruling from the U.S. Supreme
7 Court in *Hernandez v. the State of Texas*, in 1954, a decision
8 finding that Mexican Americans were discriminated against as a
9 class and that they were entitled to protection under the 14th
10 Amendment; the forum also fought to end separate schooling for
11 Mexican American children, a practice ruled unlawful in 1957; and

12 WHEREAS, During that same decade, the forum conducted voter
13 registration drives, confronted incidents of police brutality,
14 addressed the problems of migrant workers, and sponsored student
15 scholarships; and

16 WHEREAS, The group took the name American GI Forum of Texas on
17 September 29, 1954, and became a national organization in 1958; Dr.
18 Clotilde Garcia, Dr. Hector Garcia's sister, founded a women's
19 auxiliary in 1956, and junior GI forums were also launched in some
20 areas; and

21 WHEREAS, Today, the forum embraces more than 500 chapters
22 across the nation and in Puerto Rico; it continues to support
23 returning veterans and their communities through such endeavors as
24 the Veterans Outreach Program, which provides training,
25 employment, and counseling for veterans in the Southwest, and
26 Ser-Jobs for Progress (SER), whose affiliates operate employment
27 training centers and residential and other services in Puerto Rico

1 and the continental U.S.; and

2 WHEREAS, For more than half a century, the American GI Forum
3 has played a vital role in our national life, advancing the cause of
4 social justice and touching the lives of countless Americans, and
5 it is indeed deserving of commendation for its exemplary efforts in
6 furthering the highest ideals of this nation; now, therefore, be it

7 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives of the 80th Texas
8 Legislature hereby honor the American GI Forum on the 59th
9 anniversary of its founding and extend to all those associated with
10 this organization sincere appreciation for their outstanding
11 service; and, be it further

12 RESOLVED, That an official copy of this resolution be
13 prepared for the American GI Forum as an expression of high regard
14 by the Texas House of Representatives.