

By: Alonzo

H.R. No. 307

R E S O L U T I O N

1 WHEREAS, June 15, 2009, marks 21 years since the passing of
2 William C. Velasquez, founder of the Southwest Voter Registration
3 Education Project, and this solemn anniversary offers a fitting
4 opportunity to pay tribute to the achievements of this voting
5 rights pioneer and revered son of the Lone Star State; and

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

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

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

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

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

16 WHEREAS, The untimely death of Mr. Velasquez in 1988 at the
17 age of 44 was a loss deeply felt throughout the country, but his
18 legacy lives on; in 1995, President Bill Clinton posthumously
19 awarded him the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest
20 civilian honor, and he was one of the civil rights figures whose
21 names were attached to the U.S. Senate version of the Voting Rights
22 Act Reauthorization and Amendments Act of 2006; and

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

1 Texas and the other states of the Union; now, therefore, be it

2 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives of the 81st Texas
3 Legislature hereby pay tribute to the life of William C. Velasquez
4 on June 15, 2009, the 21st anniversary of his death, and commemorate
5 his record of achievement in furthering the nation's democratic
6 tradition.