87R19020 JGH-D

By:  González of El Paso H.R. No. 706

R E S O L U T I O N

WHEREAS, January 28, 2021, was the 104th anniversary of the famous "Bath House Riots" in El Paso, when Carmelita Torres and other Latinas bravely resisted inhumane and brutal treatment from U.S. border authorities; and

WHEREAS, In 1917, all Mexicans crossing the border between Ciudad Juárez and El Paso along the Santa Fe Bridge were required to pass through a federal "delousing" facility; men and women were separated into different buildings, with children accompanying the women, and then required to strip naked and submit to inspection by federal agents, while their clothing and valuables were steamed or treated with cyanide gas; and

WHEREAS, If a man was found with lice, his head was shaved and the clippings burned, and if a woman was found with lice, her hair was doused with kerosene and vinegar, after which she was required to wait half an hour for a secondary inspection while wearing only a towel; if lice were found again, the process was repeated; after this, everyone was sprayed with a toxic mixture of gasoline and soap, and, once dressed, vaccinated and presented with proof of the process in the form of a certificate that was valid for only one week; and

WHEREAS, On the morning of January 28, 1917, a 17-year-old Mexican woman named Carmelita Torres was crossing the border on her way to her job as a maid in El Paso when the trolley conductor ordered her to leave the trolley and enter the "bath house"; she refused and quickly rallied the other women on the trolley, who were also domestic workers, to refuse as well; and

WHEREAS, Soon a crowd of around 200 women were actively resisting this humiliating and racist process, some of them throwing rocks and bottles and injuring several trolley operators; as the crowd grew, many of the women placed themselves on the tracks to keep the trolley cars from moving, while others removed the operators from the cabins and destroyed the trolley controls; a number of the women were arrested, including Ms. Torres; and

WHEREAS, The incident shut down the border for two days, but unfortunately the protest did not stop the fumigations, which became even worse; starting in the 1920s, officials in El Paso began dousing Mexicans crossing the border in Zyklon B, the cyanide-based pesticide that was later used in the gas chambers of Nazi extermination camps during the Holocaust; the demeaning fumigations continued for another 40 years, until the 1960s; and

WHEREAS, Following the protest of 1917, Carmelita Torres is lost to history, but she and the other women who spontaneously stood up for themselves that January will forever be remembered for their courage, their determination, and their insistence upon their essential human right to be treated with dignity and respect; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives of the 87th Texas Legislature hereby commemorate the 104th anniversary of the Bath House Riots of 1917 and pay tribute to the heroism of Carmelita Torres.