

By: González of El Paso

H.R. No. 706

R E S O L U T I O N

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

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

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

21           WHEREAS, On the morning of January 28, 1917, a 17-year-old  
22 Mexican woman named Carmelita Torres was crossing the border on her  
23 way to her job as a maid in El Paso when the trolley conductor  
24 ordered her to leave the trolley and enter the "bath house"; she

1 refused and quickly rallied the other women on the trolley, who were  
2 also domestic workers, to refuse as well; and

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

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

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

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