

SPEECH OF HON. LINDA T. SÁNCHEZ OF CALIFORNIA IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES MONDAY, APRIL 16, 2007

Ms. LINDA T. SÁNCHEZ of California.

Madam Speaker, I proudly join my colleagues today to pay tribute to the contributions of Latinos who served in our Armed Forces during World War II. As we were painfully reminded by the complete omission of Hispanics from a PBS documentary on World War II, the important contributions of Latinos, native born, as well as immigrants, are too often overlooked and forgotten. From the American Revolution, a victory that established our Nation; to the Civil War, a victory that preserved our Nation; to the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Hispanics have played an instrumental role.

From Hispanic business owners to day laborers to the growing number of Hispanics in executive level positions, Hispanics are ingrained in the fabric of our strong Nation. As the largest and fastest growing minority in the United States, Hispanic participation in all segments of society is not only essential but apparent. It should not be surprising, then, that Hispanics also serve our nation in one of its most patriotic duties--the heroic defense of our country.

During World War II, Hispanics served in greater proportions than any other minority in the U.S. Armed Forces with the number of Hispanics serving likely peaking at well over 400,000. Although proper record keeping of Hispanics in the armed forces was not kept until after World War II, we have a multitude of accounts of Hispanic participation. One famous example is Company E of the 141st Regiment of the 36th Texas Infantry Division, which was made up entirely of Spanish-speaking Americans. For their notable service they were awarded 1,685 Bronze Stars, 492 Silver Stars, 31 Distinguished Service Crosses, 12 Legions of Merit, and 11 Soldier's Medals. One individual example is Staff Sergeant Ysmael R. Villegas. A California native, he served in the United States Army during World War II. At the Battle of Luzon in the Philippines, he stepped up to lead his squad in a counterattack of the enemy and single-handedly cleared five installations of heavy machineguns. Upon taking the sixth and final area of firing, and at only twenty-one years old, Staff Sergeant Villegas was killed in action. For his bravery, President Harry Truman posthumously awarded him the Medal of Honor.

There are countless stories of heroism like Staff Sergeant Villegas'. Hispanics disproportionately earned more Medals of Honor in the 20th Century than any other major subgroup. From the Civil War to the Vietnam War, there have been thirty-nine Hispanic Americans who have received the Medal of Honor. Twenty-two of them sacrificed their lives in combat in service to the United States Navy, Army, and Marines. According to the latest Census, there are over 1.1 million living Hispanic veterans of the U.S. Armed

Forces. And this number is expanding. Since November 2006, 25,300 Hispanics have been deployed for service. According to the Department of Defense, Hispanics have endured the most deaths for a minority group in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. Our country honors their service as well as those who have served in

the past. I encourage all Americans to take the opportunity to recognize and continue to learn about the role Hispanics played in World War II and throughout our nation's history. It is an integral part of the American story. Without these contributions and sacrifices, America would not be what it is today.