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## House of Representatives

HONORING DR. HECTOR GARCIA, RECIPIENT OF PRESI-DENTIAL MEDAL OF FREEDOM

## HON. SOLOMON P. ORTIZ

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES Monday, March 26, 1984

• Mr. ORTIZ. Mr. Speaker, when Dr. Hector Garcia was notified of his selection to receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom, his characteristically modest response was, "I'm not worthy of this honor to be considered with such people that I have respect for, both living and dead."

Despite Dr. Garcia's sincere humility, his efforts in fighting for the tradition of freedom so cherished by the country's founders are not simply a footnote in America's history. Recognizing the work of Dr. Garcia illustrates the racial inequities that have been institutionalized in our Nation. the dramatic progress made in correcting these inequities, and the great challenge ahead in maintaining and building upon past achievements.

Dr. Garcia initially became known through his work in safeguarding the rights of Hispanics. On June 16, 1945, Pvt. Felix Longoria was killed in action while serving with the 27th Infantry Division in the Philippines. After a local cemetery in Three Rivers, Tex., refused to accept Private Longoria's remains because of his Mexican descent, Dr. Garcia intervened and arranged to have Private Longoria laid to rest with full military honors in Arlington National Cemetery.

Shortly thereafter, Dr. Garcia founded the American GI Forum of the United States, a national veterans family organization composed primarily of Hispanics who are veterans or active duty service members. Dr. Garcia founded the forum with the objective of working with Government authorities to eliminate discriminatory practices towards Hispanics as well as enhancing their overall quality of life.

Since then, Dr. Garcia has molded the American GI Forum into a dynamic force in the movement for social and economic equality for Hispanic American citizens. It fact, the forum is often consulted by Federal, State and local governmental officials when considering issues which affect Hispanic Americans and veterans. Under the leadership of Dr. Garcia, the forum established the following aims and obiectives:

To develop leadership in the Spanish-speaking population by creating interest in community, civic, and political affairs:

To advance understanding among citizens of various national origins in orders to develop a more enlightened citizenry and a greater nation;

To preserve and advance the basic principles of democracy, the religious and political freedom of the individual, and equal social and economic opportunities for all Americans;

To secure and protect for all veterans and their families the privileges guaranteed to them by the Constitution and laws of the United States;

To preserve and defend the United States from all enemies through loyalty and service to our country.

The American GI Forum has not been Dr. Garcia's only contribution to this country. Prior to founding the forum, he served in the Army from 1942-46, where he was awarded a Bronze Star Medal and six battle stars. After gaining recognition in his work through the forum, Dr. Garcia was appointed by President Lyndon B. Johnson to the United Nations as a delegate in 1967 and then as a member of the Civil Rights Commission in 1968.

Dr. Garcia has been a friend to me for many years; I am particularly proud to count him as one of my constituents. Not only is he a tremendous help to me in my work as a U.S. Representative, but I can personally attest to the profound influence he has upon the State of Texas and the community of Corpus Christi in the arena of social justice.

In studying his accomplishments, we can all be assured that our system of Government is not static, but can adapt to the dynamics of a changing society. When Dr. Garcia founded the American GI Forum in 1948, few in this country were aware of discrimination against Hispanics and few were committed to improvements. Dr. Garcia brought national attention to the plight of Hispanics, awakening many Americans to the need for comprehensive social reform.

The awarding of the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Dr. Garcia indicates to all Americans the importance of his contribution to the social progress of our Nation. Several years ago, such recognition would not been possible. I join the thousands of people who have learned and benefited from Dr. Garcia's efforts in congratulating him for being selected for this prestigious award. We must all follow his example and work tirelessly in molding a better America for all people, regardless of race, culture or creed.



LINDA McCONNELL/Rocky Mountain News

I see some changes coming that are so impossible they border on cruelty. Before 1990, the Medicaid people and the (political) administration are going to tell me as a doctor when I have to let people die because of the lack of funding.

Dr. Hector P. Garcia, Gl group founder