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Dr. Hector Garcia, Distinguished Texan and Founder of the American GI Forum, Endorses Padre Island National Seashore Recreation Area

EXTENSION OF REMARKS OF

HON. RALPH W. YARBOROUGH

OF TEXAS

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

Monday, February 15, 1960

Mr. YARBOROUGH. Mr. President, thousands of Texans and many residents of many other States have announced their support of the plan to create a national seashore recreation area on Padre Island. But of all these, none of the endorsements of this project have been more colorfully stated or given me greater personal pleasure than that of Dr. Hector Garcia of Corpus Christi, Tex. There are several reasons for my gratification of Dr. Garcia's support on this undertaking. But I believe the most important to me is that I personally know from experience that in him, and in the remarkable national veterans group which he founded, we have an exceptionally capable and courageous ally. It has been my great honor and privilege to have him fighting shoulder to shoulder along with me in all of my battles for good government in Texas. He and his GI Forum members are the kind of men who will be where they say they will be, and take a stand for the right when you need them to take one. The National GI Forum is a great national patriotic organization of military service veterans of Latin origin. Dr. Garcia is an oversea American Army surgeon of World War II, with an impressive record of leadership in Texas and the Nation.

Dr. Garcia's counsel and leadership in behalf of the Padre Island National Seashore project will be a real boost to our cause. I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the Appendix of the RECORD the exceptionally clear and historically outstanding statement by Dr. Garcia, entitled "A Picturesque History of 'The White Island.'"

There being no objection, the statement was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

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A PICTURESQUE HISTORY OF "THE WHITE ISLAND"

(Statement by Dr. Hector P. Garcia of Corpus Christi, Tex., before the Senate Interior and Insular Affairs Committee favoring the proposal to establish a national shoreline park on Padre Island, Monday, December 14, 1959)

Senator FRANK MOSS, chairman of the Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs Subcommittee and other members of this committee, my name is Dr. Hector P. Garcia. I am a resident of Corpus Christi and an American citizen, and property owner on Padre Island. I am a physician by profession and have the honor of being the founder of the American GI Forum of the United States. I am representing the American GI Forum of the United States, a veterans' organization composed primarily of American veterans of Mexican origin with groups in 23 States and in the District of Columbia.

I wish to thank you gentlemen for your visit to our Texas shore and personally wish to thank you for permitting me to present my reasons why the American GI Forum favors the establishment of Padre Island as a national shoreline park.

The historical background of Padre Island is abounding with all of the excitement and adventure of the greatest of romantic novels. Padre Island is surrounded by centuries of mystery on its shores. Padre Island still has the promise and allure of hidden Spanish treasures, but more than that Padre Island is the longest island in the United States which still preserves its natural beauty as God created it.

Padre Island, an island along the Texas Gulf of Mexico coast, is approximately 120 miles long and was named after Padre Balli, a Spanish priest who found shelter and refuge from the Mexican Revolution in the early 19th century. It has been said that Padre Island has the longest and most versatile solid sand beach in the whole world.

The history of Padre Island from recorded history begins in June 1519, barely 27 years after the discovery of America when the Spanish admiral, Alonso Alvarez de Pineda, was sent by the Governor of Jamaica, Francisco de Garay, to look for a sea passage to the Orient. With four small vessels Alonso Alvarez de Pineda explored and carefully mapped the entire coast of the State of Texas and explored the Gulf of Mexico from Florida to Yucatan, and on June 24, 1519, entered the bay of where we are now meeting and named it the "La Bahia del Cuerpo de Christ!" honoring the Roman Catholic feast day of Corpus Christi. De Pineda was the first white man to see the beautiful romantic sandy island which today we call Padre Island.

In 1520, Governor Garay sent an expedition under Diego de Camargo to colonize the Rio de las Palmas which is the Rio Grande

River. A fort was built there and this gives claim to one of the oldest settlements of the United States. This fort at the Rio de las Palmas was probably close to the south tip of Padre Island. Again, in 1523, Governor Garay in person led an expedition into the present Texas coast.

Nuno de Guzman, Governor of the Province of Panuco and Victoria Garayana wherein Padre Island was located, sent his cousin Sancho de Caniedo to take possession of the Rio de las Palmas, the territory wherein Padre Island was located.

On April 15, 1528, Panfilo de Narvaez started on his expedition from Tampa Bay. With him was his Treasurer Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca. On November 6, 1528, Cabeza de Vaca became shipwrecked in Galveston Island with several of his shipmates and lived amongst the Indians for several years. Cabeza de Vaca became the first European to live on Padre Island. Cabeza de Vaca lived amongst this Texas coast until he escaped and traveled on foot reaching Culiacan, Sinaloa Mexico on May 18, 1536. The greatest Odyssey of living man happened among this island whose natural beauty we are trying to preserve.

In the month of January, year of 1553, a shipment of gold, the largest ever to leave Mexico with 1,000 passengers sailed from Veracruz. However, the ships were overcome by a hurricane and 300 living survivors out of the 1,000 were shipwrecked on Padre Island about halfway between Corpus Christi and Brazos Pass. Of all the 300 men, women, and children only 3 lived through the ordeal by the fierce Carancahuas and their long arrows. One survivor stayed with the treasure ships for 1 whole year. In 1554 Captain Angel de Villagrana was said to have recovered some of the gold. But even today the gold and silver of the Spanish galleons are awaiting someone who may be lucky to find the treasure.

And of course we still remember Robert Cavalier, Sieur de la Salle who entered Padre Island through Matagorda Bay and established the first French settlement protected by the sand dunes of Padre Island at Fort St. Louis at the Bahia del Espiritu Santo. From 1684 to 1689 the French had a claim to Texas and Padre Island also.

The Lafitte brothers (Pierre and Jean), pirates by trade, staked their hideout and headquarters along the Padre Island shores also. They left it, it is rumored, about 1821. But it is also said that they left a fortune in gold and silver in Corpus Christi pass near the Oso Creek and another valuable treasure at the mouth of the Nueces River as it flows into the Bay of Corpus Christi.

The brief sketch of Padre Island history will prove the value of the island as a national shoreline park by keeping the heritage that is so American. But there are many other reasons why we must preserve this beautiful island as it is today for the benefit of all that want to come and enjoy it.

The island is not only rich in beaches, shells, dunes, but it is the habitation for many thousands of wild animals, specially geese and ducks. It is a paradise for fishermen and a beautiful place for camping. On the south end of the island along the mainland we already have a Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, and on the other end of the island we have the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge.

We are a veterans' family organization and we feel that Padre Island should be preserved as a national shoreline park because:

First, we feel that as veterans we want all the natural beauty of our country preserved for the benefit of all its citizens. This can be done only by maintaining Padre Island as national shoreline park. We are not in favor of its beauty being marred by man-made buildings, obstacles, and fences which would not only destroy its beauty but in time would become dilapidated, worn-out, and then Padre Island would be another slum in this area. We do not want its beauty and its length blocked by big hotels and buildings which in time would take the best of the beach and leave a small beach corner for the poor people who could not afford to pay for expensive suites or cottages.

We feel, as veterans, that Padre Island as a national shoreline park would be within the means of all our citizens, poor and rich alike. We are worried that many of our poor people in this area of Texas would not be able to visit a modernized, developed, manmade Padre island beach.

We had a convention of the American GI forum here 2 years ago. We had people from California, Colorado, New Mexico, Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, Nebraska, Kansas, Utah, Arizona, Oklahoma, Missouri, Indiana, Minnesota, and many other States. We had many attractions but their greatest thrill was their visit to this primitive, enchanting, mystifying island which, by the oldtime Spaniards, was called La Isla Blanca (the White Island).

But perhaps no one can explain the beauty and the fascination of the island as well as Frank Goodwyn and perhaps the real and important reasons why Padre Island should be a national shoreline park are quoted in his book, "The Lone Star Land," by Frank Goodwyn. To quote Mr. Goodwyn:

"The camp meeting spirit is also apparent in the recreational activities of the Texas people. The 40-odd public parks under State control are equipped more for camping

and picnicking than for the combination of landscape and night club which characterizes the world's famous playgrounds elsewhere. A salient example of how the State's natural recreational assets are affected by its religious principles is the way a primitive retreat in the shadow of the southern gulf coast's booming industries has been used by Texans.

"Fronting the Gulf of Mexico with 116 miles of almost solid hard sand beach, the longest in the world, Padre Island is an exposed sandbar. The wind has done the same thing to its sand that it does to the gulf water: rolled it up in waves. The sand waves are desert dunes moving much more slowly than those of the gulf, but always moving just the same, being swept sometimes gently, sometimes severely, sometimes brutally by the everlasting trade winds. The sand is fine-grained and pure. Under the midday sun it sparkles, but in contrast to the foam caps and the clouds, it is a creamy yellow which becomes first golden then gray as the sun sinks.

"Arid and wild, Padre Island is never the same from one day to the next. Every wave, every gust of wind, gives it new contours, new esthetic effects. Sometimes its low spots are covered by water so that it becomes two islands, or three, or four. Then a fresh breeze will blow the water away and the island will become whole again. Sometimes a cluster of rough grasses will anchor the sand of a dune for awhile, and then free dunes will bend around it or bank up against the grass until they cover it. There is no certainty here, no security, no hope or permanence. All is changing and unpredictable. The only thing you can count on is that there will be more change, more sun, more wind, and more violence.

"But the island's very aridity, poverty, and primitive insecurity give it a value all of its own for Corpus Christi and the Rio Grande Valley. Two new causeways, one at each end of the island, make it possible for citizens to go there any time they wish. Travelers and natives can revert to the semi-savagery there. A working girl, having slaved for weeks in the service of civilization can bare her body to the lashing of the briny waves and the reviving ultraviolet of the sun. Under the velvet of freshly created clouds, glittering like the sea foam in the sunshine or tinted with amber and silver by the moon, she can become a cave woman again for a day, or an evening, or

at night. She can live for a few hours as Eve lived before the serpent tempted her with the knowledge of good and evil. Workingmen can take their wives and children to go temporarily wild in the sand and the sun.

"Many attempts have been made to tame and develop Padre Island to plant civilized settlements there. All have failed. If you set out domestic trees or palms there, the sand will starve their roots, the sun will suck out their sap, and the wind will blow them down. Hotels have been built between the gulf shore and the dunes of Padre. The breakers have risen without warning to crash against their walls and their joints have swollen. Their rafters have expanded and cracked in the damp air. Their roofs have caved in. They have been condemned."

Speaking of tourists, Mr. Frank Goodwyn continues:

"But most of those who come to Texas prefer the comparatively sinless and more invigorating pursuits of swimming, fishing, and camping under God's wide open sky. Padre Island, with its beaches facing both the gulf's great breakers on the east and the smooth water of the Laguna Madre Bay on the west, with its 272 different kinds of fish, with its continuous resistance to all efforts at permanent development, with its stiff winds from the Gulf Stream and its stiff laws from the State capital suits them fine."

The American GI Forum, its members, and their families and especially their children go on record wholeheartedly and enthusiastically endorsing Padre Island as National Shoreline Park. Not only are we speaking of the American GI Forum of Corpus Christi or Texas but we are speaking of the American GI Forum veterans of 23 States. We, as veterans feel that one of the things we fought for and some of our relatives died for was to preserve the natural beauty of our country and make available all of its beauty and grandeur equally to all members of this great democracy.

For many hundreds of thousands of poor citizens in this area, Padre Island is the only recreational area available to them and for many migrant workers the only vacation that they and their children have is their sojourn to the beautiful "Isla Blanca". To some of these Mexican children the only gems and jewels in their life will be the beautiful shells they will find in this, our natural land. Help us preserve this island for all the world to see and enjoy, as God created it for all of its children.

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