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Dr. Hector P. Garcia American G. I. Forum of the United States 1315 Bright Street Corpus Christi, Texas 78405

Dear Dr. Garcia:

Your efforts to prepare a memorial tribute to Gus Garcia is a great and worthy thing. Gus Garcia was the first Mexican-American lawyer leader of South Texas of modern times to win city wide office in San Antonio. He came to my attention as we served together in Japan at the close of World War II. In the immediate post-World War II years he was a militant leader; the first foremost front line fighter for justice for the Mexican-American in Texas. I can hear his eloquent voice now, perfectly bilingual with beautiful English and what those fluent in Spanish told me, was beautiful Spanish; his Spanish was beautiful to us who could understand only some of the words. He could mix the two languages together in perfect harmony; he would use words and phrases in perfect harmony, so that it flowed forth as smooth as one liquid. He was one of the most brilliant Texas orators I ever heard.

My first recollection of Gus Garcia was while we were each serving in the early days of the occupation of Japan under General Douglas MacArthur. My division (the 97th Infantry Division) had been redeployed from Europe following the surrender of Germany and we were sent to Japan for early occupation duty. We occupied the area beginning right outside the city limits of Tokoyo, under command of the Eighth Army which was headquartered in Yokohama, East of us. That was also our port of supplies.

Early in the occupation, I learned of Gus Garcia's brillance, of his serving as Judge Advocate for the Port of Yokohama (American occupied, American directed). At that time I was G-5, or the military government officer for the 97th Infantry Division, and continually heard of Gus Garcia's brillance. Our division was inactivated approximately the first of April, 1946, and I was moved to Yokohama into the

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War Crimes Section of the 8th Army Headquarters, under the command of General Eichelberger. We were then quartered in Yokohama, where Gus Garcia was the Judge Advocate for the Port of Yokohama. There I first remember meeting Gus and talking with him.

He was known to all the lawyers in service there; young, brilliant, articulate; all predicted great things of him.

We talked of the future in Texas briefly. I returned from occupation duty in June of 1946. After my return from occupation duty and Gus Garcia's return I was hearing of his brilliant progress in San Antonio as the first Mexican-American ever to be elected to the school board there.

One Saturday morning about 1948 or 1949 I met Gus Garcia on the streets of Austin as he was enroute to the noon luncheon at the State Convention of the American G. I. Forum of Texas.

After returning from overseas duty, intermittently people from over the State would come by my law office in Austin, where I was attempting to recoup from the shattering experience of closing my office and being gone three and one-half years in the Army in World War II, and urge me to reconsider public life or politics. There seemed little prospect of it then. Gus urged me to come to the meeting. It was the first invitation to come to a State wide meeting and be at the head table and be recognized, that I received in Texas following my return from overseas military duty in 1946. I went, not thinking so much of it at the time, but when we got to the Convention and I was at the head table I said, "Gus, this is unusual. I do not see the Governor, the Attorney General, or any of the dignitaries that Statewide Conventions usually invite here to your main luncheon here in Austin." He said, "Ralph, if they aren't for us, we don't invite them." It was typical of Gus Garcia's straightforward dynamic hardhitting positions, with no servility, no groveling, no pawing to kiss the foot of a Governor or sell a cause for tea in the Mansion, such as is so common among politicians in Texas.

I was impressed. Gus urged me to continue the fight that I had begun as a candidate for Attorney General in 1938. That meeting caused me to begin to think of whether I would ever again enter the Statewide political campaign. I had about decided that it was too late, following my service in World War II, my long absence from the State and the fact that it seemed that a new generation of voters were in control. The veterans of World War II and those of us who had been candidates before

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World War II seemed to have been forgotten. Gus Garcia's generous invitation and generous and stirring introduction did have an influence in my political actions and thinking as they evolved over the years.

There were many other instances over the years as he told me his life history, as he presented to me a rifle following the stealing of a Statewide Governor's race from me in Texas, and other meetings.

One public meeting with Gus that I particularly remember was the runoff campaign for the Governorship of Texas in 1954. We held the first open rally in Laredo in the 1954 runoff by a gubernatorial candidate since Pat Neff had been a candidate for Governor thirty years earlier, challenging the machine that ruled Laredo. Gus Garcia introduced me. A lady from East Texas who was completely bilingual sat on my right of the platform. Most of the crowd of 1500 to 2000 were Mexican-American veterans and knew that Gus and I had been veterans and had served together under General MacArthur in Japan. As Gus Garcia ripped the opposition with stirring sentences in Spanish part of which I could understand and part of which I could not, I asked the bilingual lady on my right, who was from my old hometown in East Texas, what Gus was saying. She merely smiled. He was talking so fast that I could not catch it and after about the third question, she said, "Well, he has tamed his language down now and he is only calling them skunks and rattlesnakes".

During the course of that rally a giant Chinese bomb was exploded within ten feet of the back of our platform and a giant cross was rolled up behind us. I saw the crowd staring back there but I would not turn around and look. All of these actions, the bomb and the cross were done under the protection of the police department, which was a part of the Laredo machine. They lighted and burned a great fiery cross twelve feet high right behind our platform which lighted up that part of Laredo. This was to intimidate the voters. I was told that a fiery cross in Laredo meant something a little different from a cross-burning in the Klu Klux controlled areas of some parts of the South; there in Laredo the fiery cross meant that if you went for the man speaking, you had crossed the Rubican, you had burned your bridges behind you, and to expect nothing else from those in power. It was an intimidation measure directed at the voters.

Later Gus and others advised us that the explosion of this mammoth Chinese bomb with that great roar, was meant to panic the crowd and cause them to flee the grounds, but most of the men in the crowd were veterans of combat in World War II and knew what real steel bombs were, not mere paper ones like a Chinese bomb. They knew the difference and not one panicked, not one moved an inch, all sat rigid through it all.

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I will never forget my last visit with Gus. He came to my office in the United States Senate Office Building, presented me with a copy of W. W. Sterlings Memoirs of the Texas Rangers and wrote in it several pages in long hand about his family in South Texas, and the history of that area, of which family history and South Texas history, he was extremely proud.

Gus Garcia was like a shooting star. He was a meteor in the sky. Other Mexican-American leaders have risen in Texas, but none whom I have heard since had that brilliant flash of oratory, that stroke of near genius, that fired Gus Garcia. It also seared his soul, because progress for his people was not as fast as he dreamed and hoped and advocated it to be.

He was a pioneer for justice for his people with the militant, brilliant, incisive ortary to both Anglos and Mexican-Americans, always pushing forward beyond the bounds of things as they were, reaching for things as they ought to be, deeming nothing impossible and in that reaching beyond the bounds of men in that decade, he stretched so far that he joined the stars.

Thank you for preparing a tribute to him; leader of men, and leader of Mexican-Americans; you, knowing his Latin American soul and feelings can do it. It requires someone who feels those feelings and the soul of a brilliant, completely bilingual, well-educated in both cultures, Mexican-American, to do him justice. He is worthy of your time, your study, your tribute. I hope to hear it in person or see a copy of it in print when you have finished it.

Sincerely your friend,

Aph W. Aarborough

RWY:jmv

P.S. Dr. Hector, pardon this delay. We had a complete change of staff in my office the first of June. The present secretary who came in the first of June had not worked in a law office before and it took about a month for us to get all the files and matter straightened out. I will be forever embarrassed about this delay. I am hopeful that it is not too late, but the change of staff prevented my earlier rendering unto this Great Spirit the things that this Great Spirit earned and deserved.

RWY

R.W. Harles reeg