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PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 111th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

House of Representatives

TRIBUTE TO
PRIVATE FELIX LONGORIA

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THE HONORABLE
JOE BACA

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EXTENSION OF REMARKS

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February 13, 2009

Madame Speaker, I stand here today to honor the 60th Anniversary of WWII Private Felix Longoria, the first Mexican American to be buried at the Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, DC.

Private Felix Z. Longoria was drafted into the United States Army on November 11, 1944, at the age of 25 from Three Rivers, Texas.

While on a voluntary patrol on June 1945, Private Longoria was killed in action by a Japanese sniper in Cagayan Valley, Luzon, Philippines. He posthumously received the Purple Heart, the Bronze Star, the Good Conduct Medal, and the Combat Infantryman Badge for his service and sacrifice.

Sadly in 1945, when the remains of Private Longoria were finally identified and returned back to the United States, Beatrice Longoria, the widow of Private Felix Longoria, was turned away and unable to hold a funeral service for her deceased husband at a private funeral home in Three Rivers, Texas. At the time, the city of Three Rivers' sole cemetery was divided by a barbed wire fence, into two sections, one for whites and another for non-whites.

This act of discrimination moved Beatrice Longoria to contact Dr. Hector P. Garcia a surgeon general of the area, and the founder of the newly created American GI Forum.

Dr. Hector P. Garcia sent out seventeen telegrams to elected and government officials, which stated "the denial was a direct contradiction of those same

principles for which this American soldier made the supreme sacrifice in giving his life for his country, and for the same people who deny him the last funeral rites deserving of any American hero regardless of his origin".

Just recently founded during that time on March 26, 1948, the American GI Forum and its founder, Dr. Hector P. Garcia launched a civil rights movement to help the Longoria family.

Then a junior United States Senator, Lyndon B. Johnson, on January 11, 1949, sent a telegram to Dr. Hector P. Garcia that read "...I have today made arrangements to have Felix Longoria buried with full military honors in Arlington National Cemetery here in Washington where, the honored dead of our nation' war rest... This injustice and prejudice is deplorable. I am happy to have a part seeing that this Texas hero is laid to rest with the honor and dignity his services deserve,".

Thanks to the AGIF, Dr. Garcia and Senator Johnson, Private Felix Longoria became the first Mexican American serviceman to be awarded this honor. On February 16, 1949, Private Felix Longoria was given a full military burial with honors in Arlington National Cemetery. The Longoria family was joined at the service by United States Senator Lyndon B. Johnson, Lady Bird Johnson, Congressman John Lyle and President Harry Truman's' military aide, General Harry H. Vaughan.

The work and legacy of the late Dr. Hector P. Garcia and the American GI Forum that he founded, still continues to this day, in the name of all Veterans and Hispanics in the United States.

February 16, 2009 marks the 60th anniversary of the burial of Private Felix Longoria, the first Mexican American servicemen to be awarded this honor. On this day, I encourage all Americans to remember the great sacrifices made by our American heroes in all the conflicts in the history of the United States.