

Washington, DC - This evening, Congressman Charles Gonzalez will honor the contributions made by Hispanic Americans to our nation during the Second World War in a speech during a special order session of the United States House of Representatives. His remarks pay tribute to the half million Hispanic Americans who courageously "fought for our country even as the schools they attended, jobs they worked, wages they earned, and living conditions they tolerated reflected systematic inequality that denied them full rights of citizenship."

Below is an embargoed copy of Congressman Gonzalez's remarks, as prepared for delivery:

Madam Speaker, It is my pleasure today to participate in this special order honoring Hispanic veterans of the Second World War. As we have already heard, the contributions made by Hispanic Americans to the war effort against the Axis powers were significant. A half million Hispanics served, and I fear their contributions are often forgotten. It is important that all Americans, including Hispanics, enjoy recognition and our historical dialogues commensurate with the contributions they make to our nation. When we fail to be inclusive, our histories are incomplete; they are half truths. We owe it to past and future generations to make our histories whole. When history is complete, it is also fair and just. Today I am honored to make a small contribution to our country's WWII dialogue on behalf of the war's Hispanic veterans in hopes that their stories come to occupy a place in history proportionate to their service and sacrifice.

Like their African American brothers-in-arms, Hispanic Americans served the United States in WWII with honor and distinction despite the fact that they had yet to enjoy the full fruits of the Liberty they defended. At that time, most of the services offered to the American public by our national, state, and local governments were segregated between whites and minorities, including Hispanics. But despite the fact that the services to which they were entitled were often withheld or inferior, Hispanics did not withhold their service to American people. They fought for our country even as the schools they attended, jobs they worked, wages they earned and living conditions they tolerated reflected systematic

inequality that denied them full rights of citizenship.

Despite the inequality endured by Hispanic veterans before and after WWII, their stories of courage and heroism during that troubling time are the equal of any that can be told. I regret that I have time to share with you the story of but one of the hundreds of thousands of Hispanic veterans who so courageously defended the liberty of humankind during our planet's darkest hour.

The Honorable Mike Machado enjoyed a lengthy career of public service to the United States, to his state of Texas, and to the residents of his beloved home, San Antonio.

He was born in San Antonio on September 4, 1923 and attended Sidney Lanier High School, where he excelled as a student athlete.

Like so many young men of his generation, Mr. Machado entered service to his country during the earliest days of adulthood by enlisting in the United States Army Air Corps at 17. He

became a nose gunner on a B-24 battling the Luftwaffe over the skies of Nazi-occupied Europe. By the summer of 1944, he had flown over 40 missions.

On June 13, 1944, Mr. Machado's B-24 was heavily damaged over Munich. Despite the desperate nature of their situation, the crew stayed with their aircraft rather than parachute into enemy hands. Mr. Machado and his comrades crossed the border into northern Italy before they were forced to make a crash landing. Upon impact, fire engulfed the B-24. Mr. Machado carried two of his fellow airmen to safety that day, saving them from the flames. In the process he received severe burns to his upper body and arms that would limit the use of his hands for the rest of his life.

The French underground provided sanctuary for Mr. Machado over the following months - hiding him from Nazi forces and eventually securing his return to the U.S. Army. His strength and resilience, combined with the rudimentary medical care provided by his French companions, allowed him to survive his injuries from fire and flack.

After his return to the U.S. Army, he began a 36-month-long recuperation at Beaumont General Hospital in El Paso. The ordeal included 23 skin graft operations that only partially repaired the injuries incurred during his heroic rescue efforts.

Mr. Machado's story of heroism does not end with his discharge from the Army. His injuries did not deter him from his pursuit of an education in Law and a career of public service as a city attorney and judge in municipal and state district courts.

Mr. Machado used the GI bill to enroll at St. Mary's University and graduated from St. Mary's University Law School in 1952. He soon became a prosecutor. In 1957 he was appointed as a municipal court judge, where he served for 20 years.

In 1977 he became a judge for the newly created 227th State District Court. The same year he was honored by Pope Paul VI with a knighthood in the Pontifical Order of St. Gregory the Great. He served as a district judge for 21 years, until the time of his death.

When he died on July 29, 1998, Mr. Machado had amassed over a half century of public service to our country as an airman, prosecutor, municipal and district judge. He was just shy of his 75th birthday and would have been retired from the bench as Texas law required on September 4th of that year.

While Texas law mandated his retirement from the judicial branch, it could not squelch Mr. Machado's desire to serve the public. Prior to the brain aneurysm that took his life, he had announced his candidacy for district attorney in Bexar County on the Democratic ticket.

Mr. Machado was highly regarded in my community, as evidenced by the over 1000 mourners that attended his funeral. As judge, he married hundreds of San Antonio couples. He welcomed the public into his chambers with open arms-often quite literally-and made himself available to individuals in need of help. Even ex-convicts that had been sentenced by Mr. Machado sought his advice at times. He was a man of the people, a man who befriended all

types.

I am honored to have had the opportunity to share with you the story of Mike Machado, a courageous man and servant of his country. Mr. Rodriguez, who organized this opportunity to recount the bravery of Hispanic veterans of WWII, should be commended for his efforts today and in the past to recognize and remember these servicemen, including Mike Machado.

As I indicated earlier, we do not offer these orders solely to highlight the virtues of specific individuals. We realize that, as Mr. Machado's son, Mike M. Machado Jr., has said of his dad:

"My father...and many more of [his] generation would be embarrassed at the prospect of receiving special attention for doing what they considered to be a privilege-serving this great country."

When we honor individuals like Mike Machado, we honor a symbol of something more. We honor them because their service symbolizes the courage and sacrifice to which the Hispanic community and the nation at large aspire. We honor the service of Hispanic veterans of WWII specifically today in order to solidify their place in WWII history and ensure that their patriotic virtues receive the appreciation they deserve. That Mr. Machado and hundreds of thousands of his fellow WWII veterans, Hispanic and non-Hispanic alike, look back on their valiant service to our country as a privilege and an honor is an inspiration to all Americans. Let our recognition of their sacrifices motivate us also to a greater appreciation of the diverse contributions made during WWII by Americans of all races and ethnicities.