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House of Representatives

A TRIBUTE IN RECOGNITION OF THE EXTRAORDINARY AND HISTORIC CONTRIBUTIONS OF TWO COMMERCE ATHLETES, BRENDA VILLA AND PATTY CARDENAS, TO THE SPORT OF U.S. WOMEN'S WATER POLO

MS. ROYBAL-ALLARD. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize and commend two extraordinary athletes who are members of the United States Women's Water Polo Team competing in the Games of the XXIX Olympiad in Beijing, China. In addition to being first-generation Mexican American Latina trailblazers in the world of competitive water polo, both of these exceptional women call the City of Commerce, in the 34th Congressional District, their home.

As children, Brenda Villa and Patty Cardenas learned to play water polo and hone their skills at the local swimming club, Commerce Aquatics. Looking back on their introduction to the sport, Brenda, now 28, and Patty, 23, credit the City of Commerce and the club's dedicated coaches for encouraging and developing their interest in water polo.

Today, in a \$20 million facility built to Olympic specifications, the city continues to encourage young people – the future Brendas and Pattys – to participate and excel in water polo. In addition to employing two full-time and three part-time youth water polo coaches and allocating more than \$250,000 a year on its programs, the City of Commerce also covers participants' competition-related expenses. These expenses might otherwise prevent the community's economically disadvantaged youth from participating in tournaments.

After Commerce Aquatics, Brenda and Patty continued to play water polo at Bell Gardens High School.

When Brenda entered high school in the fall of 1994, the school did not have a girls water polo team. With Brenda competing alongside and against the male players, the Bell Gardens Boys Water Polo Team won four consecutive league championships and back-to-back California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) Division III championships.

In the fall of 1998, following Brenda's graduation, the younger Patty entered Bell Gardens High School just in time to join the school's newly-formed Girls Water Polo Team. At that point, CIF rules prohibited Patty from playing on the Boys Water Polo

Team. With Patty as part of the high school's first girls team, the female players went on to win four consecutive CIF Championships.

Following high school, both women would go on to realize their dreams of playing competitive women's water polo in college and in the Olympics.

At Stanford University, Brenda took a leave of absence to train with the Olympic Women's National Team for the 2000 Olympic debut of the women's water polo competition in Sydney, Australia. The team won the Silver Medal. Two years later, Brenda was awarded the Peter J. Cutino Award, an honor given annually to the top female collegiate water polo player in the nation. In 2004, as a member of the U.S. Women's National Water Polo Team at the Athens Olympics, Brenda and her teammates took home the Bronze Medal.

Between Olympic Games, Brenda achieved another victory. In 2003, when she graduated from Stanford with a degree in Political Science, she became the first member of her family to earn a college degree.

Patty stayed closer to home after high school. She enrolled at Golden West Community College in Huntington Beach, California. There, Patty helped her team win the 2002 California State Championship. In 2005, Patty transferred to the University of Southern California where, for the past couple of years, she has trained on the U.S. National Women's Polo Team.

The Summer Olympics in Beijing will be Patty's first Olympic competition and Brenda's third. This time, with both Commerce athletes on the same team, they hope to work together with their other teammates to bring home the Gold.

Madam Speaker, on behalf of the 34th Congressional District and the state of California, I ask my colleagues to join me in congratulating Brenda and Patty on their incredible achievements and extending to them and their teammates our best wishes for a victorious trip to the Beijing Summer Olympics. I can assure you, regardless of how the team places, these two remarkable athletes will always be champions to their many devoted fans in the City of Commerce. They are among our hometown heroes, and we are very proud of them – in and out of the pool.

