

Remarks: Memorial Day Tribute

Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard
Cinco Puntos – Boyle Heights
May 26, 2008

“Good Morning. It is a privilege to join you in paying homage to our countrymen and women who made the ultimate sacrifice on behalf of our great nation.

On Memorial Day, we honor all our country’s heroes. But in this community we also have special pride in the brave men and women from Boyle Heights who courageously served our nation and made the ultimate sacrifice.

I commend the organizers of our 24-hour Memorial vigil. Our vigil, the only one of its kind in the country, is a reflection of our pride in the service of our fallen and a symbol of how our community places the utmost value on patriotism, honor, and service to our nation.

As you know, one of those heroes is Private First Class Eugene Obregon from Boyle Heights. To ensure that his sacrifice, and the sacrifice of the other 39 Latino Medal of Honor recipients is remembered, The Eugene A. Obregon Congressional Medal of Honor Memorial Foundation was created to finance and construct a monument in Downtown Los Angeles with the names of all 40 recipients.

On the side of the memorial will be engraved the words, “conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty”.

During this time of tribute to our men and women in uniform, I would also like to mention the outcome of last years fight to ensure that the World War II PBS Documentary, entitled, “The War”, included the contributions and sacrifices made by Latinos in defense of our country.

Thanks to your advocacy and that of many supporters across the nation, Director Ken Burns added the stories of two Latino WWII veterans to his documentary. One of those stories was of Bill Lansford from East L.A.

While the final documentary still fell short of what we had hoped for, there are indications our collective efforts are having an impact. For example, in response to the outcry surrounding the omission of Latinos in original documentary, PBS has created a new position on diversity initiatives in programming, to ensure the contributions of Latinos, and all groups that make our nation great, are included in future projects. As we pay tribute to those who have fallen in defense of our nation, it is also important that we never forget our sacred commitment and responsibility to our returning veterans and equally important, their families.

To that end, I am pleased to report that the House of Representatives and the Senate have passed a new GI Bill to restore full, four -year scholarships to veterans of the Iraq

and Afghanistan wars. The legislation will likely be sent to the President in the coming weeks. We hope he will sign the bill for it will mark a historic increase in funding to expand the education benefits of the GI Bill. As was the case with our veterans of WWII, these educational scholarships will be critical for enabling our returning troops to be part of our nation's economic recovery.

Also noteworthy, last year Congress provided the largest increase in funding for veteran's health care in the 77-year history of the VA.

These successes, coupled with the efforts of our own community such as the Eugene A. Obregon Congressional Medal of Honor Memorial Foundation and our forward movement with PBS, are a critical part of the mosaic of advocacy that honors our men and women in uniform and those who have made the ultimate sacrifice on behalf of our country and our democratic way of life.

On this Memorial Day, I would like to close by remembering the more than 4,500 U.S. warriors who have fallen in Iraq and Afghanistan since March 2003. This number includes 492 Californians – 35 of whom are from our own Los Angeles communities.

Please join me in honoring them, their families and all our nation's heroes with a moment of silence. THANK YOU

May we always be inspired by their courage and resolve that freedom can triumph over tyranny and terrorism. May God bless you, our troops, and the United States of America."

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