

American GI Forum celebrates 59 years of serving Hispanic veterans

By Patrick Ygnacio
The University Star

The San Marcos chapter of the American GI Forum celebrated its 59th year of service to Hispanics and veterans of the community Sunday at Cuauhtémoc Hall. U.S. Representative Lloyd Doggett, D-TX, was on hand to deliver the opening speech and answer questions about the condition of veterans' health administration hospitals within the district.

"It seems to me that given its history of involvement of fighting discrimination at home, the attitude of the American GI Forum has not been, 'my country, right or wrong,' but the higher patriotic calling of, 'my country, I will right the wrongs that I see within it,'" Doggett said.

The San Marcos GI Forum was one of the first chapters established in 1948 dedicated to "addressing problems of discrimination and inequities endured by Hispanic veterans."

Mayor Susan Narvaiz was among those attendees who publicly voiced their support for the organization. Both Doggett and Narvaiz arrived early to exchange greetings with various members and officers of the GI Forum.

The ceremony began with a brief prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance, given by Augustin Lucio Jr., longstanding forum member who earned a Silver Star for his service on the beaches of

Normandy.

Prior to Doggett's speech, University President Denise Trauth expressed her support for the forum and Narvaiz read an official statement proclaiming March as American GI Forum Month.

In his speech, Doggett briefly touched on the current military conflict in Iraq and discussed the needed support for the thousands of troops currently serving abroad.

"To me, 'support our troops' means listening to sound military advice and not sending our troops off unless they have the equipment, the number of troops and all that they need in order to be successful," Doggett said.

In response to the recent discovery of the lack of proper care at veterans' health administration facilities nationwide, Doggett discussed the importance of the healthcare, not only for those currently serving, but also for those who have returned home. Doggett said providing consistent follow-up care for returning soldiers is crucial to offering genuine support for American troops.

Following a brief question-and-answer session over the legislative progressions aimed at addressing this problem, attendees were invited to stay and enjoy refreshments and meet with one another. Mendez encouraged anyone interested in joining the GI forum to pick up an application and made note of the need

for younger members.

Mendez said it was a dream of the original founder, Hector P. Garcia, to have chapters at every major university in the country. Sylvia Garza, chairwoman of the women's section of the GI forum in San Marcos, said families of veterans should become proactive in the ongoing work of older members of the forum. There is a lot of work to be done, Garza said, and there is a need for younger generations to work toward taking over the leadership of the organization in the near future.

"The younger generation can promote the cause by joining and by taking the leadership because men that are already in the forum are too old and they are ready to retire," Garza said. "Some of them are close to 80."

In addition to providing support and recognition of war veterans and their families, the San Marcos chapter of the GI Forum conducts various community events. These include fund-raisers to help the organization's scholarships that are given out every year. With matching grants from different organizations, the San Marcos GI forum awards approximately \$14,000 in scholarships to local students every year, Garza said.

Lucio, Hays County's most decorated veteran, is still an active member in the GI forum. Lucio said his time in the military provided him with many educational

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experiences, but an education achieved in school should still be a priority for anyone interested in military service.

"People can educate other people by being educated themselves," Lucio said.

Aside from providing educational assistance to college students, the GI forum is actively involved in addressing concerns that are presented on a national level.

Just recently, the National

American GI Forum initiated a boycott of the Public Broadcasting System in response to a yet-to-be-aired World War II documentary. According to a press release from the national forum, producers of the Ken Burns documentary, *The War*, failed to acknowledge the "Latino WWII experience" and the major contributions the Hispanic community provided during the war. The official press release calls for support from various organi-

zations by "demanding that PBS correct this injustice" and asks donors to "question the discriminatory practices of the present administration of PBS."

The San Marcos chapter of the American GI Forum conducts meetings on the second Wednesday of each month and is currently accepting applications for membership. The local headquarters for the San Marcos chapter are located at 415 S. Mitchell St.