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SCR-38 Memorial highways. (2015-2016)

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Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 38

CHAPTER 111

Relative to memorial highways.

[Filed with Secretary of State July 16, 2015.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SCR 38, Roth. Memorial highways.

This measure would designate a specified portion of State Highway Route 91 in the County of Riverside as the Staff Sergeant Salvador J. Lara, Staff Sergeant Ysmael R. Villegas, and Sergeant Jesus S. Duran Memorial Highway. The measure would request the Department of Transportation to determine the cost of appropriate signs showing this special designation and, upon receiving donations from nonstate sources covering that cost, to erect those signs.

Fiscal Committee: yes

WHEREAS, Staff Sergeant Salvador J. Lara was born in Riverside, California, in 1920 and is survived by his niece Vivian Hernandez and his brother Alfonzo. Alfonzo accepted the Medal of Honor on behalf of his late brother from President Barack Obama during a White House ceremony held on March 18, 2014. Staff Sergeant Lara died on September 1, 1945, and is buried at the Lorraine American Cemetery and Memorial in Saint-Avold, Moselle, France; and

WHEREAS, Staff Sergeant Lara was one of 24 veterans awarded the Medal of Honor through the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2002 (Public Law 107-107) which called for a review of Jewish American and Hispanic American veterans from World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War to ensure that Jewish American and Hispanic American veterans deserving the Medal of Honor were not subject to prejudice; and

WHEREAS, Then-Private First Class Salvador J. Lara distinguished himself by acts of gallantry and intrepidity for his valorous actions in Aprilia, Italy, May 27-28, 1944. During the fight on May 27, he aggressively led his rifle squad in neutralizing multiple enemy strong points and inflicting large numbers of casualties on the enemy. The next morning, as his company resumed the attack, Private First Class Lara sustained a severe leg wound, but did not stop to receive first aid. Private First Class Lara continued his exemplary performance until he captured his objective; and

WHEREAS, Private First Class Lara's extraordinary heroism and selflessness above and beyond the call of duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Army and demonstrated his ability and leadership as the squad leader of a rifle squad with the 2nd Platoon, Company L, 180th Infantry, 45th Infantry Division during combat operations against a determined enemy; and

WHEREAS, Private First Class Lara achieved the rank of Staff Sergeant and was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross (upgraded to the Medal of Honor on March 18, 2014), the Bronze Star, the Purple Heart, the Army Good Conduct Medal, the

European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with two Bronze Service Stars, the World War II Victory Medal, the Presidential Unit Citation, the Combat Infantryman Badge, and the Honorable Service Lapel Button–World War II; and WHEREAS, Staff Sergeant Ysmael “Smiley” R. Villegas was a Mexican American who was born on March 21, 1924, and raised in the Casa Blanca neighborhood in the City of Riverside, California. On October 19, 1945, President Harry S. Truman posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor to Staff Sergeant Villegas, presenting the medal to his surviving family. Staff Sergeant Villegas was the first Riverside County resident to ever receive the Medal of Honor and the first veteran to be buried at the Riverside National Cemetery when the cemetery opened in 1978; and

WHEREAS, On March 1, 1945, Staff Sergeant Villegas’ company found itself engaged in combat against Japanese forces at the Villa Verde Trail on the island of Luzon in the Philippines, in what is known today as the Battle of Luzon. His squad was attacked by an enemy machine gun nest. Staff Sergeant Villegas took it upon himself to save his squad by destroying the nest and its occupants. For these actions, Villegas was awarded the Silver Star; and

WHEREAS, On March 20, 1945, Staff Sergeant Villegas was leading his squad at Villa Verde Trail in Luzon in the Philippines, his unit advancing in a forward position, when they suddenly clashed with a strongly entrenched group of Japanese soldiers who commanded the surrounding area and were hiding in caves and foxholes. Staff Sergeant Villegas moved boldly from man to man, in the face of bursting grenades and demolition charges, through heavy machinegun and rifle fire, to bolster the spirit of his comrades. Inspired by his gallantry, his men pressed forward to the crest of the hill. Numerous enemy riflemen, refusing to flee, continued firing from their foxholes; and

WHEREAS, Staff Sergeant Villegas upon his own initiative attacked five enemy foxholes, killing all of the occupants, and was mortally wounded when he attacked the sixth foxhole. Through his heroism and indomitable fighting spirit, Staff Sergeant Villegas inspired his men to a determined attack that swept the enemy from the field; and

WHEREAS, The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) named Post 184 in Riverside, California, the “Ysmael R. Villegas Memorial Casa Blanca Post” in his honor. A statue by sculptor Gary Courter, called Villegas Memorial, was dedicated on May 27, 1995, and is located on Main Street Civic Center Courtyard in the City of Riverside. The Ysmael R. Villegas Middle School in the City of Riverside is named in his honor; and

WHEREAS, Staff Sergeant Villegas was survived by his mother and father, and by five brothers and six sisters. In 2014, at a memorial service to commemorate the Mexican American veterans from the historic Casa Blanca community in the City of Riverside, five of Villegas’ sisters and one brother were in attendance: Rafaela, Lottie, Helen, Martha, Pat, and Art; and

WHEREAS, Staff Sergeant Villegas was also awarded the Silver Star, the Purple Heart, the American Campaign Medal, the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal, the World War II Victory Medal, and the Philippine Liberation Medal; and

WHEREAS, Sergeant Jesus S. Duran was born on July 26, 1948, in Juarez, Mexico, and was the sixth of 12 siblings. He passed away on February 17, 1977, and is survived by his daughter Tina Duran-Ruvalcaba, who accepted the Medal of Honor on his behalf from President Barack Obama on March 18, 2014, in a ceremony at the White House. The following day, she received the Medal of Honor flag from Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel in a ceremony where Sergeant Duran was inducted into the Pentagon Hall of Heroes; and

WHEREAS, Sergeant Duran, like Staff Sergeant Lara, was one of 24 veterans awarded the Medal of Honor through the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2002; and

WHEREAS, Sergeant Duran joined the United States Army on May 13, 1968, and was assigned to Company E, 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) to support Search and Destroy missions. During his service in the Vietnam War, Sergeant Duran distinguished himself during combat operations against an armed enemy in the Republic of Vietnam on April 10, 1969; and

WHEREAS, On that afternoon, upon learning that two seriously wounded troopers lay helplessly pinned down under harassing fire, then-Specialist Four Jesus S. Duran assaulted the suppressive enemy positions, firing deadly bursts on the run. Mounting his weapon on a log, he fired directly into the enemy’s foxholes, eliminating four and cutting down several others as they fled; and

WHEREAS, Specialist Four Duran then continued to pour effective fire on the disorganized and fleeing enemy. His extraordinary heroism and selflessness above and beyond the call of duty, as well as his acts of gallantry and intrepidity, were in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army; and

WHEREAS, Jesus S. Duran achieved the rank of Sergeant and, upon leaving the military, pursued a career as a corrections officer at a juvenile detention center in the City of San Bernardino, California. While working there, he dedicated numerous hours of personal time to mentor youth and lead them on educational trips. Sergeant Duran married twice and had two children. He loved spending time with all of his family; and

WHEREAS, Sergeant Duran also received the Bronze Star Medal, the Air Medal, the Army Good Conduct Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, the Vietnam Service Medal with four Bronze Service Stars, the Combat Infantryman Badge, the Sharpshooter Marksmanship Badge with Auto Rifle and the Browning Automatic Rifle "BAR" Machine Gun, the Marksman Marksmanship Badge with Rifle Bar, the Vietnam Campaign Medal with 1960 Device, and the Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross Unit Citations with Palm Device; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate of the State of California, the Assembly thereof concurring, That the Legislature hereby designates that portion of State Highway Route 91 from Madison Street to Third Street in the County of Riverside as the Staff Sergeant Salvador J. Lara, Staff Sergeant Ysmael R. Villegas, and Sergeant Jesus S. Duran Memorial Highway; and be it further

Resolved, That the Department of Transportation is requested to determine the cost of appropriate signs consistent with the signing requirements for the state highway system showing this special designation and, upon receiving donations from nonstate sources sufficient to cover the cost, to erect those signs; and be it further

Resolved, That the Secretary of the Senate transmit copies of this resolution to the Director of Transportation and to the author for appropriate distribution.