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A JOINT MEMORIAL

EXPRESSING THE CONDOLENCE OF THE SENATE UPON THE PASSING OF
LOUIS RICHARD ROCCO.

WHEREAS, Louis Richard Rocco was born on November 19,
1938 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The firstborn of eight
siblings, he grew up in rough and poor surroundings in the
valley; and

WHEREAS, he had a very eventful life, and in 1974, he
became a "south valley hero"; and

WHEREAS, his parents signed a waiver so that he could
join the United States army at the age of seventeen, and the
military became his career. Eventually, he retired after
twenty-two years as chief warrant officer and after serving
two tours of duty in Vietnam, in 1965 through 1966 and again
in 1969 through 1970, and another tour of duty during
operation desert storm in 1991 through 1992; and

WHEREAS, in 1974, Warrant Officer Louis Richard Rocco
received the congressional medal of honor from President
Gerald R. Ford, the first medal of honor presented by
President Ford to a living Hispanic soldier for "unparalleled
bravery in the face of enemy fire and his performance far
above and beyond the call of duty"; and

WHEREAS, he was awarded that medal for his act of
bravery in South Vietnam, when he volunteered to assist a
medical team whose mission it was to evacuate eight severely
wounded soldiers, and, under intense enemy fire and
disregarding his own safety, he identified and placed accurate
suppressive fire on the enemy as the rescue aircraft descended
toward the landing zone. The team's helicopter crashed, but
Rocco rescued his comrades, carrying them to safety through
twenty meters of hostile enemy fire; and

1 WHEREAS, he himself was severely wounded, suffering
2 burns over most of his body, a fractured wrist and hip and a
3 severely bruised back, and it was two days before rescuers
4 were able to land and take the survivors in for medical help;
5 and

6 WHEREAS, medal of honor recipients are humbled by the
7 realization that they are symbolizing many, many brave
8 soldiers who make uncommon sacrifices on the field of battle,
9 and Rocco's personal condition for accepting the honor was
10 that he would spend the rest of his life and energy helping
11 those veterans and their children who were less fortunate
12 than he; and

13 WHEREAS, he kept his promise by returning to New Mexico,
14 where he became a constant, positive force in the lives of
15 troubled veterans in the years following the war; and from
16 Costilla to Las Cruces, many New Mexico veterans were in some
17 way touched or helped by Louis Richard Rocco; and

18 WHEREAS, Louis Richard Rocco was the first Hispanic
19 Vietnam veteran appointed to serve as director of the
20 New Mexico veterans' service commission; and

21 WHEREAS, he established the New Mexico Vietnam veterans
22 outreach center, helped pass laws enabling veterans to attend
23 state schools without having to pay for tuition or books,
24 requested that veterans centers come into New Mexico and
25 service our veterans, helped acquire Tingley hospital in
 Truth or Consequences and turned it into an assisted-living
 and nursing home for veterans, and established "vet help" for
 homeless veterans and their families; and

 WHEREAS, Louis Richard's own life experiences gave him
 the patience and wisdom to be a "big brother" and to show
 concern for youths who were experiencing what he had been
 through as a youngster on the streets and in gangs and to

1 encourage them to take a better road than the one he had
2 traveled in his youth;

3 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE
4 STATE OF NEW MEXICO that condolences be extended to the
5 family and friends of Louis Richard Rocco, a loving and
6 devoted New Mexican who, before he died of cancer on October
7 31, 2002, fulfilled his promise to dedicate his life to
8 helping veterans; and

9 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that, if a state park is
10 designated in Angel Fire, it be named the Louis Richard Rocco
11 state park. _____

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