

HOUSE FLOOR SUBSTITUTE FOR
HOUSE JOINT MEMORIAL 23

46TH LEGISLATURE - STATE OF NEW MEXICO - FIRST SESSION, 2003

A JOINT MEMORIAL

EXPRESSING THE CONDOLENCE OF THE LEGISLATURE 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

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

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

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

20 WHEREAS, medal of honor recipients are humbled by the
21 realization that they are symbolizing many, many brave soldiers
22 who make uncommon sacrifices on the field of battle, and
23 Rocco's personal condition for accepting the honor was that he
24 would spend the rest of his life and energy helping those
25 veterans and their children who were less fortunate than he;

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1 and

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

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

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

18 WHEREAS, Louis Richard's own life experiences gave him the
19 patience and wisdom to be a "big brother" and to show concern
20 for youths who were experiencing what he had been through as a
21 youngster on the streets and in gangs and to encourage them to
22 take a better road than the one he had traveled in his youth;

23 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE
24 STATE OF NEW MEXICO that condolences be extended to the family
25 and friends of Louis Richard Rocco, a loving and devoted New

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1 Mexican who, before he died of cancer on October 31, 2002,
2 fulfilled his promise to dedicate his life to helping veterans;
3 and

4 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that, if a state park is designated
5 in Angel Fire, it be named the Louis Richard Rocco state park.