



CONGRESSIONAL HISPANIC CAUCUS

117th Congress

August 23, 2021

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The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin
Secretary of Defense
Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

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Dear Secretary Austin and Members of the Renaming Commission:

As Members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC), we write to you as a follow up to our previous letter concerning your historic task of renaming nine Department of Defense (DoD) Army installations. The CHC strongly believes that greater diversity and representation must extend to the installations and facilities that our servicemembers call home. The CHC's advocacy is focused in particular on ensuring that Ft. Hood in Texas—a state where Latinos make up nearly half of the population¹—is named after a Latino or Latina hero.

While the CHC's first recommendation is to rename Ft. Hood after Master Sergeant Roy Benavidez, the CHC understands that MSG Benavidez's background in special forces makes Ft. Bragg a stronger fit. For this reason, the CHC supports renaming Ft. Bragg after MSG Benavidez, but wishes to strongly convey the importance of also ensuring that Ft. Hood is named after a Latino or Latina hero. The CHC supports these additional recommendations:

Our recommendation is for Ft. Hood to be renamed after General Richard E. Cavazos, the first Mexican-American to reach the rank of four-star general. General Cavazos was raised in Kingsville, Texas, and served as a previous commander of III Corps headquartered at Ft. Hood. He overcame racism and other obstacles throughout his 33 years of service and eventually led the U.S. Army Forces Command, making him one of the highest-ranked Army officials of his time. General Cavazos' leadership and valor earned him the Silver Star and Distinguished Service Cross awards for leading the famed Hispanic regiment, "The Borinqueneers," during the Korean War. He also received the Distinguished Service Cross award for exposing himself to enemy fire and exploding grenades while commanding the 1st Battalion. Following his service, General Cavazos went on to serve on the Board of Regents of his alma mater, Texas Tech University. The CHC believes General Cavazos' lifelong commitment to the U.S. Army and to his community in Texas would make Ft. Cavazos a base that all Americans can be proud of.

CHC's alternate recommendation is to name the base after two Texas heroes with strong connections to the community: Staff Sergeant Macario García and Private Marcelino Serna. Sergeant García and Private Serna were both Mexican immigrants who bravely served our country during a time of need, ultimately earning Sergeant García a Medal of Honor, and Private Serna a Distinguished Service Cross award. Yet despite their bravery and service to our country, both Sergeant García and Private Serna endured discrimination. In the case of Sergeant García, he was

¹ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/TX/POP010210>

attacked at a Texas restaurant for simply being Mexican, and Private Serna regrettably encountered discrimination throughout his career. Nevertheless, Private Serna was one of the most decorated soldiers in World War I and received a Distinguished Service Cross award, as well as numerous foreign service awards for his dispatching and capture of enemy soldiers. Unfortunately, Private Serna was never awarded the Medal of Honor he rightfully deserved due to his Hispanic heritage. In the opinion of the CHC, it is far past time that the DoD honor these Latino servicemen's service to our country, including by considering renaming Ft. Hood in their honor.

Further, the CHC also recommends that the Commission consider renaming Ft. Hood after Specialist Vanessa Guillen. Spc. Guillen served at Ft. Hood in the Regiment Engineer Squadron under the 3rd Cavalry Regiment where she was responsible for small arms and artillery repair. Tragically Spc. Guillen lost her life in 2020, but her death has been a catalyst for long awaited reforms at DoD concerning sexual assaults and sexual harassment. Her death also inspired the Vanessa Guillen Act, a bill which removes the commander from the chain of command when it comes to sexual crimes and assigns a separate team of trained lawyers. Spc. Guillen's career was cut short, but the impact she made will last for generations and will ensure women who elect to serve can do so honorably and without fear for their safety.

Lastly, the CHC would like to bring to the Commission's attention that for far too long the contributions of Latinos, Latinas, and especially Afro-Latinos have been largely overlooked in our country. As the Commission moves forward with its recommendations for other important military assets such as streets and building names, the CHC urges the Department to use these opportunities to ensure that all members of our diverse communities are represented on America's military bases.

Greater representation of Latino communities at DoD and throughout America's military bases, especially at Ft. Hood, is a top priority for CHC Members. Naming Ft. Hood after the highly accomplished servicemembers included in this letter would send a strong message that the army recognizes, respects, and honors Latino servicemembers' contributions to the military and the United States. The CHC intends to remain a partner and stands ready to assist in ensuring that Latino and Latina servicemembers are represented as the Commission continues its historic work.


Respectfully,



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