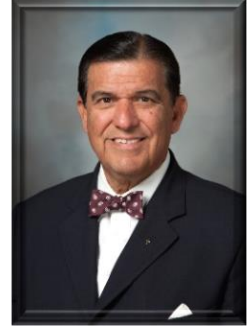




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OPINION EDITORIAL: Women Veterans Day, June 12: Another Reason to be Thankful

As communities across our state come together to celebrate the women in our armed forces, as author of the Female Veterans Omnibus Bill which permanently set in our state laws June 12th as Female Veterans Day in Texas, it is an honor to recognize the people who helped to increase the recognition and attention of female veterans in our state.

I had the honor to join Brownville's Veteran Females United in their tribute to the women who served in the military and attend their June 25, 2016 unveiling of a 12-foot, 6-inch granite statue of a female soldier in Brownsville's Veterans Park. Veterans Women United brought us together in a wonderful way to show Texas that our community will always be indivisible, provide women veterans the attention that they deserve, and pay equal tribute to the women who gave their lives for our freedom.

Building on Veteran Females United's dedication, I committed to spearhead a comprehensive effort to improve the standing, attention, and services of women veterans in our state during the 2017 Legislative Session. By working with Dr. LaShondra Jones, the Female Veterans Program Coordinator for Houston's Catholic Charities at the time, and the female veterans that they represented, I asked my dear friend from Houston Rep. Senfronia Thompson -- the longest-serving woman and African American in Texas history -- to help pass the bills I developed to strengthen the services and attention for women veterans.

In 2017, I authored ten veteran bills that became law, which included several bills to improve the lives of female veterans. By working with Rep. Thompson, my next-door neighbor in the Capitol, we successfully combined several bills that I had passed the Senate (such as SB 805, 1677, and 1698) to form the Female Veterans Omnibus Bill of the 85th Legislature, Senate Bill 805. Rep. Thompson and I were determined to include one special legislative measure that was on the verge of not passing, HB 2698, and ensure that our SB 805 guaranteed that June 12 would become Women Veterans Day in Texas!

With our Female Veterans Omnibus Bill, critical reforms and initiatives were enacted that: ensure women veterans in Texas are made aware of the resources and services that are available to them; provide women veterans the means for equitable access to federal and state veterans' benefits and services; afford women veterans specialized, dedicated outreach campaigns; and most importantly, celebrate women veterans with the appropriate credit and recognition they have earned and deserve.

Guided by the spirit of inclusiveness shown by Veteran Females United to women veterans in South Texas, we made sure that communities across our entire state would have the opportunity to recognize on June 12 a critical part of what makes the State of Texas great: the women of our armed forces!

My heartfelt thank you go out to Veteran Females United, Dr. LaShondra Jones and Catholic Charities, and Rep. Senfronia Thompson for helping us increase the services, attention, and outreach for our women veterans.

As a Valley native, I take a moment to provide a special thank you to my dear friend, Rep. Thompson. Senfronia has consistently helped me address issues important to our South Texas families. We both share the commitment that this is one Texas. Being driven by the passion to increase the representation of our minority constituencies, we have seen constituents from Houston and Brownsville come together to improve the lives of our families across our state one legislative measure at a time.

It took a community effort to set June 12 as Women Veterans Day in our Texas statutes. Thank you to our women veterans for everything you have done to protect our lives, and, once again, for helping bring our Texas communities together. We are deeply indebted to you.

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Senator Eddie Lucio, Jr. (D – Brownsville) represents Cameron, Hidalgo, Kenedy, Kleberg, and Willacy Counties. He is the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Intergovernmental Relations; Vice Chairman of the Senate Committee on Education; Member of the Senate Committees on State Affairs; Veteran Affairs & Border Security; and of the Select Committees on Redistricting; and, Texas Ports. He is member of the Sunset Advisory Commission and has been an ex-officio member of the DSHS Task Force of Border Public Health Officials since 2017. Elected in 1991, Lucio is third in seniority in the Texas Senate.