

Monday, May 28, 2012

*Santa Fe, NM – Congressman Ben Ray Luján spoke today at a Memorial Day ceremony in Santa Fe honoring the men and women who have served in the armed forces. Below are his remarks as prepared.*

“It is an honor to be here with you today to show our respect and appreciation for the men and women who have served our nation with honor and distinction. We remember those who proudly wore our nation’s uniform on the field of battle and those who made the ultimate sacrifice to protect the freedoms and values that make our country great.

“To all the veterans and current service members, thank you for the extraordinary service and sacrifices you have made and continue to make to defend our country. New Mexico has a long and proud history of service. Generations of New Mexicans heeded the call to protect their country when they were needed most.

“My grandfather Luis Lujan was one of those individuals. He was called to duty during World War II in 1944. He left behind six children and his loving wife who was expecting their youngest son, my uncle Rosendo.

“Grandpa recounted to the family one encounter in Germany on Christmas day in 1944. There was snow on the ground and it was terribly cold. At night, they dug into that frozen ground to make their foxholes. To keep from freezing they would light a single candle. While on the front lines an army tank was hit by enemy fire, causing the tank to burst into flames. Grandpa Luis went courageously to the assistance of those trapped in the tank and administered first aid and helped them to a sheltered area while taking enemy fire. Grandpa Luis was awarded the Bronze Star for heroic achievement against the enemy, as he was constantly exposed to enemy fire.

“This service is part of who we are as New Mexicans and it is a record to be honored and remembered.

“I’m sure many of you are familiar with the wonderful story ‘The Farolitos of Christmas’ by Rudolfo Anaya and how the young girl Luz, in the hopes of seeing her father return from his military service to their home in the village of San Juan, lit farolitos to light up the home through the darkness.

“Just as Luz kept the fire burning and the promise of a warm welcome upon her father’s return from war, so too must we keep that flame alive and welcome our returning men and women in uniform home with open arms. When they return home, let us honor their service not only through our words, but more importantly, through our deeds – providing them with the support and benefits that befit the heroism they have displayed.

“The story of Luz and her father also reminds us that while we commemorate the brave service of our nation’s heroes, we must also pay tribute to the families – husbands, wives, children, and parents – who shared their loved ones with their country. We must remember that when our servicemen and women are deployed, so too are their families, and it is our responsibility as a community to look out for them while their loved ones are in harm’s way.

“Sadly, not all of our friends, family, and countrymen who have served in harm’s way have returned home. But as long as we keep their memory alive and honor their sacrifice, they will never be forgotten.

“And as we reflect on those who gave the ultimate sacrifice on the field of battle, our thoughts and prayers are with the servicemen and women who are serving in Afghanistan and locations across the globe. We will keep the farolitos burning until they return home and remember them in our thoughts and prayers.

“May God bless our troops and veterans, and may God bless America.”

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