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RGV VETERANS HEALTHCARE SYSTEM INITIATIVE

McALLEN, TEXAS - State Senator Juan "Chuy" Hinojosa and State Representative Sergio Muñoz, Jr. conducted a joint press conference today to formally announce the effort to create a Veterans Healthcare System for the Rio Grande Valley that would be based in the new UTRGV Medical School and spread among Valley communities through contracted healthcare facilities. Flanked by Representatives Terry Canales, Bobby Guerra, and Eddie Lucio, III at the McAllen Veteran's War Memorial, Muñoz and his colleagues enumerated the process by which they has studied the issues, and his joint effort with Hinojosa to draft legislation that would allow certain state entities to contract with the US Veterans Administration (VA) to provide healthcare to Valley veterans.

"Veteran's healthcare issues have been a source of passionate concern from our Valley veterans since WWII era veterans began to have access to care problems a generation or two ago," said Muñoz. "We must be proactive and get things done through partnerships and regionalism. Our delegation is ready to take on the challenge of doing more for our veterans and work collaboratively to bring the right level of healthcare to the men and women who have served our country."

Nearly 50,000 veterans call the Valley region home, many of whom are going without much-needed healthcare services. The current Valley veteran's healthcare system has been besieged and continues to struggle with inefficiencies and long wait times.

The legislators' goals are to attack the existing access to care problems by creating a system of care that will eliminate the need for veterans to travel to San Antonio or Houston for inpatient or specialty care.

"Our priority will be to focus on mental healthcare and orthopedics. These are the areas that experts which we have convened into a working group, have told us the greatest need is," continued Muñoz. "We have also reached out to the Texas A&M System, which has expressed a willingness to contribute to the proposed system with resources that could help combat mental health and other issues."

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Rep. Muñoz developed and convened a working group several months ago to study the issues and develop a strategy on how best to use available resources to construct an integrated healthcare delivery system for veterans; their work is ongoing and the group continues to expand.

In addition to Muñoz, the workgroup to date has consisted of Senator Hinojosa, Congressman Cuellar, the UTRGV Medical School, representatives from UT Health Science Center San Antonio, Texas A&M Health Science Center, the Texas Veterans Commission, the Health and Human Services Commission Veterans Services Division, our federal VA partners in the Valley, and the Hidalgo County Veterans Office.

“We simply need to devise a way to take advantage of the expertise and resources we have at our disposal; the new medical school coupled with a commitment from the A&M System, a working relationship with the VA and the apparent need of assistance at the VA, all point to an opportunity that we have not witnessed before. The time is right to come together to create a system that will benefit our veterans... they deserve nothing less,” added Muñoz.

In attendance at today’s press conference were University of Texas Reagent Ernie Aliseda, Founding Dean of the UTRGV Medical School Dr. Francisco Fernandez, and several notable veterans.

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