

May 13, 2004- Loretta Honors Mendez v. Westminster

May 13, 2004 Loretta Honors Orange County's Mendez v. Westminster Desegregation Case on 50th Anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education Precursor Case Set Stage for Landmark Federal School Desegregation Law
WASHINGTON--Today on the House floor, Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez joined her congressional colleagues in honoring the 50th Anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education. Specifically, she recognized Mendez v. Westminster, the precedent-setting case from Orange County, California that helped set the stage for the Brown decision.

Today's resolution, H.Con.Res. 414 included the following language about the Mendez case: "Whereas in 1945, Mexican-American students in California successfully challenged the constitutionality of their segregation on the basis of national origin in Westminster School District of Orange County v. Mendez (161 F.2d 774 (9th Cir. 1947))"

In May 2003, Sanchez also introduced H.Con.Res. 200 "recognizing Gonzalo and Felicitas Mendez for ending segregation in schools in Orange County, California, and for setting the precedent for the historic Brown v. Board of Education case, which ended segregation in schools across the United States."

She made the following statement on the floor today:

"Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the gentleman from Michigan for introducing this resolution, and for yielding me time to speak. I ask permission to revise and extend my remarks.

"I rise today in strong support of H.Con.Res.414, a resolution which recognizes and celebrates the 50th anniversary of the Brown vs. Board of Education case.

"In particular, I would like to thank my friend Mr. Conyers, for including in this important bill a reference to the Mendez vs. Westminster case.

"Brown v. Board of Education was indeed an historic case. It ended segregation in schools across the United States and declared the doctrine of 'separate but equal' unconstitutional.

"But the Brown case was built on a few important cases that helped set the stage to end segregation in our schools. One of those important cases was Mendez v. Westminster in Orange County, California.

"In 1945, Gonzalo and Felicitas Mendez organized a group of parents to end the segregationist educational system in Orange County, California.

"Along with 4 other families, they filed a lawsuit against the Westminster, Anaheim, Santa Ana, and El Modena School Districts seeking an injunction ordering the integration of all schools in Orange County.

"On February 18, 1946, Mendez v. Westminster was decided in favor of the Mendez family and the other plaintiffs. And on April 14, 1947, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in favor of the Mendez family's case.

"The Mendez case was the first case to convince a Federal court that the doctrine of 'separate but equal' was unconstitutional.

"Eight years after Mendez v. Westminster, Thurgood Marshall argued the Brown v. Board of Education case before the United States Supreme Court, relying in part on the Mendez case as legal precedent.

"The bravery and dedication of Gonzalo and Felicitas Mendez opened the doors for a better education for children of color throughout the United States.

"I thank the gentleman for recognizing the importance of the Mendez case, and for bringing this important resolution to the floor.

"The Brown vs. Board of Education case represents an historic achievement in this country, and I am pleased to join with my colleagues to celebrate it here today."