



GOVERNOR RAFAEL HERNANDEZ COLON MESSAGE
ON THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING OF THE WESTERN
PUERTO RICO SATELLITE CLINIC IN MAYAGUEZ,
SEPTEMBER 18, 1976 - 10:00 A.M.

Hon. Richard L. Roudebush, Hon. Odell W. Vaughn, Dr. Thomas Fitzgerald, Mr. John R. Fears, Hon. Luis A. Ferré, Hon. Benjamín Cole, members of the Veterans Administration, Veterans of Puerto Rico; Friends:

"To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan." These were Abraham Lincoln's words about a century and a half ago; and these are the words which have served as motto for the Veterans Administration of the U.S.A. They have beacons the United States achievements in favor of its veterans; they have nourished the nation's spirit of gratitude, munificence, and open-heartedness toward the men and women who risked or gave their lives in defense of the democratic ideals.

And the main instrument through which this spirit continues to be manifested is the Veterans Administration. Thousands of veterans in the United States and in P. R. are well aware of it and owe their present way of life to the benefits and concern of this organization. It has strived to fill the physical, intellectual,

and spiritual needs of those who were at their post when the nation needed them.

Today we witness another demonstration of this intense desire to serve, to continue a worthy task: the opening of the Western Puerto Rico Satellite Clinic for the use and full advantage of our veterans of the Western area of Puerto Rico. This Clinic will offer multiple ambulatory service, and will take care of 30,000 veterans annually; it will also employ 100 persons in this area.

We are very thankful for the opening of this clinic, and once more we realize that the men who have been and are in charge of this organization which has made it possible, are indeed exceptional persons.

Our veterans, on the other hand, have been and are one of the main representatives of our faith in the democratic ideals. The Commonwealth goes beyond the search of its own fulfillments to share with the United States the responsibility of defending and preserving the teachings of the great leaders of the past and of the present. The common defense of Puerto Rico and the United States is one of the keystones of the relationship between the two countries under the Commonwealth status.

More than 18,000 Puerto Ricans served in the Armed Forces during World War I. Between the First and the Second World Wars the National Guard Structure and the Citizens Military Training Corps

were organized along with the first Puerto Rican ROTC units. Some 65,000 Puerto Ricans joined in the military efforts to defend the free world in the Second World War; some 43,000 served in active duty in the Korean conflict; and approximately 25,000 served in Vietnam. Puerto Rico continues in the present to contribute to the common defense and to play its part in that effort. More than 28,000 Puerto Ricans now serve in the Armed Forces of the United States; the Roosevelt Roads Naval Base plays a keyrole in the defense strategy of the United States in the Caribbean; and other military units continue to serve on the island.

And more proof of the Puerto Rican concern for democracy are the heroic acts of Eurípides Rubio, Carlos Lozada, Héctor Santiago Colón, and Fernando García Ledesma, all of them honored with the Congressional Medal of honor. And we must not forget our famous 65th. Infantry Division, honored time and again for its valor.

Apart from the heroic battle field, in our every day life, we can count thousands of veterans who, as lawyers, doctors, engineers, accountants, etc. are in the continuous task of helping to improve our quality of life, thus helping mankind in general. Our government proposes, during the next four years, a revision of the Veterans Bill of Rights, so they may even improve their task.

What else can one possibly add about the Veterans Administration and the veterans, these two groups with such devotion, such

dedication: only one thing- the Puerto Rican people thank the Veteran Administration for all the benefits given to them; and the veterans themselves thank this trully great Organization for the lives they have helped to mold and for the ideals they have helped to preserve.

On behalf of our veterans, of our people, and on my own, I wish to congratulate the Veterans Administration and their representatives, Hon. Richard Roudebush, Hon. Odell Vaughn, Dr. Thomas Fitzgerald, and Mr. John Fears for the opening of this excellent clinic which will be so useful to the veterans of the Western area of Puerto Rico. I wish to congratulate the veterans for the new benefits they will receive; and I wish to congratulate everyone who had something to do with this magnificent project.

Abrahm Lincolon's plea is trully being fulfilled.

Nota: El Sr. Fears desea que, al terminar el discurso, el gobernador presente al Sr. Roudebush la bandera de P. R. que será izada en el edificio donde se encuentran ubicadas las facilidades de esta clínica. La bandera estará disponible en la ceremonia.