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Gov. Jerry Brown Grants Historic Pardons to Deported California Veterans

- *Veterans' Coalition thanks Gov. Brown for 'compassion' and 'bold action' on Easter Eve*
- *Pardons allow honorably discharged veterans to apply to return to the United States*
- *Historic action highlights the plight of hundreds of deported US veterans*

SAN DIEGO - Today, the [Honorably Discharged, Dishonorably Deported coalition](#) (HDDDD) praised California Governor Jerry Brown for granting full pardons to three California veterans. Brown's action is historic and represents the first time that a governor has recognized and taken action to address the injustice of deported veterans of the United States armed forces. These pardons help pave the way for the veterans' eventual return to the country they took an oath to defend.

HDDDD Chair and Marine Corps combat veteran Nathan Fletcher said: "Governor Brown today has shown compassion for California veterans and their families, and taken bold action that highlights the plight of deported veterans. These veterans sacrificed to defend their country and were promised full citizenship as part of their military service - they never should have been deported. Governor Brown's historic pardons give hope to hundreds of deported veterans still fighting to return to the nation they honorably served."

Earlier this year, the HDDDD coalition [formally requested pardons](#) from Governor Brown for honorably discharged veterans deported after serving time for criminal convictions. Although non-citizen service members are entitled to full citizenship, a systematic breakdown in ensuring the completion of their naturalization process made them subject to deportation. Attorneys for the veterans believe the pardons will allow the veterans to successfully apply for citizenship and eventually return to the United States.

Jennie Pasquarella, director of immigrants' rights and a senior staff attorney with the American Civil Liberties Union of California, who has represented many of these veterans in their struggles to return home, said: "With these pardons, Governor Brown has ended the life sentence of banishment these men have suffered every day since they were deported for the crime they committed. Hector Barajas, Erasmo Apodaca, and Marco Antonio Chavez Medina long ago paid their price for their mistakes, but their deportation has been the worst price of all, as they have been permanently separated from their families and the only country they knew. These pardons open a historic pathway for these American veterans to return home to California as naturalized citizens or lawful permanent residents."

ACLU California's July 2016 report, "[Discharged, then Discarded](#)," documented the plight of deportations of U.S. veterans. HDDD, formed in September 2016, advocates for an end to the deportations of U.S. veterans and a pathway home for already deported veterans. In addition to requesting pardons the group is supporting legislation at the state and federal level aimed at addressing the problems faced by deported veterans.

The plight of deported veterans has been extensively covered by [NPR](#), [CNN](#), [NBCNews](#), [LA Times](#) and [San Diego Union-Tribune](#). One of the veterans pardoned by Brown is Hector Barajas, an Army veteran who founded the [Deported Veterans Support House](#) in Tijuana, Mexico.

Hector Barajas, a former paratrooper who served with the 82nd Airborne Division and was granted a pardon, said, "There are no words to describe the joy I feel today. I thank God for the grace of Governor Jerry Brown and am eternally grateful to all of those who advocated on my behalf. I have dreamed everyday of returning to the country I love. We have taken a big step forward for deported veterans and their families."

Nathan Fletcher added, "This is a significant step forward in our efforts and has the potential to make a life-changing difference for these veterans. However, the sad reality is there are hundreds, possibly thousands of others waiting for help. We are renewing our call on Congress and the President to honor its commitment and ensure every soldier comes home."

For more information on the HDDD coalition please visit: www.DeportedVets.org. The pardoned individuals are represented by James Erselius, Robin Kuntz, and Christina Namikas of Latham & Watkins, and Jennie Pasquarella and Lorie Alexander of the ACLU of Southern California.

*****MEDIA LOGISTICS FOR INTERVIEWS*****

HDDD's Nathan Fletcher and ACLU's Jennie Pasquarella are available for interviews by phone or Fletcher in San Diego or Pasquarella in Los Angeles.

Hector Barajas, pardoned veteran and founder of the Deported Veterans Support House is available for interviews by phone, skype or in Tijuana, Mexico.

Contact Heidi Martinez to schedule interview with Nathan or Hector:

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Contact Marcus Benigno to schedule interview with Jennie:

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*****BACKGROUNDS FOR THE PARDONED VETERANS*****

Hector Barajas



Hector Barajas served as a paratrooper in the 82nd Airborne Division of the U.S. Army during Operation Desert Storm. After he was honorably discharged from the U.S. Army, found it difficult to adapt to civilian life upon returning home. This led to substance abuse problem and a conviction for being in a car when a firearm was discharged. Hector served two years in prison and was subsequently turned over to ICE and deported to Mexico. Hector regrets his mistakes and has dedicated his life to helping other deported veterans. He opened The Deported Veterans Support House (aka “The Bunker”) in Tijuana, providing shelter and vital services to deported veterans. Through his selfless dedication and

leadership, Hector has touched the lives of hundreds of veterans who would otherwise have no source of support following their deportation. His advocacy has put the issue of the deportation of veterans on the map. Hector is eager to reunite with his daughter, who has multiple sclerosis and is in need of her father, and his parents and siblings who continue to reside in Los Angeles, where he grew up. He lives in Tijuana, Mexico.

Erasmio Apodaca



Erasmio was honorably discharged from the U.S. Marines following his service including a deployment in Operation Desert Storm. Upon his return from service, he was convicted of burglary for breaking into his ex-girlfriend's house. After serving his sentence, he was deported. While incarcerated, Erasmio participated in a program for non-violent criminals where he fought fires alongside trained firemen and only served one year in prison due to his good behavior. His deportation left his two young children without a father to raise them. Erasmio never gave up hope and continues to give back to his community. He wants nothing more than to become a U.S. citizen. Erasmio

grew up in Calexico, California and lives in Mexicali, Mexico.

Marco Antonio Chavez Medina



Marco's parents brought him to the U.S. when he was just one year old. Medina enlisted in the Marine Corps and served honorably for four years. In 1998, he was convicted of animal cruelty. He was sentenced to two years in state prison but was released after fifteen months for good behavior. In 2002, he was deported to Mexico, when an immigration judge deemed his conviction to be an "aggravated felony" under the immigration law, requiring his deportation. His family moved to Mexico to be with him, but life in Mexico was difficult for his family, especially his wife who did not speak Spanish and had to cross the border every day to work. His wife and kids eventually moved to Iowa, leaving Marco behind in Mexico. Marco has been separated from his sons, for whom he tries to be a father despite the separation. Marco wants to be more than a long, lost relative; he wants to try to repair his

relationship with his sons and be physically there for them through their milestones. Marco grew up in Los Angeles and lives in Tijuana, Mexico.

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