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Many of us living in San Diego County are aware of the dangerous duties undertaken by the men and women of the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). Often times, their accomplishments go unnoticed but these agents continue making significant contributions to the seemingly unending effort to protect our communities from the threat of drug crime and addiction.

This is a responsibility that DEA special agent Enrique “Kiki” Camarena, a Southern California resident who joined the DEA in 1974, took seriously over the course of his career in law enforcement. It was 25 years ago this March that Kiki’s body was discovered after he was kidnapped in front of the U.S. Consulate in Guadalajara, Mexico. He had been severely tortured by his captors.

Since then, more than two dozen people, including Mexican government officials, cartel leaders and associates, have been convicted for Kiki’s murder. Still, his memory has not been forgotten.

The circumstances surrounding Kiki’s death are a vivid reminder of the violence and danger attributable to illegal drugs, whether it’s directly on our borders, within our neighborhoods or in the homes of families facing the struggles of addiction. Despite our best efforts, drug cartels maintain a stronghold on the U.S.-Mexico border region, persistently attempting to smuggle contraband into the U.S. and constantly devising new methods of entry.

The DEA, as well as our nation’s other border security agencies, is on the frontline of this struggle. Its mission is to protect Americans from the threat of illegal drugs crossing our borders or manufactured domestically. It is this national obligation that attracted Kiki and countless others to serve in the DEA since its creation nearly 40 years ago.

Today, Kiki is perhaps the best-known hero of the war on drugs. His story continues to inspire the men and women of the DEA, past and present, as well as millions of other Americans to lead drug-free lives.

In fact, shortly after Kiki's death, my father, who served our community in Congress for many years, joined with one of Kiki's classmates to launch "Camarena Clubs" throughout Southern California. Hundreds of club members wore red ribbons and pledged to lead drug-free lives in honor of Kiki and others who gave their lives for the same reason.

In 1985, club members presented a proclamation to First Lady Nancy Reagan, which brought the club national attention and ultimately prompted thousands of schools, communities and states to recognize Red Ribbon Week. Now celebrated during the last week of every October, Red Ribbon week is officially the oldest and largest drug prevention program in the nation, reaching millions of young people every year.

Kiki's presence is as strong today as it was over the course of his lifetime. In recognition of this national hero, I recently introduced a resolution in the House of Representatives, H. Res. 1115, to mark the 25th anniversary of Kiki's death. The resolution also reiterates support for the DEA, which continues to uphold Kiki's legacy.

This anniversary should also serve to remind us about the importance of creating an enforceable border that effectively limits the amount of illegal drugs entering the country. Infrastructure, technology and manpower are the basis for an effective security strategy, with each element working to disrupt the smuggling activity that profits notorious drug cartels south of the border. Expanding these resources will help mitigate cross-border drug traffic and crime.

So let us take time to recognize the mission of the DEA and honor the life of Kiki Camarena. Something we can all do by simply encouraging family, friends and communities to promote healthy, productive and drug-free lifestyles.