

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

HONORING THE ALL-AMERICAN
SOAP BOX DERBY

HON. JUAN VARGAS

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 27, 2014

Mr. VARGAS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to one of the greatest amateur racing traditions in the United States, the All-American Soap Box Derby. The Soap Box Derby is a youth racing program that has run in the United States since 1934. Cars competing in the Soap Box Derby are unpowered and rely completely on gravity to accelerate. During its peak in the 1950s and 1960s, when automobile manufacturers were national sponsors and famous television and cinema stars made special guest appearances at these

races, as many as 70,000 people throughout the United States gathered each August to cheer on hundreds of young participants.

San Diego's first Soap Box Derby took place in 1939. In 1946, San Diegan Gilbert Klecan became the first West Coast participant to win the All-American World Championship, which is held every July at Derby Downs in Akron, Ohio. In those years, it was not uncommon to have as many as 300 cars racing along 6th Avenue downhill from Laurel Street. In the early 1970s, after automobile manufacturers pulled their sponsorship, the derby gradually faded in many cities. However, in the early 1990s the Kiwanis Club of San Diego Harbor and the Kiwanis Club of San Diego revived the derby and held races throughout the city. Then in 2002, Ben Hueso, now a California State Senator, and commu-

nity advocate James Justus began organizing Soap Box Derby races in Sherman Heights, where it is now held annually.

Every year, San Diego holds two races attracting hundreds of people from throughout the County. These races are held within the 51st Congressional district. A Rally Race is held late April in Encanto, and in late May, the San Diego Soap Box Derby Championship is held in Logan Heights. There are three racing divisions in both the San Diego and the All-American competition where boys and girls, ages 8 through 17, compete. Though many things have changed since the first San Diego Soap Box Derby in 1939, the goals of the program have not: to teach youngsters basic workmanship skills, the spirit of competition and the commitment to finish a project once it is started.

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