

Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 196

RESOLUTION CHAPTER 30

Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 196—Relative to César Chávez Day.

[Filed with Secretary of State April 6, 2004.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

ACR 196, Firebaugh. César Chávez Day.

This measure would recognize March 31 as the anniversary of the birth of César Chávez, and would call upon all Californians to participate in appropriate observances to remember César Chávez as a symbol of hope and justice to all persons.

WHEREAS, On March 31, 1927, a true hero named César Estrada Chávez was born in Yuma, Arizona to Librado and Juana Chávez and became the second oldest in a family of five children. César Chávez lived his life dedicated to improving the plight of farmworkers through struggle, sacrifice, and self-denial. He founded and led the first successful farmworkers' union in United States history. He stood for dignity and justice for farmworkers. Today, he remains a symbol of hope to all Californians who find hope and peace in justice; and

WHEREAS, In the 1930s, during the Great Depression, César Chávez' father lost his small farming business and the family went broke. The family became migrant workers and joined some 30,000 workers who followed the crops from Arizona into southern California, then up the length of the central valley and back again picking everything from peas to cotton. They lived in tents and other makeshift housing that often lacked a bathroom, electricity, or running water. Schooling for Chávez was irregular and haphazard. He attended some 30 different schools, often encountered discrimination, and was punished for speaking Spanish; and

WHEREAS, After graduation from the eighth grade, César Chávez was forced to quit school and take to the fields in order to help support his family. In 1944, at the age of 17, César Chávez joined the Navy and served in World War II. After he completed his tour of duty, César Chávez returned to California and married Helen Fabela, a woman who shared his dedication to the cause of the farmworker. They lived in San Jose in a tough Mexican neighborhood called "Sal Si Puedes" which translates to "get out if you can," and together raised eight children; and

WHEREAS, As a farmworker, César Chávez experienced firsthand the injustice of working long hours with little pay. Instilled with a sense of justice passed down from his mother, César Chávez made a decision to speak up and fight for change. He took part in his first strike in protest of low wages and poor working conditions for farmworkers. Although initially unsuccessful, his participation in that first strike was to mark the beginning of a long career in which he fought for improved working and living conditions for farmworkers; and

WHEREAS, In 1952, César Chávez met Fred Ross who was with a group called the Community Services Organization (CSO). Struck by César Chávez' engaging personality and leadership qualities, Ross tapped César Chávez to head voter registration efforts where he successfully registered 4,000 voters. The following year, he led organizational efforts to establish CSO offices in every major barrio. César Chávez eventually spent 10 years with CSO, and became general director in 1958. During this time, services were expanded to include citizenship classes, helping members secure driver licenses, assistance in filling out applications for aid, and securing legal counsel; and

WHEREAS, In 1962, César Chávez resigned his position with the CSO to embark on a bold new undertaking to form a farmworkers' union. He was joined by the great Dolores Huerta, and together they became the architects of the National Farm Worker's Union, the forerunner to the present United Farm Workers (UFW); and

WHEREAS, In 1965, César Chávez led a strike of California grapepickers to demand higher wages, and urged all Americans to boycott table grapes as a show of support. The strike included a 340-mile march from Delano to Sacramento in 1966 in which thousands of farmworkers and supporters marched in solidarity. The farmworkers and supporters carried banners with the black eagle with the words "HUELGA" (strike) and "VIVA LA CAUSA" (long live our cause); and

WHEREAS, César Chávez preached nonviolence to the strikers even as they were physically abused by many of those opposed to the grape boycott. In 1968, he began a Ghandi-like fast to call attention to the migrant workers' cause. Although his dramatic act did little to solve the immediate problem, it increased public awareness of the conditions under which farmworkers labored. In 1973, the UFW organized a strike for higher wages from lettuce growers, and, after many battles, an agreement was finally reached in 1977 that gave the UFW the sole right to organize farmworkers; and

WHEREAS, During the 1980s, César Chávez led the effort to call attention to the health problems of farmworkers caused by the use of certain pesticides on crops; and



WHEREAS, On April 23, 1993, César Estrada Chávez died peacefully in his sleep in San Luis, Arizona. During his funeral, Cardinal Roger M. Mahoney, who celebrated the funeral mass, called César Chávez “a special prophet for the world’s farmworkers”; and

WHEREAS, Many declared that the UFW would die without him, but on César Chávez’ birthday, March 31, 1994, under the leadership of his son-in-law, Arturo Rodriquez, the UFW marched 343 miles from Delano to Sacramento, echoing César Chávez’ historic 1966 march, and demonstrated that the UFW still worked for farmworkers; and

WHEREAS, In 1990, Mexican President Salinas de Gortari awarded César Chávez, the “El Aguila Azteca” (the Aztec Eagle), Mexico’s highest award presented to people of Mexican heritage who have made major contributions outside of Mexico. He also became the second Mexican American to receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor in the United States, which was presented posthumously to his wife, Helen Chávez, and their children on August 8, 1994, by President William Jefferson Clinton; and

WHEREAS, In 1994, César Chávez’ family and the officers of the UFW created the César E. Chávez Foundation to inspire current and future generations by promoting the ideals of César Chávez’ life, work, and vision. Communities throughout California and the United States have honored the memory of César Chávez by naming schools, parks, children’s centers, streets, and other public works after the leader; and

WHEREAS, César Chávez led by example, giving of himself so that he might help others. His relentless pursuit of the belief that the American dream should be available to all Americans, regardless of race or origin of birth, stands as a monument to our free society. His life and work is not only an inspiration to Latinos, but to working Americans of all nationalities. His legacy lives on in the improved working and living conditions of hundreds of thousands of Californians and their families; and

WHEREAS, In the year 2000, the Legislature enacted Senate Bill 984 (Chapter 213 of the Statutes of 2000) to create an annual state holiday on César Chávez’ birthday, March 31; this holiday provides all Californians the opportunity to learn from César Chávez’ life and provides schoolchildren the opportunity to learn through community service; and

WHEREAS, The State Board of Education on Wednesday, February 6, 2002, adopted a model curriculum on the life and work of César Chávez, fulfilling a key provision of Chapter 213 of the Statutes of 2000, that also includes topics on pesticides, immigration, and agriculture’s role in the economy; now, therefore, be it



Resolved by the Assembly of the State of California, the Senate thereof concurring, That the Legislature recognizes March 31 as the anniversary of the birth of César Chávez, and calls upon all Californians to participate in appropriate observances to remember César Chávez as a symbol of hope and justice to all persons; and be it further

Resolved, That the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies of this resolution to the author for appropriate distribution.

