

## Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 26

### RESOLUTION CHAPTER 51

Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 26—Relative to Cesar Chavez Day.

[Filed with Secretary of State May 29, 2001.]

#### LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SCR 26, Polanco. Cesar Chavez Day.

This measure would recognize March 31 as the anniversary of the birth of Cesar Chavez and call upon all Californians to participate in appropriate observances to remember Cesar Chavez as a symbol of hope and justice to all citizens.

WHEREAS, On March 31, 1927, a true hero named Cesar Estrada Chavez was born in Yuma, Arizona, to Librado and Juana Chavez and became the second eldest in a family of five children. Cesar Chavez lived his life dedicated to improving the plight of farmworkers through struggle, sacrifice, and abnegation. 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 1930's, during the Great Depression, Cesar Chavez' 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 Cesar Chavez 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 eight grade, Cesar Chavez was forced to quit school and take to the fields in order to help support his family. In 1944, at the age of 17, Cesar Chavez joined the Navy and served in World War II. After he completed his tour of duty, Cesar Chavez 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 translated to "get out if you can," and together raised eight children; and



WHEREAS, As a farmworker, Cesar Chavez experienced firsthand the injustice of working long hours with little pay. Instilled with a sense of justice passed down from his mother, Cesar Chavez made a decision to speak up and fight for a 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, Cesar Chavez met Fred Ross who was with a group called the Community Services Organization (CSO). Struck by Cesar Chavez' engaging personality and leadership qualities, Fred Ross tapped Cesar Chavez to head voter registration efforts where he successfully registered 4,000 voters. The following year Chavez led organization efforts to establish CSO offices in every major barrio. He 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's licenses, assistance in filling out applications for aid, and securing legal counsel; and

WHEREAS, In 1962, Cesar Chavez 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, Cesar Chavez led a strike of California grape pickers 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, Cesar Chavez preached nonviolence to the strikers even as they were physically abused by many of those opposed to the grape boycott. In 1968, Cesar Chavez began a fast, in the model of Mahatma Gandhi, 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 1980's, Cesar Chavez 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, Cesar Estrada Chavez died peacefully in his sleep in San Luis, Arizona. During Cesar Chavez' funeral, Cardinal Roger M. Mahoney, who celebrated the funeral mass, called Cesar Chavez "a special prophet for the world's farm workers"; and

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

WHEREAS, In 1990, Mexican President Salinas de Gortari awarded Cesar Chavez, the "El Aquila 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 Helen Chavez and her children on August 8, 1994, by President Clinton; and

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

WHEREAS, Cesar Chavez 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 hundred 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 Cesar Chavez' birthday, March 31; this holiday provides all Californians the opportunity to learn from Cesar Chavez' life and provides school children the opportunity to learn through community service; now, therefore, be it

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



*Resolved*, That the Secretary of the Senate transmit copies of this resolution to the author for appropriate distribution.

O

97

