

AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY FEBRUARY 27, 2012

AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY FEBRUARY 6, 2012

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE—2011–12 REGULAR SESSION

Assembly Concurrent Resolution

No. 73

Introduced by Assembly Member Alejo

(Principal coauthor: Assembly Member Monning)

(Coauthors: Assembly Members Allen, Ammiano, *Block*, Blumenfield, Campos, *Carter*, Cedillo, Chesbro, Davis, *Fong*, Furutani, Gordon, Hall, Roger Hernández, *Hill*, Huber, Hueso, *Huffman*, Lara, Bonnie Lowenthal, *Ma*, Mendoza, Perea, V. Manuel Pérez, Portantino, Solorio, Swanson, ~~and~~ Torres, *Wieckowski*, and *Williams*)

(Coauthors: Senators Calderon and Evans)

June 29, 2011

Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 73—Relative to César Chávez.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

ACR 73, as amended, Alejo. César Chávez.

This measure would call upon all Californians to observe César Chávez's birthday, March 31, as a day of public service, to recognize the hard work and self-sacrifice that farmworkers go through to feed all the families in our state, and to learn from César Chávez's life and his mission of nonviolence, social justice, and selfless service to others.

Fiscal committee: no.

1 WHEREAS, César Estrada Chávez recognized that for many
2 people, spanning many generations and many ethnicities, the path
3 to a better life frequently begins in the fields. For many

1 farmworkers, the American Dream means a life of self-sacrifice,
2 hard work, and perseverance; and

3 WHEREAS, César Chávez experienced the hardships and
4 injustices of farmworker life firsthand. He was born on March 31,
5 1927, in the North Gila River Valley in Arizona, on the small
6 family farm his grandfather homesteaded. César Chávez’s father
7 lost the farm during the Great Depression, forcing the family to
8 join some 30,000 farmworkers who followed the crops throughout
9 California and lived in tents ~~or~~ *and* makeshift housing that often
10 lacked a bathroom, electricity, or running water; and

11 WHEREAS, César Chávez understood the value of education
12 as a path to a better life because he quit school after completing
13 the ~~eightth~~ *8th* grade to work full time, helping to support his family
14 in the fields. Later in life, César Chávez became self-educated
15 through his passion for reading; and

16 WHEREAS, Although later a pacifist, in 1946, César Chávez
17 enrolled and served his country in the United States Navy. He was
18 honorably discharged whereupon he married Helen Fabela and
19 eventually settled in the East San Jose barrio nicknamed “Sal Si
20 Puedes” (“Get Out if You Can”) to raise a family that eventually
21 numbered eight children; and

22 WHEREAS, In San Jose, César Chávez was introduced to the
23 social teachings of the Catholic Church and trained in community
24 organizing strategies and tactics. César Chávez and Fred Ross, an
25 organizer for the Community Service Organization (CSO),
26 established CSO chapters across California and Arizona during
27 the 1950s, helping Latinos register to vote, pushing for basic public
28 services and infrastructure in the barrios, peacefully battling police
29 brutality and racial discrimination, and creating the most effective
30 Latino civil rights group of its era; and

31 WHEREAS, In 1962, after failing to convince the CSO to let
32 him organize farmworkers, César Chávez resigned from the only
33 decent paying job he ever held and moved his wife and eight
34 children to Delano, California. There, with \$1,200 in life savings
35 that was soon gone, César Chávez, his family, and close friends
36 began building the National Farm Workers Association, which
37 later became the United Farm Workers of America (UFW); and

38 WHEREAS, In 1965, in a partnership with a union of Filipino
39 American farmworkers, César Chávez organized a major strike
40 against grape growers in California. The following year César

1 Chávez led an unprecedented 340-mile march, from Delano to
2 Sacramento, that placed the farmworkers’ plight before the
3 conscience of the American people. Supporters carried slogans
4 with the words “HUELGA” (strike) and “VIVA LA CAUSA”
5 (long live our cause), advocating for improved compensation and
6 labor conditions. Later efforts resulted in the enactment of
7 California’s historic Agricultural Labor Relations Act of 1975, the
8 first and still the only law in the nation to “encourage and protect”
9 the right of farmworkers to organize and bargain with their
10 employers; and

11 WHEREAS, Through countless strikes, boycotts, marches, and
12 fasts that produced many victories and some defeats, César Chávez,
13 who even considered vegetarianism an integral part of living
14 nonviolently, never stopped his peaceful battles on behalf of the
15 farmworkers with whom he shared his life. His dedication to his
16 work earned him the respect of some of our greatest political and
17 civil rights leaders, including Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King
18 Jr., and Jesse Jackson. César Chávez’s motto in life, “Sí Se Puede!”
19 or “Yes We Can!” has served as an inspiration not only for Latinos,
20 but for working Americans of all walks for life; and

21 WHEREAS, In 1993, César Chávez died peacefully in his sleep
22 in San Luis, Arizona. Forty thousand people marched behind his
23 plain pine casket during funeral services in Delano to honor a man
24 who never made more than \$5,000 a year, never owned a home,
25 and left no money behind for his family. They came to affirm César
26 Chávez’s words from his landmark 1984 address to the
27 Commonwealth Club in San Francisco: “Once social change
28 begins, it cannot be reversed. You cannot uneducate the person
29 who has learned to read. You cannot humiliate the person who
30 feels pride. You cannot oppress the people who are not afraid
31 anymore”; and

32 WHEREAS, Although César Chávez was uncomfortable with
33 personal recognition in life, since his passing Chávez has been
34 honored in hundreds of communities. César Chávez was awarded
35 “El Aguila Azteca” (the Aztec Eagle), Mexico’s highest award
36 presented to people of Mexican heritage. In 1994, President Bill
37 Clinton posthumously presented César Chávez with America’s
38 highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom. In 2006,
39 California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger inducted César
40 Chávez into the first class of the California Hall of Fame. In 2011,

1 the United States Navy announced naming the latest Lewis and
2 Clark-class cargo ship being built in San Diego the USNS César
3 Chávez; and

4 WHEREAS, Since César Chávez's passing, the UFW has
5 continued his work through organizing farmworkers and campaigns
6 to enact laws and regulations to bring dignity and protections to
7 farmworkers. Meanwhile, the César Chávez Foundation continues
8 improving the lives of hundreds of thousands of farmworkers and
9 other low-wage working families through 30 high-quality
10 affordable housing communities it has built or renovated and
11 manages in four states, a network of nine popular educational
12 Spanish-language radio stations in three states, after-school tutoring
13 for disadvantaged students in two states, and the National Chávez
14 Center, including a visitor center, memorial gardens, and
15 educational center on 187 acres in the Tehachapi Mountains where
16 César Chávez lived and worked, and is buried; and

17 WHEREAS, César Chávez successfully increased public
18 awareness of farmworker working conditions. To many
19 Californians the farmworkers' struggles are an issue from the past,
20 a belief reflected by the fact that farmworker suffering typically
21 takes place in remote areas far from cities, thereby rendering
22 farmworkers invisible to our society. The fruits and vegetables
23 that we enjoy in our daily lives are produced by farmworkers who
24 often endure long hours of backbreaking work and still face
25 challenges such as inadequate enforcement of pesticide, safety,
26 and labor protection laws in the fields; and

27 WHEREAS, Farmworkers still dream of providing a better life
28 for their children, but the reality of having to move from crop to
29 crop makes this dream hard to achieve. The downturn in today's
30 economy and rising cost of living have pushed farmworkers further
31 into poverty; and

32 WHEREAS, In 2000, the Legislature passed and Governor Gray
33 Davis signed into law Senate Bill 984 (Chapter 213 of the Statutes
34 of 2000), to create the first annual state holiday in the country on
35 César Chávez's birthday, March 31. Under that law, the State
36 Board of Education also created a statewide curriculum on Chávez
37 and encourages schools across the state to engage teachers and
38 students in service learning projects as a way of honoring the
39 legendary farm labor and civil rights leader; now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved by the Assembly of the State of California, the Senate*
2 *thereof concurring,* That the Legislature calls upon all Californians
3 to observe César Chávez’s birthday, March 31, as a day of public
4 service; and be it further

5 *Resolved,* That the Legislature calls upon all Californians to
6 recognize the hard work and self-sacrifice that farmworkers go
7 through to feed all the families in our state; and be it further

8 *Resolved,* That the Legislature calls upon all Californians to
9 learn from César Chávez’s life and his mission of nonviolence,
10 social justice, and selfless service to others; and be it further

11 *Resolved,* That the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies
12 of this resolution to the Chávez family, particularly César Chávez’s
13 widow, Helen Chávez, the United Farm Workers of America, the
14 César Chávez Foundation, and the author for appropriate
15 distribution.