

Assembly Concurrent Resolution

No. 27

Introduced by Assembly Member V. Manuel Pérez
(Principal coauthor: Senator Lara)

February 27, 2013

Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 27—Relative to César Chávez.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

ACR 27, as introduced, V. Manuel Pérez. 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
4 farmworkers, the American Dream means a life of self-sacrifice,
5 hard work, and perseverance; and
6 WHEREAS, César Chávez experienced the hardships and
7 injustices of farmworker life firsthand. He was born on March 31,
8 1927, in the North Gila River Valley in Arizona, on the small
9 family farm his grandfather homesteaded. César Chávez's father
10 lost the farm during the Great Depression, forcing the family to
11 join some 30,000 farmworkers who followed the crops throughout
12 California and lived in tents and makeshift housing that often
13 lacked a bathroom, electricity, or running water; and

1 WHEREAS, César Chávez understood the value of education
2 as a path to a better life because he quit school after completing
3 the 8th grade to work full time, helping to support his family in
4 the fields. Later in life, César Chávez became self-educated through
5 his passion for reading; and

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

12 WHEREAS, In San Jose, César Chávez was introduced to the
13 social teachings of the Catholic Church and trained in community
14 organizing strategies and tactics. César Chávez and Fred Ross, an
15 organizer for the Community Service Organization (CSO),
16 established CSO chapters across California and Arizona during
17 the 1950s, helping Latinos register to vote, pushing for basic public
18 services and infrastructure in the barrios, peacefully battling police
19 brutality and racial discrimination, and creating the most effective
20 Latino civil rights group of its era; and

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

28 WHEREAS, In 1965, in a partnership with a union of Filipino
29 American farmworkers, César Chávez organized a major strike
30 against grape growers in California. The following year César
31 Chávez led an unprecedented 340-mile march, from Delano to
32 Sacramento, that placed the farmworkers’ plight before the
33 conscience of the American people. Supporters carried slogans
34 with the words “HUELGA” (strike) and “VIVA LA CAUSA”
35 (long live our cause), advocating for improved compensation and
36 labor conditions. Later efforts resulted in the enactment of
37 California’s historic Agricultural Labor Relations Act of 1975, the
38 first and still the only law in the nation to “encourage and protect”
39 the right of farmworkers to organize and bargain with their
40 employers; and

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

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

22 WHEREAS, Although César Chávez was uncomfortable with
23 personal recognition in life, since his passing Chávez has been
24 honored in hundreds of communities. César Chávez was awarded
25 “El Aguila Azteca” (the Aztec Eagle), Mexico’s highest award
26 presented to people of Mexican heritage. In 1994, President Bill
27 Clinton posthumously presented César Chávez with America’s
28 highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom. In 2006,
29 California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger inducted César
30 Chávez into the first class of the California Hall of Fame. In 2011,
31 the United States Navy announced naming the latest Lewis and
32 Clark-class cargo ship being built in San Diego the USNS César
33 Chávez; and

34 WHEREAS, Since César Chávez’s passing, the UFW has
35 continued his work through organizing farmworkers and campaigns
36 to enact laws and regulations to bring dignity and protections to
37 farmworkers. Meanwhile, the César Chávez Foundation continues
38 improving the lives of hundreds of thousands of farmworkers and
39 other low-wage working families through 30 high-quality
40 affordable housing communities it has built or renovated and

1 manages in four states, a network of nine popular educational
2 Spanish-language radio stations in three states, after school tutoring
3 for disadvantaged students in two states, and the National Chávez
4 Center, including a visitor center, memorial gardens, and
5 educational center on 187 acres in the Tehachapi Mountains where
6 César Chávez lived and worked, and is buried; and

7 WHEREAS, César Chávez successfully increased public
8 awareness of farmworker working conditions. To many
9 Californians the farmworkers' struggles are an issue from the past,
10 a belief reflected by the fact that farmworker suffering typically
11 takes place in remote areas far from cities, thereby rendering
12 farmworkers invisible to our society. The fruits and vegetables
13 that we enjoy in our daily lives are produced by farmworkers who
14 often endure long hours of backbreaking work and still face
15 challenges such as inadequate enforcement of pesticide, safety,
16 and labor protection laws in the fields; and

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

22 WHEREAS, In 2000, the Legislature passed and Governor Gray
23 Davis signed into law Senate Bill No. 984 (Chapter 213 of the
24 Statutes of 2000), to create the first annual state holiday in the
25 country on César Chávez's birthday, March 31. Under that law,
26 the State Board of Education also created a statewide curriculum
27 on Chávez and encourages schools across the state to engage
28 teachers and students in service learning projects as a way of
29 honoring the legendary farm labor and civil rights leader; now,
30 therefore, be it

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

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

38 *Resolved,* That the Legislature calls upon all Californians to
39 learn from César Chávez's life and his mission of nonviolence,
40 social justice, and selfless service to others; and be it further

1 *Resolved*, That the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies
2 of this resolution to the Chávez family, particularly César Chávez's
3 widow, Helen Chávez, the United Farm Workers of America, the
4 César Chávez Foundation, and the author for appropriate
5 distribution.

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