

Assembly Concurrent Resolution

No. 114

Introduced by Assembly Members Campos and Alejo

February 25, 2014

Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 114—Relative to César Chávez.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

ACR 114, as introduced, Campos. 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 is one of the most significant
2 civil rights leaders in the history of our nation. César Chávez
3 recognized that the dignity of a society can be measured by the
4 dignity by which the people who help feed our nation are treated;
5 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 left 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 peaceful
14 community organizing strategies at McDonnell Hall, historically
15 known as Guadalupe Mission Chapel. César Chávez and Fred
16 Ross, an organizer for the Community Service Organization (CSO),
17 established CSO chapters across California and Arizona during
18 the 1950s, helping Latinos register to vote, pushing for basic public
19 services and infrastructure in the barrios, peacefully battling police
20 brutality and racial discrimination, and creating the most effective
21 Latino civil rights group of its era; and

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

29 WHEREAS, In 1965, in a partnership with a union of Filipino
30 American farmworkers, César Chávez organized a major strike
31 against grape growers in California. The following year, in 1966,
32 César Chávez led an unprecedented 340-mile march, from Delano
33 to Sacramento, that placed the farmworkers’ plight before the
34 conscience of the American people. Supporters carried slogans
35 with the words “HUELGA” (strike) and “VIVA LA CAUSA”
36 (long live our cause), advocating for improved compensation and
37 labor conditions. Later efforts, including a 25-day fast by César
38 Chávez, resulted in the enactment of California’s historic
39 Agricultural Labor Relations Act of 1975, the first and still the

1 only law in the nation to “encourage and protect” the right of
2 farmworkers to organize and bargain with their employers; and

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

13 WHEREAS, In 1993, César Chávez died peacefully in his sleep
14 in San Luis, Arizona. During funeral services in Delano, 40,000
15 people marched in procession behind his plain pine casket. They
16 came to affirm César Chávez’s words from his landmark 1984
17 address to the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco: “Once social
18 change begins, it cannot be reversed. You cannot uneducate the
19 person who has learned to read. You cannot humiliate the person
20 who 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, In 2012, in recognition of the impact of César
35 Chávez to our nation’s and state’s history, President Barack Obama
36 established the César E. Chávez National Monument at Nuestra
37 Senora Reina de la Paz in Keene, California and concurrently
38 designated La Paz as a National Historical Landmark. In 2013, La
39 Paz, which is César Chávez’s final resting ground, McDonnell
40 Hall, located in San Jose, California, the former site of the UFW

1 headquarters, known as the Forty Acres, the Filipino Community
2 Hall in Delano, California, and the 1966 march route from Delano
3 to Sacramento were four of five sites, out of 100, found to be
4 nationally significant for a National Historic Park honoring César
5 Chávez. In 2013, McDonnell Hall (formerly Guadalupe Mission
6 Chapel) was designated a State Historical Landmark for its close
7 association with the life and work of César Chávez; and

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

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

31 WHEREAS, Farmworkers still dream of providing a better life
32 for their children, but the reality of having to move from crop to
33 crop makes this dream hard to achieve. Economic forces and the
34 rising cost of living have pushed farmworkers further into poverty;
35 and

36 WHEREAS, In 2000, the Legislature passed and Governor Gray
37 Davis signed into law Senate Bill 984 (Chapter 213 of the Statutes
38 of 2000), to create the first annual state holiday in the country on
39 César Chávez's birthday, March 31, in recognition of César Chávez
40 as the most important Latino leader in the United States during

1 the 20th century. Under that law, the State Board of Education
2 also created a statewide curriculum on César Chávez and
3 encourages schools across the state to engage teachers and students
4 in service learning projects as a way of honoring the legendary
5 farm labor and civil rights leader; now, therefore, be it

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

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

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

16 *Resolved,* That the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies
17 of this resolution to the Chávez family, particularly César Chávez’s
18 widow, Helen Chávez, the United Farm Workers of America, the
19 César Chávez Foundation, and the author for appropriate
20 distribution.