

**House Resolution**

**No. 11**

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**Introduced by Assembly Member Eduardo Garcia**

February 26, 2015

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House Resolution No. 11—Relative to César Chávez.

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

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

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

1 WHEREAS, In San Jose, César Chávez was introduced to the  
2 social teachings of the Catholic Church and trained in peaceful  
3 community organizing strategies and tactics. César Chávez and  
4 Fred Ross, an organizer for the Community Service Organization  
5 (CSO), established CSO chapters across California and Arizona  
6 during the 1950s, helping Latinos register to vote, pushing for  
7 basic public services and infrastructure in the barrios, peacefully  
8 battling police brutality and racial discrimination, and creating the  
9 most effective Latino civil rights group of its era; and

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

17 WHEREAS, In 1965, in a partnership with a union of Filipino  
18 American farmworkers, César Chávez organized a major strike  
19 against grape growers in California. The following year, César  
20 Chávez led an unprecedented 340-mile march, from Delano to  
21 Sacramento, that placed the farmworkers' plight before the  
22 conscience of the American people. Supporters carried slogans  
23 with the words "HUELGA" (strike) and "VIVA LA CAUSA"  
24 (long live our cause), advocating for improved compensation and  
25 labor conditions. Later efforts resulted in the enactment of  
26 California's historic Agricultural Labor Relations Act of 1975, the  
27 first and still the only law in the nation to "encourage and protect"  
28 the right of farmworkers to organize and bargain with their  
29 employers; and

30 WHEREAS, Through countless strikes, boycotts, marches, and  
31 fasts that produced many victories and some defeats, César Chávez,  
32 who even considered vegetarianism an integral part of living  
33 nonviolently, never stopped his peaceful battles on behalf of the  
34 farmworkers with whom he shared his life. His dedication to his  
35 work earned him the respect of some of our greatest political and  
36 civil rights leaders, including Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King  
37 Jr., and Jesse Jackson. César Chávez's motto in life, "Sí Se Puede!"  
38 or "Yes We Can!" has served as an inspiration not only for Latinos,  
39 but for working Americans of all walks for life; and

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

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

24 WHEREAS, Since César Chávez’s passing, the UFW has  
25 continued his work through organizing farmworkers and campaigns  
26 to enact laws and regulations to bring dignity and protections to  
27 farmworkers. Meanwhile, the César Chávez Foundation continues  
28 improving the lives of hundreds of thousands of farmworkers and  
29 other low-wage working families through 30 high-quality  
30 affordable housing communities it has built or renovated and  
31 manages in four states, a network of nine popular educational  
32 Spanish-language radio stations in three states, after-school tutoring  
33 for disadvantaged students in two states, and the National Chávez  
34 Center, including a visitor center, memorial gardens, and  
35 educational center on 187 acres in the Tehachapi Mountains where  
36 César Chávez lived and worked, and is buried; and

37 WHEREAS, César Chávez successfully increased public  
38 awareness of farmworker working conditions. To many  
39 Californians the farmworkers’ struggles are an issue from the past,  
40 a belief reflected by the fact that farmworker suffering typically

1 takes place in remote areas far from cities, thereby rendering  
2 farmworkers invisible to our society. The fruits and vegetables  
3 that we enjoy in our daily lives are produced by farmworkers who  
4 often endure long hours of backbreaking work and still face  
5 challenges such as inadequate enforcement of pesticide, safety,  
6 and labor protection laws in the fields; and

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

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

20 *Resolved by the Assembly of the State of California*, That the  
21 Assembly calls upon all Californians to observe César Chávez's  
22 birthday, March 31, as a day of public service; and be it further

23 *Resolved*, That the Assembly calls upon all Californians to  
24 recognize the hard work and self-sacrifice that farmworkers go  
25 through to feed all the families in our state; and be it further

26 *Resolved*, That the Assembly calls upon all Californians to learn  
27 from César Chávez's life and his mission of nonviolence, social  
28 justice, and selfless service to others; and be it further

29 *Resolved*, That the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies  
30 of this resolution to the Chávez family, particularly César Chávez's  
31 widow, Helen Chávez, the United Farm Workers of America, the  
32 César Chávez Foundation, and the author for appropriate  
33 distribution.