

AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY MARCH 19, 2015

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE—2015–16 REGULAR SESSION

House Resolution

No. 11

Introduced by Assembly Member Eduardo Garcia

February 26, 2015

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

1 Puedes” (“Get Out if You Can”) to raise a family that eventually
2 numbered eight children; and

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

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

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

32 WHEREAS, Through countless strikes, boycotts, marches, and
33 fasts that produced many victories and some defeats, César Chávez,
34 who even considered vegetarianism an integral part of living
35 nonviolently, never stopped his peaceful battles on behalf of the
36 farmworkers with whom he shared his life. His dedication to his
37 work earned him the respect of some of our greatest political and
38 civil rights leaders, including Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther
39 King, Jr., and Jesse Jackson. César Chávez’s motto in life, “Sí Se

1 Puede!” or “Yes We Can!” has served as an inspiration not only
2 for Latinos, but for working Americans of all walks ~~for~~ of life; and

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

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

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

39 WHEREAS, César Chávez successfully increased public
40 awareness of farmworker working conditions. To many

1 Californians the farmworkers’ struggles are an issue from the past,
 2 a belief reflected by the fact that farmworker suffering typically
 3 takes place in remote areas far from cities, thereby rendering
 4 farmworkers invisible to our society. The fruits and vegetables
 5 that we enjoy in our daily lives are produced by farmworkers who
 6 often endure long hours of backbreaking work and still face
 7 challenges such as inadequate enforcement of pesticide, safety,
 8 and labor protection laws in the fields; and

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

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

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

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

29 *Resolved*, That the Assembly calls upon all Californians to learn
 30 from César Chávez’s life and his mission of nonviolence, social
 31 justice, and selfless service to others; and be it further

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