

Assembly Concurrent Resolution

No. 3

Introduced by Assembly Member Mendoza

December 1, 2008

Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 3—Relative to César Chávez Day.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

ACR 3, as introduced, Mendoza. César Chávez Day.

This measure would recognize March 31, 2010, as the anniversary of the birth of César Chávez, and would call upon all Californians to participate in appropriate observances to remember César Chávez as a symbol of hope and justice to all persons.

Fiscal committee: no.

1 WHEREAS, On March 31, 1927, a true hero named César
2 Estrada Chávez was born in Yuma, Arizona, to Librado and Juana
3 Chávez. He was second oldest in a family of five children. César
4 Chávez lived his life dedicated to improving the plight of
5 farmworkers through struggle, sacrifice, and self-denial. He
6 established and led the first successful farmworkers' union in
7 United States history. He stood for dignity and justice for
8 farmworkers. Today, he remains a symbol of hope to all
9 Californians who find hope and peace in justice; and
10 WHEREAS, In the 1930s, during the Great Depression, César
11 Chávez' father lost his small farming business, and the family went
12 broke. The family became migrant workers and joined some 30,000
13 workers who followed the crops from Arizona into Southern
14 California, then up the length of the Central Valley and back again,

1 picking everything from peas to cotton. They lived in tents and
2 other makeshift housing that often lacked a bathroom, electricity,
3 or running water. Schooling for Chávez was irregular and
4 haphazard. He attended some 30 different schools, often
5 encountered discrimination, and was punished for speaking
6 Spanish; and

7 WHEREAS, After graduation from the 8th grade, César Chávez
8 was forced to quit school and take to the fields in order to help
9 support his family. In 1944, at the age of 17, César Chávez joined
10 the Navy and served in World War II. After he completed his tour
11 of duty, César Chávez returned to California and married Helen
12 Fabela, a woman who shared his dedication to the cause of the
13 farmworker. They lived in San Jose in a tough Mexican
14 neighborhood called “Sal Si Puedes” which translates to “get out
15 if you can,” and together raised eight children; and

16 WHEREAS, As a farmworker, César Chávez experienced
17 firsthand the injustice of working long hours with little pay.
18 Instilled with a sense of justice passed down from his mother,
19 César Chávez made a decision to speak up and fight for change.
20 He took part in his first strike in protest of low wages and poor
21 working conditions for farmworkers. Although initially
22 unsuccessful, his participation in that first strike was to mark the
23 beginning of a long career in which he fought for improved
24 working and living conditions for farmworkers; and

25 WHEREAS, In 1962, César Chávez resigned his position with
26 the Community Services Organization to embark on a bold new
27 undertaking to form a farmworkers’ union. He was joined by the
28 great Dolores Huerta, and together they became the architects of
29 the National Farm Worker’s Union, the forerunner to the present
30 United Farm Workers (UFW); and

31 WHEREAS, In 1965, César Chávez led a strike of California
32 grape pickers to demand higher wages and urged all Americans
33 to boycott table grapes as a show of support. The strike included
34 a 340-mile march from Delano to Sacramento in 1966 in which
35 thousands of farmworkers and supporters marched in solidarity.
36 The farmworkers and supporters carried banners with the black
37 eagle with the words “HUELGA” (strike) and “VIVA LA CAUSA”
38 (long live our cause); and

39 WHEREAS, César Chávez preached nonviolence to the strikers
40 even as they were physically abused by many of those opposed to

1 the grape boycott. In 1968, he began a Ghandi-like fast to call
2 attention to the migrant workers' cause. Although his dramatic act
3 did little to solve the immediate problem, it increased public
4 awareness of the conditions under which farmworkers labored. In
5 1973, the UFW organized a strike for higher wages from lettuce
6 growers, and, after many battles, an agreement was finally reached
7 in 1977 that gave the UFW the sole right to organize farmworkers;
8 and

9 WHEREAS, During the 1980s, César Chávez led the effort to
10 call attention to the health problems of farmworkers caused by the
11 use of certain pesticides on crops; and

12 WHEREAS, On April 23, 1993, César Estrada Chávez died
13 peacefully in his sleep in San Luis, Arizona. During his funeral,
14 Cardinal Roger M. Mahoney, who celebrated the funeral mass,
15 called César Chávez "a special prophet for the world's
16 farmworkers"; and

17 WHEREAS, Many declared that the UFW would die without
18 him, but on César Chávez' birthday, March 31, 1994, under the
19 leadership of his son-in-law, Arturo Rodríguez, the UFW marched
20 343 miles from Delano to Sacramento, echoing César Chávez'
21 historic 1966 march, and demonstrated that the UFW still worked
22 for farmworkers; and

23 WHEREAS, In 1990, Mexican President Carlos Salinas de
24 Gortari awarded César Chávez "El Aguila Azteca" (the Aztec
25 Eagle), Mexico's highest award presented to people of Mexican
26 heritage who have made major contributions outside Mexico. He
27 also became the second Mexican American to receive the
28 Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor in the
29 United States, which was presented posthumously to his wife,
30 Helen Chávez, and their children on August 8, 1994, by President
31 William Jefferson Clinton; and

32 WHEREAS, In 1994, César Chávez' family and the officers of
33 the UFW created the César E. Chávez Foundation to inspire current
34 and future generations by promoting the ideals of César Chávez'
35 life, work, and vision. Communities throughout California and the
36 United States have honored the memory of César Chávez by
37 naming schools, parks, children's centers, streets, and other public
38 works after the great labor leader; and

39 WHEREAS, César Chávez led by example, giving of himself
40 so that he might help others. His relentless pursuit of the belief

1 that the American dream should be available to all Americans,
2 regardless of race or national origin, stands as a monument to our
3 free society. His life and work is not only an inspiration to Latinos,
4 but to working Americans of all nationalities. His legacy lives on
5 in the improved working and living conditions of hundreds of
6 thousands of Californians and their families; and

7 WHEREAS, In the year 2000, the Legislature enacted Senate
8 Bill 984 (Chapter 213 of the Statutes of 2000) to create an annual
9 state holiday on César Chávez' birthday, March 31. This holiday
10 provides all Californians the opportunity to learn from César
11 Chávez' life and provides schoolchildren the opportunity to learn
12 through community service; and

13 WHEREAS, The State Board of Education on Wednesday,
14 February 6, 2002, adopted a model curriculum on the life and work
15 of César Chávez, fulfilling a key provision of Chapter 213 of the
16 Statutes of 2000, that also includes topics on pesticides,
17 immigration, and agriculture's role in the economy; now, therefore,
18 be it

19 *Resolved by the Assembly of the State of California, the Senate*
20 *thereof concurring*, That the Legislature recognizes March 31,
21 2010, as the anniversary of the birth of César Chávez, and calls
22 upon all Californians to participate in appropriate observances to
23 remember César Chávez as a symbol of hope and justice to all
24 persons; and be it further

25 *Resolved*, That the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies
26 of this resolution to the author for appropriate distribution.