

Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 113

RESOLUTION CHAPTER 86

Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 113—Relative to the Bracero Memorial Highway.

[Filed with Secretary of State August 17, 2010.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

ACR 113, Caballero. Bracero Memorial Highway.

This measure would designate a specified portion of State Highway Route 101 in Monterey County as the Bracero Memorial Highway. This measure would also request the Department of Transportation to determine the cost of appropriate signs showing this special designation and, upon receiving donations from nonstate sources covering those costs, to erect those signs.

WHEREAS, Mexican nationals, known as Braceros, were legally contracted to work mostly in the agricultural and railroad industries in the Salinas Valley, and elsewhere, to alleviate a labor shortage during World War II; and

WHEREAS, Two tragic, preventable incidents illustrate their unsafe working conditions; and

WHEREAS, On June 17, 1958, approximately 50 Mexican Braceros were being transported from a Soledad labor camp to perform field work in the Salinas Valley. The truck transporting them was a flat bed truck converted to have a covered metal top, wooden benches, and only narrow exits at the end of the vehicle; and

WHEREAS, Purportedly, two gasoline cans were in the truck for two days prior to the incident, which the driver claimed were emptied the day before the accident. The driver did not inform the passengers that they should not smoke because there were gasoline cans in the truck; and

WHEREAS, One of the men lit a match igniting a flash fire in the passenger compartment of the vehicle; and

WHEREAS, Twelve men died immediately of asphyxia and second-, third-, and fourth-degree burns as they were trapped in the vehicle, two more men later died, and an additional 17 Mexican Braceros were hospitalized; and

WHEREAS, At that time, there was no state law prohibiting carrying gasoline cans in vehicles, and no criminal charges were brought; and

WHEREAS, The National Safety Council considered the fire the worst noncollision vehicle tragedy in the nation since 1944; and

WHEREAS, On September 17, 1963, on a lonely stretch of railroad track paralleling State Highway Route 101 at Thomas Ranch Road in the City of Chualar, near Salinas, California, 32 Bracero farmworkers lost their lives

and another 24 were injured in the biggest single fatal vehicle accident in California history and the worst of its type in United States' history; and

WHEREAS, The Braceros who were injured and killed were being transported in a truck converted into a bus without the approval of, or inspection by, any government agency, on the way to harvest celery for one dollar (\$1) per hour, when struck by an oncoming train; and

WHEREAS, Legal immigrant farmworkers continue to cross the border to work in many parts of California without being provided safe working conditions or being treated with dignity and respect; and

WHEREAS, In recognition of the Braceros' contributions and sacrifice in the Salinas Valley and elsewhere in California, it would be a fitting tribute to designate a portion of State Highway Route 101, between Soledad and Chualar, in Monterey County, as the Bracero Memorial Highway; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Assembly of the State of California, the Senate thereof concurring, That the Legislature hereby designates the portion of State Highway Route 101 from milepost 312 to exit 317, south of Chualar, in Monterey County as the Bracero Memorial Highway; and be it further

Resolved, That the Department of Transportation is requested to determine the cost of appropriate signs consistent with the signing requirements for the state highway system showing this special designation and, upon receiving donations from nonstate sources sufficient to cover the cost, to erect those signs; and be it further

Resolved, That the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies of this resolution to the Department of Transportation and to the author for appropriate distribution.