

Assembly Concurrent Resolution

No. 142

Introduced by Assembly Members Solorio and Mendoza

(Coauthors: Senators Alquist, Calderon, Cedillo, Corbett, Correa, DeSaulnier, Ducheny, Florez, Hancock, Kehoe, Leno, Liu, Lowenthal, Negrete McLeod, Oropeza, Padilla, Pavley, Price, Romero, Steinberg, Wiggins, Wolk, Wright, and Yee)

March 8, 2010

Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 142—Relative to César Chávez Day.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

ACR 142, as introduced, Solorio. 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

1 WHEREAS, In the 1930s, during the Great Depression, César
2 Chávez' father lost his small farming business, and the family went
3 broke. The family became migrant workers and joined some 30,000
4 workers who followed the crops from Arizona into Southern
5 California, then up the length of the Central Valley and back again,
6 picking everything from peas to cotton. They lived in tents and
7 other makeshift housing that often lacked a bathroom, electricity,
8 or running water. Schooling for Chávez was irregular and
9 haphazard. He attended some 30 different schools, often
10 encountered discrimination, and was punished for speaking
11 Spanish; and

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

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

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

36 WHEREAS, In 1965, César Chávez led a strike of California
37 grape pickers to demand higher wages and urged all Americans
38 to boycott table grapes as a show of support. The strike included
39 a 340-mile march from Delano to Sacramento in 1966 in which
40 thousands of farmworkers and supporters marched in solidarity.

The farmworkers and supporters carried banners with the black eagle with the words “HUELGA” (strike) and “VIVA LA CAUSA” (long live our cause); and

WHEREAS, César Chávez preached nonviolence to the strikers even as they were physically abused by many of those opposed to the grape boycott. In 1968, he began a Ghandi-like fast to call attention to the migrant workers’ cause. Although his dramatic act did little to solve the immediate problem, it increased public awareness of the conditions under which farmworkers labored. In 1973, the UFW organized a strike for higher wages from lettuce growers, and, after many battles, an agreement was finally reached in 1977 that gave the UFW the sole right to organize farmworkers; and

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

WHEREAS, On April 23, 1993, César Estrada Chávez died peacefully in his sleep in San Luis, Arizona. During his funeral, Cardinal Roger M. Mahony, who celebrated the funeral mass, called César Chávez “a special prophet for the world’s farmworkers”; and

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

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

WHEREAS, In 1994, César Chávez’ family and the officers of the UFW created the César E. Chávez Foundation to inspire current and future generations by promoting the ideals of César Chávez’ life, work, and vision. Communities throughout California and the

1 United States have honored the memory of César Chávez by
2 naming schools, parks, children’s centers, streets, and other public
3 works after the great labor leader; and

4 WHEREAS, César Chávez led by example, giving of himself
5 so that he might help others. His relentless pursuit of the belief
6 that the American dream should be available to all Americans,
7 regardless of race or national origin, stands as a monument to our
8 free society. His life and work is not only an inspiration to Latinos,
9 but to working Americans of all nationalities. His legacy lives on
10 in the improved working and living conditions of hundreds of
11 thousands of Californians and their families; and

12 WHEREAS, In the year 2000, the Legislature enacted Senate
13 Bill 984 (Chapter 213 of the Statutes of 2000) to create an annual
14 state holiday on César Chávez’ birthday, March 31. This holiday
15 provides all Californians the opportunity to learn from César
16 Chávez’ life and provides schoolchildren the opportunity to learn
17 through community service; and

18 WHEREAS, The State Board of Education on Wednesday,
19 February 6, 2002, adopted a model curriculum on the life and work
20 of César Chávez, fulfilling a key provision of Chapter 213 of the
21 Statutes of 2000, that also includes topics on pesticides,
22 immigration, and agriculture’s role in the economy; now, therefore,
23 be it

24 *Resolved by the Assembly of the State of California, the Senate*
25 *thereof concurring*, That the Legislature recognizes March 31,
26 2010, as the anniversary of the birth of César Chávez, and calls
27 upon all Californians to participate in appropriate observances to
28 remember César Chávez as a symbol of hope and justice to all
29 persons; and be it further

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