

Senate Resolution No. 17
Introduced by Senator Gonzalez

Relative to Cesar Chavez Day.

WHEREAS, César Estrada Chávez recognized that for many people, spanning many generations and many ethnicities, the path to a better life frequently begins in the fields. For many farmworkers, the American Dream means a life of self-sacrifice, hard work, and perseverance; and

WHEREAS, César Chávez experienced the hardships and injustices of farmworker life firsthand. He was born on March 31, 1927, in the North Gila River Valley in Arizona, on the small family farm his grandfather homesteaded. César Chávez’s father lost the farm during the Great Depression, forcing the family to join some 30,000 farmworkers who followed the crops throughout California and lived in tents and makeshift housing that often lacked a bathroom, electricity, or running water; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHEREAS, César Chávez successfully increased public awareness of farmworker working conditions. To many Californians the farmworkers’ struggles are an issue from the past, a belief reflected by the fact that farmworker suffering typically takes place in remote areas far from cities, thereby rendering farmworkers invisible to our society. The fruits and vegetables that we enjoy in our daily lives are produced by farmworkers who often endure long hours of backbreaking work and still face challenges such as inadequate enforcement of pesticide, safety, and labor protection laws in the fields; and

WHEREAS, Farmworkers still dream of providing a better life for their children, but the reality of having to move from crop to crop makes this dream hard to achieve. Economic forces and the rising cost of living have pushed farmworkers further into poverty; and

WHEREAS, In 2000, the Legislature passed and Governor Gray Davis signed into law Senate Bill 984 (Chapter 213 of the Statutes of 2000), to create the first annual state holiday in the country on César Chávez’s birthday, March 31. Under that law, the State Board of

Education also created a statewide curriculum on Chávez and encourages schools across the state to engage teachers and students in service learning projects as a way of honoring the legendary farm labor and civil rights leader; now, therefore, be it

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

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

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

Resolved, That the Secretary of the Senate transmit copies of this resolution to the Chávez family, the United Farm Workers of America, the César Chávez Foundation, and the author for appropriate distribution.

Senate Resolution No. 17 read and adopted by the Senate March 25, 2021.

Attest: _____
Secretary of the Senate