



Legislation Text

File #: Res 2054-2009, **Version:** *

Res. No. 2054

Resolution in support of establishing March 31 as a national holiday honoring Cesar Chavez.

By Council Members Gonzalez, Barron, Brewer, Palma and Sanders Jr,

Whereas, Cesar Chavez was a Mexican American farm worker, labor leader, civil rights activist, and environmentalist, who co-founded and led the first successful farm worker's union in U.S. history; and

Whereas, Chavez was born on March 31, 1927 on a small farm near Yuma, Arizona that his grandfather homesteaded during the 1880s; and

Whereas, After losing their farm during the Depression, Chavez's family worked as migrant workers, laboring in fields and vineyards, like other displaced families; and

Whereas, Chavez was 10 years old when he began working in the fields and was forced to leave school after the 8th grade to help support his family; and

Whereas, In 1952, Chavez became an organizer for the Community Service Organization (CSO), a barrio based group, where he coordinated voter registration drives, fought racial and economic discrimination, organized new CSO chapters across California and Arizona, and rose to become the CSO's national director from 1958 to 1962; and

Whereas, After leaving the CSO, Chavez co-founded the United Farm Workers (UFW); and

Whereas, Under Chavez's leadership, the UFW organized strikes and boycotts to protest for, and later win, higher wages for those farm workers in the grape and vegetable industries; and

Whereas, In 1966, Chavez led a historic 340-mile march in California, from Delano to Sacramento, calling on the state government to pass laws which would permit farm workers to organize into a union and

allow collective bargaining agreements; and

Whereas, He also encouraged all Americans to boycott table grapes as a show of support for the workers; and

Whereas, By 1970, the national boycott forced the grape growers to sign union contracts for the first time; and

Whereas, In 1975, Cesar Chavez called for a new international boycott of grapes when table grape growers were not willing to renegotiate UFW contracts; and

Whereas, In that same year, the UFW was instrumental in the passage of the Agricultural Labor Relations Act, which became the first law governing farm labor in the continental United States; and

Whereas, Provisions of the Act were designed to protect the rights of farm workers to act together to help themselves, to engage in union organizational activity, and to select their own representatives to bargain with employers; and

Whereas, By the 1980s, tens of thousands of farm workers had won UFW contracts with higher wages, family health coverage, pension benefits and other contract protections; and

Whereas, Cesar Chavez and the UFW also challenged the use of child labor and sexual harassment of women workers, and campaigned against the use of toxic pesticides; and

Whereas, On April 23, 1993, Cesar Chavez died in his sleep in Arizona at the age of 66, and over 40,000 people attended his funeral; and

Whereas, Chavez received a number of honors in recognition of his outstanding leadership; and

Whereas, In 1991, he received the Aguila Azteca (The Aztec Eagle), Mexico's highest award presented to people of Mexican heritage who have made major contributions outside of Mexico; and

Whereas, In 1994, Chavez posthumously received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor in the United States, from President Bill Clinton, and was the second Mexican-American to receive such an honor; and

Whereas, The United States Postal Service honored him with a postage stamp in 2003; and

Whereas, Many parks, cultural centers, libraries, schools, and streets have been named in his honor in cities across the country; and

Whereas, California and seven other states celebrate Cesar Chavez's birthday on March 31st as a state holiday; and

Whereas, Cesar Chavez Day is intended to promote community service; and

Whereas, During the 2008 Presidential campaign, President Barack Obama expressed his support for a Cesar Chavez national holiday; and

Whereas, Chair of the Hispanic Congressional Caucus, Representative Joe Baca (D-CA), has sponsored H.R. 76, a resolution that encourages the establishment of a Cesar Chavez national holiday by the U.S. Congress, along with 62 co-sponsors, including Representatives Yvette Clarke (D-NY), Charles Rangel (D-NY), Jose Serrano (D-NY) and Nydia Velazquez (D-NY); and

Whereas, The late Senator Robert F. Kennedy called Cesar Chavez one of the most historic figures of our time; and

Whereas, Cesar Chavez made a significant impact in improving the lives of many Americans, and thus, should be recognized for his contributions by having a national holiday in his honor; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York supports establishing March 31 as a national holiday honoring Cesar Chavez.

LS #7449
5/18/09
11:45 a.m.
TC