

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION

No. 111

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED MARCH 11, 2021

Sponsored by:

Senator VIN GOPAL

District 11 (Monmouth)

SYNOPSIS

Designates March 31 of each year as “Cesar Chavez Day.”

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.



1 **A JOINT RESOLUTION** designating March 31 of each year as “Cesar
2 Chavez Day.”
3
4 **WHEREAS**, Cesar Estrada Chavez was born on March 31, 1927, in
5 Arizona, and from there moved to California where he grew up
6 working in farm fields; and
7 **WHEREAS**, After his father was injured in an accident, Chavez left
8 school after eighth grade and became a migrant farm worker so that
9 his mother would not have to work in the fields; and
10 **WHEREAS**, Chavez joined the U.S Navy in 1946 and served for two
11 years in the Western Pacific, and afterward, returned to working in
12 farm fields; and
13 **WHEREAS**, He became the staff director for the Community Service
14 Organization (CSO) in the 1950s and early 1960s and assisted
15 individuals in his local community with tasks such as coordinating
16 voter registration and leading campaigns against racial and
17 economic discrimination; and
18 **WHEREAS**, In 1962, Chavez founded the National Farm Workers
19 Association with just himself and his family as members, which
20 later became the United Farm Workers (UFW), the union for farm
21 workers, which grew to 50,000 members; and
22 **WHEREAS**, Chavez designed the logo for the union, an Aztec eagle, a
23 powerful symbol that would be easy for union members to draw
24 themselves on handmade flags; and
25 **WHEREAS**, Inspired by St. Francis, Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Martin
26 Luther King, Jr., Chavez embraced an approach of nonviolent
27 protests, which included organized labor strikes, marches, boycotts
28 of produce, as well as fasting by Chavez himself; and
29 **WHEREAS**, In 1966, Chavez led a 340 mile march from Delano,
30 California to Sacramento, California, to draw attention to the cause
31 of striking farm workers, garnering thousands of supporters along
32 the way; and
33 **WHEREAS**, Chavez was an innovator in developing bargaining
34 strategies for exploited workers, and he was one of the first labor
35 leaders to use boycotts in large-scale labor-management disputes,
36 recruiting millions of followers to boycott grapes and other
37 products for La Causa (the cause of the farm workers); and
38 **WHEREAS**, The boycotts led by Chavez ultimately led to the
39 enactment of California’s “Agricultural Labor Relations Act of
40 1975”, the first and only law in the United States guaranteeing farm
41 workers the right to form unions; and
42 **WHEREAS**, In 1968, Chavez fasted for 25 days in support of
43 nonviolent protesting, he fasted for 25 days in 1972 over the
44 enactment of an anti-union law in Arizona, and in the summer of
45 1988, Chavez fasted for 36 days to focus public attention on the
46 poisoning of farm workers due to pesticides; and
47 **WHEREAS**, Chavez established the National Farm Workers Service
48 Center in 1966, which is now the Cesar Chavez Foundation, a non-

1 profit organization that builds, renovates and manages affordable
2 housing, operates the Radio Campesina network with music and
3 educational Spanish language programming, and provides various
4 educational services for children; and

5 **WHEREAS**, Chavez is known for the motto, “Sí se puede,” which
6 translates to “Yes, it can be done,” spoken during one of his three
7 fasts, and Chavez’s efforts to fight for the rights of farm workers
8 became known as “La Causa”; and

9 **WHEREAS**, Under Chavez, the UFW advanced employment rights for
10 its workers, including but not limited to collective bargaining
11 agreements with medical benefits for workers, and abolishment of a
12 short-handled hoe that led to the crippling of many farm workers;
13 and

14 **WHEREAS**, In the 1960s, Chavez voluntarily gave up his position and
15 salary of staff director with the CSO to dedicate himself to La
16 Causa, and he embraced a life of poverty, never earning more than
17 \$6,000 a year and never owning a home; and

18 **WHEREAS**, Although Chavez was most well-known for his advocacy
19 for farm workers, he was never fearful to voice his beliefs, even
20 when not shared by many of his followers, including being an early
21 supporter of gay rights in the 1970s; and

22 **WHEREAS**, In 1962, President Kennedy offered Chavez a leadership
23 position within the Peace Corps, but Chavez turned down the job to
24 carry on his work; and

25 **WHEREAS**, Although Cesar Chavez died in 1993, his work and life
26 continue to inspire oppressed workers and other groups of people to
27 stand up for their rights; and

28 **WHEREAS**, President Clinton awarded the Medal of Freedom, the
29 nation’s highest civilian honor, to Chavez posthumously; and

30 **WHEREAS**, March 31st is celebrated as Cesar Chavez Day in nine U.S.
31 states and as a federal commemorative holiday, and

32 **WHEREAS**, It is altogether fitting and proper, and in the public interest,
33 for the Legislature and Governor of this State to commemorate and
34 honor the anniversary of Cesar Chavez’s birth; now, therefore,
35

36 **BE IT RESOLVED** *by the Senate and General Assembly of the*
37 *State of New Jersey:*
38

39 1. March 31 of each year is designated as “Cesar Chavez Day”
40 to commemorate the anniversary of the birth of Cesar Chavez, who
41 dedicated his life to provide a voice to oppressed migrant farm
42 workers and their families.
43

44 2. The Governor shall annually issue a proclamation and call
45 upon public officials, and all citizens of this State, to observe
46 “Cesar Chavez Day” with appropriate programs and activities.
47

48 3. This joint resolution shall take effect immediately.

STATEMENT

This joint resolution commemorates the birth and celebrates the life of Cesar Chavez by designating March 31 of each year as “Cesar Chavez Day.”

Cesar Chavez worked in the farm fields of California since he was a child, leaving school when his father suffered an accident so that his mother would not have to work in the fields. Chavez joined the U.S. Navy in 1946 and served for two years in the Western Pacific. Upon completion of his service, Chavez returned to work in the farm fields.

However, Chavez still had a desire to help others, and despite only having an eighth grade education, he became the staff director of the Community Service Organization (CSO) in the 1950’s and early 1960’s. In this position, Chavez assisted individuals with important tasks such as voter registration. Although this work provided Chavez with a stable salary, he voluntarily left this position to dedicate himself to “La Causa,” standing up for the employment rights of oppressed migrant farm workers and their families. By doing so, Chavez took on a life of poverty, never earning more than \$6,000 per year.

Inspired by St. Francis, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mahatma Gandhi, Cesar Chavez employed a strategy of non-violent advocacy for the rights of farm workers. This advocacy included labor strikes and the boycotting of grapes and other produce. The boycotting ultimately led to the passage of California’s Agricultural Labor Relations Act of 1975, the first and only law guaranteeing farm workers the right to unionize.

Further, Chavez led a 340 mile march from Delano, California to Sacramento, California in 1966. Additionally, Chavez engaged in fasting on three separate occasions: in 1968, Chavez fasted for 25 days; in 1972 Chavez fasted for another 25 days; and in 1988, at the age of 61, Chavez fasted for 36 days.

Chavez founded the National Farm Workers Association, which is now the United Farm Workers (UFW), the union for farm workers, in 1962. Moreover, Chavez formed the National Farm Workers Service Center in 1966, now the Cesar Chavez Foundation, which provides educational services to children, provides and manages affordable housing projects and operates the Radio Campesina network, providing Spanish language music and educational programming.

Although Chavez died in 1993, his legacy endures. In 1994, President Clinton awarded the Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor, to Chavez posthumously, and Chavez’s work and life continue to inspire many others.

With this designation, the Legislature and the Governor honor the life of Cesar Chavez and continue to raise awareness for “La Causa.”