



HR0249

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HOUSE RESOLUTION

2 WHEREAS, The members of the Illinois House of
3 Representatives are pleased to honor the life and legacy of
4 farm workers' leader Cesar Estrada Chavez; and

5 WHEREAS, Cesar Estrada Chavez was born on March 31, 1927
6 on a farm near Yuma, Arizona that his grandfather homesteaded
7 in the 1880s; after Cesar Chavez's father, Librado, was forced
8 from his farm in 1937, the Chavez family became migrant
9 workers in California, the beginning of Cesar's legendary
10 destiny; he quit school after the 8th grade in 1942 in order to
11 help support his family by working in the fields full time; and

12 WHEREAS, In 1944, Cesar Chavez joined the United States
13 Navy, where he was slated to serve in the western Pacific
14 theatre during World War II; just before he was to be shipped
15 to the Pacific, he was arrested in a segregated movie theater
16 in Delano, California for sitting in the "whites only"
17 section; and

18 WHEREAS, In 1952, Cesar Chavez was recruited into the
19 Community Service Organization (CSO) by community organizer
20 Fred Ross, who discovered the young farm worker laboring in
21 apricot orchards outside San Jose, California; together with
22 Mr. Ross, he organized 22 CSO chapters across California

1 during the 1950s, leading to CSO becoming the most militant
2 and effective Latino civil rights group of its day; and

3 WHEREAS, On March 31, 1962, his 35th birthday, Cesar
4 Chavez resigned from CSO, choosing instead to move his wife
5 and eight small children to Delano, California and to dedicate
6 himself full time to organizing farm workers; the first
7 convention of Cesar's National Farm Workers Association (NFWA)
8 convened in Fresno, California on September 30, 1962; and

9 WHEREAS, The 1960s presented a prime opportunity for Cesar
10 Chavez and his new organization to advocate for the rights of
11 migrant workers; having worked on building the membership of
12 his infant union during the early 1960s, the NFWA, with
13 1,200-member families, voted on September 16, 1965 to join an
14 ongoing strike against Delano-area grape growers started by
15 the mostly Filipino American members of the Agricultural
16 Workers Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO (AWOC), beginning the
17 famous five-year Delano Grape Strike; during March and April
18 of 1966, he and a band of strikers embarked upon a 340-mile
19 Peregrinacion (Pilgrimage) from Delano to the steps of the
20 California state capitol in Sacramento to draw national
21 attention to the suffering of farm workers; as a result of the
22 march and a four-month boycott, Schenley Vineyards negotiated
23 an agreement with NFWA, the first genuine union contract
24 between a grower and farm workers' union in United States

1 history; and

2 WHEREAS, Cesar Chavez's success with the NFWA continued
3 throughout the late 1960s, with a successful boycott at the
4 DiGiorgio Fruit Corporation and a strike at the Giumarra
5 Vineyards Corporation; in 1966, the NFWA and the Filipino
6 American AWOC merged to form the United Farm Workers, which
7 affiliated with the AFL-CIO; in 1968, Cesar fasted for 25 days
8 to rededicate his movement to nonviolence; United States
9 Senator Robert F. Kennedy joined over 8,000 farm workers and
10 supporters at a mass where Cesar broke his fast, calling the
11 weakened farm labor leader "one of the heroic figures of our
12 time"; and

13 WHEREAS, Cesar Chavez's movement continued apace during
14 the 1970s, with most California table grape growers signing
15 UFW contracts by 1970; after Salinas Valley growers signed
16 contracts with the Teamsters Union in the summer of 1970, he
17 led a national boycott of lettuce, a decision that led to a
18 jail sentence in Salinas, California from December 10 to 24 of
19 1970; still going strong, the UFW became chartered as an
20 independent affiliate by the AFL-CIO in 1972, becoming the
21 United Farm Workers of America, AFL-CIO (UFW); and

22 WHEREAS, After a hard-fought battle with the California
23 state government and various growers, Cesar Chavez and the UFW

1 managed to pass the landmark Agricultural Labor Relations Act
2 in June of 1975, which guaranteed California farm workers the
3 right to organize and bargain with their employers; under his
4 leadership, the United Farm Workers of America won hundreds of
5 labor elections across the nation during 1975 and 1976; and

6 WHEREAS, The number of farm workers protected by UFW
7 contracts grew to about 45,000 by the early 1980s; Republican
8 George Deukmejian was elected California governor in 1982 with
9 \$1 million in grower campaign contributions; under Governor
10 Deukmajian's leadership, the California Agricultural Labor
11 Relations Board ceased enforcement of the Agricultural Labor
12 Relations Act, forcing Cesar Chavez to declare a third grape
13 boycott in 1984; and

14 WHEREAS, In 1986, 61-year old Cesar Chavez kicked off the
15 "Wrath of Grapes" campaign to draw public attention to the
16 pesticide poisoning of grape workers and their children; the
17 campaign included a 36 day public fast in Delano, California,
18 his last and longest-running; and

19 WHEREAS, In 1992, Cesar Chavez, working with UFW First
20 Vice President Arturo Rodriguez, led vineyard walkouts in the
21 Coachella and San Joaquin valleys, resulting in the first
22 industry-wide pay hike in eight years for grape workers; this
23 feat proved to be the last for this brave pioneer, who passed

1 away in his sleep on April 23, 1993 in the midst of defending
2 the UFW against a multi-million dollar lawsuit brought against
3 the union; and

4 WHEREAS, On August 8, 1994, President Bill Clinton
5 posthumously awarded the Medal of Freedom, America's highest
6 civilian honor, to Cesar Chavez in honor of his everlasting
7 contributions to society; and

8 WHEREAS, Today, the UFW continues its vigilant protection
9 of its many union members; the union remains strong, with
10 undeniable strength in numerous states such as California,
11 Florida, and Washington, a fact that would certainly make
12 Cesar Chavez proud; therefore, be it

13 RESOLVED, BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE
14 HUNDRED SECOND GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that
15 we honor the life and legacy of Cesar Chavez and his
16 contributions to the downtrodden of our society; and be it
17 further

18 RESOLVED, That a suitable copy of this resolution be
19 presented to the family of Cesar Chavez as a symbol of our
20 great esteem and respect.