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1 SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 589

2 WHEREAS, The Members of the Illinois Senate are pleased to  
3 honor the life and legacy of farm workers leader Cesar Estrada  
4 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 workers  
9 in California, the beginning of his legendary destiny; he quit  
10 school after the 8th grade in 1942, in order to help support  
11 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, however, he was arrested in a segregated movie  
16 theater 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, Cesar Chavez organized 22 CSO chapters across

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

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

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

1 between a grower and farm workers' union in United States  
2 history; and

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

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

23 WHEREAS, After a hard-fought battle with the California

1 state government and various growers, Cesar Chavez and the UFW  
2 managed to pass the landmark Agricultural Labor Relations Act,  
3 which guaranteed California farm workers the right to organize  
4 and bargain with their employers, in June of 1975; led by Cesar  
5 Chavez, the United Farm Workers of America won hundreds of  
6 labor elections across the nation during 1975 and 1976; and

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

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

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

1 feat proved to be the last for this brave pioneer, who passed  
2 away in his sleep on April 23, 1993, in the midst of defending  
3 the UFW against a multi-million dollar lawsuit brought against  
4 the union; and

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

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

14 WHEREAS, On March 31, 2008, Northeastern Illinois  
15 University celebrated and honored the life and legacy of Cesar  
16 Chavez; therefore, be it

17 RESOLVED, BY THE SENATE OF THE NINETY-FIFTH GENERAL  
18 ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that we honor the life and  
19 legacy of Cesar Chavez and his contributions to the downtrodden  
20 of our society; and be it further

21 RESOLVED, That a suitable copy of this resolution be

1 presented to the family of Cesar Chavez as a symbol of our  
2 great esteem and respect.