achievements of Cesar Chavez

The Speaker pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2001, the gentleman from California (Mr. Baca) is recognized for 6 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

General Leave

Mr. BACA. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on the subject of this Special Order.

The Speaker pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

Mr. BACA. Mr. Speaker, yesterday I had introduced a resolution, H. Res. 105, recognizing the achievements of Cesar Chavez, the founder and president of the United Farm Workers of America.

It is introduced and supported by the United Farm Workers and supported by all Members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, and many of my fellow Members of the House of Representatives.

This resolution encourages a Federal holiday for March 31 in honor of Cesar's birthday. It encourages States to make March 31 a holiday. It encourages schools to incorporate lessons on Cesar Chavez's life and work into their curriculum and to learn about their curriculum.

Cesar Chavez is a true American hero. He carried the torch for justice and freedom. He was a light for thousands of impoverished people. He was a beacon of light for many Latinos in the community, a giant of a man. His legacy will live on in our hearts, in our hopes, in our dreams.

Cesar Chavez was born near Yuba, Arizona, and grew up in a migrant labor camp. In 1938, the Chavez family had joined some 300,000 migrant workers who followed the crops in California.

Migrant workers had no permanent homes. They lived in overcrowded quarters, without bathrooms, electricity, or running water. Can one imagine individuals living without bathrooms, electricity, or running water? Cesar Chavez lived there as a poor individual.

Going to school was not easy for a child of a migrant worker since they are always away and on the move. Can one imagine the impact it has on many of the children who want to get a good quality of education but are moving from one camp to another?

He noticed that the labor contract and landowners exploited the workers. He tried reasoning with farm owners about higher pay and better working conditions. But most of the fellow workers would not support him for fear of losing their jobs.

Yes, people want to obtain jobs and sometimes are not willing to speak up; and sometimes we do need a leader. So we had a leader in Cesar Chavez. As a solitary voice, Chavez had no power, but was willing to stand up and speak out.

In 1944, he joined the United States Navy and served his country, a man who had fought for the same principles that many of us had fought for or served this country. For the freedom that we enjoy for the justice, the equality, he went in to preserve that and served in 1944.

Upon returning, he would no longer stand to see the workers being taken advantage of, watching as they worked long hours for low pay, and I state for low pay.

At the age of 35, he left his well-paid job to devote his time to organizing the farm workers into a union, a union that would help improve the quality of life for many individuals.

In the early 1960s, Chavez became co-founder and president of the United States Farm Workers. In 1968, Chavez gained attention as the leader of a nationwide boycott of California table grapes in a drive to achieve labor contracts. In fact, some of us still do not eat grapes even now today, even though that boycott is over.

He led his organization to increase protection for workers, for health and safety; to buy child labor from the fields, to win fair-wage guarantees, and to fight against discrimination in employment and the sexual harassment of female workers.

Chavez also used nonviolent tactics to bring attention to the plight of farm workers. His efforts are a shining example to young people and can provide an invaluable lesson for what he or she believes in if they work hard, perseverance, and people banding together, solidarity and unity, that changes can come about.

He organized the farm workers to stand together and in one loud voice say, "From this day, we demand to be treated like men. We are to be respected as human beings. We are not slaves, and we are not animals, and we will not work for low wages.

"You live in big farm homes, but we live in boxes. You have plenty to eat while our children must work in our fields for food. You wear good clothing, but we are dressed in rags.

"Your wives are free to make good homes, while our wives work in the field along pesticides. Fighting for social justice is one of the most profound ways in which a man can recognize another man's dignity."

Cesar Chavez lived there as a poor individual. His legacy will live on in our hearts, in our hopes, in our dreams.

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the House to pay tribute and pay respect to a man who brought dignity to every man and woman and child in this country, as we struggled from the fields.

Chavez was bestowed one of the greatest honors when he was introduced into the U.S. Department of Labor's Hall of Fame. This honor is solely reserved for Americans whose contributions to the field of labor have enhanced the quality of lives for millions. Not only did he enhance the lives of millions, but he touched deeply those individuals with compassion and commitment and, as we used to refer, to la causa (the cause).

Many of my colleagues may remember one particular time when he had 25 days of fast that was conducted by Chavez, which reaffirmed the United Farm Workers' commitment to nonviolence.

For those of us who lived through that period of time, we heard of the great odds that Chavez faced as he led the successful 5-year strike and boycott. Through these boycotts, Chavez was able to forge a national support of coalitions of unions, church groups, students, minorities, and consumers.

By the end of the boycotts, everyone knew the chant that unified all groups, si se puede, yes we can. It was a chant of encouragement, pride, and dignity.

Although we knew him for his advocacy on behalf of farm workers, he was influential in other areas. He helped communities mobilize by assisting them with voter registration drives and insisting that the minority communities had just as much right to have equitable access to quality education.

The migrant schools that we find today is a tribute to his work and his hard efforts in assuring that those youngsters, those children of those workers should have access to a quality education. He helped to mobilize by continuing to move forward in these areas.

Many of us today look to Chavez for the inspiration even here in the House of Congress. Those of us who continue his fight to make sure that the voice of those voiceless is heard and that the dignity that is deserved by all laborers, no matter what their work, should continue.

America has seen few leaders like Chavez. To honor his work and deeds, I ask each Member to be supportive of these efforts and this resolution.

I want to just briefly also just talk about the fact that here was a man who organized individual, very nonviolent, very unassuming. Yet he was a giant of a man.

I know Art Rodriguez who has followed after him. I had the pleasure of being at St. Mary's University with him as a student. To me, Cesar Chavez meant a great deal. Because as I started to get my degree in pharmacy, I changed and got involved in the movement during that time, even changed my degree to political science and in other fields and got involved in politics.

My life was also involved in the boycotts, in lettuce as well as the grapes. That is how I met my wife, Carolina.

Mr. Speaker, there is a great deal that he brought to us, and that was the fight and dignity that every worker should have, that every individual should be treated in an equitable manner. In terms of the struggle we see today, Mr. Speaker, I would not be saying, if you want to bring in a bracero program or a guest worker program, you make sure that you treat those people in the same way as you treat the 300,000 that we just brought over with high-tech technology and degrees, to make sure that they get treated in the same manner.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from California (Mr. BACA), and the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER), who have brought forward year after year resolutions and efforts in creating a holiday for Cesar Chavez.

Mr. BACA. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER).

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from California (Mr. BACA) for this special order and for his resolution, H. Res. 105, that will bring us toward a great national recognition for Cesar Chavez.

We call today the strongest possible terms for Cesar Chavez's birthday on March 31 to be recognized as a Federal holiday. This great national hero should be recognized with a national holiday. This Nation, this world, lost a great civil rights leader nearly 8 years ago, when Cesar Chavez died after a tireless struggle for social change. March 31 is a State holiday in my State of California, and countless schools, roads, libraries and other public institutions have been named after Cesar Chavez. It is now time that the entire Nation honor his enduring legacy with a Federal holiday.

We will hear tonight the poignant story of Cesar Chavez's life. I want to talk about the impact of his life on my life, and on the life of my constituents, and on the life and soul of this Nation.

He brought dignity and respect to farm workers who organized themselves and became an inspiration to all people engaged in human rights struggles throughout the world. It is time we pay him the respect that he deserves.

His work was holistic, helping to empower farm workers on their basic rights. Influenced by the writings of Gandhi and other proponents of nonviolence, he began to register his fellow farm workers to vote and then to organize contracts for farm workers to a safe workplace and a just wage.

Through the use of a grape boycott, Cesar Chavez, Delores Huerta, and others in the fledgling United Farm Workers were able to secure the first union contracts for farm workers in the United States. These contracts provided farm workers with the basic services that most workers take for granted today, services such as clean drinking water and sanitary facilities.

Because of Cesar Chavez's fight to enforce child labor laws, farm workers could also be certain that their children would not be working side by side with them and would instead attend the schools that he helped to establish. He was a model of the exposure to dangerous chemicals that farm workers and consumers face every day.

Cesar Chavez's influence extended far beyond agriculture. He was instrumental in forming the Community Service Organization, one of the first civic groups in the Mexican-American communities of California and Arizona.

He worked in urban areas, organized voter registration drives, brought complaints against mistreatment by government agencies. He taught community members how to deal with governmental, school and financial institutions and empowered many to seek further education and politics.

During a time of great social upheaval, he was sought out by people from all walks of life to help bring calm with his nonviolent practices. Our country's leaders joined Cesar Chavez literally, and often figuratively, in prayers and acts of solidarity in his many fasts for justice.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., sent Cesar Chavez a message on the occasion of Chavez's first fast. Dr. King told him, "Our separate struggles are really one. A struggle for freedom, for dignity and for humanity." There are countless stories of judges, engineers, lawyers, teachers, church leaders, organizers and other hardworking professionals who credit Cesar Chavez as the inspiring force in their lives. I count Cesar Chavez and his work as the message, among his most strong early influences.

Cesar Chavez will be remembered for his tireless commitment to improve the plight of farm workers, children and the poor throughout the United States, and for the inspiration his heroic efforts gave to so many Americans.

Mr. Speaker, I have introduced legislation in every Congress since 1995 to create a Federal holiday to honor Cesar Chavez, and today with the gentleman from California (Mr. BACA), to teach all of America about Cesar Chavez. Surely we can do this and pass such a resolution.
Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to cosponsor H. Con. Res. 105 or H. Con. Res. 3. We must make sure that we honor him from this time forward by declaring March 31 as a Federal Holiday in honor of Cesar Chavez.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. Moran) for his efforts tonight.

Mr. BACA. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. Moran).

Mr. Moran of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, Cesar Chavez was one of the greatest labor leaders of our time. His courage was unbelievable. Before he stood up to some of the most selfish and apparently uncaring farmers, he recognized that there were thousands, hundreds of thousands of people who were absolutely, had no recourse, no redress for their grievances, were being exploited in our economy, particularly the agriculture economy.

Mr. Speaker, Cesar Chavez united them. We as a Nation, many of us, boy-cotted grapes and lettuce and felt that we were part of a movement greater than ourselves, and, in fact, in retrospect it was.

Many good farm workers were even worse treated. They were indentured servants. They would travel up the migrant stream, their children would have to follow with them. The children would get no education. The few children of farm workers who got an education, it would not be from bilingual teachers. They would be in hovels off the road where no one would see them. They were huts, really, that were no more than chicken coops, many of them. They would have to borrow money for their rent and food and necessities. The harder they worked, many farmers would reduce the piece rates so they would always be in debt. They would have to come back the next year to pay off their debt. This became a tradition, an institution of exploitation.

Cesar Chavez gave these families hope. He was in the American tradition. I know there are still many families who hate him today for the fact that he turned around a system that was greatly to their benefit, but this was a man that was American in all of the finest traditions. We look to him for inspiration, and I would hope that we will find ways to continue to honor him.

Many of the children and grandchildren of the families that he organized now have a good education, have broken into the middle class, and have control over their lives, and they will soon forget why it is that they have a piece of the American pie now. They have some control over their lives. But in many instances, it is because of the courage that he showed, the leadership of Cesar Chavez.

So I thank the distinguished gentleman from California for being here, and his colleagues from Texas and California, and I know there are many other colleagues, if the House was still in session, who would be here, but who had to leave. This House bears a real debt of gratitude to Cesar Chavez, as does the Nation.

Mr. BACA. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. Moran). As the gentleman noted, there are many individuals that would have been here to speak, as many individuals have signed on as cosponsor of this particular legislation.

I think it is important for all of us to recognize the importance of why we are doing this. We are doing it for an individual who has given so much of his life for this country, for this area; his leadership, his vision, his struggle to help many of the poor and disadvantaged, his inspiration, and what it means to all of us.

For some of us, unless we worked out in the fields, we really do not understand what it is like. I happened to have picked peaches and tomatoes out in the field, and let me tell my colleagues, it is not the best job. And when you see a lot of the people out there that are suffering, and you see the working conditions of individuals, and you see the children, you can see the emotion and the feeling of many of the children that are out there that are being affected.

What Cesar Chavez wanted to do was to make sure that the children also had a better education. He said the children need a better education. He went through 36, 38 different schools, and so he said, I want the children to enjoy the same life that other children have. I want to make sure they have the opportunity.

When he looked in their eyes, when he looked at their clothes, and realize their opportunities, he could see the feeling of what was expressed in the dignity and the respect that he wanted for all children, for all individuals. When he looked at the campesinos and the working conditions, he wanted to make sure that they had a better opportunity not only for themselves, but for their families. He wanted to make sure they could put food on the table and they could take care of their clothes and their housing, have better conditions, so they would not have to worry about not having their health, not having to get up with pain to go back to work the next day because there was the service.

He wanted a better life, and he gave a lot of himself. He gave of himself for many individuals. Our Nation should be grateful for a great hero and a great American, a veteran, a leader, a visionary, an inspiration, a man that we all look to.

It is hard to be a leader, Mr. Speaker. It is hard to really be involved. It is easy to sit on the sidelines and say it is nice if someone does lead, but he was willing to pick up the banner. And now Arturo Rodriguez has carried that struggle and banner, carried it forth to make sure equality is there.

Another person along with him was Delores Huerta, who led in the struggle and the fight. She is ill today. Who knows why she is ill today and in the hospital. It could be because of all of the involvement she had, the struggles and the sacrifices she made; and many other individuals.

Mr. Speaker, we need to support this resolution encouraging a Federal holiday for March 31 in honor of Cesar Chavez’s birthday, to encourage States to make March 31 a holiday, to encourage schools to incorporate a lesson on Cesar Chavez, because if they do not know his contributions, what he has done, then we are lost, because it is by learning each other’s customs and traditions and our heritage that we know the struggle of individuals and we accept history. We need to work that into our curriculum.

Ms. ROYBAL-ALLARD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to add my voice in honor of Cesar Chavez.

The son of a migrant farm worker, Cesar Chavez was not born into greatness. However, he became a great leader in our nation’s continuing fight for labor and civil rights.

Cesar Chavez is best remembered as the founder and president of the United Farmworkers of America. The contributions of Cesar Chavez, however, were not limited to the fields. His voice reached the urban areas, particularly in the East Los Angeles neighborhoods where I was born and raised and now am proud to represent in Congress.

Cesar Chavez was part of the Latino empowerment movement of the 40’s. Even today his memory inspires Latinos to be activists at the community, state and national levels.

Cesar Chavez understood that participation was the greatest tool to implement changes in our society. He once said, it is possible to become discouraged about the injustice we see everywhere. But God did not promise us that the world would be humane and just. He gives us the gift of life and allows us to choose the way we will use our limited time on earth. It is an awesome opportunity.

The world is a better place because of the work of Cesar Chavez. The best tribute we can pay is to find opportunities to continue his work in the fight for civil rights, and to encourage others to join us.

Ms. SOLIS. Mr. Speaker, Cesar Chavez is one of the most well-known and respected
fought tirelessly until the end to help his fellow workers and kept Cesar Chavez' struggle alive. He was a pioneer in addressing environmental justice issues related to pesticides in food and how farm workers' health was placed at great risks due to exposure to chemicals used in the fields.

As a State Senator in California through Chavez's influence, Huerta's friendship, I fought to improve the working, living, and safety conditions for farm workers. I strongly supported a ban on methyl bromide, an acutely toxic pesticide responsible for poisons many farm workers and many have even died due to methyl bromide poisoning.

I also fought to eliminate the dangerous "short hoe" method for strawberry workers, and worked for clean housing and bathrooms for farm workers.

I am very committed to continue Chavez' legacy by supporting pro-labor and environmental legislation in Congress to help remedy some of these environmental and labor injustices.


SPECIAL ORDERS GRANTED
By unanimous consent, permission to address the House, following the legislative program and any special orders heretofore entered, was granted to:

The following Members (at the request of Mr. Rodriguez) to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material:

Mr. Pallone, for 5 minutes, today.
Mr. Langevin, for 5 minutes, today.
Mr. Skelton, for 5 minutes, today.
Ms. Jackson-Lee of Texas, for 5 minutes, today.

This secret session discusses the fight for a "Cesar Chavez National Holiday." This would officially recognize Cesar Chavez, as one of the most outstanding national Latino leaders in modern U.S. history.

Mr. Berman, Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay heartfelt tribute to Cesar Chavez, a man of courage, faith and love who shared his great strength with thousands and inspired millions of Americans. As a leader in the fight for social justice, he was a hero to farm workers, to the Latino community, to the labor movement and to me.

Cesar Estrada Chavez was born on March 31, 1927, near Yuma, Arizona. In 1962, Chavez founded the National Farm Workers Association, later to become the United Farm Workers—the UFW. With persistence, hard work and faith, Chavez built a great union that galvanized the spirit of all people through commitment to the struggle for justice through nonviolence. He devoted his life to inspire his fellow farm workers and to fire the conscience of the rest of us.

It was my great fortune to work with Chavez as a colleague and friend. Cesar's efforts were critical in focusing public attention on our nation's deplorable treatment of migrant farm workers. Through his leadership and his legacy, the United Farm Workers has grown in strength in its efforts to achieve a lasting justice for farm workers.

On this anniversary of his birthday, it is appropriate to mention that today across the nation and in this Chamber there are numerous efforts to commemorate the life and work of Cesar Chavez. I am grateful for the opportunity to express my thoughts about Cesar and to be among the many to celebrate the life of one of the most heroic figures in American history.

Cesar Chavez was a great man who exemplified justice, love and humility. I ask my colleagues to join me in recognizing Chavez, whose dedication to the plight of farmworkers has inspired us all. I salute him for his courage and commitment to La Causa (the cause).

LEAVE OF ABSENCE
By unanimous consent, leave of absence was granted to:
Ms. Baldwin (at the request of Mr. Gephardt) for today on account of a death in the family.

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD—HOUSE
March 29, 2001
ADJOURNMENT
Mr. Baca. Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now adjourn.

Mr. G. Michael, I think it's appropriate to agree: accordingly (at 4 o'clock and 23 minutes p.m.), pursuant to House Resolution 107, the House adjourned until tomorrow, Friday, March 30, 2001, at 10 a.m., in memory of the late Hon. Norman Sisisky of Virginia.

OATH FOR ACCESS TO CLASSIFIED INFORMATION
Under clause 13 of rule XXIII, the following Members executed the oath for access to classified information:


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Mr. Pallone, for 5 minutes, today.
Mr. Langevin, for 5 minutes, today.
Mr. Skelton, for 5 minutes, today.
Ms. Jackson-Lee of Texas, for 5 minutes, today.

(The following Members (at the request of Mr. Osborne) to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material:)

Mr. Goss, for 5 minutes, today.