



UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

1331 Pennsylvania Ave, NW • Suite 1150 • Washington, DC 20425 www.usccr.gov

March 28, 2014

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write on behalf of the United States Commission on Civil Rights (hereafter “the Commission”) to request formal recognition and establishment by Congress of March 31 of every year henceforth as a permanent national holiday--National Cesar Chavez Day--and that the President issue an Executive Order declaring March 31st the Cesar Chavez National Day of Service.

To date, three states honor Cesar Chavez Day: California, Texas and Colorado. President Barack Obama designated his home in Nuestra Senora Reina de la Paz (Our Lady Queen of Peace) as the site for the Cesar E. Chavez National Monument in October 2012¹ and declared March 31, 2013 as Cesar Chavez Day by issuing a Presidential Proclamation.²

Cesar Chavez is a civil rights icon, an American who stood for non-violent advocacy and inclusion. Born in Yuma, Arizona in 1927, Mr. Chavez was one of six in a Mexican-American family. When he was 11, Mr. Chavez’s family lost their farm during the Great Depression. The family became migrant farmers throughout California where a young Mr. Chavez worked fulltime to help support his family. He later went on to serve in the United States Navy from 1946-1948.³

Mr. Chavez’s personal experience as a migrant worker exposed him to the harsh realities of working in the fields where there was no one to give voice to the needs of the voiceless. He went on to join the Community Service Organization as an organizer in 1952, an effort which started out urging Mexican Americans to register to vote and speaking out nationally for workers’ rights.⁴ After ten years of leading campaigns against racial and economic discrimination, Mr. Chavez realized his dream of organizing a union that would protect and serve farm workers. He founded the National Farm Workers with 10 members. NFW later became the United Farm Workers of America. His tireless

¹ <http://news.yahoo.com/blogs/ticket/obama-honors-cesar-chavez-monument-210802015--election.html>, last accessed February 26, 2014.

² <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/03/29/presidential-proclamation-cesar-chavez-day>, last accessed on February 26, 2014.

³ Cesar Chavez Foundation, http://www.cesarchavezfoundation.org/page.php?code=001001000000000&page_ttl=About+Cesar&kind=1, last accessed February 25, 2014.

⁴ Dream to Organize Farm Workers, Cesar Chavez Foundation website, http://www.cesarchavezfoundation.org/page.php?code=001024000000000&page_ttl=Dream+to+organize&kind=1; Cesar Chavez Wikipedia page, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cesar_Chavez, both last accessed February 26, 2014.

efforts led to the first collective bargaining agreements between farm workers and growers in American history, and were the first contracts to require rest periods, toilets in the fields, clean drinking water and hand washing facilities. His wins also included the first comprehensive union medical benefits for farmworkers and their families.⁵

Mr. Chavez's movement and his legacy have grown far beyond the rights of farmworkers, but to the civil rights of all, especially of American of Latino descent. Indeed, Mr. President, as you said in 2008:

"Chavez left a legacy as an educator, environmentalist, and a civil rights leader. And his cause lives on. As farmworkers and laborers across America continue to struggle for fair treatment and fair wages, we find strength in what Cesar Chavez accomplished so many years ago. And we should honor him for what he's taught us about making America a stronger, more just, and more prosperous nation. That's why I support the call to make Cesar Chavez's birthday a national holiday. It's time to recognize the contributions of this American icon to the ongoing efforts to perfect our union." -- Senator Barack Obama March 31, 2008.⁶

Today, the Commission stands with the thousands advocating for a National Cesar Chavez Holiday and a National Day of Service to honor the man who dedicated his life to ensuring that the working person's basic civil rights and dignity were not trampled.

Sincerely,



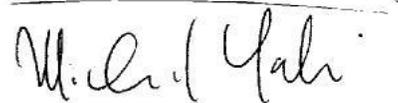
Chairman Martin R. Castro



Commissioner Roberta Achtenberg



Commissioner David Kladney



Commissioner Michael Yaki

*Approved by a majority of the members of the Commission as of March 14, 2014

⁵ Historic Victories for Union, Cesar Chavez Foundation website, http://www.cesarchavezfoundation.org/page.php?code=00102500000000&page_ttl=Years+of+adversity&kind=1, last accessed February 26, 2014.

⁶ <http://www.cesarchavezholiday.org/>, last accessed February 26, 2014.