

THE UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

PRESS RELEASE

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U.S. COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS SENDS LETTERS TO CONGRESS URGING NATIONAL HOLIDAYS TO HONOR CESAR CHAVEZ AND FRED KOREMATSU

WASHINGTON, DC: Martin R. Castro, Chairman of the United States Commission on Civil Rights, announced that the Commission has sent letters to the President and Congress to urge the creation of national holidays on the anniversaries of the birth of Cesar Chavez and Fred Korematsu.

The letters request formal recognition and establishment by Congress of March 31st of every year henceforth as National Cesar Chavez Day, and January 30th of every year henceforth as National Fred Korematsu Day. In addition, the letters request that the President issue an Executive Order declaring those two days national holidays in recognition of both men's contribution to upholding civil rights and liberties for all citizens in our country.

The Chairman said, "Cesar Chavez is a civil rights icon, an American who stood for non-violent advocacy of farmworker rights and inclusion. Born in Yuma, Arizona in 1927, Mr. Chavez was one of six in a Mexican-American family who lost their farm during the Great Depression and became migrant workers. 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 their plight. He went on to organize Mexican-Americans to register to vote and speak out nationally for workers' rights.

"Fred Korematsu refused to enter the United States' internment camps established for Japanese-Americans in the wake of the 1941 Pearl Harbor attacks. Mr. Korematsu was arrested, tried and convicted, and his case went all the way to the Supreme Court which ruled against Mr. Korematsu. In 1983 his conviction was overturned by a San Francisco federal district court judge, although the U.S. Supreme Court decision stands. Mr. Korematsu was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Clinton in 1998 in recognition of his lifelong efforts to remedy the wrongs done to him and other Japanese-Americans. The nation should never forget the contributions of both these men."

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is an independent, bipartisan agency charged with monitoring federal civil rights enforcement. Members include Chairman Martin R. Castro and Commissioners Roberta Achtenberg, Gail Heriot, Peter Kirsanow, David Kladney, and Michael Yaki. Commission meetings and briefings are open to the general public. The Commission's website is <http://www.usccr.gov>.

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