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HOUSE BILL 34

54TH LEGISLATURE - STATE OF NEW MEXICO - FIRST SESSION, 2019

INTRODUCED BY

Miguel P. Garcia

AN ACT

RELATING TO PUBLIC HOLIDAYS; ESTABLISHING THE FIRST FRIDAY IN
APRIL AS A PUBLIC HOLIDAY DESIGNATED AS "DENNIS CHAVEZ AND
CESAR CHAVEZ DAY".

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF NEW MEXICO:

SECTION 1. Section 12-5-2 NMSA 1978 (being Laws 1969,
Chapter 114, Section 1, as amended by Laws 1987, Chapter 3,
Section 1 and also by Laws 1987, Chapter 309, Section 1) is
amended to read:

"12-5-2. LEGAL HOLIDAYS--DESIGNATION.--Legal public
holidays in New Mexico are:

- A. New Year's day, January 1;
- B. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday, third Monday
in January;
- C. Washington's and Lincoln's birthday, President's

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1 day, third Monday in February;

2 D. Dennis Chavez and Cesar Chavez day, first Friday
3 in April;

4 [~~D.~~] E. Memorial day, last Monday in May;

5 [~~E.~~] F. Independence day, July 4;

6 [~~F.~~] G. Labor day, first Monday in September;

7 [~~G.~~] H. Columbus day, second Monday in October;

8 [~~H.~~] I. Armistice day and Veterans' day, November
9 11;

10 [~~I.~~] J. Thanksgiving day, fourth Thursday in
11 November; and

12 [~~J.~~] K. Christmas day, December 25."

13 SECTION 2. A new section of Chapter 12, Article 5 NMSA
14 1978 is enacted to read:

15 "[NEW MATERIAL] DENNIS CHAVEZ AND CESAR CHAVEZ DAY.--The
16 first Friday of April of each year shall be set apart and be
17 known as "Dennis Chavez and Cesar Chavez day", and in addition
18 to its designation as a legal holiday pursuant to Section
19 12-5-2 NMSA 1978, shall be observed in recognition of the great
20 integrity and many contributions of United States senator and
21 civil rights leader Dennis Chavez and civil rights and labor
22 leader Cesar Chavez to the civil, legal and economic heritage
23 of all the residents of the United States. This day shall be
24 observed by the people of New Mexico in those efforts and
25 undertakings that shall be in harmony with the general

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1 character of Dennis Chavez and Cesar Chavez day."

2 SECTION 3. TEMPORARY PROVISION--LEGISLATIVE FINDINGS--
3 DENNIS CHAVEZ AND CESAR CHAVEZ BIOGRAPHIES.--

4 A. In recognition of United States Senator Dennis
5 Chavez and civil rights leader Cesar Chavez, the legislature
6 finds that the specific histories and contributions of both
7 leaders shall be recognized and provided in this section.

8 B. United States Senator Dennis (Dionicio) Chavez
9 was affectionately known as "El Senador" by his New Mexico
10 constituents. He was born into a Spanish-speaking household on
11 April 8, 1888 in the Hispano village of Los Chavez, located in
12 the territory of New Mexico. When Dennis Chavez was seven, the
13 Chavez family moved to the Barelmas neighborhood directly south
14 of downtown Albuquerque. In 1900, at the age of twelve, Dennis
15 Chavez left school to help support his family.

16 During his six-day-a-week job delivering groceries for the
17 Highland grocery store, Dennis Chavez became concerned with
18 inequities in class and race that he witnessed. Much of his
19 time off was spent at the public library immersing himself in
20 United States history. One day, his boss loaded up a wagonload
21 of groceries for delivery to the Barelmas railyards. Upon
22 arriving at the railyards, he noticed that the workers were on
23 strike. Dennis Chavez refused to cross the picket line and was
24 fired as a result.

25 In 1917, Dennis Chavez moved to Washington, D.C., where he

1 worked for United States Senator A. A. Jones as an assistant
2 legislative clerk. In the evenings, he attended Georgetown
3 university school of law, from which he graduated in 1920.
4 That same year, Dennis Chavez returned to Albuquerque to set up
5 a law practice, but his future was in politics. He was elected
6 to the New Mexico house of representatives in 1922 and eight
7 years later was elected to the United States house of
8 representatives, where he was appointed chair of the Indian
9 affairs committee. In 1935, Dennis Chavez became the only
10 Hispanic in the United States senate, where he served until his
11 death in 1962, having established himself as a vigorous
12 advocate of civil and human rights.

13 "El Senador" was a man ahead of the times. His 1944 fair
14 employment practices commission bill, prohibiting
15 discrimination in the workplace based on race, religion, color,
16 national origin or ancestry, did not pass, but twenty years
17 later, these rights were protected in the Civil Rights Act of
18 1964. Dennis Chavez was an ardent critic of Senator Joseph
19 McCarthy's anti-communist campaign. In 1952, he co-sponsored
20 the Federal Highway Act that led to the national highway
21 system. He chaired the powerful United States senate
22 subcommittee on defense spending that controlled the purse
23 strings for New Mexico's military bases and national
24 laboratories.

25 Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson provided the eulogy at

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1 Dennis Chavez's funeral in 1962. Dennis Chavez is buried in
2 Albuquerque's Mount Calvary cemetery. He conferred with every
3 president from Hoover to Kennedy and ultimately became one of
4 the most powerful members of congress. Yet, when he returned
5 home to New Mexico, he always delighted in the opportunity to
6 visit with his fellow New Mexicans. He never forgot his humble
7 roots.

8 C. Cesar Chavez was born on March 31, 1927 in Yuma,
9 Arizona, which, at one point in history, served as the western
10 boundary of the territory of New Mexico. Members of the Chavez
11 family were migrant farm workers. While living in California,
12 they would pick peas and lettuce in the winter, cherries and
13 beans in the spring, corn and grapes in the summer and cotton
14 in the fall.

15 In 1942, Cesar Chavez quit school in the seventh grade
16 because he did not want his mother to have to work in the
17 fields. It would be his final year of formal schooling. He
18 dropped out to be a full-time migrant farm worker. Cesar
19 Chavez joined the United States navy in 1944, and upon
20 completing his service, he and his wife moved to San Jose,
21 California, where the couple raised eight children.

22 Cesar Chavez worked in the fields until 1952, when he
23 became an organizer for the community service organization, a
24 Latino civil rights group. In 1962, Cesar Chavez left the
25 community service organization and, with New Mexico native

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1 Dolores Huerta, founded the united farm workers union. It was
2 in his days as leader of the united farm workers that Cesar
3 Chavez waged some of the most heroic civil and human rights
4 struggles to bring better living and working conditions for the
5 most marginalized of the American workforce, the farm worker.

6 An American farm worker, labor leader and civil rights
7 activist, Cesar Chavez became the best known Hispanic civil
8 rights activist in the annals of United States history. He has
9 become an icon for organized labor symbolizing support for
10 workers and for Hispanic empowerment based on grass roots
11 organizing and nonviolent forms of civil disobedience. He is
12 also famous for popularizing the slogan "¡Si, se puede!"
13 (Spanish for "Yes, it can be done").

14 In the spring of 1966, Cesar Chavez and the united farm
15 workers led striking California grape pickers on the historic
16 farm workers' march from Delano to the state capitol in
17 Sacramento. The Delano march was the first step in the
18 unprecedented five-year boycott of table grapes that activated
19 millions of Americans from all four corners of the nation in
20 supporting the demands of the united farm workers union for
21 collective bargaining and improved living and working
22 conditions for farm workers.

23 The United States in the early 1970s was percolating with
24 organized strikes and boycotts by the united farm workers, the
25 most famous being the "Salad Bowl Strike". It was the largest

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1 farm worker strike in United States history. The strike
2 protested for, and later won, higher wages for farm workers
3 working for grape and lettuce growers. Influenced by the
4 Catholic tradition of penance and by Indian activist Mohandas
5 Gandhi's fasts and emphasis on nonviolence, Cesar Chavez
6 undertook a number of spiritual fasts in 1968, 1970 and 1972.

7 The last speaking engagement that Cesar Chavez made in New
8 Mexico was in the early spring of 1993 at Rio Grande high
9 school located in Atrisco. He spoke on the "no grapes"
10 campaign banning the use of toxic pesticides on grapes. Cesar
11 Chavez passed away eight weeks after the high school assembly.
12 President Bill Clinton posthumously presented Cesar Chavez with
13 the presidential medal of freedom.

14 SECTION 4. DELAYED REPEAL.--Section 3 of this act is
15 repealed effective December 31, 2020.