

Date of Hearing: April 11, 2018

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION  
Patrick O'Donnell, Chair  
AB 2644 (Reyes) – As Amended March 20, 2018

**SUBJECT:** Dolores Huerta Day

**SUMMARY:** Designates April 10 of each year as Dolores Huerta Day, encourages all public schools and educational institutions to conduct exercises remembering the life, accomplishments, and contributions of Dolores Huerta, and requires the Governor to annually proclaim April 10 as Dolores Huerta Day. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Designates April 10 of each year as Dolores Huerta Day, a day having special significance, and requires the Governor to annually proclaim April 10 as Dolores Huerta Day.
- 2) Encourages all public schools and educational institutions to conduct exercises remembering the life of Dolores Huerta, recognizing her accomplishments, and familiarizing pupils with the contributions she made to this state.
- 3) Makes findings and declarations regarding the life of Dolores Huerta:
  - a) Activist and labor leader Dolores Huerta has worked her entire life to improve social and economic conditions for farmworkers, is a leader in the fight against discrimination, and is a defender of civil rights, equal rights, and dignity for all.
  - b) Dolores Huerta was born Dolores Clara Fernández on April 10, 1930, in Dawson, New Mexico.
  - c) Dolores Huerta's father, Juan Fernández, a farmworker and miner by trade, was a union activist who ran for political office and won a seat in the New Mexico State Legislature in 1938. Dolores Huerta's mother, Alicia Fernández, had an independent and entrepreneurial spirit and was active in numerous civic organizations and the church. She used her 70-room hotel to provide housing to low-wage workers.
  - d) Dolores Huerta spent most of her childhood and early adult life in Stockton, California, with her two brothers and their mother, following her parents' divorce.
  - e) While Dolores Huerta was a student at Stockton High School, she was active in numerous school clubs and the Girl Scouts. Upon graduating she earned a provisional teaching credential. She taught until she could no longer bear to see her students come to school with empty stomachs and bare feet, and thus began her lifelong journey of working to correct economic injustice.
  - f) Dolores Huerta found her calling as an organizer while serving in the leadership of the Stockton chapter of the Community Service Organization (CSO), and founded the Agricultural Workers Association. She set up voter registration drives and pressed local governments for barrio improvements.

- g) During this time, Dolores Huerta met César Chávez, a fellow CSO official, who had become its director.
- h) In 1962, both Dolores Huerta and César Chávez lobbied to have the CSO expand its efforts to help farmworkers, but the organization was only focused on urban issues.
- i) As a result, César Chavez and Dolores Huerta resigned from the CSO, and cofounded the National Farm Workers Association. Dolores Huerta's organizing skills were essential to the growth of the association.
- j) The two made a great team. César Chávez was the dynamic leader and speaker, while Dolores Huerta was the skilled organizer and tough negotiator.
- k) Dolores Huerta overcame the many challenges she faced as a woman. She remained the most talented negotiator, securing services for farmworkers in California in 1963 in the form of Aid to Families with Dependent Children and disability insurance, an unparalleled feat of the times.
- l) The Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee was an integral part of the farmworkers original organizing, and was formed by Filipino workers. The Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee was led by Larry Itliong, Philip Vera Cruz, Pete Velasco, and Andy Imutan, all of whom were instrumental to the farm labor movement.
- m) In 1965, the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee and the National Farm Workers Association combined to become the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, later known as the United Farm Workers (UFW). That year, the union took on the Coachella Valley grape growers.
- n) Dolores Huerta was also instrumental in the enactment of the Agricultural Labor Relations Act of 1975. This was the first law of its kind in the United States, granting farmworkers in California the right to collectively organize and bargain for better wages and working conditions.
- o) While the farmworkers lacked financial capital, they were able to wield significant economic power through hugely successful boycotts and at the ballot box with grassroots campaigning. As the principal legislative advocate, Dolores Huerta became one of the UFW's most visible spokespersons. Robert F. Kennedy acknowledged her help in winning the 1968 California Democratic Presidential primary, moments before he was shot in Los Angeles.
- p) Dolores Huerta advocated for the entire family's participation in the movement because of the involvement of men, women, and children together in the fields picking, thinning, and hoeing. Thus, the practice of nonviolence was not only a philosophy but a very necessary approach in providing for the safety of all. Nonetheless, her life and the safety of those around her were in jeopardy on countless occasions.

- q) During the 1980s, Dolores Huerta served as vice president of the UFW and cofounded the UFW's radio station. She continued to speak for a variety of causes, advocating for a comprehensive immigration policy and better health conditions for farmworkers.
- r) The most widely-known phrase "Sí se puede" was a phrase first used by Dolores Huerta in the farmworker movement.
- s) In 1988, at age 58, she nearly lost her life when she was beaten by San Francisco police at a rally protesting the policies of then-presidential candidate George H. W. Bush. She suffered four broken ribs and a ruptured spleen.
- t) Public outrage resulted in the San Francisco Police Department changing its policies regarding crowd control and police discipline.
- u) Following a lengthy recovery, Dolores Huerta took a leave of absence from the union to focus on women's rights, traveling the country for two years on behalf of the Feminist Majority, encouraging Latinas to run for office. The campaign resulted in a significant increase in the number of women representatives at the local, state, and federal levels.
- v) At age 83, Dolores Huerta continues to work tirelessly, developing leaders and advocating for the working poor, women, and children. As founder and president of the Dolores Huerta Foundation, she travels across the country advocating in campaigns and legislation that support equality and defend civil rights. She continues to be a voice for social justice and public policy.
- w) Dolores Huerta continues to lecture and speak out on a variety of social issues involving immigration, income inequality, and the rights of women and Latinos.
- x) Dolores Huerta teaches the concept of personal power that needs to be coupled with responsibility and cooperation to create the changes needed to improve the lives of the working poor.
- y) Dolores Huerta has been honored for her work as a fierce advocate for farmworkers, immigrants, the working poor, and women.
- z) There are four elementary schools in California named after Dolores Huerta, the most recent being the Dolores Huerta International Academy in Fontana, California.
- aa) Dolores Huerta was inducted into the California Hall of Fame in March of 2013. She has received numerous awards, including: the Eleanor Roosevelt Human Rights Award from President Bill Clinton in 1998, Ms. Magazine's One of the Three Most Important Women of 1997, Ladies' Home Journal's 100 Most Important Women of the 20th Century, the Puffin Foundation's Award for Creative Citizenship: Labor Leader Award 1984, the Kern County Woman of The Year Award from the California State Legislature, the Ohtli Award from the Mexican Government, the James Smithson Award of the Smithsonian Institution, and nine honorary doctorates from universities throughout the U.S.

- bb) Dolores Huerta received the Ellis Island Medal of Freedom Award and was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame in 1993. That year proved bittersweet for her as she also experienced the passing of her beloved friend César Chávez.
- cc) In 2012, President Barack Obama bestowed Dolores Huerta with her most prestigious award, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian award in the United States. Upon receiving this award she said, "The freedom of association means that people can come together in organization to fight for solutions to the problems they confront in their communities. The great social justice changes in our country have happened when people came together, organized, and took direct action. It is this right that sustains and nurtures our democracy today. The civil rights movement, the labor movement, the women's movement, and the equality movement for our LGBT brothers and sisters are all manifestations of these rights. I thank President Obama for raising the importance of organizing to the highest level of merit and honor."
- dd) The accomplishments and contributions of Dolores Huerta should be properly memorialized within the history and culture of the United States. Dolores Huerta deserves proper recognition for her numerous sacrifices in the name of justice and the amelioration of severely inadequate working conditions.

#### **EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Designates a number of days as days of special significance to the public schools and educational institutions, and encourages them to observe that day and to conduct suitable commemorative exercises. Those recognizing individuals are John Muir Day (April 21), Harvey Milk Day (May 22), Fred Korematsu Day (January 30), Ronald Reagan Day (February 6), and Ed Roberts Day (January 23) and Larry Itliong (October 25).
- 2) Requires public schools to close on a number of holidays, including January 1, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Lincoln Day, Washington Day, Memorial Day, July 4, Labor Day, Veterans Day, Thanksgiving Day, December 25, all days appointed by the Governor or the President of the United States for a public fast, thanksgiving or holiday, and any other day designated as a holiday by the governing board of the school district.
- 3) Requires, for some specified holidays for which schools are required to close (Dr. Martin Luther King Day, Lincoln Day, Washington Day), that schools conduct exercises in commemoration.
- 4) Authorizes public schools to close on two other days if the governing board, pursuant to a collective bargaining agreement, agrees to close schools for that purpose. These days are César Chávez (March 31) and Native American Day (fourth Friday in September).
- 5) Requires public schools to remain open on specified days (unless otherwise closed to mark a holiday by decision of the governing board), and to celebrate the significance of those days with appropriate commemorative exercises. These days are the anniversary of the adoption of the U.S. Constitution, the birthdays of Luther Burbank (March 7) and Susan B. Anthony (February 15), and the death of Crispus Attucks (March 5).

**FISCAL EFFECT:** This bill has been keyed non-fiscal by the Office of Legislative Counsel.

**COMMENTS:**

*Need for the bill.* The author states, “In 1955 Huerta began her career as an activist when she co-founded the Stockton chapter of the Community Service Organization (CSO). Through a CSO associate, Huerta met activist César Chávez, with whom she shared an interest in organizing farm workers. In 1962, Huerta and Chávez founded the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA), the predecessor of the United Farm Workers’ Union (UFW), which formed three year later. Huerta served as UFW vice president until 1999. Despite ethnic and gender bias, Huerta helped organize the 1965 Delano strike of 5,000 grape workers and was the lead negotiator in the workers’ contract that followed.

Throughout her lifetime, Huerta organized workers, negotiated contracts, advocated for safer working conditions including the elimination of harmful pesticides. She also fought for unemployment and healthcare benefits for agricultural workers. Huerta was the driving force behind the nationwide table grape boycotts in the late 1960s. The recipient of many honors, Huerta received the Eleanor Roosevelt Human Rights Award in 1998 and the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2012. As of 2015, she was a board member of the Feminist Majority Foundation, the Secretary-Treasurer Emeritus of the United Farm Workers of America, and the President of the Dolores Huerta Foundation.

Existing law proclaims the first week of April as Labor History Week and encourages school districts to commemorate the week with appropriate educational exercises that make pupils aware of the role the labor movement has played in shaping California and the United States. It is only appropriate that we give Dolores Huerta proper recognition for her numerous sacrifices in the name of justice and the labor movement.”

*Dolores Huerta’s contributions recognized in state’s new History-Social Science framework.*

The state’s History-Social Science Curriculum Framework, adopted by the State Board of Education in 2016, includes content about the contributions of Dolores Huerta in several grades. In second grade, Dolores Huerta is named as a hero whose biography students may study. In the 4<sup>th</sup> grade California history, and in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade course, U.S. History and Geography, students may study “how Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, and the United Farm Workers’ movement used nonviolent tactics, educated the general public about the working conditions in agriculture, and worked to improve the lives of farmworkers.”

**REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

**Support**

None on file

**Opposition**

None on file

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