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BILL ANALYSIS



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Senate Bill 352 (Substitute S-1 as passed by the Senate)  
Sponsor: Senator Buzz Thomas  
Committee: Local, Urban and State Affairs

Date Completed: 6-10-03

### **RATIONALE**

Cesar Estrada Chavez (1927-1993), raised in Depression-era poverty among California migrant farm laborers, rose to organize and eventually become the first president of the United Farm Workers of America. Through years of organizing workers, staging successful boycotts of grapes and other agricultural products, conducting nonviolent protests, and staging farm laborer strikes, Chavez is credited with helping to improve the wages, working conditions, and lives of the nation's farm workers. It has been suggested that Chavez's birthday, March 31, be declared by the State as Cesar E. Chavez Day, in his honor.

### **CONTENT**

The bill would create a new act to declare March 31 each year as Cesar E. Chavez Day, and to encourage individuals, governmental and educational institutions, and community organizations "to pause on Cesar E. Chavez day and reflect upon the courage and sacrifice of a man to whom Robert Kennedy once referred as 'one of the heroic figures of our time'."

The bill contains the following statement:

The legislature recognizes the fundamental contribution that Cesar E. Chavez made to this nation by organizing farm workers to campaign for safe and fair working conditions, reasonable wages, decent housing, and the outlawing of child labor. Cesar E. Chavez began working in the fields of Arizona and California at the age of 10. Profoundly influenced

by these humble beginnings, Chavez embraced the nonviolent principles of Mohandas Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to crusade against racial and economic discrimination, coordinate voter registration drives, and found the united farm workers of America. In 1994, Chavez was posthumously awarded the presidential medal of freedom, the highest honor given to civilians by the United States government.

### **BACKGROUND**

In 1991, Cesar Chavez received the Aquila Azteca (the Aztec Eagle), Mexico's highest award for an individual of Mexican heritage who has made significant contributions outside of Mexico. In 1994 he was awarded posthumously the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Clinton. On April 24, 2003, the U.S. Postal Service issued the Cesar E. Chavez commemorative stamp.

In Michigan, Public Act 361 of 2002 named a portion of business route 196 in Grand Rapids and Kent County as "Cesar E. Chavez Way".

A detailed description of Chavez' life and accomplishments can be found at the following Internet site:

<http://clnet.ucr.edu/research/chavez/>

### **ARGUMENTS**

*(Please note: The arguments contained in this analysis originate from sources outside the Senate Fiscal Agency. The Senate Fiscal Agency neither supports nor opposes legislation.)*

**Supporting Argument**

Cesar Chavez led a life of unrelenting effort toward, and sacrifice for, the betterment of migrant farm workers, farm laborers in general, and a more equitable society. Born into and raised in crushing poverty, he showed people that such obstacles could be overcome. His achievements gained him worldwide recognition as a labor organizer and leader, and stand as a testament to his integrity, persistence, and courage. By declaring Cesar E. Chavez Day, the State would send a strong message that it recognizes and honors his life, would encourage school children to study his life, and would serve as an inspiration.

Legislative Analyst: George Towne

**FISCAL IMPACT**

The bill would have no fiscal impact on State or local government.

Fiscal Analyst: Bill Bowerman

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This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan Senate staff for use by the Senate in its deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.