

JUNE 10, 2003

YES WE CAN. AND WE MUST

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) today issued the following statement in support of H.R. 925, a bill to designate a U.S. Post Office in Chicago, IL the "César Chávez Post Office."

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 925, a bill to designate a U.S. Post Office in Chicago, IL the "César Chávez Post Office." I can think of no one more deserving of such an honor than the great civil rights leader, César Chávez. I want to commend my colleague, Representative Gutierrez, for his leadership in bringing this legislation before the House and I am proud to join him as an original cosponsor.

César Chávez was an organizer, an activist, a protestor, a farm worker, a peace-lover, a father, and a son. Raised in a family of farm workers forced to migrate throughout the Southwest, Chávez was led by his compassion, his ability to inspire others to action, and his deep sense of fairness and equality to organize and establish what is today the United Farmworkers of America. Because of his efforts, many farm workers today enjoy higher pay, family health coverage, pension benefits, and other contract protections. While we still have a long way to go in giving farm workers the fair pay and healthy work conditions they deserve, César Chávez laid the foundation toward accomplishing those important goals.

César Chávez understood what it took to create a movement and he dedicated every part of his life to setting an example and leading the way. As a child and young man, he experienced firsthand the harsh working conditions of farm workers - the long hours, poverty wages, harassment, and abuse - as well as the limited access to education and health care. Understanding and addressing the roots of the problem, Chavez was able to make a lasting and significant impact. He conducted voter registration drives and campaigns against racial and economic discrimination. He led boycotts and pickets and hunger strikes. His nonviolent methods echoed those of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi. He showed us all how critical it is to organize people, to unify them for a cause, and to help them believe in themselves and their ability to make a difference.

César Chávez continues to be an example for us today. He taught us that "Si se puede," or "Yes we can." We can - and we must - help those with no voice, help those who are discriminated against, help those who are taken advantage of, and help those who live in poverty and are struggling to survive. If César Chávez were alive today, I am sure he would still be leading the fight for fairness and equality for workers and their families. We must not let his legacy die; we must not let his great strides forward become giant steps backward. We must continue to work for what is right. I urge my colleagues to vote yes on H.R. 925.