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OPINION

Honoring Cesar Chavez and the Dignity of Work

We're united in the fight for living wages

BY MARC H. MORIAL



While it is commonly thought that the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s was by, of, and exclusively for the benefit of African Americans, the life and legacy of Cesar Chavez remind us of how much it touched the lives of our Hispanic brothers and sisters and oppressed people everywhere.

A Mexican-American who was born March 31, 1927 on a farm near Yuma, Ariz., Chavez and his family moved to California in 1938 to eke out a living like thousands of other overworked and underpaid migrant farm workers in his community.

But rather than tolerate the daily injustices heaped upon them, which also included forced child labor, sexual

harassment of women workers and the use of pesticides harmful to both workers and consumers, Chavez devoted his life to organizing and improving the lives of migrant workers.

In 1962, he and Delores Huerta co-founded the United Farm Workers Union. Inspired by the non-violent examples of Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Chavez embraced the philosophy of non-violent protest and employed such tactics as marches, boycotts and hunger strikes to garner mainstream support for the rights of migrant workers.

In 1968, he fasted for 25 days for better wages and working conditions in the fields of California's San Joaquin Valley. Upon ending that strike by breaking bread with Sen. Robert Kennedy, Chavez addressed his supporters, saying, "We are gathered here today, not so much to observe the end of the Fast, but because we are a family bound together in a common struggle for justice. We are a Union family celebrating our unity and the

non-violent nature of our movement."

Chavez's work and sacrifice inspired millions of people around the world, including Dr. King and National Urban League President Whitney M. Young Jr.

In 1969, towards the end of a five-year strike and boycott for the rights of Mexican and Filipino grape workers, Young met with Chavez and his supporters in Delano, Calif. Young was moved to write a To Be Equal column in which he said, "I was inspired by their spirit and their faith in the face of the odds against them." He added, "Labor, by organizing the poor and the friendless, can help end poverty by protecting low-wage workers, and it can give the lie to those who happily proclaim the selfishness and prejudice of some unions."

Cesar Chavez died on April 23, 1993. Following Whitney Young's example, subsequent National Urban League leaders, me included, have continued to work in solidarity with the goals of the United Farm Workers and numerous other Latino civil rights organizations.

I spoke at the National Council of La Raza conference last summer and attended part of the League of United Latin American Citizens conference in February. We are all united in many of our struggles, especially the fight to end income inequality and poverty.

As an iconic labor leader and anti-poverty activist, Cesar Chavez would have likely also been an enthusiastic supporter of the National Urban League's current petition to raise the minimum wage and all of our work for jobs with living wages and fair benefits.

President Obama has proclaimed Chavez's birthday, March 31, as Cesar Chavez Day "to remember a man who made justice his life calling." We believe that the best way to honor Chavez's legacy is through service and a renewed commitment to end income inequality and poverty. Congress can do its part by raising the minimum wage now.

Marc H. Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.

We Can't Give Up on Preventing Gun Violence

Our silence will not protect us

BY SANDY SORENSEN



I am not writing this in the immediate aftermath of another horrific mass shooting. I am not marking the anniversary of a prominent gun violence tragedy, although given the estimated 30,000 deaths from gun violence annually; it is likely the anniversary of a gun tragedy in some American community somewhere.

And although legislation to strengthen background checks on gun purchases is still before Congress, most political observers give it little chance of moving in a midterm congressional election year. But perhaps it is just such a time as this when we need to redouble our efforts to prevent gun violence from continuing to take its tragic toll in our nation.

Truly our silence will not protect us.

The fact is that gun violence is preventable. We have the means to reduce gun violence, and we have the knowledge to implement prevention approaches. We have studies that give us insight into the factors contributing to gun violence and insight into effective strategies for preventing it.

We certainly know the cost of failing to prevent further gun violence, although we may not ultimately be able to fully measure the cost of trauma, despair, hopelessness and grief that is left in its wake.

It is striking and sobering that 14 months after the mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School, charities that

nomination of Dr. Vivek Hallegere Murthy for Surgeon General, because he has identified gun violence as a public health crisis.

Faiths United Against Gun Violence, a diverse, interfaith coalition of faith-based groups united by the call to confront our nation's gun violence epidemic, just concluded its Gun Violence Preven-

tion Sabbath observance. Thousands of people of faith around the country engaged in prayer and action to address the gun violence in our communities through public policy advocacy, participation in community prevention programs and education.

Faiths United rests on a core belief that is reflected across faith traditions, the belief that violence and death cannot and will not have the final word. That is reason enough to continue our efforts to prevent further gun violence.

It is time to reclaim our streets, schools, and workplaces from the threat of gun violence, and it is time to reclaim the power of our vote from narrow special interests that seek to block even modest, common-sense measures to prevent gun violence.

Our culture has a heavy investment in death; isn't it time we invested in hope and change?

Sandy Sorensen is director of the Justice and Witness Ministries for the United Church of Christ.

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helped to provide funds for mental health care in the Newtown community have nearly exhausted those funds, and it is unclear how long into the future the need for such services will remain.

What we seem not to have is the political will to take action. An overwhelming majority of the American public, including a majority of gun owners, supports strengthening the background check system on gun purchases in response to gun violence, but such legislation remains mired in the fear of alienating special interests in an election year.

These same special interests have even gone on the offensive to derail the

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