HR-98 (2017-2018)

REVISED APRIL 30, 2018

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE— 2017–2018 REGULAR SESSION

HOUSE RESOLUTION   NO. 98

Introduced by Assembly ~~Member Holden~~ *Members Holden and Kalra*
(Coauthors: Assembly Members Bonta, Burke, Gipson, Jones-Sawyer, McCarty, Thurmond, ~~and Weber~~ *Weber,*
Acosta, Aguiar-Curry, Arambula, Baker, Berman, Bigelow, Bloom, Brough, Caballero, Calderon, Carrillo,
Cervantes, Chau, Chávez, Chen, Chiu, Choi, Chu, Cooley, Cooper, Cunningham, Dahle, Daly, Eggman, Flora,
Frazier, Friedman, Eduardo Garcia, Gloria, Gonzalez Fletcher, Gray, Grayson, Harper, Kamlager-Dove, Lackey,
Levine, Low, Maienschein, Mathis, Mayes, McCarty, Medina, Melendez, Mullin, Muratsuchi, Nazarian, O'Donnell,
Patterson, Quirk, Quirk-Silva, Rendon, Reyes, Rodriguez, Rubio, Salas, Santiago, Steinorth, Mark Stone, Ting,
***Voepel, Waldron, and Wood*)**

April 09, 2018

Relative to the 50th Anniversary of the Poor People's Campaign of 1968.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

HR 98, as introduced, Holden.

WHEREAS, A year before his assassination, in a speech given at a Southern Christian Leadership Conference staff retreat in May 1967, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. announced, "I think it is necessary for us to realize that we have moved from the era of civil rights to the era of human rights..." and further stated, that there must be "a radical redistribution of economic and political power"; and

WHEREAS, Later that year, in December 1967, Rev. Dr. King announced the plan to bring together poor people from across the country for a new march on Washington. The purpose of the march was to demand better jobs, better homes, and better education, in sum, better lives than the ones the poor were living; and

WHEREAS, As an initial step to build the power needed to achieve the goal of a radical redistribution of political and economic power, Rev. Dr. King, with other leaders of the poor including Johnnie Tillmon of the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO), worked to establish the main elements of the platform for the Poor People's Campaign (the Campaign) of 1968; and

WHEREAS, An important aspect of the Campaign was petitioning the government to pass an "Economic Bill of Rights" as a step to lift individuals out of poverty. The Campaign aimed for a $30 billion annual appropriation for a real war on poverty, congressional passage of legislation to attain full employment and guaranteed income, including a guaranteed annual wage, and construction of 500,000 low-cost housing units per year until slums were eliminated; and

WHEREAS, The Campaign consisted of three phases. The first phase was to construct a shantytown, to be known as "Resurrection City," and located on the National Mall between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument. With permits from the National Park Service, Resurrection City was intended to house between 1,500 to 3,000 Campaign participants. Other participants would be housed in group and family residences located around the metropolitan area. The second phase was to begin public demonstrations, mass nonviolent civil disobedience, and mass arrests to protest the plight of the poor in this country. The final phase of the Campaign was to launch a nationwide boycott of major industries and shopping areas as a means of prompting business leaders to pressure Congress into meeting the demands of the Campaign; and

WHEREAS, Despite the assassination of Rev. Dr. King on April 4, 1968, the Campaign went forward. Beginning in Washington, key leaders of the Campaign gathered to engage in lobbying efforts and media events before dispersing around the country to formally launch regional caravans to bring thousands of participants to Washington; and

WHEREAS, The efforts of the Campaign peaked in the Solidarity Day Rally for Jobs, Peace, and Freedom on June 19, 1968. Fifty thousand people joined the 3,000 participants living at Resurrection City to support the demands of the Campaign on Solidarity Day; and

WHEREAS, Civil rights organizer and activist Bayard Rustin put forth a proposal for an "Economic Bill of Rights" for Solidarity Day, which called for the federal government to: 1) recommit to the Employment Act of 1946 and legislate the immediate creation of at least one million socially useful career jobs in public service; 2) adopt the pending Housing and Urban Development Act of 1968; 3) repeal the 90th Congress's punitive welfare restrictions in the Social Security Act 1967; 4) extend to all farmworkers the right guaranteed under the National Labor Relations Act to organize agricultural labor unions; and 5) restore funding to programs benefitting the poor that were subject to budget cuts, including bilingual education, Head Start, summer job programs, the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965; and

WHEREAS, Unfortunately, the Campaign was unable to achieve the unity and organization needed to complete all three of the planned stages and to form the "new and unsettling force" capable of disrupting "complacent national life" and achieving an economic bill of rights. The assassinations of Rev. Dr. King and Senator Robert Kennedy, a key proponent of the Campaign and a Presidential candidate, only served to cripple the Campaign and drastically limit its impact. The Rev. Dr. King emphasized the need for poor whites, Blacks, Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans to unite. He asserted that the Campaign would only be successful if the poor could come together across all the obstacles and barriers set up to divide them, and if they could overcome the attention and resources being diverted because of United States engagement in the Vietnam War; and

WHEREAS, The night before his assassination, in Rev. Dr. King's "Promised Land" speech, he explained that poor people being disunited only helped the rich and the powerful. He stated, "[W]henever Pharaoh wanted to prolong the period of slavery in Egypt, he had a favorite, favorite formula for doing it. What was that? He kept the slaves fighting among themselves. But whenever the slaves get together, something happens in Pharaoh's court, and he cannot hold the slaves in slavery. When the slaves get together, that's the beginning of getting out of slavery"; and

WHEREAS, According to political historians such as Barbara Cruikshank, "the poor" did not conceive of themselves as a unified group until President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty, declared in 1964, identified them as such. Figures from the 1960 census, Bureau of Labor Statistics, United States Commerce Department, and the Federal Reserve estimated that anywhere from 40 to 60 million Americans—or 22 to 33 percent—lived below the poverty line; and

WHEREAS, In 1967, an estimated 43.1 million Americans lived in poverty according to an official measure. Rev. Dr. King's influence in America has helped to change the poverty rate, but much work still needs to be done to help the war on poverty; and

WHEREAS, California's poverty rate currently stands at 14.3 percent, according to official poverty statistics; and

WHEREAS, The official poverty rate in America is 12.7 percent, based on the United States Census Bureau's 2016 estimates. In 2016, there were 40.6 million people in poverty; and

WHEREAS, This spring marks the 50th anniversary of the Poor People's Campaign of 1968. This landmark presents an opportunity for us to examine where we have been as a nation with respect to the interests of the poor, and the work that still needs to be completed; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Assembly of the State of California, That the Assembly encourages the observance of the 50th anniversary of the Poor People's Campaign of 1968 and encourages individuals to take this opportunity to reflect on our past treatment of the poor, and to reflect upon the work that still needs to be completed; and be it further

Resolved, That the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies of this resolution to the author for appropriate distribution.

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REVISIONS:
Heading—Lines 1 and 3.

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