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ACR-133 California's Sikh American Awareness and Appreciation Month. (2019-2020)

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Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 133

CHAPTER 179

Relative to California's Sikh American Awareness and Appreciation Month.

[Filed with Secretary of State September 26, 2019.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

ACR 133, Kalra. California's Sikh American Awareness and Appreciation Month.

This measure would designate the month of November 2019 to be California's Sikh American Awareness and Appreciation Month. This measure would recognize and acknowledge the significant contributions made by Californians of Sikh heritage to our state and seeks to afford all Californians the opportunity to better understand, recognize, and appreciate the rich history and shared principles of Sikh Americans. This measure would condemn all hate crimes and bias incidents against Sikh Americans and encourage all Sikhs to practice their faith freely and fearlessly.

Fiscal Committee: no

WHEREAS, California and our nation are at once blessed and enriched by the unparalleled diversity of our residents; and

WHEREAS, Sikhs, who originated in Punjab, India, first entered California in 1899 through the Angel Island Immigration Station in San Francisco, California; and

WHEREAS, The Sikh pioneers initially worked on railroad construction projects and in lumber mills; and

WHEREAS, By 1910, these pioneers turned to farming in the Sacramento, San Joaquin, and Imperial Valleys; and

WHEREAS, On October 14, 1912, the first Sikh house of worship (gurdwara) in the United States, the Stockton Sikh Temple, was founded by Jawala Singh and Wasakha Singh. The following year, the congregation formed the Pacific Coast Khalsa Diwan Society; and

WHEREAS, There are now more than 220 known gurdwaras in the United States, 58 of which are in California, including the Gurdwara Sahib of San Jose, the largest gurdwara in North America; and

WHEREAS, The Stockton Record, dated November 22, 1915, quoted the gurdwara's elected leadership declaring, "We do not permit our people to become charges on public charity. If a man is hungry and out of funds we feed him. Our dining room is open at all hours of the day and is closed only for a few hours during the night"; and

WHEREAS, Legislation to authorize Sikhs and other East Indian immigrants to naturalize as United States citizens was not enacted until 1946; and

WHEREAS, On January 1, 1912, Jawala Singh and Wasakha Singh, who migrated to California through Angel Island in 1908 and served as the founding Granthis (religious leader) of the Stockton Sikh Temple, recognized the value of education and started six Guru Govind Singh Sahib Educational Scholarships at the University of California, Berkeley; and

WHEREAS, These scholarships were awarded without regard to ethnicity or religion and the first awardees included three Hindus, one Christian, one Sikh, and one Muslim; and

WHEREAS, Board and lodging was provided at the students' home at 1731 Allston Way, Berkeley, where smoking and drinking were prohibited; and

WHEREAS, On November 1, 1913, The Ghadar, the first Punjabi-language newspaper in the United States, was published by Kartar Singh Sarabha, who was then 17 years of age, with financial support from the Stockton Sikh Temple; and

WHEREAS, On December 31, 1913, Jawala Singh and Wasakha Singh organized the Ghadri Conclave in Sacramento to form the Ghadar Party to overthrow the British colonial rulers of the Indian subcontinent; and

WHEREAS, The Ghadar Party sent 616 of its members to India, of whom 86 percent were Sikhs; and

WHEREAS, Homage is paid to them annually at a dozen different gatherings called melas from Sacramento, California, to Bakersfield, California; and

WHEREAS, Sikh history and culture is represented in the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco, in the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, D.C., in the Community Memorial Museum of Sutter County, and in the museum at the Stockton Sikh Temple; and

WHEREAS, Sikh farmers contribute abundantly towards production of peaches, raisins, grapes, almonds, pistachios, okra, and other specialized crops of fruits, vegetables, and nuts; and

WHEREAS, Sikhs have also excelled in security services and transportation services, as doctors, attorneys, engineers, teachers, and small business owners, and in other notable capacities; and

WHEREAS, Dalip Singh Saund, a Sikh who was born in Punjab, India, earned a Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley in 1924, initially worked as a foreman of cotton pickers in the Imperial Valley, and later became a farmer, played a major role in raising the funds needed to lobby for the Luce-Celler Act of 1946 that enabled him and others to naturalize as citizens, and served as an elected judge in the Westmoreland County Judicial District from 1952 to 1956, before becoming the first Asian American elected to the United States Congress, wherein he served three terms from 1957 to 1963; and

WHEREAS, Sikh Americans have served and continue to serve as mayors and council members of many California cities; and

WHEREAS, Sikhs have served in all American wars since World War I, including Bhagat Singh Thind, a Sikh born in Punjab, India, who was a United States veteran of World War I, who campaigned actively for the independence of India from British rule, who supported Indian students and lectured on metaphysics throughout the United States, and who has been honored by the Fred T. Korematsu Institute as a "Race in the Courts Hero" for fighting his citizenship case in the United States Supreme Court in 1923; and

WHEREAS, Narinder Singh Kapany of Palo Alto, a Sikh born in Punjab, India, is an accomplished scientist and inventor who has been awarded over 100 patents that spurred advances in lasers, biomedical instrumentation, pollution monitoring, and solar energy, and is widely acknowledged to be the father of fiber optics, a technology that has allowed for high-speed digital communication; and

WHEREAS, Yuba City, often called "Mini-Punjab" because of its 10 percent Punjabi population, commemorates the inauguration of the holy Sikh scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib, on the first Sunday of November, rain or shine, and this international event has in recent years attracted up to 100,000 participants from all over the United States, Canada, and even abroad; and

WHEREAS, Sikh Americans throughout California celebrate the coronation of Sikh scripture and other Sikh festivals at the gurdwaras and through parades in cities across California and the United States; and

WHEREAS, November 12, 2019, is the 550th birth anniversary of the first of 10 gurus and founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak. This day is celebrated by Sikhs in California and worldwide as Guru Nanak Gurburab and is one of the most important dates in the Sikh calendar; and

WHEREAS, Various Sikh organizations, including the Sikh Council of Central California, the Sikh Coalition, the Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund, United Sikhs, and the Jakara Movement, and individual gurdwaras participate in interfaith meetings, seminars, conferences, and functions and share the tenets of their monotheistic religion that respects other religions and welcomes all to their gurdwaras, and try to promote mutual understanding and respect among all peoples; and

WHEREAS, The Sikh American community continues to peacefully overcome attacks on its identity and practices, whether in the form of school harassment, employment discrimination, or hate crimes, including the murders of six Sikhs during the Oak Creek, Wisconsin Sikh gurdwara shooting on August 5, 2012, as well as the senseless murders of Surinder Singh and Gurmej Singh Atwal in Elk Grove, California, on March 4, 2011; and

WHEREAS, Due to ignorance and hate, Sikhs have been the subject of hate crimes because of their articles of faith, including a turban and beard, which represent the Sikh religious commitment to justice, equality, and dignity for all; and

WHEREAS, The faithful service of the Sikh American community to this state and country merits appreciation as an integral thread in the fabric of American plurality; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Assembly of the State of California, the Senate thereof concurring, That the Legislature hereby designates the month of November 2019 to be California's Sikh American Awareness and Appreciation Month; and be it further

Resolved, That the Legislature recognizes and acknowledges the significant contributions made by Californians of Sikh heritage to our state, and by adoption of this resolution, seeks to afford all Californians the opportunity to better understand, recognize, and appreciate the rich history and shared principles of Sikh Americans; and be it further

Resolved, That the Legislature condemns all hate crimes and bias incidents against Sikh Americans and encourages all Sikhs to practice their faith freely and fearlessly; and be it further

Resolved, That the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies of this resolution to the author for appropriate distribution to the Members of the Legislature, members of the California Sikh American community, and other interested organizations or persons.