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ACR-216 California Hindu American Awareness and Appreciation Month. (2023-2024)

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Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 216

CHAPTER 182

Relative to California Hindu American Awareness and Appreciation Month.

[Filed with Secretary of State August 26, 2024.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

ACR 216, Kalra. California Hindu American Awareness and Appreciation Month.

This measure would designate the month of October 2024 as California Hindu American Awareness and Appreciation Month. The measure would also recognize and acknowledge the significant contributions made by Californians of Hindu heritage to the state and seek to increase awareness and understanding of the Hindu American community, and would condemn all hate crimes and bias incidents against Hindu Americans, Hindu temples and centers, and places of significance to the Hindu American community.

Fiscal Committee: no

WHEREAS, California and the nation have been influenced by the extraordinary cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity of its residents; and

WHEREAS, There is an estimated one billion Hindus worldwide, and approximately 2,230,000 Hindu Americans live across the nation; and

WHEREAS, California is home to the largest Hindu American population in the United States; and

WHEREAS, Hindu Americans in California represent diverse ethnic backgrounds, including individuals of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Malaysian, Indonesian, Afghani, Nepali, Bhutanese, Sri Lankan, Fijian, Caribbean, and European descent; and

WHEREAS, California and our nation have greatly benefited from Hindu Americans, especially through the Vedanta philosophy, Ayurvedic medicine, classical Indian art, dance, music, meditation, yoga, literature, and community service; and

WHEREAS, The year 2023 marks the 130th anniversary of when Hinduism was officially introduced to the United States by Swami Vivekananda in 1893 at the World's Parliament of Religions in the City of Chicago, and the 123rd anniversary of when he founded the Vedanta Society in the City of San Francisco, California, in 1900; and

WHEREAS, Hindus are primarily an immigrant community and first started immigrating to California and the United States in the early 1900s, and came in increasing numbers after the lifting of the Asian Exclusion Act of 1924 in 1943 and the abolishment of quotas for immigrants based on national origin in 1965; and

WHEREAS, Most Hindu immigrants have come to the United States as students, in search of better economic opportunities, or to unite with family members, while others have arrived in this country after facing religious persecution in their countries of origin;

and

WHEREAS, Hindu Americans and the Vedanta philosophy have significantly influenced notable intellectuals such as President John Adams, Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, J.D. Salinger, Christopher Isherwood, Aldous Huxley, Huston Smith, and Joseph Campbell; and

WHEREAS, The first Hindu temple in the United States was built in San Francisco, California, and at the dedication of the temple on January 7, 1906, it was proclaimed to be the "First Hindu Temple in the Whole Western World"; and

WHEREAS, There are now over 120 Hindu temples, religious centers, and cultural centers throughout California, and the greater bay area is home to over 40 of those temples and centers; and

WHEREAS, Hindu Americans have greatly enriched California's higher education university systems by teaching numerous students, especially in the academic fields of astrophysics, computer science, engineering, law, planetary science, psychology, and neuroscience, and a majority of Hindu Americans are in high-skill occupations; and

WHEREAS, Seventy-seven percent of Hindu American adults have a college degree and nearly 50 percent of Hindu American adults have a postgraduate degree, according to the Pew Research Center; and

WHEREAS, Hindu Americans share the entrepreneurial spirit of America and contribute to California's economic vitality, having been pioneers and leaders in Silicon Valley and founding several of its early startups. Hindu Americans are estimated to be employed in 40 percent of startups in Silicon Valley; and

WHEREAS, Hindu Americans have also contributed to many of California's economic sectors and have particularly excelled in the areas of business, law, politics, information technology, medicine, and science; and

WHEREAS, Hindu Americans now serve in various levels of government across the state and nation, including four Members in the United States House of Representatives; and

WHEREAS, California Hindu temples, organizations, and individuals actively engage in seva, a Sanskrit word for selfless service, toward their fellow human beings through charity, public service, and the provision of free medical and legal services; and

WHEREAS, Ahimsa, which is the Sanskrit word for noninjury or nonviolence, is a central principle for Hindu Americans in California, and it provides the ethical foundation for vegetarianism, environmentalism, and harmonious living; and

WHEREAS, Hindu Americans in cities throughout California celebrate numerous holidays and festivals, such as Diwali, which celebrates the victory of good over evil and knowledge over ignorance; and

WHEREAS, Hindu Americans promote the ideals of tolerance, pluralism, and religious freedom, which are inherent in their beliefs and respect the diversity of all faiths, and the Vedas, the 5,000-year-old texts of Hindu Americans, provide the basis for these core principles: "Truth is one, the wise call it by many names" (Ekam sat viprah bahudha vadanti); and

WHEREAS, Despite their positive contributions to California and this nation, Hindu Americans face stereotypes and misconceptions about their heritage and have been the targets of bullying, discrimination, hate speech, and bias-motivated crimes; and

WHEREAS, Hindu American religious symbols have been misunderstood, including the sacred swastika, which translates to "all is well" in Sanskrit and has been used in religious observances for over 4,000 years; and

WHEREAS, Many Hindus and their families in California and the United States face an uncertain future in this country due to inequitable immigration policies and decades-long backlogs for green cards; and

WHEREAS, There have been documented instances of anti-Hindu hate crimes against Hindu Americans over the last few decades in many parts of the country, especially on college campuses; and

WHEREAS, According to the Federal Bureau of Investigations Hate Crimes Statistics Report, crimes targeting Hindu Americans are on the rise and researchers have detailed how hate messages on social media can translate into real-life threats toward people of the Hindu faith; and

WHEREAS, According to the California vs Hate program within the Civil Rights Department, 23 percent of all religiously motivated hate incidents in the state reported to the hotline were directed at Hindus; and

WHEREAS, In December 2023, vandalism of the Shri Swaminarayan Mandir Hindu Temple in the City of Newark occurred and was condemned by the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs within the United States Department of State, and weeks afterwards the Vijay's Sherawali Temple in the City of Hayward was also vandalized; 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 October 2024 as California Hindu American Awareness and Appreciation Month; and be it further

Resolved, That the Legislature recognizes and acknowledges the significant contributions made by Californians of Hindu heritage to our state, and by adoption of this resolution, seeks to increase awareness and understanding of the Hindu American community; and be it further

Resolved, That the Legislature condemns all hate crimes and bias incidents against Hindu Americans, Hindu temples and centers, and places of significance to the Hindu American community; and be it further

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