

Honoring Dolores Huerta for a Lifetime of Quiet Courage

By Jim Gonzalez

On Tuesday March 15th in Sacramento, the California official family, led by Governor Brown, Attorney General Kamala Harris, Assembly Speaker John Perez, and Senate President pro Tem Darrell Steinberg will honor Dolores Huerta, co-founder- of the United Farmworkers Union. They will join Dolores at a benefit for the Dolores Huerta Foundation, a charitable organization dedicated to addressing issues of social injustice in housing, education, health, employment, and the environment.

True profiles in courage are often not found in just one compelling act, but in a lifetime of quiet acts, consistent and strong, that have the power to shape history. For over 50 years, Dolores' quiet acts of courage have indeed shaped the bent the arc of history in favor working families and progressive politics.

Dolores negotiated the first collective bargaining agreement with an agricultural company. Dolores stood with Robert Kennedy on the night he was assassinated in the kitchen of the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles. And on dozens of occasions, Dolores has been arrested for non-violent acts of civil disobedience that brought the light of public opinion on injustice and oppression. It is entirely fitting that Governor Jerry Brown will be among those honoring Dolores. Governor Brown and Dolores share a noble history. In 1975, during the first year of his first



term as governor, Jerry Brown signed the law establishing California's Agricultural Labor Relations Board, a milestone event in securing dignity and labor rights for farm workers. However, Dolores' quiet acts of courage have not come without great personal risk. In 1988, while I was a member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, I received word that Dolores was brutally assaulted by an SFPD officer who rammed a baton into Dolores' side, severely injuring her, resulting in the removal of her spleen in emergency surgery. She almost died for her participation in a peaceful protest against the policies of Vice President George H. W. Bush, then a presidential candidate.

Although the City fulfilled its responsibility to provide financial compensation for the wrongs inflicted on Dolores, the pain of those days remains searing in the memory of all of us who wondered if we had lost this deeply inspiring hero. I will never forget being at her bedside with her children who just wept for their mother, without a word of anger or blame for anyone – just tears and prayers for their mom. Dolores' courage brought needed police restraint in handling peaceful demonstrations, and exposed for reform the cover-up policies used to investigate incidents of excessive force. But in a larger sense, Dolores' lifetime of quiet, strong acts have always been about that great promise enshrined in the First Amendment, that everyone in our great country has the right "peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances." **Recently, Dolores helped save the Democratic majority in the U.S. Senate when she helped turn-out the key Latino vote in Nevada that made all the difference.**

On Tuesday, we will look forward with Dolores, as she approaches her 81st birthday, and marvel at her lifetime filled with quiet acts of courage that continue to make an untold difference in so many lives. So Dolores, may your good work continue for decades more to shape California's history for working families in peace, hope and inspiration. And, may you always inspire in others an appreciation of their rights – especially the precious right to petition for a redress of grievances. Si Se Puede!

(The Dolores Huerta Foundation benefit will take place in Sacramento on Tuesday, March 15 at the new Mayahuel Restaurant on the corner of 12th and K Streets, from 4:30 to 7:00 pm. Individual tickets are \$50, and will be available at the door.)