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Dennis Chavez and the National Agenda: 1933–1946

ROY LUJAN

Dennis Chavez, one of three Mexican Americans ever elected to the United States Senate, served part of his Senate years from 1933 to 1946 during the turmoil of the Great Depression, World War II, and the post-war readjustment period.¹ Throughout, Chavez took a stand on behalf of the poor, the defenseless, and the oppressed. Consequently, he made a significant impact on the history of New Mexico and the country during the 1930s and 40s.

Before delving into Chavez's political career during this period, a brief background of his earlier years is necessary to understand his ideological stand on behalf of the people he represented. Chavez was born on 8 April 1888, in the small farming community of Los Chaves situated approximately twenty miles south of Albuquerque along the Rio Grande. He was the third of eight children born to David and Paz Chavez. David Chavez, farmer, rancher, and politician, served as Republican precinct chairman and Justice of the Peace at Los Chaves.²

In 1895 when Dennis was seven years old, the family moved to Albuquerque for its schools, increased job opportunities, and larger sphere of politics.³ Dennis enrolled in school for the first time. When he was in the seventh grade, however, the family encountered economic difficulty, and he was forced to quit school to help support them.⁴

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For the next five years, while he worked full time, he managed to expand his knowledge. He delivered groceries in a horse-drawn wagon for Charles Conroy, owner of the Highland Grocery Store, but whenever he could, Chavez frequented the Albuquerque Public Library where he studied United States history and government. He focused specifically on the lives of early political leaders such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Andrew Jackson.⁵

While David Chavez remained active in the Republican party, he served as chairman of Barelás precinct number five and was one of the most loyal supporters of Frank Hubbell, who controlled the Republican organization in that area. David Chavez's involvement with the Republican party had a negative impact on young Dennis. On various occasions he heard Hubbell's speeches on the theme of prosperity. And although Hubbell's party always won, the community where Chavez resided never progressed. Education, for example, was neglected. Chavez charged that "Public Schools were a disgrace" and the teachers in the Barelás area spoke worse English than the students. Dennis disagreed with his father and told him that when he turned twenty-one, he was going to register as a Democrat.

Chavez's politics were influenced by his study of Thomas Jefferson's political philosophy. Chavez saw in Jefferson's view of human rights an alternative to the *patrón* system that flourished in the state and made farmers, laborers, and other workers politically and economically subservient to landowners and employers.⁶

By age eighteen, Chavez became interested in local politics. In 1906 he got a job as rodman in the Engineering Department of Albuquerque. According to unpublished notes, he was given this job in return for his "assistance" in the 1906 mayor's race in which Frank McKee was elected. During his nine years with the Engineering Department, Chavez's political interest increased and in 1908, the twenty-year-old son of a farmer made his first political speech in Gallup in support of the unsuccessful choice for Congress, Octaviano Larrazolo. Within a few years, his participation in politics increased. In the 1911 general election, Chavez served as interpreter when the victorious Democratic candidate for governor, William G. McDonald, addressed Spanish-speaking crowds.⁷ In 1916, at age 28, Chavez left his position with the city to run for his first public office, Bernalillo County Clerk. He was defeated by 300 votes.⁸

In 1917, Chavez took advantage of an opportunity to work for Senator Andrieus Jones. In addition to a Senate clerk's position, Chavez was given the opportunity to fulfill a lifetime dream: to obtain a formal education and become an attorney. At that time, the only requirement to enter law school was satisfactory completion of entrance examinations.⁹

Eventually, Chavez passed his entrance exam and was admitted to Georgetown University Law School. Working during the day and attending school at night was difficult. Not having been to school since age thirteen, he found the law school structure of organized study quite demanding, but he persevered and graduated in three years.¹⁰ Armed with his new degree and vital knowledge of the legislative process, he returned to Albuquerque to begin his law practice.

In 1922, Chavez re-entered politics and easily won his race for state representative. From this position he sponsored such reform measures as the first bill regulating train length and an act that provided free textbooks for public school children. The law required New Mexico school districts to purchase school books and loan them to school children. This law shifted the financial burden of purchasing textbooks from parents to the school districts, enabling children to attend school.¹¹ Since his childhood years in Barelás, Chavez had witnessed the lack of concern among political bosses for the education of the local poor people. As a state representative, he prioritized public education and took a lead in appropriating government aid for improving educational opportunities that had long been neglected.

In 1930, Chavez ran for the House of Representatives, easily defeating the incumbent Republican, Albert Simms. Chavez served two terms in the House, then announced his candidacy for the Senate against incumbent Bronson Cutting. Defeated, Chavez filed fraud charges and a bill of particulars before the Senate. In the course of the contested election, Cutting was killed in an airplane crash. Subsequently, Governor Clyde Tingley appointed Chavez to fill the vacant seat in the Senate on 11 May 1935.¹²

Chavez established a firm working relationship with his liberal Democratic colleagues in the House and Senate. For example, Congressman Ewing Thomason of El Paso joined Chavez's efforts in 1932 and 1934 to enact legislation that extended a moratorium to western irrigation districts on payment to the government of irrigation construction charges.¹³

Chavez himself had struggled to earn an education and he understood that an individual's key to prosperity lay in a sound education. He sponsored the House version of a bill Senator Sam Bratton of New Mexico first introduced in the Senate to give Eastern New Mexico College at Portales an additional 76,667 acres of public land for educational purposes. The House passed this bill on 23 March 1932.¹⁴

His liberal record also extended to taxation and labor. When the Hoover Administration sponsored a tax measure calling for a federal sales tax, Chavez supported Congressman Norris La Guardia and other liberals to oppose the bill on the grounds that it would adversely affect the country's poor. In the area of labor, Chavez welcomed the opportunity to assist workers by supporting the Norris La Guardia Anti-Injunction bill.

Chavez's reputation extended beyond the legislative branch. After Franklin Delano Roosevelt announced his candidacy for president, James Farley, his campaign manager, called on Congressman Chavez in Washington. In turn, Chavez contacted his brother, David Jr., in Santa Fe. At the Democratic Party state convention in Clovis, New Mexico, David Chavez introduced the resolution that bound the state Democratic national convention delegates in support of Roosevelt. President Roosevelt told reporters that "Chavez was a pretty good congressman."¹⁵

As a Senator, Chavez personified the New Deal and its reforms in response to a devastating economic situation. Chavez believed it was imperative to support New Deal legislation. During World War II, Chavez constantly kept in touch with families of soldiers and sponsored and supported legislation benefitting American service personnel. Although his concern was for all American citizens, he was particularly aware of the economic, political, and social crises his constituents faced. He was instrumental in voting for and bringing relief measures to the United States and to the state he represented during a time of turmoil.

During the New Deal, Congress enacted a number of pieces of legislation designed to bring relief to this country. Among them were the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA), the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA), the National Youth Administration (NYA), and the Rural Electrification Administration (REA). Chavez supported all these measures to reduce unemployment and bring relief throughout the country and to New Mexico. When necessary, Chavez acted as intermediary between his constituents and federal administrators. Chavez's involvement with the Works Public Administration (WPA) illustrates his role.

On 8 April 1935, Congress approved the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act. One government agency that would receive money from this new appropriation was the WPA. The WPA was concerned with two major functions: first, in an effort to provide employment, it was to manage "small useful projects" throughout the country; second, the agency would plan the activities of the work relief projects. The WPA existed from 6 May 1935 through 30 June 1943. During these eight years, the program employed about 8.5 million people. Approximately one-fourth of all families in the United States depended on the WPA for employment.¹⁶

Throughout the country, the WPA accomplished a myriad of public works and community service projects. In New Mexico, WPA projects provided assistance by employing over 14,000 people quarterly. Among some of the facilities constructed or renovated in New Mexico were highways, roads, bridges, schools, hospitals, libraries, armories, and recreational buildings of many types.¹⁷ It is clear, therefore, that the agency

improved the lives of thousands of New Mexicans through employment and the projects themselves. Dennis Chavez was primarily responsible for ensuring that New Mexico received its share of federal monies from the WPA.

Chavez's fight for appropriations resulted in an important political development. His role in the WPA strengthened his political influence, providing the means to build a political machine. A strong political organization was essential for Chavez's political future because he was scheduled to run for the unexpired term at the next general election in 1936. And besides Chavez himself, the greatest beneficiary of his organization was Governor Clyde Tingley.

Chavez ultimately centered the patronage system under his command. Although Chavez originally disapproved of *los patrones*, once he became a powerful political figure, he, too, utilized the patronage system of politics; however, he did not use this power to retard but rather to accelerate progress for his state. Dennis Chavez took a potentially dangerous and corrupting system and used it to bring hope and prosperity to many New Mexicans.

The first step Chavez and Tingley took in building a political machine was to appoint cooperative WPA administrators. Assuming the responsibility of WPA administrator in New Mexico was Lea Rowland, of whom both Chavez and Tingley approved. Rowland had been hired on the recommendation of Carl Hatch, the senior senator from New Mexico. Hatch, a lawyer, had moved from Oklahoma to Clovis, New Mexico in 1916, where he established his law practice. He later became State Assistant Attorney General and between 1923 and 1929 he was district judge for the 9th district in New Mexico. On 10 October 1933 he was appointed to the United States Senate. Elected Senator in 1934, he served until 1949.¹⁸

Chavez also took the lead in attempting to ascertain exactly what New Mexico was going to receive from the initial \$4.8 million acquired through the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act. In order to realize his goal of constructing a large dam in Conchas, New Mexico with WPA funds, Chavez met with WPA National Administrator Harry Hopkins and President Roosevelt to impress upon them the significance of water to the state of New Mexico. Eventually, the WPA constructed the dam.¹⁹

Chavez determined that several New Mexico school houses could benefit from WPA funds, and conveyed this idea to Tingley, indicating that improvement in schools was one area of spending Roosevelt favored.²⁰ Because schools were being built by the WPA throughout the country, it is difficult to assess how many schools in New Mexico were constructed due to Chavez's influence and power. But by the time the

WPA was terminated in 1943, New Mexico had 361 new schools constructed under its auspices.²¹ More importantly, the construction of schools achieved the goals of the WPA to provide employment and modern educational facilities for New Mexico's citizens.

The Senator used the WPA to build a political machine. Through Tingley, Chavez suggested names of people to Rowland for job assignments in the WPA throughout the state. In turn, these people would support Chavez and Tingley at election time.²² With both the Governor and Senator working together to employ New Mexicans and to ensure political self-aggrandizement, life in New Mexico was improving both for the people and their politicians. A letter from Tingley to Chavez reflects this atmosphere. Things were improving "politically and otherwise," he wrote. "You would hardly know there was a depression and when we get these Works Projects started it will be hard to get men in the State for all jobs. Of course this is confidential and I wouldn't want the government officials to know about it."²³ Initially, the WPA allotted \$1,244,000 for New Mexico. As projects began in the state, Chavez acted as intermediary between constituents and WPA officials and he often wrote Rowland to ask him about the status of WPA applications.²⁴

By early 1936, New Mexico was steadily receiving funds. In February the WPA authorized \$161,215 for various projects in the state. Among these were \$75,999 for construction and landscaping of an orthopedic hospital in Las Vegas; \$67,000 for road construction in Harding County; and additional smaller projects such as constructing a rural school house in Santa Fe County; widening streets and bridges; and constructing a fire department building.²⁵

With more funds coming into the state, communities were anxious to begin projects and pressured Chavez for approval. On one occasion, for example, Chavez responded to H.T. Watson, indicating he was doing everything possible for approval of a county hospital in Gallup and would contact Rowland to check the status of the application. In June 1936, the project was approved.²⁶

Chavez's influence in Washington appears to have been pervasive. J.C. O'Leary contacted the Senator regarding the construction of a recreational building at Fort Bayard, asking him to expedite the project. Five days later, Chavez responded, informing O'Leary that the President had approved the \$111,790 for the project.²⁷

Other examples of projects built in New Mexico communities included sewer systems, post office buildings, dams, roads, and a host of public works projects. By the end of fiscal year 1936, New Mexico had been allotted \$4,970,656—fourty-first of the fourty-eight states. The following states received less money than New Mexico during the same time period: Arizona, North Dakota, Idaho, Maine, New Hampshire, Wyoming, Vermont, Delaware, and Nevada.²⁸ Chavez's ability to help initiate these

projects indicated his commitment to assist his constituents throughout the state. Chavez realized that the more projects built in New Mexico, the greater the number of people who would have jobs. In the long run, New Mexico would benefit from these permanent improvements.

In the 1936 election, Chavez defeated the Republican candidate, Miguel A. Otero Jr., by 19,556 votes. And Tingley defeated Jaffa R. Miller with a 25,578 vote margin.²⁹ With the Democrats firmly in power, the state would continue to garner federal dollars and Chavez's political career would continue to flourish. He held office until 1962.

The Depression years gave way to another time of uncertainty with the outbreak of World War II in Europe. In the Senate, Chavez actively supported peace efforts. Until the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Chavez favored anti-war legislation and spoke in favor of keeping this country at peace from 1935–41.

With the outbreak of war in Europe in 1939, the issue of neutrality was uppermost in the minds of many Americans. Chavez supported the Neutrality Acts of 1935, 1936, and 1937, designed to maintain peace and keep the United States out of war.³⁰ In mid-September Roosevelt called Congress into special session to consider revision of the Neutrality Act of 1937. The debate centered on the question of repeal of the arms embargo, which Chavez opposed. He argued that propaganda and pressure politics from munitions makers had involved the United States in World War I, and he warned that these forces were again at work. Chavez substantiated his argument by recounting that between the outbreak of the war in Europe in 1914 and the Democratic National Convention in 1916, Americans wanted peace. He reminded the Senate that President Woodrow Wilson was renominated, and won the presidency in 1916 with the slogan "He kept us out of war." But because of pressure politics and propaganda from munitions makers, five months after the election, the United States was at war. Chavez also opposed the pending legislation because its enactment would bring the United States one step closer to another war. Recounting the number of men and the amount of money it took to fight the previous war, Chavez felt that this country was not ready to see history repeat itself.³¹

Despite Chavez's opposition, Congress voted to repeal the arms embargo act, and Roosevelt signed it on 4 November 1939. The new law enabled the United States to sell war materials to all belligerents on a cash-and-carry basis. As far as Chavez was concerned, the only positive side of this legislation was the escape from actual physical participation in the European war.³²

Although Chavez opposed war, he did not oppose an adequate national defense program for the United States. When France capitulated to Germany on 17 June 1940, Chavez, as a member of the Subcommittee on Defense Appropriations, supported and voted for Roosevelt's na-

tional defense program, which included increased production of war materials, enlargement of the air force, and the creation of a two-ocean navy. According to Chavez, a strong defense ensured safety in an attack from another country. For the same reason, when Congress was considering compulsory draft legislation in the summer of 1940, Chavez voted for the Selective Service and Training Act.³³

In early 1941, the lend-lease legislation came before Congress. Chavez argued against it, feeling that it ran contrary to the Good Neighbor Policy's commitment to nonintervention in the internal affairs of other nations. Moreover, he argued that over the years the United States had moved closer to war; therefore, he opposed lend-lease because it would be the last step before physical participation in war. Additionally, Chavez argued that the legislation would provoke an attack on this country. He felt that by permitting countries at war to use our naval bases, naval yards, and ports, the United States was committing belligerent acts that in the end could result in an attack. Despite his opposition, lend-lease passed the Senate, and President Roosevelt signed the bill on 11 March 1941.³⁴

Throughout the 1930s and into the 1940s, Chavez made his position clear: he would support an adequate defense—not for purposes of aggression, but for keeping aggressive nations out of the Western Hemisphere. He would not, however, vote for any legislation that would lead this country to war.³⁵ The attack on Pearl Harbor, however, caused Chavez to reverse his position. He supported the declaration of war. Moreover, he provided assistance to those especially close to the disastrous event and sponsored legislation that recognized American soldiers' achievements in battle.

Among the worst losses of World War II were the United States' defeat by the Japanese forces in Bataan and Corrigidor on 9 April and 5 May 1942, respectively. Among the soldiers who surrendered were those of the 200th and 515th Coast Artillery units, which were composed partly of the New Mexico National Guard.³⁶ Approximately a month after the surrender, Senator Chavez received a list of 106 New Mexicans assumed to be prisoners of war.³⁷ Immediately, families of New Mexicans stationed in the Philippines contacted Chavez asking for information about their relatives. Chavez shared whatever information he had. If a name appeared on his list, it was almost certain that the individual was a prisoner.³⁸ If a name did not appear on his list nor on the casualty list of the War Department, he had to inform the family that their relative was presumed to be imprisoned.³⁹

Attempting to provide news to his constituents about prisoners of war, Chavez contacted the War Department, the office of the Chief of Staff, and the Red Cross. He could not find good news because the Japanese refused to cooperate.⁴⁰ For the next year, the Japanese

government's attitude remained unchanged. In the meantime, propaganda broadcasts via shortwave radio from American soldiers in the Philippines were transmitted daily to the United States. Prisoners requested food, vitamins, shoes, mail, and other essentials. Families of prisoners called on Chavez to intervene on their behalf.⁴¹ Consequently, Chavez wrote Chief of Staff George C. Marshall requesting a statement to distribute in New Mexico. Chavez hoped that a communiqué coming from a high-ranking official would give some comfort and encouragement to his constituents.⁴²

However, the response Chavez received was not encouraging. It was merely a statement outlining the steps the International Red Cross and the War Department had taken to send supplies since the surrender. The letter did not indicate whether supplies sent aboard the Swedish ship *Gripsholm* in 1942 had ever reached American prisoners.⁴³ By this time, the War Department, although aware of war atrocities, had not disclosed any information.

About a year after the surrender of the Philippines, a group of American soldiers managed to escape and eventually reached General Douglas MacArthur's headquarters in Australia. Included in the group was Captain William B. Dyess, who had been captured in Bataan. Although not disclosed to the public, it was from Dyess's testimony that the United States first learned about penal camp conditions, the death march, beatings, tortures, and indiscriminate killings.

The Navy and War Departments did not disclose this information to the public until 28 January 1944 and in the Senate, Chavez's reaction to war atrocities was unparalleled. Three days later, Chavez, particularly appalled by the situation because the New Mexico National Guard had been stationed in the Philippines, addressed the Senate on war atrocities. He agreed with his constituents who accused the government and military of inaction in the Philippines. Additionally, he contacted Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox and Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson and urged them to issue a statement to the American people assuring them "that something is being done and will be done beyond the efforts which have heretofore been expended on the Pacific battle line." Chavez also contacted the Department of State and asked for a progress report on United States-Japanese negotiations regarding prisoner aid and the location of American prisoners.⁴⁴

Long before anyone confirmed the atrocities American prisoners of war were experiencing, Chavez insisted that these men were entitled to some compensation and recognition. In September 1943, Chavez introduced a bill in the Senate providing that effective 8 December 1942, every officer in the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps below the rank of colonel plus every warrant officer and enlisted man below master ser-

geant who had been captured in the Philippines, Wake Islands, or Guam be promoted one grade annually. The bill was referred to the Committee on Military Affairs, which in turn requested the input of the military branches involved.⁴⁵

On 20 November 1943, Secretary of War Stimson responded to the proposed legislation. He opposed it because promotion of wartime personnel was based upon performance of duties and responsibilities. Being held captive or being hospitalized for wounds received in battle might impede or prevent a soldier's promotion. The letter read as follows: "In the case of captured personnel there is no way to distinguish between those men who, by virtue of having fought to the last, might be deserving of a reward in the form of promotion and those who surrendered in circumstances under which they might reasonably have been expected to continue to resist. The general effect of promoting such personnel would be to establish a reward for becoming a prisoner."⁴⁶

Two days later, the Committee received notification from the Department of Navy opposing the bill because it excluded those missing in action who might be held captive and military personnel who were stationed in North China, the Asiatic Fleet, or other theaters on 8 December 1941. Also excluded from the bill were those serving in the Philippines, Wake Islands, and Guam who might have been captured after 8 December 1941 and those who might have been taken prisoner any time for the duration of the war.⁴⁷

Having received the reports from the Army and the Navy, Chavez appeared before the Committee on Military Affairs and wrote to the Departments of War and Navy. In each case he objected strenuously to the part of Secretary Stimson's letter that distinguished between prisoners who deserved a promotion for resisting to the end and those who did not because they "surrendered in circumstances under which they might reasonably have been expected to continue to resist." Chavez felt "It is unpardonable for anyone to say this who understands that our men were fighting barefooted, and sometimes unclad with such a lack of food that the story is often repeated of how they ate the flesh of monkey and of the mules of their outfits in order to carry on their resistance of the enemy! When medical supplies were not available and the sick and wounded had to do without medicine. . . . Short of food, short of clothing, short of medical supplies, short of guns, short of airplanes, short of anti-aircraft weapons, short of munitions! This is the real story!"⁴⁸

Chavez reiterated the arguments on the floor of the Senate and declared his intentions to pursue the enactment of the bill.⁴⁹ Finally, in August 1944, the committee reported favorably on the bill. It was then sent to the House Committee on Military Affairs.⁵⁰

On 8 September, Chavez's bill came up for debate in the Senate. Texas Senator John Connally questioned why the bill should not include those individuals who were taken prisoner in other war zones. Chavez explained that these prisoners were special cases because of the hardships they had encountered in the Pacific theater and because they had continued to defend themselves against the Japanese without sufficient arms and ammunition. At the end of the debate, the bill was amended so that prisoners be promoted every year for the duration of their imprisonment, and the Senate passed the bill.⁵¹

Much to Chavez's disappointment, Congress adjourned without the House Committee on Military Affairs, taking any action on the bill; however, he refused to give up. He reintroduced the same bill at the beginning of the 79th Congress in January 1945 with one change. Trying to enhance the bill's chances of passing, Chavez reworded it to include military personnel who were serving in the Philippines, Wake, Guam, Java, or other Pacific or Asiatic Ocean areas on 8 December 1941.⁵² For the second time the Senate passed the bill, and as before, referred it to the House Military Affairs Committee where it died.⁵³

During the 79th Congress, membership in the House Military Affairs Committee included Andrew J. May, chairman, Kentucky; R. Ewing Thomason, Texas; Overton Brooks, Louisiana; John Sparkman, Alabama; Paul J. Kilday, North Carolina; Clifford Davis, Tennessee; John Edward Sheridan, Pennsylvania; Philip J. Philbin, Massachusetts; Paul Steward, Oklahoma; Arthur Winstead, Mississippi; and John Rooney, New York. Although there is no evidence of any personal political battles between Chavez and members of the House Military Affairs Committee, the only member of the Committee that Chavez recommended for lobbying the bill was Congressman Thomason because he was "in a good position to help, and there is no reason why he shouldn't."⁵⁴ Because the majority of House Committee members were southerners, one can speculate that Chavez may have incurred the wrath of these congressmen because by this time Chavez had already taken a strong stand in favor of civil rights. For this reason, the committee may have killed the bill.

In the following session of Congress, however, the War Department issued a letter in reference to Chavez's bill. Once again, the War Department reiterated its guidelines regarding promotions; nevertheless, it was willing to bend the rules. The prisoners below the ranks of colonel and master sergeant recently released from the Philippines were given immediate promotions. A similar promotion was accorded to individuals who served in the Philippines but who were not captured. The Department of War explained that this action deviated from established policy "but was motivated by considerations which were deemed sufficiently exceptional to justify a departure from such policy."⁵⁵

Although his bill was defeated, Chavez called attention to the hardships and atrocities the men in the Pacific had endured. Perhaps he did not achieve his objectives, but he never forgot the men of Bataan, always believing they deserved recognition out of common decency and justice.

The soldiers, however, were not the only Americans who had been forgotten in certain segments of American society during the war years. As the war was coming to an end, Chavez was confronted with a new challenge in the area of civil rights. As with the American soldiers, Chavez made America aware of the plight of minorities. He worked relentlessly to enact legislation aimed to create opportunities for Americans who had been denied employment because of their race, color, creed, national origin, or ancestry.

Once the American economy was directed toward defense efforts, full use of the country's manpower was essential to achieve maximum production. Reaching full employment required integrating minority groups into the defense program. Among the steps taken to achieve this goal was Executive Order 8802, which President Roosevelt issued on 25 June 1941. This order stipulated that employers and labor unions were obligated "to provide for the full and equitable participation of all workers in defense industries without discrimination because of race, creed, color, or national origin." Additionally, the order provided for the appointment of a five-member Fair Employment Practice Committee (FEPC) to enforce it.⁵⁶

FEPC statistics reveal that during the fiscal year beginning 1 July 1943, and ending 30 June 1944, the group that experienced the most discrimination due to race was African Americans, accounting for 80.8 percent of the complaints. Jews accounted for 72.2 percent of complaints related to creed, and Mexican Americans accounted for 71.9 percent of complaints of discrimination tied to national origin.⁵⁷

Victims of discrimination could not only take their cases before the FEPC but could, in addition, consult with Senator Chavez. Being of Hispanic descent, Chavez was an ardent opponent of discrimination. People of all races and national origins turned to Chavez to intervene on their behalf, but Hispanics especially appealed to him for help.

In 1942, there were approximately 3,000,000 individuals in the United States who were classified as Mexican, Mexican American, or Spanish American. Therefore, it is impossible to document every complaint of alleged discrimination that reached Chavez's office. People from California, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Wyoming, and Texas complained to him, alleging discrimination in defense work, industry, business, and the private sector. The majority of the complaints alleged unfair hiring practices, wage differentials, and refusal of service in public establish-

ments such as restaurants, swimming pools, pharmacies, and movie theaters. In every case Chavez took appropriate action, reporting the charges to the FEPC or other governmental agencies. In cases of private discrimination, he apprised employers of the complaints he had received.⁵⁸

By the summer of 1944, it was evident that the war was coming to an end and Chavez had the foresight to see that soldiers who were ethnic minorities would be the first to face discrimination once they were home and looking for jobs. In addition, the FEPC was only a temporary organization designed to help the war effort and, therefore, it was scheduled to expire with the war's end. By March 1944, plans concerning the future of the FEPC began to unfold.

A subcommittee of the Senate Appropriations Committee unanimously adopted a resolution offered by Senator Richard B. Russell of Georgia that in effect would abolish the FEPC by removing its \$500,000 funding from the war agencies appropriations bill. In May, the House approved the bill with appropriations for the FEPC.⁵⁹ If the measure were to be approved in the Senate, the FEPC would become an independent organization until further funding, but if it failed, the FEPC would expire on 1 January 1945.

In June, the FEPC appropriation came before the Senate. Countering Senator Russell's efforts to remove the \$500,000 allowance for the FEPC, Chavez defended the FEPC on grounds that its goal to establish fair employment practices was tied to equality embodied in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. On 20 June, the Senate defeated Russell's amendment, thirty-nine to twenty-one.⁶⁰

Sensing victory, Chavez carried the fight against racial intolerance a step further. On 23 June 1944, he introduced a bill to prohibit discrimination in employment on the basis of race, creed, color, national origin, or ancestry. Co-sponsors of the bill included Senators Sheridan Downey of California, Robert Wagner of New York, James Murray of Montana, Arthur Capper of Kansas, and William Langer of North Dakota. The bill called for the replacement of the FEPC with a permanent commission that would be known as the Fair Employment Practices Commission.⁶¹

Subsequently, on 22 August 1944, Chavez was appointed chairman of a special subcommittee on Education and Labor that began hearings on his bill on 30 August.⁶² Having concluded the hearings, Chavez, on 20 September, submitted a report on his bill with a "do pass" recommendation.⁶³ The House of Representatives had also held hearings on three bills called the Scanlon-Dawson-LaFollette bills, which were companions to Chavez's bill in the Senate. The three bills were consolidated as one, and in December of 1944, the bill was reported back to the House without amendments.⁶⁴ However, the 78th Congress adjourned *sine die* before additional action was taken on Chavez's bill.⁶⁵ He reintroduced it

on 12 January 1945, a few days after the start of the 79th Congress. Chavez reminded the Senate that during the recent presidential campaign, both the Democrats and Republican parties had supported a permanent FEPC.⁶⁶

The 1st session of the 79th Congress did not take up any serious consideration of the legislation. However, Chavez indicated he intended to move for its consideration as soon as Congress reconvened following the holiday recess. Senator Theodore Bilbo of Mississippi, an avid opponent, indicated that "the Lord willing," he would be there for the occasion.⁶⁷

The 2nd session of the 79th Congress convened on 12 January 1946. Three days later, Chavez made a motion for consideration of his bill, S.101.⁶⁸ As the Senate proceeded with debate, however, the chair recognized Senator James Eastland of Mississippi. From that moment until the end of the day, the southerners monopolized the Senate to filibuster against Chavez's bill.

In the ensuing days, southerners, along with other senators, remained steadfast in their opposition. Senators John Bankhead, Russell, John McClellan, James Eastland, Theodore Bilbo, O' Daniel, Millard Tydings, and others made endless speeches against it throughout January and into early February. Bilbo's opposition was so intense that he stated that there would not be a vote on the bill during the session of Congress. O' Daniel felt that the bill should be recommitted to committee where it should be allowed to die. Echoing a common attitude of the times, Senators O' Daniel and Eastland went so far as to intimate that those who testified before the Subcommittee on Education and Labor were communists.⁶⁹

On 7 February, Senate Majority Leader Alben Barkley, who favored the bill, prevailed upon the Senate and filed a petition for cloture to end debate on S.101.⁷⁰ If approved by a two-thirds vote, each senator would have one hour to talk on the issue after which time a vote on the bill had to be taken. If the vote on cloture failed, the bill would remain on the calendar as if a vote had never occurred. On 9 February, 1946, the Senate rejected cloture forty-eight yeas to thirty-six nays. Immediately after the vote, Chavez addressed the chair, predicting that the vote on cloture notwithstanding, the fight for civil rights had only begun and that America would go forward. He then withdrew his bill.⁷¹

Chavez's failure in civil rights legislation may be attributed to the fact that his vision and goals were too far-reaching. In the mid 1940s, the United States was not ready to accept civil rights. Many people throughout the country and some of his Senate colleagues could not or would not recognize or correct discriminatory practices. Nevertheless, through Chavez's fight for civil rights legislation, he challenged southerners'

longstanding control of the Senate on this issue. Chavez's strong commitment to fight racial intolerance laid the groundwork and encouraged and inspired other congressmen to introduce civil rights legislation, which finally came to pass under the Lyndon Johnson administration.

In 1964, twenty years after Chavez first introduced his bill to create a permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission, Congress invoked cloture to cut off debate after a fifty-seven-day southern-run filibuster and then enacted the 1964 Civil Rights Act. A provision of that act prohibits employers and labor unions from discriminating because of race, color, sex, religion, or national origin.⁷²

Chavez, however, could not witness one of his greatest victories. He died on 18 November 1962. He succeeded, however, in awakening the country regarding the plight of minorities. Moreover, his prophecy had come true. America indeed had moved forward.

Chavez's role in national legislation between 1933 and 1946 had a positive impact throughout the country. During the New Deal he supported legislation that would improve the lives of many Americans. At the same time he ensured that New Deal legislation reached New Mexico. Before Pearl Harbor, Chavez favored isolation from European affairs; however, when Japan attacked the United States, he supported the President's request for a declaration of war.

During the war years and into the post-war era, Chavez sponsored and supported legislation for American prisoners of war. During the war years, Senator Chavez led the fight against discrimination in employment, which culminated in the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The late senator and vice president Hubert H. Humphrey, who himself left his imprint on the battle for civil rights, once referred to Chavez as a "gentleman" and a "kindly" man who "many times gave me encouragement when I really needed it; many times gave me a feeling of sense of purpose when one needed it; and at all times set an example of being deeply concerned about the needs of humanity."⁷³

During the post-war period, Chavez continued to be of service to his constituents. Because he was able to study law at Georgetown University while under the patronage of Senator Andrieus Jones, Chavez later placed young New Mexicans under his own patronage, enabling them to work and earn money with which to obtain an education. Chavez hoped that these young people, trained in various professions, would return to their homes and work for the betterment of all New Mexicans.

As Chavez continued his career in the Senate, he made sure that the federal government continued to allocate appropriations for New Mexico, especially in the area of atomic research and development. The establishment of military bases and nuclear research installations in New Mexico was being discussed in New Mexico in 1939, the year Chavez became a member of the Subcommittee on Defense Appropriations. Be-

cause Chavez was a member and later chairman of this important subcommittee, he was able to channel money for defense-related fields into New Mexico; consequently, he was pivotal in establishing White Sands Proving Grounds, Holloman Air Force Base and Development Center, and Sandia Base.⁷⁴

Due to his seniority, by the 1950s he was chairman of the powerful and important Committee on Public Works. During the 84th Congress, 1955–56, the Committee on Public Works approved the Highway Act of 1956, authorizing the construction of the federal aid program for fiscal years 1958–59. In addition, this legislation approved a program for the National System of Interstate and Defense Highways for the fiscal years 1957–69. The Public Works Committee also approved the Water Control Act of 1956, which amended the Water Pollution Act of 1948 by extending and strengthening the 1948 law. Specifically, it authorized funds to support and assist research related to the prevention and control of water pollution.

As chairman of this committee, Chavez personally guided legislation through the Senate that assisted citizens against floodwaters, improved the nation's harbors and waterways, and developed our water resources. By strengthening and improving the highway system, providing funds for research and implementation of air and water control, and providing for construction of federal and post office buildings throughout the nation, the Committee on Public Works provided for the general improvement of the national economy.⁷⁵

By the end of his legislative career in 1962, Chavez was outranked by only three Senators.⁷⁶ He had climbed his way up to the top and had become one of the most powerful and influential members of the United States Senate. His career in Congress spanned thirty-two years. Throughout that time, he remained a loyal Democrat and sought to advance the ideals and traditions of the party. He never forgot his humble beginnings and remained throughout his life a spokesman for the weak, the poor, the defenseless, and the oppressed.

NOTES

1. The other two were Octaviano Larrazolo and Joseph M. Montoya. All three represented New Mexico.

2. Personal Data Sheet of Dennis Chavez, 30 October 1939, Albuquerque, New Mexico, University of New Mexico, Center for Southwest Research, Chavez Papers (hereafter UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers); Barbara Chavez, interview with author, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 17 March 1981.

3. Personal Data Sheet of Dennis Chavez; Dennis Chavez to Miss Melecia Fernandez, 27 November 1941, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers.

4. *Ibid.*; biography in typescript of Dennis Chavez, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers, 2.

5. Chavez to Fernandez, 27 November 1941.
6. Barbara Chavez, interview with author, 17 March 1981; biography in typescript of Dennis Chavez, 1-2; Dennis Chavez, *First Local Politics, 1904*, 7, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers; Tom Popejoy, "Dennis Chavez," in *The Historical Society of New Mexico Hall of Fame Essays* (Albuquerque: Courier Press, 1963), 30.
7. Anonymous, *A Young Engineer*, 1906, No. 8 (author's private collection); Chavez to Fernandez, 27 November 1941; Personal Data Sheet of Dennis Chavez; Biography in typescript of Dennis Chavez, 3; Chavez, *First Local Politics, 1904*, 1-2.
8. Popejoy, "Dennis Chavez," 30-31; Chavez, *First Local Politics, 1904*, 7-8.
9. *Ibid.*; biography in typescript of Dennis Chavez, 4.
10. Chavez to Fernandez, 27 November 1941; biography in typescript of Dennis Chavez, 4-5; Popejoy, "Dennis Chavez," 31.
11. Personal Data Sheet of Dennis Chavez; biography in typescript of Dennis Chavez, 6-7; *New Mexico Session Laws, 1923*, chap. 148, sec., 1423, 326.
12. For a comprehensive examination of the 1930 and 1934 elections, see Roy Lujan, "Dennis Chavez and the Roosevelt Era, 1933-1945" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of New Mexico, 1987), 22-60, 94-120.
13. "Senator Dennis Chavez: His Records and His Merits," UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers, 10-11; United States Congress, House, *Congressional Record*, 72nd Cong., 2d sess, 1932, 76, pts. 1:1019, 5:5160; United States Congress, House, *Congressional Record*, 73rd Cong., 2d sess., 1934, pts. 2:1647, 5:4866-4867.
14. Barbara Chavez, interview with author, 17 March 1981; United States Congress, House, *Congressional Record*, 72nd Cong., 1st sess., 1932, pts. 2:1276, 6:6745-6748.
15. Anonymous, "Senator Dennis Chavez: His Records And His Merits," 10-11; James MacGregor Burns, *Roosevelt: The Lion And The Fox, 1822-1940* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World Inc., 1956), 202.
16. United States Federal Works Agency, *Final Report On The WPA Program, 1935-43* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1947), 46.
17. *Ibid.*, 135-36.
18. Carl Hatch to Harry Hopkins, 27 January 1937, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers; Clyde Tingley to Hatch, 13 July 1935, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers; Joint Committee On Printing, Congress of the United States, *Biographical Directory Of The United States Congress 1774-1989: Bicentennial Edition* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1989), 1151.
19. Chavez to Tingley, 25 June 1935, .
20. *Ibid.*
21. United States Federal Works Agency, *Final Report On The WPA Program, 1935-1943*, 135.
22. Chavez to Tingley, 17 July 1935.
23. Tingley to Chavez, 17 July 1935, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers.
24. Chavez to Rowland, 7 November 1935, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers; Chavez to Rowland, 18 November 1935, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers.
25. Hatch and Chavez to Tingley, 13 January 1936, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers.
26. Chavez to H. T. Watson, 22 January 1936, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers; Chavez to J.P. Gribben, 18 June 1936, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers.
27. J. C. O'Leary to Chavez, 2 April 1936, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers; Chavez to O'Leary, 7 April 1936, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers.
28. United States Federal Works Agency, *Final Report On The WPA Program, 1935-43* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1947), table viii, 120.
29. Ernestine Evans, comp., *New Mexico Election Returns, 1911-1969* (Santa Fe: New Mexico Secretary of State, 1970).

30. United States Congress, Senate, *Domestic Stability, National Defense, And Prosecution of World War II: Legislative and Executive Background, 1933-1942*. Report prepared for the United States, Senate, 77th Cong., 2d sess., document no. 285 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1942), 8-9; Dennis Chavez, "Keep America Out Of War." Address delivered at the Convention of the United Postal Employees of New Mexico, Tucumcari, New Mexico, 11 May 1940, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers, 2.

31. Chavez speech, "Keep America Out Of War," 3-4; United States Congress, Senate, *Congressional Record*, 76th Cong., 2d sess., 1939, 85, pt. 1:316-320.

32. United States Congress, Senate, *Domestic Stability, National Defense, And Prosecution Of World War II*, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers, 11-12; Chavez to Ernest W. Atalder, 6 November 1939, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers; Chavez to Ed Laughlin, 6 November 1939, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers.

33. United States Congress, Senate, *Domestic Stability, National Defense, And Prosecution Of World War II*, 12-14; Chavez to Isabelle Campbell, 29 May 1940, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers; Chavez to Fred Nicholas, 21 June 1940, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers; Chavez to Tony Taylor, 21 June 1940, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers; Dennis Chavez, speech entitled "Conscription," UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers; United States Congress, Senate, *Congressional Record*, 76th Cong., 3rd sess., 1940, 86, pt. 10:11142.

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35. Chavez to Frank Burnett, 14 March 1941, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers; Chavez to Lane P. Criswell, 8 May 1941, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers; Chavez to Mrs. R. P. Woodson, 8 May 1941, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers.

36. Raul Morin, *Among The Valiant: Mexican Americans in W.W. II and Korea* (California: Borden Publishing Co., 1966), 34, 39-40; Donald Knox, *Death March* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), xxii-xxiii.

37. J. R. Deane to Chavez, 7 May 1942, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers.

38. Chavez to Mrs. C. P. Robertson, 12 May 1942, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers; Chavez to Hilario Rivera, 21 May 1942, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers.

39. Chavez to Mr. J. D. Reyes, 20 May 1942, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers.

40. Chavez to Mrs. H. E. Barron, 12 August 1942, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers; Chavez to P. W. McCahon, 14 October 1942, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers.

41. Chavez to Cordell Hull, 22 March 1943, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers.

42. Chavez to George C. Marshall, 31 May 1943, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers.

43. Joseph T. McNarney to Chavez, 5 June 1943, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers.

44. United States Congress, Senate, *Congressional Record*, 78th Cong., 2nd sess., 1944, 90 pt. 1:929-931; Chavez to Frank Knox and Henry L. Stimson, 1 February 1944, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers.

45. United States Congress, Senate, *To Provide for Promotion of Certain American Prisoners of War*, 78th Cong., 2d sess., S. 1374, 1944, 1-2; Chavez to R.N. Dosh, 10 November 1943, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers.

46. Henry L. Stimson to Robert Reynolds, 20 November 1943, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers.

47. Ralph A. Bard to Reynolds, 22 November 1943, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers.

48. Reynolds to Chavez, 22 November 1943, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers; Chavez to H. K. Westcott, 2 December 1943, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers.

49. United States Congress, Senate, *Congressional Record*, 78th Cong., 1st sess., 1943, 89, pt. 8:10207-10213.

50. United States Congress, Senate, *Congressional Record*, 78th Cong., 2d sess., 1944, 90, pts. 5:6929, 6:7654.

51. United States Congress, Senate, *Congressional Record*, 78th Cong., 2d sess., 1944, 90, pt. 6:7616-7618.
52. United States Congress, Senate, *Congressional Record*, 79th Cong., 1st sess., 1945, 91, pt. 1:517.
53. *Ibid.*, 3:3754, 3937.
54. United States Congress, House, *Congressional Record*, 79th Cong., 1st sess., 1945, 91, pt. 1:15; Chavez to Mrs. Alexina Fall Chase, 16 March 1945, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers.
55. Henry L. Stimson to Elbert Thomas, 12 March 1945, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers.
56. Anonymous, "The President's Committee On Fair Employment Practice: Beginning And Growth," Mimeographed, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers, 1-2.
57. Fair Employment Practice Committee, *First Report, July 1943-December 1944* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1945), 37.
58. For a complete reading of the complaints that reached Senator Chavez, see Lujan, "Dennis Chavez and the Roosevelt Era: 1933-1945," 480-98.
59. Dr. Emily Hickman to Chavez, 16 March 1944, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers; United States Congress, House, *Congressional Record*, 78th Cong., 2d sess., 1944, 90, pt. 4:4990, 5008, 5067.
60. *Ibid.*, 6155-6160, 6264; "FEPC Praised and Condemned," *Savannah Ga. News*, 20 June 1944, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers.
61. United States Congress, Senate, *Congressional Record*, 78th Cong., 2d sess., 1944, 90, pt. 5:6593; United States Senate, *A Bill to Prohibit Discrimination in Employment Because of Race, Creed, Color, National Origin, or Ancestry, S. 2048*, 78th Cong., 2d sess., 1-14.
62. Press release from Chavez's office, 22 August 1944, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers.
63. For a complete reference to these hearings, see United States Congress, Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee on Education and Labor, *To Prohibit Discrimination in Employment Because of Race, Creed, Color, National Origin, or Ancestry: Hearing on S. 2048*, 78th Cong., 2d sess., 30 August 1944; United States Congress, Senate, Committee on Education and Labor, *Prohibiting Discrimination in Employment Because of Race, Creed, Color, National Origin, or Ancestry: Report to Accompany S. 2048*, 78th Cong., 2d sess., 1944, S. Rept. 1109, 1-8; United States Congress, Senate, *Congressional Record*, 78th Cong., 2d sess., 1944, 90, pt. 6:7973.
64. United States Congress, House, Committee on Labor, *Bills to Prohibit Discrimination in Employment Because of Race, Creed, Color, National Origin, or Ancestry: Hearing on H.R. 3986, H.R. 4004, And H.R. 4005*, 78th Cong., 2d sess.; United States Congress, House, *Congressional Record*, 78th Cong., 2d sess., 1944, 90, pt. 7:8789.
65. Chavez to Francis Biddle, 26 January 1945, UNM CSWR, Chavez Papers.
66. United States Congress, Senate, *Congressional Record*, 79th Cong., 1st sess., 1945, 91, pt. 1:80.
67. *Ibid.*, pt. 9:12502.
68. United States Congress, Senate, *Congressional Record*, 79th Cong., 2d sess., 1946, 92, pt. 1:81.
69. For complete details of the filibuster, see Lujan, "Dennis Chavez and the Roosevelt Era: 1933-1945," 522-34.
70. United States Congress, Senate, *Congressional Record*, 79th Cong., 2d sess., 1946, 92, pt. 1:1061-1063.
71. *Ibid.*, 1219.
72. For a complete reading of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, see *Statutes at Large of the United States of America*, 1964, vol. 78, 241-68.

73. United States Congress, Senate, *Acceptance of the Statute of Dennis Chavez*, 89th Cong., 2d sess., 1966, Senate Document 128 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1966), 27.

74. Popejoy, "Dennis Chavez," 35.

75. United States Committee on Public Works, *Summary of Legislative Activities on Public Works* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1956), iii, 1-3.

76. "A Fighter, Senator Dennis Chavez Battled to Top Post," *Albuquerque Journal*, 19 November 1962.