

1 [Transcontinental Railroad Workers Day - May 10]

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3 **Resolution commemorating the 150th Anniversary of the completion of the**
4 **Transcontinental Railroad; honoring the contributions of Chinese railroad workers for**
5 **their significant contributions; and declaring May 10, 2019, and every May 10 thereafter,**
6 **as Transcontinental Railroad Workers Day in the City and County of San Francisco.**

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8 WHEREAS, In 1862, the Pacific Railroad Act chartered the Central Pacific Company
9 and the Union Pacific Railroad Company to build a railroad connecting the United States from
10 east to west; and

11 WHEREAS, The Central Pacific Railroad Company was tasked with building the
12 railroad starting in Sacramento towards the east and the Union Pacific Railroad company built
13 westward from the Missouri River; with both tracks to meet in the middle; and

14 WHEREAS, The construction of the Transcontinental Railroad took nearly seven years
15 to complete and stretched nearly 2,000 miles; and

16 WHEREAS, On May 10, 1869, laborers of the Central Pacific Railroad from the west
17 and the Union Pacific Railroad of the east converged at Promontory Summit, Utah to join the
18 two tracks connecting the rail lines by hammering in the last spike, famously remembered as
19 the “Golden Spike” bringing the coast-to-coast project to completion; and

20 WHEREAS, The Transcontinental Railroad relied heavily on human labor requiring
21 thousands of workers, including Civil War veterans; 8,000 to 10,000 Irish workers; African
22 American freed slaves; an unidentified number of Native Americans; 3,000 to 4,000 Latter-
23 Day Saints; and 12,000 to 15,000 Chinese workers; and

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1 WHEREAS, The Chinese workers comprised 80% of the railroad workforce in the west
2 and consisted of almost 90% of the Central Pacific's entire workforce by 1867, and were
3 considered indispensable for their work ethic and endurance; and

4 WHEREAS, The Chinese railroad workers set a world record by laying 10 miles of
5 railroad track in just one day; and

6 WHEREAS, The Chinese railroad workers were subjected to extremely dangerous
7 conditions, grueling hours of work, and substandard pay; and

8 WHEREAS, The Chinese workers came mostly from counties in the Guangdong
9 province of China, historically known to experience high levels of poverty and civil unrest,
10 resulting in desperation among residents for employment opportunities abroad; and

11 WHEREAS, The Chinese railroad workers took on the lowliest and most dangerous
12 tasks, were paid 30% less than their white co-workers with no provision for housing unlike
13 their white counterparts, and were banned from managerial roles; and

14 WHEREAS, The Chinese railroad workers built tunnels and tracks through the most
15 dangerous part of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, taking fifteen months to drill and blast
16 through 1,659 feet of solid granite rock to complete the Summit Tunnel, the highest point of
17 the Central Pacific Track; and

18 WHEREAS, The treacherous conditions resulted in the death of 1,200 Chinese railroad
19 workers; and

20 WHEREAS, In 1867, after enduring deadly explosions and mistreatment, Chinese
21 workers organized a strike against the Central Pacific Railroad demanding higher wages and
22 shorter workdays, marking one of the era's largest labor strikes against any employer; and

23 WHEREAS, As recently as the 1969 ceremony commemorating the 100th anniversary
24 of the golden spike, then-Transportation Secretary John Volpe ignored the contributions of the
25 Chinese railroad workers by declaring that only "...Americans could drill ten tunnels in

1 mountains 30 feet deep in snow...Who else but Americans could chisel through miles of solid
2 granite?...Who else but Americans could have laid ten miles of track in 12 hours?" despite
3 knowing full well that the Chinese were barred from becoming Americans until after the
4 Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed in 1943; and

5 WHEREAS, In 2014, the United States Department of Labor inducted the Chinese
6 railroad workers into the Labor Hall of Honor for their contributions and their organized efforts
7 to fight for fair wages and safe working conditions; and

8 WHEREAS, In the face of discrimination and unfair wages, Chinese railroad workers
9 made history by building one of the United States' most innovative engineering feats; and

10 WHEREAS, The Transcontinental Railroad changed the face of transportation in the
11 United States and in its 150th Anniversary this year, continues to be a defining part of modern
12 economy providing passage for people across the country and the delivery of goods; and

13 WHEREAS, The Transcontinental Railroad's successful completion would not have
14 been possible without the thousands of workers who made possible its construction; and

15 WHEREAS, By honoring the legacy of the Transcontinental Railroad workers, we
16 inspire future generations to continue advancing the values of providing dignity, equal
17 opportunity, civil rights, and equity to working people everywhere; now, therefore, be it

18 RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco
19 hereby declares May 10, 2019, and every May 10 thereafter, as Transcontinental Workers
20 Day in the City and County of San Francisco; and, be it

21 FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San
22 Francisco commits to supporting efforts to illuminate the history of Transcontinental Railroad
23 workers, especially the sacrifices of Chinese railroad workers; and, be it

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1 FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San
2 Francisco urges that the United States Congress recognizes the Chinese railroad workers by
3 passing House Resolution 165 introduced by Congressman Meng.

4 FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San
5 Francisco directs the Clerk of the Board to transmit copies of this resolution to the Offices of
6 Speaker of the United States House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi, United States House of
7 Representative Jackie Speier, United States Senator Kamala Harris, United States Senator
8 Dianne Feinstein, respectively, upon passage.

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