

1 [Transcontinental Chinese Railroad Workers Day - May 10]

2
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 Chinese Railroad Workers Day in the City and County of San**
7 **Francisco.**
8

9 WHEREAS, In 1862, President Lincoln signed the Pacific Railroad Act, establishing the
10 Union Pacific Railroad to build west from Omaha, and the Central Pacific Railroad to build
11 east from Sacramento to connect the country by rail; and

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

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

18 WHEREAS, Facing a severe labor shortage, the Central Pacific began reluctantly to
19 hire Chinese workers from the surrounding area; and upon realizing that Chinese workers
20 were the answer to the labor problem, hired Chinese throughout California and recruited
21 workers from the Guangdong area of China, historically known to experience high levels of
22 poverty and civil unrest; resulting in desperation among residents for employment
23 opportunities abroad; and
24
25

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 took on the lowliest and most dangerous
5 tasks, were paid between half or two-thirds of what their white counterparts made; with no
6 provision for housing and were banned from managerial roles; and

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

9 WHEREAS, The Chinese laborers moved tons of rock, chipped and blasted away at
10 the sides of mountains, carved 15 tunnels through the granite of the Sierra Nevada Mountains
11 during two horrific winters; and

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

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

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

21 WHEREAS, On April 28, 1869, teams of Chinese workers and eight Irish tracklayers
22 set a world record of laying ten miles of track in one day; and

23 WHEREAS, On May 10, 1869, the Central Pacific Railroad and the Union Pacific
24 Railroad met at Promontory Summit, Utah, uniting the country by rail and marking the moment
25 with the driving of a ceremonial gold spike; and

1 WHEREAS, The contributions of Chinese workers has been minimized, overlooked,
2 sometimes completely ignored in accounts of the construction of the first Transcontinental
3 Railroad; and

4 WHEREAS, As recently as the 1969 ceremony commemorating the 100th anniversary
5 of the golden spike, then-Transportation Secretary John Volpe ignored the contributions of the
6 Chinese railroad workers by declaring that only "...Americans could drill ten tunnels in
7 mountains 30 feet deep in snow...Who else but Americans could chisel through miles of solid
8 granite?...Who else but Americans could have laid ten miles of track in 12 hours?" despite
9 knowing full well that the Chinese were barred from becoming Americans until after the
10 Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed in 1943; and

11 WHEREAS, in 1969, the Chinese American community commemorated the
12 contribution of Chinese workers to the first Transcontinental Railroad by donating two
13 plaques, one in Sacramento and the other at Promontory Summit; and

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

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

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

22 WHEREAS, The Transcontinental Railroad's successful completion would not have
23 been possible without the thousands of workers who made possible its construction; and
24
25

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

4 RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco
5 hereby declares May 10, 2019, and every May 10 thereafter, as Transcontinental Chinese
6 Railroad Workers Day in the City and County of San Francisco; and, be it

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

10 FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San
11 Francisco urges that the United States Congress recognizes the Chinese railroad workers by
12 passing House Resolution 165 introduced by Congressman Meng; and, be it

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