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President Obama,

I am writing to urge you to posthumously award the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Fred Ross Sr. From 1976 to 1981 I worked with the United Farm Workers Union (UFW) and had the opportunity to learn from Fred. Fred's lessons have inspired me and influenced my work for close to 40 years. I learned the art of *'making things happen'* from Fred. I have been fortunate to serve and succeed as a teacher, an educational leader, and architect of educational reform in California, all because I was an organizer first. An organizer inspired by Fred Ross. Fred was the embodiment of the *'back of the room'* leader – the organizer who stands behind, supports, and pushes others forward. He supported and pushed hundreds into leadership roles, including Medal of Freedom recipients Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta and Cruz Reynoso. Fred went into diverse communities, primarily Spanish speaking communities in the 1940's and 50's, talked with people, listened as they identified their problems and shared their aspirations, and gave them the tools to make a difference. He provided a participatory, interracial and socioeconomically diverse model for communities to come together around specific goals. A model we badly need today.

In 1987, I had the opportunity to work with Fred collecting his stories for a book he was never able to publish. In 2007, I was approached by Gilbert Padilla to document the Community Service Organization (CSO), which Fred helped form. The Community Service Organization was a grassroots community organizing effort that empowered a generation of Mexican Americans and changed the course of history for their children. Through voter registration drives, citizenship classes, lawsuits and legislative campaigns, CSO enabled poor immigrants to make demands on the political system and to move into the mainstream of American Society. The CSO Project has worked to keep the success stories of civic participation alive.

In a time when there is so much division and separation, I can think of no better inspiration for the country than a successful model of leadership and civic participation that brought diverse communities and perspectives together. By awarding the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Fred Ross Sr., you will not only honor the power and success of those who lead by pushing, you will also provide the country with a model of how working together for common beliefs and ideals can make us all stronger.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gretchen Laue".

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