

Dear President Obama:

Forty years ago, when I was a reporter in Central Washington state, I met a young man named Fred Ross Jr. who was teaching farm workers to come together and stand up for themselves to get better working conditions, wages and treatment.

I learned a lot watching Fred organize the workers and give them the tools to stand up to farmers who had enjoyed near absolute control over the living and working conditions. Our paths have crossed many times since and we have remained good friends.

He made a lasting impression on me as I pursued a career as an activist journalist, I used those tools to give voice to the San Fernando Valley community that was ignored and disrespected by the city's power structure and to help end officially sanctioned brutality by LAPD officers of the poor and minorities.

The tools were ones that were developed by Fred's father, Fred Ross Sr., whose lifelong commitment to social justice and community organizing helped lead to the formation of the United Farm Workers Union and the empowerment of the Latino population of California, now the largest racial/ethnic group in the state.

The accomplishments of Fred Ross Sr. are worthy of the Presidential Medal of Freedom – a posthumous acknowledgement that will help inspire another generation to step forward and fight for a more just, free and egalitarian society.

There is only one answer to the domination of our political culture by vast sums of special interest money – people organizing and working together to make sure their values, needs and interests are served and protected while respecting the values, needs and interests of others.

Fred Ross Sr. was an inspirational leader in his lifetime which can help inspire a new generation to stand up for itself and make a difference.

Sincerely,

Ron Kaye

Retired Editor, Los Angeles Daily News