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February 27, 2013

Honorable Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

All of us stand on the shoulders of those who came before us. Fred Ross Sr. stands as a giant among those who are interested in strengthening our democratic institutions through grass roots community, labor and civil rights organizing. Fred Ross' contributions were well known to my late brother, U.S. Representative Phil Burton of San Francisco, and I. That is why I am asking you to award him the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Cesar Chavez joined Fred Ross in organizing the San Jose chapter of the Community Service Organization civil rights group in the barrio of East San Jose in 1952, registering an unprecedented number of Latinos to vote in the biggest registration drive that community had ever seen. Local Republicans engaged in an early campaign of voter suppression, showing up at the polls to try to intimidate many of these first-time voters. Drawing upon the coalition they built through CSO, Cesar and Fred beat back the GOP voter suppression attempt.

Fred, working with Cesar and Dolores Huerta, organized chapters of the Community Service Organization up and down California during the 1950s despite the political repression of the McCarthy era.

My brother Phil Burton, then a member of the state Assembly, worked closely with Fred, Cesar and Dolores by authoring Assembly Bill 5, the landmark 1961 law repealing the citizenship requirement for old age pensions that was sponsored by CSO.

When hatred and racial bias were still staining our nation's reputation during and immediately after World War II, Fred worked to help Japanese Americans return to their homes from the internment camps.

Finally, Fred's work in organizing the CSO directly resulted in the historic 1949 election of Ed Roybal to the Los Angeles City Council, which was the genesis of modern political participation by Latinos in L.A. and across California.

So many of activists and leaders have over the generations stood on the shoulders of Fred Ross Sr. Because of all these accomplishments and many others, he deserves the Medal of Freedom. Thank you for your consideration of my request.

Sincerely yours,



John L. Burton
Chairman
California Democratic Party