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At-Large Member
MEA-MFT 8024

March 15, 2013

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President;

I am writing to respectfully ask you to posthumously award legendary organizer Fred Ross, Sr. the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Mr. Ross is a true American that dedicated his life's work to sparking democracy and realizing American dreams in corners of our country where it might not have seemed possible.

In times when the interpretation of our laws could have born a very different culture in the United States, Fred Ross Sr. carved out the America that we all believe through people-based action. He brought a passionate sense of justice, a focused energy and a matchless persistence to the craft of organizing. Perhaps of the most selfless and most effective things he did was to use his skills, not to lead, but to cultivate leaders – thousands of them. Mr. Ross was a man of the people who gave the people the platform, the road map, and the courage to change the course of their lives, their community, and our nation.

Ross was a pioneer for racial and economic justice. In the thirties and early forties, he organized Dust Bowl refugees in the migratory worker camps that John Steinbeck wrote about, helping them form camp councils and self-governance. In the mid 1940s, he worked with Japanese Americans during World War II, helping them get jobs and housing as a precondition to getting out of the internment camps.

In the midst of KKK activity, he organized Civic Unity Leagues, bringing Mexican Americans and African Americans together to battle segregation in schools, skating rinks and movie theaters. In Orange County, California he organized parents to fight the practice of segregation in local schools and successfully integrated school boards through voter registration drives and civic engagement. One of the most dramatic outcomes of his work occurred when parents sued the school districts and prevailed (Mendez et al vs. Westminster School District, et al.), creating the legal precedent and laying the foundation for the landmark Brown vs. the Board of Education decision.

Mr. Ross was a mentor to past medal recipients Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta,

training them as organizers and helping them to form the National Farm Workers Association (later United Farm Workers). He is also known for founding the Community Service Organization with Tony Rios and the late Congressman Edward Roybal. Ross fought tirelessly for the rights of workers and oppressed people.

It was because of his voter registration drives and Get-Out-The-Vote techniques that some of the country's first Latino leaders were elected. As you well know, the registration and GOTV programs he developed are now standard practice and critical elements in winning campaigns.

Dolores Huerta also noted that Ross was a feminist – she has stated that he fully recognized the personhood of women, and he "always made a seat for women" in positions of leadership and responsibility.

I believe honoring Mr. Ross in this way would be an affirmation to all Americans that those who live their lives doing the right thing for others – even when it's the hardest thing to do – are never forgotten.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alan D. Ekblad". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Alan D. Ekblad, Executive Secretary