

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

Dear Mr. President,

I am writing this letter to encourage you to award posthumously the Presidential Medal of Freedom to the legendary organizer Fred Ross, Sr.

For more than half a century, Fred Ross Sr. educated, agitated and inspired people of all races and backgrounds to overcome fear and despair. As he said, Ross's goal was "to help people do away with fear, to speak up and demand their rights, to push people to get out in front so that they could prove to themselves that they could do it." He brought a passionate sense of justice, a focused energy and a matchless persistence to the craft of organizing.

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 in many states during World War II, helping them get jobs and housing as a precondition to getting out of the internment camps.

After the war, in the midst of KKK activity, he organized eight Civic Unity Leagues in California's citrus belt, bringing Mexican Americans and African Americans together to battle segregation in schools, skating rinks and movie theaters. In Orange County he organized parents to fight the practice of segregation in local schools and successfully integrated school boards across the citrus belt through voter registration drives and civic engagement. One of the most dramatic outcomes of his work in Orange County 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.

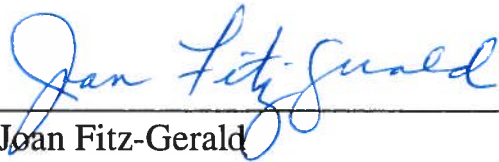
Mr. Ross was a mentor to past medal recipients Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, training them as organizers and helping them to form the National Farm Workers Association (later United Farm Workers). He is also known for founding the

Community Service Organization with Tony Rios and the late Congressman Edward Roybal. Ross fought tirelessly for the rights of Hispanic farm laborers, but not just on their behalf – as Nancy Pelosi said during his memorial service, he "empowered people of color." 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. Dolores Huerta also has 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.

In recognition for this unsung hero, I urge you to confer the Presidential Medal of Freedom posthumously to Fred Ross, Sr.

This recognition would be a beacon of hope for living and future organizers committed to social justice.

Sincerely,



Joan Fitz-Gerald
President, America Votes