



STATE OF CALIFORNIA
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
KAMALA D. HARRIS
ATTORNEY GENERAL

February 20, 2013

The Honorable Barack H. Obama
President of the United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I am writing to join the chorus of voices encouraging you to bestow the Presidential Medal of Freedom on Fred Ross Sr. posthumously.

Though I never had the opportunity to meet Fred Ross Sr. personally, I am very much aware of his work and his enduring legacy as one of the greatest organizers of our times.

Many have chronicled the highlights of Fred Ross Sr.'s fifty years of organizing work. His work with the farmworkers as a teacher and mentor is well known. His organizing with Dust Bowl refugees in the 1930s and 1940s and with Japanese Americans during World War II, his work with African American and Mexican American families fighting for desegregation in Orange County, his efforts on behalf of domestic workers and immigrants, and his work against police brutality are less well known.

Fred Ross Sr. trained and taught three generations of organizers the skill and art of building community power to advance human and civil rights. He encouraged and inspired thousands of young people to dedicate their lives to advancing social and economic justice for the least among us. He encouraged these young men and women to take on leadership roles.

César Chávez and Dolores Huerta recognized Fred Ross Sr. as a teacher and mentor. California Supreme Court Justice Cruz Reynoso, businessman Herman Gallegos, and labor leader Eliseo Medina are just a few of the young people he mentored who have dedicated their lives to social and economic justice. Even those of us who did not know him personally are the beneficiaries of his organizing, and that of the organizers who fought for and continue to fight for racial, economic, and social equality in our country.



Fred Ross Sr. also understood the importance of building institutions and the legal architecture that codify the principles of social and economic justice into law.

The landmark case, *Mendez v. Westminster School District* (1947), which ordered the desegregation of schools in Orange County, California, and the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act of 1975 which codified labor rights and protections of farmworkers who were not protected under the National Labor Relations Act of 1935, are sterling examples of the fruits of Fred's vision and work.

As the chief law enforcement officer in California, I am deeply indebted to Fred Ross Sr. for teaching communities how to build power in order to hold government, business and the broad community accountable, and for reminding us all of the principles and standards set forth in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights that make the American Dream the envy of the world.

But as Martin Luther King, Jr. stated speech forty years ago—and as Stanford historian, and author of the newly released *Martin's Dream*, Dr. Clayborne Carson reminds us—the great freedom struggle continues. Its fulfillment will require the painstaking work and vision of leaders and grass roots organizers who live out the enduring legacy and spirit of Fred Ross Sr.

Conferring this award upon Fred Ross Sr. nourishes this spirit. It is a powerful gesture, and especially fitting since you are a leader who understands the extraordinary value and power of community organizing as an integral part of the foundation upon which our great nation relies.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



KAMALA D. HARRIS
Attorney General