

March 12, 2013

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

Dear Mr. President,

As leaders in the environmental movement in the United States, we, the undersigned, are writing in support of a posthumous Presidential Medal of Freedom to the late community organizer and champion of human rights, Fred Ross, Sr.

Over nearly five decades, Ross fought for racial and economic justice and educated and inspired people of all races and backgrounds to come together for the greater good. He was the mentor of some of the country's most prominent organizers, including United Farm Worker founders Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chavez. In fact, Cesar Chavez once said: "I learned quite a bit by studying Gandhi, but the first practical steps I learned from the best organizer I know: Fred Ross Sr."

In the 1930s and 1940s, Ross organized in the worker camps of Dust Bowl refugees, helping form community councils and self-governance structures. In the mid-1940s, he worked with Japanese Americans during and after World War II, helping provide community support to combat wartime discrimination. In the late 1940s, Ross organized Civic Unity Leagues across California's Citrus Belt, bringing together Mexican Americans and African Americans to promote desegregation in schools and other public places. One of his most significant victories was organizing Orange County parents, culminating in a lawsuit against the school district (*Mendez et al vs. Westminster School District, et al.*), which was an important legal precedent for *Brown vs. the Board of Education*.

Ross also worked with Saul Alinsky to organize the Community Service Organization (CSO) in Los Angeles, helping elect the first Hispanic to the City Council. Together with leaders across California and Arizona, Ross successfully overcame voter suppression efforts and passed landmark legislation on behalf of immigrants.

Perhaps, Fred Ross Sr. is most remembered for his work with America's farmworkers and their struggle for justice and dignity during the 1960s and 1970s. He trained close to 2,000 grape and lettuce boycott and strike organizers in every major city in the United States and Toronto, Canada. The powerful pressure that resulted from massive collective action led to the passage of the historic California Agricultural Labor Relations Act signed into law by California Governor Jerry Brown in 1975. Fred Ross died in 1992 at the age of 82.

As leaders in the environmental movement, we believe Fred Ross Sr. holds a special place in our nation's history: His life's work revealed the importance of collective action, citizenship engagement, and leadership development as cornerstones of any campaign for change.

Honoring Fred Ross Sr. with a posthumous Presidential Medal of Freedom would be an important way to recognize this legacy and the impact his work still has on those of us working for environmental protection and civil rights.

We thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

The Undersigned

Lindsey Allen, Rainforest Action Network
Michael Brune, Sierra Club
Wenonah Hauter, Food & Water Watch
Sarah Shanley Hope, Alliance for Climate Education
Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., Waterkeeper Alliance
Frances Moore Lappé and Anna Lappé, Small Planet Institute
Peter Lehner, Natural Resources Defense
Alex Levinson, Pacific Environment
Bill McKibben, 350.org
Erich Pica, Friends of the Earth
Philip D. Radford, Greenpeace USA
Larry Schweiger, National Wildlife Federation
Kierán Suckling, Center for Biological Diversity