

February 28, 2013

Via electronic mail

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

Dear Mr. President,

I respectfully write to urge you to award posthumously the Presidential Medal of Freedom to the late community organizer and civil rights activist, Fred Ross, Sr.

For more than a half-century Fred Ross taught the unempowered and poor how to harness the power of their number. Spurred by the injustice and racial prejudice he witnessed as a young man during the Depression and during the post-World War period against the Japanese Americans, Fred Ross committed his life to change. How? By teaching hundreds of people how to organize and how to utilize the techniques of successful and meaningful community organizing to achieve justice. Through his work first with the Community Service Organization and then with the United Farmworkers in California, Fred Ross showed us how we might achieve great things if we stand together. And, in doing so, he taught us how the wheels of democracy truly work.

In 1969, my parents hosted migrant farmworkers trained by Fred Ross, who came to San Francisco to boycott grapes to achieve fair treatment and wages in the fields and vineyards of California. Thus, at age ten, I walked the picket line with my parents in their organized protest. Twenty years later, I had the honor of meeting in person Fred Ross who, together with his son, Fred Jr., Marshall Ganz, and others, had come to San Francisco to train young organizers in a grassroots campaign to elect Nancy Pelosi to Congress. The lessons I learned there were greater than any amount of education I've been fortunate to have, and continue to inspire me to work for social justice.

Those Fred taught, in turn, taught many others – carrying the community organizing tradition down through three generations now. Many of the compassionate organizers with whom I have worked continue to implement Fred Ross's transformative organizing strategies. Today, his teachings are implemented to educate the public on climate change, to change immigration policy, to fight for marriage equality, to elect representatives to Congress, and to elect a President.

Above all, Fred's legacy reminds us of the "dangers of futility," of the power of our democracy, and the belief that (in the words of Robert F. Kennedy) even the tiniest ripple of hope can "build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and

resistance." Granting the Medal of Freedom to the master teacher honors this great tradition and acknowledges its importance in a participatory democracy.

I hope you will honor his enduring contributions by awarding Fred Ross Sr. the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Sincerely,

Lokelani Devone
Attorney

California Grape Boycott (1969)
Organizer, Nancy Pelosi Congressional Campaign (1987)
District Representative, Office of Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi 91987-89)
Board Member, Neighbor To Neighbor (Non-intervention in Central America)(1989)
Board Member, SF AIDS Foundation (1987-89)
Founding Board Member, The AIDS Quilt (1988-90)
Board Member, Continuum HIV Adult Day Healthcare Project (1994-97)
Board Member, Project Inform (1996-1999)
Board Member, PRBO Conservation Science (1997-1999)
Board Member and Chair, Pangaea Global AIDS Foundation (2000-2011)
Board Member, The Center for Justice & Accountability (2009-present)
Trustee, Grace Cathedral, San Francisco (2010-present)