

President Barack Obama
White House
Washington, D.C.
C/o Julie Chavez Rodriguez
Associate Director of Latin Affairs and Immigration
White House Office of Public Engagement

Dear Mr. President:

Please award posthumously the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Fred Ross, Sr. It would be a very fitting tribute to honor this legendary organizer, who touched so many people in the fight for what is just and good.

I had the privilege of being trained by Fred Ross Sr. and witnessed firsthand his impact. As a young organizer with the United Farm Workers Union (UFW), like so many others, I learned organizing techniques from Fred that he had perfected. Thanks to his training and continued mentoring the UFW accomplished what had been considered impossible.

Later, I served on the campaign staff of then-Mayor Diane Feinstein of San Francisco, who faced an unfair recall, started by a group opposed to her effort to strength gun laws. Fred Sr. joined his son, Fred Jr., on the campaign and trained the campaign staff, which pioneered the use of Vote By Mail (absentee ballots) at the grassroots level. Over 50,000 of the Mayor's supporters were signed up in roughly a month to Vote By Mail. The result was an overwhelming defeat of the recall.

I also know that in addition to mentoring Cesar Chavez and Delores Huerta, Fred Sr. helped launch a second union envisioned by Cesar Chavez and founded by people of color. Cesar Chavez recruited a group of African-Americans in San Diego to start a union for domestic workers and asked Fred Sr. to train them to organize. The result was the United Domestic Workers of America (UDW), which is now an affiliate of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Workers (AFSCME), representing home care providers. I worked for UDW and often heard the founders speak of the importance of Fred Sr.'s training.

There are many other examples of how Fred Ross Sr. stood up for those in need during his long career. More importantly he taught those in need how to stand up for themselves and to change their situation for the better. His impact lives on today in countless community organizations that are populated with those of us who learned from him, and are passing on to others what we learned. Fred Ross Sr.'s work deserves to be honored with the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Sincerely,

Bob Johnson
Field Operations Manager
California School Employees Association
(Organization listed for information purposes only.)