



February 27, 2013

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

Re: The Nomination of Fred Ross Sr. to Receive the Presidential  
Medal of Freedom

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of the 325,000 members of the California Teachers Association, I'm writing to express our enthusiastic support for the nomination of legendary organizer, Fred Ross Sr. for receipt of the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Ross's life embodied all that the medal seeks to honor: "especially the meritorious contribution to the security and national interests of the United States, world peace, cultural or other significant public and private endeavors."

Ross fought racism, discrimination, and the myriad of injustices confronted by working men and women for five decades. He helped build the labor movement and the bridges between labor, religious, civic, and neighborhood organizations. He was a pioneer in opening doors to women and people of color, encouraging their full participation in leadership roles.

One of the earliest experiences that sparked Ross's interest in becoming an organizer was his close observation of CIO organizers and "dust bowlers" in the fight against terrible mistreatment by the growers in the early 1940s. Their courage and hunger for justice was contagious and became the impetus for Ross's lifelong dedication as an organizer.

Shortly after the end of World War II, Ross worked with Japanese Americans to help find housing and employment in the midst of residual war time hysteria, prejudice and discrimination. He enlisted San Francisco Labor Council leader, Jack Shelly, to challenge the illegal and immoral discriminatory practices of employers.

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In the late 1940s, local Latino leaders appealed to Ross to help them organize Community Service Organizations (CSOs). The founding leaders, including members of the Steel Workers, the ILGWU, Meat Cutters and the Laborers formed the core of the early leadership of what became the most effective and militant Latino civil rights organization in the state of California. The CSO leaders built a powerful coalition that included the NAACP, the JACL, the Catholic Church, and the Jewish community. Together they fought for fair housing, employment and working conditions.

By 1958, the CSO had become a state-wide organization with twenty-two chapters. When the labor movement was faced with an extremist "right to work" initiative, the CSO stepped up. Using "get out the vote" methods created by Ross and Cesar Chavez, they registered 160,000 new voters, turned out an unprecedented vote and defeated the "right to work" initiative and elected Democratic Governor Pat Brown.

From 1966 to 1978, Ross worked with Chavez to establish and develop the United Farm Workers Union (UFW). Ross recruited and trained men and women from the fields to the cities, many of whom became legends in their own right in labor, politics, and civil rights. Ross recruited and trained more than 2,000 young organizers from unions, universities, and religious congregations in every major city in the United States and Canada. He taught them the value of solidarity with the rest of the labor movement. He built labor power which, in turn, translated into legal precedents codifying workers rights, including the strongest labor law in the country, the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act of 1975.

Ross learned that there are no short cuts. You find people one at a time, teach them to develop their own powerful voices, turn their anger about injustice into hope by encouraging them to take collective action.

Ross taught us that the organizer works quietly behind the scenes, patiently asking questions, listening respectfully, teaching new leaders, pushing them to take action, and creating hope with great enthusiasm.

His goal was "to help people do away with fear; 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."

Our country continues to benefit from the legacy of Fred Ross Sr. Over the past thirty years, the organizing ranks of no fewer than 18 international unions have

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been filled with Ross trainees, and countless local labor councils and state Federations of Labor.

We urge you to recognize this unsung hero by conferring the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dean E. Vogel". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Dean E. Vogel  
President

DEV:tw

c: Eric C. Heins, CTA Vice President  
Mikki Cichocki, CTA Secretary-Treasurer  
CTA Board of Directors  
Carolyn Doggett, CTA Executive Director  
Karen Kyhn, CTA Deputy Executive Director  
Joe Nunez, CTA Associate Executive Director  
Becky Zoglman, CTA Associate Executive Director