

By E Letter to Julie Chavez Rodriguez ,
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February 20, 2013

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave.
Washington D.C 20500

Dear President Obama,

I am writing to urge you to award posthumously the Presidential Medal of Freedom to an unsung American hero, the legendary community organizer, Fred Ross, Sr.

During his nearly 50-year organizing career, Fred had a profound impact on advancing social and economic justice in this country. Many have doubtless already cited to you the names of the remarkable Hispanic leaders mentored by Fred: Cesar Chavez. Dolores Huerta. Cruz Reynoso. Eliseo Medina. For recognizing and training these leaders alone, Fred would deserve high honor and our nation's deepest thanks.

But Fred trained literally thousands of community organizers and leaders during his career — people whose contributions continue to ripple throughout our society, making ours a stronger, more just democracy. In the 1930s and 1940's, Fred organized Dust Bowl refugees and interned Japanese Americans. In the 1950's, he brought Mexican Americans and African Americans together in Southern California to battle segregation in schools and movie theatres. In the 1960's and 1970's, Fred trained nearly 2,000 lettuce and grape boycott organizers who generated the powerful pressure that led the California State Legislature to pass, and Governor Jerry Brown to sign into law, the historic California Agricultural Labor Relations Act.

When I met Fred during the 1980's, he was working with his son, Fred Jr, to train a new generation of organizers working to challenge the Reagan foreign policy in Central America. I became one of those organizers, steeped in Fred's successful methods and discipline of doing community outreach, finding and engaging people with fire in their belly, organizing house meetings, rallies, phone banks,

and delegations to visit Congress members — never neglecting to follow up, follow up, follow up. I was thrilled when the people I helped organize in central Tennessee persuaded their Congressman, a swing vote, to oppose further U.S. funding for the Contra war in Nicaragua. In fact, Congress ended support for the Contra War during that vote – thanks in no small part to similar grassroots organizing drives our campaign ran in swing congressional districts throughout the country.

I continue to rely on the organizing techniques and discipline I learned from Fred Ross, Sr. in my work raising funds for non-profit organizations. Over the years, I have raised millions of dollars for peace in Central America, international grassroots health education, and environmental conservation. Others trained by Fred have gone on to make their mark on the U.S. labor movement, the Fair Trade movement, government service, academe, and on all manner of peace and social justice organizations.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the lives of millions of people have been touched and improved directly and indirectly by Fred and the countless organizers he trained. And the work goes on.

In recognition of his extraordinary life and legacy, I urge you to confer the Presidential Medal of Freedom posthumously upon Fred Ross, Sr.

Sincerely,

Denise Bergez
Oakland, CA