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The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the The United States
The White House
Attention: Ms. Julie C. Rodriguez
Associate Director, Latino Affairs

Dear Mr. President:

I am writing to seek your selection of Mr. Fred Ross, Sr. for the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

The great theologian, Dr. Howard Thurman once wrote: "To know a man (person) is to know, somewhat of his or her landmarks." The following are some of the notable landmarks and points of referral that merit selecting Fred Ross, Sr. for this great honor. Fred's work in training farmworkers to build a union of their own, including the mentoring of Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta is well known, therefore, I will cite other examples to make the case for his selection.

Worthy of his many accomplishments is the key role Fred Ross and Hector Tarango played in securing the landmark school desegregation case, Mendez et. al. vs. Westminster School District, et. al. This early school desegregation victory set the precedent for the 1954 ruling of Brown vs. Board of Education, for overturning de jure segregation within American Public Schools.

Another example is more personal. I first met Fred Ross in 1952, while helping to organize a Chapter of the Community Service Organization (CSO), in the East San Jose Barrio then known as "Sal Si Puedes" (Get Out if You Can). We went on to organize a state wide civil rights organization dedicated to improving the well being of Mexican Americans and other minorities in the urban and rural barrios where life was often harsh and bleak. Thanks to the community organizing genius of Fred, and today, of course, to you, President Obama, Mexican Americans and most Americans no longer think of Get Out if You Can, but "Si, Se Puede!" "Yes, We Can!"

If former colleagues and fellow organizers associated with CSO and Fred were to visit those places where organizing took place, one would see paved streets, sidewalks, traffic signs, parks and healthier, safer communities, truly worthy to be called landmarks, and testimony to organizing skills that nurtured the human spirit of ordinary citizens to engage the establishments of social power to pursue the democratic ideals of social justice for marginalized communities. Recognizing that the leverages of social-political power count, Fred encouraged CSO to organize classes in basic English, citizenship and the lifeblood of democracy: voting. In 1960, while I was serving as National President, and Cesar Chavez as Executive Director, the CSO carried out an unprecedented campaign registering 160,000 new Latino voters in California. This laid the base for the future election of Latino officials, and the passage of important civil rights legislation as the Fair Employment Practice Act and Fair Housing Act.

One of the most significant landmarks attributed to Fred was his success in training and developing ordinary, indigenous, community-based residents to go and achieve extraordinary social change beyond the experiences gained through CSO. Such notables as Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta are well known, but there are many others: Edward R. Roybal, Honorable Cruz Reynoso, Gilbert Padilla, J.J. Rodriguez, Henrietta Villaescusa, Grace Montañez Davis and A.P. "Tony" Rios. I went on to co found and serve as first Executive Director for what is now the National Council of La Raza and was among the first Latinos elected to serve on a number of philanthropic and corporate boards.

Early in California's civil rights movement, Fred recognized that international and domestic issues are

inextricably intertwined. He feared that the “zoot suit” and “Bloody Christmas” and other incidents in Los Angeles against, Mexicans, Mexican Americans, African Americans, Asians, and Jews were inimical to the ability of the United States to sell the idea of democracy to other nations when many U. S. residents were being subjected to unwarranted police action, brutality, job discrimination and loss of civil liberties here at home.

A surety against far left, American radicalism, and extreme, far right forces of darkness, Fred encouraged CSO to collaborate with respected, racial, ethnic and religious organizations as NAACP, Japanese American Citizens League, American Jewish Committee, Anti Defamation League, Community Relations Council, key labor groups, the Catholic Church, Council of Churches, and American Friends Service Committee. In this way, CSO established its reputation as a moderate civil rights organization and helped navigate the hostile Cold War climate that complicated the struggle for social justice and civil rights.

Today, when the United States faces a continuing global “war on terror,” our changing demographics will surely test our ability to further the dignity and worth for all persons in American life, while making our actions consistent with our international agenda to encourage democracy abroad. Fred Ross, Sr. spent a lifetime building community-based leadership, helping communities define their own agendas and helping them to go out and work for responsible social change. His legacy remains a great option for saving the world for democracy and merits the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Thank you.

Sincerely yours,
Herman Gallegos