



UNIVERSITY OF
SAN FRANCISCO

CHANGE THE WORLD FROM HERE

School of Law
Office of the Dean
2130 Fulton Street
San Francisco, CA 94117-1080
Tel 415.422.6304
Fax 415.422.5443

February 20, 2013

Barak Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

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

Dear President Obama:

I write in enthusiastic support of Fred Ross Sr. to receive posthumously the Presidential Medal of Freedom. His life embodied all that the Medal seeks to honor: "especially meritorious contribution to the security or national interests of the United States, world peace, cultural or other significant public or private endeavors." Indeed Mr. Ross' entire life's work was a spirited, defiant, persistent struggle for freedom and equality on behalf of the dispossessed, the marginalized, and the despised whether in Japanese 'relocation' camps in California, in the fields of California, Texas and Ohio, or in the barrios of Los Angeles. Along the way, he organized legions in a struggle for inclusion, equity, fairness and human dignity. Mr. Ross demanded and frequently succeeded in forcing America to live up to its constitutional guarantees for all its citizens at a time when glaring contradictions in American life denied access to the ballot box, membership in unions, and equal protection under the law.

At the outset, a comment about my own qualifications to recommend Mr. Ross and some images of him that I think helpful in judging the appropriateness of awarding the Medal of Freedom in his honor. I am the Dean at the University of San Francisco School of Law where I have taught Constitutional Law and Labor Law. In addition, I am familiar with the struggle of farmworkers for fair treatment, having served as an Administrative Law Judge for the Agricultural Labor Relations Board. As a result of this experience, I am also fully familiar with the difficulty of the struggles Mr. Ross took on and the benefits his work has brought to millions of Americans.

As I prepared to write this letter, I took an emotional ride through Mr. Ross' life, reading articles and viewing photographs of Mr. Ross with his comrades and family. There he is standing in front of hundreds, arms folded, intensely interacting with those he is mentoring and organizing. There he is standing behind an American treasure – Cesar Chavez. There he is smiling with family and friends, a reminder that the struggle for equality takes time and that a buoyant spirit is critical to success. My journey through Mr. Ross' life revealed his humility, his modesty, and his determination to organize and train those who would lead – whether it be Ed Roybal whose election as the first Mexican City Councilman in Los Angeles resulted from Mr. Ross' organizing efforts; or, Cesar Chavez whom Mr. Ross identified and recruited to lead the United Farmworkers; or, Hector Tarango who led the fight to overturn California's exclusion of Mexicans from all white public schools because of Fred Ross Sr.'s initial tutelage. Mr. Ross led from behind and stood in the shadow of others because he understood that he was facilitating inclusion and empowerment rather than seeking to control. It is now time to bring Fred Ross Sr. into the sunlight and to recognize his incalculable contributions by awarding him the Medal of Freedom – an award that the likes of Cesar Chavez, Ed Roybal and Hector Tarango would have supported and applauded.

It is impossible to recount in any letter the full scope of Mr. Ross' life. As I thought about his work, however, a unifying theme became apparent – the life of Fred Ross Sr. was devoted to upholding the Constitution of the United States and making its guarantees, inked in parchment by our Founding

Fathers, a reality for all citizens regardless of color or national origin. A review of the life work of Fred Ross Sr. demonstrates that time after time his struggles mobilized the citizenry – black, white, yellow and brown - to fight for rights that are the bedrock of our democracy. Examples are plentiful:

- Fred Ross Sr. struggled mightily against the shame of the Japanese 'relocation' camps during World War II and the decision of the United States Supreme Court in Korematsu v. United States that sadly upheld their existence. In 1981, forty years after his work with the War Relocation Authority, Mr. Ross testified before the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians which eventually led to the award of reparations to families of the internees: "This country should never have had to be asked for reparations for the worst, single, wholesale violation of civil rights of American citizen in the entire history of our country," stated Mr. Ross before the Commission.
- Fred Ross Sr. struggled for six calendar decades to bring dignity to farmworkers, managing the Arvin Migratory Labor Camp for dust bowlers in Bakersfield, founding the Community Service Organization in Los Angeles (where Cesar Chavez' skills were honed and mentored), organizing farmworkers in Delano, Salinas, and Guadalupe, Arizona, and organizing the great table grape boycott. Those efforts were arguably the greatest contributions, along with those of Cesar Chavez, to achieving economic justice for agricultural workers in the history of the United States. Surely, but for Mr. Ross' efforts, California's Agricultural Labor Relations Act would never have been law and the National Labor Relations Act's glaring omission of agricultural laborers would never have been remedied for California's agricultural workforce.
- Fred Ross Sr. revolutionized minority access to the ballot box nearly two decades before passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. His extraordinary outreach resulted in the election in 1949 of Ed Roybal as the first Mexican American Councilman in the history of Los Angeles.
- Fred Ross Sr. fought for racial equality as a member of the Council on Race Relations and led the fight to indict Los Angeles police involved in the beating of CSO president Tony Rios just weeks after Los Angeles' Bloody Christmas that witnessed the beatings and torture of Mexicans at the Lincoln Heights police station.
- Fred Ross Sr. mentored and trained Hector Tarango whose brilliant struggle in the courts led to the 1947 Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals decision Mendez v. Westminster School District, holding that the segregation of Mexican school children violated the United States Constitution's guarantees of equal protection and helping to lay the foundation for the United States Supreme Court's 1954 ruling in Brown v. Board of Education.
- Fred Ross Sr. understood the implications of globalization long before it would become a household word, organizing in the 1980s with his son and namesake, Fred Ross Jr., against American aid to the Contras in Nicaragua and military aid to El Salvador's dictators.

It is not a stretch to say that the vitality of our Constitution today owes much to the work of Fred Ross Sr. The right to associate, the right to vote, the right to due process of law, and the right to equal protection of the laws were all guiding principles around which he organized his life and ultimately organized thousands in the struggle for freedom and equality. Fred Ross Sr. shunned public recognition and awards and prizes for himself in his tireless service for others. At this moment in our history, however, his self-effacing humility should give way to the inspiration that the posthumous award of the Presidential Medal of Freedom would provide for future generations who continue to struggle for justice.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey S. Brand
Dean and Professor of Law
University of San Francisco School of Law
2130 Fulton Street
San Francisco, CA 94117
brandj@usfca.edu
Telephone: 415.422.6304
Fax: 415.422.5443