

The President c/o Julie Chavez Rodriguez,
Associate Director of Latino Affairs and Immigration for the Office of
Public Engagement
President Barack Obama
The White House

Dear Mr. President,

During the 2008 presidential campaign, some of your opponents snidely referred to your role as a community organizer. They shamefully belittled that profession which can so uniquely unite communities and lead people from hopelessness to active participation in civic life. Today I write to ask you to honor the role of the organizer by honoring a largely unsung hero. I urge you to confer the Presidential Medal of Freedom posthumously on Fred Ross, Sr. Fred gave most of his life to incredibly effective organizing: training leaders to organize their communities to rise above discrimination, poverty and hopelessness.

You will have heard from others about Fred's organizing of the Community Service Organizations in Latino communities in Arizona and California starting in the late 1940s and of his history-changing role in training and mentoring Cesar Chavez and countless other leaders of the United Farm Workers union. I was lucky to part of one of the last groups of organizers trained by Fred in the early 1980s as part of a campaign of young people working to change U.S. policy toward Central America from support for repressive governments to support for a peaceful and just end to years of conflict. I will always be grateful for the tools Fred provided which allowed so many of us to go on to organize in many different ways for a more fair and just world, in our own country and beyond. Part of Fred's greatest legacy are the 'ripples in the pond' which continue still as organizers trained by Fred have trained and mentored the next generation of organizers, who trained the next generation, and so on and on.

The cynical comments of your 2008 opponents notwithstanding, those of us who know the power of community organizing were inspired and hopeful at the idea of having a President who comes from that great civic tradition. Fred Ross, Sr., community organizer, embodied the creative, hard-working, unselfish best of what it means to believe in our country's highest values. I hope you take this opportunity to give Fred this well-deserved and long overdue honor, and thereby give young people who learn about the award a glimpse of what this profession of 'community organizing' is about, and why it is so important not just to our country's past, but to our future.

Sincerely,

Mary Ann Buckley

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