



ANTONIO R. VILLARAIGOSA  
MAYOR

February 22, 2013

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I am pleased to submit this letter of support to posthumously award the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Fred Ross, Sr.

Fred supported and pushed many people into leadership roles including Medal of Freedom recipients Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, and Cruz Reynoso. Fred went into diverse communities, including many Spanish speaking communities in the 1940's and 1950's, and gave them the tools to make a difference.

For nearly half a century, Fred educated, agitated and inspired people of all races and backgrounds to overcome fear, despair and cynicism. He was a pioneer who fought for racial and economic justice.

In the thirties and early forties, he organized "Dust Bowl" refugees in the migratory worker camps that John Steinbeck wrote about, helping them form camp councils and self-governance. In the mid forties, he worked with Japanese Americans during World War II. He organized community support to combat wartime hysteria and prejudice. He helped newly released "internees" find employment and housing in Cleveland and San Francisco.

In 1947 Saul Alinsky hired Ross to organize the Community Service Organization (CSO) in Los Angeles' Eastside. In 1949, the CSO helped elect Ed Roybal, the first Latino ever elected to the Los Angeles City Council.



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In the early 1950s, Ross met Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta. He recruited them to become fulltime organizers with the CSO and became a lifetime mentor. Together with CSO leaders across California and Arizona, they successfully overcame voter suppression efforts and passed landmark legislation on behalf of immigrants. Ross recruited and trained many other Hispanic leaders, including Cruz Reynoso who was later appointed the first Hispanic Supreme Court Justice in California, and who received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2000.

In a time when there is so much division and separation, I can think of no better inspiration for the country than a successful model of leadership and civic participation that brought diverse communities and perspectives together.

By awarding the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Fred Ross, Sr., you will not only honor the power and success of those who lead by pushing, you will also provide the country with a model of how working together for common beliefs and ideals can make us all stronger.

Fred Ross, Sr.'s enduring legacy as an organizer who built collective action, citizenship engagement, and leadership development has never been more relevant or important to our democracy.

Very truly yours,



ANTONIO R. VILLARAIGOSA  
Mayor

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