

March 14, 2013

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We wish to add our support to those who have urged you to recognize the life and legacy of Fred Ross, Sr. by awarding him, posthumously, the Presidential Medal of Freedom. As individuals who have previously worked in the White House and been involved in the process of identifying Americans worthy of this most singular honor, we understand how difficult it is to choose among equally meritorious individuals. Nonetheless, we urge you to confer this most important honor on Fred Ross, Sr.

Others have previously written to you and your staff detailing the variety of ways in which over 50 years Fred helped lift the voices of ordinary people so that the powerful had to listen. As people collected the many stories and examples of the impact of Fred's organizing work, one constant theme emerged: his legacy has been largely unrecognized because he did not seek public recognition. His personal modesty and lack of desire for public credit is precisely why he should be recognized now.

One organizing principle key to his work, and which remains highly relevant in today's very diverse America, was the effort to build bridges among and between different communities. For example, Fred organized Civic Unity Leagues in California's citrus communities bringing together Mexican-Americans and African-Americans to promote desegregation in schools, swimming pools and other public places. Indeed, his work in Orange County led to a lawsuit (*Mendez et al vs. Westminster School District, et al.*) which was a critical legal precedent critical to the seminal decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education*.

As a review of Fred's career indicates, ordinary citizens often felt (and continue to feel) powerless to change their circumstances. As a teacher and a guide, Fred helped people find their inner strength and their common humanity as they worked across racial and ethnic lines to fight injustice and unfairness. Ensuring that ordinary people feel empowered to organize to improve their lives continues to be vital to a strong democracy. By lifting up the life and work of a man who worked in the background of movements that changed our country, countless community activists who are toiling today to lift up the voices of ordinary people will take heart.

One purpose of the Presidential Medal of Freedom is to recognize individuals who are not always widely known, yet whose life and work contributed to the progress of our country. Fred Ross, Sr. through his life and work is deserving of such recognition.

Respectfully,



John Podesta
Chair, Center for American Progress
Former White House chief of staff
to President William J. Clinton



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