



February 19, 2013

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

MARY KAY HENRY
International President

ELISEO MEDINA
International Secretary-Treasurer

KIRK ADAMS
Executive Vice President

MICHAEL P. FISHMAN
Executive Vice President

GERRY HUDSON
Executive Vice President

EILEEN KIRLIN
Executive Vice President

VALARIE LONG
Executive Vice President

TOM WOODRUFF
Executive Vice President

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) I am writing to lend my strong support for the conferral of the Presidential Medal of Freedom on legendary organizer, Fred Ross Sr.

Last year, I was honored to be present when you conferred this award upon Dolores Huerta. I was profoundly moved when she recognized Fred Ross Sr. as the organizer who recruited and mentored both her and Cesar Chavez, first to the Community Service Organizations (CSO) in California and later during the heyday of the United Farm Workers' (UFW) movement. It is especially noteworthy that Fred was one of the first to recognize the leadership potential for women and who created opportunities for us to assume leadership roles in organizations and in labor.

Fred Ross Sr. stands out as a shining light in our history. He dedicated his life to building civic engagement and the exercise of full citizenship in order to make real the promise of the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights.

He trained a generation of UFW organizers and members of the Hispanic community, many of whom pioneered the way for Latinos to assume leadership roles in labor, civic organizations and in local, state and federal politics. SEIU's ranks are full of talented organizers who are the beneficiaries of Fred Ross Sr.'s legacy. SEIU's Secretary Treasurer, Eliseo Medina, was trained by Fred Ross Sr. as a young farm worker. Today Eliseo is an international labor leader and one of the most prominent voices calling for meaningful comprehensive immigration reform.

For his entire life, Fred Ross Sr. helped communities fight against prejudice and racism and for basic human dignity in some of the most violent and daunting circumstances.

During WWII, Fred Ross Sr. defended Japanese Americans. After the war, in the midst of KKK activity, he organized Civic Unity Leagues in California's Citrus Belt, bringing together Mexican Americans and African Americans to challenge segregation in schools, ice rinks, and movie theatres. The work of the

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community organizations he helped organize resulted in the landmark legal case, Mendez et. al. vs. Westminster School District, 1947, an important legal precedent leading to the historic Brown vs the Board of Education in 1954.

In the 1960s and 1970s Fred Ross Sr. trained upwards of 2,000 organizers in virtually every major city in the United States and Canada to support the UFW's grape and lettuce boycotts. The extraordinary organization he helped build gained recognition for farm workers in our country and codified into law basic organizing rights. The historic California Agricultural Labor Relations Act was signed into law by California Governor Jerry Brown in 1975. In the early 1980s, he trained the founding organizers of the Domestic Workers Union of America. In the mid 1980s, he worked with his son, Fred Ross Jr., through Neighbor-to-Neighbor to fight for an end to the brutal wars ravaging Central America, training yet another generation of organizers.

Fred Ross Sr.'s organizing methods – especially the use of relationship building through house meetings and relentless dedication are among the best practices for organizers today. He believed that an “organizer is a leader who “gets behind the people and pushes.”

In 2006, SEIU published Fred Ross Sr.'s *Axioms for Organizers* as a tool for our own organizing staff. Two of my favorite axioms read, “Organizing is providing people with the opportunity to become aware of their own capabilities and potential.” And “Good organizers never give up – they get the opposition to do that.”

Fred Ross Sr. was a humble, brilliant man who tirelessly offered his gifts as an extraordinary organizer, teacher and strategist to improve the human condition. He inspired courage over fear, hope over despair, and power informed by love and justice over powerlessness – all through organizing. He remains an inspiration to those of us dedicated to the same cause, from the fields to the factories, from the kitchen table to the halls of Congress.

Conferral of the Presidential Medal of Freedom upon Fred Ross Sr. posthumously is a tremendous tribute to this unsung hero whose legacy continues through the countless men and women of all races he trained as organizers.

By recognizing Fred Ross Sr., we celebrate the full meaning of an engaged citizenry and hold up the best of the American tradition. This award not only recognizes Fred Ross Sr., but all organizers committed to fulfilling the American Dream.

I am honored to join the many other voices supporting his receipt of this important recognition.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mary Kay Henry". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Mary Kay Henry
International President