

February 27, 2013

The Honorable Barack Obama

President of the United States

The White House

Attention: Ms. Julie C. Rodriguez, Associate Director, Latino Affairs

Dear Mr. President:

I am writing to express the full support of the Industrial Areas Foundation network for the selection of Mr. Fred Ross, Sr. as a recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

I am one of the co-directors, along with colleague Ernesto Cortes Jr., of the IAF. As such, I am honored to acknowledge that Ernie and I, Arnie Graf and Sr. Christine Stephens, along with the 200 professional organizers, scores of thousands of leaders, and millions of members, are the inheritors of the courageous and innovative organizing that Fred Ross Sr. began more than 60 years ago.

Our nation rightly values people who are pioneers and entrepreneurs. Fred Ross Sr. was both.

A social pioneer, he ventured out into a harsh and dangerous territory – the barrios and fields of California, where workers were being exploited and where the dangers of organizing those workers and standing with them were ever-present. He blazed new trails as he went about his work -- testing and refining civic, legal, voter education, and labor organizing strategies that could survive in a hostile environment and generate lasting social change.

A social entrepreneur he *created value and added value* wherever he went. Cities and towns were richer – in paved streets, improved drainage and sanitation, better schools – after he and his colleagues had invested their time, energy, and courage in them. Workplaces were safer – safer both in terms of their physical conditions but also safer in the sense that workers were no longer vulnerable to threats and acts of violence by brutal employers. And people were clearer of their rights, their God-given dignity, and their responsibilities to one another and their neighbors.

We who organize with the IAF believe that Fred Ross Sr. was with us when we won a difficult battle to bring water and sewer systems to the desperately poor colonias of the Rio Grande Valley.

He was with us when we broke ground in East Brooklyn, New York, in 1983, amid acres of rubble and burned-out buildings and began the revitalization of one of our nation's most violent and desolate urban communities.

He was with us in Baltimore when we began the country's first after-school authority with a combination of public and private funding, so that children in Baltimore's schools could have the option of a safe and supportive environment once the school day ended and where, today, we are rebuilding the very streets made infamous by the HBO series The Wire.

He was with us in Massachusetts when we worked with state officials there to design and pass the nation's first significant health reform package in 2006 – an approach that helped lead the way to national health reform.

Fred Ross Sr. is with us today in 21 states and hundreds of cities, towns and counties as we continue to reweave the social fabric – bringing diverse people together, bridging gaps created by ideology, finding common sense solutions to our nation's many challenges.

In addition to recognizing pioneers and entrepreneurs, our nation also profoundly appreciates and fully honors its citizen soldiers, as it should.

Mr. President, we urge you to honor Fred Ross, Sr. – one of our finest and bravest soldierly citizens.

With respect,

Michael Gecan

Co-Director

Industrial Areas Foundation