



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-6502
May 9, 2013

Mr. Barack Obama
The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

I write to add my voice to those calling for legendary community organizer Fred Ross Sr. to be awarded a posthumous Presidential Medal of Freedom in recognition of his significant contribution to our democracy.

For more than half a century, Mr. Ross educated and inspired Americans of every background to overcome fear and despair. His mission, as he put it, was “to help people do away with fear, to speak up and demand their rights, to push people to get out in front so that they could prove to themselves that they could do it.” He brought a passionate sense of justice, a focused energy, and a dogged persistence to the craft of organizing.

Mr. Ross was a pioneer for racial and economic justice. In the 1930’s and early 1940’s, he organized Dust Bowl refugees in the migratory worker camps, helping them form camp councils and address communal challenges through a process of self-governance. In the mid 1940’s, he worked with Japanese Americans in many states during World War II, helping them obtain jobs and housing in order to meet the requirements to be released from internment.

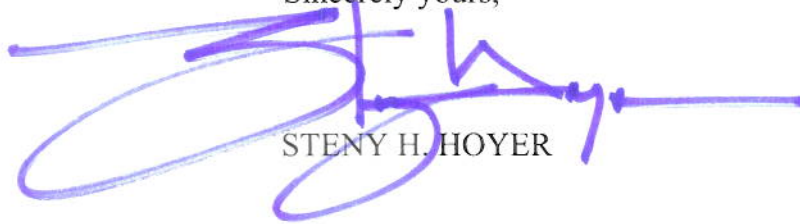
After the Second World War, Mr. Ross organized eight Civic Unity Leagues in California’s citrus-growing region, bringing Mexican Americans and African Americans together to battle segregation in schools, skating rinks, and movie theaters. In Orange County he organized parents through voter registration drives and civic engagement to fight successfully for the integrated of school boards. One of Mr. Ross’s most memorable successes came about when parents sued their school districts and prevailed, creating a legal precedent that laid the foundation for the landmark *Brown v. the Board of Education* decision eight years later. That case, *Mendez, et al. v. Westminster*, was a landmark moment in Hispanic American history, and you awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Silvia Mendez, the daughter of the named plaintiff, in 2011.

Mr. Ross was a mentor to past medal recipients Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, training them as organizers and helping them form the organization that became United Farm Workers of America. He was also a co-founder of the Community Service Organization with Tony Rios and the late Congressman Edward Roybal. Throughout his career, Mr. Ross fought tirelessly for the rights of Hispanic farm workers, and it was because of his voter registration drives and get-out-the-vote techniques that some of the country's first Latino officials were elected.

In recognition of his achievements and important role in empowering Americans to engage fully in the democratic process, I urge you to confer the Presidential Medal of Freedom posthumously on Fred Ross Sr. Doing so would send a strong message of encouragement to all who are engaged in community organizing to help more of our people access the equal justice and opportunity that serves as the foundation for our American Dream.

With warmest personal regards, I am

Sincerely yours,



STENY H. HOYER