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Walter L. Johnson

RESOLUTION CALLING ON PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA TO AWARD FRED ROSS, SR. WITH THE PRESIDENTIAL MEDAL OF FREEDOM

WHEREAS, for nearly half a century, Fred Ross, Sr. educated, agitated and inspired people of all races and backgrounds to overcome fear, despair and cynicism, was a pioneer who fought for racial and economic justice, and popularized invaluable organizing methods, tactics and strategies among countless social justice activists; and

WHEREAS, in the thirties and early forties Fred Ross organized “Dust Bowl” refugees in the migratory worker camps that John Steinbeck wrote about, helping them form camp councils and self-governance, and In the mid-forties, worked with Japanese Americans during World War II, organizing community support to combat wartime hysteria and prejudice, as well as helping newly released “internees” find employment and housing in Cleveland and San Francisco; and

WHEREAS, after WWII, in the midst of KKK activity, Fred Ross organized eight Civic Unity Leagues in California’s Citrus Belt, bringing Mexican Americans and African Americans together to battle segregation in schools, skating rinks and movie theatres, and in Orange County he organized parents to fight the practice of segregation in local schools and successfully integrated School Boards across the Citrus Belt through voter registration drives and civic engagement, leading to a dramatic victory when parents sued the School Districts and prevailed, creating the legal precedent for the landmark Brown vs. the Board of Education decision; and

WHEREAS, in the early 1950s, Fred Ross recruited Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta to become fulltime organizers with the Los Angeles Community Service Organization (CSO) and became a lifetime mentor to them, and together with CSO leaders across California and Arizona, they successfully overcame voter suppression efforts and passed landmark legislation on behalf of immigrants, and Fred also recruited and trained many other Latino 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; and

WHEREAS, in 1965, as part of the “War on Poverty,” Fred Ross worked through Syracuse University and trained many of the organizers who went on to be leaders in the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in the deep south; and

WHEREAS, Fred Ross Sr. is perhaps most remembered for his work with America’s farm workers and their struggle for justice and dignity during the 1960s and 1970s, during which he trained close to 2,000 grape and lettuce boycott and strike organizers in every major city in the United States and Toronto, Canada, and the powerful pressure that resulted from this massive collective action led to the passage of the historic California Agricultural Labor Relations Act signed into law by California Governor Jerry Brown in 1975; and

WHEREAS, Fred Ross continued to be active throughout the 1980s, joining his son, Fred Ross Jr., and training organizers to defeat the unfair Recall election of then-San Francisco Mayor Dianne Feinstein who had been targeted because of her support for tough gun control regulation in the aftermath of the assassination of Mayor George Moscone and Harvey Milk, and also In the mid-1980s, Fred helped train yet another generation of organizers to challenge the unjust Reagan foreign policy in Central America;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the San Francisco Labor Council urges President Barack Obama to honor Fred Ross, Sr. posthumously with the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Submitted by Mike Casey, Unite Here 2, and adopted by the San Francisco Labor Council on February 11, 2013.

Respectfully,



Tim Paulson
Executive Director

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