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HOUSE MEMORIAL 66

51ST LEGISLATURE - STATE OF NEW MEXICO - FIRST SESSION, 2013

INTRODUCED BY

Christine Trujillo

A MEMORIAL

REQUESTING THAT PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA AWARD THE PRESIDENTIAL MEDAL OF FREEDOM, POSTHUMOUSLY, TO FRED ROSS, SR., FOR HIS MERITORIOUS CONTRIBUTION TO THE UNITED STATES.

WHEREAS, for nearly half a century, Fred Ross, Sr., educated, agitated and inspired people of all races and backgrounds to overcome fear, despair, oppression and cynicism; and

WHEREAS, Fred Ross, Sr., was a pioneer who fought for racial, social and economic justice; and

WHEREAS, 2012 presidential medal of freedom recipient and native New Mexican Dolores Huerta recognized Fred Ross, Sr., as the organizer who mentored both her and Cesar Chavez; and

WHEREAS, 1994 presidential medal of freedom recipient Cesar Chavez once described his relationship with Fred Ross,

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1 Sr., by saying, "I learned quite a bit by studying Gandhi, but
2 the first practical steps I learned from the best organizer I
3 know, Fred Ross, Sr." and "he changed my life"; and

4 WHEREAS, hundreds of New Mexicans volunteered with the
5 united farm workers of America and experienced excellent
6 organizing training from Fred Ross, Sr.; and

7 WHEREAS, in the 1930s and early 1940s, Fred Ross, Sr.,
8 organized "Dust Bowl" refugees in the migratory worker camps
9 that author John Steinbeck wrote about, helping them form camp
10 councils and institute self-governance; and

11 WHEREAS, in the mid-1940s, Fred Ross, Sr., worked with
12 Japanese Americans during World War II, organized community
13 support to combat wartime hysteria and prejudice and helped
14 newly released "internees" find employment and housing; and

15 WHEREAS, after World War II, in the midst of ku klux klan
16 activity, Fred Ross, Sr., organized eight civic unity leagues
17 in California, bringing Mexican Americans and African Americans
18 together to battle segregation in schools, skating rinks and
19 movie theaters; organized parents to fight the practice of
20 segregation in local schools; and successfully integrated
21 school boards through voter registration drives and civic
22 engagement; and

23 WHEREAS, one of the most dramatic outcomes of his work
24 occurred when parents sued the school districts, and prevailed,
25 in the seminal *Mendez et al v. Westminster School District, et*

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1 al case, creating, in 1947, the legal precedent for the
2 landmark school desegregation case, *Brown v. Board of*
3 *Education*; and

4 WHEREAS, in 1947, Saul Alinsky hired Fred Ross, Sr., to
5 organize the community service organization in Los Angeles,
6 which helped elect as councilman native New Mexican Ed Roybal,
7 who was the first Hispanic to be elected to the Los Angeles
8 city council and who later became a United States congressman,
9 a position he held for thirty years; and

10 WHEREAS, in the early 1950s, Fred Ross, Sr., became a
11 lifetime mentor to Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, recruiting
12 them to the community service organization, for which they
13 became full-time organizers and helped to overcome voter
14 suppression efforts and pass landmark legislation on behalf of
15 immigrants; and

16 WHEREAS, Fred Ross, Sr., recruited and trained many other
17 Hispanic leaders, including Cruz Reynoso, who became the first
18 Hispanic supreme court justice in California and received the
19 presidential medal of freedom in 2000; and

20 WHEREAS, Fred Ross, Sr., recruited and trained a young
21 farm worker, Eliseo Medina, who dedicated years of his life to
22 the united farm workers of America, became secretary-treasurer
23 for the service employees international union and is currently
24 a leading advocate for comprehensive immigration reform; and

25 WHEREAS, in 1965, as part of the "War on Poverty", Fred

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1 Ross, Sr., trained many of the organizers who went on to be
2 leaders in the student nonviolent coordinating committee and
3 the congress of racial equality in the deep south; and

4 WHEREAS, Fred Ross, Sr., is most remembered for his work
5 with America's farm workers in their struggle for justice and
6 dignity during the 1960s and 1970s, training close to two
7 thousand grape and lettuce boycott and strike organizers in
8 every major city in the United States and in Toronto, Canada,
9 and galvanizing the collective action that led to the passage
10 of the historic California Agricultural Labor Relations Act,
11 signed into law by California Governor Jerry Brown in 1975; and

12 WHEREAS, Fred Ross, Sr.'s, enduring legacy is his
13 dedication as an organizer who helped foster collective action,
14 citizen engagement and leadership development, all of which
15 have never been more relevant or important to American
16 democracy; and

17 WHEREAS, President Obama's recognition of Fred Ross, Sr.,
18 would serve as a beacon of hope for living and future
19 organizers committed to social justice; and

20 WHEREAS, the presidential medal of freedom recognizes
21 those individuals who have made an especially meritorious
22 contribution to the security or national interests of the
23 United States, to world peace or to cultural or other
24 significant public or private endeavors; and

25 WHEREAS, Fred Ross, Sr., distinguished himself through a

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1 lifetime of service to his country;

2 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF
3 REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF NEW MEXICO that President
4 Barack Obama be requested to posthumously award the
5 presidential medal of freedom to Fred Ross, Sr., for his
6 meritorious contribution to the United States; and

7 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this memorial be
8 transmitted to President Barack Obama.

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