

WALDORF, MD – Today, Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (MD-5) attended the 31st Annual Black History Month Breakfast in Waldorf where he was joined by keynote speaker, Dr. Freeman Hrabowski, III, a prominent African American educator, and hundreds of community leaders from Maryland’s Fifth District. Below are his opening and closing remarks as prepared for delivery:

Opening Remarks

“Black history has always been a complex subject here in Maryland. Ours was, we must remember with sorrow, a slave state – and one of the first places where African slavery took hold on this continent. At the same time, some of the earliest abolitionists raised their voices in Baltimore to pass one of the nation’s first anti-slavery laws in the 1790s, which for the first time allowed slave-owners to set slaves free.

“On one side of the State House in Annapolis stands a statue of Roger Taney, the Supreme Court Justice who delivered the Dred Scott decision. Yet, on the other side of our State House stands a statue of a man whose life was a forceful dissent against it and who became the first African-American to sit on our nation’s highest court. We also look back to Marylanders like Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass who defied injustice with the courage of giants.

“Black history month is a time to celebrate the contributions African-Americans have made to this nation from government to business, from the arts to the law, in science, in education, and in national service. We honor the African-Americans who gave their lives fighting overseas for democracy, even during those times when they found democracy just out of their reach at home.

“Each year, I look forward to this gathering in our community to celebrate Black History Month and hear from some of those who are the movers and shakers in forging our shared history today. We’ve had the venerable John Lewis, with whom I feel privileged to serve every day in the halls of Congress. We’ve had Ron Kirk, Valerie Jarrett from the Obama Administration, and

we heard from Eric Holder before he was Attorney General.

“In fact, we welcomed then-Senator Barack Obama to this breakfast a few years ago before we had any idea he’d make history as president. Well, actually that isn’t entirely true. I think we all had a feeling he would end up in the White House after hearing him speak.

“Today it is my great honor to welcome a speaker who Time Magazine called one of our nation’s top ten college presidents – an outstanding educator and an advocate for expanding access to education for more of our nation’s students. Freeman A. Hrabowski, III, has served as President of UMBC since 1992.

“His research and publications focus on science and math education, with special emphasis on minority participation and performance. He chaired the National Academies Committee that recently produced the report, ‘Expanding Underrepresented Minority Participation: America’s Science and Technology Talent at the Crossroads.’

“Born in 1950 in Birmingham, Alabama, Dr. Freeman Hrabowski iii graduated at age 19 from Hampton Institute with highest honors in mathematics. At the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, he received his Master’s in Mathematics and, four years later, a PH.D. in Higher Education Administration and Statistics at age 24. Please join me in welcoming our distinguished guest speaker, Dr. Freeman Hrabowski.”

Closing Remarks

“Again, I want to thank Dr. Hrabowski for his remarks. They are a reminder of the work that remains to ensure that all of our students, no matter where they grow up, have every opportunity to achieve, to succeed, and to make it in America.

“In a speech that continues to move our hearts today, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King shared his dream of an America where ‘the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.’ I like to think Dr. King would be filled with spirit if he were with us here today at this breakfast.

“Our state has a long and rich black history, a juxtaposition of the bitter waters of slavery and the powerful thirst for freedom, of setback and advancement, of exclusion and equality. It is that complex history we come together to mark this morning – and by coming together we are celebrating that the arc of our history has continued its bend toward the Justice Thurgood Marshall practiced and for which Harriet Tubman risked her life.

“Black History Month is an opportunity to come together around tables like these and set them with the hopes and dreams we have for Maryland and for this nation over the years to come. Hopes and dreams that include a reduction in poverty, hunger, homelessness, and despair, which continue to plague many of our communities. It is a chance to draw comfort and hope for a better future from the eternal words of scripture – and I quote from Luke 22:30: ‘You will eat and drink at my table in my kingdom.’

“Let us mark this month together as one state and one community by continuing to make Dr. King’s immortal words ring true. May we continue to set a table of brotherhood for ourselves and our children for all time.”

Congressman Hoyer, who attended as a guest of the Black History Month Planning Committee, helped launch the annual breakfast when he became a Member of Congress in 1981.