

**WALDORF, MD – Today, Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (MD-5) attended the 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Black History Month Breakfast in Waldorf where he was joined by keynote speaker, Ben Jealous, President and CEO of the NAACP, U.S. Senator Ben Cardin (D-MD), and hundreds of community leaders from Maryland’s Fifth District. Below are his opening and closing remarks as prepared for delivery:**

***Opening Remarks***

“Thank you all for being here to celebrate another Black History Month in Maryland’s Fifth District.

“Black History Month is an opportunity for us to reflect on the many important contributions African-Americans have made to our history and national life. We must remember that black history is American history.

“Maryland has a particularly long list of notable African-American sons and daughters who have helped build our communities and advance the causes of justice, opportunity, and the arts. Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Thurgood Marshall, Benjamin Banneker, Billy Holiday, Eubie Blake, Matthew Henson – these are names we are all proud to associate with Maryland.

“In my years in public office – both in Annapolis and in Washington – I have been privileged to serve with many outstanding African-American leaders working to continue making Maryland a great place for all to live and pursue the American dream.

“As we gather to celebrate a proud and diverse history, filled with achievement and great contributions to American life, please join me in kicking off today’s program by welcoming the Gwynn Park High School Junior R.O.T.C to present the colors that unite us in our common love for the nation we are building together.”

***Introduction of Senator Ben Cardin***

“Now, it is my distinct honor to introduce a tireless public servant for Maryland. Senator Ben Cardin has been fighting for greater opportunities for everyone in our state since he was first elected to the House of Delegates in 1967. That was the same year I was elected to the State Senate.

“Senator Cardin rose to become Speaker of the House, while I went on to be President of the Senate – and we had the fortune later of serving together in Congress.

“Elected to the Senate in 2006, he was re-elected by a wide margin this past November, and I attribute that to his passion for justice, his determination to improve lives across our state, and his sharp intellect when it comes to legislating.

“I hope you will join me in welcoming our Senator, Ben Cardin.”

***Introduction of Ben Jealous***

“Our keynote speaker this morning needs little introduction.

“Benjamin Todd Jealous has served as president of the NAACP since 2008, when he became the youngest person in history to lead the organization.

“Ben was a community organizer in Harlem with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund while attending Columbia University.

“Ben went on to a distinguished career in investigative journalism that helped exonerate the unjustly convicted, make our justice system more fair, and advocate for better conditions in our

prisons.

“Since taking the helm of the NAACP, Ben has overseen the addition of nearly half a million new members and saw its donor base rise from 16,000 to over 120,000 supporters. Under his leadership, the NAACP is making a real difference when it comes to promoting equal justice and equal opportunity in our country.

“It is my great honor to welcome him to our breakfast this morning, continuing a tradition of inviting today’s leaders in the African-American community to share their wisdom with us here in the Fifth District.” □

### ***Closing Remarks***

“I look forward to this breakfast every year, and this year is special. This year, we are observing major anniversaries of two critical milestones in black history.

“The first, which we marked on January 1, was the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, which brought freedom to millions who were subjected to the horrors and injustices of slavery.

“Here in Maryland, we constantly grapple with our own history when it comes to slavery. But as much as we must accept our state’s role in sustaining that evil institution for so long, so too can we take pride that Maryland produced some of slavery’s fiercest opponents, including Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass.

“The other anniversary this year, which is coming this August, is the 50<sup>th</sup> year since the March on Washington and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have A Dream” speech. It was more than a speech – it was a call to arms. And that march was more than just a march – it was a turning point in the advance of American liberty.

“In many ways, this year is a bookend, with the second inauguration of our country’s first African-American president.

“But, as President Obama would remind us – and as we all know too well – there is too much unfinished work to rest on our laurels. The arc of the moral universe bends forward with no end. The trials and triumphs of black history teaches all of us – black, white, Hispanic, Asian, Native American – that we can only make our nation stronger and make our union more perfect by working together.

“We must choose to seek out the table of brotherhood Dr. King spoke of in his speech fifty years ago and make sure it is set for those who will gather around it another half century from now.

“Every year, not too long after this breakfast, I travel to Selma, Alabama, with Congressman John Lewis and other Members Of Congress to take part in a recreation of the 1965 Civil Rights March.

“This breakfast is a fitting way to begin preparing for that journey, because the march from Selma truly began not at the Brown Chapel AME Church but in the long span of black history, which made that turning point possible. I look forward to carrying the hopes and reflections from this breakfast with me as I embark once again on that journey.

“Before I close, please join me in thanking our musicians and our sponsors today, as well as the members of the Committee and all the volunteers who make this breakfast possible. Thank you.”

***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.***