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MEDIA CONTACT:
Faith Bautista
(818) 318-7665

media@nationaldiversitycoalition.org

NAAC and NDC mourns the passing of Former General Counsel Robert Gnaizda

The National Asian American Coalition (NAAC) and the National Diversity Coalition (NDC) are saddened to announce today that our former General Counsel Robert Gnaizda, affectionately known as Bob Gnaizda among friends and family, passed peacefully on Saturday evening. NAAC and NDC have lost a visionary genius and fearless leader and the world have lost an amazing human being. We are grateful for the support and kindness of those who share our feelings for Bob.

Robert Gnaizda, a Columbia University and Yale Law graduate and a veteran of the civil rights movement, dedicated his life work to promote equal opportunity, build bridges between communities, fight discrimination and to serve the less fortunate in society. During his glorious career of more than 50 years, Bob founded many organizations dedicated to fighting institutional discrimination around the U.S. and helped African American minorities gain control of their vote. He fiercely advocated for minority economic empowerment through his representation as Chief counsel in over 100 administrative lawsuits.

One of the most notable works of him is being the founder of America's First Legal Service Program- the California Rural Legal Assistance, where he worked extensively for farmworkers rights and was acknowledged through many state and local awards. His brilliance and leadership led him to co-find the Greenlining Institute in 1993 and later the Public Advocates law firm in the Western U.S. in 1971. Thereafter, in 2014, he went on to join NAAC and NDC as General Counsel. His breathtaking career witnessed many important developments and reforms for the underserved, low-income and minority communities, farmworkers and women through innovative partnerships between private enterprises, banks, utilities, insurance and telecommunications companies, and community organizations that has resulted in tens of thousands of home mortgages and business loans for low-income people, thousands of contracts for minority-run businesses, significant increases in philanthropy to the underserved, and overall economic development and opportunity for California's poorest communities.

Bob's passion for social justice led him to stand for democratic principles before the government. He was an excellent leader and advisor to many governmental agencies and served as California's Health Director and Chief Deputy Secretary for Health, Welfare and Prisons and was the State Bar representative for the Federal Judicial Selection Committee. Amongst many awards he was honored throughout his lifetime, he

was also awarded the Lauren Miller Award from the California Bar Association naming him the Most Effective Public Interest Lawyer in California, an award that honors an attorney who has demonstrated long-term commitment to legal services and who has personally done significant work in extending legal services to the poor.

Faith Bautista, serving as the CEO of both NAAC and NDC, said “Bob was an inspiration for all of us. He fought till his last breath. I thank him for his hard work and dedication for helping the underserved people in America. Bob, all your work will not go in vain. If you are a member of International Giraffe Appreciation Society, Inc., you will continue Bob’s work. For those wondering, International Giraffe Appreciation Society, Inc., is how Bob recruits you to stick your neck out to join an organization that has no benefits to you, no membership fees and all one has to do is selflessly do good deeds in this world. Bob preached this throughout his life and lets all continue his legacy. His work will not be forgotten, and we will continue to further his noble deeds. We will miss Bob so much.”

Jin Sung, Board Chair of NDC, said “Our general counsel Mr. Robert Gnaizda was a true hero who fought the financial structures that deepened the wealth inequality and racial discrimination in our times. National Diversity Coalition is tremendously honored to have worked along-side with him, as he actively taught the next generation how to be the change through indirect public policymaking. His brilliance and tactics supersede all strategists that I have come across, and I am found grieving for the loss of this magnificent man of justice. Thank you, Bob for your dedication and love for the minority communities and shedding light on the power of people in this nation.”

Steven Sugarman, Former General Counsel of NDC and Founder of The Capital Corps, LLC, said, “Bob Gnaizda was an inspiration to me and so many others. He stood for doing right, putting the community first, speaking on behalf of society’s voiceless, and challenging others to live up to their ideals.

I was proud to meet Bob’s challenge to help finance his vision for the National Diversity Coalition; I was humbled by the opportunity to assume the General Counsel role at NDC upon Bob’s retirement; and I am proud of The Capital Corps’ progress meet his challenge to build a revolutionary CDFI focused on expanding access to capital for those ignored and left out of the banking system.

Bob, we thank you, remember you and honor you and your legacy. Your inspiration, patience, and wisdom built a legacy that demanded our community, business and political leaders do more and do better. You demanded more than words, you acted with integrity and decency, and you were not afraid to give credit where credit was do. May you Rest in Peace. We all miss you.”

Joseph Otting, 31st Comptroller of the U.S. Currency, remembers, “Bob was a giant amongst mankind in caring and supporting low to moderate communities and individuals in America.”

Eugene Ludwig, CEO of Promontory Financial Group and 27th Comptroller of the U.S. Currency, expressed, “Bob Gnaizda, was someone I cherished as a friend. I had deep respect for Bob. To me he combined the highest standards of a concern for his fellow

man, particularly those in the greatest need, with considerable talent and energy. Bob made things happen for the common good. I often remember when I was Comptroller of the Currency how he would come to visit me and inspire me to do more for low- and middle-income Americans of all races, genders, ethnicities and religion. He led the charge. An activist with a sense of humor, he leaves behind a legacy of achievement in which friends and family can take pride.”

Dr. Mark Whitlock, Pastor, COR Church said, “He was the wise beginning to a living end. Thank you for living to end red lining for others to have a greener living.”

George McDaniel, President and Co-Founder of African Americans for Economic Empowerment in Oakland, CA, mentions, “I was very saddened to learn of the passing of Bob Gnaizda, one of the most notable and stalwart Champions for Social Justice in the nation over the 20th Century. He was one of my idols and heroes in large part because of his intellectual prowess and his courage in speaking truth to power unashamedly and with great positive effect on the economic and quality of life outcomes for many powerless people of color around the Nation. He blazed a trail for so many others to follow. Rest in Peace my Friend!”

Gilbert R. Vasquez, Managing Partner of Vasquez & Company LLP, recalls, “I met Bob Gnaizda in 1979 on a Filipino matter before the California Board of Accountancy. It was a “small racial matter” to some but it was a big deal and blatant discrimination to Bob. Bob won this battle and justice was served. What a man and he was no ordinary man. A man to be admired and who was a dear friend.”

His legacy has changed human history for highest good possible and will never be forgotten. We, at NAAC and NDC are deeply saddened by this loss and promise to continue working on Bob’s legacy and serving the underserved.

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About the National Asian American Coalition

The National Asian American Coalition is a HUD-approved 501(c)(3) nonprofit housing counseling organization and a US Department of the Treasury-certified Community Development Financial Institution (“CDFI”). Since its inception in 2004, the NAAC has advocated for and has provided essential services such as housing counseling, microlending, and alternative financing to Asian Americans and other minority and low-income communities. For more information: <https://www.naac.org/>

About the National Diversity Coalition

The National Diversity Coalition is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that includes many of our nation’s major African American, Asian, and Latino organizations as well as leadership from major minority and women oriented national non-profits, businesses, and CDFIs – united by a common mission of advocating for greater opportunity, economic empowerment, and financial equality for a constituency of over 3,000,000 low-income, minority, and other disadvantaged communities.

For more information: <https://nationaldiversitycoalition.org/>