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*(Unedited Transcript)*

Thank you very much. First of all I want to thank the foundation for this initiative, and for bringing all of you and all of us together. When I received a letter from Senator Harris and from Alan, I have to tell you I reread it about five or six times, I so enjoyed, sort of, the distilling of the issues, and of Geno, and the Genoisms. Actually, I wish we had a sheet of paper up here somewhere where we could add our own remembrances of things that Geno may have told us and that stuck with us.

Last night with the Baroni family here, I asked to meet Rodney Reggerio (phonetic), who was one of Geno's sort of favorite characters that he used. And of course, there is no Rodney Reggerio. And I also asked, did they really eat spaghetti at Thanksgiving? Because part of one of Geno's stories was how Geno would be trying to argue with his brothers and his sister about issues, and his mother finally would say, "Shut up, eat the spaghetti, it's Thanksgiving."

(Laughter.) 0150 Geno had the talent to somehow -- just pulling you in, and giving you a sense of common people, and ordinary people, and the issues and the struggles that they have. It really is an honor to be here.

It is also interesting thing that I just realized this morning: 20 years after he's gone, we're still trying to figure Geno out. And I think there's a lot to be said for that. I think that's again part of the genius of how he worked with people, and how he made you think, and how he motivated people.

First of all, a reality check. You know, after listening to everyone for the last two days at this conference, maybe we ought to be talking about "think Geno Baroni," he did everything right, he did nothing wrong.

But for the reality, and for those of us who knew him, Geno was a beloved man, a phenomenal person, but he was often frustrating, many times contradictory, disorganized -- which I have learned from him and use all the time as an excuse -- and enigmatic.

But he actually used those traits, I 0151think, to motivate many of us, to push us, to make us try to understand, and to try to build part of a vision, and a part of a movement that he was so strong about.

But my goodness, even if we talk about those kind of things could he motivate. Was he able to draw you in. Not only did he have a vision, and not only did he develop a vision, but he drew you in into making that vision part of your own ideas, and contributing your ideas to that vision.

And yet I really believe even now after more than 20 years, Geno really is like a pebble in a lake. And the rings just keep going out, and keep going out, and keep going out, and effect so many of us in so many ways. There are now people who Geno has had the opportunity to touch, at all levels, from neighborhood organizations to churches, to foundations, to government positions. I can't go anywhere in the country -- I'm being very honest with you -- without finding someone. And all of a sudden I make a phrase and somebody looks at me and then I say, "Geno," and he says "Geno," and that's it. You know, 0152you've got the connection and you go from there.

So even 20 years after his death, we are about trying to determine how Geno's vision and principles can be a reality in our times and for the future. For many of us, obviously, this is also sort of a personal mission and a personal travel. Yesterday when the issue by Leila was raised about the narrative, and the importance of the narrative, that has also stuck with me to a great extent. Because that is really what Geno was about, and that is what we need to be about, which is continuing the narrative. About the issues, the concerns, the people, the insights, as we try to understand this continuing great experiment of America.

There is nowhere in the world that is diverse as America is. There's nowhere in the world that has the economic successes that America has. But the fact of the matter is that there is nowhere in the world with the kind of economic power that we have, that poverty and discrimination and all of those issues continue to be there. Where we don't respect the cities and the urban centers.

I'm an immigrant to this country, I came to America in 1957. Actually, two days ago was the 49th anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution. And as a child in Obuda, I played soccer on the floor of the Roman amphitheater, that was built for a city called Aquincum by the Romans 2000 years before. I didn't think that was anything unusual. It didn't get bulldozed over the years. It's preserved, it's part of the culture, it's part of the community. In this country, our sense of history, our sense of place is so different.

And it is one of the things I think that ethnics and those of us who still maintain our understanding and our ties to our roots need to be able to continue to add to this mosaic called America.

The other part of the personal story is I have my daughter with me here, Betsy. Betsy was baptized by Geno, and now works for a community development corporation that Geno helped start fund. The neighborhood folks and the businesspeople raised \$3000 -- and this is a true story -- by the time Geno got done with us, we had a \$3.2 million project going. And it was all drawn out on a napkin that I still have. Of how we were going to match what, where what was going to come from, how much the community was going to have to bring, how much local foundations would have to be challenged, what the federal funding that would be available to be able to do, how we did the development, and all those kinds of things.

I have to also say today that as I look at that napkin, I can't make sense of it.

(Laughter.)

But it made a lot of sense when we were sitting at Frankie's bar, eating pizza and drinking red wine, and planning the strategy.

I met Geno actually through an article in Time magazine. As I said, I'm an immigrant to this country, but boy, did I buy the American dream. My citizenship papers, it's Peter Alexander Yjvagi, 'cause Shandor (phonetic), I figured nobody could figure out what Shandor was, so I had it changed when I became citizen.

But you know, something was missing. And all of a sudden I read an article in Time magazine about this Catholic priest who was talking about issues of civil rights and justice, but was also reaching back and talking about those of us who continued to be in the community, and weren't the enemy, and shouldn't be the enemy, and that we had to

begin to find common ground. And that you had to respect the ethnicity and the diversity of people.

And to this day, I can hear Geno talking about Dr. Martin Luther King, and about how those of us who are ethnics, maybe the color of our skin doesn't tell you who we are, but there continues to be diversity. We owe that debt of gratitude to Dr. King. And for him, his belief that you can be an American, you can be proud of your heritage, you can be different and you can be an American as well.

I can't forget -- I'm gonna say this real quickly, kind of part of the story and the narrative, 'cause that's the way these things work -- and get down to specifics here. I mentioned to Senator Harris that I met his wife, LaDonna in 1976, at a bicentennial conference called BEREC, the Bicentennial Ethnic Racial Conference. It was when George Bush senior was trying to get rid of Geno being involved in the bicentennial because he considered him to be a rabble-rousing radical.

And there was a conference here at the Hilton where I will have to tell you, every ethnic and racial minority community and cultural community came together for this huge conference, to say that "this is our America as well, and the bicentennial isn't just about the original 13 colonies." And to use -- nobody's used this yet, Geno's line which I love, as an immigrant -- "Immigrants came to America thinking the streets were paved with gold. When they got here, they found out that the streets weren't paved and actually, they were going to pave it."

And that happened for all of us. For those of us who came on ships by force, or on planes by choice, as immigrants we have been part of that community. And so Geno fought to have that bicentennial reflect that diversity in our nation. And as would have it, with 0157Eastern Europeans, there was a big conference -- Vicki, you'll remember this -- we got into a fight on the floor between the Polish Americans, the Hungarian Americans, I don't even know who else.

A Sioux Indian got up to the microphone and stood there until the whole -- you remember? Until the whole hall of nearly 2000 people were quiet, and in one sentence he brought us all together. He said, "I didn't know you white men had so many tribes."

(Laughter.)

And that really -- and I think it's important to understand how ethnicity is different than all of its layers. When I worked for Monsignor Baroni, I ended up working with Cape Verdians, who were Africans who spoke Portuguese. And when we started working with the Latino community, and understanding the differences between the Dominican Republic and community in between -- between the Cuban community and all those kinds of things. That is really what America is about. You have to understand those differences, and you have to understand those 0158layers.

And that's where community organizations become so important in terms of how we proceed to work with in our communities.

I guess I'd like to talk about -- I'm gonna try to focus real quickly on the issues of both communities and empowerment. You know, we talked a great deal to people that live in neighborhoods. And the reason for that was because it was a question of human scale. We now need -- and I think it's a challenge for this conference in the future -- to really

define what that neighborhood means. Is it still the physical neighborhood? In the dispersed society that we have -- how does the Internet even come into play?

You know, I've wondered, would Geno be blogging? He hated to write, but I'll tell you I think in the middle of the night, he'd be out there checking on what everybody else was saying, and every now and then putting something in there. It's a whole new community. We were just talking with Congresswoman Kaptur about the tragedy of what happened in Toledo a couple of days ago, and the fact of the matter is that some of the people who were part of that, of the riot that really occurred, were text messaging each other, were sending photographs of what was going on, were using their mobile phones in a way that obviously a generation ago we didn't have.

So you know, one of the things we need to understand is, what is that community today? And what is a neighborhood today?

One of the big tragedies I think we have is an absolute lack of an urban policy, and I would now change that to an urban-suburban policy. Because when we start talking about the inner ring suburbs, and some of the older, traditional suburbs, that them-and-us situation; "they" are becoming "us." And yet, there is no policy that understands that either at the federal level or at the state level.

And at the local level, again we had -- if you noticed, one of those -- somebody called it a "Baroni session." We were out there in the corner talking about some things. Local government is surviving. It is trying to do the core work that it needs to do, because the resources aren't there. And that is for so many, so many reasons that that is the case, that that local government has that kind of problem.

So we need to redefine how government should function, and we need to redefine how neighborhoods work.

We also need to look at issues, and this is a very interesting thing. During my time in the neighborhood, one of our biggest issues was redlining and disinvestment. All of you remember that. Where it was almost impossible to get a loan in our communities.

You know what the issue today is? They figured it out. There are resources and there are assets in our communities. Now, the issue is predatory lending and flipping, for they are sucking, basically, out the assets and the value that are in those communities. Twenty years ago they wouldn't give us credit. Now, they're trying to force credit on us. And it's a serious, serious issue. Ohio right now has the largest share of foreclosures in the nation, home foreclosures in the nation. And we can't get anything done at the state level, to be able to deal with that and to be able to address it.

So the issues may have changed to some extent, but some things are still the same, and one of them is empowerment of people, and empowerment of organizations. And that obviously can't happen from top down. It continues to need to happen by communities coming together, understanding what their interests are, and there again, Geno I think had a genius in understanding people's self-interest, and connecting it to the common interest. And so it's not just appealing to people's self-interest, but understanding how that fits into the common interest and into the common good in our community.

Again -- now, I'm a state legislator. I will tell you, I think it took six months on the floor of the Ohio House before I heard someone from the other side of the aisle stand up and

use the word "common good." The concept of the common good just doesn't seem to be there now, in our public policy. And I think we have a responsibility to be able to put it back there, and to return it.

The issue of politics and religion. I will say -- I'll disagree with some of the panel members from before. I think Geno would take a look at this whole question of faith-based organizations, and I think he would see it as an opportunity. Geno always had faith-based organizations -- then we called it something different -- I know most everything that he worked with. The difference was that they were part of the community. And in fact, he used it as a building block.

Well now, I think the public strategy is to separate those things out. And so I think the argument we need to make is, how do churches, how do faith-based organizations fit within a community, okay, and are part of that coalition that everybody has talked of? Okay, and in instances they may lead, but in other instances I think they need to follow. And so we need to think through on that, do we oppose it top to bottom? Do we understand how -- as in the previous presentation it indicated how certain people have a certain level of trust in faith-based organizations. We can't turn our back to that. I mean, that's a reality. The church is a core to a lot of people in a lot of different ways, no matter how they may conduct themselves, you know, Monday through Saturday, Saturday and Sunday become something important.

So I think Geno would have looked at the question of faith-based organizations, I think he would have tried to change and to reshape that debate, and to put it in the context of a coalition, to put it in the context of a community.

The other part of religion and politics at this point -- and this is a very disconcerting effort, and we have to understand it and know it. There is in Ohio now something called the "Patriot Pastors." The Patriot Pastors are a group that has a very specific, very targeted, very direct strategy, political strategy. To be able to not just elect their people who believe as they do; but then to start imposing what they call the value kinds of issues into legislation, and into law.

And again, we need to understand how we're going to be defensive on those kinds of issues, or how do we move forward and try to articulate for goodness sakes what we believe in, in such a way that it connects with people ?

And added to that is what I call -- and these two are connected -- what I call political apartheid. And what that is is that somebody very, very brilliant over the last decade, decade and a half, has figured out what to do with us. And that is that they've concentrated in Ohio -- as the example -- with 99 legislators. They've concentrated poor, working class minority, older ethnic communities into about 30 House districts, mostly in the cities, with a few of the inner ring suburbs.

Thirty of those seats will always be won by Democrats. They have at least put together 50 seats where they're going to win every time, and maybe there's 55 seats, 60 seats they're going to win every time, and only the rest are in play.

And for those of us who are also political junkies, you might say, "Oh, that's a very strategic to be able to do that," but what has been the public policy cost of that? And that is that now we have isolation. The state representatives who represent the suburban

communities and the rural communities, have in their -- I can tell you that the vast majority of them are white, male, all the rest of that -- have no understanding and no interest in understanding the issues people in poverty, and the issues of the cities, in our inner ring suburbs.

Conversely, I see it among my own -- very honestly -- legislators, who represent the cities, who do not understand suburban, rural problems, exurban problems. There is a something called issue four on the ballot in Ohio this year, and we'll see what happens in November, that would require that districts be balanced, that it has to be competitive. 52 to 48 percent.

The result of which would be that you would have to be able to represent a much more diverse kind of district. Now interestingly, for those of us who have been in the desert, in the minority now for such a long time, 0166there are some of our members who had a political index of 75, 80 percent, who don't want to touch issue four. They want to stay exactly where they're at.

And the reason I raised that is because we have to take risks as well. And quite honestly, this is a major debate, with the Black Caucus and with the African-American community in Ohio, is that how much do you sacrifice for that risk on your safe districts, versus how that's going to impact on our ability, in terms of public policy, and in terms of law?

And that connects up, from my point of view also to religion, to politics, to the Patriot Pastors.

And then lastly in that area is the use of language. We used to do this very well. We don't do it anymore. Defense of marriage: the Defense of Marriage act has nothing to do with the defense of marriage, but boy did it sound great. I mean, I can give you so many examples of how language has been used in a way that defines others, and doesn't really reflect what the values are of the policies 0167that are going to be promoted.

And so I think we need to be working at the community level, in terms of neighborhood-based community organizations, I think we need to be working at the political level. I think we have to be working at the faith-based level; to really be able to take what Geno has talked about and try to bring that back into focus.

Over the last couple of weeks I've thought about WWGD, "What Would Geno Do?" I thought about that yesterday, too. And you know, when the discussion was about to ebb, Abu Ghraib prison. Well, WWGD? Well you know, Geno would have also been concerned about those guards, and about why they were in a situation they were in, and what made them do those things they did? And how a young woman from a small community in West Virginia ended up losing her way, to make that happen? And I think I would have raised that issue very quickly. And I only realized this -- and I was ashamed of myself when I got home last night -- that none of us did. None of us thought about them. And that's part of the 0168dynamic, and that's part of the debate. WWGD, when the Nazis came to Toledo and the reaction occurred in that community? Geno would have been on the street. And Geno would have asked the question, "Where is the church? And where are the political leaders? And where are the people who should be working with the young people who are so frustrated that they're reaching out --

And I don't have to tell you, for those of us who are Toledoans and who are very disconcerted by all of this, by four o'clock in the afternoon, it was over. And what happened on the national news again, WWGD? Geno's note that if it's not in print, if it's not been reported, it didn't happen.

Well, just a 30 second contrast: at the same time that the riots occurred, there was an "Erase the Hate" rally with 300 people. That never got onto the national press. It got very little news locally; it didn't happen. Last weekend, Congresswoman Kaptur held a listening session which was a wonder. Geno's spirit was there. There were African-Americans there, there were Hispanics there, there were Polish-American folks, there were some Hungarian-Americans there. There was not a sense of racial tension in that room. But there was this defense of the community, and even of the young people in the community. And so, when we talk here about the term, "common people," or "little people" -- I think another part of Geno's genius in building not-for-profit organizations and neighborhood groups and neighborhood organizations, is understanding that the reliance on people in the community comes first. And I think he would have made a great difference to that.

How do we and where do we go from here? Well, I'm going to reach way back. I'm going to reach back to the national commission on neighborhoods, which had its final report presentation to President Carter, just before he was no longer in office -- so you can tell what happened to it afterwards. I have a few, by the way, if anybody wants some. I have a number of these.

(Laughter.)

But I had the opportunity to work and to chair a group called -- it was the Subcommittee on Government and Neighborhood Empowerment. And there was a concept that we developed then that I think makes sense now as well. And that is, as you look at a community you need to look at three things. You need to look at governments, capacity, and equity. And that governance is not just going to the poll and voting, and it's not just the decisions I made in Congress and made in the House of Representatives, or maybe city Council. But it's all of the ways that decisions are made about the future of a community. And that neighborhood people have to be involved in their governance. And in some instances they have to do that self governance through themselves through their own organizations and in their own communities.

But to be effective in governance, you have to have capacity. And that if we don't build that capacity in individuals and in organizations, their ability to be able to fight for their interests and their community's interests is unsuccessful at that governance level, no matter where you may be. And that to me is probably the greatest frustration, the greatest challenge that I think that we all have here, and that has to come out of this conference in some form or another. And I think it's not by accident that the Eisenhower Foundation that puts a significant emphasis on capacity building, is the one who's holding this conference.

But that is absolutely critical. We have to renew a strategy for capacity building in our communities, whether they be neighborhoods, whether they be Internet communities, whether they be rural suburban communities.

And thirdly, with equity, which I think should make America unique. And that whenever decisions are made, the sense of equity and justice and common good in our country must be part of it. And that is something we have lost in both the public debate, and the public dialogue, at the political level, I think at the church level, and that the religious level. And I'm not sure whether we understand how to assure equity at the community level, and the neighborhood level as well. 0172 And so only, I think, can we build a kind of community and a kind of city and the kind of nation that Geno talked about it, if we focus on governance, capacity, and on equity.

Let me finish, you all know the words from Geno's final sermon, and his final prayer. There are so many folks who aren't here but who are part of all is. Art Napperstack (phonetic) passed away some time ago, he was a major component of what Geno was about. Vicki's here, and it's great to see her. Dave (unintelligible) who's a community organizer, who's worked for so long with the Center for Community Change, with neighborhoods all over the country, and he's now the head of a foundation. And he sent me before I left this quote that he thought would be very appropriate, and think about this in the context of Geno's last prayer. It comes from Revelations 22, versus 10 through 17:

"We shall in some wise live, not surely in body; in soul we trust. And certainly in the deeds we do now, the memories we leave, the lives we influence, and the ideas in which 0173we dream. Of such and all in mortal life makes us worthy, oh God." Amen.