

ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

Molly Smith Artistic Director Edgar Dobie Executive Producer Zelda Fichandler Founding Director

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ARENA STAGE TO HONOR CONGRESSMAN BEN RAY LUJÁN
WITH THE AMERICAN VOICE AWARD
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2020

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater will present the American Voice Award to **Assistant Speaker Ben Ray Luján** on **Thursday, February 13, 2020**. Beginning at 6 p.m., the evening will include a cocktail reception in the Bank of America Lower Lobby, a seated dinner in the Molly Smith Study, the 8 p.m. opening night performance of *Mother Road* in the Fichandler Stage and a post-show dessert reception in the Grand Lobby. *Mother Road* playwright Octavio Solis will give remarks. *Mother Road*, directed by Bill Rauch, is inspired by John Steinbeck's "The Grapes of Wrath" and follows the terminally ill William Joad and his quest to pass down his Oklahoma family farm to a Joad descendant who migrated west. The seated dinner will feature the presentation of the American Voice Award to U.S. Congressman Ben Ray Luján.

The **American Voice Award** honors elected officials recognized for their extraordinary support of and advocacy for American arts and arts education. Congressman Luján, elected in 2008, is a member of the Congressional Arts Caucus, an advocate for comprehensive immigration reform and the highest-ranking Hispanic in Congress. He has championed efforts to create good-paying, green jobs in New Mexico, expand quality health care and protect patients with pre-existing conditions, and preserve our natural resources and sacred sites. The Congressman has focused on spurring local economic growth through several legislative initiatives, such as his legislation to leverage New Mexico's labs and, therefore, drive job creation while addressing tomorrow's energy challenges. He has also been a leading voice in the fight against climate change and the fight for New Mexico's health care. Congressman Luján earned his bachelor's degree from New Mexico Highlands University in business administration.

"Congressman Luján is a tireless advocate for the natural resources in his home state of New Mexico and a fan of the arts," shares Artistic Director **Molly Smith**. "I so admire his commitment to environmental preservation, gun control, protecting the rights of women and Native Americans, among many other important issues. In a time when our country struggles with derision and hatred, Congressman Luján is a champion for those whose voices are often silenced. We are thrilled to honor him with the American Voice Award."

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Page 2— Assistant Speaker Ben Ray Luján to receive American Voice Award

Past recipients of the award include Congressman John Lewis (D-GA); Congressman G. K. Butterfield (D-NC); Senators Thad Cochran (R-MS), Daniel Inouye, Tim Kaine (D-VA), (D-HI), Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) and Ted Stevens (R-AK); Representatives Tom Davis (R-VA), Norman D. Dicks (D-WA), Marcia L. Fudge (D-Ohio), Bob Matsui (D-CA), Jim Moran (D-VA) and Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC); former Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts Dana Gioia; and Congressman Chris Van Hollen (D-MD).

This will be Octavio Solis' first production at Arena Stage. Solis' work has been seen across the country in theaters such as, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, the California Shakespeare Theatre and the Center Theatre Group. *Mother Road* is a powerful new play which premiered with the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in 2019 and examines the crossroads of family, immigration and the American dream. Performances run through March 8, 2020.

For media inquiries, please email press@arenastage.org.

Mother Road is generously sponsored by **Altria, AARP** and the **David Bruce Smith Foundation**.

In addition to the *Mother Road* production sponsors, the Opening Night Celebration is generously sponsored by **Peggy and David Shiffrin** and **Arent Fox LLP**.

Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater, under the leadership of Artistic Director Molly Smith and Executive Producer Edgar Dobie, is a national center dedicated to American voices and artists. *Arena Stage produces plays of all that is passionate, profound, deep and dangerous in the American spirit, and presents diverse and ground-breaking work from some of the best artists around the country. Arena Stage is committed to commissioning and developing new plays and impacts the lives of over 10,000 students annually through its work in community engagement. Now in its seventh decade, Arena Stage serves a diverse annual audience of more than 300,000.* arenastage.org

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