NAME mourns the loss of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg

The National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME) is disheartened by the tragic loss of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. She died Sept. 18 at her home of complications from metastatic cancer of the pancreas. The 87-year-old jurist was nominated to the Supreme Court in 1993 by President Bill Clinton, becoming only the second woman behind Justice Sandra Day O’Connor to serve on the highest court in the land. The 13 years previously Ginsburg served on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, appointed in 1980 by President Jimmy Carter.

Ginsburg for years has anchored the liberal wing of the Supreme Court, which has become increasingly conservative with new members nominated by Republican presidents and confirmed by the Senate. National Public Radio reported: “Just days before her death, as her strength waned, Ginsburg dictated this statement to her granddaughter Clara Spera: ‘My most fervent wish is that I will not be replaced until a new president is installed.’”

To honor Ginsburg’s wish, NAME urges the president to not nominate anyone to the seat that Ginsburg held and the Senate to also refrain from any vote on the matter. The nation and the high court would be better served if the position were filled after the new president is seated in January 2021. When Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia died in February 2016, Senate Republicans insisted the seat not be filled due to the presidential election about nine months away. As of Ginsburg’s death, we were only 46 days away from the presidential election.

Ginsburg was a giant in the legal profession before joining the bench in 1980, leading the fight for gender equality. She is best known even as a relatively new justice on the Supreme Court for writing the 1996 opinion in the 7-1 decision, stating that the Virginia Military Institute must admit women.

The Brooklyn-born Ginsburg went to Cornell University on a full scholarship. She met and married Martin Ginsburg, and after graduation they left for Fort Sill, Okla., for his military service. Ginsburg, having scored high on a civil service exam could only get a job as a typist. Two years later the couple returned to the East Coast to attend Harvard Law School. NPR reported: “She was one of only nine women in a class of more than 500 and found the dean asking her why she was taking up a place that ‘should go to a man.’” NAME knows too well that women and people of color continue to face such discrimination. Ginsburg later transferred to Columbia University, where she graduated first in her class in 1959.

Ginsburg taught from 1963 to 1972 at Rutgers University Law School, and then from 1972 to 1980 at Columbia University, where she was the first woman tenured professor. She was the director of the American Civil Liberties Union’s Women’s Rights Project in the 1970s before President Carter appointed her in 1980s to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit.

NAME applauds Ginsburg’s staunch advocacy for civil rights and women’s rights, which she championed throughout her long and storied career. As a Supreme Court Justice, she even set the stage for legislation that led to equal pay for women. In her 2007 dissent in the Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co., Ginsburg in a rare move read aloud what she had written. That led to Congress passing and President Barack Obama signing in 2009 the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, amending the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to reset the statute of limitations on equal-pay lawsuits with every paycheck. Ginsburg also was a staunch advocate for a woman’s right to an abortion.

“These moments always remind me that we are on the same side, that we are not alone, that our work is not in vain, that the struggle is ongoing and happens on multiple fronts,” said Miguel Zavala, co-President of the California NAME chapter (CA-NAME).

Ginsburg died the same year that the United States celebrates the 100th anniversary of women receiving the right to vote. She was a giant, looking out for the rights of people who long have been trampled by explicit and implicit bias. NAME mourns her loss and encourages the emergence of many more champions like Ginsburg.