

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH ANTONIO VILLARAIGOSA,  
MAYOR OF LOS ANGELES

SUBJECT: PRESSING URBAN ISSUES AND THE CALIFORNIA POLITICAL SCENE

MODERATOR: JERRY ZREMSKI

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MR. ZREMSKI: Good afternoon, and welcome to the National Press Club. My name is Jerry Zremski, and I'm the Washington bureau chief for the Buffalo News and the president of the National Press Club. I'd like to welcome club members and their guests in the audience today, as well as those of you who are watching us on C-SPAN.

We're looking forward to today's speech. And afterwards I will ask as many questions from the audience as time permits. Please hold your applause during the speech so that we have as much time for questions as possible. For our broadcast audience, I'd like to explain that if you hear applause, it may be from the guests of members in the audience, not necessarily from the working press.

I'd now like to introduce our head table guests and ask them to stand briefly when their names are called.

From your right, Teddy Davis, field producer for ABC News; Mark Seibel from McClatchy Newspapers; Ed Epstein from the San Francisco Chronicle; Lisa Friedman from the Los Angeles Daily News; Maribel Hastings from La Opinion; over here on this side, Keith Hill of BNA, the vice chair of the National Press Club board of governors.

Skipping over our speaker for a moment, we have Bob Carden of Carden Communications and the member of our speakers committee who organized today's lunch; Duke Heflin (sp) from the Los Angeles Times; Paul Baskin from Bloomberg; John Fogarty (sp) from White House Bulletin; and Charles Ericksen from Hispanic Link. Now you can applaud. (Applause.)

Our guest today, Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, is living proof that the American dream still comes true. Born in a working-class neighborhood of Los Angeles and raised by a single mother, he dropped out of high school. Decades later, he is winning a reputation as one of the nation's most innovative mayors and as a rising star in the Democratic Party.

It all happened because a teacher inspired the young man to return to school. The future mayor went on to college and law school, and after working as a labor organizer, joined the California State Assembly. Within four years he was speaker. And in 2005 he became the 41st mayor of Los Angeles.

He is the first Hispanic mayor of the city since 1872, when the City of Angels was a frontier town with 5,000 residents. In less than two years in office, the mayor has plowed through an ambitious agenda as he works to turn the sprawling, fractious city that he loves into an urban model.

He's added 1,000 police officers to the streets and seen violent crime plummet. He's won praise from the city controller for making city government services more efficient. And, in a case study that the new D.C. mayor, Adrian Fenty, might want to examine, the mayor has struggled in his efforts to reform city schools.

Characteristically, the mayor isn't giving up on his school reform efforts. As he told the Los Angeles Daily News, "People keep underestimating me. I tell people that you can knock me down, but I'll keep getting up because I believe it's the right thing to do."

It's that kind of fighting spirit that leads many to think that Villaraigosa could become, well, California's next Governor.

Here to discuss pressing urban issues in the California political scene, let's welcome Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa. (Applause.)

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: Thank you. Thank you, Jerry, for that kind introduction.

Thank you all for having me here today. I want to concede something up front. I hope you'll pardon me, but I have the butterflies today. It's more than a little daunting to be here in the sanctum sanctorum of American journalism to enjoy the honor of addressing this venerable club, the National Press Club.

But my philosophy in dealing with the media is quite simple: I do and say what's on my mind. For instance, just a few minutes ago Jerry said to me that I couldn't go into the crowd because we had a program. I asked him what time the program started, because I always go in a

crowd. And I said, "You can tell me what time the program starts. I'll decide what I do in between." And let me say that I had an opportunity to greet every one of you, and I'm glad I did. That helps with the butterflies. But I like getting to know who I'm talking to, and I want to thank you all for being here today.

I believe that talking to the press is fundamentally about earning respect. We don't say it enough. News reporters are some of the most engaged and intellectually curious people you'll ever come across. You work hard, doing what you believe in, and most of you do it for very little money.

My daughter Natalia gave me some good advice when I told her about the butterflies. She said, "It's a tough audience, Dad, but don't worry. And don't focus on being brilliant or insightful. Just be yourself." (Laughter.) Now, anybody who knows Natalia, she's a 13-year-old. She's quite brilliant herself. She's witty, tough and she'd be at home with all of you right now.

I'd like to say this, though. Over the years I've had a very positive and productive relationship with the working press. Of course, everybody doesn't agree with that. Take my communications director, for example. He accuses me of being too loose-lipped around reporters. He calls me a walking and talking link -- leak, and link. He complains that I take too many questions at my press conferences, that I go on and on and on.

And when he's really annoyed, he says that the problem with me is that I try to persuade these reporters to -- or believe that they're going to be like the electorate and going to want to vote for me, and so I spend too much time getting them to like me.

But I'll say this. I believe that the press has a very important role in a democratic society. I said a few minutes ago that the role of the press is to be skeptical, but not cynical. And what we have in common is that I'm not cynical yet. I believe that people working together can change the world. I believe that in a democratic society, all of us have a responsibility to give back, that we have a responsibility to serve.

And in that vein, I think most journalists and public officials are propelled by the same abiding belief in service. And I believe that we all have a responsibility to one another, one that we should take great heed on.

Seventeen months ago, our nation watched in frustration and disbelief as a Category 3 hurricane slammed into the towns and cities of the Gulf Coast, destroying in its wake untold lives and property and breaching the mighty levees that guard one of America's oldest and most treasured cities.

Storms as fierce as Katrina not only have the power to change the landscape. They may also have a way of removing the camouflage. And in the twisted aftermath of this hurricane, with the water overflowing those levees, we were all forced to confront the less than flattering reflection of ourselves.

There it was for all of us to see the naked and painful truth, the truth that for many Americans, despite the most urgent distress calls, the cavalry may not always arrive on time; the truth that in America today, if you're flat broke or flat on your back, you may be flat out of luck in a time of serious jeopardy.

And America stood frozen, transfixed on our TV screens. We could all read the lips of those people calling out from the rooftops of the Lower Ninth Ward. The lack of an effective evacuation plan was not merely a question of emergency preparedness.

In a broader sense, millions of Americans find themselves equally stranded today with no clear or coordinated long-term pathway to a middle-class life. You certainly don't need to go to New Orleans or be from the South to understand the crippling effects of persistent poverty in our country today.

From South Los Angeles to the south side of Chicago and the South Bronx to Southeast Washington, you see more children growing up in poverty in America than in any other leading industrialized nation. In my city, we have close to 10,000 kids arriving in our public schools every day who don't have a bed for the night.

Fifty years after Brown versus Board of Education, one-third of African-American children still grow up in poverty. Eleven million Americans can't read a bus schedule or fill out a job application. And the statistics tell another story as well. They tell us that for many Americans, working full-time just isn't enough in an age of globalism.

More and more middle-class families feel their grasp hopelessly slipping. They see their fates inexplicably sliding down the economic ladder. In the words of Senator Webb last night in his response to the State of the Union, "The middle class of this country is losing its place at the table."

With increasing competition from abroad, wages have stagnated or declined for more than 40 percent of our country's workforce. And millions of people now find themselves questioning themselves, questioning the continuing relevance of the basic American idea, the idea that if you work hard and you play by the rules, you ought to be able to provide a good life for your family. What's more, we've always looked forward to a future with confidence, knowing that your kids will have an even better life.

So last January the U.S. Conference of Mayors established a Task Force on Poverty, Work and Opportunity. And we set to work on these important and hard questions. We talked to leading experts in the field. We took ideas from both political parties. We culled through the data and identified the most effective policies and practices.

And with every idea, we applied a basic test. We asked, "Is it grounded in the reality of global economic transformation? Is it proven by practice? Does it have demonstrated bipartisan support? Is there a clear and quantifiable return on investment?" And we asked how our investments will be strategically leveraged and aligned in coordination with private, philanthropic, corporate, state and local

dollars.

Over the last year, our work converged on two overarching conclusions. First, we came to the belief that the way to fight poverty is to increase the rewards for work. Second, to expand the earning power of our people, we concluded that there's an overriding national need for bold, coordinated, cross-cutting and transformative strategies giving Americans the education and skills they need to compete and thrive in the global workplace. And we all know what this means. There's no clearer predictor of economic success, no more powerful weapon against poverty, than educational attainment.

Members of the Press Club, it's time to move the issue of education reform to the front and center of the national debate. Let's avoid divisive distractions of the past like teaching intelligent design and confront the fundamental question of the future: How do we intelligently design and align our policies to give all our people a shot at a good education and a better life?

Tomorrow I'll be presenting the findings of the Mayors' Task Force on Poverty, Work and Opportunity. But since my communications director isn't here, let me give you a brief overview of our top recommendations. (Laughter.)

First, we're recommending a substantial new federal investment to guarantee high-quality pre-kindergarten instruction for every child in America. The evidence supporting this investment is abundant and absolute. We know the achievement gap starts before kindergarten. We know that nearly a quarter of our children now live in single-parent households. We know that kids growing up in poverty are three times as likely to drop out.

One recent study projects that \$2 trillion in GDP will be generated over the next two to three generations if we make this one single investment. This is a down payment on America's future that we can no longer afford to postpone.

Next, we need to retool our schools. We need to give our kids job skills more relevant in the global workplace. This isn't rocket science, and we can't afford to stay stuck in the past. We can see the macroeconomic trends coming right at us.

Let me give an example. As the baby boom generation ages, we know that millions of new full-time health care jobs, many with career ladders and family-supporting benefits, will open up for the next generation of workers. Meanwhile, planners predict that half of our current stock of buildings will be built and rebuilt in the next 30 years. We need to prepare our workers for the jobs that are coming.

So we're recommending that state and local governments commit up to \$650 per student for schools adopting a high-quality, standards-based career academy curriculum. It's time to reinvent voc-ed with rigorous and relevant instruction emphasizing career-building in fields ranging from graphic design, biomed and information technology to health care.

But ultimately this is a knowledge-based economy and we need to

send more people to college and back to college. So we're calling for the creation of a tax-free lifetime learning savings account for every child born in America where the government would match individual contributions by up to \$500 per student per year.

Just think about the power of this idea. Imagine if every kid in America knew that no matter who you are or where they come from or what their parents' circumstances, there's a bank account with a balance for them to go to college.

We estimate conservatively that by the typical high school graduate's 18th birthday, they'll have \$30,000 to invest in education or career training. And let's not be confused. This is not our grandparents' entitlement program. It's an idea that's been championed by both parties -- or members of both parties, anyway.

It demonstrates that big ideas don't necessarily translate into big government. In a nation that has one of the lowest savings rates in the industrialized world, this plan leverages savings by leveraging public investments against the individual initiative and compounding the combination over the life of each child.

Our recommendations recognize the need to pay our people what they deserve. We're calling for what the House of Representatives, on a bipartisan basis, has already approved in its first 100 hours, a reasonable increase in the minimum wage. We recommend expanding the earned income tax credit to include more people who are working every day but still struggling to pay the basic necessities of life.

You'll see the full report tomorrow. I hope that it will help to keep all of us focused on the stories that really matter. Believe me, I say this as one who knows. The future wasn't always so bright for me. Somebody gave me a second chance.

Think of what we can achieve when we regain our confidence. If we work together, we overcome the poverty that exists in America and the poverty of political will that exists here as well.

Thank you so much for listening. I'd be more than happy to answer your questions -- (applause) -- or your questions.

MR. ZREMSKI: My questions. Thank you very much, Mayor.

First of all, could you estimate the total cost of your proposals that you just outlined?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: Well, we'll provide that estimate for you tomorrow, as I said. But we do have it. As I said, this was a preview of what we'll be presenting tomorrow.

Tomorrow, we'll have an entire annotated research set of recommendations that also have a cost associated to it. I will tell you this: the cost is in the billions, the dividends are in the trillions. (Applause.)

MR. ZREMSKI: Talking about what you're talking about here today, and the fact that we do have a new Democratic Congress, could you just

go into a little bit more detail about what you're expecting and hoping for from the Democratic Congress?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: Well, actually, I'm not expecting the Democratic Congress, as you say, to just act on these recommendations. We're hoping that this is going to generate a conversation in America -- a conversation that cities throughout the nation. Eighty-five percent of the wealth that's created in America are created in our cities. We need an agenda that focuses on creating that wealth -- an agenda that invests in people.

It has to, as I said from the beginning, be a bipartisan agenda. The one that the mayors throughout the country realize much better than both Democrats and Republicans here in the Congress is that the people in our cities are tired of partisanship. They want government to work for them. They want America to move forward.

These investments that we're talking about are investments that give us the opportunity to move forward together to create community and opportunity in a way that's always been emblematic of America.

And so we're going to work on both sides of the aisle.

As an example, the child savings account was sponsored by former Senator Santorum and Kennedy. These aren't ideas that are Democratic in the "Big D" sense or Republican. They're ideas that emphasize individual initiatives, ideas where we can create common ground. They're not entitlement programs. They are investments that will bring dividends at the end of the rainbow.

MR. ZREMSKI: What do you think of Governor Schwarzenegger's health insurance plan? And how much of the responsibility for health care should be borne at the federal level and how much at the state level?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: Well, let me start with the proposition that in a great prosperous America -- the richest country on the planet Earth in the history of human kind -- I believe that health care is a right, not a privilege; that the only issue should be how we get there.

I think Governor Schwarzenegger and Speaker Fabian Nunez, speaker of the California State Assembly, have offered bold initiatives to provide health care to every Californian. I'd like to see the Congress and our president do the same thing. It's time to stop tinkering around the edges and recognize that 46 million Americans go without health care. We can all offer our proposals, but they should be bold, and they should start from the proposition that every American at the end of that rainbow should be provided with health care.

Finally, I believe that the federal government has to take the lead. States have to join them and that cities and counties have to play a role as well. Finally, without the private sector, all of us paying our fair share, we can't solve this issue of providing health care for every American.

MR. ZREMSKI: What kind of job is Governor Schwarzenegger doing? And could you please describe your relationship with him? (Laughter.)

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: I had breakfast with the governor on Saturday with my son and the speaker of the Assembly, Fabian Nunez. We have a great relationship. It's one focusing on getting things done.

What I think the governor and I share is a commitment to make government work for us. As I said, I think America is tired of the partisanship. They're tired of those who put the interests of their party ahead of the interests of America. They want common-sense solutions. And so I can tell you, I think the governor is proposing not just a health care initiative, but a number of fronts -- climate change -- working with the legislature in a bipartisan basis and that's why he's enjoying such popularity.

You know, as a person in a nonpartisan office, I can tell you -- though I'm passionate about my party and the democratic values of that party -- I could tell you that people elected me to get things done. I think they elected all of us who serve in public life to get things done. And I think the governor understands that and that's why he's so effective at this time.

MR. ZREMSKI: How much will Los Angeles have to change its car culture to meet state and federal regulations that may be upcoming on regulating greenhouse gases and other air pollution?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: Well, you know, it's interesting because when I campaigned for mayor, I knew what would get the biggest applause when I addressed the issue of traffic. I said, "You know, I'll stop construction during the rush hour." I said, "I'll give you left-hand turn signals that work on demand." I said, "I'll assign traffic officers at the worst intersections." I said that we'll have more one-way lanes and reversible lanes. And they always got the most applause when I said that.

But I also talked straight and tough with Angelinos. I said, "As long as we continue to over-rely on the single-passenger automobile, we'll have traffic, gridlock and the worst air in the United States of America. We're all part of the problem and part of the solution." And so I said to Angelinos, "We're going to have to get out of our car, invest in public transportation, rethink what the city looks like. Create -- move away from a city of sprawl to a city of elegant density and mixed-use development -- bringing homes closer to jobs."

Now you should know that I did stop construction in my first 100 days during the rush hour. That I have assigned -- that we've done some 188 -- we're in the process of implementing left-hand turn signals at the worst intersections -- about 188 of them. We've assigned 75 officers at the worst intersections in Los Angeles. We've done many of the things we said would be done in 100 days. And Angelinos who are watching will tell you we still have traffic. (Laughter.)

And so we still have traffic because we have to move people from that single-passenger automobile and invest in public transportation.



That's why I've talked about building a subway to the sea, expanding our light rail, our bus system, beginning to move away from the car culture, investing in mix-use development downtown and along transportation corridors where people live and work and walk in their communities.

And so that's the key to addressing greenhouse gases in Los Angeles and across the country. You've got to get people away from the car culture that has been emblematic of America's cities throughout the years.

MR. ZREMSKI: How resistant have residents of Los Angeles been to changing the car culture and using mass transit?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: Very resistant. (Laughter.)

MR. ZREMSKI: Could Washington help them change their attitude by providing more funding for a more extensive, mass transit light rail system?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: There is still here in Washington too much of a focus on highway building and highway construction. And while that works in the heartland and in some places in America -- in the rural areas and even in the suburban areas where we're creating new communities -- it doesn't work in cities. We have got to invest in public transportation.

When I go to the Congress I oftentimes hear, "Well, you know, we don't want to subsidize public transit." Well, my answer to that is, "We're subsidizing the public -- you know, the single-passenger automobile when we make those massive infrastructure investments." So as you build a freeway in Los Angeles or most other urban areas, you fill it up.

So the way that Washington can help is to reward cities and counties and states that are investing in public transportation. I'm a big believer in self-help, and where cities and counties and states are demonstrating a willingness to painfully invest in these infrastructure projects, you know, the least the federal government could do is to match us and invest in those initiatives as well.

MR. ZREMSKI: We have several questions about education and education reform.

One writer asks, the Bush administration today announced that it would give school districts new authority to let mayors take over failing school districts. Do you imagine that federal encouragement would in any way assist mayors attempting to do that?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: I'd like to see the federal government and state governments participate with mayors' efforts across the nation to get involved in our schools.

I want you to think for a second, those of you who buy into this idea that mayors and cities shouldn't be involved in our schools -- when you buy a home, and I see a lot of young people here, or when you've bought your home, for those of you who are already homeowners,

one of the things you ask the real estate agent is, "What kind of schools in the neighborhood?" Why? You all know that a great neighborhood school is an anchor for a great neighborhood.

Well, if that's true, then so is the logical extension of that argument, and that is that a great city has to have as its anchor a great public school system. When you think about why schools are so critical, and why in our proposal -- our recommendations to address poverty, work and opportunity -- why schools and the school setting has a principal focus, you know, we all get it.

You mention, Jerry, my own story. You can say that for many of us in this room and throughout the nation. You know, it was a public school that gave us a second chance, a public school that gave us an opportunity to achieve. It seems to me that mayors and cities need to be involved inextricably in our schools. We need to be part of a partnership of a community that creates and supports innovation in our schools; that is part of the accountability and responsibility that I think we need to turn around our schools.

And so my efforts to be involved in the schools is predicated on that idea. It says that the mayor, the Council of Mayors, the school board, teachers and parents need to be empowered, need to be involved in our schools, that we need to work together and that we need to be responsible for success. When you look at schools -- urban schools, not just in my city, but again, as those who are watching in cities all across the nation -- you know, a dropout rate of almost 50 to 60 percent and more in many of our communities.

In urban schools across the nation, kids are scoring at the bottom 80th percentile in math and reading in the fourth and eighth grade. When you look at those numbers, it's chilling, not just for the quality of life, for the economic vitality of our cities and the nation, but for the essence of our democracy, because what is a democracy if it's not about an informed citizenry who understands their rights and their responsibilities? And so education, education, education if we want to ensure an appropriate place in the future in the global marketplace and in the world.

MR. ZREMSKI: As I mentioned, D.C. Mayor Adrian Fenty wants to take over the public schools here in Washington. Do you have any advice for him? (Laughter.)

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: Be steadfast. I said the other day when they asked me about plan B, just after our legislation was over -- enjoined in the Superior Court, I said, "I'll have a plan B, a plan C, a plan D all the way to the end of the alphabet." I will not be deterred, and neither should you, Mayor Fenty, because the fact of the matter is the future of our cities depend on it and the future of the nation does as well.

MR. ZREMSKI: As a former organizer for your city's teachers union, do you agree with those who believe that overly powerful teachers unions and their contracts pose a major obstacle to meaningful school reform?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: You know, I worked for the teachers union for eight years. Mickey Ibarra, who's here with me today, I worked for him at the National Education Association and the California Teachers Association and at the United Teachers of Los Angeles.

In the course of the seven years that I had the honor of working for teachers, I walked away with a deep and abiding respect for the work that they do. Teachers are some of our most committed public servants, make no mistake about that.

I also recognized why teachers have organized in unions and the role that they play in addressing the workplace, the benefits and the like that teachers enjoy. They're underpaid, make no mistake about that, and we should support them.

I also believe that our teachers unions have to involve themselves in the effort to raise expectations in our schools, have to be responsible, because I learned something from my mother along time ago, it's not just about your rights, it's also about your responsibilities. I've said to the other unions that, you know, it's your children in our public schools. If you can't work with the teachers unions, working together in a partnership to raise expectations and success in our schools, then you're missing the opportunity and the responsibility that comes with representing those employees as well.

So my belief is that there's a great opportunity here in our reform effort. It's an opportunity for us to work together, to respect one another, to understand that with the rights that we all enjoy come responsibilities. And I believe that there are many teachers who agree with that.

MR. ZREMSKI: If violence and poverty are two of the biggest problems facing urban schools, why shouldn't the mayor spend more time trying to fix those problems, before trying to do the job of the school board?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: Because when you're mayor, you can't just work on one or two issues. Yes, I'm taking responsibility on the issue of poverty. I was asked by the U.S. Conference of Mayors when I was first elected, or rather when I went to my first U.S. Conference of Mayors meetings, to be involved to chair this effort on poverty, work and opportunity. I took that responsibility and ran with it. And as you'll see tomorrow, we're making bold initiatives around those issues.

But I can't just focus on poverty or crime. On the issue of crime I can tell you that we're addressing -- you mentioned, and let me just correct for a second -- I haven't already gotten those 1,000 officers. What I did was I got help to create the political consensus in the city with the City Council of Los Angeles to fund 1,000 officers over the next five years. We're focusing on -- the City of Los Angeles is safer today than at any time on a per capita basis since 1956 two years running. Crime is down. Violent part 1 crimes are down by 40 percent over the last five years. We're focusing on gang crime, not just suppression, but prevention and intervention.

But you're right -- or at least you're right. I've got to focus on those issues, but we've also got to focus on our schools, because when you talk about crime and poverty, there's a connection with our schools.

Someone said to me, a neighborhood prosecutor who's running for the school board -- a candidate who I'm supporting -- said to me that in her work as a neighborhood prosecutor she had never met a gang member who wasn't first a truant or a dropout. So when you see me focus on the schools, it's with this understanding that all of these issues are interconnected and intertwined.

And so whoever asked that question, I intend to work on all three.

MR. ZREMSKI: How has Los Angeles been dealing with the problem of gang violence?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: Well, you know, we're the most under-policed big city in the United States of America. We have some 9,400 police in a city with 4 million people. Just to give you an example, New York with 8 million as 35,000 police officers. New York has somewhere in the neighborhood of 14 (000) or 15,000 officers. And so we're trying to grow our police department.

We're focusing, however, not just on suppression. We're looking at, as we speak, a comprehensive effort addressing a study that was conducted at our request at how we more strategically focus our anti-gang efforts with prevention, intervention and suppression. I tell people I was an at-risk kid and I know what a -- the power of an education, the power of the services and the support, the power of families to turn lives around. And so we're going to focus on a multi-pronged approach of prevention, intervention and suppression.

And I think you'll see that we've had -- although crime is down substantially in Los Angeles, gang crime is up about 14 percent. And I think you'll see in the coming months a very coordinated and strategic effort in that regard. This effort around schools and the dropout rate, make no mistake, is part of that effort.

MR. ZREMSKI: What is the most significant thing that Congress can do to address gang problems in Los Angeles and elsewhere?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: Well, again, I'm big on bipartisanship. There's bipartisan support, at least in -- on an -- a policy claim, for a gang initiative. There has got to be money attached with that -- investments, if you will. I believe that we need to do what President Clinton did and the federal government needs to invest in expanding police forces in our cities and across the nation.

We need to have a coordinated multi-agency approach -- the feds, the states, cities and counties -- on the issue of gangs. We need to fund intervention and prevention services to a greater extent than we have. We focus much more on suppression and not enough on prevention and intervention. So I think there is a role for the federal government, and one that I'm hoping -- that a void will be filled soon.

MR. ZREMSKI: Instead of hiring more police, would it not be more cost effective for your city to provide entry-level public jobs for young people as a gang prevention measure?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: We've got to do all of that.

When I say prevention and intervention, one intervention technique is something quite simple. Father Boyle, a priest, a Jesuit who works in the city of Los Angeles with gang youth says it's simple: nothing stops a bullet like a job. And so training and apprenticeship programs -- we've expanded our summer youth job training programs and our summer youth programs last year. We were providing about 2,500, and in my first year I committed to 5,000. We went beyond 7,500; this year it will be 10,000, and by the end of my term, a lot more than that. We've got to give kids and young people alternatives. We've got to give them the job training.

But don't let anybody tell you -- whoever asked that question -- that it's just alternatives, that it's just prevention and intervention. It is a multi-pronged approach to addressing all of this. We've got to get beyond the debates between the left and the right, and the truth of the matter is, it is a number of strategies working together interconnected that will help to address the scourge that gangs are in the city of Los Angeles and urban areas across the country.

MR. ZREMSKI: Why do you not embrace Chief Bratton's request for a gang czar to monitor the federal and local expenditures to quell gang violence in the city of Los Angeles?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: Well, actually it wasn't Chief Bratton's request. It was a recommendation from Connie Rice and the Advancement Project, the entity -- the woman that we asked to look at our anti-gang programs. She has recommended a gang czar. I've said that I'm open to the idea, but when you get a study of this magnitude and, you know, depth, you've got to read it; you've got to digest it; you've got to identify that which you can afford and prioritize, and that's what we're going to do.

I'm open to a gang czar, but before we have a gang czar, let's find out what the gang czar is going to do. Once we've decided that, I'm very open to the idea of a gang czar who will help coordinate our anti-gang strategies.

MR. ZREMSKI: Given the gang problem in Los Angeles and the fact that many of these gang members are illegal aliens, do you support stronger border enforcement?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: You know, the word "many" is an adjective that doesn't bear itself out in -- when you take a deep look at gangs

in Los Angeles. There are some undocumented gang members, make no mistake about it. And we -- to the extent that they are breaking the law -- we should put the full weight of the law against them as we would citizens or residents of our city.

I will say this: I believe that we have to have a -- not just a coordinated effort between the feds, states, cities and counties, but also international cooperation around gangs as well. As an example, you know, MS-13, the 18th Street Gang, the Crips and the Bloods started in Los Angeles and migrated across the United States. In the case of MS-13 and 18th Street, they've also migrated to El Salvador; in the case of some of the other gangs, to Mexico. So our ability to work across borders to address this issue is important.

But don't let anyone convey that the vast majority or that many of these gang members are undocumented. They roughly reflect the population of the city. What they are is mostly poor. What they are, almost exclusively, are dropouts, people without skills and people who have lost hope; people who have moved away from the responsibilities of citizenship -- prey on the innocent. And what we are saying with respect to any effort that we engage in, it has to be multi-pronged, it has to address the roots, but it has to address it all across the board in the way that we've mentioned.

MR. ZREMSKI: Do you support the president's immigration reform proposals? What do you like about it, and what don't you like about it?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: Well, let me say this: I think what was heartening was that there was -- seemed to be bipartisan support and consensus for immigration reform, given the standing ovation on both sides of the aisle that I saw last night. I'll say as well that the time for talk is over.

The Pew study indicates that the vast majority of America supports the basic tenets of McCain-Kennedy, which said we should secure our borders; we should hold people accountable for breaking the law by applying a fine for those who are here illegally; we should give them a pathway for citizenship that says if you work here, if you've paid your taxes, if you haven't broken the law, you ought to have an opportunity to become a citizen. I would hope that the Congress' standing ovation last night was indicative of a bipartisan commitment to that end. But we'll see.

MR. ZREMSKI: Last week, more than 750 undocumented aliens were arrested in sweeps throughout the Los Angeles area. Do you think that there should be more or fewer such raids?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: I think we need comprehensive immigration reform. I think we need to address the root causes of immigration. When you look at what Europe did with Ireland and Spain, when Ireland and Spain were sending too much of its immigrants to those nations, they invested in the sender countries. You look at some of the

countries that send us their immigrants, they're going to continue to send them unless we strategically and smartly invest in those countries, creating job and opportunities there.

We've got to hold employers accountable, not just the people that come here looking for work. We've got to ensure that we're enforcing out labor laws so there is an incentive to hire the undocumented. We've got to create a pathway for citizenship while at

the same time securing our borders in a way that vindicates the times that we live in. I think that will produce much better results than the raids which occur, that oftentimes two weeks later, you know, those people are back.

So I think we need to look at this issue with candor. We have to look at this issue in a way that solves the problem and not just talks about it. You know, it's kind of like what you see with politicians on crime -- they like talking tough, and that's good, but people want you to succeed as well. They want you to demonstrate results at the end of the rainbow, and I think that what we have is a lot of tough talking, you know, and not enough results.

MR. ZREMSKI: Do you get the sense that some of the people who are doing the toughest of the tough talking are racially motivated?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: I don't want to ascribe nefarious reasons for the positions people take. I think there are many people on both sides of the immigration debate who come by their views honestly. As I said, I believe we need to get beyond the partisanship and focus on the common ground. I think most Americans are looking for comprehensive immigration reform that will work. They want, as I said, to secure our borders, but they also believe that when people have come here and worked hard and they're building their families here, there should be some pathway to citizenship. And so my hope is that we'll move away from, you know, what are all of the motivations of those who are engaging in this debate and look to the more thoughtful people who are trying to create a common ground that will work on this issue of immigration reform.

MR. ZREMSKI: When Los Angeles extends its services and benefits to undocumented aliens, how do you justify that to the citizen taxpayers who foot the bill?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: First of all, let me just say that I came here to talk about poverty, work and opportunity, and as mayor, the city of Los Angeles has nothing to do with immigration reform. What you should know is that's a federal responsibility. I'm willing to engage in the debate and the conversation around immigration reform because I recognize that in a city that has so many immigrants -- 46 percent of our city is foreign-born -- I have an opportunity to provide some insight. I also believe that as a mayor in a nonpartisan office, I have an opportunity to move away from some of the rhetoric around immigration reform and put forth some concrete proposals that will work. And that's what I have attempted to do.

MR. ZREMSKI: Now we have some political questions. (Laughter.) Do you see yourself as a national political figure who can bring Hispanics together given their diversity of ideas and needs?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: I'm the mayor of Los Angeles. When you were born and raised in the city, a third-generation Angelino -- my grandpa got here 100 years ago with a dream -- I can tell you that I'm very proud and honored and I wake up every morning and thank God for the opportunity I've been given to be the mayor of the city of Los Angeles.

Sometimes in life, all of us -- whether we're in public life or private life -- we're always looking ahead. I think the best way to kind of create your future is to do your job, and that's what I'm doing. I'm not intent on being a national leader. But I will say that as the mayor of the second-largest city in America, and I believe the city of America's hope and promise, where I have an opportunity to participate in debates that have a national impact and a local impact as well, I will.

With respect to Latinos, I'll say this: I didn't run to be a Latino leader, I ran to be the mayor for all the people of Los Angeles. I think there are too many people in this city and across the nation, frankly, that focus on those things. When you ask me what the Latino agenda is, it's the American agenda. It's an agenda for a better life, for good schools, for safe neighborhoods, for a good job at the end of the rainbow. And so if I have a goal as mayor of Los Angeles, the goal is to be a mayor for all the people; a goal is to represent the community I was born and raised in, but to do it in a way that makes sure that everybody feels that I'm taking their interest in as well.

MR. ZREMSKI: Are you supporting any particular Democrat for president, and who might that be? (Laughter.)

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: No. (Laughter.)

MR. ZREMSKI: (Laughs.)

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: Let me just say that I know all of the Democratic candidates for president. And I think it's exciting that there are so many people willing to put forth their candidacy for the presidency of the United States of America. I think it's important that they engage the nation and our party in a conversation.

I like the idea that there are so many firsts: the first African-American to run for president in a very, very long time; the first woman; the first Latino. I think it's a great thing. It says so much about our country, about our values, about who we are as a nation. So I'm looking forward to those candidates engaging one another and engaging us.

I will say that I hope that they're going to be bold, because the problem with the Beltway is that they oftentimes just cut around the edges. America's at a crossroads right now. They're looking for bold ideas. They're looking for people that will bring us together. They're looking for Democrats or Republicans, frankly, who can unite America around a common agenda for a better future. And to the extent that the Democratic candidates for president understand that, I think our party will be better. But whoever is elected, my hope is they understand that the vast majority of the people in this country want government to work for them. That's what they're looking for. They're tired of the partisanship. They're tired of the gridlock. They want government to start delivering on all the promises.

MR. ZREMSKI: Okay, we're almost out of time, but before I ask the last question, I've just got a couple of quick announcements.



First of all, let me remind you of our upcoming speakers. On Friday the 26th, Gary Sinise, the actor, will be here to discuss veterans' issues. On January 30th, Marion Blakey, the administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration, will be here to talk about aviation safety. And on February 5th, Ted Leonsis, the owner of the Washington Capitals and the vice chairman of AOL, will be here to talk about the Internet.

Second, I'd like to present some gifts, as we always do here at the National Press Club.

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: I have to report them, I want you to know.

MR. ZREMSKI: (Laughs.) First of all, a certificate.

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: Very good. We love certificates. (Laughter.)

MR. ZREMSKI: And second of all -- and I hope you love mugs.

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: And we love mugs -- for the green tea.

MR. ZREMSKI: Good, because we have a mug. Exactly. (Applause.)

Okay, and the last question comes from someone in the audience who asks, "Is this your timetable: mayor today; governor, 2010; president, when?" (Laughter.)

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: Mayor today, mayor tomorrow, mayor the next day. Thank you very much. (Laughter, applause.)

MR. ZREMSKI: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you for coming today.

I'd also like to thank National Press Club staff members Melinda Cook, Pat Nelson, Joanne Boos, and Howard Rothman for organizing today's lunch. Also thanks to the NPC library for its research. The video archive of today's luncheon is provided by the National Press Club Broadcast Operations Center. Press Club members can also access free transcripts and video of our luncheons on our website, [www.press.org](http://www.press.org). Nonmembers may purchase transcripts, audio, and videotapes by calling 1-888-343-1940. For more information about joining the Press Club, please call us at 202-662-7511.

Thank you very much. We're adjourned.

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