

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH JEFF BRIDGES

SUBJECT: ENDING CHILDHOOD HUNGER IN THE UNITED STATES

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ALAN BJERGA: (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon, and welcome to the National Press Club. My name is Alan Bjerga. I'm a reporter for Bloomberg News and this year's President of the National Press Club. We're the world's leading professional organization for journalists and we are committed to our profession's future through our programming and by fostering a free press worldwide. For more information about the National Press Club, please visit our website at www.press.org. And to donate to our program, please visit www.press.org/library for our connection to the Eric Friedheim National Journalism Library. I understand that Edith Friedheim, the widow of Mr. Friedheim, is in the audience today and we certainly welcome her to today's events. (Applause)

On behalf of our members worldwide, I'd like to welcome our speaker and attendees at today's event, which include guests of our speaker as well as working journalists. I'd also like to welcome our C-SPAN and Public Radio audiences. After the speech concludes, I will ask as many audience questions as time permits. But I'd now like to introduce our head table guests.

From your right, Eleanor Clift, columnist for *Newsweek* magazine; Rick Dunham, Washington bureau chief for the *Houston Chronicle* and the president of the Eric Friedheim National Journalism Library, and a past president of the National Press Club; Linda Kramer Jennings, Washington bureau chief for *Glamour* magazine; Kelly Wright, anchor report with Fox News Channel; Donna Leinwand, reporter with *USA Today* and the immediate past president of the National Press Club; Billy Shore, founder and executive director of Share Our Strength, and a guest of the speaker; Andrew Schneider, associate chair for Kiplinger and speakers committee chair.

Skipping over our speaker for the moment, we have Melissa Charbonneau, producer with Newshook Media, and the speakers committee vice chair; Clark Bunting, president of the Discovery Channel; Governor Martin O'Malley of Maryland, a guest of the speaker (Applause). I can tell there were some elections last week. Robert Yoon, CNN political research director; Justin Duckham, a Simon editor for Talk Radio News Service, and a new member of the National Press Club; and finally, Paul McKellips, executive producer with FBR Films. Thank you. (Applause)

Our audience may recognize today's guest as he is affectionately known in certain circles. They call him The Dude. The moniker has clung to actor Jeff Bridges since he played the unemployed slacker in the 1998 cult film, *The Big Lebowski*. This year, Bridges was honored with a new, and more coveted title, even than Dude. He was named Oscar winner. (Applause) At the Academy Awards, Bridges received the Best Actor award for his portrayal of alcoholic country singer, Bad Blake in the film *Crazy Heart*. Today, he is at the Press Club in his latest role as national spokesman for Share Our Strength: No Kid Hungry campaign.

Bridges, along with Share Our Strength founder, Billy Shore, is launching a nationwide initiative to stamp out childhood hunger in the U.S. by 2015, a goal President Barack Obama embraced during his presidential campaign. This week, Bridges met with two top advisors of President Obama, Agricultural Secretary Tom Vilsack, and Education Secretary Arne Duncan, to spotlight what he calls a hidden epidemic, the nearly 17 million American children every day who don't have regular access to food.

Bridges, in 1983, founded the End Hunger Network, a nonprofit organization dedicated to feeding children worldwide. He's juggled this with his acting career. The son of the late film and TV star, Lloyd Bridges, has appeared in films including *Sea Biscuit*, *The Fabulous Baker Boys*, *American Heart*, and *Fearless*. He's received four Oscar nominations for roles in *The Last Picture Show*, *Thunderbolt and Lightfoot*, *Starman*, and *The Contender*, where he played the President of the United States. He's also played a journalist. Starring in *Jagged Edge*, Bridges played a newspaper publisher who was on trial for murder and the author of these remarks did not note his legendary star turn in the film, *Masked and Anonymous* with Bob Dylan. Please tell me what that film meant when this is over. Thank you.

Bridges is also a musician. He plays guitar and sang on the *Crazy Heart* soundtrack. So please welcome to National Press Club the Oscar-winning actor, The Dude himself, Mr. Jeff Bridges. (Applause)

MR. BRIDGES: Thank you. Thank you all so much. Volkswagen. I say that because Melissa challenged me. She promised me that she'd buy me a cup of coffee if I worked it into my speech, so I thought I'd just get it out of the way. (Laughter)

Well, I want to say thank you, first of all, to all the people here in this room and who aren't in this room who have made the No Kid Hungry campaign a reality. I want to

thank Con Agra Foods Foundation, the Food Network, our friends in the culinary industry, Bob Lanier of the NBA, and also all the NBA players who are involved. And the teachers. And I especially want to acknowledge Governor Martin O'Malley from Maryland. (Applause) The Governor is the first to make his state a No Kid Hungry state, and he's an inspiration to all of us, and hopefully all the rest of the governors. And I'd also like to acknowledge Tony Hall, who is a personal hunger hero of mine. Thank you, good to see you.

It's an honor to be here today and I'm here to kick off the No Kid Hungry campaign. I'm the national spokesperson. And I thought I would begin by letting you know a little of my background regarding the hunger issue. Back in 1983, I helped found an organization called The End Hunger Network. And we are all about creating programs and events that make ending hunger a national priority. Events like Live Aid, we were responsible for making all the facts and figures that were announced between the musical acts. We created the End Hunger Presidential Award. These were ceremonies that were held in the White House honoring hunger heroes. We created Prime Time End Hunger, and this was the first time that all three major television networks joined together and dealt with the hunger issue in all of their prime time television shows.

We created the U.S. End Hunger Mayor Awards, and that was focusing attention on positive action in various communities. And something I'm particularly proud of is we produced a movie called *Hidden in America* that was all about what it's like living in our country and being a member of the working poor and not being able to afford putting food on your table and putting a roof over you and your kids heads, and health issues, and so forth. One of the reasons I'm particularly proud of this is that my brother, Beau, my big brother, he started it and he was nominated for a Screen Actors Guild Award, and the film was also nominated for three Emmys.

We created the Fast Forward to End Hunger, working with the video retailers. We raised \$3 million for local food banks. And most recently, we've gotten into partnership with a wonderful organization that's been dealing with ending hunger for about as long as the End Hunger Network has, and that's the Share Our Strength, a wonderful organization. They've come up with a campaign to end childhood hunger in our country by 2015. And I'm just so thrilled to be the national spokesperson for this campaign.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture, currently we have 17 million of our children living in food insecure homes. These are households where they're not certain that they're going to be able to get enough nutritious food to lead a healthy, active life. That's one in four of our kids, 17 million. We currently have 44 million who live in poverty, 15 ½ million of those are kids. Poverty is a very complex issue. But feeding a child isn't. And there's some good news in all these dire statistics. The good news is that there are programs in place that we know work. And these are federally funded programs like the SNAP program, formerly the Food Stamps; the Wick program, and the school meal programs, breakfast, after school and summer programs.

So the problem is not having the right programs in place. The problem is that they're not reaching enough kids. For example, there are 19 million kids who are eligible for school breakfast, free or reduced price breakfast. Only half of those kids actually get those breakfasts. Summer is a particularly difficult time for kids who are challenged with hunger because they're looking towards the schools to be their main source of nutrition. Only 15 percent of the kids who are eligible for that program are participating in it. We got to turn that around. That's the key to ending hunger in our country, making sure that families know how to access these programs. Making sure that our kids have enough food to thrive.

Our kids, they don't have any direct political representation, you know? No child really chooses to be hungry, and no one gains when a child is hungry. When a child doesn't get enough nutritious food, they fall behind physically, academically, cognitively, socially, and emotionally. And, of course, they suffer but right along with them, their families suffer, their community suffers and their country suffers. Adults who experience hunger in their childhood, they don't have the same educational and technological skills so they create a workforce that isn't strong.

So, ending childhood hunger, it definitely ends the needless suffering of our children. But it also contributes significantly to solving many of America's problems; problems like healthcare, education, workforce, competitiveness in the-- let me back up. See, in movies you would say, "Take two," and it would be a fine thing. (Laughter) But take two.

Anyway, what I'm trying to say is that it's not only about ending this terrible suffering that's going on with our kids. But ending hunger is important for our nation, you know? I just found out that there was a report from the Pentagon that only 25 percent of our citizens between the ages of 14 and 19 are fit to serve in the military. You know, very patriotic to end childhood hunger, don't you think? With the recent election, we've found out that there's many issues that our country's in disagreement about. Ending childhood hunger is not one of those. There's a lot of common ground here. Everyone wants to have our kids have a healthy start. So, no kid hungry, we're not proposing new programs, but we're proposing more effective use of the ones that are already in place.

Now, these programs that are available, there are barriers to them, blockages that we have to look at. Things like transportation, for instance. It might be a case of a child taking the bus to school, it might not get him there in time to take advantage of the meals that are available to him. Or, some of the meal programs, they might not have safe transportation to where that particular location that those meals are being held. Shame, embarrassment is a huge factor in all of this. For a kid to be pointed out, "Oh yeah, that's Johnny. He's a poor kid. He can't afford the food. He's got to eat this free meal that the school provides." And then the parental side of that, being a parent and being ashamed and feeling, "Oh, I can't provide for my child." It freezes your action, you know? Thinking, "I might not be eligible because I'm working," or the red tape, "There's too much red tape to figure out what to do here." So, these are things that we have to look at and these are the reasons that childhood hunger exists in our country.

So, there's attention that needs to be paid to these programs. Where are we going to find that attention? Who's going to give that attention? Well, we can do that. Come on. We're the guys, this is our country. We're the ones who are going to do it. (Applause) I'm asked sometimes, "Why are you doing what you're doing? Why are you doing this hunger-- why are you interested in that?" It seems kind of an odd question. It seems like the most natural thing in the world for me, really.

I'm so fortunate, I was born in a very lucky bed. My folks, talking about my dad and my mom, what wonderful parents I had. And they were fortunate enough to be able to provide for their kids, as I am lucky to provide for my three daughters. And I can imagine what it must be like, that feeling of failure and depression that just freezes you if you're not being able to afford to put food in front of your kids to eat.

My profession involves getting into other people's shoes and seeing what that experience is like and trying to imagine what it must be like. But that, to imagine what it must be like, not being able to provide for your kids, that available to all of us. I think we can all look inside, can feel that. Another, I think, reason I'm doing what I'm doing is that I have hunger. It's a different kind of hunger. It's the hunger to contribute, you know? To create the kind of world that I want to live in, and I want my children to be raised in and to live to bring up their kids and their grandkids. And this hunger to participate. We're all in this together. And I find when I do participate, I feel connected and that connection feels really good and it feeds this hungry feeling I have. So, that's kind of some of the reasons why I'm here.

I'd like to encourage all of you, and anyone who's out there listening to our talk here today, to go to Nokidhungry.org and find out what you personally can do to end hunger in our country and take the No Kid Hungry pledge. I believe that no kid should go hungry in America. And by taking this pledge, I'm adding my voice to the national movement of people committed to ending childhood hunger in our country.

And something else I'd like to encourage Congress to do, there's a very important bill in the next couple of weeks that's coming up, the child nutrition bill. And this is so important that we pass this bill to end childhood hunger in our country. I want to invite the viewers out there in TV land to call their congressmen and encourage them to pass this bill, it's most important. (Applause)

Before we get into the question thing, there's a quote that I came across that I wanted to share with you guys. It's from Muhammad Yunus, the founder of the Grameen Bank and Nobel Prize winner. This is what he had to say. "A society that does not pay attention to its children is bound to be a society on a rapid downslide. If a nation has a dream, it can only make it come true through its children. Thank you, guys. (Applause)

MR. BJERGA: And thank you so much for your time today. We have many questions from the audience, and please be able to keep them coming. And as well, you can send them over the internet and we'll get them from the audience at Press.org. Our

first question from the audience is do you recall the first time the issue of childhood hunger caught your attention? Or what did move you to get involved?

MR. BRIDGES: Well, back in the early '80s, I was made aware of the enormity of the problem of world hunger. And the fact that, number one, we had enough food to end world hunger. We had enough money. We knew how to end it. Many countries had ended it, so we knew the solution. The missing ingredient was creating the political will. And, of course, governments are made up of individuals. So I looked inside myself and said, "What am I willing to do to create that political will?" Not just make a quick contribution to some organization that kind of scratches my guilt itch, but something that kind of works with my life, something that I do in a natural sort of way and that I can continue to do until the problem is ended.

And so I said, "Well, an entertainer, I'm involved in the media. I do things like we're doing right here, right now. I said, "Well, yeah, maybe that could help." So I created along with Jerry Michaud, who's also here today, the End Hunger Network. And that's exactly what we did. We've worked towards ending hunger through doing the kind of stuff we're doing right now, putting out the message.

And then about, oh, maybe 20 years ago, we shifted our focus from world hunger to hunger right here in our country because some of these safety nets that I mentioned, food stamps and the Wick program and school meal programs, they weren't being fully funded and there were holes in these safety nets. So we thought it was important that we shift our focus to hunger here in America, and that's what we're up to now.

MR. BJERGA: Several questions along the lines of this one. What do you suggest the average American do to help reach the 2015 goal?

MR. BRIDGES: Well, I would advise kind of the path that I took. I think it's a good one. To look into your life and figure out what you might do. If you're a teacher, for instance, my gosh, the No Kid Hungry campaign is something that falls right in line, what you can do. I mean, if there are students who don't have enough calories to make those brain cells fire, they're not going to be able to learn. So feeding kids, it's also an educational issue. So you just kind of look inside whatever you can do, there's something you can do.

I love the title of the organization that we're in cahoots with, Share Our Strength. We all have strengths. Well, share that.

MR. BJERGA: Switching from the average American, what can President Obama do to reach the goal of ending child hunger for 2015?

MR. BRIDGES: Well, he's done a wonderful thing already. He's declared that we can end childhood hunger by 2015. That is enormous. That's like Kennedy saying we're going to put a man on the moon in ten years. And all of a sudden, that creates a whole new context for the problem. Now the guys that were arguing about the right kind

of fuel or the shape of the rocket, now, yeah, come on, bring your disagreement with me so we can figure out the best way to do this. This is something we all have to do together. I think what President Obama has done is a wonderful thing and now it's up to us to support that.

MR. BJERGA: Earlier, you mentioned the Pentagon study about the lack of physical fitness about 14 to 19 year olds. In that study, a lot of the concern wasn't actually childhood hunger, it was childhood obesity. There's a twin issue of hunger and obesity in the U.S. How do you square the contrast between those two problems occurring simultaneously? Is there a problem with not just whether children eat, it's what they eat?

MR. BRIDGES: Absolutely. Obesity and hunger are kind of two sides of the same coin. You know, it's interesting. Went to visit a terrific school while I was here in D.C., the Elsie Stokes School, a charter school, that is taking all of the money, the federal money that's given to schools to provide food for their kids. Normally, the food that's provided is not very nutritious. It's pizza and pizza pockets, and these kinds of things. And this particular school, the Elsie Stokes School, they took that money and they hired a chef who goes out and shops and it turns out that it costs less for her to shop that way than use this food that the government has some kind of connection with that you get this fast food stuff.

So at this school, she encourages the kids to build a beautiful garden, vegetable garden, and they use that garden for the salad bar, you know? And we're talking about obesity. It occurred to me, if you're a kid and you're having pizza pockets, or whatever kind of trashy food, your palate is going to dig that stuff. That's the kind of food that you're going to get in the habit of eating. And when you become an adult you say, "Oh, you know, I want a pizza pocket. Where can I get--?" But as a kid if you're eating salad, you develop a taste for that stuff. So, obesity and hunger are very closely related and that's my thoughts on that.

MR. BJERGA: Record federal budget deficits and concerns about cutting costs in government tends to cause programs to try to do more with less and sometimes that can mean cheaper ingredients, cheaper food. So when you're talking about the pizza pockets, which tends to be less expensive than a lot of other issues, it would seem that the trend from the overall governmental perspective would be more pizza pockets and fewer salads, rather than the other way around. So how from a policy standpoint do you convince people when they see deficits and they see revenues that they can actually support this and that this should be a government priority?

MR. BRIDGES: Well, for one thing, it doesn't cost any more. This school is, with that same money that the government is providing, they're buying more nutritious food for their students for a cheaper price. Because they think about it, they care. They shop specifically for what the kids are needing. And then when you think about it, you got to think long-term on this deal. It's not only a hunger issue, it's an educational issue. It's an economic issue, but it's also a military issue, like we were talking here, you know?

Defense. It weakens us in so many different areas that we have to address it, not only for the suffering kids, but also for our nation's security.

MR. BJERGA: This is a question from the internet. Where are this country's priorities when funds for food stamps are cut to hire back laid off teachers? Why must children's nutritional needs and educational needs have to compete for government funds?

MR. BRIDGES: That's a good question. You know, I'm going to shoot that over to my colleague here. Billy? I'd like to introduce Billy Shore, the founder of Share Our Strength. (Applause)

MR. SHORE: Thank you. First, I'll take advantage of the opportunity to thank Jeff personally for your incredible commitment and leadership on this. This has meant the world to us and you're making a huge impact. (Applause) We just had the opportunity with Jeff to meet with the Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack. And one of the things we were talking about was although some cuts had been made in programs for kids to fund teachers, there had been some cuts made in the SNAP program's future benefits to fund the child nutrition bill. Both Secretary Vilsack, President Obama, most of the congressional leadership, have committed that if we pass this child nutrition bill that the Senate has passed, if that becomes law, they will work to make sure that these other offsetting cuts, which would detract from future food stamp and SNAP benefits, which would detract from other education programs, that those will be restored.

So I think to Jeff's point, we've tried to create a program here with No Kid Hungry that does not necessarily take from one program to give to another but says so many kids are eligible for these programs that aren't participating. Jeff has used the figure, and I think accurately, over the last day or so, there's a billion dollars, one billion dollars, available to state governments to get kids-- if they get kids more enrolled in these programs. It's something that Martin O'Malley has made happen in Maryland. It's something that other states are now looking to do. So this doesn't have to be playing one side off of the other. (Applause)

MR. BJERGA: And actually, while we're bringing the band up on stage, we have a question that was actually addressed to Governor O'Malley. If Governor O'Malley can please come on down? (Laughter) We have a question for you, Governor, leader of the first state to embrace this. How are you going to make this campaign work in Maryland, for ending childhood hunger by 2015?

GOVERNOR O'MALLEY: Sure. We, first of all, partnered with Share Our Strength. But the truth of the matter is, because of the existing programs out there, this is much more a matter of organizing, political organizing and addressing those-- what do you call them, gaps? Areas of underachievement where you know where the kids are most vulnerable, you know where the families are most hungry. And it also happens to be the places where you have the greatest opportunity to be able to do the greatest amount of good if you'd only focus your effort.

So, increasing enrollment. And you can't do this sort of thing where you wake up on 2015 and say to yourself, "Golly, this was the year we wanted to eradicate childhood hunger." You have to do it, not even annually. Government's great at doing things annually and it usually only measures the inputs. You have to measure the outputs in terms of additional kids enrolled in these programs every two weeks. And if you do that, it might only be a few hundred, a couple hundred every couple of weeks. But over a period of time, you look back over your shoulder in a complete year and you'll see that you're making the graphs move in the right direction. And over the period of five years, you say, "Wow, you know what? We signed up five times as many kids for school breakfast as were signed up three years ago. We signed up three times as many kids for the summer nutrition program."

But it's something that people work against deadlines. People work against deadlines, they like measurable results. Everybody has that hunger to give back and to be involved. And if you measure it openly and transparently and do it against the guidelines that people are accustomed to working against in their own lives, in their own businesses, you can make a lot of progress. (Applause)

MR. BJERGA: Ladies and gentlemen, Billy Shore and Governor O'Malley. Lots of questions here, of course, switching over to a different topic. We have several audience questions about your film career. And transitioning into that, there are many celebrities with many causes promoting many worthy causes for many worthy reasons and there's a certain amount of attention that people can give to different issues. How do you try to set yourself apart from other celebrities with your cause? And do you fear that people get celebrity fatigue, as yet another Hollywood actor tells them what good they should do for the world?

MR. BRIDGES: I don't know about that. I'm just a guy out there trying to make the world-- like the man says, I have a dream. Well, me too. I'm just out there trying to express that dream and I got the feeling, like the other guy said, I'm not the only one, you know? I think we all can use our imagination and imagine how it could be better. And I don't know about that, the thing that celebrities aren't supposed to say stuff or something, I'm not sure. I mean, it's like when we get in a conversation, I don't have a set sound bite for that one. I don't know.

MR. BJERGA: You talked during your speech about getting into the shoes of your characters. What was the character's shoes that was most difficult for you to put on?

MR. BRIDGES: Oh, that's interesting. Well, it's funny. Two come to mind. One was-- anybody see *The Vanishing*? Oh, I played a terrible person. I buried people alive. So that was kind of challenging. And then the opposite of that was *Crazy Heart*, was extremely difficult because music is so dear to me and I was getting a chance to work with my dear friend T Bone Burnett and Stephen Bruton and John Goodwin and, man, I was anxious. I did not want to drop that ball. This was going to be such a great opportunity. So that kind of created a different kind of difficulty for me.

MR. BJERGA: What kind of research did you do for *Crazy Heart*? Were you out on the road? What sort of life were you living during the preparation for that role?

MR. BRIDGES: Well, a lot of the boozing, us actors, we have something called sense memory that I used. I've tried that thing, "Oh, it's a drunk scene. I think I'll get a little drunk." It doesn't work, I've tried that. It doesn't work because you got the rest of the day and the day after. But no, what we did, when I first got the script I turned it down because there was no music attached to it, and no songs. And I said, "Oh no, if this movie doesn't have good music, it's not going to be any good." And then when I found out that my dear friend, T Bone Burnett was going to be in charge of the music I said, "Oh, okay. This is in good hands." But we didn't have any songs. We had to come up with the songs.

So a lot of the preparation for that as far as being a musician, and so forth, was actually writing those songs and then working with a wonderful band that T Bone put together and learning those songs. And getting the costume on, getting the guitar and being the guy as soon as I could.

MR. BJERGA: Of course, you've been known as a prolific actor during your career in Hollywood and there always seems to be other projects coming up. And one of these is a remake of a famous film. How does one prepare to be in a remake of a film such as *True Grit* that so many people know, remember and identify with some iconic performances?

MR. BRIDGES: Well, when I got the call from the Cohen brothers to do *True Grit* and the Cohen brothers, they're masters. You know, *Lebowski*, come on, let's hear it for the brothers. (Applause) So if they're throwing a party, you want to go. But I said, "Why are you guys doing *True Grit*? I don't understand that." And they said, "Well, have you read the book?" And I said, "No." And they said, "Well, we're not really referencing the film, we're referencing the Charles Portis book. And I said, "Oh, okay, I'll check that out." And I read the book and I said, "Oh, now I see why." The book is very Cohen-esque and it's a wonderful book. So that's, you know--

MR. BJERGA: If there were any film that could be remade, what remake would you want to act in, and what role would you play?

MR. BRIDGES: Oh, that's interesting. All right, you know what pops into my mind is *Sea Hunt*. And the role I would play would probably be producer. I don't think I would step into those particular flippers. But, you know, *Sea Hunt*, my father did such a remarkable job in that show. I get the scientist, oceanographers come up and say, "You know, your dad is the reason I'm doing this." I say, "Oh, yeah?" And I've just recently gotten involved with a wonderful organization called the Pollution Coalition that is trying to get rid of single use plastics, these plastic bottles. They say they're biodegradable, but what really happens is they just break down to very small, little particles that microscopic organisms in the ocean eat, and then the fish eat those, and then the birds eat those. It just pollutes our whole planet.

I learned about these gyres that the ocean, on our planet we have five gyres. They're like big whirlpools. They're just packed with plastic. I don't have the facts in my mind right now, but it's tons and tons, billions I want to say, it's probably true. I think it's billions or millions, I get that confused sometimes. But, I thought this is a job for Mike Nelson, you know? Our oceans are a big concern for me, and I work on saving our oceans as well. So that's something that popped into my mind.

MR. BJERGA: How about roles that you'd like to play in films that you would participate in the non-family category?

MR. BRIDGES: Oh, okay. How long do I have to think about that, because nothing's popping in my mind. I'm not one of those guys who says, "I gotta play Lincoln," or something like that. I sort of take it as it comes. Every once in a while, I will produce a film like *Hidden in America*, the one I talked about that Beau was in, produced that and that was very gratifying. And I produced another film called *American Heart*, and that was maybe the only time when I really went out in kind of an aggressive way to see if I could get a movie realized. But I mainly just kind of field the stuff that comes in. There's a lot of wonderful stuff that does come in. I'm fortunate that way.

MR. BJERGA: We have a couple of people who have questions about your marriage. They're good questions. They both say you have one of Hollywood's most admired marriages. Any tips on marital happiness you can share? And then a second question, are Susan and your children involved in the fight against hunger?

MR. BRIDGES: Good question. What was the first part of it again?

MR. BJERGA: Jeff Bridges, tips on a happy marriage.

MR. BRIDGES: Tips? Thanks. See, well falling madly in love helps. For me and my wife, it was love at first sight. I reached for my wallet here because I have a picture-- I can tell kind of a long story. I got a little time, yeah. I've got a picture in my pocket-- let me back up, let me start the tale in a little different way. I'm in Montana, we're shooting *Rancho Deluxe* and I see this gorgeous girl. She was working there at this dude ranch making beds and serving food and stuff. And she's gorgeous, but she has a broken nose and two black eyes. But I can't take my eyes off of her. I keep looking over the paper, the magazine, you know how the guys do. And she busts me every time. I finally get up the courage to ask her out. And I said, "Would you like to go out with me?" And she says, "No." And I said, "Really?" And she says, "No. It's a small town, maybe I'll see you around."

And it turns out that her prophecy came true. We cut 15 years later, we're married and we've got a couple of kids. And I'm at my desk there and I'm going through the mail. And I open a letter from the makeup man on that particular show and he says, "I was going through my files and I came across a photograph of you asking a local girl out. Would you like that? I thought you might like it." And it's a picture, two photographs. A

two-shot and a single shot of my wife. What are the odds of that? To capture a photograph of the first words you ever uttered to your wife asking her, "Will you go out?" And her saying, "No." So that's my prize possession and I keep it. And that's one secret, I have that in my pocket. Whenever I think about, "Was she the right girl," or whatever? I say, "Hey, come on. Who you fooling, you know? Look what you got in your pocket." So, yeah.

But also, I would say it's like the punch line of the joke, "How do you get to Carnegie Hall?" Practice. Well, that's how you create a good marriage, you practice. You know, you pay attention. It's the same thing about ending childhood hunger, it's all the same stuff. I guess you pay attention to what's going on and you participate. So when my wife and I have a problem and it comes up, and if you've been married-- we've been married 33 years now, they come up, you know? (Applause)

And we have this little technique that we do sometimes when it gets kind of rough. We just sit opposite each other, quite close, look at each other. And one person's task is to express, say what they're feeling. And the other person is to receive, listen. Don't be thinking, "Oh now when she stops talking, I'm going to say this." No, just listen, get her side. And then when she kind of feels-- runs out, now I go. And we go back and forth like that for as long-- until we're exhausted, or whatever. And it might not solve the problem in that instance, but something has shifted out of that and we keep meeting like that. And that seems to be a good technique that helps our marriage.

MR. BJERGA: What is the greatest challenge you have had to face as a "famous person?" There's the quotes. (Laughter)

MR. BRIDGES: It's a moving question. I'm trying not to break down because it's right here. Give me a second, maybe I can get something else out. (Applause) Mental telepathy. You guys know what I'm talking about. This is the most important thing, right here. The movie, the reality of ending childhood hunger in our country. This is the most significant thing that I have ever done. (Applause)

MR. BJERGA: So following on that, our next audience question, do you have any film projects planned, or documentary projects, that may be spotlighting the hunger issue?

MR. BRIDGES: Yeah, visiting that school, the Elsie Stokes School, I thought, "Wow, let's make a documentary of this school that we might share with other schools." And there are also wonderful public schools that are doing things like this. And we're looking towards making a documentary of that school and other schools that are doing this and try to share our knowledge. One of the things that the governor here, him stepping up and being the first, now we were just talking in California, and that's where I'm from. I'm hoping that Governor O'Malley will help Jerry Brown get with the program, too, and make California a No Kid Hungry state.

MR. BJERGA: You're going into the recording studio after you leave Washington. What are your plans for a new album?

MR. BRIDGES: Well, I get to work with my buddy, T Bone Burnett. Tomorrow, I leave here, go to Texas where T Bone will receive the Stephen Bruton Award. He's our friend who died shortly after *Crazy Heart* was completed and was my music hero. And we'll be playing there a bit. Then we're going to zip back to L.A. and for maybe six days, we're going to go into the recording studio with this incredible band that he's put together. As far as the songs go, we don't really know what they're going to be. T Bone came up the other day and we went through a bunch of my songs and a bunch of John Goodwin's songs, probably my oldest friend. We go back to the fourth grade and have been painting together, doing creative things together. And there'll be probably some of his songs on there. And maybe some Greg Brown tunes. If you guys don't know who Greg Brown is-- anybody know who Greg Brown is? Yeah, man. Check him out, he's good.

MR. BJERGA: One question that you're much less likely to be asked once you leave Washington, D.C., but it's pretty common to be asked when you're here. You've been an actor and you've been politically active. Would you advise your children or grandchildren to go into movies or politics?

MR. BRIDGES: Well, a couple of things come to mind with that. You asked the question before, were my kids involved with this issue. All of them are, and they all participate in different ways. My eldest daughter, Isabel, she joined me not too long ago on the first socially engaged Buddhist symposium that my friend Bernie Glassman gave there in Massachusetts. And it was a wonderful gathering. And Isabel is close at my side with many projects relating to hunger.

MR. BJERGA: Tomorrow's Veterans Day. This questioner from the audience would like to hear about your experience in the Coast Guard?

MR. BRIDGES: Yeah, it was the Coast Guard reserve, seven years. And I kind of-- I was very proud to serve my country in that way. My brother was also in the Coast Guard. And I remember doing-- I'd go out and tend buoys and this sort of thing for weeks at a time. In a way, it kind of reminded me of a movie. I'd dress up and play a character, get in-- I'm an actor. I've been raised-- I was an actor, so most things seemed like movies to me.

MR. BJERGA: Question once again about film remakes. If *Big Lebowski* ever gets remade, what young actor would you like to see in your role?

MR. BRIDGES: Gee, I don't know about that. They probably will make it so many years down the line that there'll be new guys. What actors now around could play Lebowski? Oh, man. Who's that guy in the movie with Robert Downey, Jr., it's a long kind of a Greek-- what is it? Galifianakis or what is it? There are so many great young actors out there now.

MR. BJERGA: Who is a young actor now that isn't paid attention to enough by audience? Who should people be watching more closely?

MR. BRIDGES: Oh gosh, that's a good question. Now would be a good chance to herald somebody, and no one's coming to my mind. Well, I know one a perfect one, Jordan Bridges, my nephew. Absolutely. Yeah, Jordan.

MR. BJERGA: Also on the family topic, how did your father influence your approach to acting?

MR. BRIDGES: That's a good one. Well, unlike a lot of people who are actors, he really encouraged all of his kids to go into show biz. He just loved it. My first movie was at six months, I was six months old. He was visiting a friend of his, John Cromwell, was making a movie. And he was visiting the set with my mom and they needed a baby in a scene, Jane Greer was the actress. And so my mother said, "Here, take my baby." And I was a rather happy baby and in the scene, I was supposed to cry. And so my mother said, "Oh, just pinch him." And so Jane pinched me and now we cut maybe 30 years later and I'm making a remake of a movie that Jane made called-- her movie was called *Out of the Past* and my movie was *Against All Odds*, right? And Jane was playing the mother to her original character's part. And I had a scene with her, with Jane. And I said, "Jane, I'm having a little problem emoting here. Would you just give me that little--" "Anyway, that's kind of a sidestep because you were asking about my dad.

But anyway, my dad was very enthusiastic and wanted all his kids to go into acting. I was in a lot of those early *Sea Hunts*, and I can remember him sitting me on his bed, teaching me all of the basics like make it seem like it's happening for the first time. Don't just wait for my mouth to stop and then you say your line. You've got to hear what I'm saying and then respond. "Go out of the room, now come back. I want you to do it all completely different." Things like that. So he told me all the basics.

But the most important lesson, and this was really evident when I got to work with him as an adult in two movies in *Tucker* and *Blown Away*, whenever he came on the set the joy that he was experiencing was contagious and it would just go throughout the room. He loved what he was doing so much, and I think that's kind of what I learned. Just his whole approach. And not only to his work, but in his life. He was a very joyous guy.

MR. BJERGA: A few minutes ago, you were talking about the most difficult parts of dealing with fame in your own role. How do you encourage other people who are well known across, celebrities or such, who may not be involved in hunger or other causes, how and why they should get involved so that they can use their own platforms for social good?

MR. BRIDGES: I'm not really clear.

MR. BJERGA: How do you encourage other people? You know, you're at an event and you see other people who may have some power and some message to draw upon. What do you tell them to encourage them to get involved the way that you're getting involved in hunger, or whatever issue they may choose?

MR. BRIDGES: Just do it. I mean, it's as simple as that. Just say, "I want to do this." And then when you kind of make that declaration to yourself, things are going to pop up in the universe that are going to support that.

MR. BJERGA: We're running low on time, but there are a few important matters to take care of before we ask the last question. So if you'll just abide for a moment?

MR. BRIDGES: I am abiding.

MR. BJERGA: Okay, we appreciate that. First of all, we'd like to remind our members and guests of future speakers here. On November 29th, we'll have Steven Chu, the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Energy will be here. And then on December 2nd, we'll have Muhtar Kent, the chairman and CEO of the Coca-Cola Company, who will be speaking here at a National Press Club luncheon.

Second important item of business, a moment that we all wait for here at the National Press Club, is the presentation of the coveted National Press Club mug. (Applause)

MR. BRIDGES: Wow, isn't that good? Thank you, beautiful mug.

MR. BJERGA: Governor O'Malley doesn't even have one of those. (Laughter) We'll get that taken care of. We do have a final question here dealing with a lot of the words that have been spoken here, and you were quoting some famous speakers in your own address, and many famous names have come in this address as well. And people have words to live by. They do have words to abide by. And as many people here, I'm sure, will abide by your words, but I'm just wondering, what are the words that The Dude abides by?

MR. BRIDGES: Connection, joy. Those are words that are popping up in my mind. And participation, you know? Enjoy the fact that we're alive right now and we can participate in this world and make it a beautiful place.

MR. BJERGA: Thank you, Jeff Bridges. (Applause) We'd also like to thank you all for coming here today. Would like to thank the National Press Club staff including its chef, Susan Delbert, and the staff, for putting together a wonderful meal today, as well as our organizer, Melinda Cooke, the library staff which helps with its research. The Eric Friedheim National Journalism Library at the National Press Club, and Edith Friedheim for all the support that they're doing for journalism an Dartmouth support that you, the audience, has for supporting the National Press Club today.

For more information about joining the National Press Club, and on how to acquire a copy of today's program, please visit our website at www.press.org. Thanks again to our speaker, thanks again to our guests, thank you to you, and this meeting is adjourned. (Applause)

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