

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH MAYOR ANTONIO VILLARAIGOSA

SUBJECT: IMMIGRATION REFORM: NOW IS THE TIME

MODERATOR: THERESA WERNER, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

LOCATION: NATIONAL PRESS CLUB BALLROOM, WASHINGTON, D.C.

TIME: 12:30 P.M. EDT

DATE: MONDAY, JANUARY 14, 2013

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THERESA WERNER: (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon, and welcome to the National Press Club. My name is Theresa Werner, and I am the 105th President of the National Press Club. We are the world's leading professional organization for journalists committed to our profession's future through programming and events such as this while fostering a free press worldwide. For more information about the National Press Club, please visit our website at www.press.org. To donate to programs offered to the public through our National Press Club Journalism Institute, please visit Press.org/institute.

On behalf of our members worldwide, I'd like to welcome our speaker and those of you attending today's event. Our head table includes guests of our speaker as well as working journalists who are Club members. And if you hear applause in our audience, we'd note that members of the general public are attending so it is not necessarily evidence of a lack of journalistic objectivity.

I'd also like to welcome our C-SPAN and our Public Radio audiences. Our luncheons are also featured on our member-produced weekly Podcast from the National Press Club available on iTunes. You can also follow the action on Twitter using hashtag NPCLunch. After our guest's speech concludes, we will have a Q&A, and I will ask as many questions as time permits. Now I would like to introduce our head table guests, and I'd ask each of you here to please stand briefly as your name is announced.

From your right, Patrick McGrath, WTTG retired, National Press Club Board of Governors member; Raisa Camargo Voxxi; Julio Aliaga, freelance journalist; Anthony Ng, Immigrant Rights Consultant, Asia Pacific American Legal Center, United We

Dream, and a guest of the speaker; Richard Simon, *Los Angeles Times*; Janet Murguia, President and CEO, National Council of La Raza, and guest of our speaker; Alison Fitzgerald, Speaker Committee Chair and freelance journalist.

I'm going to skip our speaker for just a moment. Bob Weiner, President Robert Weiner Associates News, Public Affairs and Issue Strategies and Newsmaker Committee member who helped organize today's event. Hector Sanchez, Chair of the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda and guest of the speaker. Jeff Ballou, Al Jazeera, governor elect, National Press Club Board of Governors and Speakers Committee member who organized today's event; Michele Salcedo, immediate past president, National Association of Hispanic Journalists; Larry Bivins, Gannett News Service. Thank you all for joining us today. (Applause)

Before becoming Los Angeles's 41st mayor, public activism and service came early to Antonio Villaraigosa. During his youth, he became a farm worker volunteer, an activist, leading student walkouts. This led him on a path taking him to the State Assembly, City Hall, and the inner circle of the Democratic National Committee where he chaired the 2012 convention in Charlotte.

Regarding the topic of immigration, Mayor Villaraigosa has said that the time is now to pass comprehensive immigration reform. He has slammed Congress for doing nothing on the issue. Yet Sunday, on *Face the Nation*, he said he was heartened that Republican Senator John McCain and others have been discussing solutions. But given the country's current fiscal food fight, is it realistic to expect immigration any time soon? Republican Senator Marco Rubio thinks there is a way and said so this past weekend in the *Wall Street Journal*. With trial balloons coming from Senator Rubio and others, how does the Mayor feel about the host of federal and state and local immigration initiatives?

And immigration is not the only topic on the mayor's agenda. He's been discussing gun control, the economy, and many other matters. Some have taken notice of his travel to Latin America and some are asking whether a position in the Obama Administration will be part of his future. Please join me in welcoming to the National Press Club the Mayor of Los Angeles, Antonio Villaraigosa. (Applause)

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: Thank you, Theresa, for that introduction and for inviting me here today to the National Press Club. Before I start, I grew up in a home where we're used to serving ourselves. So whenever I'm served, I like to thank our servers, if we can give them a big hand, please? (Applause) And I want to thank particularly the members of the Press Club for this opportunity to speak to you all today. I'm truly honored to be here at one of our country's most venerable institutions of public deliberation.

In less than six months, my final term as Mayor of Los Angeles will come to a close. And with each passing week, I take another step toward what one wit called "the transition from Who's Who to Who's He?" Now, the sun may be setting on my

administration, but I'm not riding off into the sunset just yet. The agenda's still packed with challenges and many of those pressing challenges still demand action.

And chief among them is immigration reform. There are a few more fundamental questions that we face than who we welcome to our shores, how we secure our borders, what we do to include the millions of undocumented men and women who work hard and do the hardest work, and how we keep them safely together with their five million citizen children and nearly two million dreamers who know no other country but this one?

Now, these questions go straight to the heart of who we are as a people. At stake, our bedrock rights and responsibilities of American democracy. They fuel strong passions on all sides. And ladies and gentlemen, it's time we gave clear and consistent answers to these most basic questions.

Now's the time for real immigration reform; comprehensive immigration reform, commonsense reform, humane reform, reform that is cemented by our most sacred values. Reform that serves our country, bolsters our economy and respects the immigrants who risk so much to come here in search of nothing else and nothing more than a better life.

This cause strikes a deeply personal chord for me. It's at the heart of one of my proudest moments as an elected official, as an Angelino, as a human being. In March 2006, one million people marched to Los Angeles City Hall and on that historic day, one million people threw off the yoke of suspicion and fear and stepped out of the shadows; moms and dads, kids, grandmas and grandpas, people who worked hard, who were humble, who were tired of being scapegoated, tired of hearing the catcalls that they're the cause of all the country's problems. Tired of being told to go home, to go back where you come from.

They marched because they had a message; they were home. And they're not leaving home. They wanted a response from me, *el alcalde*, the mayor. Some said, in fact many on my staff said, "Don't go out there. Don't do it. You've been in office less than a year. Your job is to fix potholes, leave immigration to the Feds." But when one million people march to your front step, they deserve a welcome. And here's what I said. "I said I don't see illegals here." That one got me into a little bit of trouble. But sometimes you have to say it figuratively before it becomes true. No human being is illegal; no human being should be illegal. We must enshrine this principle into the heart and soul of the country's immigration policy. That is our moral imperative. That is our political challenge, and 2013 is our time.

When we fix our broken immigration system, we will restore a basic American covenant, that we are a nation of immigrants and rightly claim distinction for our long history of welcoming people from all four corners of the Earth to our shores. This history is a source of national pride. This history is a source of national profit. Think of it. Immigrants or their children started a full 40 percent of our Fortune 500 companies. These companies, the powerhouses of our economy, the planet's most recognizable

brands, have combined revenues of \$4.2 trillion. That sum is greater than the GDP of every single country in the world except the United States, China and Japan.

Now, we're a beacon of freedom and opportunity the world over because we have sealed the social compact, a contract if you will, of a special and significant sort. As immigrants have stepped across our borders, we've always said if you apply yourselves, if you work hard, if you join and participate in American society, doors will be open. You can achieve a sense of security, prosperity and above all else, dignity not only for yourselves but for your children. In exchange for hard work and loyalty, we promise to give immigrants a grip on the ladder to provide access to education and resources, to chart a path to full participation in our society that is transparent and fair.

Now unfortunately, we've lost touch with this tradition of openness and opportunity. For the last two decades, we've not kept our side of the bargain. We've created an immigration system that is long on enforcement but short on opportunity. A system where states compete with one another to draft more and more draconian anti-immigrant legislation. A system that happily capitalizes on the labor of millions of undocumented men and women but then refuses to extend them the basic rights and privileges that most of us take for granted. We've created a system no longer in step with our cherished values and our ideals.

Now in November, Americans faced a fundamental choice, a choice between keeping our broken system or reviving our immigration compact. Now, the American people made the right decision. They rejected a policy based on fear and fences. They embraced the hopes and dreams of people like Anthony Nunn and Salvador Torrontes. Anthony and Salvador aren't citizens, they're dreamers. Anthony is with us in the audience today, he's sitting at the head table.

Anthony came to the United States of America from the Philippines when he was 12 years old. Salvador first came to America from Mexico when he was two. They've worked hard, they've excelled, they've made us proud. Their hearts overflow with a passionate desire to give back to the place they call home. Anthony is determined to let the world know that there are many Asia Pacific islander dreamers out there, so he works with API youth educating them, inspiring them, to lift their voices and to be heard. He is a patriot to the bones.

Salvador's dream is to join the military, to stand tall in America's uniform, to fight for the country that has given him so much. This has been Salvador's goal since he was a kid. When President Obama stopped the deportation of Dream Act eligible youth last year, he opened the door of opportunity for young people like Salvador and Anthony, and he pointed the way forward by establishing important principles to guide immigration reform.

Immigrants must take personal responsibility for their actions. But, as they do, we must provide a meaningful path forward to become full members of American society. Now, we have every right, every right, to enforce our laws and protect our borders. But

we must balance this with the need to encourage the aspiration of America's immigrants. These are the principles that the American people threw their support behind in November. These are the principles that must guide immigration reform in the coming months.

With these principles in mind, we need reform built on the following six policy pillars. One, a pathway to legal, permanent residency and citizenship for the 11 million undocumented immigrants must be at the core of reform.

Two, legalization should be earned, but not unattainable. It should be a process, not a punishment. It should include a criminal background check, proof of English language skills and American civic knowledge, and the payment of back taxes.

Three, family unification should continue as a key priority of our immigration policy. The goal must be to protect the sanctity of the family. Keeping families together not only keeps capital in the United States, it also maximizes the human potential; these immigrants start family based small businesses and grow our economy. Now despite the economic benefits and moral imperative, millions wait over two decades to be reunited with family members. This must change.

Four, the hard work and talent of immigrants fuels our economy. Our immigration policy must expand the avenues for these valued workers to seek legal employment. As the President has suggested, let's staple a green card to the diplomas of foreign students getting advanced degrees in science, technology, engineering, and math. We need to expand the H-1B visa program and at the same time, we need effective visa programs for agricultural workers and low skilled non-seasonal workers.

Five, immigration reform must include an effective and efficient employment verification system. Such a system can and must prevent unlawful employment, reward those employers and employees who play by the rules and protect America's fundamental rights.

Six, we must protect our border through smart enforcement. Now, according to the Migration Policy Institute, immigration enforcement takes the lion's share of federal law enforcement spending. Today, net undocumented migration is at below zero. But we must realize that we will not meet our immigration challenge through enforcement alone. The goal of our immigration enforcement policy should be to remove real threats to our borders and inside our country. We should deport serious offenders. We should not deport people whose most serious crime is a lack of papers.

By deporting such people, we erode the trust between law enforcement and the immigrant community. We needlessly break up families and deprive children of the love and protection of their parents all in our zeal to enforce the law. According to ISA's own data, almost three-fourths of those deported have no serious felony convictions. So the reform of secure communities must be a part of the overall reform of immigration policy.

It's time to put an end to the practice of deporting non-serious criminals. Our neighborhoods will be safer and our families will be more secure.

Now, this is an ambitious agenda but immigration reform cannot wait another political season. Already, we're hearing the voices of those who did not learn the lessons of November or who have chosen to ignore them. "This isn't the right year," they say. "The agenda is too crowded," they caution. You even heard some point to the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary to argue that immigration reform should be punted again. Well, Washington should be able to walk and chew gum at the same time. Congress is fully capable of enacting responsible gun safety legislation and comprehensive immigration reform. (Applause) Not to mention sequestration and not defaulting on the full faith and credit of the United States of America.

Now, other voices are calling for a piecemeal approach. Instead of a path to full citizenship, they're advocating the weigh station of permanent residency. Instead of reform for all immigrants, they're advocating just reform for the highly skilled. Instead of balancing enforcement with integration, they're calling for us to double down on the policy of widespread deportation.

Now, the time for half measures and one-sided approaches is over. The bottom line in this debate is full citizenship. There can be no second class citizens in the United States of America. (Applause) This doesn't just make moral sense, it makes economic sense. As the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce notes, when the head of a household becomes a citizen, family income rises almost 14 percent. According to the Center for American Progress, if we legalize the 11 million undocumented immigrants here in the United States, we give an infusion to our economy of \$1.5 trillion, a shot in the arm over the next decade. The federal government would see \$4.5 billion in more tax revenue in just three years.

Now, we know that creating a path towards citizenship would also help us create a path away from the fiscal cliff. So let's make 2013 the year. Immigrants don't deserve half a handshake, they deserve a full embrace. We aren't the land of opportunity for some, we're the land of opportunity for all. We Americans may come from different backgrounds, we may speak different languages and worship in different ways. But all of us are pursuing the same American dream.

It's a dream that brought my grandfather from Leon, Guanajuato to Mexico to Los Angeles a century ago. He had little money, even less English, but an unshakable faith in the relationship between hard work and reward. He left Mexico because the country was too divided. There was just rich and poor. My grandfather did not believe that birth was destiny. He believed that where you were born should not determine where you end up, and that's why he came to America.

In 2013, let us raise our voices above the partisan din and bring a message, a message of hope and promise to our fellow Americans. In 2013, let us achieve

immigration reform that honors our country's promise, its founding promise, its glorious promise of liberty and justice for all. Thank you very much. (Applause)

MS. WERNER: Do you think Republicans who are pro-immigrant such as Marco Rubio, will find success in convincing their colleagues to agree with legislation that offers a pathway to citizenship for the eight to twelve million undocumented immigrants?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: I certainly hope so. I believe that we need comprehensive immigration reform that, as I said, includes a full path to citizenship. I know that Senator Rubio has talked about four pieces of legislation, what we don't want that to be is an excuse for not doing something around comprehensive immigration. That means a pathway for citizenship for the 11 million people, assuming they qualify, that they've had a background check, that they meet the requirements I've outlined. I would hope that there's bipartisan support for that notion.

I was on *Face the Nation* yesterday with Senator McCain and in passing in the Green Room he said to me that he expected we'd see real reform on this issue. He's one of eight senators that have come together working on this issue. And my expectation and hope is that we will have a bipartisan solution. This issue should not be a Democratic issue or a Republican one. It ought to be one that we get behind because it conforms, as I said, with our values and also with the need for infusing our economy.

MS. WERNER: Critics of immigration reform cite past experience that after concessions are made, the flow of illegal immigrants does not decline, it increases. Would that happen again this time?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: Well, that's an issue. The flow of future immigration is an issue that will have to be addressed this time around. One way to address it is the issue of addressing a Social Security card that cannot be counterfeited, making sure that employers aren't hiring and exploiting these people. And then making sure that the quotas that we put on countries, particularly countries in the western hemisphere, are realistic. I mean, come on. We share a border with Mexico. Latin America is in our hemisphere. The fact of the matter is people from that part of the world have come here and will continue to come here. So we need to be realistic in addressing that flow and addressing the need for smarter, more realistic quotas for this part of the hemisphere.

MS. WERNER: Because of their election defeats in November in which many Hispanics voted for Democrats, do you believe the Republicans are now genuinely interested in a bipartisan immigration reform?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: Again, I know I chaired the Democratic Party Convention. I obviously was one, a surrogate, for the President throughout the campaign. But I'm a mayor. I'm here with, by the way, with the U.S. Conference of Mayors. Mayor aren't-- while we may come with our party labels, we tend not to be as orthodox. We tend

not to be as ideological, and we're certainly not as partisan as our counterparts here in the beltway, and in our state capitols. So I'll say this: I hope there's bipartisan support. I believe that there will be bipartisan support.

And you mentioned something, or the question did. I know you're reading the question. You mentioned, I think the election had something to do with it. I mean, there's no question. I mean, let's be honest; 74 percent of Latinos voted against the Republican Party and the Republican nominee. I'm sorry, 71 percent. Seventy-four percent of Asians. Now, I haven't studied that, but I've never seen Asians vote in that number against Republicans. I got to believe it has something to do with all of the scapegoating, with the name calling, with the vitriolic nature of the immigration debate particularly in the Republican primary.

When you call for the deportation of 11 million people, let's understand there's not a nation in the world that has ever deported 11 million people. When you continually talk about the border with Mexico, you're not acknowledging that 30 percent of the undocumented don't come from Latin America, they come from other places. So I'm hoping that the election, but also that there's-- the election is one of the reasons why, I believe one of the reasons why, there'll be bipartisan support is because of the election.

But I hope that another reason will be that people realize this kind of debate, this failure to fix the broken immigration system doesn't conform with our values, with who we are, with who we've been, with what makes us proud as Americans. And so yeah, I do expect that something's going to happen.

MS. WERNER: Republicans have insisted that completion of a fence or other forms of border enforcement must come first before the support of immigration reform. What do you think? How can you change their mind on that?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: Well, I think with the facts. And I know in the Congress, particularly in the House, facts don't seem to matter around a lot of issues. But, you know, when the Migration Policy Institute has documented that we have a minus zero, a net minus, in immigrants crossing the border from Mexico, when you realize that we spend 24 percent more for border enforcement than we do for the FBI, the DEA, the ATF and other federal law enforcement agencies, at some point we've got to acknowledge and we've deported more people than any time before. We've got to acknowledge the time is now for the balanced approach that includes a pathway for citizenship and the other points that keeps families together, that addresses the other points that I mentioned as well.

MS. WERNER: Can the coalition of blacks, Latinos, single women, and other communities sustain beyond the Obama campaign? In other words, are we looking at a true shift in the electoral landscape, or was Obama's November win the result of a savvy campaign organization and strategy?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: I'll let the pundits kind of-- I'm going to punt that one for a second only because I really-- I don't want to talk about campaigns as much, I'd just say this very quickly. I think what we saw is a seminal shift in the electorate and if the Republicans don't go to the center, if they continue to be dominated by the far right, you're going to see them lose more and more market share. You didn't mention young people. I mean, the questioner didn't mention-- young people, blacks, Latinos, Asians, women. At some point, it doesn't look good for them. But I'd prefer focusing on this immigration issue if I could.

MS. WERNER: What role do the congressional caucuses of color such as the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, the Hispanic Leadership Caucus, the Asian American Caucus, and the Congressional Black Caucus, need to play in immigration reform? And how can they become more effective this time than in the past?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: I think they need to play a leading role. But I wouldn't limit it to just the caucuses of color or women, and just to the Democrats. I mean, frankly this can't happen without bipartisan support. There are good Republicans, by the way, of European descent who understand that fixing the broken immigration system conforms with our values as Americans. And so yes, I think they should all play a very-- you know, a lead role. I think it's important to tell the story of the many faces of the undocumented. They come from Canada, too. They come from Britain, they come from Europe. They don't just come from one country. And the fact is, that would be an important role for those caucuses to play. We need to share the many faces of immigrants including the undocumented in our nation.

MS. WERNER: Do you believe that the 1965 Immigration Reform Law that ended northern European preference facilitated the expanding racial diversity we are experiencing in America?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: I'm not a demographer, but I think it played some role. I think so do birth rates and the like. I will say that even-- again, I do think that we have to be more realistic with the quotas we've set on this hemisphere. We've got people with families here for, in some cases, decades and decades and even beyond, and it would seem to me taking that into account, reunifying families, has got to be something that we put a lot of focus on.

MS. WERNER: With the upcoming battles on the Hill about spending cuts and the debt ceiling, what is a likely timeline for Congress to start debating an actual immigration bill? And what is plan B if the Republicans don't go for a full package?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: I'm focusing on plan A. And I'll say this. We don't expect that this will just be up to the Congress. We've seen in the past, particularly with this do nothing Congress of last session, that they respond to public pressure. I think you'll see mayors across the country engage on this issue. I'm giving a speech at the U.S. Conference of Mayors on immigration reform. And by the way, we are a bipartisan organization. We unanimously have passed every year comprehensive immigration

reform. To the mayors, sometimes the most-- the best people I've seen get up on the floor of the Conference of Mayors to speak about the positive impact of immigration, have been Republican mayors from small towns who've talked about their towns being decimated by people leaving their small town and that a new generation of immigrants have come and they're working hard and playing by the rules and sending their kids to schools. And while they may come from a different country and speak another language still, they're as part of that town as anyone.

And so, I think you'll see a lot more in the way of pressure from civil rights organizations, the AFL-CIO, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. I just heard that Tom Donohue, I think it was this weekend, focused and talked about this issue of comprehensive immigration reform. I'm the epicenter, let's be honest. I have more undocumented-- about 10 percent of my city is undocumented and 42 percent of my city is foreign born. They come from every corner of the Earth; 140 countries, 220 languages. I think 30-some odd countries where they have the largest-- their largest population in the United States is in L. A., and then about ten of them that have the largest population of their country outside of their country.

So I'm like the second largest Mexican city, the second largest Salvadoran city, the list goes on. I think number of cities, a number of countries have their largest population there. So I think you'll see mayors, civil rights organizations, I think you'll see labor, I think you'll see the Chamber of Commerce and business, the time is now and people recognize that. And they expect this Congress to be able to chew and walk at the same time, chew gum and walk at the same time. They expect that they address this issue, as I said, responsible and safe gun legislation.

Let me just mention what I mean by that. It's an abomination that we don't have an assault weapons ban. I am the California author of the assault weapons ban along with then-Senator Don Perata. During my speakership, we passed the one gun a month bill, we passed safe storage and trigger locks. We passed the Saturday Night Special bill and we've gone far in addressing this issue. But when you can buy those same assault weapons in Arizona, when we don't have tough enough laws on people who legally buy and then sell to people who can't, when you don't have universal background checks-- and by the way, 40 percent of all gun sales are between private owners and no universal background check is required. When you don't have the kind of coordination that you could have if we repealed the TR [?] amendments so that the Feds and the States and the cities can work together to identify people who have guns who shouldn't, the mentally ill, criminals and the like, when you're not doing enough to beef up and resource the mental health registry and the list of people who are mentally ill. And, you're not doing enough to provide mental health services, something's wrong.

So, I do want to add that in addition to immigration reform, responsible gun legislation, addressing sequestration in a balanced way, and not defaulting on our full faith and credit, I think is something you're going to see at the top of the U.S. Conference of Mayors agenda led by our president, Michael Nutter.

MS. WERNER: I want to come back to you on some of the other issues you raised. But you said at the Mayor's Conference, every year you pass comprehensive immigration reform amongst your group. What advice would you give to Congress on learning from how you all can manage to pass something but yet they can't?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: Well, with all respect, I was Speaker of the Assembly, and I was proud to be. I was a legislator, but I liken that organization-- it's a lot like a big debating society. You know, we actually have to run things. I run a government, a city that if it was a nation, it was the 17th largest economy in the world, you know, as a metropolitan area anyway, a city of four million. I would hope they would realize what I understood when I first got elected in 1994. And that is things like, values like, statesmanship and civility and compromise and getting things done were values that people actually cherished. And that didn't mean that we had kumbaya sessions. We had our battles, don't get me wrong, but we understood we got elected to get things done.

And I think the mayors are much more focused on results. And the advice we'd give them is you got a 12 percent approval rating. There's not much farther down that you can go. And it would seem to me that the time is now that you come together and be able to tell a story about a Congress that went from the do nothing Congress to a Congress that's getting things done on some of the most important issues of our time.

And I think if they do, both parties will benefit and certainly the nation will benefit. So I say that not as a partisan, I say that as someone who believes that both parties need to compromise on all of these issues. Both parties need to understand that people are watching and they expect more from folks here in the beltway.

MS. WERNER: When you compromise and you don't walk with everything you wanted, do you still feel like you're successful?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: I'm sorry?

MS. WERNER: When you compromise and you don't get everything you want, do you still feel like you've been successful?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: All the time. You know, I used to say when I was Speaker of the Assembly and I'd say they got elected, too. The world wasn't made in my image. You know, we got to fix things and we got to work on things. And that means you got to compromise. And compromise helps you find a balance.

I'll tell you something. I'm going to be 60 two weeks from now, I guess-- no, next week, very soon. I don't know when it is exactly. (Laughter) No, I'm looking forward of it. I'm proud of those years. But, you know, I'll be 60 and I tell people the one thing that you get over time is the world's a lot grayer than when you walked on a college campus or led a demonstration on a high school campus, in my case. The fact is that these problems while big, have solutions. They're not perfect. You build on success and my

hope is that in all of these issues, you're going to see a lot more in the way of compromise.

That's what I called for when the U.S. Conference of Mayors on my motion got behind the Simpson-Bowles as a template for resolving our deficit and debt. That's what we called for when we said to both Democrats and Republicans that when you're building bridges and hospitals in Baghdad and Kandahar and not in Baltimore and Kansas City, something's wrong, something's broken. We ought to find that middle ground. We got to be able to cut the size of a defense budget that is bigger than the next 11 or 12 nations combined. So there's compromise, there's a middle ground and there's certainly a path forward on all of these issues.

MS. WERNER: If the deficit can only be resolved by increasing taxes and cutting expenses, what expenses would you cut?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: Well, I don't believe we should just cut across the board, we should cut strategically. There are some things-- there is fat in government, there's no question about it. We got to find efficiencies, we got to address defense spending. I would start there. There's no question that this defense budget is bloated, and I'm speaking-- I can tell you that the mayors of the country want to see less spending on defense and more spending on bridges and roads and highways and schools, investments that will bear dividends down the line.

And I've also said, and I'm a Democrat and this doesn't fly well with some Democrats, but I think we've got to look at entitlements. You can address entitlement reform and not be for privatizing Social Security or turning Medicare into voucher care. There are places where you say you stop. In my own city, and I can tell you mayors across the country, have gotten the support of pension reform. There are a number of things that we can do that don't decimate the safety net but do make the kinds of investments.

You know, a balanced approach is the only way to deal with deficits at the level and debt at the level we have in the nation today. It's the only path forward.

MS. WERNER: Should President Obama invoke the 14th Amendment and ignore Congress to deal with the debt ceiling?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: I would hope it wouldn't come to that. But if it has to, it must. You know, we can't let extremists put us in default and play chicken with the full faith and credit of the United States of America. And that's what they are. When people say let's go into default-- and I've been watching the boob tube over the last few days-- when I hear people that are duly elected to the Congress saying, "Well, let's just go into default," I say, "This person is from some other planet. This person is not from this planet." The notion that we would do that boggles the mind and the good, common sense of the vast majority of Americans.

MS. WERNER: What's your perspective on America's melting pot being better reflected in small town or rural America? What would urban political civic leaders learn from that experience of small town mayors?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: I mean, I think we're enriched. I know I am. You know, my kids have grown up-- I tell people, my kids have been in the homes of Persians, Iranians and Armenians, Koreans and Filipinos and Mexicans and Italians and Greeks and Jews and Muslims. We're enriched when we can experience other cultures and people and other perspectives that enrich us as a nation. I think you're seeing-- the fastest growing places of immigration are in some of the small towns across the country.

And at first, there's a little tension from that, sometimes a lot. And then over time say, "Oh well, this is okay. This is going to be good. I understand." I mean, you know, and we benefit. So, I see it as a positive sign of where the nation's going. I always saying L. A. is the city where the world comes together, and that's true for America, too. I mean, it's true for America. There aren't very many countries that welcome people from every corner of the Earth the way that we do, and it makes us proud, as I said, in my talk a few minutes ago. It makes us feel good about ourselves, about who we are. Does that mean we shouldn't enforce our borders? Of course not. We can enforce our borders and still value and embrace our values and what's made us strong. And I think that's what we ought to do.

MS. WERNER: New York Governor Andrew Cuomo says he may be nearing a deal with state legislative leaders in a broad package of changes to the state's gun law that would expand New York's ban on assault weapons. What is your reaction?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: Go, New York! You know, we got to do the same. I authored the assault weapons ban in California. Over time, we've realized there are some loopholes, we're going to have to address them. We need New York and other states to pass assault weapon bans. But we need the country to do it as well. Because as I said, if the state next door to yours doesn't have an assault weapons ban, if they don't have stiffer laws on straw purchases, which are legal purchasers who purchase on behalf of people who can't and shouldn't have a gun, if you don't have databases and criminal background checks that are strong enough to be able to identify who can't get a gun, then one state doing something is good, it's a step forward, but it's not what we need. We need comprehensive-- we need a federal approach.

MS. WERNER: Do you think Congress is cowed by the NRA?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: That's pretty clear, isn't it? I mean, when you grow up, my friends who are unable to say no to their constituencies, it's easy to say no to an enemy or an opponent, rather, I don't like to call people enemies. It's easy to say no to an opponent or to a constituency of the other party. It's tougher to say no to a friend, to a supporter. And when you get in these jobs, when you get elected to the Congress or the legislature, you get elected as mayor, the measure of your oats is when you could look a

friend in the eye, someone that you mostly agree with and say, "I don't agree with you, and you're wrong on this issue."

And I think the nra is wrong when they say that the answer to a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun. When they say that teachers ought to be carrying guns in our elementary schools. When they say that no gun legislation, virtually no gun legislation, is acceptable to them. That, to me, is an extreme position and I would hope there are people, both Democrat and Republican, that could look them in the eye and say, "I'm sorry, I mostly agree with you but you're wrong," and vote against them.

I mentioned that I'm riding into the sunset but not just yet. I still have a few months. I'd like to be able to continue in public life. I've been majority whip, majority leader, speaker of the assembly and council member and now a mayor of L. A. But I'd rather be able to look at the man in the mirror because that, at the end, is what we all have to be comfortable with. If you can't look at the man in the mirror, or the woman in the mirror, if you can't look at the reflection of yourself and say, "I've done good, and I've taken on injustice and what's wrong," then you shouldn't be in this business. You should go get another job.

MS. WERNER: Do you think the 2nd Amendment is outdated?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: Look, the 2nd Amendment is an amendment to our Constitution that's enshrined in our Constitution. I do think, though, when-- I mean, when the 2nd Amendment was adopted, we didn't have assault weapons. We banned machine guns, why shouldn't we be able to ban assault weapons and high capacity magazines? Why shouldn't we have stronger background checks? Why shouldn't we have databases for the mentally ill and for people who are criminals and shouldn't be able to buy a gun? Why has the Congress not approved a ATF director in what, seven or eight years? Why? Why do they pass the TR amendments preventing the Feds from keeping background checks for longer than 24 hours? Why is that a protection of the 2nd Amendment? Why do they do that?

Well, the fact is because they use the 2nd Amendment to defend the unconscionable, to defend what's wrong, to defend what doesn't make sense to the vast majority of us. And that's the challenge. After the tragedy-- and, you know, I was on CNN today and I couldn't see the images of the press conference at Sandy Hook and Newtown, or at Newtown, Connecticut, but I could hear the mothers speak. And as I heard them speak, it raised goose bumps on your back and on your arms. And their words kind of were like a knife cutting through butter.

We all have a responsibility to those kids. We have a responsibility to the victims of massacres across the nation that seems to become more and more commonplace, to do something responsible and safe that doesn't violate the 2nd Amendment but does give us stronger, safer, more responsible gun laws in this nation.

MS. WERNER: You said you don't see yourself riding into the sunset right away. Are you considering running for Governor of California?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: God, that's a new question. I haven't gotten that one in a while. Just joking. Look, I think I've spoken on that issue enough. I'd be honored to continue to serve in public life, but for now, I'm looking to finish my term, focus on my job whether it's immigration or responsible gun safety laws, whether it's balancing our own budget. By the way, we talked about compromise and taking on your friends? Most people know that I had a very strong union support when I ran. And yet, I've taken on pension reform. I've had to lay off and furlough thousands of people. I've cut the size of the L. A. civilian general fund workforce by a third, from 15,000 to 10,000. I've required a new pension system for new employees retiring not at 55 but at 65.

I've taken the issue of education reform and challenged the notion of absolute seniority and tenure. I know what it is to take on your friends, and I want to-- I'm going to work as hard as I can until the very end and then, you know, we'll see, see what happens.

MS. WERNER: The President has been criticized for the lack of diversity in his recent cabinet nominations. Short of calling for binders full of women and people of color, what should he be doing to keep his 2008 promise of a cabinet that reflects the demographic makeup of the country?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: I know Barack Obama. I trust him. I know that our President not only has but will continue to promote a cabinet that looks like America, that is balanced gender-wise, that is reflective of the changing face of America. I have no doubt in my mind that when it's all said and done, that that will be the case. This was the guy who signed the Lily Ledbetter Act, a man who stood not just for equal pay for women, but has always stood for the notion that when you open up the door for one of us, you open up the door for all of us. So I expect that you'll see that reflection of his values in his cabinet.

MS. WERNER: Has the White House or any administration surrogate approached you about considering becoming the next Labor Secretary or any other cabinet secretary, for that matter?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: Like the governor question, a question that has been asked and answered in the past. I'll just say that, as I said yesterday on-- I expect to be in Washington quite frequently over the next few months, both my work with the U.S. Conference of Mayors and the issues that I mentioned. I can't tell you, I don't care to comment on any future job. I'm focused on the job I've got and want to finish as strong as I can on the challenges that we face.

You know, my city is safer than at any time since 1952; 40 percent drop in violent crime, 40 percent drop in homicides, a 70 percent drop since the 1990s. Our schools, we've doubled the number of successful schools at 800 and above on the academic performance index. We've reduced from 33 percent to 10 percent the number of failing

schools. We've got more charters than any school district in the country. And we increased ninefold the number of successful cahrtesr at 800 and above. My partnership schools, 22 schools, 16,000 kids, the most improved school district in the state, if we we're a school district on the academic performance index. A high school I took over in Watts, Jordan, is the most improved high school.

So, we've hit the Kyoto Accords. We started at 7 percent, below 1990 levels was the goal. We're at 28 percent below 1990 levels. I think only London and Toronto are ahead. So, you know, we're going to keep on working on all of the things we started until I'm out of here and then I'm out of here. I've said we'll see what I do. But I know one thing, I won't be mayor anymore.

MS. WERNER: And as you said, that comes to a close here in the next few months. And based on your last statement, that was talking about all the successes you've had as mayor and it sounds like a good marketing point for you. And I want to know if you are asked to serve in the administration, would you do it after you're finished being mayor?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: When I'm asked, I'll answer the question.
(Laughter)

MS. WERNER: We are almost out of time, but before asking the last question, I have a couple of housekeeping matters to take care of. First, I would like to remind you of our next upcoming luncheon speaker. We have Christopher Dodd, President and CEO of the Motion Picture Association of America here to speak right before the Oscars. Second, I would like to present our guest with the traditional National Press Club coffee mug. It will look great on a desk in L. A. or in Washington.

Last question. In the D.C. area, we have Liberty's Promise, which is working with hundreds of immigrant youth, especially those in need, with civics, education and scholarship opportunities for advanced education. What words of encouragement would you offer these immigrant youth in D.C. area to fully engage and appreciate the fundamental values and traditions in America?

MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA: Reach for the stars and follow your dreams. Be the change that you want to see in the world. Don't lose this sense of the possible. Make sure that you keep the cycle of humanity moving forward by when you get through a door, making sure that someone gets through that door after you. I think those are some of the things I'd say to them.

MS. WERNER: How about a round of applause for our speaker today?
(Applause) Thank you for coming. I'd also like to thank the National Press Club staff and the Journalist Institute Broadcast Center for organizing today's event. Finally, here's a reminder that you can find more information at press.org. Thank you, and we are adjourned. (Sounds gavel.)

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