

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH MARISKA HARGITAY

SUBJECT: THE JOYFUL HEART FOUNDATION

MODERATOR: ANGELA GREILING KEANE, PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

LOCATION: NATIONAL PRESS CLUB HOLEMAN LOUNGE, WASHINGTON, D.C.

TIME: 12:30 P.M. EDT

DATE: WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13, 2013

(C) COPYRIGHT 2008, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB, 529 14TH STREET, WASHINGTON, DC - 20045, USA. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. ANY REPRODUCTION, REDISTRIBUTION OR RETRANSMISSION IS EXPRESSLY PROHIBITED.

UNAUTHORIZED REPRODUCTION, REDISTRIBUTION OR RETRANSMISSION CONSTITUTES A MISAPPROPRIATION UNDER APPLICABLE UNFAIR COMPETITION LAW, AND THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB RESERVES THE RIGHT TO PURSUE ALL REMEDIES AVAILABLE TO IT IN RESPECT TO SUCH MISAPPROPRIATION.

FOR INFORMATION ON BECOMING A MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB, PLEASE CALL 202-662-7505.

ANGELA GREILING KEANE: (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon, and welcome to the National Press Club. My name is Angela Greiling Keane, and I'm a reporter for Bloomberg News. I'm the 106th President of the National Press Club. We are the world's leading professional organization for journalists committed to our profession's future through programming with 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 through the National Press Club Journalism Institute, please visit www.press.org/institute.

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

I'd also like to welcome our C-SPAN and Public Radio audiences as well. 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 the hashtag NPCLunch. After our guest's speech concludes, we'll have question and answer. I will ask as many questions as time permits. Now it's time to introduce our head table guests. I'd like each of you here to stand briefly as your name is announced.

From your right, Dan Freedman, national editor for the Washington Bureau of Hearst Newspapers; Emily Goodin, featured editor for *The Hill* newspaper; Alexandria

Baca, a graduate student at the University of Missouri School of Journalism and a reporter at the *Dallas Morning News*, Washington bureau; Kym Worthy, the Wayne County, Michigan, prosecutor; Kathleen Parker, a syndicated columnist for the *Washington Post* writer's group; Sarah Tofte, the Director of Policy and Advocacy for the Joyful Heart Foundation

Skipping over the podium, Alison Fitzgerald, a freelance journalist and Speakers Committee chair; skipping over the speaker for just a moment, we'll get back to you, Danny Selnick who is the Vice President for Public Policy Group, a division of Business Wire and the Speakers Committee member who organized today's event. Thank you, Danny. Dave Shepardson, *The Detroit News* Washington bureau chief; Natalie DiBlasio, a reporter for *USA Today*; Pablo Sanchez, Washington correspondent and producer for Univision News; and Kris Rose, the Deputy Director of the National Institute of Justice. (Applause)

Our guest today is an actress who you might easily recognize as Detective Olivia Benson. Mariska Hargitay has played the role for 14 seasons on television's "Law and Order: Special Victims Unit." The show deals with sex crimes and the detectives who solve the cases. With more than a dozen years on the show, and Emmy and Golden Globe Awards for her work, our speaker is also known for her work outside of television. The content of the scripts, as well as the work she did to prepare for the role, opened her eyes to the epidemics of sexual assault, domestic violence, and child abuse.

What she learned was staggering. One in three women report being physically or sexually abused by a husband or boyfriend at some point during their lives. Every two minutes in the United States, someone is sexually assaulted. Nearly four children die every day in this country as a result of child abuse and neglect. And up to 10 million children witness domestic violence each year.

It wasn't the facts alone that led Miss Hargitay to act in a way that she wasn't just playing a part. What really opened her eyes was the fan mail she received. The letters didn't just say, "I love your show. Can you send me an autographed picture?" They'd say, "I was raped when I was 15. I'm 40 now, and I've never told anyone." Victims were disclosing their stories to her. All of this inspired her to become an advocate for survivors of violence and abuse by creating the Joyful Heart Foundation whose mission is to heal, educate and empower survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence and child abuse and to shed light into the darkness that surrounds these issues.

This year alone, the foundation will serve more than 3,000 survivors and the professionals that care for them. Today's speaker has been out in front of related issues testifying before Congress to highlight the need to get rid of the backlog of completed rape kits saying she's received thousands of letters from rape victims about how isolated they feel after a completed rape kit and police reports appear to fall on deaf ears. In spite of Miss Hargitay's advocacy, "Law and Order: SVU" drew criticism last month when it hosted Mike Tyson as a guest star. In addition to being a former heavyweight boxing champ, Mike Tyson served three years in prison following a 1992 rape conviction. Even

though the part he played on the show was as an abuse survivor, according to the *Washington Post*, the episode drew the smallest audience in the blockbuster show's history.

The daughter of actress Jayne Mansfield and Mr. Universe, Mickey Hargitay, our speaker, made her film debut in the 1985 horror comedy film, "Ghoulies," and her major television debut in the 1986 adventure drama series, "Downtown." She appeared in numerous roles in film and television throughout the late 1980s and '90s before being cast as we know her today as Olivia Benson. Please join me in giving a big National Press Club welcome to Mariska Hargitay. (Applause)

MS. HARGITAY: Hi. So I am so truly honored and thrilled to be here today, so thank you Angela. Ah, reminding me of the old days. My heart's beating and it is such an honor and a thrill to be here for so many reasons. I just came from standing with the Vice President and Attorney General Holder at a press conference to highlight the dire and immediate need to reduce domestic violence homicide. And here I am now, with all of you, in Washington, D. C., very exciting day. The kind of day that makes you diary burst into flames when you write about it that night.

I mean, I have to tell you that I whipped out my cell phone and took a selfie with the VP when I met him. (Laughter) You understand. So I understand that I owe the honor of being here today to a very sweet Olin Selnick. Where are you? Hiding? Where are you? There you are, beauty. I wanted to point that out to everybody, who is Danny Selnick's daughter, and I want to thank you for throwing my name into the ring. And I understand you're a fan of the show, but I also understand that you want to be a prosecutor when you grow up. So I thank you in advance for everything that you are going to do with your life.

The website for the National Press Club describes it as a place where news breaks out and flows out into the world, where journalists train to become the next generation of storytellers. And all of that serves to reinforce not only what a huge and great honor this is to be here, but also the scope of this opportunity and the importance of this moment and of this day.

You also say on the website that the stakes couldn't be higher, so I would like to say I could not agree with you more. When I was thinking about what I wanted to say here today in this place where news flows out into the world, I thought about my first encounter with the statistics of sexual assault and domestic violence and child abuse and it was almost 15 years ago, I hate to say. I was doing research for my role on "SVU" and there they were, and if you'll bear with me I would like to repeat them, although Angela's already said them because I think they are worth repeating and repeating and repeating.

In this country, one in three women experience physical or sexual abuse by an intimate partner in her lifetime. One in four girls and one in six boys are sexually abused by the age of 18. Every two minutes in the United States, somebody is sexually assaulted.

Every nine seconds, a woman is beaten. Every day, more than three women are killed by an intimate partner, and every day five children die of abuse and neglect.

So the statistics went on, and then the letters came. And at first there were few and then there were more and then there were hundreds. And since then, of course, there have been thousands, sadly. So the women and men that were writing these letters to me, they didn't ask for an autograph, they didn't ask for a head shot, they disclosed their stories of abuse to me, and the majority of them had some version of the phrase, "I've never told this to anyone." So there I was holding in my hand the stories behind the statistics that I had just learned. There I was at work every day having these issues pressed into my soul, pressed into my consciousness. And they were imprinted on me. They changed my thinking.

So I educated myself. I trained to become a rape crisis advocate. I joined a few boards, I got involved. And I was so proud, and still am, to be on a show that was brave enough to go into a territory that nobody else was talking about. Obviously, I had my role to play on television, but after learning what I learned and after hearing the statistics and receiving these letters, I knew that I wanted to do more. And I wanted to play a larger role in helping survivors heal and reclaim their lives.

So in 2004, I started the Joyful Heart Foundation. Our mission, as Angela said, is to heal, empower and educate survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence and child abuse and to shed light into the darkness that surrounds these issues. So under the amazing leadership-- I can't look at you because I get emotional-- of our CEO, Maile Zambuto, we've raised more than \$10 million. (Applause) Thank you. Okay, let me try that again. Anyway, we've raised over \$10 million in private funds and served directly over 10,000 survivors and the professionals who care for them.

We've connected with over one million individuals through our education and awareness initiatives and have championed crucial legislation and policy reform, which again I'm very proud of, Sarah Tofte, and to get justice for survivors. So while I'm not an expert on these issues, I proudly claim the title of advocate in the literal sense of the word; one who calls out to you. That's my inner self clapping for myself, do you hear that? (Laughter) Okay, let the emotion pass, here we are. Okay, so what it calls out for you on behalf of the thousands of survivors whose voices, whose courage, whose hope that I am honored to bring into this room today.

So today, I want to talk about gardening. How's that for a left turn? When you buy a plant, it comes with instructions, right? Says, "Requires watering daily. Thrives in sunlight." If the issues of domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse came with a label on them to how to make them grow in society it would say, "Requires darkness, thrives in darkness of silence, fear, shame, and isolation." Silence allows criminals to thrive. So think about how helpful it is for each one of us-- think about how helpful it is to a criminal if we're not willing to talk about these crimes.

And this is not about the victims who refuse to come forward. I'm talking about everybody else. I'm talking about all of us here in this room. Think about how helpful it is for a rapist if we consider rape an unseemly topic, one that is too frightening, one that is too complex, one that is too murky, too difficult to prosecute, or simply not worth it. What kind of society do we end up with? We end up with a society where after 40 years plus we can still count on one hand the number of corporations funding these issues in any significant way.

Now, so many of you are here today so I want to say thank you for that. We end up with a society where schools and institutions settle cases of sexual violence with as little transparency, as little accountability and as little exposure as possible. A society where it is so hard for the anti-violence movement to come together because in order to compete for limited funding, organizations must stand out, which means by definition they must stand alone. We end up with a society where although, thank God, Congress recently reauthorized the Violence Against Women Act, thank God-- (Applause) but we end up with a society where 22 senators and 138 congressmen voted against it? It's unconscionable. It's unconscionable.

We end up in a society where after a victim has been raped or beaten at the hand of a spouse, after the devastation of the trauma, she has to live through the trauma of how society receives her. She has to survive the trauma of 'we don't want to talk about that, we don't want to deal with that, we don't want to deal with that.' She has to deal with the trauma, she has to live through the trauma of, "What was she wearing? Why was she dancing like that? Ah, why was she out so late? Well, what did she expect? She was asking for it. I'm sure he didn't mean it. But he's such a nice guy. Why didn't she just leave?"

So to me, one of the most shocking demonstrations of how we regard crimes in our society is the backlog of untested sexual assault evidence kits, known as rape kits, which are sitting in police storage facilities across the country. Now, both because I feel compelled to talk about it every chance I get and because it is such a clear and concrete example, please allow me to dig down into this issue for a second. So every day in the United States, individuals take the enormously courageous step of reporting their rape to the police. Now, because of what these individuals have suffered, their bodies are a living, breathing, feeling, crime scene from which doctors and nurses collect a rape kit, right? This process of evidence collection typically takes between four and six hours.

Now, one would assume that if somebody endures a four to six hour invasive exam that evidence would be handled with care and immediately tested. When tested, rape kit evidence can identify an unknown assailant, confirm the presence of a known suspect, it can affirm the survivor's attack of the story, discredit the attacker, connect the suspect to other crimes. I'm going to say that one again. Connect the suspect to other crimes. I should say it a third time, really, because we got to get this one. It can also exonerate the innocent.

So the bottom line here is a rape kit can bring justice, often an integral part of a survivor's healing. And it is vital in keeping rapists off the street. And yet federal authorities estimate that there are hundreds of thousands of untested rape kits across the country, hundreds of thousands. I don't get it.

Polly Poskin, a leading sexual violence advocate so perfectly summed this up when she said, "If you have fact of physical evidence of a crime and you're not doing everything you can with this evidence, then you must be making a decision that this isn't a very serious crime." Here's the good news. Jurisdictions have started to see the results of testing every single rape kit. New York City cleared its backlog of 17,000 kits and now tests every single kit that comes in. And the proof of the value of testing every kit? Their arrest rate, the arrest rate for rape, jumped from 40 percent to 70 percent compared-- (Applause) Right? Huge! Compared with only 24 percent nationally. Can't fight with statistics.

Within the past two years, Los Angeles has also cleared its backlog of 12,669 kits. And then there's Detroit. And the unbelievable, unstoppable Wayne County Prosecutor, Miss Kym Worthy, who is here with me. (Applause) Who is here with me on the dais. And by the way, Kym, I really want to be you when I grow up. It takes us eight days to shoot an episode, her office handles 70,000 cases a year, 25,000 of them are felonies and she didn't have a full time designated unit to prosecute sex crimes until just under two years ago and now only has six assistant prosecutors, three investigators and one victim advocate for 70,000 cases a year. And she's the mother of two. Just sayin'.

In 2009, Kym's office discovered that there were more than 11,000 rape kits rotting, literally, in a storage room in the Detroit Police Department. The National Institute of Justice, Lynn Rosenthal and Kris Rose, who's also with me here today on the dais, addressed the backlog, thank God. So we at Joyful Heart are so proud to partner with Kym and to NIJ for this work. And just weeks ago, this is very exciting, when the first 400 kits were tested and entered into CODIS, the DNA database, law enforcement were able to identify 29 serial rapists. (Applause) It's huge. And that's only out of the first 400. We're talking about hundreds of thousands. So that just goes to show you and makes you think about what could have not been.

So one of the kits in Detroit belonged to a young mother who was raped at gunpoint in her bed while her two young children were sleeping next to her. Immediately following the attack, she bravely called the police and she went to the hospital where evidence was collected from her body. And in her words said, "I have no choice. The only way that I had of getting this person on the street was to go." The rape kit was tested 14 years later, 14 years. And when a prosecutor finally told her that they had identified the rapist, she courageously moved forward with the prosecution. Her attacker was found guilty and was sentenced up to 60 years in prison. That's the happy ending of that story.

Detroit has nearly 10,000 untested rape kits remaining. And the city's financial woes are making national headlines. Joyful Heart is also working with Kym's office to explore how to rise the \$12 to \$15 million that it will take just to clear the backlog, not to

mention following up on the investigative leads and moving cases forward. The Detroit Crime Commission has also set up a fund to which individuals from all over the country have already given \$40,000, many in donations of \$10 and \$20 increments from survivors in Detroit that want to help, people who just want justice, people who want the rapists off the street, people who want to send a message to rapists that they will be accountable for their crimes.

So where does that leave us? Does it leave us helpless? Does it leave us defeated? No. It leaves us with where we are today as a society, and today as a society we say, "No more." Everyone say it with me, no more. So for the first time nearly every organization that's working to change the haunting statistics behind these preventable crimes, whether the organization focuses on women and girls, men and boys, teens, children, rural or urban communities, it's coming together in a movement, united, under one symbol, right? No more. Peace has its peace sign and the red ribbon demands action for AIDS and the pink ribbon has changed the way we think about breast cancer. And now, our collective commitment is to end sexual assault and domestic violence.

It now has its own symbol, its sign, its beacon. So No More is not an initiative, it's not a campaign, it's not a-- it's a call to action. It's a movement to stand up and to speak out for every woman, for every man, for every child who is suffering from this violence. You know, in a movement for every victim struggling to find their voice, perpetrators have relied on the fact that the movement to stop them wouldn't come together. They've relied on fragmentation, they depend on fear and silence to keep doing what they're doing. No More seeks to remove that shame and that stigma around surviving these issues, to make these issues easier for people to talk about, what we're doing here today. And to empower bystanders in every community to get involved in preventing them.

You know, that's a thing, that you think like, "Oh, what am I going to do? How am I going to get involved? How am I going to get involved?" People think, "Well, I'm just-- who am I to get involved?" And that's what this is, it's for everybody to get involved. No More leaving it for others to find the answers. No More blaming survivors. No More standing by and doing nothing. No More has been years in the making. What began as an idea three years ago today has become a reality. And as people align themselves with this movement and the cause gains visibility, policymakers will take notice leading to stronger public policies and more funding for prevention of services. And this means more funding for places like Wayne County and Kym Worthy who need it. More funding for survivors to have their rape kits tested. Together, we can end domestic violence and sexual assault. Together.

So today, you have the opportunity to play a role and it's simple, really. Each of you has been given a pin to frame this No More symbol, and I'm asking you to wear it as a simple-- and it's profound, just wear it. I'm asking you to share it. And I know that there are at least some of you in this room who question whether this will work, understandably. And the closest corollary I can give you is the AIDS ribbon, right? AIDS was an issue that nobody wanted to talk about. It concerned sexual behavior and drug

abuse and people blamed and there was a lot of stigma around it. But then when people started wearing the AIDS ribbon, it moved the issue out into the open, right? It encouraged people, it encouraged the conversation, discussion and ultimately it contributed to a better place for policies, for progress and for, most importantly, combating the illness. So it's also helped change social norms, making AIDS related discrimination less acceptable. So that's our wish for No More.

And it begins here today in this room, in this room here today. So, it's a moment, a big one, a big chance. So, anyway, we all have a role to play in this. And I encourage you to play yours, to end domestic violence and sexual assault. And it may not happen in my lifetime, but I am committed to doing my part in bringing that about. And conversations like this are happening all over the city today, on Capitol Hill, on Twitter. And speaking of playing a role, the Wizards are playing the Milwaukee Bucks in a game that's dedicated to No More tonight. And so, this is what a day looks like when these issues are pressed the way they ought to be pressed.

And I obviously use that word deliberately, because I believe that that is our job, right? Yours and mine to press. We must press things out into the light. We must press our fingers on the button of the bullhorn to make the world listen. So, as members of the National Press Club, I urge you please to press on and indeed teach the next generation to do the same, you know?

I just want to say that when I started out on this journey, I was an actress and very happy that I just landed a gig on a TV show. (Laughter) Truly. And I didn't know that I would start a foundation. I didn't know that Joyful Heart would have a place in the first ever White House roundtable in sexual violence. I did not know that I would testify before Congress. I did not know that I would ever get to meet the President and stand with Joe Biden, my hero who wrote the original VAWA legislation. I did not know that I would have the privilege of seeing survivors take the courageous steps towards healing and reclaiming their lives. And in short, I didn't know I'd be here today.

So as I watch my diary burst into flames tonight, I will celebrate all of these things. And perhaps, most of all, I will celebrate those things that we all don't know yet, but are within reach. So if we persevere, if we press on. Again, in the National Press Club, very wise words, the stakes couldn't be higher. Thank you. (Applause)

MS. GREILING KEANE: Thank you very much. We have, of course, a lot of questions on several different topics. So catch your breath.

MS. HARGITAY: Can I just get a drink?

MS. GREILING KEANE: Get a drink of water and come on back up.

MS. HARGITAY: Oh! Who wants to talk about like makeup and stuff?

MS. GREILING KEANE: There's no questions about makeup.

MS. HARGITAY: Oh, darn it. Okay.

MS. GREILING KEANE: Lots about the cause, and about the show.

MS. HARGITAY: Shall I stand here with you?

MS. GREILING KEANE: Yes, we'll share the microphone up here. First questioner asks, there's many causes out there, lots of good ones. So of all the causes that you could choose to put your name behind, why the No More movement?

MS. HARGITAY: Why the No More movement? You know, I think that we're stronger in numbers, we're more powerful in numbers. Education, illumination, learning about how a-- through my job what I've learned and how these issues have, as I said, pressed into me. As I started the Joyful Heart Foundation, I've seen so many different organizations, as I said, vying for the same things. And I think that dilutes and it's about unity and coming together. And I've seen the way coming together and rallying around a cause and a survivor makes change. And when a group of likeminded people come together, the change is made.

MS. GREILING KEANE: Where did you learn about the rape kit backlog? You talked a lot about what it is, why it matters, but how did you learn about that initially and why did you pick that as one thing to focus on? Then one follow-up on that, where besides Detroit does progress still need to be made on that front?

MS. HARGITAY: Okay, that's a two-parter. The first part is where I learned about the rape kit backlog was Maile Zambuto, the CEO of Joyful Heart, had just come back from meeting with Sarah Tofte, who was an expert on it, who I'm going to throw this question to in a minute. And when I learned about it, as I said in my speech, one assumes that if somebody gets the evidence that can then seek justice, you assume-- and I was so horrified and mortified and truly in disbelief and immense pain for everyone knowing that justice wasn't being served in this way. And I thought, as I said, it's a perfect microcosm of how these issues are regarded.

So, Kym and Sarah, Kym can speak and Sarah can speak about where the other places are like Detroit, if I may invite you up to answer that?

MS. ZAMBUTO: Thank you, that's a great question, what other cities are struggling with untested rape kits and the backlog. The big answer we're not sure because we only have estimates at the moment, like Mariska said earlier, hundreds of thousands of untested kits, perhaps in police storage facilities across the country. But the fact is very few, only two states, actually track what happens to rape kits once they're collected from victims. That would be the state of Illinois and the state of Texas, and very few other cities.

So we're not sure. And one of our big reform pushes is to get the federal government and other states to actually require that police report out publicly what they're actually doing with rape kits. Because in our experience, once a city announces a rape kit backlog, we can find the resources and the political will and the public outrage to make the changes that are needed. I can say that every city we've ever looked at, any city we've ever asked or pressed for numbers has ended up with backlogs at a minimum of a thousand or so, but usually in the multiple thousands, 10,000 or so. Lots of cities are struggling with this. But again, those that have acknowledged it like Los Angeles or New York or Cleveland or Detroit or Houston or Dallas, those are cities that have publicly acknowledged backlogs, they're all actively taking steps now to fix it because it's just too embarrassing not to.

MS. WORTHY: I'm Kym Worthy, I'm the Wayne County prosecutor. I don't have much to add, but you're assuming that the cities report when they find them. And so I don't think there's any other way to really know. There was a study done about five years ago by CBS News where they found untested backlog rape kits in 49 of the 50 states, and I'm sure it was in the 50th state as well.

But the biggest problem is getting people to acknowledge a problem. Many people like Detroit tried to sweep it under the rug once they found them.

MS. GREILING KEANE: Our next question's maybe for the subject matter experts as well, so feel free to throw it back. What does it cost to test a single rape kit and what exactly is involved in the testing? Is it DNA testing or is there more to it than that?

MS. HARGITAY: Kris?

MS. ZAMBUTO: I would actually love Kris to answer that. In terms of what it actually means to test a kit. I think the general cost is roughly-- you hear lots of different estimates, between 1,000 and 1,500. That's a general estimate. So it's expensive. But we've also-- our experience has been that it's not just about the resources. Once a community commits to and prioritizes testing, they find a way to find the money.

MS. ROSE: I'm Kris Rose, Deputy Director at the National Institute of Justice, which is the research arm of the U.S. Department of Justice. And Sarah's right, the testing of a rape kit or DNA testing can cost anywhere between a thousand and fifteen hundred dollars, I would say. And we at the National Institute of Justice, I'm going to give us a little bit of a plug, are working toward faster and cheaper ways of doing that. Because I think once you can get that kind of thing in place, along with a number of other things because this is a multifaceted problem, then we can really truly make some progress and move things along a little bit quicker.

MS. GREILING KEANE: Thank you. Turning now to the show, this questioner says your TV character influenced your thinking and now your advocacy. How much do you influence your character and the content of your show?

MS. HARGITAY: I like the question. I'd say it's 50/50. I think this has been-- when I used to talk about Olivia Benson I would say I've learned so much from her because she is-- she has-- excuse me for reaching. We can still be polite. You know, that's sort of her motto, is fearlessness. It's not that she doesn't have the fear, it's that she does it anyway because it's not about her, it's about-- you know, she's mama bear, she's a lioness. And what's been so exciting about this process and about me needing to do something from my outage-- and if I could just to say this, Sarah and Kym, for me, I was a civilian. I learned about the rape kit backlog, I was like, "What?" I couldn't believe it. And everyone that I've told about it has responded the same way because, as I said, we assume, we just assume, if you get a rape kit done, you assume that it gets tested. So when you learn about all these things and why they don't, it's a call to action. It pushes you into action.

So in terms of Olivia, what's been exciting is that first I wanted to do something, and she influenced me. And now with my stellar A team behind me of Joyful Heart and the reach that I have to the experts, which is such a gift to me, they have helped infuse the show. And now our show runner, Warren Light who's such an incredibly bright man and understands the value and the platform of the knowledge that we have access to, and because of that, we have done shows about it. So there'll be times when I will read a script and I say, "Hey wait a minute, this is an opportunity." Or would say, "Well, let me have our expert on that, or Kym, can you help me out with these statistics?" And we actually did a show on the rape kit backlog, we did a show on that. We've done shows so much about a survivor and what happens in this process. And the answer to your question of what is a rape kit, what does that entail? We showed it because people just don't know.

So there's been many places where now Joyful Heart is aiding the show and supporting the show. And originally, Neal Baer, our original executive producer and show runner, was also a board member. So he, too-- I mean, I think people with this whole-- that are bright like these men understand the platform we have and the power in educating. I hope that answers your question.

MS. GREILING KEANE: Yes. Given your advocacy and your position with the important topic, how did you respond to having Mike Tyson guest star on the show? And what was it like to have him on the set with you?

MS. HARGITAY: Well, you know, ultimately I think that the episode was a very powerful episode. And my response was I didn't know that they had cast Mike Tyson originally, initially, and where my concern lie was how survivors would respond. And my concern was I understood their confusion and why they would be hurt and confused by this choice. So that's what I wanted to take care of, is survivors who often in the past haven't had a voice, and I wanted to make sure that they have one. And that's why we stood up at Joyful Heart and made the statement that we did. Again, you know, life is complex and I don't know all the pieces of all the moving parts, but as I said, I thought that the episode was compelling and powerful and at the end of the day told a beautiful story.

MS. GREILING KEANE: Are there any other shows in Hollywood that you think are doing a good job shining light on this subject that are also on TV now?

MS. HARGITAY: That's a great question. I have 14 children so I don't really watch TV. And that's the truth. I'm trying to think if there's any shows. Nothing comes to mind right now, but if I think of something, I'll let you know.

MS. GREILING KEANE: Yes, if you think of something, we can schedule you back.

MS. HARGITAY: I just don't watch television because of my children. It's probably the best choice.

MS. GREILING KEANE: TV often lacks the nuance and detail of real life. What do you think is the most unrealistic part of the portrayal of sexual assault or domestic violence on "SVU" either in what you show or in what you don't show?

MS. HARGITAY: What is the most unrealistic part? Sarah? Yeah, okay, I'll say it. I think that Olivia Benson and the members of the special victims unit on "SVU" are extremely compassionate and well versed in these issues and knowledgeable and empathetic and maybe sometimes not every survivor or victim is met with the compassion and the respect that they should be met with.

MS. GREILING KEANE: There's, of course, been a lot of attention--

MS. HARGITAY: May I?

MS. GREILING KEANE: Yes, of course.

MS. HARGITAY: Well, because that's a big question and there's many issues. I mean, for example SVU detectives in real life don't deal with homicide. That's the first thing. In the show, because we have 40 minutes, 42, to tell a story, obviously I deal with homicides on the show that are linked, obviously. Most people know that, but if you don't, usually if it's a homicide, it's a homicide. If it's a sexual assault, domestic violence, it's a different thing.

But what I want to say is-- wow, I just went off on a tangent and now I forgot what I wanted to say. Ah, when I first, as I said, when I first got this role, you think, "How can I do research to play this character with the integrity that I wanted to play her?" So in doing my research, going on ride-alongs and hanging out at precincts and sort of modeling myself after a few SVU detectives that I met that I thought were amazing and like Kym, they were just powerhouses in doing their jobs and would never stop at anything. And I wanted to be like them.

But in addition, the night, and it was a specific night, when I learned these statistics, my boss, Dick Wolf, was being honored by an organization at Mt. Sinai called

Sexual Assault Violence Intervention. They had a dinner called a Silver Whistle Dinner. And that's the night that I learned these statistics. And then I learned about rape crisis counselors and rape crisis advocates. So I went through that training to become that. And learning what I learned there and how to deal respectfully and kindly with survivors the way they deserve to be really infused my character.

So, I wish that all cops, all detectives, all special victims unit detectives, or all cops, really, because the special victims unit are obviously trained in a very specific way, that all cops could understand the compassion that-- you know, I said one time, "How would you feel if your bike got stolen, if your car got stolen, if your house was robbed and the cop dissed you and doubted you and didn't treat you with respect?" It's about respect. That's an important part.

MS. GREILING KEANE: Violence in the media, of course, has been in the news a lot in recent months and obviously "SVU" is, I'm assuming, not a program that you watch with your children. How do you square the personal activism with trying to curb violence in real life with the fact that the show is a violent show on television?

MS. HARGITAY: Well, I think that when material is dealt with responsibly and when consequences and accountability are shown, it changes-- when violence is gratuitous and it's out there and yes, people imitate it and when there are no consequences, then people go like, "Yeah, video games," and it gets you into a crazy fervor and then there's certain things that are quite irresponsible. I think that "SVU" brings to light so many issues, again, that people don't talk about and haven't talked about. And you see people having to take accountability. I think that's the part that puts it through a different lens, is that when you're educating people, you're having people talk about issues that they normally don't talk about, and then showing perpetrators the consequences.

And I think the beauty of Joyful Heart in that way is that with Olivia Benson and with the special victims lens and with the entertainment component combined with what we are all doing in this room and the power of this unity, it's just going to change everything. And if we say to perpetrators, if we say, "I will not stand by and watch what you do, I will not not tell. I am involved. I see you. I'm watching you, and I'm going to take accountability." Because it's our problem. There's no more, "Well, who am I to get involved?" Who are you to get involved? You're a human being that is watching violence, that is witnessing somebody being hurt. It's about accountability. It's about connecting to our responsibility as a human being. My opinion. (Applause) Now you're getting me all hot and bothered. (Laughter) You guys are going to be watching the show going, "She's mad now. Oh, she's not kidding, she means this." (Laughter)

MS. GREILING KEANE: We have an active online audience today, so I'll ask one of the questions that's come in while you've been up here via Twitter, there's several. This person asks what advice do you give to someone who would like to report their rape?

MS. HARGITAY: What advice would I give people who want to report their rape? First of all, I would say you are so strong and I admire you so much, and there are people that want to help you and you are not alone. And I applaud you and you're changing the world and preventing this from happening to other people. And we are unifying to do everything we can so this doesn't happen again. Do you want to add anything, Kym or Sarah? Thank you.

MS. GREILING KEANE: We're here in Washington, of course, and you mention that the Violence Against Women Act was just, of course, reauthorized. What would you say is the next political priority for you in Washington or in state legislatures?

MS. HARGITAY: For me? Well, there's a lot to be dealt with, isn't there? You know, for me, we have our focus right now on the rape kit backlog, so we're going to stay focused and we're not giving-- we certainly are very ambitious, as you've heard me, what Joyful Heart wants to do and how we want to partner with other organizations. We're not going to stop until we do. So for me right now, the most important thing is about educating and sort of locking arms with people so they don't say, "Well, what can I do?" I want people to know what they can do. And I want people to feel empowered and realize how much power they do have to say something, to speak up for somebody who in the past hasn't.

And hopefully, again, what the symbol is-- and I just think that the breast cancer analogy is so beautiful to me because when I see-- you know, breast cancer used to be a thing like, "Oh, breast cancer, we're not going to talk about that." And now you see people wearing the pink ribbon and I always feel like they're a rock star. They're so proud and you see somebody who survived breast cancer and you just want to jump on the bandwagon and support and you look at them differently and admire them and they're so empowered.

And whether it's breast cancer or all the different things, once you've survived it, you are empowered. So let's unify around these issues and make it something that we all talk about so our kids know how to keep themselves safe so women feel supported so men go, "You know what? That's not okay." So we stop blaming other people and taking responsibility.

This morning listening to Vice President Biden he said, "If a woman runs across the field naked, you can arrest her for--" what's it called? "Indecent exposure, but that doesn't give you the right to rape her." So the point is, let's stop blaming rape victims and putting the blame there and taking it on ourselves and teaching men, women, children, about the fact that people deserve to live a violent-free life. How about that? How about that? (Applause)

MS. GREILING KEANE: This questioner says we're seeing more and more celebrities come to Washington to lobby for a cause. And while some might think it's publicity oriented, why is it important for you to come to the Capitol to talk about a cause and do you worry about celebrity backlash for your issue?

MS. HARGITAY: No, I don't worry about that at all. I think that I've been given an incredible opportunity as far as I can understand the issues from where I stand, from where I stand as an actor and where I stand as a person in the spot that I am. I've dealt with these issues. I've seen the power of community and how it affects survivors. I've seen lives changed, I've seen people have their life back, I've seen people begin again. That moves me deeply.

The other side of that is I've also seen people after they were victims of sexual assault and domestic violence give up. And I used to describe it as you see the lights go out, or people to think that they're not worthy because somebody did something to them. How is that right? You're not worthy because somebody did something to you? No, no, no, they're not worthy, not you. So, to encourage survivors that may have a skewed vision of their beauty and their worth. Sometimes, you need to refocus. I'm passionate about refocusing the blame, where it needs to be.

Again, how convenient is it for a perpetrator if we're not talking about it? We're saying, "It's not important. Go ahead, do it again." By being in this room today, by writing about this, by educating people that don't know about it, they're not going to have that much leeway. They're not going to have it.

So I feel moved by my heroes that are making a difference, Kym Worthy and Sarah and Maile and everyone in Joyful Heart that has devoted their life, and everyone and all of our partners. I mean, the people that came up with the No More campaign, I should actually take credit for that today.

You know, when I thought about-- when I first came up with this, it was funny because I love blue. But saying to people that I sit around brainstorming, you know, this is a train I wanted to get on. This is a train that I'm going, "We're changing people's lives. We're giving them their lives back." So celebrity backlash? Not so much because I started the Joyful Heart Foundation. I didn't sign up for the day. I'm sort of in for the long haul. (Applause)

MS. GREILING KEANE: Someone asks, would you ever run for public office yourself?

MS. HARGITAY: Ha-ha! That's a good one. You know, I could get used to it up here. Not that I see, but thanks so much for asking.

MS. GREILING KEANE: We are almost out of time, unfortunately. But before asking the last question, we have a couple of housekeeping matters to take care of. First of all, I would like to remind you about our upcoming luncheon speakers. On March 15th, we have Thomas Drake who is National Security Administration whistleblower and he'll be our Sunshine Week speaker. On March 18th, we are having a special Speakers Breakfast with Republican National Committee Chairman Reince Priebus. He will talk about the forward strategy of the Republican Party. And on March 20th, we have Kathy

Calvin, who is the President and CEO of the United Nations Foundation. She will discuss the public charities work in supporting the mission and programs of the United Nations.

Second, I would like to present our guest with our traditional National Press Club coffee mug. I hope to see it on the set some time soon.

MS. HARGITAY: Thank you. “Hey Olivia, where’d you get that?” Thank you.

MS. GREILING KEANE: Thank you. And we always wrap up with one final question, so this one’s got to be about the show. We want to know will you still be doing “SVU” next year?

MS. HARGITAY: You little devils, you. Will I be doing the show next year? I certainly hope so. (Applause)

MS. GREILING KEANE: Thank you very much for coming today. I'd also like to thank National Press Club staff including its Journalism Institute and Broadcast Center for organizing today’s event. And finally, here's a reminder, that you can find more information about the National Press Club on our website. If you'd like to get a copy of today’s program, please check out the website at www.press.org. Thank you, and we are adjourned. (Sounds gavel.)

END