

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH WASHINGTON, D.C. MAYOR ADRIAN FENTY  
(D)

SUBJECT: ISSUES AFFECTING THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

MODERATOR: JERRY ZREMSKI, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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MR. ZREMSKI: (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon, and welcome to the  
National Press Club. My name is Jerry Zremski, and I'm the Washington  
Bureau Chief for the Buffalo News and president of the National Press  
Club.

I'd like to welcome the Club members who are here today along  
with their guests and our audience watching on C-SPAN. We're looking  
forward to today's speech, and afterwards, I'll be asking as many  
questions as time permits. Please hold your applause during the  
speech so that we have as much time for questions as possible. And  
for our broadcast audience, I'd like to explain that if you hear  
applause during the speech, it may be from the guests and members of  
the general public who attend our speeches, and not from the working  
press.

I'd now like to introduce our head table guests, and ask them to  
stand briefly when their names are called. From your right: Anthony  
Gallo, a playwright whose play, "Margarita," is opening in New York in  
January, a longtime Club member and D.C. resident; Skip Coltenhauser  
(sp) of naturaltraveler.com, and an independent writer; Nancy Shia  
(sp), freelance photographer and member of the Press Club's  
Photography Committee and someone who has been elected as a D.C.

Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner from Adams Morgan; Anna Ianuso (sp), editor for Ansa Italian News Agency (ph); Phil Fenty, father of the speaker; Keena Sealy (sp), reporter for Bloomberg News and a former constituent of Mayor Fenty's when he was in the City Council; Michelle Cross-Fenty, the first lady of the District of Columbia.

Skipping over the podium, Melissa Charbeneaux (sp) of CBN News, the vice chair of the National Press Club Speaker's Committee; skipping over our speaker for a second, Skip Digiambani (sp), reporter for McGraw-Hill's Energy Division, Platts, and the Speaker's Committee member who organized today's luncheon; Jan Fenty, the mother of the speaker; Trudy Walsh, senior writer for Government Computer News; Andrew Craig, president of Wireless Communications Association International; Dawn Onley (sp), account director for Spire Communications; and Ramish Futani, president of HRTM Corp., and executive producer and host of the Darshan TV Show. (Applause.)

The neighborhood where I live, historic Logan Circle area, about a mile northeast of the White House, has undergone many changes in the decade that I've lived there. And one of the most unusual came in early 2006, when, on weekend days, I suddenly noticed hordes of fresh-faced young people wandering the streets all clad in green. They appeared out of nowhere, it seemed. But they were everywhere, all of a sudden. Outside my door, whenever I left, always asking me the same question: would I vote for Adrian Fenty for mayor of the District of Columbia?

Those enthusiastic young volunteers, and the candidate they loved, inspired thousands of District voters in 2006, enough to elect the former City Councilmember in a landslide as the city's youngest mayor ever.

Mayor Adrian Fenty, our speaker today, came to office promising change, and there's no doubt he's delivered. For one thing, he doesn't wear bow ties. (Laughter.) For another, BlackBerry in hand, he's taken control of the city government and implemented the best practices of other cities in hopes of giving District residents the best possible local government.

And, perhaps most importantly of all, Fenty pushed fiercely ahead with his top priority: Improving the D.C. public school system. He appointed a new schools chancellor and worked to reduce the power of the D.C. Board of Education and increase his oversight of the city's public schools.

Fenty has said many times he believes in public schools, that several Nobel Prize winners went to public school, that public school students can learn to improve their lives and the city around them.

But sometimes the problems of D.C.'s public schools seem as intractable as they are implausible. For years the District had trouble getting textbooks to its students. The latest figures show that two-thirds of the city's students have low reading and math scores. And the mayor's office got 700 complaints about problems in the schools this summer alone.

Together with his new schools chancellor, Michelle Rhee, Fenty

has taken to addressing all those problems with the same diligence he pays to all those e-mails he gets on his BlackBerry. He says schools should be held accountable for their performance. And given that his address today is called "Mayoral Accountability in Education," it seems he wants to be held accountable as well.

Mayor Fenty, welcome to the National Press Club. (Applause.)

MAYOR FENTY: Well, thank you very much, and good afternoon. It is an honor to be here. And I just want to start out with a couple of quick remarks.

First, Melissa to my right told me that she's pretty confident that I'm the only speaker who's had their parents with them at the podium. (Laughter.) So with that in mind, can we give a round of applause to the people who've known me from the beginning, my parents? (Applause.)

And I usually don't give any sources to the media. You all are good enough. But feel free to use my mom as a source. (Laughter.) It won't be biased, I promise you. (Laughter.)

And most importantly, we are all honored today to be joined by a woman who has stood beside me as a regular person and now, as mayor of the District of Columbia, running all over the place, she not only makes sure that the house and household are kept well, but she's an attorney up the street at Perkins Coie, the mother of our twin boys. And she does an amazing job as the first lady of the District of Columbia, Michelle Cross Fenty. (Applause.)

So let me just start off by talking globally. If you look around the country -- we were just talking about Buffalo, New York and Mayor Brown up there, who's a new mayor doing great things for the residents of Buffalo. But it really is an exciting time in the country. There are new energetic mayors in places like San Francisco, Atlanta, Denver, you name it, who are really taking a real private-sector approach towards running their cities.

And when I say private sector, I really mean just getting down to business, real efficiency, holding people accountable, and focused on nothing more than results for the taxpayers. And I think it's having the type of renaissance in the country that people realize who live in the cities -- they may realize outside, but it probably hasn't been talked about in a historical perspective, as it probably soon will be.

Here in Washington, D.C., you see the revitalization. We literally just left the Anacostia River, where Forest City Development is going to build -- I think it's a \$1.5 billion development right next to the new baseball stadium. Earlier this week we were at the Harman Shakespeare Theater, which is an \$89 million project.

And all around the city, residential neighborhoods to downtown, you see the type of investment and energy that didn't exist 10 years ago in Washington, D.C. and didn't exist 10 years ago probably in major cities from New York to Chicago to Los Angeles. And so I think it's a great time for the country.

And still, even with all of the energy by the new projects, there still really is the traditional projects that come across the mayor's desk -- press conferences about crime in an area, press conferences about lawsuits against the city, legislation that needed to be passed.

And then there are the larger issues that still have to be resolved. I call these the higher hanging fruit in the city -- poverty, crime, human services issues. And in the District of Columbia, we, of course, as most people here know, continue to lack voting representation in Congress, which is just up the street, by the way, despite the fact that we all pay federal taxes and have done so for 200 years.

And so their issues abound, no matter what city you are in, but there's probably no larger issue in the big cities of America than education. And Washington, D.C. is right now in the process of facing that issue head-on.

Well, why is education the premier issue? Here in D.C. you've got famous museums, famous monuments, and we talked about the restaurants and the malls, et cetera. You've got old residents and new residents who love the city. But without a world-class public education for our children, I think it's safe to say that none of these other things matter.

The residents who have recently moved to Washington, D.C., the residents who have lived here for a long time, will not be able to maximize their potential if every young person in our city does not have a great opportunity.

But it is a nationwide problem. In LA, only 14 percent of students in the public schools are proficient in science, for example. In history and social science, 20 percent are proficient. And in English, it's just a tad better at 31 percent.

In Miami, another great city represented by a great mayor, they have the nation's fourth-largest school district. But if you're in high school in Miami, you have less than a 50-50 chance of graduating with your classmates.

Here in Washington, D.C., especially on the eastern side of the city, only one in three students on the eastern side finishes high school in five years, and only one in 20 graduates college within five years.

So, for a group this size, that means that only a handful or two of us would have graduated college within five years. It would mean that all of us, the professions that we have, journalists and otherwise, would not be in those professions today.

And this has great implications on the future of a city like Washington, D.C. If your parents and grandparents don't finish high school, I think everyone is aware it's likely that the grandchild or child will not as well. So we have entire generations where this cycle is playing out in our inner cities.

In the District of Columbia, despite the fact we've had 12

consecutive balanced budgets and our employment base is growing, only 28 percent of the jobs in the District are held by residents of this city, according to the D.C. Chamber of Commerce.

The one glaring explanation for this is that our schools are not preparing young people properly for the working world. Indeed, every social ill affecting the population of our city can be traced back to education.

If you take what's happening in these cities, and dozens of others across the United States, I think you can understand why we in our administration have been so uber-focused on education. Literally the day after I was sworn in, we submitted a plan to do, as it has been done in other jurisdictions, have the mayor be put in control.

Well, we want to talk about how you get results in a broken school system. The number one thing that we have said is that you have to have someone who is accountable.

There's a quote by Mayor Villaraigosa of Los Angeles that says that too often in the school system, you get caught up in a debate over who will have the power or who will have the control. But what really should be the debate, Mayor Villaraigosa said, is who will make sure that there is accountability. Bloomberg says, for decades politicians just threw money at our schools without holding them accountable for success, and a generation of children paid a heavy price. I think most people who know the District of Columbia school system know that money is not the issue. In fact, we spend more per capita than most jurisdictions in the country but have -- for too long our results have been at the bottom.

Year after year in D.C., superintendents come and go. The council would continue to appropriate a larger budget for the school system, and again every year test scores went down. Twenty years of reports, a central administration that resembles the most disorganized and inefficient organization that anyone in the government can recall, and examples of inefficiency abound. There's a recent story that the chancellor has told me about of principal who couldn't get the books for her students because of some procurement snafu. Well, the chancellor inquired further only to find out that this huge problem preventing the principal from having the books that she needed was that the budget had been blown by \$1.24. Well, the chancellor said, "Well, how in the world could we then not get the schools merely because we're over the budget?" And of course, she was told, as has probably been the custom for decades, that "those are the rules."

And when you rely on rules instead of relying on what's best for the kids to the point where just being -- just a simple fact of being \$1.24 over a purchase order allows you to not get textbooks to the school -- I think people realize that not only is there severe mismanagement, not only does there need to be a reworking of policy, but again, there is no accountability in the school system.

In the rest of the government, the mayor is in control; the mayor decides who will run the agencies. If they don't get it done, they are relieved of their jobs and the council has direct authority over the budget of the agency. So we decided that if we were going to

mirror some of the progress that you've seen in other agencies -- and my predecessor deserves a tremendous amount of credit for that -- that we would have to have the same type of accountability in the District of Columbia public schools, and that would be that the mayor would have to be in control.

Now, the good thing for us is that we are essentially the fourth biggest -- the fourth big city in this country to go with mayoral control. Going all the way back to Mayor Tom Menino 15 years ago, who first tried the approach, and then coming along to Mayor Daley in Chicago and then Mayor Bloomberg in New York -- all were initially criticized. I think they also were all thought to have been committing political suicide. But if you look at the results of mayoral control, I think you see why it makes sense for Washington, DC.

In Chicago, when Richard Daley faced a \$1.8 billion dollar deficit, he also was able to correct that within a few short years and now operate in the black. He was able to start things that would have been unimaginable under a political school board: mandatory homework, ending social promotion. Of course, in the District of Columbia, a huge majority of our kids can't read by the time they're in the third grade but continue to be promoted. It's inspiring that jurisdictions like New York and Chicago have been able to say, "We are going to stop this process and people are going to be held accountable."

In New York, they've raised graduation rates 20 percent in a school system that's 20 times the size of the District of Columbia, in addition to raising test scores. And if Joel Klein were standing here today, I think one of the things that he would emphasize is that the greatest increases have been amongst the minority children in New York City -- African-American and Latino youth who had the farthest to go.

And so, like these other jurisdictions, after we were able to introduce the bill and get such great support by the council of the District of Columbia and establish mayoral accountability on June 12th of this year, we knew that we had to make sure that we got a great team in place. And all throughout the district government, I'm here to say, you will find the best and the brightest. But when you're trying to turn around a school system that's had decades of neglect, I think it's safe to say that even the best and the brightest wouldn't do. We had to find the best, the brightest, and then some.

Luckily we already had on board Victor Reinoso, who has not only been on the school board but is a real reformer in education. We had a great state superintendent of education, Deborah Gist. And we found the number one facilities person in the city, Alan Lew, who had built a convention center in New York, a convention center in Washington, DC, and was well on his way to building the new baseball stadium here in the nation's capital, and convinced him to take the facilities job knowing that the facilities nightmares of our system are like so many other urban school systems, where there's just been no maintenance and the deferred maintenance are now a big capital problem.

But at the top of our school's hierarchy is the chancellor position, and in choosing this position, we actually went with someone who I think most people would refer to as a nontraditional candidate,

Michelle Rhee. And we chose Michelle because of her management acumen, because she had been a teacher herself and started a program

called the New Teacher Project, which essentially made sure that urban jurisdictions got some of the best and brightest teachers who were looking to come into school systems.

But more than anything, I think what Michelle represents is a real building on what was done in Boston and Chicago and New York. There they also, I think, most often looked at people who were not from the traditional ways of finding chancellors -- nontraditional candidates.

But Michelle is the first chancellor to run a big city school system who is actually from the front lines of the reform movement herself, having been in Teach for America and being part of I think a new generation of people in this country who want to tackle education and who want to do so by going against the grain. It really is a real movement and a real boost to the reform movement to now have one of those, quote, unquote, "outsiders" or frontline reformers actually running a public school system. And if you've looked at some of the press clippings from what she has been able to do, she has already made enormous strides in just convincing people that not only is there accountability but there is a real understanding that responsiveness and efficiency have to be part of running a school system. And most importantly, as we like to say, we believe that this school system, like so many others, for decades has been run for what is best for adults, and the chancellor and I are committed, as is every other district resident, that we will from now on only run the school system for what is best for children.

And so now we are at the point where we have to make sure we are measuring results. You're not going to have a school system merely by hiring a great team, though that is an essential component. We are now looking towards other jurisdictions and looking inward to say, "Well, what are the ways that we will measure our performance?"

We looked to Boston, a school district roughly the size of ours, where the number of 10th graders passing the state English and language arts exam has doubled to 86 percent. In Chicago, they have nearly doubled the number of students in grades three to eight who are proficient in reading and math. In just a couple of weeks, New York City under Mayor Bloomberg won the \$500,000 Broad Prize for its school district's accomplishments under mayoral control, including, as I mentioned, closing achievement gaps for students of color.

We plan to set clear performance goals. We, in the District government, have been using the CapStat program to measure performance by the numbers. We plan to look objectively at response times, expenditures and results in the school system as well. Again, the residents of the District of Columbia deserve the same quantifiable results from their schools that they have come to expect from the rest of the government.

At this moment, for example, we have two teams of auditors who are combing the finances and operations of our school system. This is the first time that an examination of this nature has ever been done.

We expect not only to increase efficiency, but to find ways to save administrative costs and direct education dollars from central administration to where they belong -- and that is the classroom.

Just a little bit about what has gone on since June 12th, the day we took over the school system. Although our students are only in their fifth week of classes and it's too early to start looking at test scores, again, accountability seems to be pushing its way through the school system and we'll continue to push it faster.

There's an example of an employee in our school system who made a \$227,000 mistake. Essentially, a lot of you know that in these legal cases where people take on the school system and say the young person doesn't have -- their child doesn't have all of the resources that they need in the schools -- that the school system doesn't provide those resources -- then the child can go to a different school. Well, one of our employees didn't even bother to respond to the initial legal filing and we found that that happened in a couple of different instances. We found out that the school that the young person was eventually transferred to -- because of the employee's mistake -- cost \$227,000 a year. And so in an effort to show accountability -- and something that has been a hallmark of Chancellor Rhee since she took over -- that employee no longer has their job.

We have hired 425 new teachers and 20 new principals and pay them on time. We've created a new system to keep track of textbooks and deliver more than 97 percent of them to the classrooms on time. Again, these two things at the very least sound like the basics of a school system, but if you know urban education you know that paying teachers on time and getting textbooks to kids on time unfortunately seems like it rarely happens. We scanned and filed more than 4 million disorganized confidential personnel documents. When we arrived in the school system on June 12th, our personnel office

literally had the files strewn all over the floor -- not a good way to make sure you pay people on time or to even know if the people who you're paying actually report to work.

We've fixed up hundreds of classrooms in almost half the schools with both public and private investment; built six new athletic fields and provided new uniforms for every high school team. And later this afternoon we will be releasing new findings and recommendations about how to finally right size the structural weaknesses in our central administration. We'll have a list of employees and how much money they make -- as well as how much money are on leave. We'll stop losing money on food service. We'll cut spending on utilities and security without cutting services. And we'll have a list of the system's contractual obligations for the first time. And again, while these basics may sound like something that should have been taken care of a long time ago, we are here to say that we agree. But the fact of the matter is, under the old system of doing things they were not resolved, but they will be under mayoral control.

President John F. Kennedy once said, "Many months of sacrifice and self-discipline lie ahead -- months in which both our patience and our will will be tested, months in which many threats and denunciations will keep us aware of our dangers." President Kennedy was, of course,



talking about the Cuban Missile Crisis. The schools may not measure up to that national fiasco, but as Kennedy concluded, he said, "The greatest danger of all would be to do nothing." As we go into the next couple of weeks and months and years in the school system, we know that making the tough decision will not be well received by all. There will be lots of pushback. There will be people who literally have made their careers on doing things the way things have always been done. So it will take courage on behalf of the chancellor and the administration, the Council of the District of Columbia, but also on behalf of the residents of the District of Columbia to say that we know there's pushback, but we want to see this administration push ahead.

So what does the future hold for the District of Columbia public schools? Every classroom should be in excellent physical condition with state-of-the-art equipment. Every teacher and principal should have access to top-notch professional development opportunities. The central administration, whether dealing with its own employees or with parents, should have a customer service approach and children have appealing, nutritious choices for breakfast and lunch. We will bring more of our students with special needs into the classrooms of their neighborhood schools, keeping them a part of their own communities. We'll raise test scores and graduation rates. We'll keep working aggressively with nonprofits like the Gates Foundation to double the number of students in the class of 2010 who graduate from college, and triple the number for the class of 2013.

Ladies and gentlemen, nearly 600,000 residents of the capital of the greatest democracy on earth depend on my administration to do this job every day. With their support, patience and everything else, I'm confident that the District of Columbia public schools will be a shining example for the rest of the nation and for the rest of the world -- a place where the promise of a bright future belongs to every student and where every child has a chance to succeed.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MR. ZREMSKI: Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

We have a lot of questions about the schools, a lot of questions about other topics as well. First of all, how long will it be before D.C. has a public school system that it can be proud of?

MAYOR FENTY: Well, I think the best way to answer this question is look at other jurisdictions. The most measurable improvements in New York -- literally, the raising of test scores across the board, especially amongst lower-income and minority youth, have happened within the past year. And I think they took over the school system in 2002. So I think that those 8 percent gains and more in test scores and achievement will probably take a similar amount of time.

What we hope to do at every stage is to show measurable progress. Because if you're like me and have lived in this city your whole life you know that for decades you saw almost no progress in the school system. So the renovation of buildings, the hiring and paying of teachers on time, making sure that textbooks are available and making

sure that if things go wrong that someone is held accountable are things that have already been done at both the small and intermediate levels and we'll keep pushing that to the bigger issues as we're in control of the school system longer.

MR. ZREMSKI: President Bush talks about accountability with his No Child Left Behind education initiative. What's the fundamental difference between your approach to accountability and the president's?

MAYOR FENTY: Yeah, I think the president has some similarities in that, you know, they want to hold schools accountable in the No Child Left Behind Act. And it makes sense. I think if a school is underperforming, then you need to have a private sector approach. You shouldn't keep that school running. You should find a way to either reconstitute it or find a school that is working in the system and strengthen that one.

The difference, of course, I think is in the implementation. Where No Child Left Behind I think will move on the broader, more federal level, we can do it on the ground. We can make immediate changes even before a school gets to be nonperforming and has to be closed down or reconstituted. So we think that that's an important component to running an urban school system in the 21st century as well.

MR. ZREMSKI: Should parents be held accountable for the performance of their children in school? And if so, how does one do that?

MAYOR FENTY: Well, I think the best approaches I've heard of to really try and to get parents more involved in the school system is really to do it more with the carrot.

When I was on the council, people kind of batted around various ideas to give a stick to parents, but it never really got anywhere. Contrast that with Miami under Superintendent Rudy Crew, where they've established these Parent Academies that are set up after school in so many areas of Miami and the parents come in, get not only trained and taught about how to supplement what's happening in the school and during homework -- not only are taught classes themselves but really taught the essential ingredient for any parent who has a kid in any school system, private or public and that is to be more demanding -- to really push the principal and the teachers, mayors and chancellors to do more with their children and more with their children's education. So we're kind of looking more at that Parent Academy model that they've had successful in Miami and other places.

MR. ZREMSKI: How important are pre-school and after-school programs to ensuring the success of public school students?

MR. FENTY: I would say critical. I think both in the academic world and in the quote-unquote "real world," we've seen how early child education makes all the difference in the world. And here in Washington, D.C., the failure to make sure that young people learn to read at an early age -- learn the other basics of education -- it has drastic results. A child who can't read by the time they're in the

third grade never will probably catch up, and we have to reverse that immediately. And I think it starts by emphasizing earlier child -- early childhood education.

MR. ZREMSKI: Are there any areas where the D.C. schools are working well? If so, why?

MR. FENTY: Sure.

The -- there are -- and I'm a -- I graduated from D.C. public schools as did tons of other people who I think you would qualify or categorize as successful. So there are a number of successful teachers, a number of successful principals and even successful schools. But even in the success stories, the problem of accountability still remains. So if you take a school -- for example, like Coresmann (ph) or Banneker that not only are some of the tops schools in the region, but top schools in the country -- if you go talk to the principal or teachers of those schools, you'll find that there is just far too many "nos" coming out of central administration. What do I mean by that? Well, if the principal wants to set up some new program that makes sense to them and how they can continue to

improve test scores and do well, the central administration very quickly and eagerly finds a way to tell them that they can't do that. And we really see our responsibility both in the areas of our school system where things aren't working well and even where they are to find ways to get to "yes" -- to find ways to enhance the principal's creativity, ingenuity and to give them the flexibility they need to succeed.

MR. ZREMSKI: How have D.C. charter schools shaped your initiatives for the public school system? And do you see their influence expanding in the future?

MR. FENTY: Sir, I think the charter schools are probably more reflective of how school systems were originally thought to work. I never -- I don't think that anyone ever envisioned that a central administration would become as big, as bloated and as bureaucratic as it has in some these big cities. Someone said while we were going through the school reform debate that the goal of an urban school system should be not to have a system -- I'm sorry -- should not be to have an excellent school system, but rather to have a system of excellent schools. And so what that -- how that plays out is that you should not try and have a cookie-cutter approach -- that you can have an excellent school, a School Without Walls. That's very different than an excellent school like Banneker in our system, and I think that's where the charter schools have gotten right. And I think Bloomberg has taken the right approach.

You don't ever want to get into this thing where it's either/or. You can have successful charter schools and you can have successful traditional public schools.

MR. ZREMSKI: Do you believe the fix for a broken school system in D.C. should include a plan for school vouchers? Why or why not?

MR. FENTY: Well, I'm not a traditional voucher proponent. We

have a voucher system here in the District of Columbia that was established under my predecessor. There are kids in the program. We're relying upon it and I have every expectation that it will be renewed in the outyears. But suffice it to say, our focus is 100 percent on making our public school system work for everyone.

MR. ZREMSKI: Do you plan to implement greater security measures to protect students and teachers?

MR. FENTY: Well, if this means the security in the traditional sense absolutely -- we have to do so. You cannot have schools where people feel unsafe, whether they are a child going there or a parent picking up their child or certainly a teacher. And we have a lot of good ideas. I think some of the best practices here rely somewhat and partially on law enforcement, and we've got law enforcement running our school -- the Metropolitan Police Department is in control. And they're going to keep doing a good job and keep improving. But there's been a real movement to get peer mediators into the schools, and we really support that program.

Here in Washington, D.C., we have a recreation program called Roving Leaders. We have nonprofit -- like a group called the Peaceaholics which come from the same life experiences of many of our quote-unquote "troubled youths," and I think will connect with them more than a mayor or a chancellor or certainly a -- more than a police officer ever could and steer them in the right direction. So I think it's both a law enforcement issue as well as it's a peer mediation and peer intervention issue.

MR. ZREMSKI: Three contractors were fired yesterday, but the schools' project managers who were also blamed were reassigned rather than fired. Why?

MR. FENTY: Yeah.

So one of the two things that we're working on right now in real time is legislation that would allow the chancellor and the school's facilities director greater flexibility in holding people accountable. And quite simply, the old way of doing things just required so many different bureaucratic hoops that it was impossible to hold someone accountable. We think that a legislative change is in order. We're currently drafting that. We'll be submitting it to the Council of the District of Columbia and we believe that these two leaders, if we're going run the world's best school system, have got to have the ability that, in the case just like that one, holds people accountable. And once that legislative change is made, expect it to happen rapidly.

MR. ZREMSKI: Most of the school buildings that we have repaired need to be torn down. Why spend taxpayers' money on old buildings?

MR. FENTY: So -- I always remember that -- something that someone told me -- when I heard someone -- I think that question was asked in a public forum one time and someone answered the question that Harvard has old buildings. (Laughter.) And what I think they mean by that is that just having an old building doesn't mean that it needs to be torn down. What you need in old buildings is they need to be maintained and they need to be given care. And that is what has

been missing from this school system. I suspect it's the same in urban school systems around the country.

MR. ZREMSKI: Okay.

We also have some questions that are a little bit more political in nature. What is the primary hurdle that has prevented D.C. from getting the votes in Congress and do you think that will change during your administration?

MR. FENTY: Well, it's hard to pick just one thing that has prevented the city from getting the vote. The -- as I look to the vote that the Senate fell short on last month, I saw the ability to get to the point. We got 57 votes for the day -- this Norton bill that would have given us the full vote in the House of Representatives

-- I saw that as a real confluence of so many different positive things. We had great media focus on the issue. The citizens of the city really pushed hard, especially through the D.C. Voter Organization, Council and the mayor -- both my predecessor and the current Council tried to work very hard to make sure that they understand that it is the priority of the local officials. And then you just had great -- you really did have bipartisan support -- not enough at the end in the Senate from the Republicans, and even a couple of Democrats fell short.

But I think we've got great momentum. I was on the floor of the United States Senate when they took the vote and I really just say, in my honest opinion, I think that there were more votes there than 60. But everyone knows how legislatures work, and there's a lot of arm-twisting, et cetera. And what we have to do now is both, kind of, prevent the arm-twisting, try to reverse it, and then also look to the next elections in -- next Fall, as a way to build on those 57 votes.

MR. ZREMSKI: Have you talked to Speaker Pelosi or Senator Reid about putting the voting issue on a "must pass" omnibus spending bill? (Laughter.) Just an idea.

MAYOR FENTY: Right. (Laughs.) Someone knows the legislative process. (Laughter.) I will. I will.

MR. ZREMSKI: Oh! (Laughter, applause.) I think we have some news there (laughs).

Someone who also may know the legislative process asks, won't the possibility of District residents getting Congressional representation ultimately be determined by amending the U.S. Constitution? Why not pursue that instead of the approach you're taking now?

MAYOR FENTY: Yeah, well the House of Representatives can be added to without a Constitutional amendment -- and there are legal scholars who have opined on this, expressly, on the right of people like Ken Starr and others. So we thought this is a great approach for right now in the District of Columbia, and I don't think that it means that there's not a right approach for getting the full franchise. And I think most people do realize that to get to full statehood, it is going to have to take a Constitutional amendment.

And we think that should happen as well, but we thought that there was real merit in the fight for the -- for the voting member of the House of Representatives and we'll keep pushing for that as well.

MR. ZREMSKI: The Supreme Court is planning to take up the issue of whether D.C.'s gun law is unconstitutional. What would, or could your administration do if the Court finds that the law is unconstitutional?

MAYOR FENTY: Okay, so if the Supreme Court either rejects our petition to hear the case, or if they agree with the lower court then, just factually, it will be up to the local government to write a law that complies with the lowest court's ruling.

What the lower court found, which flies in the face of almost -- Constitutional interpretation for 100 years, is that the Second Amendment applies to individuals. The Supreme Court has held itself, that the Supreme Court -- I'm that the Second Amendment only applies to state militias, and that any jurisdiction, if they want to give individuals the right to carry handguns, they can, but that there's no Constitutional right.

And so we're going to argue that case. We're confident we'll win., but hypothetically, if it didn't go our way, we'd have to write a law that would allow people to have handguns inside the homes. It's important to note that the lower court said nothing about handguns on -- in public or on the streets of the District of Columbia, only allow for them to be held in the home.

And, of course, that law has not been overturned, so right now handguns are still illegal everywhere, including inside the homes.

MR. ZREMSKI: In light of the heated debate over illegal immigration, how have your views developed on whether D.C. should become a sanctuary city?

MAYOR FENTY: To be candid, there really just has not been a lot of discussion on this issue. We probably need to have that discussion and debate, but it hasn't happened yet -- not since I've been a mayor.

MR. ZREMSKI: You have endorsed Barack Obama for president. How involved do you plan to get in his presidential campaign?

MAYOR FENTY: Well, we've already tried to raise the profile of the senator here in the District of Columbia, and in other places where I think people pay attention to the issues of the city, and urban issues in general. I think the short answer is that when you get in a campaign, you do everything possible to win. And so count me in on that "doing everything possible" category.

(Laughter.)

MR. ZREMSKI: Why isn't he doing better in the polls?

(Laughter.)

MAYOR FENTY: You know, I've talked to the senator over the past month, I think that presidential campaigns -- unlike a campaign like the one I ran, is a very focused, strategic campaign. And we are now in October, the primaries are still months away. I think people expect, not only for there to be a shift, but for things -- for exposure to really grow over the coming months.

I think even though in Washington D.C. Senator Obama's name is a very big name, across the country and in the heartlands of the country he's still working on building the name recognition. I think that now -- the time between October and the first primaries early next year, I think you're see his name recognition grow exponentially and then that gap will close.

MR. ZREMSKI: We also have a lot of questions about city operations, starting with this: Washington has been listed as the 66th city in the nation in terms of foreclosures, with over a 400 percent increase since July of 2006. What proposals are on your plate to work on this problem?

MAYOR FENTY: You know, I know that our attorney general is working both on the foreclosure issue and predatory lending. For whoever asked that question, expect there to be an announcement about how we can go after people who are preying on our residents, especially our lower income and senior residents, within the coming weeks.

MR. ZREMSKI: When the city moves on absentee landlords demanding payment and fines imposed for health and safety violations, what safeguards are there for the tenants of those buildings?

MAYOR FENTY: Yeah, I think this is kind of -- this situation is a real situation where the city has to be careful in not cracking down on a landlord to kick everyone out who lives there, and then the landlord, kind of, gets to, in the future, sell the property.

So what we have tried to do, there's -- there's money available, and then there's laws available, to make sure that if a property is not being kept up, and the landlord won't do it, that the government will step in, fix the property up with dollars that have been appropriated, and then put a lien on the property owner, rather than saying it doesn't meet code so everyone has to move out. And then, of course, they would find another place, and eventually the landlord would sell it at a higher price. That's the way we're trying to preserve affordable housing in the city.

MR. ZREMSKI: How can we make the process of getting building permits easier, and getting rid of the bad reputation that the District has for allowing people to get building permits?

MAYOR FENTY: That's a great question. One, management, our new director of our Permits office, Linda Argo, is first rate and she is steadily moving through the bureaucracy and weeding out people who don't understand that you have to get people's permits issued, and you have get inspections done within a matter of hours and not months.

And then what we've done, is we've opened up the permitting process. If you go to our -- to the Consumer Regulatory Affairs Department now you'll find all of the people who take your information sitting out in the open. And so you don't have to worry about what's happened, once you file something, behind the walls of the agency -- so that's a private sector approach.

And then three, last month we announced that even more of the applications, permits, licenses, et cetera, can be done on-line. And we hope to move towards a stage where upwards of 70 percent of the things that need to be done at the Permits office can be done on-line, and quickly.

MR. ZREMSKI: This question comes from someone who obviously disagrees on the building permits issue. (Laughs.) Many of our city's landmarks have been destroyed and more are marked for demolition. What will you do to keep our city's character when giant projects are taking over the city?

MAYOR FENTY: I think that, 1) we do have a historic preservation process. As many know, a lot of the neighborhoods in this city have been around for a long time and are unbelievable, and we do have a historic designation process for a whole neighborhood. And that, in large measure, will help protect those neighborhoods.

It doesn't apply across the city, and so in other places what we're trying to do is to make sure that restrictions on the ability to build over a lot -- or too tall in an area, will hopefully preserve the architectural quality of the neighborhood.

And our planning director is actually looking to see if there's any ways that we can continue to preserve the community, and to really support a lot of the developers in the area who are very conscious of the historic importance of the city's neighborhoods. We've got a great planner, and she's coming forward with more ideas, and we'll be rolling them out.

MR. ZREMSKI: What are the plans for the evacuation of Washington citizens in the event of a terrorist attack? This guest says, "I live at 26th and Pennsylvania Avenue and have no car. How can I leave town in an emergency?"

MAYOR FENTY: Okay. So there are -- there is a transportation evacuation route planned. It's available on the website. And one of the things that we did in the -- in last month was to commit to making sure that we revised that to kind of look at situations that have happened since September 11th -- Katrina being the biggest example of that. And our homeland security-EMA director is doing that right now. We expect to release it sometime in October.

But what's important about places like the District of Columbia is that it is probably just as important to prepare to have shelter in place as it is to evacuate to some other shelter. It's very likely that the safest place that you'll find is where you are right when a disaster occurs. And so what some other big city mayors like Gavin Newsom of San Francisco have done is to establish a real intense effort to alert people about what is needed to shelter in place. And



those are pretty much the supplies, resources and information you need in the first 72 hours after an emergency. So I just stole and copied Mayor Newsom's idea about his website, 72hours.org, and our chief technology officer is going to do a website exactly like that and we'll put brochures together that have the same information, pass it out to as many places as possible.

And one thing that people don't realize is that -- I know people criticize WMATA a lot, and you know, that -- they have to defend themselves; they're a big transit organization -- but one of the things they did right was they kept the transit -- the trains going during the September 11th terrorist attacks. And that would have -- and that goes right to your question. That would have caused an amazing amount of gridlock, had they not done so, so it was a good decision.

MR. ZREMSKI: When will your administration make a decision on whether to put meters in DC cabs? (Laughter.)

MAYOR FENTY: October 17th

MR. ZREMSKI: This year?

MAYOR FENTY: Yeah.

MR. ZREMSKI: Okay. Good. (Applause.) Wow, more news.

How concerned are you about a potential lack of parking at the new baseball stadium?

MAYOR FENTY: Well, it is on the top list of things that we're working on. We're trying to do two things: one, to promote mass transit, to promote to people actually just not even driving to the stadium but using the three subway lines that are around the Nationals stadium. And then we are working to find new ways to get lots available.

We're almost there. Roughly we're at a point where everyone who has been going to Nationals games and parking could find a place to park around the area, but we want to increase it just in case. And of course, we fully expect that even more people will be going to the games on average as they continue to do even better.

MR. ZREMSKI: When will you decide on the developer for the new soccer stadium?

MAYOR FENTY: I think that question is probably more -- we decide on a developer for the Poplar Point site, and that will -- the responses to the RFP are due in October, and I'm pretty sure there's a 45-day window that the administration has to decide on what is the best use for Poplar Point.

Now, the tie-in to the soccer stadium is that there was a prior proposal to just sole-source the land for that purpose. We decided that 70 acres on the Anacostia could only be developed after vetting it out and getting great ideas from a lot of different developers. We expect many of those will probably propose a soccer stadium, and if

that is what's best for that area and for the people of the city, then that's what we will decide.

MR. ZREMSKI: What's the ultimate answer to the low water pressure problem in the district which is hampering the efforts of firefighters?

MAYOR FENTY: Yeah. It -- the short answer is to get the larger pipes, actually. The pipes are old. They're six inches. In some of the newer parts of the city, the pipes are 20 inches. And I mean, you don't have to know anything about anything to know that a 20-inch pipe is going to move three times as much water as a six-inch pipe. (Laughs.)

MR. ZREMSKI: (Laughs.)

MAYOR FENTY: And we've got to make it happen faster, and we will.

MR. ZREMSKI: Okay.

We are almost out of time, but before I ask the last question, we have a couple of important matters to take care of. First of all, let me remind our members of our future speakers. On Monday October 8th, Congressman Dave Obey of Wisconsin will discuss the showdown over the federal budget priorities. On October 10th, Robert Zoellick, president of the World Bank, will be here to discuss an inclusive and sustainable globalization. And on October 18th, Lynne Cheney, wife of the vice president, will be here to discuss "Blue Skies, No Fences," her soon-to-be-released memoir about growing up in the years after World War II and the 1950s.

Second, we have a lot of traditions here at the National Press Club, including the presentation of our plaque to our speaker, and the much coveted National Press Club mug. (Applause.)

MAYOR FENTY: Wonderful. Wow, thank you very much. Thank you very much.

MR. ZREMSKI: Sure. Sure.

MAYOR FENTY: I appreciate it.

MR. ZREMSKI: Okay.

And the last question: You're quite famous for the use of your Blackberry -- or Blackberrys, I should say. There's a new medical condition called "Blackberry thumb," and I was wondering if you had ever suffered from it. (Laughter.)

MAYOR FENTY: Yeah. So I think the way to solve is to -- solve that problem is to have three Blackberrys because then you're not using the same -- different type of Blackberry.

MR. ZREMSKI: Then you can IM your doctor.

MAYOR FENTY: Yeah. You can just use different ones. It's like cross-training.

MR. ZREMSKI: Oh, okay. (Laughter.)

MAYOR FENTY: Yeah. (Applause.)

MR. ZREMSKI: Thank you very much, Mayor Fenty.

I'd like to thank all of you for coming today. I'd also like to thank National Press Club staff members Melinda Cooke, Pat Nelson, Jo Anne Booz and Howard Rothman for organizing today's lunch. Also thanks to the National Press Club library for its research.

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Thank you. We're adjourned. (Applause.)

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