

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH RICHARD TRUMKA, PRESIDENT OF AFL-CIO

SUBJECT: RECENT EFFORTS TO CURB COLLECTIVE BARGAINING RIGHTS IN SEVERAL STATES, INCLUDING WISCONSIN AND OHIO. HE ALSO WILL DISCUSS THE POLITICAL OUTLOOK FOR THE 2012 ELECTIONS, AND THE IMPACT OF AUSTERITY BUDGETS ON LOCAL, STATE AND FEDERAL WORKERS.

MODERATOR: MARK HAMRICK, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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MARK HAMRICK: (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon, and welcome to the National Press Club. My name is Mark Hamrick. I'm a broadcast journalist for the Associated Press. And I'm the 104th President of the National Press Club. We are the world's leading professional organization for journalists, committed to our profession's future through our programming, events such as this, while also working to foster a free press worldwide. For more information about the National Press Club, please visit our website at www.press.org. And to donate to programs offered to the public through our Eric Friedheim National Journalism Library, you can find information there also, at www.press.org/library.

So, on behalf of our members worldwide, I'd like to welcome our speaker and those of you attending today's event. Our head table includes guests of our speaker, as well as working journalists who are Club members. And so, if you happen to hear applause, I'd remind you that members of the general public are in attendance. So, that does not necessarily point to a lack of journalistic objectivity.

I'd also like to welcome our C-SPAN and Public Radio audiences. Our luncheons are featured on our member-produced weekly Podcast from the National Press Club. And that's available, for free, on iTunes. You can also follow the action on Twitter, using the hash tag-- #NPCLUNCH.

After our guest speech concludes today, we'll have a Q and A, and I'll ask as many questions as time permits. And now it's time to introduce our head table guests. I'd ask each of you up here to stand up briefly as your name is announced. And we'd ask that you hold your applause until all are introduced.

So, from your right, Donovan Slack is a White House reporter for the *Boston Globe*. And we're proud to announce she is a new member of the National Press Club. Thank you for doing that and for being here today. Holly Rosencranz is a labor reporter for Bloomberg news. Paul Shinkman, he's a radio reporter for WTOP, also a new member. Alex Hannah is a member of the Wisconsin American Federation of Teacher, Co-President of the Teaching Assistance Association, AFT Local 3220, a guest of the speaker. Sabrina Eaton is a Washington correspondent for the Cleveland Plain Dealer. Arlene Holt Baker is the AFL-CIO Executive Vice President and a guest of the speaker today.

Skipping over the podium, Marilyn Geewax is Senior Business Editor at NPR, Vice-Chair of our Press Club Speakers Committee. Thank you for all your work in that regard, Marilyn. Skipping over our guest speaker, Rod Kuckro is Chief Editor of Platts, a member of the Press Club Speakers Committee who organized today's event. And thank you for that, Rod. John Sweeney, you'll recognize him. He's President Emeritus of the AFL-CIO, guest of the speaker. Thank you for being here today, Mr. Sweeney. Jennifer DuPaul is a reporter for the *Fiscal Times*. Beth Ward, a reporter with Platts. And Craig Gilbert is *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* Washington Bureau Chief.

Let's give them a round of applause. [applause]

As you probably know by now, organized labor in America has been under renewed attack this year. While it has not been as physically violent as seen in our nation's history, it has often been bitter, at times. The benefits and collective bargaining rights of unions representing teachers, firefighters, police and civil servants, have become a special target.

In more than a dozen states, politicians want unions to help reduce budget shortfalls by paying more for their benefits and giving up the abilities and negotiate working conditions. Much of the impetus behind all this anti-union legislation might be linked back to the 2010 election, which flipped control of many Governors' seats and legislatures from Democrat to Republican.

In April, Ohio's Governor signed into law a bill stripping state and local workers of their collective bargaining rights. And a similar bill, signed by Wisconsin's Governor, appears headed to that state's Supreme Court.

But Democratic Governors, too, in places like Massachusetts and Connecticut, for example, want union give-backs to help balance their budgets. Their demands may not be driven so much by ideology as fiscal necessity. But, for a union matter, that difference may seem to be academic.

The assault on labor is not limited to public employees. Fourteen states recently have considered right-to-work bills, barring mandatory union dues in private sector workplaces. All of this occurring at a time when unions are struggling to maintain their membership. Today 15 million, or 12 percent of working Americans, belong to unions. That happens to be the lowest level in 70 years and compares with roughly 22 million in 1980, when our speaker was just beginning his career as a union activist and as a leader.

As for our speaker today, Richard Trumka was raised in the coalfields of Southwest Pennsylvania. After earning his law degree at Villanova University in 1974--that's where my son Christopher is a rising sophomore (have to put a plug in for him)--having actually worked in the coalmines, our guest speaker went to work for the United Mineworkers Union, eventually becoming, at age 33, the youngest President in that union's history. That was in 1982.

He served three terms and brought the mineworkers into the AFL-CIO. In 1995 he became Secretary/Treasurer of the AFL-CIO and served in that post until his election in 2009 as the fifth President of the 55 unions in the nation's largest labor federation, representing more than 12 million members.

Please give a warm National Press Club welcome to Richard Trumka.

[applause]

RICHARD TRUMKA: I want to thank you for that kind introduction. And I want to thank the Press Club for inviting me to speak here today. And I'll get right into it, quite frankly. Oh, by the way, I wanted to thank the chef for those wonderful cookies. [laughter] Tools(?) that all of you, I'm sure, recognize and work with over this period.

You know, I guess how can we make sense of the spectacle that's been unfolding across the American political landscape? As Mark alluded to, politicians in Wisconsin and Ohio and a dozen other states are trying to take away workers' rights to organize and bargain for a better life. But that's not all.

In state after state, politicians are attacking voter rights by imposing ID requirements, by shortening early voting periods, by blocking young people from voting because they're "too liberal." And even levying criminal penalties and fines for breaking arbitrary rules in the voter registration process, all of which so it'll be harder for people to vote, especially the least privileged among us.

Now, just in Wisconsin, listen to the list of who doesn't have state issued voter IDs that'll be needed to cast a ballot under legislation that Governor Scott Walker will sign next week. Twenty-three percent of elderly Wisconsinites. Fifty-nine percent of Latino women. Fifty-five percent of African American men overall. And 78 percent of African American men who are between 18 and 24 years of age.

Now, budget proposals unveiled in Washington and state capitals across the country this year revealed a despicable canvas of cruelty. In Michigan, a state Senator thinks foster children should be required by law to purchase secondhand clothes with the \$79 dollar annual stipend they get for those clothes.

In Maine, the Governor thinks more children should go to work at half the minimum wage. In North Carolina the legislature thinks that we should balance the budget on the backs of autistic children. In Arizona the state Senate President floats the idea of locking up protesting public employees in desert tent city jails. In New York a billionaire mayor proposes to fire 5,000 teachers, rather than tax the bonuses of Wall Street executives who brought down the American economy.

And not just meanness, but destructiveness, a willful desire to block the road to the future. Now, how else can you explain Governors of states with massive unemployment refusing to allow high speed rail lines to be built in their state? How else can you explain these same Governors' plans to defund higher education, close schools, fire teachers, when we know that, without an educated America, we have no future whatsoever.

Here in Washington, where Republicans in Congress have defunded housing counselors and fuel aid for the poor, and they're blocking worker training and transportation infrastructure. I think the final outrage of these budgets is hidden in the fine print. Because, in state after state, and here in Washington, these so-called fiscal hawks are actually doing almost nothing to cut the deficit.

The federal budget embraced by House Republicans, for example, cut \$4.3 trillion in spending, but gives out \$4.2 trillion in tax cuts that disproportionately benefit wealthy individuals and corporations. Florida is gutting the jobless workers, aid for jobless workers, and using the money saved to cut already low business taxes.

And, at the end of the day, our governments will be in no better fiscal shape than when we started. But they're just being used as a pass-through, if you will, to enrich the already rich at a time when inequality in this country stands at historic levels.

Now, think about the message these budgets send. Sacrifice is for the weak. The powerful and the well-connected, well they get tax cuts so they can become more powerful and more well-connected. All these incredible events should be understood as part of a single challenge.

And it's not just a political challenge. It's actually a moral challenge. Because these events signal a new and a dangerous phase of concerted effort to change the very nature of America, to replace the Land of Liberty and Justice for All with the Land of the Rich, by the Rich, and for the Rich.

You see, I personally believe the United States is not a place as much as it is an idea. For working people, the United States of America has offered, from its foundation,

a promise that everyone can be a full participant in national life, a promise that we the people make the rules, so that hard work is rewarded with economic security, and a fair share of the wealth that we all helped create. Now, that promise has always been a work in progress.

This year we commemorate the 150th anniversary of our bloodiest war, a war that resulted in the extension of the American promise to African Americans, who did so much of the work of creating the United States.

We were the first country in the history of the world to embrace the idea that you don't have to own land to vote, that citizens come from-- citizenship comes from where you live, not what you own, or who your parents were. We were the first country to make land available to those who had worked that land, in the Homestead Act.

And, in the modern era, giant corporations dominated our economy. We pioneered the idea that we had a right to a voice on the job, a right made real when we came together to form unions and to bargain collectively. And, while Boeing and the Chamber of Commerce may not like it, the law of the land protects working people who exercise that right against any retaliation by their employers.

Since 1960s, public employees finally won those same rights. Working people remember full well that these rights were not easily won. The pivotal 1968 Memphis Sanitation Workers Strike began with two men crushed to death in a garbage truck, and ended with Dr. Martin Luther King giving his life for the cause of public workers' rights to organize together.

From the beginning of this country, through our efforts and our ideas, working people have made the American dream real. And what is that dream? Well, it's the idea that, if you work hard and you play by the rules, you'll enjoy economic security and a better future for your children. It's not that a few of us will be rich, but that all of us will be treated fairly, that we look after each other, and that we all have a share in the wealth that we all helped create.

This spring, working people are engaged in a great struggle to defend their dream, in Green Bay and Indianapolis and Benton Harbor, Michigan, and in Columbus, Ohio. And not just in the Midwest, in New York and Los Angeles and in Florida and Texas, quite frankly in every corner of our nation.

The struggle began after last November's elections brought to power politicians in state capitals across the heartland who had a hidden agenda, an agenda worked out at posh resorts with the Koch Brothers and the American Legislative Exchange Council and other shadowy groups.

Politicians like John Kasich and Scott Walker campaigned, promising to do something about jobs, only to reveal, when they took office, that their jobs agenda was to make them disappear. But the real passion, their real passion was for eliminating the

rights of working people and destroying their unions, who are standing in their way of their agenda.

And, in response, working people took to the streets. On April 4th, under the banner of “We are One,” we came together all across America. And then we did so again on May 1st, when we stood together with our immigrant brothers and sisters, saying again, that “We are Truly One.”

In signs all across the rotunda in Wisconsin State House, we proclaimed that we were there to defend the principle that, in America, we look out after each other. And one of the people who was there is here with us today. And I’d like to introduce him. Alex Hannah is a graduate assistant at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a Co-President of the Teachers Assistance Association of the American Federation of Teachers. Stand up please, Alex. [applause]

Now Alex stood up for teachers and other public workers in Madison over the last couple of months, even as he built solidarity with workers in the Middle East. You see, his family comes from Egypt. And he strengthened links between movements for change all around the world. And Alex, I want to thank you for your inspiration and everything that you have done so far. You’ve been a wonderful example for all of us.

I would also like to thank those Democratic Senators in Wisconsin who stood up and walked out on behalf of working people. [applause] And those Democratic Senators in Indiana, who did the same thing and brought a screeching halt to right to work. [applause] And, quite frankly, I’d like to thank our Democratic and Republican friends in the Ohio Legislature that stood up for workers. They deserve a round of applause. [applause]

You see, Alex embodies the fact that we are not a nation of isolated individuals. We’re a land of communities. We’re a land of families. Our republic, our democracy is an expression of our solidarity, of our common values, and our common life as a nation. In America, firefighters rush into burning buildings every day, risking their lives to save people that they’ve never met. Social workers care for other people’s abused children. And home health workers provide care and companionship for those who need it.

And every day, you and I pay our Social Security taxes and Medicare. And that same money is sent out again to provide comfort and security to other people’s parents and grandparents.

See, this is not just a matter of morality. But it also makes economic sense. And being a community makes more economic sense today than it ever has in the past. And it’ll simply not be enough to beat back the Scott Walkers and the John Kasichs and the Koch Brothers.

American’s economic fate depends on us coming together, to educate our children, to invest in our infrastructure, to face the threat of climate change, and to

reverse the yawning economic inequality that threatens our future. And let me be specific.

Unemployment stands at nine percent. Underemployment is at 16 percent. Housing prices are falling. And foreclosures remain at historic highs. Economic growth is hovering around two percent annually, not enough to put a dent in unemployment, especially as tax cuts expire and as the Recovery Act winds down, and state and local governments gear up for more deep cuts.

Yet, instead of having a national conversation about putting America back to work, to build the future, the debate here in Washington is about how fast we can destroy the fabric of our country, about breaking the promises that we made to our parents and our grandparents.

Now understand, the Ryan budget destroys jobs. It destroys almost all the jobs created during the recovery so far. It guts Medicare. It attacks Social Security, the one piece of our retirement security system that actually works. And now we see Speaker Boehner and his colleagues engage in a new round of blackmail, with a ransom note that reads, "Cut Medicare, dismantle the government, destroy hundreds of thousands of jobs to fund more tax cuts for the rich, or we'll cause the United States to default on its debt."

Now, why is our national conversation in such a destructive play? Not because we're impoverished. We've never been richer. The American economy has never produced as much wealth as it produces today. But we feel poor, because the wealth in our society has flowed to a handful among us. One hundred percent of all income gains going to the top ten percent in the last 20 years.

And they and the politicians who pander to the worst instincts of the wealthy would rather break promises to our parents and grandparents and deny our children a future than to pay their fair share of taxes.

You see, America's real deficit is a moral deficit, where political choices come down to foster children, forcing them to wear hand-me-down clothes, while cutting taxes for profitable corporations. Powerful political forces are seeking to silence working people, to drive us out of the national conversation.

And I can think of no greater proof of the moral decay in our public life than that of Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker would dare to give a Martin Luther King Day speech hailing-- hailing Dr. King. And, at the same time that he had drafted a bill to take away the collective bargaining rights from sanitation workers in Wisconsin.

See, the ultimate goal of those who blame workers for Wall Street's economic crisis is to unravel the fabric of our common life, in pursuit of greed, and in pursuit of power. In this environment, working people and our unions must do more, more than just protect our own rights to a voice in the life of our nation. We must also raise our voice to

win a better future for all working people, every last one of them, here in America and around the globe.

See, here is what we're going to be doing. First, we're going to use that voice to end the Scott Walker agenda as a viable political strategy, by winning recall elections in Wisconsin and citizen vetoes of destructive legislation in other states, and then retaking State Houses. [applause]

Then we'll spend the summer holding the elected leaders in Congress, as well as states accountable to one measure: Are you improving? Or are you degrading life for working families? And, moving forward, we're looking hard at how we work in this nation's political arena.

We've listened hard. And, what workers want is an independent labor movement that builds power of working people, in the workplace and in political life. Working people want a labor movement strong enough to help return balance to our economy, fairness to our tax system, security to our families, and moral and economic standing to our nation.

See, our role is not to build the power of a political party or a candidate. It's to improve the lives of working families and strengthen our economy, our country. And it doesn't matter if candidates and parties are controlling the wrecking ball or simply standing aside to let it happen. The outcome is the same either way, to us.

If leaders aren't blocking the wrecking ball and advancing working families' interest, then working people will not support them. This is where our focus will be now, in 2012, and beyond. We will uphold the dignity of work and restore respect for working people.

In this season's political battles, teachers and nurses and firefighters have been vilified. Decent jobs with economic security have been cast as more than America's workers deserve. Low wage, part-time, temporary, no-benefit work is being sold as the "new normal" for the economy.

And we know that only a dynamic, effective movement of working people, working together, can reclaim the value of work. So our unions must reach out to every working person in America, to those whose jobs have been outsourced and downsized, to carwash workers in Los Angeles, to domestic workers who had few legal rights, to freelancers and young workers who had gigs rather than jobs.

And together, with the AFL-CIO's construction and manufacturing workers, our pilots and painters, our plumbers and public employees, our bakers and others, we will be heard. Because the stakes are so high for working America and for us, for our working families.

So the question becomes, will the country be ruled by greed, by people who would cut or take pensions away from first responders, people who would take away the fundamental human rights of our workers, who would choose tax breaks for the richest among us, over a future for all of us? Or, will we be a country where we choose a future, where we look out for each other, where we all have a voice?

We'll only win investments in our future if we again embrace the idea that we are one national community, that our identities are bound up with the promise that all of us have a voice in the workplace, at the ballot box, and that we're all responsible, in a deep sense, for one another.

The fabric of our government, our Democratic republic, is about making that responsibility for each other real. And this is the message that working people have always brought to our national conversation. It's the message that Alex Hannah and hundreds of thousands of others who took to the streets of the Midwest this spring, and that we will take to the polling places of the heartland in recall elections and in citizens' veto campaigns, in the coming months.

And it's the message that we'll continue to shout this year and next year and the year after that, until we are heard. The moral character of America is worth fighting for. And that is exactly what working people are going to do in the days and the weeks and the months ahead. Thank you.

[applause]

HAMRICK: We're grateful we have many of your supporters here in the room, along with we working journalists, hardworking journalists.

TRUMKA: Unionized journalists.

HAMRICK: That as well. And part of our job is to take a look at the very skillful prose which you delivered here today, and try to read between the lines. And we're paid to do that. So I hope you can understand some of the questions, why we're directing them to you today the way we will.

And these are supplied from our audience, for the most part, as well as some that we came up with having had the benefit of some of your speech having been released in advance. So, we'll go right to it. With all the unprecedented attacks against labor at the state level, isn't it time to redirect all campaign contributions to the battleground states? And what will that take?

TRUMKA: Well, we're actually redoing our entire political program in the way we do things. As you know, the AFL-CIO gives very little money to candidates. Most of the money we do is used to educate and mobilize our members. But our affiliate unions do give a considerable amount of money to candidates. And we hope to be able to

coordinate that spending in a much more effective way, to build power for working people.

We will target those. Some of them will be targeted toward battleground states. Some of them will be targeted to friends that have stood up for workers. Some of them will be Republicans and some of them will be Democrats who stood up to help us. And we will stand up to help them.

So, we will change the way we spend, the way we do, and the way we function, in a way that creates power for workers, and hopefully brings the America back, at least in the conversations that we're talking about.

HAMRICK: So that's a broad framework. But, one might ask, weren't you doing that all along? And, if not, why not?

TRUMKA: Well, it's a good question. We have been educating all along. The question becomes, are we going to spend all our money in the battleground states? And we've never done that. We've spent money where we've had friends. And we will continue to do that.

Of course, our focus will remain in those battleground states. That's why they're called battleground states. But we will also focus on our friends. That someone who had stood up with us and is not in a battleground state that's in a tough race, we're going to stand with them. And we're going to take challenge, people that have been against us as well. Some will be in battleground states, and some will not be in battleground states.

HAMRICK: So someone hearing this, up to this point, asked, "Well, does this mean that you'll be concentrating less in fighting against congressional attacks on Social Security and Medicare?" They're worried that you might seed that kind of ground.

TRUMKA: Actually, we'll be fighting more strenuously for those types of fights. And let me make this personally clear. The AFL-CIO and working America will fight against any proposed cuts to Social Security and Medicare, regardless of who proposes them. That's point number one.

But we will be mobilizing, hopefully, in a year-round basis, right now. We'll be able to hold people accountable. In the past we dismantled our process after the election. And then we would have to reenergize it when issues came up. We intend, now, to keep that process in effect. And, when friends or foe get a little weary and forgetful about who they should be representing, we'll remind them with an educated and mobilized rank and file.

HAMRICK: So, as I try to step back from this a little bit and look at the broad picture, is it your sense that Washington, in general, has made too much of a priority out of what might be viewed as trying to be more fiscally prudent?

TRUMKA: Well, Mark let me answer that in two ways. First, let's look at the states. Are there states that have deficit problems? Yes. Are there states that are using deficit problems as hysteria and as a front to attack working people? Most definitely yes. [applause] We will stop that.

And here, there is not much difference here. We don't have a short-term deficit crisis in this country. Anybody will tell you that. Any other country will tell you that. What we have is a short-term jobs crisis in this country. Create jobs, you'll lower the deficit. Do some other things, have a real healthcare program, you lower the deficit.

So the deficit has been used as a way to cut, cut, cut, and do to an ideology. I mean, Grover Nordquist(?) said it. He didn't care about the budget. He cares about shrinking government. And the best way to do that is stop any revenue from increasing and make continual cuts. That means a different type of America.

And they keep telling us, they keep telling the public, "We can't provide good jobs. We can't provide retirement security. We can't-- You have to scale back your definition of the American dream." Well, we totally reject that. This is one of the richest nations on the face of the Earth. Other countries have figured out a way to do it. It's a matter of priorities.

And the priorities should be having everybody have a chance to get ahead, every worker get a fair wage, everybody have some healthcare, everybody have some retirement security. Not just the top ten percent or one percent or one-tenth of one percent. They've been doing quite well the last 20 years. But the rest of America has suffered because of it. And these deficit fights that they talk about are aimed in that direction as well.

Now, in the long term, I want to say this. In the long term, there is something. So you do have to adjust it. But it ought to be shared sacrifice. And people at the bottom have already sacrificed. First they sacrificed with their jobs. Eleven million of us lost a job, fourteen million unemployed. Then they sacrificed with their homes. Workers' homes were foreclosed on.

Then we sacrificed with our taxes as we paid to bail out Wall Street for their excesses. And they're back to business-as-usual. Nothing has changed for them. They haven't lost their third home. They haven't had a decrease in salary. And then, they come back to us with a fourth one and say, "Now that you've paid three times, because of these deficits, let's eliminate Social Security or Medicare and make you pay again." We think the sacrifice should start at the top. And I think most Americans totally agree with us on that. And that's why they support, by almost 80 percent, a surtax on millionaires.

[applause]

HAMRICK: One short-term problem that is looming is the debt ceiling. Indeed, we already bumped up against that, and the Secretary of the Treasury, who also is a

Democrat, of course, has said, "Let's deal with this before it's a crisis that the financial markets present to us when we cannot necessarily see it coming, you know, a day or two out." We've seen that happen in Europe. We've seen it happen in South America, around the world, in years past.

As you look at that-- and that doesn't mean that you need, necessarily, to be in sympathy with the Republicans-- but, how serious a problem is that? And, what should members of both parties be willing to give up to attack the issues that surround that?

TRUMKA: Well, look. Increasing the debt ceiling is a ministerial thing. It's the budget and the long-term deficit that you have to look at. Now, the Republicans are going to try to say, "In order for us to increase the debt ceiling, you got to make all these more draconian cuts. Get rid of Medicare. Raise the age of Social Security. Take away Head Start for 200,000 kids. Cut grade school and secondary schools by 25 percent. Take eight million students'-- student loans away from eight million people. And we won't do anything unless you do that."

Look, it's the solvency and the credibility of the United States are at stake. It's not about the debt limit. If they were serious about the deficit, they wouldn't have proposed a budget that cuts \$4.3 trillion out of it, and then gave \$4.2 trillion away. Let's do the math. That means, over ten years, their budget is going to reduce the deficit by \$100 billion dollars, \$10 billion a year.

Now, my math says that doesn't get it. And that's not going to help us. So they ought to look at the problems and be realistic about it. Raising the debt ceiling is something that we've all begun ourselves to do. It's like the following. It's like you went home one day, and you bought a house, you bought a car. And one day you said, "You know, our debt is up to \$50,000 dollars. And, if it goes up to \$51,000, I'm not paying." [laughter] Duh!

So they take your car and they take your house because you don't pay. Our standing in the world gets very, very tarnished, because the dollar has been the currency for the rest of the world. And I think that people should honor that, honor their commitments.

And, if you want to talk about the deficit, talk about it really. Don't come to us with a deficit that says, \$4.3 billion in cuts, so that we can give \$4.2 billion of it back to the rich and kick kids off of Head Start and stop housing counselors and all the draconian things that that budget did, not mentioning gutting Medicare and things like that.

HAMRICK: Unions have threatened to pull support from Democrats many times before when they don't seem to be pursuing labor's agenda. But it seems like unions always come back because they then realize the alternative, i.e. Republicans in leadership is worse. So, is there something different this time?

TRUMKA: Ask Blanche Lincoln. [laughter] [applause]

HAMRICK: Are you willing to apply that standard more broadly?

TRUMKA: Look. We're not going to apply a litmus test. What we're saying is, people that support workers, we're going to be with them. And candidates that don't support workers, well we're not going to be with them.

HAMRICK: [simultaneous conversation] the litmus test?

TRUMKA: Well, here is the difference. It covers a whole broad issue of things.

HAMRICK: Not one thing?

TRUMKA: It's not just one single issue. Because you could be a friend and make a mistake once in a while. [laughter] We forgive you for that mistake. But, if you-- The difference is this, that we're not going to spend precious resources helping candidates that don't stand up and help for us. We'll focus on those people that help us. And we'll have more resources to spend on protecting our friends.

HAMRICK: Fair enough. So people want to know how far you're willing to go. You've mentioned the need for independence from Democrats before. Could this manifest itself in support for third parties, such as the Green and Labor Parties?

TRUMKA: Was there a question there? [laughter]

HAMRICK: In other words, are you willing to look beyond the two-party structure? Absolutely.

TRUMKA: Here is what we're looking at doing. We're looking at training workers, too, and recruiting workers to be candidates. So that, in primaries, we have real choice. We're going to give that a real whirl to see what happens.

HAMRICK: So is that an answer, that you'd look at third-party candidates? Absolutely?

TRUMKA: If they were supporting working people, we would look at third party candidates. We would look at all the candidates that are out there. That's what we're paid to do. And we decide which one is the best for our members. And we would support the one that's the best for our workers.

HAMRICK: Do you need to look to alternative solutions outside the traditional structure? Is the current structure getting the job done?

TRUMKA: No. How much time do we have left here? [laughter] That's a longer conversation.

HAMRICK: You're a very succinct speakers.

TRUMKA: Because if you want to look at the system, the system is broken. The Supreme Court helped break it even more with Citizens United. The system needs to be changed so that average, ordinary Americans can have as strong a voice as Exxon Mobil does in the Congress. It needs to be changed. The campaign finance laws need to be changed. So I, for one, would be for an overhaul.

I'd start at the Supreme Court, probably, because they believe that money equals free speech. That's what their decision said. That means that the forefathers sat around the table one day and said, "You know, George, you have \$500,000 dollars, so you get \$500,000 dollars of free speech. And you know, Alexander, you only got \$100 dollars. So you get \$100 dollars of free speech." I just don't believe that conversation took place. I don't believe that. But yet, this Supreme Court equates that.

So we need to take on the system and change it and make it more rational, so that we can have, again, government of the people, by the people and for the people.

[applause]

HAMRICK: So back to your speech, someone asked, "What is your game plan to spread the spirit of the Wisconsin protest to other parts of the country?"

TRUMKA: We're out there every day, educating and mobilizing. And it's not just in Wisconsin. We have cross-pollinated Wisconsin people with Ohio people, with Missouri, with Tennessee, with Indiana. We've gone all over the country. And people are mobilized. And it's not just union people, it's working people in general. Small business people are out there supporting us. Non-union workers are out there supporting us because they think these people have gone too far in trying to pay back their rich donors by destroying the rights of workers out there.

So we're taking that message everywhere. We're seeing it take effect. And apparently, we're doing something right, because guys like Scott Walker, his ratings in his own state have fallen like a big rock in a small pond. They think he's going too far.

HAMRICK: Someone says, "I didn't hear the word Obama in your prepared remarks. Doesn't the President warrant at least an honorable mention?" [laughter]

TRUMKA: Well, I was talking about people that are off on the wrong course. So of course I wouldn't mention him. I think the President has done a good job. I think his scale has been limited, either because he was too low on things in the fixing, or because the Republicans have prevented him from being.

But, if you look at the framework that he's tried to lay out for getting the economy back on track, I think it's been the right framework. And that's to create jobs. That's to rebuild our infrastructure. That's to give aid to state and local governments so

they don't lose it. That's to try to get money back into the hands of small business and medium sized business through loans that these big banks aren't giving out.

So I think that's a step in the right direction. I think the scale hasn't been there, and we'll work on that. Now, of course, he's made some mistakes too, but we'll get to that at some point. [laughter]

HAMRICK: Well you have time. [laughter]

TRUMKA: Do we:

HAMRICK: We do. Absolutely. [laughter]

TRUMKA: Well, I think he made a strategic blunder, whenever he confused his stimulus jobs agenda and he allowed deficits to start walking on top of them. He confused everything. No one understood the importance of the stimulus package. They started talking about deficits and equated the two. I mean, I think that was a strategic blunder.

I think putting the Columbian Free Trade Agreement up will be a strategic blunder; one, because I think it's morally wrong to reward a company or a country that assassinated 51 trade unionists last year. [applause] And just two-- [applause]-- assassinated a labor leader and a teacher just the other day, day before yesterday. They killed them. And, you know, we're going to reward them. It'll be an agreement that allows-- for a country that is not in compliance with ILO standards, they will be getting a free trade agreement with us. And that's insane. And we will fight that.

HAMRICK: So scale, as your criticism, if you had to give him a letter grade, traditional teacher giving a report card, what might that be?

TRUMKA: Well, there's a lot of subjects, whenever I got report cards, anyway. Most of my grades were the same in each subject, so it didn't much matter. But, you know, it all depends on what you're doing. If you look at enforcing health and safety laws, I think the President gets an A. I think if you're talking about enforcing trade laws, he gets an A. Negotiating trade laws, he's down on the scale there. He's not going to get on the honor roll with that one. [laughter]

For direction, I think an A. For execution, well, he doesn't make the honor roll again with that one. But there is a lot of variables there, some of which are way beyond his control. I mean, you got a determined opposition that says no to any taxes and things of that sort. And that's not his fault. But I hope that-- and we all fight a little harder to create jobs in this country. And I think you'll see him, over the next several months, making jobs the centerpiece of what he tries to accomplish.

HAMRICK: So he'd make your Deans List? No C's?

Well, I'd say it's finals week. We'll see. [laughter]

TRUMKA: Very good. [applause] Something in the news on the health and safety front, just yesterday an independent report commissioned by the State of West Virginia found that the mine explosion that killed 25 men last year resulted from the failures of the owner, Massey Energy, and rejected the company's assertion that the sudden gas build-up was to blame for the deadliest coal disaster in four decades. What's your reaction to that?

HAMRICK: It's no surprise at all. You have an explosion in the mine, one of two things had to happen. Either the laws were inadequate to protect those miners, or the laws weren't complied with. With Massey, he has a record of not complying with the laws, of making shortcuts, allowing things to happen. And, when you start cutting shortcuts, it's inevitably going to catch up with you. And those miners and their families paid the price. And, quite frankly, they're still paying the price.

I mean, every male in my family died from black lung disease. We knew about black lung. We could have prevented it. Christ, in the U.K., it was an occupational disease in the '20s. And we had coal companies in this country, in 1969, standing in front of a podium and saying, "We have proof positive that breathing coal dust is good for you." [laughter] I offered to pump it through their air conditioning unit and share the good health; they weren't interested in that.

But, you know, look. Miners get killed every day. Workers get killed in this country every single day. They also contract pieces of occupational diseases every day. And that doesn't make the headlines. It makes the headlines when we kill a bunch of them, or they're trapped and we're trying to get them. And we're glad that it makes the headlines then.

But they die in ones and twos every single day. Every single day. And they get disabled every single day, whether you're a construction worker, which is highly dangerous occupation, whether you work in different occupations around the country, they get killed every day.

And, until we had this Secretary of Labor, the last eight years it was like killing fields out there. Now, at least, we have a Secretary of Labor that's enforcing the laws in OSHA and MSHA and saying, "You shouldn't have to sacrifice either your life or your health to make a living in this country at this point in time."

And I might add one other thing. The lunacy of operating a facility, whether it's a mine, a factory, a school, a hospital or anything that's unsafe, because every single bit of the literature will tell you that the safest facilities are the most productive facilities. So it's a two-fer. There's no reason to do it; and yet, it happens every day. And workers die with impunity. Thousands and thousands and thousands a year.

If we had had-- By the way, we dwarf what happened in 9/11 each year with workers killed on the job. That shouldn't happen in this country. My first job in the mining industry was Chairman of the Health and Safety Committee. And I took that job seriously, because I wanted every miner that went in that hole to go home at the end of the shift, with all of their fingers and all of their eyes and their legs and their ears. And we all ought to be outraged by what happens when workers get killed and slaughtered in this country.

[applause]

HAMRICK: So, of course you're here in the National Press Club. And we have upcoming an appearance by Arianna Huffington. And the Newspaper Guild is calling on unpaid writers for the Huffington Post to boycott that online news venture. And they complain that Huffington and others will get more than \$300 million dollars from the sale to AOL, while unpaid writers will not share that wealth. So, how do you feel about that issue in general? And then I might follow up with a question about the news business.

TRUMKA: Well, I could talk about the news business too, because I do have some perspectives on that as well. [laughter] I think we could make you guys a lot better. [laughter] Look. I stand with the workers in that issue. I mean, workers are entitled to a decent rate of pay. And they ought to be negotiating a fair contract that gives them a decent rate of pay so that the entity becomes productive, can make money, and that those workers can have a decent standard of living. So I would stand with them.

HAMRICK: Okay. And then the questioner says, "We have lots of corporate business-owned media, other than specialty magazines. Why is it there are no labor-backed unions, news organizations doing reporting, investigative reporting, with beat reporters? So I guess that gets to the ownership of a news media properties.

TRUMKA: Well, first of all, it comes down to resources. in order to do a news media, whether faceted, whether it's print media, written, radio, whatever it is, it takes a lot of resources. And, at the time, we don't have the resources to be able to spread them around in all those different directions.

But let me ask you this question. Let's assume that we owned a network, the Labor Network. What would be the first shot you guys took at us? And what would be the first shot that most conservatives do? "You can't listen to those guys. That's labor." An independent press is a good thing. An independent press that is a watchdog on those that are out there, with responsibility to workers, whether it's at the federal level, the state level, or anywhere else is a good thing.

PAC journalism is not a good thing. And the fact that you guys are getting squeezed with money and can't do the type of investigative stuff that you used to do is a tragedy for the country. And networks like Fox are really entertainment. They're not actually networks, because their perspective is so slanted towards things.

Now, I don't say that about every one of the journalists on Fox, because I think they have some real independent journalists that I think do a credible job. But, by and large, the network and the programming is awful slanted away from working people. And that's a tragedy.

HAMRICK: I'll ask you to be somewhat more succinct in this next one, just because we're up against time. And there is a final question I want to get to. But, in a week, we'll have DeMaurice Smith, the Executive Director with the NFL Players Association here with the Marquis Player to be named later, we hope. That's part of the AFL-CIO. Americans seem to have one primary thought here. And that's they want their football. So, is this going to be resolved by the fall? And, how do you see this playing out?

TRUMKA: Look. We certainly hope that it's resolved by the fall. And let's start off with the baseball lesson. I'm sure DeMaurice will tell you this. The football players didn't ask for a single thing. They did not ask for a single increase. They've asked to maintain what they have. That's all they asked for.

Now the owners, on the other hand, asked for a couple of billion dollars in give-back. They want the players-- One of their proposals is to have the players pay for the practice facilities, to have the players pay for their travel to and from games. Now, that's a \$9 billion dollar industry.

But guess what. It isn't just the players and the owners, as people think about it. There is almost 200,000 workers out there that'll get hurt because of this lockout. And remember what a lockout is-- it's the employers saying, "No, you can't come to work." It's not the employees saying, "We won't come." They want to come.

But you think about who's going to get hurt. It's going to be the guy that sells the hot dogs. It's going to be the groundskeeper. It's going to be the small business person at the stadium next to them. It's going to be the bus driver. It's going to be the taxicab driver. And the cities are going to get hurt because of all that.

Now, here is the truth about it, I believe. The problem with this is, the owners haven't cut the deal among themselves yet. They can't negotiate. They don't know what to negotiate before, because they haven't cut their deal. We ought to be putting pressure on them to say, "Look. Get your butts in a room somewhere. Figure out your deal. And then come back and let's negotiate this thing out."

Because, while it's a wonderful sport, and I happen to love football, love it with all my heart, it's not just football players and owners in all of this. It's all the other people that are going to get hurt in this process because the owners can't come up with their own deal on how to split their revenue before they come and talk to the players.

HAMRICK: Fair enough. We'll continue that conversation in a week. And we do certainly welcome the NFL Commissioner, a representative for the owners to come here and speak at this venue as well.

Well, we're almost out of time. But, before we ask the last question, a couple of housekeeping matters to take care of. First of all, I'd like to remind you all about some upcoming luncheon speakers that we have. May 26th, Juan Williams, Fox News, to reply to some comments that were made earlier this year by the then-head of NPR. And then, DeMaurice Smith will be here on May 27th. Gary Sinise late in June. The Oscar-Nominated actor will announce the formation of a new foundation dedicated to raising funds for charities supporting the military.

And, of course, as is our tradition, if I can find it, I would like to present you with our traditional NPC mug as a token of our thanks today.

TRUMKA: Thank you. [applause]

HAMRICK: And I would like to now ask the last question. And so, we're talking about football. You're a native of Pennsylvania, football country. A lot of great quarterbacks from there. Huge Steelers fan, I'm told.

TRUMKA: I am.

HAMRICK: These days, that doesn't take a lot of investment. But you're hanging in there. You come by that naturally. So here is the last question. Given that you're a leader in the political arena, so to speak, if you had to choose, would you rather have lunch with the Manning brothers, i.e. not Steelers players, quite the contrary, or the Koch brothers? [laughter]

TRUMKA: First of all, it would depend on where the lunch was going to be. [laughter] I personally would probably have-- rather have lunch with the Manning brothers. The Koch brothers, me talking to them would not do a lot. Although, let me think about that for a second. I would like to have lunch with them, as a matter of fact. [laughter] I'd like to give them a few minutes to explain to me what they think. And I'd like to indicate, in some mild fashion, what I think. And then see where we went from there.

HAMRICK: Very well. How about a round of applause for our speaker today. [applause]

TRUMKA: Thank you. Appreciate it.

HAMRICK: Thank you. I'd like to thank our National Press Club staff, including our library and broadcast center for organizing today's event. Thank you, and we're adjourned. (gavel)

