

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH MARC MORIAL, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE

MODERATOR: JONATHAN SALANT, NPC PRESIDENT

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

TIME: 1:00 P.M. EST

DATE: TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2006

(C) COPYRIGHT 2005, FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, INC., 1000 VERMONT AVE. NW; 5TH FLOOR; WASHINGTON, DC - 20005, USA. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. ANY REPRODUCTION, REDISTRIBUTION OR RETRANSMISSION IS EXPRESSLY PROHIBITED.

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

FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, INC. IS A PRIVATE FIRM AND IS NOT AFFILIATED WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. NO COPYRIGHT IS CLAIMED AS TO ANY PART OF THE ORIGINAL WORK PREPARED BY A UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT OFFICER OR EMPLOYEE AS PART OF THAT PERSON'S OFFICIAL DUTIES.

FOR INFORMATION ON SUBSCRIBING TO FNS, PLEASE CALL JACK GRAEME AT 202-347-1400.

MR. SALANT: Good afternoon, and welcome to the National Press Club. My name is Jonathan Salant, a reporter for Bloomberg News and president of the club.

I'd like to welcome club members and their guests in the audience, as well as those of you watching on C-SPAN.

Please hold your applause during the speech so we have time for as many questions as possible. For our broadcast audience, I'd like to explain that if you hear applause, it is from the guests and the members of the general public who attend our luncheons, not from the working press.

The video archive of today's luncheon is provided by ConnectLive and is available to members only through the National Press Club website at www.press.org. Press Club members also can get free transcripts of our luncheons at our website. Nonmembers may purchase transcripts, audio tapes and video tapes by calling 1-888-343-1940. For more information about joining the Press Club, please call us at area code 202-662-7511.

Before introducing our head table, I'd like to remind our members of future speakers.

On February 16th, Richard Dreyfuss, the actor, will talk about Hollywood's view of today's media. On February 17th, General Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. And on February 27th, Governor George Pataki of the state of New York.

If you have any questions for our speaker, please write them on the cards provided at your table and pass them up to me. I will ask as many as time permits.

I'd now like now to introduce our head table guests and ask them to stand briefly when their names are called. Please hold your applause until all the head table guests are introduced.

From your right, Bruce Alpert, a Washington correspondent with the Times-Picayune of New Orleans; Keith Hill, a reporter for the Bureau of National Affairs and a member of the Press Club's board of governors; Golam Arshad, Washington bureau chief with the daily Inqilab, a Bangladeshi newspaper; Eleanor Clift, contributing editor with Newsweek; Lavern Chatman, chief executive officer of the Northern Virginia Urban League, and a guest of our speaker; Alison Bethel, the bureau chief of the Detroit News, and a member of the Press Club's board of governors; George Curry, editor with the National Newspaper Publishers Association's News Service, and a guest of our speaker; John Hughes of Bloomberg News, and chairman of the National Press Club Speakers Committee; skipping over our speaker for a moment, Doris Margolis, president of Editorial Associates, and the Speakers Committee member who organized today's luncheon. And, Doris, thank you very much. Maudine Cooper, president of the Greater Washington Urban League, and a guest of our speaker; Charles Smith (sp), Media24 Newspapers of South Africa, and a new member of the Press Club; Stephen Koff, Washington bureau chief of the Plain Dealer of Cleveland; and Alan Risbiki (sp), a freelance writer and a new member of the National Press Club. (Applause.)

At a time when the future of New Orleans is a question, it is fitting that our speaker today is a former two-term mayor of that city.

In fact, you could call the mayoralty the family business for Marc Morial. His father was the city's first African-American mayor, and Marc was only the third black chief executive of the city.

Marc Morial was a state legislator before he -- when he decided to run for mayor. In office, he presided over a drop in the crime rate, helped in part by a curfew for anyone below the age of 17. He put together youth programs. The message worked. Crime dropped, civil rights complaints against police dropped and the murder rate plummeted. He also brought New Orleans a new National Basketball Association team, the Hornets, to replace the long-deceased -- the long-departed Jazz.

He was so popular he petitioned for a change in the law to let him run for a third term. (Scattered laughter.) He failed to win approval, and after stepping down as mayor remained active in public life as head of the National Urban League. The 95-year-old league provides civil rights protections and services for African-Americans and other emerging ethnic communities.

Mayor Morial's programs include a five-point empowerment agenda focusing on education and youth, economic empowerment, health and quality of life, civic engagement, and civil rights and racial justice. Progress in these five areas is tracked in an equality index found within the league's "State of Black America" report. This year's report will be presented March 29th here at the National Press Club.

In 2004, Mayor Morial began an annual legislative policy conference where a common agenda of jobs, education and civil rights -- the Urban League leadership from across the country brought that agenda to discussions with national legislators.

He formed the Black Male Commission to address inequities, disparities and social trends disproportionately affecting black males, and a program to combine public- and partnered-sector resources to support business development growth among minority entrepreneurs.

Mayor Morial, during Black History Month, it is a pleasure to welcome you to the National Press Club. (Applause.)

MR. MORIAL: Thank you. (Applause.) Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Jonathan, and happy Valentine's Day. (Laughter.)

Happy Valentine's Day to my wife, Michelle. (Applause.)

And there are many, many people I want to acknowledge this afternoon, but I certainly want to thank the National Press Club for this opportunity to come and share some thinking on important issues which face our cities, which face our nation, which face America's communities of color.

I want to acknowledge all of my colleagues from the Urban League movement: Maudine Cooper; Lavern Chatman; especially leaders of our affiliates in this area; many, many people from the staff; and many board members of our affiliates in this area. I do want to thank all of you for being here.

To other friends and colleagues with whom I've worked over the years -- Tom Cochran, Donna Brazile, Wade Henderson -- I want to thank you all for coming out -- Dave Dworkin -- people with whom I've had a chance to work professionally for many, many years. Thank you so much.

And to supporters of the National Urban League, who support our work through many important partnerships, I also want to thank all of you for being with us today.

I've got three things I want to cover today.

One is to talk to you a little bit about the National Urban League and the Urban League movement in the context of civil rights organizations today. I want to make some observations regarding Hurricane Katrina, and then I want to talk a little bit about civil rights in the 21st century and what it means, and the challenges it presents.

Now, last evening, when I sort of sat down to really collect my thoughts in an earnest fashion about what I would talk about this morning, I thought that I would place Hurricane Katrina at the end. But then I received phone calls last night and read the paper on yesterday and again this morning about a number of new and troubling developments. And I want to offer my observations about those. But before I do so, I just want to take a minute to tell you about the National Urban League, which will celebrate its 100th birthday in the year 2010, as one of the nation's historic civil rights organizations.

The NAACP was founded in 1909; the National Urban League in 1910. Today we are very proudly a non-partisan, multi-racial civil rights and direct services organization that serves 2.1 million Americans each and every year. Those are people in early childhood programs, youth in after school programs, people who are seeking employment that we assist, people who participate in our job training programs, our home ownership preparation programs, who go through a wide variety of diversity training that we sponsor through the work of our 100-plus affiliates that are in 35 states and the District of Columbia. We serve, of the 2.1 million, 1.2 million African Americans, 600,000 white Americans, 200,000 Hispanic Americans. We serve the disadvantaged; we focus on African Americans.

And I think I want to share that, because there's all too often a context of sameness among civil rights organizations. And the nation has a robust community of organizations that work on and focus on civil rights. And while we share a common mission, we do our work in different ways, albeit in a complimentary fashion. The NAACP Legal Defense Fund is a public interest law firm and a civil rights organization. The NAACP I would characterize as a direct action, social movement that works through a very strong core of volunteers. There are organizations like the National Action Network, the Rainbow PUSH Coalition, the National Council of Negro Women, a whole, wide variety of very important organizations.

I think it's important to recognize that what we do at the National Urban League is unique. And that is, we provide direct services to 2.1 million people a year, proudly in partnership with many other organizations for whom their mission is civil rights.

Let me offer some observations about Hurricane Katrina. And without re-stating the obvious, there are some new developments which I think this nation's citizens and this nation's national press corps needs to be take not of.

Yesterday, in the state legislature, African-American legislators, members of the Louisiana Legislative Black Caucus, of which I am a former member, walked out of the legislature. This is unprecedented. I cannot think, in the history of African-Americans serving in the legislature, which goes back to my father's inauguration in 1968 -- a case where African-American legislators walked out of the state legislature.

One asked: Why did they do it? They did it because the legislature refused on yesterday to enact a bill which would allow those who are evacuated to vote at satellite voting places throughout Louisiana. I think the act of the legislature is tantamount to an act of disenfranchisement. I think it's an act that borders on being a 21st century poll tax.

And here's why. What also happened yesterday is that FEMA ended -- I use the word "evicted" -- some 12,000 people nationally and 4,400 in New Orleans who had been temporarily housed, as a part of FEMA's plan, at hotels. So the people in New Orleans, they've been invited to leave New Orleans, where they've been in hotels, to go live in a shelter or a trailer park in places like Monroe, Louisiana, 200 miles away.

Once again, these actions underscore the feeble and failed fashion in which this recovery has been undertaken: no long-term housing transition plan; no foresight and no thoughtfulness, which once again has people walking around the streets of American cities with all of their belongings in a garbage bag, walking around with their children, knowing not where they are going to go. They're in the possession of an \$1,800 FEMA check, which won't buy you one month of housing in New York City or many American cities.

Also, new developments that occurred on yesterday was a meltdown in the New Orleans criminal justice system. Two courageous judges, Judge Arthur Hunter and Judge Calvin Johnson, suspended all criminal cases because the public defenders office in New Orleans, which once had 42 lawyers, now has six. They have no office. They have no computers. They have no staff. They have no telephone. These judges decided that it was very important to send an -- a message.

And another new development that occurred yesterday was a report by a select committee of members of Congress, made up completely of members of the majority party, that have in very pointed language assigned blame from top to bottom and responsibility from top to bottom for the debacles of Hurricane Katrina.

Ladies and gentlemen, no matter what anyone wishes, hopes, this crisis is not going to go away. It can't be imagined away. It's not going to go away because it ceases to be a leading news story or a front-page news story in this nation's papers. I know I'm talking to many people in the media today, and I would want to underscore this. I believe in the case of Hurricane Katrina I think that the national media has done a job of important public responsibility by continuing to focus, by continuing to keep attention. Indeed, in the days immediately after the levees broke in New Orleans, it was the pictures that the national media captured, that shocked the American consciousness, that woke people up, that underscore how difficult this challenge and this problem is.

With respect to these new developments, first, the failure of the legislature to enact satellite voting. I believe that the Justice Department and the court should intervene immediately to force Louisiana, my home state, to do the right thing. Now is not the time for political agendas to get involved in legislation, because people are more concerned about who wins an election when they ought to be concerned about ensuring that everyone votes in an election. The people of Louisiana, the people of this nation deserve this.

And to underscore a salient point, this nation right now is engaged in an undertaking in the Middle East to, quote, "bring democracy to Iraq." The recent Iraqi elections involved an expenditure of taxpayers' dollars in the tens of millions -- I think the Council of Foreign Relations pegs it at 90 (million dollars) -- to allow Iraqis, who live in the United States, not to

absentee vote, but to vote at physical polling places here in the United States. Now, if an Iraqi in Houston can vote in an election in Baghdad, then certainly somebody in Baton Rouge ought to be able to vote in an election in New Orleans. (Applause.)

And -- (continued applause) -- and I would say to some of my former colleagues in the legislature who've raised the flag of, quote, "fraud," shame on you. Louisiana does a lot of things, maybe not to the highest standards, but you know, its elections have been pretty much foolproof, because Louisiana has had voting machine elections since 1960 as a matter of law.

Also, with respect to the eviction by FEMA of people from housing, I think the National Urban League has said from the very beginning, from September and October, that the national when faced with almost 1 million displaced Americans needs a comprehensive housing plan to transition people from shelters back into permanent housing, and that the FEMA one-size-fits-all method of giving people vouchers, placing people in hotels and now trailers, I would submit to you is going to end up costing more money than if FEMA and the federal government had given every victim of Katrina a \$100,000 check. These trailers to purchase, transport, store, mobilize and set up, I understand, are costing in the six-figure range. This underscores -- underscores -- how from the very beginning the failure to recognize that this was an unprecedented American catastrophe requiring an unprecedented American response, and this has underscored this.

I also want to mention about the criminal justice system in New Orleans. I understand that in -- that in order to sustain the system, not the police department, but the courts, the public defenders in the Clerk's Office, would probably cost in the neighborhood of 10 (million dollars) to \$12 million a year. You can't have a judicial system and a court system and a criminal justice system unless all parts of it are adequately functioning.

I would say to those who are listening on C-SPAN, if you're interested in learning more about what we at the National Urban League have done and are doing about Katrina and with respect to Katrina, you can go to our website at www.nul.org.

And one might ask, why should we be concerned? We should be concerned because we must be concerned, because a major region in this country, major parts of two states have seen unprecedented devastation. We should be concerned because never before in American history have so many people been displaced and so many people lost so much. And the toughest thing, I think, for many to deal with -- I know for me to deal with -- has to do with the fact that most of the human pain and the suffering and the losses occurred not because of the hurricanes acting alone. It came because of broken levees and weak responses. It came from human failure.

And I've been hoping from the very beginning that all the officials on the frontlines in the response effort to Katrina would see this as an effort to redeem themselves, would see this as an effort for America to stand tall as ever. What is the standard by which we should judge this response? It's 9/11. 9/11, when New York was hit by a terrorist attack. No one in Congress, no one along the countryside of this nation raised a peep about whether we could afford to do what was necessary. No one questioned an independent commission. No one questioned a victims' compensation fund. No one questioned giving Consolidated Edison \$250 million. No one questioned any of the strategies that were put into place in the 60 to 90 days after 9/11. Katrina

seems to be a different story. The eyes of the nation and the world are watching, and I believe that with this, I think we must be vigilant, and I do think that the nation has to hold all officials accountable to ensure that the right thing gets done.

I want to turn to the issue of civil rights and the 21st century. And I think it's helpful because we now begin the sixth year of the new century to recognize at what the civil rights movement did for this nation.

What the civil rights movement did to this nation goes far beyond the immediate of knocking down the walls of segregation. I think what the civil rights movement did for this nation was a renewal and an inspiration of democracy. It was an effort, that was successful in large measure, to say that the words of the Founding Fathers indeed need to have true meaning in the lives of so many people.

And what the civil rights movement contributed beyond that was something very special. If you look at the movement for equality among women, if you look at the movement for equality among America's gay and lesbian communities, if you look at other movements for inclusion, the tactics, the strategies, the philosophy, the idea of what equal justice really, really means has inspired all of those movements. The civil rights movement made America a better nation, made the 20th century a special century, improved the way we see ourselves, and strengthened America's moral standing in the world in the second half of the 20th century. (Applause.)

But what does it indeed mean today, and where are we? I think across the nation we are at a point where this nation should set as a goal for this the 21st century the reduction and the elimination of economic disparities, the reduction and the elimination of gaps when it comes to jobs, homeownership, skill, business development and wealth.

If you go back to the 1960s, half of all African Americans lived below the poverty line; today it is 25 percent. If you go back to the 1960s, some 20-plus percent of all white Americans lived below the poverty line; it is now less than 10 percent. The last frontier for the civil rights movement deals with jobs, it deals with homeownership, it deals with economics. It deals with the very, very difficult issues that confront this nation.

But why is it so important that this nation get this right? And here is why. We're now in the proverbial global marketplace, and at present, the Chinas, the Japans, the Indias, the Russias produce more, for example, engineers than we do in the United States. Getting this right means ensuring that all Americans have an opportunity to achieve their full potential.

And in a nation that is becoming a nation of more communities of color and more people of color, ensuring that every single American -- every single child -- has a chance to fully participate in the economic marketplace of the United States -- to get a skill, to get a good job that pays well, not to face the proverbial glass ceiling -- is essential for this country to retain its status as a world economic power. Now those are not the kinds of things that people perhaps discuss each and every day, but they are the issues that face this nation today.

And I think that when it comes to civil rights in the 21st century, I also want to underscore a second point, and that is that the courts will always be important to the African-American community and important to the civil rights community. And one might ask why. We know -- we know too joyously and too painfully that the Supreme Court giveth and the Supreme Court taketh away. And those nine justices of that court can do everything like a decision in Plessy v. Ferguson, which reversed the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendment, to a decision like Brown v. Board, which opened the doors to a new era in the United States. So courts will always be important. Who sits on a court will always be not an issue of politics for us, but an issue of principle for us, because we know how important they are in saying what the Constitution is here in the United States.

I want to just close today by also giving some fast, quick observations about the 2008 presidential election because I think that the nation in 2008 is going to be at a very interesting crossroads. I think these issues that I've shared with you today are going to be very important in 2008. I also believe that in 2008 we will end a 20- year run where presidential politics has been dominated by two names -- Bush and Clinton. Every president for the last 20 years will have been a Bush or a Clinton.

So what does that present? That will present whether the nation is comfortable and will continue with that pattern -- perhaps -- or whether the nation will be looking for a departure, a change, a new generation and a new era. And I do believe that as 2008 draws near, that we are going to begin in 2006 and 2007 challenging people who are going to run for office, in both parties, to break out of talking the same old same old, to be leaders that are going to raise the difficult and challenging issues that this country indeed is going to face, and not to run campaigns like campaigns have become in this nation, where people take a poll, they see what people want to hear, and then they resput it, and it's a continuous cycle of how policy gets made, and no one stands on leadership, and no one stands on principle.

So we're going to be looking for that in 2008. And I think it's going to be a very interesting time.

I couldn't, wouldn't share, wouldn't try to handicap these candidates. But I also believe -- and I would challenge the members of both political parties not to fall into the typical and usual paradigm, on one hand, of ignoring African-Americans or, on the other hand, taking African-Americans for granted, which has been a pattern that has persisted for many, many years, but to see the growing vote of the communities of color as the new swing vote that could in fact and will in fact, I think, help to decide elections in the future, not only in '8 but also in '6 and certainly beyond '8.

So I want to thank you. I'll be happy to share any questions -- respond to any questions that any of you all might have. But I want to thank all of you for listening to me today. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MR. SALANT: Let's begin with a series of questions on Katrina. What is your reaction to the upcoming congressional report criticizing the Bush administration's response to the hurricane? And also, why do you think the administration was so slow to respond?

MR. MORIAL: Well, you know, I think that it was so clear from the very beginning that there was a slow response. I emphasize, everywhere go and in everything I say, that the response was weak and woeful from the feds, the state and the city. This was a perfect storm of failure.

Secondly, I'm eagerly anticipating looking at all of these reports from members of Congress about what in fact may have gone wrong. But let me tell you what's missing.

What's missing is lessons learned. Hurricane season will be back on June 30th, and my question is, is FEMA ready? Are the state emergency preparedness officials from Virginia to Texas ready? Are the local emergency preparedness officials up and down the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts ready? Hurricane season is coming back. It's going to be here on June 30th, and I've not heard one thing or seen one thing which indicates that that which happened this past year would not, could not and will not repeat itself.

MR. SALANT: If you were mayor of New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina, what would you have done differently than the current New Orleans mayor?

MR. MORIAL: A lot. (Laughter, applause.) And I've avoided second-guessing because it's easy to do when you weren't there, but I will say this. For the life of me, I could not understand two things. One, a delay in the evacuation, and number two, why there was no food, water or medical supplies for days at the shelters of last resort. I could second-guess, and I've tried to avoid doing that, but when you have a crisis, you've got to put people first. You've got to think of their basic needs and they're certainly -- and their necessities.

I hope that what Congress will do, instead of a usual congressional report that says who did what and who didn't do what, and who knew what and when they knew it, that that would part A of any report, and the second part's going to be some real recommendations, and that what Congress will do, what the state legislature in Louisiana will do, what the local officials throughout the region will do is take them and make them real; and that this won't be a report that involves a couple of front-page headline stories and then we never hear anything else about it, and it doesn't give us any direction for the future.

MR. SALANT: With so many evacuees from New Orleans due to Hurricane Katrina vowing never to return, how do you assess the demographics of a rebuilt New Orleans?

MR. MORIAL: You know, I think that people -- I think an initial reaction of people is -- has been "I don't want to return." A lot of people who felt that they were treated so badly certainly have a bad taste in their mouth, but I know in my heart and my soul, because people love New Orleans, they really want to come back.

Let's clear that up. You have a lot of people speaking for people saying they don't want to come back. No one's asked them. No one has asked them. (Applause.) People can speak for themselves. They can decide for themselves. The role of government is to create a climate and an environment and a system which gives everyone an opportunity to return, if they choose, not because they face government-made barriers, systematic failures that they don't want to return.

I certainly think that we certainly would respect that. But I think what's been happened -- it's not been a question of people not wanting to return. It's been a question of people not being able to return, not being able to return.

And I would invite -- I think Katrina shouldn't become a sightseeing tour. It shouldn't become that. But I do think that there's something to be gained, particularly from people in the media and others to go and see. You've never seen the wholesale devastation that has occurred to the Gulf Coast. It's beyond description. It's beyond belief. It can't be captured even in video and in a film because it's so widespread.

So I think what we say at the National Urban League is everyone has a right to return, everyone has a right to rebuild. And the issue of, quote, "The demographics of the city" -- I regret that that's become an issue. Because at a time when there ought to be racial togetherness, racial reconciliation -- shame on anybody who says, "We don't want anybody to come back." Shame on anybody who will erect artificial barriers, whether it's making it more difficult for people to vote or denying people electricity in their neighborhoods or building permits to rebuild their homes. There's a humanitarian, folks, and I believe, a moral underpinning to this because of the level of human devastation.

And let it be said -- and let me emphasize -- this was an equal opportunity destroyer. I know wealthy people who lost their primary home, their summer home, their business. I know people living in one-room apartments who lost their one-room apartment. You know what the case is? They both ain't got nothing. They're in the same situation, so this is a time when leadership at every level ought to be talking about giving everyone the same opportunity to come back and rebuild their lives.

MR. SALANT: Should the Urban League and other African-American organizations have some input regarding the rebuilding of New Orleans and the rest of the Gulf Coast?

MR. MORIAL: My answer would be yes, but I think the most important thing about the rebuilding of the Gulf Coast is two things: ensure that everyone is really at the table, and that means the victims and the hurricane survivors need to have a voice in the decision-making.

The other thing is you don't need a plan to turn the electricity on. You don't need a plan to get the water system back operational. You don't need a plan to repair public buildings. You certainly don't need a plan to ensure that the judicial system and the police system are operating.

You know, there's a side of this which is difficult but simple. There's another part of it which is difficult and complex, if you understand the distinction. It's difficult and simple -- it's difficult because of the magnitude of it, but it's simple because anyone could figure out what to do.

The housing issue is more complex. It's difficult, but it's more complex because it involves decisions about which house can be rebuilt, which houses had to be replaced and what the design of new housing ought to be.

So I believe that -- one of my basic observations about the recovery thus far has to do with the slowness with which basic services have been restored. It's been hard to understand. It's been hard to fathom. You give people power and electricity and a way to get building permits quickly, and people will take it on themselves to rebuild their lives.

I mean, some of this is give people a chance to do things on their own. (Applause.)

MR. SALANT: Since you have stated your opposition to FEMA's termination of housing assistance to families displaced by Hurricane Katrina, when, in your view, should these public payments of rent end, if ever?

MR. MORIAL: I think what I've tried to emphasize -- and I've shared this with officials in the administration, I've shared this to Congress -- is that from the very beginning, there needed to be a plan. I don't have a problem with a person being transitioned from a hotel if there's a place and a mechanism to help them transition. To where will they go? Some people whose stay in hotels are being terminated are being sent back to shelters.

Now, in the Gulf Coast, one of the basic challenges is, is that the hotels just happen to be units of housing that were not destroyed. And there's really not a lot of housing for people to transition to in the Gulf Coast or in Louisiana. So what I think from the very beginning is it's not simply a question of when the rent payments stop, but where's the plan to transition people, to say to people, "We will help you develop a plan, we will help you transition, we will help you find new housing, we will help you connect"?

Let me just share something that's probably -- 4,400 families in New Orleans were living in hotels. A lot of them were working. If they can't live in New Orleans, what happens to their employers? What happens if a business that had 10 employees, five of whom were hurricane evacuees staying in a hotel, they don't show up to work tomorrow because they don't have anyplace to live? Making sure that people have a place to live is essential to the rebuilding of the economy; the rebuilding of the economy will produce taxes; those taxes will give the governmental agencies a chance to get back on their feet.

So that is what I've been urging. Get the best minds in the room. HUD has a housing locator service. I think that one of the things that surprised me is that the housing portfolio has been left to FEMA, not to the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Whatever criticism people may have of HUD, there's some great initiatives, resources inside of HUD that I think could be very helpful in transitioning people so we don't have homeless people. Forty-four hundred of the 12,000 were in the Gulf Coast, but now you're going to have people being put out of hotels in Houston, Dallas, New York City, Washington, Detroit, communities all across. To where are they going to go? Those folks may have an easier time finding housing, but our reports from many of our affiliates is that in some cities, the housing market is so tight it's difficult for people to find a place; and when they do, \$1,800 may buy them one month, two months. They've got to go out and find a job.

Folks, this is a humanitarian crisis in our own country. And I say to anyone who says, "When does it stop," put yourself -- walk in the moccasins. Walk in the shoes. Ask yourself: If today you

couldn't go back to your house, and all you had was the clothes on your back, and your job was gone, what would you do?

MR. SALANT: Moving to politics, how do you handicap the 2006 race for your old job in New Orleans? (Laughter.)

MR. MORIAL: You know, I got this thing called a 501(c)(3) -- (laughter) -- got to be non-partisan.

Let me tell you what my concern is -- I think everyone's concern. Everyone's concern ought to be that everyone is -- that the displacement doesn't turn into disenfranchisement; that everyone -- (applause) -- has a right to vote. And that second, that the candidates who run will rise above the temptation of division; division based on race, division based on people who are living in New Orleans versus people who have been displaced, division based on whether my neighborhood is okay, versus another neighborhood that's been destroyed.

This is a time for statesmanship. This a time when I hope that the discussion is going to truly be elevated about what the future certainly holds.

I think it's very interesting that even though there's an incumbent, it's like it's an open race. It's like it's an open primary. It's a very, very critical election because the next person is going to have limited resources to work with and a very difficult challenge to face.

But I think ensuring that people have a right to vote is every American's business, because democracy is democracy and it's the foundation -- and voting is the foundation of democracy.

So I would -- I wouldn't go farther than that. But it looks like an interesting crew. When I ran in 1994, I think we had 11 people running. I think this may exceed that number. You know, New Orleans is interesting. You got all kind of people. We have an open primary system; you don't have to be nominated by anybody, you just got to show up and put some money down and you can run. (Laughter.) So New Orleans is the kind of place you had the bicycle candidate; you know, you had the longshoreman who was running because he wanted to pave the Information Super Highway. I mean, New Orleans, it's going to be -- you're going to have a very, very interesting debate and discussion. But I do, do hope that there's going to be some candidates in there who are going to try to rise above some of the temptations.

And one of the -- I guess troublesome things is that in the state legislature right now they've been -- the governor included in a call some issues about consolidating courts, consolidating assessors and changing the structure of government, which I never understood because I don't see what assessors have to do with a hurricane. I don't see whether a court is one court or two courts has anything to do with a hurricane. I think there's got to be also some departure from extraneous issues to keep the focus on what's important; keep the focus on the recovery, keep the focus on economics and housing.

MR. SALANT: You talked about the 2008 presidential elections. But do you foresee a change or departure from politics as usual this fall in the congressional elections?

MR. MORIAL: You know, you all would have -- everyone in here would have just as informed an opinion as me about the 2006 congressional elections. It's still, I think, too early to tell. I think a lot depends on how some of the current issues certainly play out.

But one of my observations about elections and congressional elections and all elections has a lot to do with the fact that I think that it just costs too much to run for office in America today. It costs too much money. Now, why does it cost too much money? Because television commercials cost a lot of money.

And fundamentally, the media is one of the great beneficiaries. I mean, I remember when every time political season would come around, and the general managers and the sales staff of all the television stations would get excited because they knew -- knew you're going to have a lot of candidates spending a lot of money on television advertising. So I do think that that's one of the overall concerns, that money.

But I do think this could be a very, very interesting year because this is -- I think we're -- for the first time in -- and somebody would have to help me -- you have a majority of Americans who believe that the country's on the wrong track. That's the most important polling number that there is for people who are in power and people who are trying to change course, is what do people feel about the direction of the country. And I think those numbers are pointing -- I know when I was in office I used to watch those numbers like a hawk because I always felt that if that number was good, if I did the right thing, I'd be okay; and if that number went bad, then it could have an impact. And so I think that that's the number I think you ought to watch throughout the year, is the right direction/wrong direction track of the country.

MR. SALANT: Without breaking any embargoes, could you share some highlights from your 2006 report, due out the end of March?

MR. MORIAL: Yeah, thank you. And we're going to release that report --

(As an aside.) What's our date?

MS. : March 29th.

MR. MORIAL: -- March 29th right here in this room, the "State of Black America" report. A couple of quick things. We're going to be talking -- building out on a policy statement we made last year called the Opportunity Compact, and we're going to be talking about some strategies to try to deal with economic disparities and poverty. We're going to have some stuff on Katrina. It's going to be exciting. We're really, really going to work hard to try to address some of the very difficult issues.

And another thing which should be of some interest in the media, we're going to update our "Sunday Morning Apartheid" study, which is a study our policy institute did which is a very, very interesting study where we looked at the voices of people of color on Sunday talk shows, everything from "Meet The Press" to George Stephanopolous to "Face The Nation," to look at

the inadequate number of voices of color that have an opportunity. And those shows set the tone for the debate in this country, and certainly in this city, and the policy discussions.

And we've just pushed -- I mean, I think somebody like, you know, Donna Brazile ought to be on every week, you know what I'm saying? (Applause.) I mean, first of all, she sounds better, she's smarter, and she certainly looks better -- (laughter) -- than a whole lot of those folks who are on. But I mean, it's an example.

So we're going to update that report to try to keep it in front as we seek a greater voice and seek to have people of color have a greater voice in policy discussions.

MR. SALANT: What is your opinion on the state of racism today in the United States? Is it smaller or bigger than it -- in this country than it was 10, 20, 30 years ago?

MR. MORIAL: I think that people are uncomfortable discussing race, and I think sometimes people equate not discussing it with the fact that it is not a problem. Having healthy discussions about race and racism in this country is very important to the continuing racial reconciliation and racial progress that we're going to make in this nation. It's become much more of a -- it's a different issue today. In some ways, it's the same as it once was.

But I think we should not -- we don't have to -- you don't have to be in the half -- glass half empty or glass half full camp in this country. See, the glass half empty sort of believes that we have made no progress in the last 40 years, which isn't true.

The glass half full suggests, you know, well, we're already there, we've accomplished our mission, there's -- equality and opportunity abound everywhere, and therefore we don't need any of the things we've had over -- both sort of polar views are inaccurate. We have made progress, but there is, as I mentioned, in the economic arena, a long way to go for this nation.

And new challenges in the 21st century are that we've got a growing Hispanic and Latino population, we've got a growing Asian population, and in communities -- in black communities -- New York is an example -- you've got growing communities of people from the Caribbean and the issue of African immigrants or the African immigrant community.

So the fabric of the issue is evolving, and it's changing. But race remains one of the defining issues in American life. It defines problems. It defines opportunities. It defines outcomes. And I think there's got to be a continuing commitment to recognize it and to work on it. And I think that is what the 19 -- the 20th century taught us. We've got to recognize it. We've got to work on it. And just because we don't talk about it doesn't mean it's there -- it shouldn't, quote, unquote, "be an obsession" in our domestic discussion, but we've got to acknowledge that some things that on the surface don't appear to have a racial impact can sometimes have a racial impact or racial considerations.

MR. SALANT: The murder rates in many of our largest American cities remain stubbornly high. Why? Have Americans become too tolerant of this problem?

MR. MORIAL: You know, it's interesting. I think that the root cause of the problem of murder in America's cities has so much to do with the problem of drugs -- crack cocaine, cocaine, heroin now, and the like. I think that's one of the engines of violence in America's cities.

I think another engine of violence in America's cities -- and I was just briefed on a report this morning -- is the significant issue of recidivism, the idea that people go to jail and 50 percent of them end up back in jail, because the prison system does very, very little in America today, for the most part, to help people transition back into the mainstream.

So it is -- I think that one of the things I've noticed and one of the concerns that I certainly have is that, for example, the Community Oriented Policing Program, Tom, that the Conference of Mayors worked to put into place, which was a very important initiative of the Clinton administration, has sort of -- it's kind of seen its demise, with the funding being shifted to Homeland Security, almost substantially. And I think that the law enforcement resources have not been there.

I think the second thing is, is when budgets go bad at state and local level, all too often, the quickest things people want to cut are programs for youth, physical education and arts programs for kids, recreation programs in the inner city.

And when you do that, there'll be a direct correlation in increase in violence among young people. So we got to have a -- have -- we got to return to some thinking that I think was prevalent in the 1990s, and that is, you can have good, strong, decent law enforcement on one hand, but that's not enough; but you've got to have youth programs, drug treatment and the other things on the other hand in an effort to try to deal with the problem of violence in America's cities -- and small towns, I might add, and little villages, because the problem of violence exists everywhere in American life.

MR. SALANT: In many big cities, middle class -- upper middle class Americans have stopped fleeing to the suburbs. In fact, many of them are coming back to urban areas. Is this resulting in a shortage of affordable housing, and are urban governments doing enough to combat this problem?

MR. MORIAL: You know, that's a(n) important question. How many of you all live in what might be called the suburbs? (Pause.) Interesting. It's about 40 percent of the hands that went up in this audience.

I think the concern we need to have is that the suburbs of the 21st century become the -- become -- become to the 21st century what inner cities were, because you've had, in effect, a gentrification or a shifting. I think it's positive that more middle class people want to live in urban communities. But I do believe that one of the side effects of that is the pricing out of affordable and working housing. That's why you've got to have good public policy and good interventions: to ensure that what makes a city a city is it's not a community of all rich people, not a community of all poor people, not a community of all middle class people, not a community of all blacks, all whites, all Asians, all Hispanics. What makes a city a city is the

multifaceted diversity that makes a city a city. And I think that there's got to be public policy in interventions.

I know many communities -- Seattle is one, Denver's another, Washington, D.C. is beginning to become a community like this -- where housing is just beyond the affordability level of many working class people. That requires some thinking, some strategies, some interventions from those in the housing market, those in a community-based space like we are, people who advocate civil rights, mayors and local elected officials, and also people who are going to run for national office. I mean, here's an issue that might not sizzle in the public opinion polls. But here's an issue that affects the way many people live in this country.

So I believe that we do face a set of challenges, a set of -- interesting set of factors, and we don't want, we shouldn't want today's suburbs to be yesterday's inner cities, where we've just flipped, because if we've done that, then progress here in, for example, the District, in some other inner city, has a cost for other communities, because we've not addressed the issue of poverty, the issue of schools, we've just played musical chairs on the deck.

MR. SALANT: Before I ask the last question I want to give you the official National Press Club coffee mug. (Laughter, applause.) And a certification of appreciation for appearing today.

Thank you very much.

MR. MORIAL: Thank you very much. (Applause.)

Let me do one last thing. I want to thank all of you all for listening, and this is a very nice cup. (Laughter.) I also just want to remind everyone that on the 29th here in this room we'll release our State of Black America Report. George Curry, who's one of my guests today, is the editor of that report, which is being prepared by our Policy Institute, headed by Stephanie and Lisa, with her help. And Donna's going to be writing a piece, and if any of you all just got a real, real urge, because you want to write, you want to get your writings published, we've got space in the 2007 report. (Laughter.) We're closed this year.

Thank you.

MR. SALANT: Last question. Do you plan to return to New Orleans next week to show your support for the first post-Katrina carnival?

MR. MORIAL: (Laughter.) I don't think I'll be going to Mardi Gras this week. I got two little ones at home. (Laughs.) But I -- you know, I -- I've been torn about Mardi Gras -- very, very torn. But I think this is probably -- what do I say. You know, you really can't cancel Mardi Gras because it's in the DNA. (Applause.) When I say you can't cancel -- you could cancel it, but it wouldn't be cancelled. (Laughter.) You could cancel it, but people -- I mean, you know, people would go out, and they would find a way to party on Mardi Gras day even if there wasn't a single parade on the street. That's the truth. And you know, the experience was -- Mardi Gras was cancelled in 1979. My father was mayor, and there was still one hell of a party that took place -- (laughter) -- I mean, even though there were no parades.

So it is creating some controversy, but let me just offer this thinking to people, and that is, that what Mardi Gras does for the city when visitors come in and spend is it'll put some tax dollars in the coffers of the government. I mean, it is an economic development project of significant proportions, and while people may see the frivolity and the fun on the surface and wonder if this is what people ought to be doing in the face of human tragedy, the other side of it is that it'll help some people have jobs. It'll produce some tax revenues for the city and the state that the city and state desperately need.

So I think that's the reality, and I hope when people look at it, they'll see -- they'll also see that side of it. (Applause.)

MR. SALANT: Don't forget the mug. (Laughter.)

I'd like to thank you for coming today. I'd also like to thank National Press Club members -- staff members: Melinda Cooke, Pat Nelson, Jo Anne Booze and Howard Rothman for organizing today's lunch. And thanks to the Press Club Library for its research.

We're adjourned. (Bangs gavel.) (Applause.)

#####

END