

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH CHRIS "LUDACRIS" BRIDGES

SUBJECT: COMMUNITY PHILANTHROPY

MODERATOR: DONNA LEINWAND, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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DONNA LEINWAND: (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon. Welcome to the National Press Club for our speaker's luncheon. My name is Donna Leinwand. I'm a reporter with *USA Today*, and I'm President of the National Press Club. We are the world's leading professional organization for journalists, and we are committed to a future of journalism by providing informative programming and journalism education, and fostering a free press worldwide. For more information about the National Press Club, please visit our website at www.press.org.

On behalf of our 3,500 members worldwide, I'd like to welcome our speaker and our guests in the audience today. I'd like to also welcome those of you who are watching us on C-SPAN. We're looking forward to today's speech and afterwards, I'll ask as many questions from the audience as time permits. Please hold your applause during the speech so that we have time for as many questions as possible. For our broadcast audience, I'd like to explain that if you hear applause, it may be from the guests and members of the general public who attend our luncheons, and not necessarily from the working press.

I'd now like to introduce our head table guests and ask them to stand briefly when their names are called. From your right, Kelly Wright, anchor and reporter, Fox News Channel; April Ryan, White House correspondent and Washington bureau chief for American Urban Radio Network; Linda Kramer Jennings, Washington editor for *Glamour* magazine; Marilyn Geewax, senior business editor for National Public Radio; Roberta Shields, president of the Ludacris Foundation, and Chris's mom.

Skipping over the podium for just a moment, Angela Greiling Keane, chair of the Speakers Committee and a reporter for Bloomberg News; we'll skip over our speaker for just a second; Lori Russo, organizer of today's luncheon and managing director for Stanton Communications. Thank you very much, Lori. Barry Florence, Chris's publicist, also of the Ludacris Foundation; Cynthia Tucker, a columnist for the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*; Paul Rodriguez, managing director of Burson-Marsteller; Janice Crump, senior director for special projects for the Committee on House Administration of the U.S. House of Representatives; and finally, Aisha Davis, president of the DESHO Productions. (Applause)

Our guest today could probably give a crash course on time management. When he isn't cutting a record, discovering the next rising hip-hop star, filming a movie, developing a clothing line or launching new brands of cognac, Chris "Ludacris" Bridges is dedicating time and money to helping America's young people become meaningful contributors to their communities.

Ludacris is perhaps best known for his sometimes controversial rap lyrics. You may remember his song, "Politics (Obama is Here)." It was not exactly well received by the then-presidential candidate. But he's also had memorable movie roles, including as a car thief, Anthony, in the Oscar-winning film, "Crash." And lately, he's increasingly in the news for his philanthropic endeavors. Just a few weeks ago, he and fellow rap star T.I. donated \$10,000 to help victims of flooding in Atlanta, his hometown.

Today, our guest will tell us about the Ludacris Foundation, which since its creation in 2001, has donated \$500,000 and more than 2,500 hours of service to support grass roots organizations that help young people. LudaCares, the organization's annual Thanksgiving through Christmas holiday program, has provided food baskets to more than 1,000 families, and Christmas toys to thousands of children in hospitals and low income communities.

Chris Bridges understands the potential of this nation's children. He wrote his first rhyme at age nine and began to rap competitively as a teenager in Atlanta. He studied music management at Georgia State University before going on to launch his own label and production company, Disturbing the Peace. In 2005, he became the first hip-hop artist to ring the opening bell on Wall Street. Please join me in giving a warm, National Press Club welcome to Chris "Ludacris" Bridges. (Applause)

MR. BRIDGES: Thank you. Thank you very much for that wonderful introduction. She is definitely right, I did write my first song when I was nine years old. But to let everybody know, I don't still have the audio. But just let you know, when I was nine years old, my first song I wanted to rhyme with girlfriend, so the rap was called, "I'm Cool, I'm Bad, I Might be Ten, But I Can't Survive Without My Girlfriend." So once I actually turned ten years old, I could say that song with the utmost confidence ever. So just letting you know, that was my first song. So thank you very much.

First of all, I want to thank, of course, the NPC and the general public. The general public, make some noise. Where's the general public at? All right. It feels good for the general public to come out and support me. This is my first time doing this. This is our first time doing our annual foundation dinner here in Washington, D.C. Of course, we want to connect with all the policymakers and the movers and shakers of the United States of America. So that's why I'm here. It's definitely my first time doing this luncheon and I'm very, very proud and I feel like the gratitude is out of this world right now, just for accepting me and having me do this.

So real quick, I want to thank everybody for this honor. Of course, like I said, I want to thank you for inviting me to speak to this special group of truth seekers, the recorders of the industry and all of the change agents. You, the press, have a very special responsibility, and that is to be a mirror for us to see ourselves, our communities, our country, and of course the rest of the world. And I truly respect the role that you play in our system.

I'm sure that some of you are asking, "Now, why would I want to speak at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C.? And why would they invite me?" To some, I'm just an entertainer, and of course I make my living by stringing together verses or playing a part in some movie or television series that you all may have seen, "Law and Order," by the way. I don't know if you saw that. "The Gamer" is also out at the movie theaters. In case you haven't seen it, go check it out.

Well, what would Ludacris have to say, what would I have to say about leadership? Well, I'm here to let you know, I'm going to say a lot of different things. So take what I say word for word. Immediately, you wonder if I'm planning to run for office, maybe for president in 2012. I'm here to let everybody know you don't have to worry about me doing that, for sure. But in fact, when I speak of leadership, I'm talking about leadership that is apolitical, leadership that is very basic and that starts with self. There's a cry for it. In fact, that is what the last election was all about. People were saying that we need something fresh, we need something new, we need something that defies convention. America has a great promise, but to me it's a promise that's unfulfilled. Not everyone gets an equal chance at it, and some never get a chance at all.

Not everyone believes that tomorrow can be better than today, or that the promise is even meant for them at all. Now, it's not right with all of our resources, every citizen is not afforded the opportunities to be the best that they can be if they want. And it was once said to treat people as if they were what they ought to be, and you help them become what they are capable of being. That is a promise fulfilled, in my opinion. Our communities need fixing. Our systems are badly broken. We can't wait on the government, the institutions, social programming and policies alone to fix our communities. We have to look at other sources, and that's why I'm here today.

In today's world, we have new issues and new challenges. The old way of looking at these issues and challenges have not rendered the outcomes that I feel we want. Trust bonds have been broken. Logical thinking, while necessary, is not sufficient. We need

lateral thinking. And by that, I mean thinking outside our current frame of reference. We need a new type of leadership. And that's why maybe I will run for president in 2012. (Laughter)

But currently, people are looking in a different direction for philanthropic leadership. There's a call for everyday people to take leadership role within philanthropy in order to help the communities in which they work and live. And that's something I feel like I've done to the fullest of my capabilities. When I say leading by example, that's exactly what not only myself but the Ludacris Foundation has done. With my mother, of course, the Ludacris Foundation was formally established in December of 2001 to sustain my commitment to make a difference in the lives of the youth, the families and communities throughout the United States of America. Now, my foundation inspires you through education and memorable experiences to live their dreams, thereby uplifting families, communities, and fostering economic development.

We have three key program focus areas, and I call them the three Ls. This is what I came up with. The first is leadership and education, the second is LudaCares, and the third is living healthy lifestyle, which is something very similar to what Mrs. Obama is doing right now. So let me share these with you.

Leadership and education is preparing everyone and all the youth to be successful with an emphasis on why education matters and making a lifelong difference. Not only education, but educating yourself. LudaCares, insuring that communities and its residents know that we care about them. I feel like I do that by leading by example and continuing to go to these communities, because if I weren't there, they wouldn't know how much we care about them.

Living healthy lifestyles. As I said, this is geared towards youth to learn about healthy eating, to address issues like nutritional health and childhood obesity, provide preventative health services and education to underserved youth. We help young people achieve their dreams through the encouragement of the principles of success. We aim to show young people in America that they are the builders of their own future. And it's not necessarily the cards that they're dealt, but how they play their cards.

Now since 2001, the Ludacris Foundation has donated well over \$2 million to support organizations that work to help families and communities. Our programs and support initiatives have directly impacted thousands upon thousands of lives. And what I'm more proud of is the fact that we have over 10,000 hours of invested hands-on service. That means that I don't just cut the checks and I tell everybody else to do the work for me, I'm there personally to make sure I know exactly where not only my money, but anybody who donates their money is going. And that's extremely important to me.

I'm going to give you an example. As a result of Hurricane Katrina's devastation, approximately over 20,000 families were relocated or migrated to the city of Atlanta. And I, along with my foundation, my mother, and Ebony Sun Entertainment, donated over \$100,000 in support of families victimized by the hurricane. We provided housing,

we provided housing assistance, we provided counseling assistance, we provided job referral assistance to 15 impacted families relocated to the Atlanta area. Each of these 15 families received four months of free rent, free furnished housing, a refrigerator full of food, clothing, toiletries, linens, all because not only did we dedicate our own supplies to these people, but we partnered up with a local radio station to ask the rest of the city of Atlanta to come and donate things that they don't need and that they would be willing to help out with.

Another example, in 2006 I released a song, "Runaway Love," which depicted children running away from a very dysfunctional life situation. As a follow-up to the song, my foundation partnered with the National Runaway Switchboard, and that's something I feel very important. Any song that I put out, I want to make it a movement, not just a single. There's a whole story behind it. But we partnered up with the NRS to help bring awareness to the problems facing runaway youth in America. Last year for November's National Runaway Prevention Month, I started a new public education campaign including a new PSA that was distributed to TV stations across the country. The initiative was spearheaded by the NRS with seven support from Greyhound to increase their awareness of issues facing America's runaways and educate the public on solutions and the role they can play in preventing youth from running away.

This year, we are continuing those efforts, and a lot of people don't even understand that over a million kids run away from home each and every year. I feel like this is one of those problems that a lot of people don't really understand about, and because I came out with this song I wanted to make everyone at how serious of a problem that that is, and how that can lead to so many other problems that we see in America today.

Yet another example, last Christmas, or LudaCrimas, as I would put it, we hosted a LudaCrimas event in the four cities for over 500 disenfranchised children, ages ranging from six to seventeen years old. Each event was tailored to the specific age of the youth involved, but the common theme was to create a fun and memorable experience for all of them. Children attending the events were treated to games, entertainment, of course great food, and at some locations, the children were also able to outfit a teddy bear and take pictures with Santa. These children were selected from communities throughout each city's metropolitan area by partnering with that community based and municipal organizations.

Now recently, we were able to offer our own-- I'm extremely proud about this, and I'm sure a lot of you heard about it-- But we offered our own metro Atlanta stimulus package. A LudaCares stimulus package of the sort, so to speak. We partnered with the local dealership and gave away 20 cars to individuals that needed a hand up during these tough economic times. And that's something that's extremely important to me. I feel like we give a hand up, we don't give a hand out. I only like to help people that want to help themselves, not people that are just going to take it and just take advantage of the situation. That is what I love to do. So having a vehicle to get back and forth to work and daycare would make the difference in getting and keeping a job, especially in these hard

economic times. And it touched my heart to be able to personally give the key to these cars to these individuals and to hear their stories.

We got over 5,000 different letters, and out of those 5,000 you can understand how hard it could possibly be for us to pick 20 out of those 5,000. So when I sit here and say that we always wish that we can do more, I honestly say that and I feel like with more power and more influence and the more that I do, the more that I can give back. And the reason I'm up here today is just to let everybody know I try to lead by example in that I feel like I have a certain amount of power and influence. I feel like that there are others that have more power and influence than I have, and there are some that may not feel as if they have as much power and influence as I have. But that doesn't mean that they can't do their part in giving back.

Now to give you another example, two weeks ago we raised over \$100,000 to support flood survivors in the Atlanta area. T.I., who's another rapper, and myself, we reached out to our friends in the hip-hop entertainment community for help. And I know a lot of people, they like to criticize the hip-hop community, but let me tell you exactly what the hip-hop community did within one hour of myself and T.I. reaching out to them to help our community. First of all, I donated \$10,000, T.I. donated \$10,000 and he was actually incarcerated at the time, and he still donated \$10,000 towards the cause because he feels just as important about giving back to his community as I do. And then we turned to friends and colleagues for help, and they didn't hesitate. We made over \$80,000 in eight hours from the hip-hop community. And it's as simple as that.

So with everything that I'm sitting here trying to tell you today, all the facts that I'm giving you, all of my personal insight, to me this is the new philanthropy that I'm talking about. Operating as an organization at the community level day to day. It's not your typical corporate institutional giving, just a group of likeminded individuals pooling their efforts to make a difference. Changing the social landscape one frame at a time.

Secondly, because there are new challenges in education, as we all know, there are new challenges in health care, as we all know, and other deep social issues that affect our youth, families and communities. Now, I feel like we have to approach these challenges with a new language. A form of communication that everyone knows about, a new technological platform and a broader view of community and globalism. Social networks and digital platforms are critical to reaching donors and communicating with constituents. Tweeting, Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, they're all essential tools in this new philanthropic environment.

Now third, the call for new philanthropic leadership is also a call for new relationships of trust. Understanding these communities in need and garnering their trust and the trust of donors that their contributions will make a direct and positive impact is extremely important to me, which is why all of the examples I've given you I was very hands on with, I was there in person with, and people know. They're starting to call me-- I have many different nicknames, but Luda FEMA is one of them. (Laughter) I'm here to let you know. That's because I'm hands on. Please believe me when I tell you.

Now, I take the responsibility of leadership and giving back very seriously, as you can tell. I have a deep-rooted tradition of service that has only broadened with my celebrity status. If I have more, I will try to do more, as I've said before. I mention these things not to pat myself on the back or brag, but to underscore the responsibility I feel like we all have to turn back, to reach back and give back to our communities. This period in our history should be a time of reflection for all of us to appreciate what we have and what we have given to those in need of our help.

This year, I chose D.C. to host my 6th Annual Ludacris Foundation Dinner, and I wanted to reach a national audience about service and a new call for leadership. We are recognizing five outstanding individuals for their tireless work and strong commitment to community service. Honorees are selected in acknowledgement of the excellence and integrity embodied in their work, as well as their willingness to support and participate in programs benefiting their community.

Now this year's honorees include, I call him my godfather, Mr. Quincy Jones, the Chairman's Award goes to, of course, Mr. Quincy. Kevin Liles, the President's Award, Debra Lee, BET Networks, the Corporate Award, and DC WritersCorp, accepted by Kenny Carroll, the community service award.

In addition, this year in honor of the foundation's first Washington, D.C. gala, Congresswoman Maxine Waters will be bestowed the first Ludacris Foundation Congressional Leadership Award. All of this, I say, to make you understand that when we leave Washington, the work of the foundation will carry on stronger than before. Thanks in part to success of the benefit dinner, of course, our partners and the opportunity that you have afforded me today to get our message across.

In the coming months, we look forward to expanding our footprint and doing more in the D.C. area, as well as everywhere else. And in closing, I just want to say, again like I said before, the task is not so much to see what no one yet has seen, but to think what no one yet has thought, about that which everybody sees. We have to have a paradigm shift regarding issues and possible solutions. And I shouldn't have to tell you all that, because you know it. Thank you very much. (Applause)

MS. LEINWAND: Okay, thanks for sending up all of your questions, we have lots of them today, so we'll get started. Your foundation dinner is in Washington for the first time. What do you want from Washington policymakers such as congressmen and senators?

MR. BRIDGES: Well, it's not called a fundraiser for any old-- For any reason. We are fundraising. Everything that I've told you about, I have facts and I have proof that we have actually done. I'm kind of one of those individuals that likes to let my work speak for itself. So to answer your question, what are we asking for, we are asking for your help. I'll just keep it as simple as that. I could go into specifics, I could talk for days about the specifics of what we could actually want. But I would just put it out there and

ask for help. And I feel like I've given you the parameters of how you can help, and I've given you the information of how you can help.

And just for the record, I want everybody to know that our foundation is the LudacrisFoundation.org, and that's the first place you can begin in order to help.

MS. LEINWAND: What do you think could be done if all young celebrities started foundations like you did when you were only 24 years old?

MR. BRIDGES: I feel like there would be no more issues in America whatsoever. I feel like we would almost be on our way to living the perfect lives in a perfect United States of America. That's the reason that I fight so hard and put myself in the forefront, even sometimes to be subjected to so much criticism. I put myself in front of this podium for the simple fact that I would love for more celebrities to do the exact same thing that I'm doing. Not just celebrities, I'm sorry, for everyone, everyone. And that is why I put myself in this position, even all of the criticism I have gotten over the past ten years. So I feel like I'm taking on the responsibility you know what I'm saying? I'm sitting here. Being in front of you I'm telling you that even though these things have happened, I'm not afraid to be in front of you and tackle any of the hard issues or questions or anything that I have done.

And I feel like there are many other celebrities that haven't been through half as much stuff as I have been through and they could put themselves in the same position. I say that in a great manner.

MS. LEINWAND: Well, we'll get back to that controversy.

MR. BRIDGES: I'm sure we will, NPC.

MS. LEINWAND: But for now, does the Ludacris Foundation plan to expand its efforts to other areas outside of Atlanta, such as D.C.? Or is the foundation only geared towards youth and individuals in Atlanta?

MR. BRIDGES: We have already expanded our reach outside of D.C. We have expanded our reach in every city that I can possibly name and think of right now. From feeding the homeless in Miami, from going to hospitals and rehabilitation centers in New York City, from working with Maxine Waters in south central Los Angeles and going to underprivileged facilities, dealing with kids and families. From doing things in Atlanta, Georgia from back to school programs and helping kids that can't normally get a haircut or get new school supplies and getting new backpacks and helping them there.

From going all the way to another continent, to South Africa, and helping with AIDS research. Like, I can go on and on, so that question, it's already been done. We continue to expand, we continue to try to reach places that we haven't already reached. And not only that, we continue to stay consistent in the city that we have already reached.

MS. LEINWAND: What do you think is the greatest challenge facing the national philanthropic community: money, time, national leadership or something else?

MR. BRIDGES: If I had to answer that question, I would say all of the above. Yes, we could use more money, we could use more time, and we could definitely use more of the government's time and leadership. It's as simple as that. All of the above. I don't want to get too longwinded. I feel like we can use all of that, which is another reason why I'm up here today.

And some people don't necessarily have money to give, and whenever I try and say that everybody can do something and we have answer President Obama's call to service, just because you don't have money doesn't mean you can't dedicate time. When I say go to the LudacrisFoundation.org, or if I say the internet is such a powerful tool these days, if you look at what you can do in your own community as donating your time to a service, whether it's rebuilding a school or painting something or getting rid of trash in an area, that is another way of giving back. So everybody can do something on their own and help to give back. It's just about you taking the initiative to find out how you can do that. If we all take care of our own communities, then I feel like we will be already on our way to a great solution of all the issues that we're having in the United States.

MS. LEINWAND: You meet lots of other celebrities. I'm thinking of Jay Leno the other night, and you kind of get around. So how do you pressure them to give back? What kinds of conversations have you had with them about what their responsibility is for philanthropy?

MR. BRIDGES: I pressured him by doing exactly what it is that I'm doing right now. I do this in hopes that other people will say, just like in the urban culture or just pop culture in general, how influence is extremely important. How people always say we have so much influence over other people. If I have that much influence, I'm hoping that me being here today and talking to all of you individuals will help to be influential and help pop culture to make other people want to do the same thing.

What can I tell, and what talks do I have with other celebrities? I basically tell them the same thing that I just told you all; that with great power comes great responsibility. And I feel like any celebrity has, even if they didn't ask for it, even if they don't realize it until a certain point in their being a celebrity, that they have a great responsibility and they have great influence. And like I said, with great power comes great responsibility.

MS. LEINWAND: What inspired you to use your influence in such a positive way? Do you have any specific experience that you can share with us that inspired you?

MR. BRIDGES: I could answer that question with one word, and that would be the individual that's sitting right next to me, my mama. It's as simple as that, my mother. Give her a round of applause. (Applause) I also have to thank-- I started in radio, this was way before, of course, when I was nine and I made my first song, but when I was about

19, I started at a radio station in Atlanta, Georgia, that is a Radio One station, so of course shout out to Kathy Hughes and Mary Katherine Snead where I had a certain amount of community service that they required us to do every week. So with that being said, those leaders at that Radio One station, whoever made that decision to say that everyone that works at this station is required to do a certain amount of community service every week, I think that person, and I commend them, because that is also why I feel has a substantial amount to do with why I give back so much. Knowing my influence and knowing my power. And as like I said before, as my power continues to grow, then so does my foundation and the work that we do in giving back.

MS. LEINWAND: All right, speaking of Mama, right over there, can you tell us what gift she gave you that helped you become the man you are today?

MR. BRIDGES: I can name a lot of different examples on that particular question. However, I'll tell you one that I feel like will resonate to everyone in this room. I've come to realize that I think this will help all parents who want their children to be focused and to live a life that they are confident about in terms of following their dreams and setting expectations for themselves. And it goes a little something like this, since before I can remember, I don't know even know where she got this idea from. First of all, I was one of those kids that, of course, I did well in school but I definitely can say that I hated when my mother gave me extra work outside of the schoolwork that I was supposed to be doing. Did not like it at the time. But, of course, everyone in this room can understand that, something that their parents made them do that they probably hated. In retrospect as you get older, you look back at it and say, "I'm very glad that that happened."

She made me, every year, write down my expectations and what I wanted to accomplish in the next year to come. My goals and my ambitions and all these different things, I had to write down. And I remember I hated doing it, but it made me become the man that I am today. That's why I feel like I'm so driven, that's why I feel like I'm up here today. That's why I feel like I don't take no for an answer. This is why I feel like no matter what, I'm never satisfied to a certain degree. I always feel like I can do more. So take that and understand. Write your goals down, make your kids do it, have expectations for yourself, go after your dreams, know exactly it is that you want, and make sure you do it and follow up. And if you don't accomplish it, understand why and make sure that you don't make the same mistake or continue going towards that goal, absolutely.
(Applause)

MS. LEINWAND: Please expand on the work you have done on providing transportation to families in Atlanta. What sparked your interest in this endeavor, and why do you think transportation is so critical?

MR. BRIDGES: In an economy like the one we're in today, I think that's as simple question. You can't walk and/or take the bus to be as efficient as you may want to be in order to try and get the job that you feel you want. Or if you're lining up a certain amount of job, a certain amount of job interviews and things of that nature, you want to

be as efficient as possible. It's pretty much as simple as it gets. I just wanted to help people that I knew wanted to help themselves.

There was an actual-- There was a guy that really touched my heart that had come from Africa and his entire family had been killed, of course, because of the government situation or lack thereof in Africa. He came to the United States, and he started a family of his own. He saw his own daughter get hit by a runaway car-- I'm sorry, by a car that-- What's the word I'm looking for, I'm sorry? A hit and run, yeah. He saw his own daughter get run (sic) by a hit and run car and all he wanted to do was try and get a job to provide for his own family. And we were able to provide him with that car. His church, all these different individuals had been praying for him. They were trying to look for ways to get him to these job interviews so that he could help take care of his family in spite-- Or despite of what had happened before. And I almost broke down as tears as a grown man when I helped this individual. And it makes me realize why I work so hard in doing what I do. Because to see the reward in which helping individuals like that brings to me, that's all I could possibly ask for, absolutely.

MS. LEINWAND: In what ways do you distinguish who needs a hand up from those who are looking for a handout?

MR. BRIDGES: Man, with all due respect, I have family members who are looking for a handout from me and not a hand up. And I may get criticized for saying that, but it's just something that with all of our given intuition, we can just tell, it's just something that you know. I had a family member email me the other day and say something along the lines of, "I don't know why I'm asking you this because I know you probably won't do it, but." I'm just like, "How do you start off a sentence like that?" That automatically puts me on the defensive like, "Okay, I'm not going to do whatever the hell you want to ask me to do."

I don't know, I think we all know the difference of people who are looking for a handout and people that are looking for a hand up. I know there's a big homeless problem here in Washington, D.C., I know we drive our cars each and every day. We look on the side of the street, we see signs of individuals saying this and that, and you know that if you give them money, whether or not you're helping them to give them a hand up or if you're helping to give them a handout, whether they're headed to the nearest liquor store after you give them some money or not, I feel like we all individually make that decision based on our own intuition on what we feel. So to answer that question, all I can say is it's my intuition. It's as simple as that.

MS. LEINWAND: Okay. Can you talk a little bit about your foundation's sponsorship of DC Culture Shock's east coast dance competition?

MR. BRIDGES: There are so many things that we do, not vividly I don't remember too much about the specifics of that, but I do know that any initiative where it's trying to help people get off of the streets or to distract them from doing negative

things and extracurricular activities, I can definitely say that we are 100 percent for that. And that is exactly why we did that particular thing.

MS. LEINWAND: Several years ago, MTV ran a special that highlighted your efforts combating AIDS and poverty in South Africa's shanty towns. Do you have an update on how your efforts there are going?

MR. BRIDGES: I can definitely say that we always check back in with everything that we do and try and see how everything is going. Unfortunately, I can say that the war against AIDS in Africa is very far from being won. So, I feel like we did help, but I would ask that anyone who can, try to help continue that fight as we will continue doing. That's just one of those questions where I can honestly say that it's not enough. We have a lot more work to do. There's a lot going on in Africa in terms of the AIDS virus and epidemic and all of these things that I feel like we need a lot more help in doing.

MS. LEINWAND: Here's a question from one of our local reporters. The rumor is that you're going to homecoming at Howard. What's your role this year?

MR. BRIDGES: I think that probably came from a song that I put out maybe about five years ago saying that I never miss a Howard homecoming. It just so happens that this year, my foundation dinner was at the same weekend as the Howard homecoming. I didn't do that, or did I? I don't know, I might have. I might have purposely done that so that once I get out-- No, I'm sorry. Anyway, I don't have any involvement with the Howard homecoming this year. I'm just in the town, so a lot of the energy that's being brought forth, I'm just a part of that energy. But as far as everything I'm doing this weekend, it has everything to do with what I'm talking about, about foundation, about charity, about giving back, about people coming together, about bridging the generation gap, about trying to meet Capitol Hill with the youth.

I honestly feel like, when we talk about bridging the generation gap, there will be a lot of solutions to the problems that are going on today if the youth and the people at Capitol Hill come together and try and find solutions. Because I feel like it's just one entity working and not getting any help from another entity. If we all come together and get new ideas and new perspectives, then that's where solutions come from. Us opening up certain discussions so that people can talk and being open to new ideas, that's what it's all about.

MS. LEINWAND: Have you thought about including your message about philanthropy in any of your rap lyrics?

MR. BRIDGES: I would definitely say that "Runaway Love" song and other songs that I've done have pretty much done exactly that. When I say the "Runaway Song," and that's partnering up with the National Runaway Switchboard. When I say every song is a movement, that's pretty much what it comes down to. So absolutely, to answer that question, yes I have. I try to do what I can. I also stay true to my art form and

I talk about all walks of life. Are you going to expect an entire album from Ludacris saying what we should be doing? I'm not sure, I don't know. However, I definitely try to input that in some of my music.

MS. LEINWAND: I suppose if you can come up with a rhyme for girlfriend, you could come up with one for philanthropy.

MR. BRIDGES: At nine, absolutely.

MS. LEINWAND: You seem to have a very strong urge to serve. Oh, I think someone is recruiting you for a political campaign. Service is a major part of politics. It sounds like you're on the road to run and for what? Have you seriously considered politics as something you might be interested in in the future?

MR. BRIDGES: I was joking when I said it earlier, but since I've been up at this podium, I am strongly considering running for President in 2012. As long as they don't use some of the things that people want to criticize me for in the past during my campaign, I feel like I have a very strong chance of winning.

MS. LEINWAND: Okay, so that would be a forward-looking campaign. So how do you reconcile your controversial lyrics with your position as a role model for youth?

MR. BRIDGES: Good one, that's a great question. I love it, I love it, I love it. You know, I don't expect for everyone to agree with the use of language that I use. Like I just said, music is an art form. In different forms of entertainment, whether it be movies, whether it be comedy, I know that we all say certain things and I know that I say certain things to get an effect from people. But regardless of the effect, I know that I'm here today and you can see the person that I am giving your intuition, as I said earlier. And I would hope that you understand that regardless of my music art form, that you see many different sides of who I am. And we all have multifaceted personalities in this room and the people that are watching and know that Ludacris is not one-sided. It's as simple as that. Know that I have a big heart, and me giving back and wanting to make change in this country and abroad is the most prevalent thing that I could possibly say.

MS. LEINWAND: A lot of people are concerned about violence in hip-hop music. What's your opinion?

MR. BRIDGES: Another good one, all right. I don't attribute violence to hip-hop. I attribute violence to ignorance, honestly speaking. And with that being said, there are a lot of ignorant things going on in the United States of America today, and that is again why I am here in front of you all speaking. Trying to make a difference about the ignorance that is going on today, trying to come forth, trying to take the responsibility and trying to get people to come together to talk about what we can do about this ignorance, about trying to change the minds of those who are doing the ignorant things. About trying to say that it all starts at home, it starts with family. How do we change the family structure in America in order to raise daughters and to raise sons to where they are

thinking in the lines of being positive and not doing ignorance, not to give into peer pressure, all of these things. That is exactly why I'm here.

MS. LEINWAND: Okay, we have a lot of young people in the audience today. I think we have some folks from the Seed School, from St. Paul's. And they want to know, what do you think are the most important ways in which young people can help and influence each other?

MR. BRIDGES: I think young people need to understand that being themselves is good enough. It's always somebody trying to convince them that if they're not doing this, then they're not cool, or they're not up with the times. I think the best thing that they can do is to, like I said, find out what you can do to help in your community. I think you can lead by example. I think that most people feel as if they don't have influence amongst enough people. But it's not about having influence amongst enough people, you can have influence over one person. You could be a bigger sister, you could be a bigger brother and have influence over your younger siblings. That enough is to me, I feel like reason to try to make a difference, to try and lead by example.

What you don't understand is that whatever you do positive is going to rub off on someone else, or at least spark the seed inside of the brain of the individual that may think differently in terms of making a decision, of saying, "Well should I do this or should I do this?" So what I feel is that everyone take responsibility. You have to take responsibility, no matter how young you are. If you look at me as an influence, you sit there and say, "I'm going to make a difference in my own community," whether it's you with your church, whether you talk to your parents about it. You know, all the greats in history, they didn't necessarily know how they were going to do what they did. They just knew that they were going to do it. So what I'm telling you is if you make up in your mind that you're going to do something, there's nothing that can stop you from actually making it happen.

Use all of the resources, use all of the people that you know, all the people that you love in order to make it happen. Ask questions. That's all I do. Until this day, I continue to ask questions from everyone around me. It's okay if you don't know everything. So continue to ask questions, to get to do exactly what it is that you feel like you want to accomplish.

MS. LEINWAND: So there was a little addendum to that question. Someone asked, "Are you single?"

MR. BRIDGES: That has absolutely nothing to do with what I'm talking about up here today. (Laughter) No comment, I'm not talking about that. No, I'm actually not single, I'm actually taken. That's as simple as that. Except for the general public ladies in here that want to have at 'em. It's all good, yeah, yeah.

MS. LEINWAND: So can you tell us some of the concrete steps that you took to make it happen for yourself?

MR. BRIDGES: As far as me being not single? Is that what you're talking about? I'm not married, by the way, I'm just not single.

MS. LEINWAND: The career.

MR. BRIDGES: Yeah, I know what you're talking about. As far as the career, I think it all started with me writing my goals each and every year that my mother made me do outside of schoolwork, like I said before. It started with that. It was just about learning from every mistake. I think success always-- Success, it consists of going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm. And I think that right there alone has made me successful. People get so discouraged when something goes wrong, or when they lose at something or they fail at something, and then they just quit. I would tell everybody out there, stop quitting. I hate a quitter. And I don't use that word a lot. The word "hate" is a strong word. But I can honestly say that I hate quitters, I hate them. Simple as that.

MS. LEINWAND: What was your best subject in school and your worst?

MR. BRIDGES: Man, that's a good question. Best subject in school was probably English, which is what leads me to be the best rapper and speaker and actor that I could possibly be. The worst, that's a good question. Maybe we have to ask my mom that question since she checked my report card every time. What did I get Cs and Ds in, is the question. I don't know. I was definitely good in math. Yeah, I'm good in math 'til this day, believe that. I can't think of what was the worst. Maybe history, I'll be honest with you. Yeah, I would definitely say history because I was very stubborn as a child in knowing that where you come from will determine-- Or, you know, helps you understand where you're going. But I can say that at this point in my life I have learned from my mistake of being stubborn about history. And that is why I'm speaking so freely about what has happened in the past and about where we are going today, absolutely.

MS. LEINWAND: So what's the coolest thing about being a celebrity?

MR. BRIDGES: The coolest thing about being a celebrity is the fact that we already make a lot of money and people still give us stuff for free. I can't think of anything besides that, except of the fact-- Like you have money, but they still give it like it just doesn't-- It's the greatest thing in the world, man. It doesn't matter how much money you have, you still appreciate the hell out of getting something for free. I don't care what it is. It could be a pen that somebody gives me, it's free. I didn't have to pay for it.

So with that being said, there's also the other greatest thing about being a celebrity is when you do-- When you are able to provide for your family and make money, it's almost like you are able to provide certain individuals that you love with jobs that-- Or, you're able to provide for your family or you want to do certain things for your mother or your father that you felt like you owe them because of everything they've done for you. But it's as simple as that.

Now, don't get it twisted. Sometimes, you get jobs for the people you love and they don't do the job the correct way. And then you end up having to show them some tough love and having to fire them. But at the end of the day, it's the point in which you sit there and you say you can provide that person with the job. That means the most to me. Now, what's the worst thing about being a celebrity?

MS. LEINWAND: Oh, I forgot about that part.

MR. BRIDGES: With all due respect to the media-- With all due respect, how some of you-- I'm saying some, because I'm not saying all-- try to paint certain stories just to get a story in a negative light, especially when it comes to rappers. And you try to-- It's almost like you make it seem a certain way just so that you can get people to read whatever it is that you're putting out. I don't appreciate that. But I feel like it comes with the territory. My life can't be that great, there has to be certain things that are kind of like, "Damn, why did they do that to me? That's not even true." So I feel like that is the worst thing, when people say things that are totally untrue, or they hear a rumor and they totally twist it. And I sit there and read it and I'm like, "Why would you even say something like that?" But at the end of the day, it matters to me, the people that know me and the people that love me, they know who I am. They can read something and automatically say, "No, that's not something he did or that's not something he would do." You know what I'm saying? Simple as that.

MS. LEINWAND: Well, boy, are you going to be confused today because we're a media group and we're going to give you something for free.

MR. BRIDGES: That's good.

MS. LEINWAND: What made you want to start singing and rapping? And have you ever discovered a talent on the street?

MR. BRIDGES: Have I ever discovered a talent on the street? I can say on the D.C. streets, there's people beating on drums and stuff like doing the go-go music here in Washington, D.C. that I've discovered talent. But what was the question, what made me-- ?

MS. LEINWAND: What made you want to start singing and rapping?

MR. BRIDGES: What made me want to start singing and rapping? I can say this from my father, may he rest in peace. Every morning, I would wake up as a child, he would be playing some music. Whether it was like Michael Jackson or Prince or Frankie Beverly and Mays, and I feel like it just was a part of me. And I just started loving music, period. And from there, hip-hop was born and everything from Run DMC to LL Cool J I just gravitated towards it just because I had such a natural love for music. So, I would say that's what made me start.

MS. LEINWAND: Okay, this is a very polite question from one of our students. It says as the artists within hip-hop mature, which I think means as the artists within hip-hop get old, do you expect the music of hip-hop to mature as well?

MR. BRIDGES: Do I expect the music of hip-hop to mature? I feel like it already has. I can't speak for all of hip-hop. I can speak for some of hip-hop. I feel like it's very diverse, I feel like there's a lot of versatility. And I feel like that's what makes hip-hop so great, is because everything is not the same. I feel like we all have the choice to listen to what type of hip-hop or whatever music that we want to listen to. And that's what makes it so great. So, do I feel like it's matured? Absolutely. And after this interview, do I think that other people will feel like it's matured? Just from me being here, I feel like that is clue enough to understand that hip-hop has matured.

MS. LEINWAND: Being one of the first southern hip-hop artists to work with the legendary New York producer, DJ Premier, could you briefly describe your experience with him? And do you plan on working with any other golden era hip-hop producers, maybe Ludaversal (sic)?

MR. BRIDGES: It depends on what your opinion of-- What was that? Opinion of golden era hip-hop producers are? However, yeah, in my opinion I feel like I will work with more. And my experience with DJ Premier was a good one. He's been one of those people that's been around since the beginning of time as far as Gang Starr and all these people are concerned. And that's why as a southern artist, I wanted to link with him because I love hip-hop so much and I feel like we came up with a historic project and a historic song. So, I'm very grateful because of that. but working with him is great. He's extremely focused. He knows what he's doing, he makes beats extremely-- Like, very fast and I think he's one of those individuals that will last through the ages.

MS. LEINWAND: We are almost out of time, but before I ask the last question, we have a couple of important matters to take care of. First of all, let me remind our members of future speakers. On October 26th, Captain Wei Jiafu, President and CEO of Costco, will address U.S./China relations in general and discuss the trade issues between the two countries.

On November 13th, Chik-fil-A founder and Chairman, Truett Kathy and Chik-fil-A President and CEO Dan Kathy, the father and son team, will discuss their company's unprecedented sales growth despite a struggling economy and their recipe for success, hospitality and customer service. On November 16th, Debbie Hersman, chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board will be joining us.

And second, I would like to present our guest with his official media freebie.

MR. BRIDGES: Freebie, all right.

MS. LEINWAND: The NPC mug. (Applause)

MR. BRIDGES: You see what I tell you? Thank you, thank you, thank you. See, I appreciate it, it's free. I'm going to use this, I will use this.

MS. LEINWAND: Well, maybe you'll come back again, you can get a matched set. So before we conclude our program, I'm going to ask you all to stay in your seats as we do end the program because people need to get out, so if you can all stay seated I will ask the last question. Could you explain how you chose the area codes in your hit single, "Area Codes."

MR. BRIDGES: And you chose that one last for a reason, I'm sure. What a great question that is. After you say that, I'm going to add one more. Honestly speaking, people take from it what they will. The song "Area Codes" came from the simple fact of me always being in one city and being able to tour and go and do shows in different cities. Whether we collected numbers from different individuals and people will call us from these different numbers because it was the first time that we visited these different cities, that is basically where the song "Area Codes" came from.

It's nothing specific. But on a last note, this question right here says what can you say to a young person that is thinking about running away from home? I just want to end on a good note and say that you can talk to a teacher, you can talk to a friend. And most importantly, there's the National Runaway Switchboard that you can call and let them know if you're thinking about running away. So there you have it.

MS. LEINWAND: Okay. Thank you very much. I'd like to thank you all for coming today. I'd also like to thank National Press Club staff members Melinda Cooke, Pat Nelson and Joann Booz for organizing today's lunch. Also, thanks to the National Press Club Library for its research. The video archive of today's luncheon is provided by the National Press Club's Broadcast Operations Center. And our events are available for free download on iTunes as well as on our website. Nonmembers may purchase transcripts, audio and videotapes by calling 202-662-7598, or emailing us at archives@press.org.

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