

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH LEWIS BLACK

SUBJECT: POLITICS AND SOCIAL ISSUES

MODERATOR: MYRON BELKIND, PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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**MYRON BELKIND:** (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon, and welcome. My name is Myron Belkind. I'm an adjunct professor at the George Washington University School of Media and Public Affairs, a former international bureau chief for the Associated Press, and the 107<sup>th</sup> President of the National Press Club. The National Press Club is the world's leading professional organization for journalists committed to our profession's future through our programming with events such as this while fostering a free press worldwide. For more information about the National Press Club, please visit our website at [www.press.org](http://www.press.org). And to donate to programs offered to the public through our National Press Club Journalism Institute, please visit [www.press.org/institute](http://www.press.org/institute).

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

I'd also like to welcome our C-SPAN and Public Radio audiences. You can follow the action on Twitter using the hashtag NPCLunch. And after our guest's speech concludes, we will have a question and answer period. I will ask as many questions as time permits, and I understand we've already received a number of very good ones. Now it's time to introduce our head table guests. I'd ask each of you to stand briefly as your name is announced.

From your right, Mike Hempen, AP broadcast supervising editor; Amy Morris, radio anchor, WNEW; Pat Host, reporter *Defense Daily*; Nikki Schwab, Washington Whispers editor, *U.S. News & World Report*; Barry Lynn, a guest of the speaker who is executive director of the Americans United for Separation of Church and State; Lenny Hughes, also a guest of our speaker, retired *Washington Post* editor and writer; Jerry Zremski, Washington bureau chief of *Buffalo News* and chairman of the NPC Speakers Committee and a part president of the National Press Club.

Skipping over our speaker for a moment, Bob Carden, Carden Communications and the Speakers Committee member who organized today's event. Thank you, Bob. Torie Clarke, a guest of the speaker and a former spokesperson for Donald Rumsfeld; Lucas Wysocki, reporter, BankRate; Rod Kuckro, reporter, E&E Publishing; Fred D'Ambrosi, news director, WUSA TV. (Applause)

It's one thing for a comedian to make you laugh. It's quite another for that comedian to make you think, make you mad, make you question authority. Our guest today does all of that. Lewis Black's original humor fused with angry rants and faux nervous breakdowns portray an everyday man at odds with a mad society around him. Mr. Black is probably best known for his appearances on Comedy Central's "Daily Show." His "Back in Black" commentaries are among the show's most popular segments.

Mr. Black lampoons popular culture, family values, politicians and religion. Few subjects are off limit. Less known is that Mr. Black is a prolific writer and diverse performer. He has written more than 40 plays, a few books, released several comedy albums and produced and starred in numerous specials for HBO, Comedy Central, and others. He has also acted in the "Law and Order" TV series, and appeared in a number of films.

The son of an engineer and schoolteacher, Lewis began writing plays at Spring Brook High School in Silver Spring, Maryland, and at college. He attended the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill and maintains a residence there. While at UNC, he lived in a theater commune. He earned a master's in fine arts from the Yale School of Drama in 1977.

Mr. Black is a progressive thinker who once described himself as a socialist. He described his humor as "being on the *Titanic* every single day and being the only person who knows what is going to happen." Many critics and observers think Mr. Black belongs in the same company as those people who influenced him; George Carlin, Richard Pryor, and Lenny Bruce. One thing's for sure, he's funnier than I am. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Lewis Black to the National Press Club. (Applause)

**MR. BLACK:** Boy, if I knew that there were going to be these things that I could read off of-- seriously. Nobody told me there was this-- that's how you-- I thought you were doing that by heart. Because I would have written a speech and stuff. But instead, I just got notes. To those watching C-SPAN and public whatever you are out there, I may use profanity, so tough. Because I can't really work and speak without using

it talking about some of the things I'll talk about. If I make it through the whole thing, it'll be exciting for both of us.

I want to thank all who are up here on the dais with me, just so I could say the word dais. It is the only time you use that word, and I really would like to thank my friends who are joining me today and I think are absolute proof that if you look at Tori, to Barry Lynn, I have the entire political spectrum of Washington. So when people say, "Well, you're a--" he was right to say that I'm-- I do say that I'm a socialist, and I am a socialist. And that is about as powerless a position as you can be in the United States. And I really just wanted to start with that because the idea of calling anyone outside of maybe Bernie Sanders a socialist, to call Obama a socialist is you have got to be out of your goddamn mind.

There are seven socialists left in the country and if you really want to see the leadership of the socialist party, you can go to a cemetery and find them. We have no effect. As a matter of fact, when I was a kid you actually read about them, and I can't imagine that in many of the history books which you've also kind of forgotten evolution is a real thing, that socialism is really even discussed historically. I kind of got this background from my parents who are here today and my father was a mechanical engineer and my mother was a schoolteacher. They are really the ones who shaped the way that I look at things. So, if anything upsets you, they're here. You can discuss it with them. (Applause)

It's been tough because to try to figure out how to-- I have 25 minutes to speak. To actually speak to what I would speak to, it would take-- you'd be sitting here actually for an hour and a half and then probably you'd leave and I would still keep talking because there really is a bunch of things I want to cover.

My parents are the last of the middle class families in America. I was raised middle class, absolutely middle class. When I hear a discussion in Congress about the disappearing middle class and what needs to be done, I don't think they have a clue. I don't think they have any sense of history. I don't think they have any idea of how it works. It worked really remarkably. I don't look back at that time and go, "Oh, it was a golden age," you know? Because TV wasn't in color until I was much older, so it wasn't that great a time. But you have to realize that there was a sense in the community that I was in where everyone was middle class. That there was truly a sense that somehow, everything would be okay. Things would be taken care of.

We had a thing back then, and I know this will come as a shock here in Washington, called taxes. Listen to the lack of the laugh in this room. Listen to the lack of a laugh in this room. Taxes. Hahahahaha. And your response is, "Huh?" You can't even talk about it. You won't even crack a smile. It's extraordinary. And what those taxes went for were to things like-- when I finished school at the end of the school year during the summer, there was a 10 to a 12 week program down the street that I walked to that was a recreation center run by Montgomery County in which I could go there at eight and

go there until five. No one called it child care. It was called get the little shit out of the house.

And as a result, I spent a lot of time at that place. My parents didn't have to worry. It was extraordinary. Those don't exist. They may exist in pockets around the country; gone. Gone. A community effort, gone. There was the high school, the junior high, the elementary school. We went down six times a year, and not just me, the whole school, went down to watch the national symphony and that's where I learned that I had no interest in classical music. But it was an effort. It was arts in the school. And now you have to fight to get arts in the school because nobody wants to pay for it. Nobody wants to pay for anything anymore. I mean, it's the way I look at it. That nobody wants to pay to get the things that would allow really to be a great education for children. And I had that education and they were middle class. It wasn't some wealthy neighborhood.

My parents were earning your basic kind of a salary and they had health insurance. And my mother taught at my high school. She was a substitute teacher there. And I will tell you just as a sidelight, the fact that my mother was a substitute teacher where I went to school and that I don't have asthma today is really extraordinary because that's the kind of thing that could really break a child. But my mother was seriously funny, which has made it easy for me to deal with the other students because students would come out after a class and talk about how my mother had told some jackass who was sitting in the back row what an asshole he was.

But my mother once said, and it was one of the greatest things I've ever heard. Some kid said, "Well, why do I have to learn this?" And my mother said, "The reason you have to learn this is because in two years when I drive up to the Sears on the corner to get my gas, I don't want you to be standing there pumping it." So, my mother, probably part of what formed the way I look at things is my parents, we would sit around. It was my brother, my parents, myself and Walter Cronkite. I literally thought until a few years ago that Walter Cronkite was a part of my family.

And then my mother would go in and out of the kitchen and whatever was on the TV she would yell about. "Well, I can't believe they're doing that today." And my father would sit there and when the Vietnam War occurred, I think was a profound change in my life because-- and let me get this off while I remember it. If we're not going to have an army that's drafted, so that there is no kind of fail safe system within our system so that people might respond to a war in another fashion because we are insulated from that army, it might well be considered that if you want to go to war there will be a tax and then maybe people will think about it. That's just a thought. Apparently of no interest here.

So, my mother was immediately against the war in Vietnam. My father was a mechanical engineer who worked for-- was it the Navy Department or the Defense? The Navy, right? The Navy Department. He made sea mines. Sea mines are a defensive weapon, for those of you who don't-- you younger members of the audience, it looks like a beach ball and it's got spikes in it and floats around in the water and submarines hit

them. And you put it in your harbor to protect your harbor from an invading ship. He was listening to my mother yell on and on about this and one of the main reasons that we declared war was the decision was made over something called the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which I would have Googled last night, but I'm a very busy man.

So, my father said he didn't know if the war was-- and the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution was based on the Geneva Accords, so that we were going to war over these Geneva Accords. And my father said that my mother was full of it because she didn't know if this was a legitimate war or not. And that he was going to sit down and read the Geneva Accords. Do you know anyone, do you know anyone, anywhere, a distant relative-- send out emails today-- that you know that read the Geneva Accords. You didn't. Did you really? No, of course not. (Laughter) The Geneva Accords and he sat down and read them. He went to the library, he got them, he read it and he finished it and he announced that there was no legal basis for us to be in Vietnam. There was no legal basis to go to war. And so he took an anti-war stance, as did my mother mainly over the legitimacy of it.

And during the course of the next few years, of that war, we mined Haiphong Harbor. And when we mined Haiphong Harbor, we put sea mines there so that my father, who was essentially building defensive weapons, his weapon was being used defensively. And he decided at that point in time that in all good conscience, he could not stay at his job. And at the age of 55, he retired.

Now, that-- that's my agent [phone ringing] and I'll have to go now, apparently there's big things on my horizon. So, his retirement had a profound effect on me because it was-- I'd never seen anybody, and I've seen a few people in my life, make a choice out of conscience. I've read about people. And my father did it. And it was an extraordinary thing to do. To do it at a time in which I'm in my last year of school, of college. My brother's in his first year of college, and he's going to walk away and I'm going, "Where's the cash going to come from?" And he walked away and became an artist and went ahead and did what he wanted to do, probably from the very beginning of his life, which was to do art. But, you know, you don't come out of the Depression and go, "Hey, I'm going to paint," unless it was a house.

So, it really affected, for me, choices that I made during my life, that you choose to do what it is you want to do. He was a much happier person after that and he started in stained glass and that was becoming too much and he said he couldn't get as much done and he studied painting. And at the age of 83 retired as a painter at which point he said-- I said, "Why are you quitting?" And he said, "Because--" and this is the greatest thing I've ever heard any artist say and the most honest-- "I've run out of ideas." And my mother would yell and scream about anything that she found appalling. And apparently, there was a lot.

So between the two of them, I was given a sense of conscience and of at least for myself, and a sense of the most important lesson-- one of the most important lessons of my life. Do what it is that you want to do. Whenever I'm asked by kids, "What's your best

advice to a young person?" It's do what you want to do and everything will fall into place and you don't worry about money. And you don't worry about money. It's the last thing you worry about. You worry about your satisfaction as a human being. And my parents lived on a very frugal budget. It was really irritating to me. I had no really proper vacations as a child. You wouldn't believe some of the places we ended up. Even they would arrive there and go, "Holy God, it looked better in the magazine." And as a result, they have survived and survived well. I mean, they're 96 and 95. (Applause)

And my father, listen good out there, those in C-SPAN, my father has the same health insurance as the members of Congress do, the same health insurance was given to my dad. And as a result, they've been able to live nicely, not over the top. One of the things that someone had said, my age had said that I remember that I thought was really one of the great things about my youth, I had no sense or did I care that I wasn't rich. We lived next to a rich neighborhood and the buildings were bigger and they had nicer lawns. But I didn't care. I could not imagine that they had more than I did except vacations. I know they had better vacations.

And so between them and just to piece this together in a quilt, probably the three things that had an effect in the way that I look at life that was outside of me was-- and the reason I think that I ended up feeling that the Democrats and the Republicans really didn't work for me and that I did believe-- that I did feel that socialism was the way in which I felt about things-- part of the reason I believe in socialism is because if you are going to have a Christian philosophy, if that is going to be the basis of the country that you live in, and it is a Christian philosophy, and I know this because I'm a Jew, that you might want socialism because what it is is enforced Christianity. You put your money where your mouth is and shut up. We're not going to wait on you to help the poor. You're going to help the poor, like it or not. Toughsky-shitsky.

So, three things had that effect besides my folks. One was Edward R. Murrow's "Harvest of Shame," which I would recommend to any young member of the audience to watch. It's one of the greatest documentaries I've ever watched. And I had no concept of this. I was 12 years old and I lived a really sheltered life in a really nice community. And all of a sudden, I'm looking into people who really are the ones picking the food and gathering it and getting it to market. And they're living in squalor and they're not getting paid for it. And I'm going, "Well, there's something wrong with this picture. That makes no sense."

And then I was born and raised at a time-- here's just another sidebar. When you take a look at this city and they talk about downsizing the federal government, because that's the most important thing that possibly has to happen, is to make government smaller. You're going to make government smaller? Watch what happens to Washington, D. C. Watch it. Why do you think it's out there? What do you think the motor is behind all those restaurants? It's the government. It's the federal government. The federal government combined with all the lobbyists coming in, and that's what-- do you think it's tourists? Are you out of your goddamn minds? It's the federal government.

And when I was a kid and the federal government was smaller, this didn't exist. You had a Woodrow & Lothrop. Hoo-ha. And you had a small downtown area. And behind the capitol were the worst slums in the United States, the worst. And I know this because the *Washington Post* every two years when I was a kid would show a photo of the capitol and it would be a big photo and behind it there would just be slum after slum after slum after slum. And that had a profound effect on me.

And then my mother would drive me-- I don't know if she did it consciously or she didn't want to leave me alone in the house because she knew I might burn it down-- she would drive me down-- we had a housekeeper who would come once a week and she would drive her home into the slums of Washington. And it did not compute for me why she had to live like that and we could live like this. Or why the people behind Congress-- or house congressmen could sit there and see that and watch that and nothing would change.

And so I believe, in part, that the great society came into being, in part, because of Lyndon Johnson sitting there. Because anybody with half a wit of sense looking out that window would have to think maybe we should do something. And you were looking at one of the last people that worked in an anti-poverty agency in Washington, D. C. These are words I know that you out there in the airwaves I know try to comprehend this, an anti-poverty agency. The mind reels. Imagine that, an agency of the federal government which would hopefully try to change poverty. Not by saying-- and this was the Appalachian Regional Commission. Due to some sort of mistake in my civil service application under the Nixon administration, I got through and I got a job there. And they were going to raise up the Appalachian-- they did some good things for Appalachia, but the idea that was basically proposed in terms of raising the capital in Appalachia and to improve the living of the citizens there was to build golf courses. Once again, I expected a better laugh. (Laughter) A, because it's true and I didn't make it up. I mean, golf courses. They were going to build 16 golf courses there and build the highways and make Appalachia a place that you would take a vacation. We wouldn't, my family wouldn't, but others would go.

And I just was stunned by this but it was amazing to me that that attempt was at least made in some fashion or another as opposed to hoping and praying that an entrepreneur shows up on the scene. If I hear another thing about entrepreneurs, and the fact that what we really need are more entrepreneurs, how do you think that happens, asshole? How do you think an entrepreneur happens? It's some schmuck, generally who has some sort of a learning disorder who's totally focused on something that you would never obsess about, that it's hard to find them. You don't have a school-- there's one at Chapel Hill and I know the guy who runs it and I've told him he's full of it-- of an entrepreneurship school.

Well, you can teach somebody who's got an idea of what to do with the idea. But to say that it is all going to be done from the private sector is psychotic. And the fact that what truly irritates me about this town more than anything else is how simple it is. It's that simple, that you look at what the private sector needs, you look at what the

government should do in terms of facilitating it. And you've got two parties, both who have a different ideology in terms of how to do it. And if you come to a compromise between those two parties, you actually have a solution. And this is nonsense, to watch the fact that jobs aren't being created.

Look at this. You've got a-- just the beltway alone was built by idiots and it continues to be just a piece of shit. (Applause) And you live with it. You live with it! There are ways to get things done. These people actually have to sit down and do it. And the fact that you live here, your job should be you should quit your jobs and just go and stand around Congress and say, "You're not coming out until some shit gets done." And I think that's-- is that 25 minutes? (Laughter) Thank you. (Applause)

**MR. BELKIND:** Do you want to have your mother and father stand up?

**MR. BLACK:** Mom, do you want to stand up? Yeah, here are my folks. (Applause) She did that on her own. That was actually-- she's a trained gymnast.

**MR. BELKIND:** How, kind your opinion, is the first amendment doing in our country?

**MR. BLACK:** Well, I'm doing pretty fucking good with it.

**MR. BELKIND:** Do you get more material from Republicans or Democrats?

**MR. BLACK:** They're equal opportunity. Now I get a little bit more from the Republicans than normal. It usually depends on-- the interesting thing is when Bush left office, the constant thing was just, "Well, what are you going to do now?" And I said, "Just because Bush left office, it doesn't mean that stupidity fled the country." So, I always look to both sides. I mean, the Democrats, the difference between them is the Republicans say really kind of stupid things from time to time. And stupid, I'm sorry, is funny. It is. When you hear something stupid, you laugh. Democrats are dumb, okay? And when you hear something dumb, you just go, "Why'd you say that?"

**MR. BELKIND:** Are you disappointed with President Obama either as president or as a source for comic material?

**MR. BLACK:** I'm not as disappointed with President Obama because I never bought into hope. I would say in my act, "I'm at the age where hope just doesn't work for me. Hope is a young man's game." I thought that-- I wasn't disappointed because I did not expect anyone who took the presidency after the eight years that we had gone through and the war that we went through, that the next president was going to be dealing with the country as if-- and I certainly didn't know that the shit would hit the fan in terms of the economy-- but dealing with the American people would be like dealing with a stroke victim. And so the best thing that an American president could hope for is to get the country to raise its right hand.



**MR. BELKIND:** Which leads me to the next question; who would you like to see as president and why?

**MR. BLACK:** Well, I mean, in terms of material, nothing would give me greater pleasure than Ted Cruz, Sarah Palin, a combo-- it would be a heinous time to live through, but I think I could sell out stadiums.

**MR. BELKIND:** What advice would you give to Hillary Clinton regarding how she could win the presidency?

**MR. BLACK:** I'm sure she'll be listening to this because when it comes to-- when you're looking for a political advisor, you really want to turn to me. I think one thing would help is go hide for a while. Get out of the public view and then pop out again. And then everybody would go, "Oh, that's right. She's going to run." She's putting herself out there again. There just comes that thing, the cycle of da, da, da, over and over and over and over again and then by the time she's going to run you go, "Oh, she just irritates the shit out of me." And it's not because she's irritating, it's just I've seen her too much. Can't we get somebody else? Where's Deputy Dawg?

**MR. BELKIND:** So Chris Christie wants to be president, too. What advice would you give him?

**MR. BLACK:** Lose 80 pounds. Hahahaha. Seriously. Or wear Spanx. And I like that kind of shoot from the hip style, is nice, but you're going to have to make some tracks because your shoot from the hip style had an effect on what happened in terms of the George Washington Bridge incident. It may be good for you, but you got to be sure-- it's like I can't have the folks who work-- I've got a number of people who work for me. Who I am as a personality yakking and stuff, I can't have the people working around me acting like me.

**MR. BELKIND:** When CBS hired Stephen Colbert last week to replace David Letterman, Rush Limbaugh said, "CBS has just declared war on the heartland of America. No longer is comedy going to be a covert assault on traditional American values. Now, it's just wide open in the open." What is your take on what Mr. Limbaugh said?

**MR. BLACK:** That's the kind of sentence that's stroke inducing. I go through that paragraph and about halfway through there's like a slight twitch of the eye and I can feel a blood vessel beginning to pump too much. What could he possibly-- he's an idiot. He really is just a mean spirited prick. And it really is-- assault on America? Let me see that. Comedy is going to be covert-- so here's how big an assault it's going to be on American values. Stephen Colbert has five, I think, five children, happily married, has this great family. Was still hanging in with the Catholic church when people were fleeing en masse. What are you talking about? He doesn't know shit.

**MR. BELKIND:** What is it like to work with Jon Stewart?

**MR. BLACK:** Well, really the question would be-- that's a question you should ask Jon, what it's like to work with me. No, he's great to work with. He really is. He's smart, he's bright. I've known him since we were both breaking into the clubs and he took off really quickly and I've watched his career. We've been friends in the sense of office friends. We don't hang out, but we really respect what each other does and I consider it a pleasure to work with him. And he's brilliant, which is really irritating.

**MR. BELKIND:** What's your thoughts on Colbert replacing Letterman? Should Stewart have been considered?

**MR. BLACK:** I'll find out, I'll ask Jon. I don't even know if he was considered. I don't know if Jon would have taken it. I don't know if that's something-- Jon directed a movie recently, I think, and he writes, he's written a book. I think Jon is more looking around of things. I think if the movie went well, I think he may end up in that. He may stay with this. But, Stephen's kind of born to it and I think the choice of Stephen Colbert is-- I wrote to him, I thought every so often they get it right and that's really one of the few times I went, "That's right."

**MR. BELKIND:** Is your father a better painter than George W. Bush?

**MR. BLACK:** My father, if you actually watch-- one of the things I neglected to mention-- I did two specials. In one of them, we literally took a painting of his and turned it into a three dimensional set that I worked on. And the last one, the last one which is on May 2<sup>nd</sup> in which I use a lot more profanity for those of you who panic over those words, we actually use a full scale painting of his that we blew up. He is a much better painter than George Bush. He is a hard edged abstractionist. Go home and look that one up. I still don't even know what the fuck it means. But he's good at it. And there really are, there's some really-- this is how I know he's good. I thought when he started bringing this stuff home I said, "My father has lost his mind." I mean, because there's these squares and rectangles and all different colors. "Who's your favorite artist," I asked. "Mondrian." Do you know who Mondrian is? He made squares of colors. It was like what kind of a painter is that? It's just squares of colors. He was brilliant, nobody knew color better than him. And after really studying his paintings for about 25 years, he's brilliant.

**MR. BELKIND:** How do you respond to critics who say you've destroyed their will to live in our society? (Laughter)

**MR. BLACK:** Boy, I'd like to meet them. If I destroyed anybody's will to live in our society, oh man, then you really-- maybe life wasn't for you.

**MR. BELKIND:** Do you think we should charge people for healthcare by the pounds?

**MR. BLACK:** Oh, oh. Oh boy, that bad question. Well, right now, considering what I weigh, yeah. With what I weigh, it would work out pretty well. No, I don't think

we should do that. No, huh-uh. No, not by the pound. And I only said that because there were so many sad people in the audience.

**MR. BELKIND:** At your Passover Seder--

**MR. BLACK:** I'm coming back.

**MR. BELKIND:** At your Passover Seder, are you the wise son, the bad son, or the son who is unable to inquire?

**MR. BLACK:** I'm the son who didn't make it home. If you know the Seder, you know they put out a cup of wine for Elijah and there's a seat for Elijah and he never shows up. I'm Elijah.

**MR. BELKIND:** Elijah's meant to lead people to the messiah, so is that--?

**MR. BLACK:** Yeah. I'm out looking. He's not at the Target.

**MR. BELKIND:** Donald Trump will be at this dais soon.

**MR. BLACK:** No!

**MR. BELKIND:** May 27<sup>th</sup>.

**MR. BLACK:** Then I'll see ya.

**MR. BELKIND:** May 27<sup>th</sup>, if you want to come back. What would you say to him?

**MR. BLACK:** I would say to Donald Trump-- oh, God. I did a thing on Donald Trump about three years ago on "The Daily Show," and then-- and it was kind of a-- I seriously can't remember what it was, but it wasn't nice. But it wasn't mean, it was funny and I just-- I don't think you should-- well, we'll talk. That's what I'd say to you is "next" about having him here. But, I got a call from his-- his secretary calls and says, "Donald Trump wants to talk to you," after I did this thing, the next day. And I was really busy and my parents were coming to town. And I was like, "Are you--?" So I got my assistant to call his assistant to say I'm a busy man. And I'm thinking-- and then he called the next day, he had the assistant call. I'm going, "What? Are you shitting me? I'm a comic and I got too much to do to have a conversation with you. You're an entrepreneur, how can you have time?" So, I would say don't call me again. And I don't think-- is he coming here to be-- is he going to speak?

**MR. BELKIND:** Right here.

**MR. BLACK:** You know-- no. I don't think we should-- he's had his time. Just zip it. Once he got through, when he kept with the birth thing, it was like, no, you're just-- it's self advertising. You're allowing self advertising. I didn't bring my CDs here today.

**MR. BELKIND:** Should the Redskins change their name?

**MR. BLACK:** Yeah. Yeah, I think they should. (Applause) How sad applause was that? Everybody else still on the fence. "I don't know." "You think?" "Maybe when we get home, we'll talk about it." What's interesting is you're born and raised here and I've been a Redskin fan all my life. And so it's not got any connotation to me, at all. It doesn't even mean-- it really means nothing to me, it's just a name, you know? And I see it on the helmet and it doesn't-- it's just like been there for so long. But in terms of the reality of things, you know, everybody in the room knows if it was the Washington Jewie Jews, people would say, "Well, I think maybe we're going to have to change that."

And the other thing is I don't like what Dan Snyder has done with the team on any level whatsoever and it is one of the most irritating years that I've watched in sports. I mean, watching year after year after year. "Oh, let's pay \$100 million for somebody who's just going to lie down on the bench for three hours. Let's get Steven Spurrier. Are you kidding? If I know Steven Spurrier's not going to be a good pro football coach, what the hell do you have for brains? It was one thing after another.

And then Daniel Snyder said that he was going to keep the Redskin name and since that's what he wants, I'm dead set against it. (Applause)

**MR. BELKIND:** Should Anthony Wiener change his name?

**MR. BLACK:** No. I used to do-- the joke I used to do about Anthony Wiener was if you didn't have your own joke, then you really need to see a doctor. No, he should-- but Anthony Wiener is one of the few people-- I think somebody who shames himself in public and does something awful and then they go away for three or four years and then they come back and everybody kind of, "What did he do, I don't remember? But he looks better now and he seems nicer and much more Christian than he was before." But you usually leave for that amount of time. He didn't. I believe that Anthony Wiener could leave forever and it would make no difference. He could leave for ten years, when he comes back and you see that nose you just go, "Oh, there he is again." It's not his name he needs to--

**MR. BELKIND:** The nose?

**MR. BLACK:** Yeah.

**MR. BELKIND:** How did you rate Eric Holder's backstage impression of you?

**MR. BLACK:** Eric Holder did a really great impression of me. I'm actually thinking of having-- I'm having him do my next two performances just to see if my audience even notices.

**MR. BELKIND:** What really makes you mad?

**MR. BLACK:** Kind of what I was talking about earlier, I think, stupidity really makes me mad. When they said-- like you see the words legitimate rape, that like sends me around the bend. I don't even come back for a day. I'm like a barking dog. Literally, how do you even-- huh? Or, that thing, when somebody says something like, "Well, you know, when you're raped the woman will reject the--" You just go, wow, oh boy. When did they stop teaching science? No, that stuff really-- and what really makes me mad is that our educational system is 17<sup>th</sup> in the world and I think that's beyond-- in the course of my lifetime, my generation, to its credit, took the greatest education system on Earth and we got it to 17<sup>th</sup>. And I think we can get it to the 25<sup>th</sup> by the time I drop dead.

**MR. BELKIND:** Did you always set out to be a comedian or a satirist?

**MR. BLACK:** No, I set out to work in the American theater because my parents would take me to see plays at what was initially the Shubert Theatre where they would bring in shows, so I got to see all these really-- I saw shows before they'd go on to New York and it got me intrigued in it. And then we went to New York and they'd take me to shows and then my father got tired of seeing mainstream stuff, so he takes me at the age of 15, we go down to a thing called the Washington Theater Club, which was a really-- the first initial outside of Arena, real step forward. And they were doing stuff by Ionesco and Brendan Behan and Beckett and he's taking a 15 year old down there. I'm like [mouth noise]. But it was great, great stuff and so I got hooked on it and I always thought-- and then I ended up-- I wrote plays. That's where I thought I'd be, I thought I'd be a playwright.

And then I discovered that the fastest way that your play could be read is if you actually took your play and put it in a bottle and then if you threw it in the Potomac River, eventually someone would find it and I was pretty sure that once they got the play out of the bottle, they'd read it.

**MR. BELKIND:** What do you do for fun?

**MR. BLACK:** I call my parents and pretend I'm somebody else just to keep them on their toes. For fun, I try to read a bit. When I'm in New York I spend-- I try to spend as much time with my friends as I can because they're in-- and if I get a chance to go to a show or watch somebody else work, that's always like thrilling to me. And I play golf, which is not-- I wouldn't call it fun, but your brain doesn't think about anything but stupid things. Like I don't think about this or that, what am I going to do, what's that joke going to be, and how are we going to talk about that today? It's really, "Oh, I got to remember when I swing, I have to remember to breathe in through my ass."

**MR. BELKIND:** Aside from your mother and father, who inspired you as a youth?

**MR. BLACK:** Once again, my friends. We're all really interesting, interesting people. And they were at the time, and they were all really, really funny. Here's one for you. My parents were really great, I say this in my act because in my youth, they didn't really do anything. They did nothing. You know, it's not like they hovered over me, "Where you going now?" They would just-- I'd come home and my mother would say, "It's nice to see you. Now go away and go play with people." She didn't like track down who I was playing with and stuff. And so as a result, I was able to get, unbeknownst to them, and I don't know why they never looked at it-- I think eventually you may have. My mother will say I'm lying afterwards, but I think I got a thing called *The Realist*. *The Realist* was written by someone named Paul Krassner and it was this-- it came like in-- like it was pornography. It was in a brown kind of folder thing and then they wouldn't open it. And I'd grab it and open it up and it was-- it had a huge effect on me because I was 14, 15. I won't repeat what was in it, I've written about it in my book.

One of the things he had, though, that I can tell you, I opened up like the second issue I got and there was a map of-- now, I'm 15 or 16 and there's all of the Disney characters done by a guy from Disney, an artist, and they're all doing the most perverse things that you can imagine. So Mickey is shooting up. It's like it was-- and I looked and at first you go, "Oh, ha ha." It really changed-- for somebody who was born and raised on Davey Crockett, this put everything into perspective. That really shook up my world. Martin Luther King, the Marx Brothers, not so much-- I mean, John Kennedy in the sense of-- as a kid, when you're like, you know, like a kid-kid, you're just like, "Wow, look, he's great." And like you actually want to hear what he has to say. Oh boy, that was extraordinary.

All of those people, there was a sense that you-- Fulbright, Wayne Morris. I got an endless list. And as you said, Carlin, Bruce, all of them. Shelly Berman, Bob Newhart. There are others. You can go to my website.

**MR. BELKIND:** Thank you. That was the penultimate question and thank you for the expansive answer. We are almost out of time but before asking the last question, we have a couple of housekeeping matters to take care of. First of all, I'd like to remind everybody that there are some upcoming events, and we already mentioned-- but first, on April 21<sup>st</sup>, next Monday, Deborah Hersman, Chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board, will give her farewell address at a National Press Club breakfast.

On April 23<sup>rd</sup>, U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff, General Mark Welsh will discuss the future of the Air Force, also at breakfast. And on May 27<sup>th</sup>, as we revealed a few minutes ago, Donald Trump, president of the Trump organization, will speak at a luncheon, just like our guest today.

Next, I'd like to present our guest with the traditional National Press Club mug.

**MR. BLACK:** Oh, I'm going to sell it to my parents.

**MR. BELKIND:** I'm going to arrange that we give a mug to your parents, okay? So don't leave without it. We're going to arrange two mugs for your parents. The last question: let's presume that Jon Stewart is watching us here on C-SPAN. Please explain to him why he, too, should speak at a National Press Club luncheon.

**MR. BLACK:** He won't do it?

**MR. BELKIND:** I don't know. He would take advice from you.

**MR. BLACK:** Jon, Lewis here. Let me just tell you, you're really going to want to do this. The pay is unbelievable. To think I worked here an hour and I'm getting \$150,000. I had access to a really nice condo downtown. It was right across from the Verizon Center, free tickets to both the Caps and the Wizards game. And every meal was comped by the Press Club. They give you a credit card, "Just take it, Lew." So you're really going to want to do it.

No, you should do it because you'll get a kick out of this, you really will. And if you do do it, I need 10 percent. (Applause)

**MR. BELKIND:** Thank you, excellent. Thank you so much for coming today, we have great appreciation--

**MR. BLACK:** Can I-- one second--

**MR. BELKIND:** Sure, we have three minutes.

**MR. BLACK:** Oh, we got three minutes. All right, this is going to be really fast. No, I really appreciate. This has kind of been a privilege to speak here. I didn't know who I'd be speaking to, I still don't know who you are or why you showed up. But I was honored to be here. And also, I just wanted you to know that I want to-- the only other thing I want to mention is the fact that-- and I mean this-- I did three USO tours. I think that there's a big bill coming from the military, we have a lot to pay for for that war in terms of what those folks went through. You're going to have to pony up. There's no ifs, ands or buts about it. Attention's got to be paid to these people. I've spent a lot of time with them. They're unbelievable. Their sacrifice was absolutely extraordinary. And if every American had 10 percent of the sacrifice of any of those in the military, then we'd have no problems in this country today. Thanks.

**MR. BELKIND:** Thank you. And thank you to all for coming today. Thank you for those watching on C-SPAN for tuning in. I'd also like to thank the National Press Club staff including its Journalism Institute and Broadcast Center for organizing today's event. Also, if you'd like to get a copy of today's program and maybe there will be a lot of requests for copies of today's program, or to get more information about the National

Press Club, please check out our website at [www.press.org](http://www.press.org). Thank you, we are adjourned. (Sounds gavel.)

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