

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH MAYOR STEPHANIE RAWLINGS-BLAKE

SUBJECT: U.S. CONFERENCE OF MAYORS

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JOHN HUGHES: (Sounds gavel.) Welcome to the National Press Club. My name is John Hughes. I'm an editor for Bloomberg First Word, that's Bloomberg's breaking news desk here in Washington. And I am the President of the National Press Club. Our speaker today is Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake. As the President of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, she will discuss that group's agenda for the 2016 presidential candidates.

But first, I want to introduce our distinguished head table. This includes club members as well as guests of the speaker. From the audience's right, Jared Rizzi, White House correspondent for Sirius XM; Wesley Lowery, national reporter for the *Washington Post*; Erika Sutherland, assistant professor at the School of Communications at Howard University; J. P. Grant, President of Grant Capital Management.

Skipping over our next guest for just a moment, Kevin Johnson, Mayor of Sacramento and former member of NBA's Phoenix Suns; Donna Leinwand-Leger, breaking news editor for *USA Today*. She's a past president of the National Press Club, and she is the vice chair of the club's Speakers Committee.

Skipping over our speaker for a moment, Jonathan Salant. He's the Washington correspondent for NJ Advanced Media, the *Star Ledger*. He's a former National Press Club president and he's the member of the National Press Club Speakers Committee who organized today's event. Thank you, Jonathan. Kaliope Parthemos, Chief of Staff for the Mayor of Baltimore; Bruce Johnson, anchor reporter at WUSA TV; Chris Chambers,

professor of media studies at Georgetown University; and John Domen, a reporter at WNEW FM and the coach of the National Press Club softball team. (Applause)

I also want to welcome our C-SPAN and our Public Radio audiences. You can follow the action on Twitter. Use the hashtag NPCLive. That's NPCLive.

Thirty-five years ago today, a telephone call was made from Yankton, South Dakota, to the National Press Club and history was made. In a small room upstairs here at the Club, C-SPAN created the first regularly scheduled national TV call in show, a tradition that continues today with the Washington Journal program. The Press Club today is placing a permanent recognition of that call, that historic call, on the wall outside of that small room upstairs where the call was made so future generations will always know that part of history at the National Press Club.

The man who took that phone call that day? Well, he's Brian Lamb, the founder of C-SPAN. Brian is a broadcast legend. He is a journalist, he's the past recipient of our highest honor, the Fourth Estate Award, and he's a personal hero of mine and I know so many others here. At the National Press Club, we simply love Brian Lamb. Brian, could you stand and be recognized? (Applause)

Our speaker, who we are also honored to have here today, Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, was thrust into the news earlier this year in a way that she wished would have never happened. In April, an unarmed black man, Freddie Gray, died in police custody. This set off a series of urban disturbances in Baltimore. At least 34 people were arrested, six police officers were injured, and Maryland Governor Larry Hogan called out the National Guard.

The Small Business Administration estimated that about 285 businesses were damaged at a cost of \$9 million. Mayor Rawlings-Blake was forced to cope not only with the riots, and their aftermath, but the underlying problems that led to the disruption. Elected at age 25 to the Baltimore City Council, she was the youngest person ever to ascend to that position. She later was council president before being sworn in as Baltimore's 49th mayor in 2010.

She announced in September that she will not run for reelection. She said, "It was a very difficult decision, but I knew I needed to spend time focused on the city's future, not my own." Mayor Rawlings-Blake is here today in her other capacity, as President of the U.S. Conference of Mayors. She will talk about the mayors' urban agenda, the issues they want the 2016 presidential candidates to discuss. Let's give a warm National Press Club welcome to Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake. (Applause)

MAYOR RAWLINGS-BLAKE: Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you very much for the very kind introduction. And while you've given, I think, a very thorough and thoughtful introduction of the head table, I think one of-- the thing that I would like you to know about K. J. is that he's not just a former basketball player, but also a former

President of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, and I'm very grateful that you are here.
(Applause)

I appreciated his leadership for many reasons, not the least of which is now I can be Mayor S. R. B. since he was Mayor K. J. I figure if I say it enough times, it'll stick like K. J. sticks, just a few more years. Either that or I'll have to learn how to dunk, one of those things.

So I want to thank the National Press Club for giving me an opportunity to join you today to talk about a few things, both my role as Mayor of the City of Baltimore, as well as my role as President of the U.S. Conference of Mayors. I will do my best to cover both of those areas as well as give us some time for questions at the end. And depending on what I see as coming in as questions, that'll be determining how long I go.

So, as I was listening to my introduction, it reminded me that so much of the country's current view of Baltimore have been shaped by a few things. And we know that we'd had the challenge of being shaped by the excellent writing and acting in the HBO series "The Wire." But we've also been shaped by the two weeks in April following the death of Freddie Gray and the subsequent demonstrations and unrest.

And the tragic death of Freddie Gray, you know, it-- The challenges of that tragedy are complex because we know that it is a tragedy, the loss of any life, anywhere, to violence in our streets is distressing. And it is distressing for Baltimore at many levels. It was traumatic for residents, for police officers, for business owners and it is traumatic for the industries in Baltimore that depend on the image of our city. Because Baltimore is much more than what was shown on the endless loops on some of our national media.

Truth be told, while in my introduction it was suggested that I was forced to confront these issues that emerged subsequent to Freddie Gray's death, none of those issues new to me, nor was my work on those issues. I've been working on the issue of police-community relations since I've been mayor, and well before. As a city councilperson all of those years ago, I introduced legislation to address the issue of racial profiling in Baltimore City.

And when I became mayor, the issue of police-community relations, police brutality, I knew was front and center as part of the work that I had to do as mayor of the City of Baltimore. I was very, very pleased in 2011 to be able to reduce the homicides to the lowest number they'd be in generations, more than 40 years. However, that same year when I was traveling from community association to community association to talk about the progress that we've made, getting under 200 when I was growing up would have been-- to talk about it would have been laughable. You know, the thought that Baltimore could get under 200 homicides. So when we achieved that goal, I was very, very proud.

But when I talked to residents during that time, what I learned through those conversations was as pleased as people were about the progress with homicides, they were equally frustrated with the treatment that they were receiving by the police, by the

activity that they were seeing from the police. That's why when I became mayor I dismantled the unit that was responsible for much of the abuse and the mistreatment of Baltimore City residents.

I held public safety forums across the city throughout my time as mayor, and particularly in the summer of 2014, to hear from residents about these issues as we worked to reform the police department. And that's why I launched the body camera taskforce, because I knew that it was important to fight for more accountability; more accountability on the ground as well as more accountability in the policies surrounding the police department. And that's why I went to Annapolis to fight for changes in the state law on the law enforcement officer's bill of rights. It was a lonely fight in January was I tried to convince legislators that we were living in a powder keg, that we had to deal with the issue that many people in our community felt that there was an uneven playing field. That police officers in our city, in our state, were held to a different standard after they'd been found guilty of a crime and that we had to start the process of reforming our police department across the board.

I'm very encouraged now that after Freddie Gray's death, many have come to realize the wisdom of that argument and they are now willing to be a part of that solution. I just think about what would have happened if those reforms could have started in January during the session I was fighting for those reforms. And I knew that the reforms needed to happen, like I said, within the department and within the way that we connected with communities. And that's why I invited the Department of Justice COPS program into Baltimore for a collaborative review.

I heard very loud and clear from communities that they wanted to be viewed as partners and not perpetrators. And I knew that we needed help to get there. And I asked for the Department of Justice COPS office to come in to help us evaluate our community policing efforts, to help us guide-- create a pathway forward to stronger relationships. Yes, we were seeing progress and reducing crime, but we had a long way to go when it comes to bettering the relationship between the community and the police.

So despite the progress that we made, it was clear that the community was still on edge with respect to police relations. And in retrospect, what happened around the tragic death of Freddie Gray serves a reminder to cities across the country about what can happen in their cities. When I've spoken to mayors across the country, virtually all of them have the sobering sense that what happened in Baltimore could have happened in their city as well.

The unrest in Baltimore served as a reminder of so many things. And it was clear to us as well as we believe we prepare for those things, the unrest and our response was a stark reminder that Baltimore was not as prepared as we should have been, and certainly could have been for the unrest. And we're making significant improvements when it comes to communication, when it comes to training and equipment. I don't think anyone would have expected the unrest to unfold in the way that it did. But what it did give us was an opportunity to strengthen our response, to strengthen our training, and to be better

prepared. And I'm pleased to say that I've seen a lot of improvement in the way that we've handled the potential unrest that has happened since.

And I haven't waited for the after action reports, while I'm grateful for those, the work the independent evaluations of the incident, I haven't waited for those reports to be finished before making changes. We're making changes as soon as we saw those problems come up. We made sure that-- I made sure that the police department was led by someone that eliminated distractions away from our crime fight. Our new police commissioner's taken a number of steps to insure that we are better prepared for what could be six challenging and separate criminal trials coming forward.

We're working with the Department of Justice on a patterns and practice investigation. I think I'm the only mayor in the country that's actually asked the attorney general to come in to do a patterns and practice investigation which will likely result in recommendations for even broader reforms. We've improved communications, training and equipment already.

So the unrest in Baltimore-- created in Baltimore and the aftermath points to deeper underlying issues, issues of lack of jobs, challenges with housing, education, and disparities in opportunity. The crime surge in Baltimore and cities across our country right now this spring and this summer illustrates that as well. And if we are to succeed in preventing future unrest, we must attack these underlying issues. None of this was created overnight, and it won't be solved overnight. Whether it's the breach in the relationship between the community and the police, whether it is abandoned housing. When you have years of neglect, when you have years of abandonment, we know that the fix will take years as well.

To make progress, we need all of the support of our partners to participate in the not for partners, the private sector, the state and federal government. The Obama Administration has really stepped up for Baltimore and I know that it wants to step up for other cities as well. And this speaks to what all of us at the U.S. Conference of Mayors are hoping we will see from the 2016 presidential campaign, a substantive conversation among candidates that recognizes the issues facing our cities and speaks to real solutions. This past week, more than two dozen mayors of cities big and small gathered in Baltimore to discuss both our priorities as well as our strategies moving forward to insure that those who wish to lead our federal government fully understand that cities are the engines of our national economy and are at the center of every major issue that we currently face in public life. We know that there are so many great economic and culture things happening in our cities of all sizes, all over our country. We know that the strength of our cities and their metro areas help to bring the national economy back from the recession. And we also know that if we are going to continue to grow and be more successful as a country, cities have to be at the center of the solution.

We know that there are far too many people who have been left out of the recovery since the great recession. They lack opportunity. Far too many Americans in cities large and small continue to fear for their safety. They feel disconnected from the

broader community. This is something I'm especially aware of in Baltimore, but it's something that affects and concerns mayors, all of the mayors that convened last weekend. And as we confront challenges like these, our partnership with the federal government is threatened by the dysfunction in Washington that no serious candidate for president or Congress can or should allow to continue.

Gridlock strangles Washington, and the consequences of that gridlock, they're passed on to cities, that's passed on to mayors. That gridlock is strangling the future of our country. Major campaigns like this one come along once in every four years and mayors are uniquely positioned to influence the national dialogue. And as mayors, we have a very large bully pulpit.

And we can get our message out to great portions of constituencies throughout the country. We know that people are frustrated thus far that this campaign has not been wholly focused on issues that matter most to working families and people who live in our cities where the majority of people in this country live. We have to have a campaign that's focused on substance and things that can move our cities and our country forward.

So we came together this past weekend to define our priorities which will be carried forward to the candidates over the next 13 months. We will publish these priorities in a new document, the Mayors Compact for a Better America, a 2016 call to action. And while the exact wording of the document is still being finalized based on intense conversation, that's code for-- what is that code for, intense conversation? I won't say argument. (Laughter) Intense or robust conversations that we had this past weekend.

But we are reaching consensus on many of the critical areas that we want to see a part of the national campaign, a part of the national conversation. Investing in our infrastructure, our roads, our bridges, our rail, investing in our water and sewer systems. Focusing on educating and training the 21st century competitive workforce. Strengthening the federal and local partnership on homeland security and public safety and reforming our broken immigration system.

We're going to focus on expanding clean energy use, to grow our economy, to protect our climate and our environment. We're going to focus on investing in community development and affordable housing. Encouraging pathways for access to entrepreneurship, technology and innovation in our cities. Improving access to healthcare, particularly mental healthcare. Redirecting tax policy to promote investment in cities, advancing middle class growth, and reducing income inequality. Increasing the economic strength of metro economies through promotion of trades and exports, and the attraction of international tourism.

I realize that these are broad ideas, but underneath each one of these ideas lie the future of our country. And as we work through the final wording on all of these issues, I know that there won't be total consensus. While we have a great track record of working across the aisle in the U.S. Conference of Mayors, even all the Democrats don't agree on everything, and the Republicans don't agree on everything. So we know that there won't

be total consensus, but what you will see is mayors speaking in a unified voice about what's important to our country.

I know that we can find Democratic mayors who are willing to take these issues to the Democratic candidates for president and that Republican mayors will be willing to address these issues with the Republican candidates. And, they'll be issues that we work on together, regardless of who gets elected as president, or whatever the makeup of the next Congress will be. Because there's one thing that we have a track record of, and that's working together. We are bipartisan group of mayors who know how to put ideology aside to focus on things that matter most to American families.

Because our jobs demand results. We can't have ideological conversations about how we're going to fix potholes or collect trash. People just want it done. They don't want to know how we feel about it. Mayors have to get things done. We believe Washington could learn something from us. And as we define our federal priorities, we also know that mayors have never been the type to wait for others to help. Mayors around the country have created and implemented best practices on each of these issues that we're putting forth in our compact. We're not asking any of the candidates to do anything that we're not willing to do ourselves.

We must continue to share in innovations with each other and with our broader community so that can maximize our impact with or without federal support. I want to thank you again for giving me the opportunity to join all of you today. I want to thank all of my Baltimore contingency. We wanted to make sure I had a nice, friendly audience down here in D.C. (Laughter) So I'm very pleased to have so many friends from Baltimore who have traveled with me. I look forward to answering what I've already seen are going to be some very thoughtful and interesting questions whether they're about Baltimore, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, or even my role as secretary of the DNC. I'm looking forward to hearing from your questions. Thank you very much. (Applause)

MR. HUGHES: Thank you so much, Mayor. As you suggest, many great questions have come in. This questioner asks in an era when congressional Republicans won't even fund crumbling roads in their hometowns, how do you expect any support for an urban, read Democratic, agenda?

MAYOR RAWLINGS-BLAKE: I think it's a mistake to read urban and Democratic as synonymous. We have many mayors across this country, Republican mayors, that are fighting for those same infrastructure dollars. Republican roads are crumbling just like Democratic roads and we need-- we need a solution. I think when-- and again, this is why this election is so important-- when we let the debate be around what somebody's face looks like or, you know, whether somebody has low energy, you know, whatever-- I don't want to use a bad word-- but that kind of stuff, it misses the mark because we have families that are hurting.

And when you talk about wanting to push our economy forward and create jobs, when you're fixing a bridge in Baltimore, you can't export those jobs to China. That's

work that happens in Baltimore. When you're fixing roads, when you're fixing rails in Philadelphia, that work has to stay there. So we need the Republican Congress to understand that they're not being patriotic when they're holding up these projects from moving forward. When they refuse to fund infrastructure investment, they're refusing to support America and the people that they've pledged to serve.

MR. HUGHES: You mentioned hope for a substantive debate on poverty and crime issues from the 2016 presidential campaign. What have you heard so far that heartens you, what have you heard so far that's disappointed you most?

MAYOR RAWLINGS-BLAKE: So I'll take off my nonpartisan Conference of Mayors hat and put on my very partisan Secretary of the DNC hat. The one thing I can say about the debates that I've seen from the Democratic candidates, or the conversations, it's been about real things that matter to families, whether it's the fight to increase minimum wage or whether it's our efforts to make sure that more Americans have access to quality healthcare. These are the things that matter to people at home. These are the things that connect. These are the things that will hopefully reengage a population that I think is growing in their frustration around what they're seeing at the national level when it comes to politics.

I would be very, very embarrassed if someone who had no concept of our country and what we stand for in politics, had only one opportunity to get a sense of what we stand for when it comes to campaigning, and that was the Republican debates on TV. If that was someone's only-- they only had that experience to judge our country, I would be embarrassed. I think we're better than that, and we should hold all of our national leaders to be better than that. There are too many things that are important to families that aren't getting addressed and we're having personality conflicts at a time when our country can afford to have that the least.

MR. HUGHES: This questioner notes that mayors often focus on local solutions to big problems but what issues require national solutions? Can gun control and police reform be responsibly conducted in a national patchwork?

MAYOR RAWLINGS-BLAKE: So just in the question, when you talk about gun control and a patchwork approach, I mean the question answered itself. You can't have a patchwork approach to gun control. Right now, not too far from here, mayors from across the country are meeting with the Department of Justice, police chiefs are meeting to talk about the surge in violence that we've seen across the country this summer. And the mayors are speaking with one voice about what's needed, and that's better support from our federal-- our criminal justice partners. We need to do whatever we can to get guns out of the hands of people who have no respect for their lives or the lives of other members of the community.

We need to do more to strengthen the laws and the enforcement when it comes to people suffering from mental illness having access to guns. Those are the conversations that we're having because in our cities, people are dying every single day while the NRA

and Congress has debates, people are dying. And we know that we can't wait on the lobbyists to miss a meeting or to not make a phone call. We have to get stuff done, and we're looking for the Department of Justice and our federal law enforcement partners to step up and to fill that gap until we can get some commonsense gun reform in our country.

MR. HUGHES: What can mayors do to combat the rising homicide rate that's happening in so many cities across the country including Baltimore and here in Washington, D. C. as well. What can be done to stem it?

MAYOR RAWLINGS-BLAKE: So in Baltimore, we had a very, very rough July. August was better than July, September was better than August, but we're still suffering from a very high rate of violent crime. One of the things that we've seen working, and why I keep talking about the partnership with federal law enforcement is our work embedding federal agents in the police department, increasing the partnership between the U.S. attorney's office, our state's attorney's office as well as the Baltimore City Police Department. We're talking right now, the conversation is happening, about what happens when ATF agents are embedded in crime labs and have the ability to give almost in real time data around guns that are used on the streets. This used to take upwards of six months to get the information back. And if you're a mayor, that's useless. You might as well never tell me where the gun is coming from if you're going to tell me six months from now.

So anything we can do to strengthen that communication, to better share data and information, it will help us to be more nimble and to be more responsive to crime. And I think that partnership has been responsible for the improvements that we've seen over the summer. But there's still a long way to go.

MR. HUGHES: What are the one or two things you would put at the top of the list in terms of what other mayors in the nation should learn from your experience following Freddie Gray's death. In other words, what are the one or two things you would cite to them as things to do to prepare, to be ready?

MAYOR RAWLINGS-BLAKE: To prepare to be ready? I would say that what mayors are learning, not just looking at what happened in Baltimore, but the unrest, the riots that we've seen in other places, is that the protests and the riots of today are substantially different than what happened in the '60s. And in those ways that they're different, we need to prepare differently. And I've been pleased that we've had-- the lessons learned helped prepare not just Baltimore's police department, but police departments throughout the country that understand that the tactics are different and the strategies for how we deal with them are different. So, our after-action work, I think, will be helpful as we move forward, as I mentioned, with the six trials of the officers that are coming up.

But also, they're helpful in other cities. I mean, the mayors across the country have watched the work that I've done pushing for reform in the police department.

Mayors across the country have watched me fight for a more level playing field holding officers that have been accused or found guilty of wrongdoing accountable. They've watched the work that we've done trying to repair the breach between the community and the police. And they've also seen, in spite of all of those efforts, we still had riots. We still had the unrest and the protests. So they're taking what happened in Baltimore very seriously.

So the lessons would be to take a look at what we've done subsequent to the unrest with the improved training, the better communication protocols, as well as equipment. And to understand that it's never enough. The work to build relationships, it's never over. It's not something that you can say, "Okay, I had a forum. I went to a community meeting, you're done." It's constant relationship building work. I say all the time in community association meetings that the police and the community are married. It can be a healthy marriage or it can be a bad marriage. But we're in this together. There's no way that the community can do it alone and there's certainly no way the police can do it alone. For better or worse, we are stuck together and it's up to us to decide if we're going to have a healthy relationship or we are going to allow us to have an unhealthy relationship.

I know plenty of people married for 30 years haven't spoken in 20. You know? It can happen, right? And it happens day after day of just not talking. It happens day after day of not attending to the relationship. So when we have these-- when I have public safety forums, it's me working to attend to that relationship. One of my colleagues in government says you don't ask the doctor if the medicine is working, you ask the patient. We have to stay in communication. Sometimes, it's stuff you want to hear, sometimes it's not. But you have to deal with all of it because we cannot think that the relationship is going to get better on its own. It's going to get better because the police make the decision to be in this relationship repairing work and the community. And that's why the partnership with the Department of Justice is so powerful for me because they get it. They've done it before, they've worked communities through these types of problems and encouraged by what I'm seeing and I'm encouraged that over these next I think 13, 14 months of my term that we are going to get some significant progress.

MR. HUGHES: The Department of Justice announced that it will begin keeping more statistics on those killed by police. How important is transparency regarding police killings to developing positive relationships that you're talking about between police and the communities?

MAYOR RAWLINGS-BLAKE: I think it's important to have transparency around police killing, but also around police interaction, which is why I've been working very hard in Baltimore to make sure that we implement a police body camera, a body worn camera program that works and something that the community can have faith in. I want us to attend to those issues around privacy. What happens when a police officer goes into the house of someone who's called because of domestic violence issue? You know, do you turn the camera, off, do you not turn the camera off? What happens to that woman if she is victimized again because once it's filmed, it's part of the public record.

Those types of issues we have to grapple with in order to get it right. How do we maintain the-- not the film, but the video. Who has access to it, and all of those things?

So I think by making sure that we get this right, we'll have the transparency, yes, around in custody deaths or police involved shootings, but also around the day to day interaction of the police with the community which I think will be helpful.

MR. HUGHES: This questioner says the police commissioner said he was stunned by the level of poverty in Baltimore and in part attributed that to crime. Why hasn't more been done to address poverty in Baltimore? What can be done at the city level?

MAYOR RAWLINGS-BLAKE: Yeah, poverty is a problem that exists in Baltimore and cities around this country. It is not just a-- not even an American problem, it's a global problem. I don't know of a city that's solved the issue of poverty. And while many work to eradicate the disparities in income, raise your hand if you know the city that's fixed this problem. It is an intractable problem that I think if you're looking-- if a cure to it is success, we're never going to be successful. But I think the work that we're doing every single day to improve our schools. I'm standing here next to one of the biggest advocates in the country for excellence in education. When we provide excellence in education, we're creating pathways out of poverty.

My dad grew up in the projects. And he made it very, very clear to us growing up that education was his key out of poverty and he wanted us to understand that education would be our key to whatever we wanted to do in life. My dad was an elected official, my mom was a pediatrician. We had access to a whole lot, but I said if Jordache made encyclopedias, we would have had them, but they weren't spending money on stuff that wasn't going to help our education. You know, there was no designer jeans, there was no-- unless our grandparents got them-- designer tennis shoes. They wanted us focused on our education. We had the same little black and white TV, I know you know what I'm talking about, old school, you turn it with the pliers, you know?

Because their resources were going to making sure that their children were educated, right? And so, education is a key. Focus on creating jobs, that's why it frustrates me so when we've made the infrastructure investment a partisan issue. Those are jobs that could help bring people out of poverty today if those resources were put there. So, I think that the work to eradicate poverty is ongoing work. It's work that I think will continue to the end of our time. I think that there's a way to continue to make progress, and I'm pleased to say that there are many mayors that are doing a lot of the work, making progress on this very, very challenging issue. Is it perfect? No, but we have mayors including the work that I've done in Baltimore, that are fighting for progress every day.

MR. HUGHES: Mentioned in the introduction that you have said that you're not running for reelection and you've got more than a full year in office yet. How has your announcement affected your ability to work in the city? Has it helped or hindered?

Sometimes lame duck is limiting, but other times as John Boehner is showing, he seems to feel a little freed up. So how is your announcement affecting your work going forward?

MAYOR RAWLINGS-BLAKE: I'll say that I'm very focused on the work at hand and fighting for progress every single day. While I've made it clear that I'm not seeking reelection, I've also made it clear to everyone that works with me and for me that that doesn't mean that we're on vacation. That means that there's a lot of serious work that needs to be done. And I think Boehner, Obama, you can go down the history of people who have been where I am, and see that there are great examples of leaders in the-- running up to the end of their term who have been unfiltered, unchained, unrestricted.

I think for me, I have the benefit of every single thing I do not being viewed through the lens of campaigning or politics. And I have the freedom of being able to be more, I think, intentional when I'm talking about those things as well. When I see that politics is standing in the way of progress. So, I am determined that there's more than a year that I have left on my term will be made and every single day pushing for progress for Baltimore's families. And I have no doubt that we're going to continue to make progress.

MR. HUGHES: This questioner wants you to put on your DNC hat and they wonder should there be more sanctioned debates? Why or why not?

MAYOR RAWLINGS-BLAKE: It's interesting for me what things kind of get traction and what don't. This notion of more debates or not, you know, I won't really weigh in on that except to say that we have the same number of debates this time as we did the last time we had a contested Democratic primary. So, then it leads me to the question, and it was not a-- there wasn't an issue last time, the number of debates was seen to be fully satisfactory. There wasn't this push to have more than the question then comes, what's different this time? Is it that we have some candidates that have a lot of resources and that are highly ranked in the polls and some that aren't? What are those issues that created this debate, this debate controversy?

I know that our chair, Debbie Wasserman Schultz, is working with the leadership of the DNC to look at that issue, and I'm sure that if there's a consensus that we need more debates, I'm sure that will happen. I still have this question of why, when you have a contested primary and a contested primary why this time the number of debates that we have is seen as insufficient.

MR. HUGHES: Can you tell us who you're supporting or in your DNC job, do you have to wait until there's a nominee? How does that work?

MAYOR RAWLINGS-BLAKE: So the officers of the DNC have-- we have this neutrality provision that we can't participate in the presidential primary. So, I get to ignore that question. (Laughter)

MR. HUGHES: Here's a question at the intersection of presidential politics and local issues. Are you concerned that any of the presidential candidates may try to limit or eliminate the municipal bond tax exemption? What case are you making to the candidates or to Congress to preserve the exemption?

MAYOR RAWLINGS-BLAKE: Yeah, that's one of the things like when I talk about infrastructure investment I try not to get too upset about it because it really frustrates me. That issue really frustrates me as well. I don't know who's telling anybody that we should be balancing the budget on the backs of American cities. Who's telling anybody that it makes sense to restrict the capacity of cities to make significant investments? It just doesn't make sense. So we have was group of mayors that have taken on this campaign and we will continue to be aggressive in making sure that the municipal bonds are protected.

MR. HUGHES: This is a little early, I acknowledge, with a full year left. But the questioner says what is your biggest regret as mayor? And what would you say is your biggest accomplishment?

MAYOR RAWLINGS-BLAKE: Biggest regret? I don't know. I always feel like there's always going to be opportunity to have a bigger regret than any I've had to date. I will say-- I can say the thing that-- one of the things I felt most proud about is the work that we've done when it comes to school construction and fighting for more than a billion dollars to come to Baltimore. Baltimore has the oldest school facilities in the state and when I toured our schools, it was embarrassing and it was-- you know, to see some of the classrooms with the ceiling tiles coming down, the windows were fogged, you know that kids are cold when they should be hot, hot when they should be cold. You can't drink from the water fountains. I always would joke that the boy's bathrooms, you wouldn't even send your mother-in-law to except for somebody told my mother-in-law.

But no, it was deplorable. Deplorable. So when we were able to bring that level of investment-- I don't know of another city in the country that has that level of investment going on in capital improvements, building new schools, when the governor signed that piece of legislation, there was a sense of calm that I had that I didn't-- I wasn't expecting. And that calm came from the fact that I knew if it was God's will that I died that day that I was a part of something that would transform my city in positive ways for generations to come.

So I said as far as biggest accomplishments, I'm really, really grateful to have been mayor at a time when we could do something huge like that, that I know far after I'm gone will still have changed the trajectory of Baltimore's future.

MR. HUGHES: And, of course, this is a question along those same lines. You've got a year left, but how do you see yourself being involved publicly after you're done being mayor of Baltimore? What kind of work do you see yourself getting involved in?

MAYOR RAWLINGS-BLAKE: You know, I guess I should be thinking about that more because I get that question every single day. But I have so much that we're doing in the city, and I'm sitting here looking at my team from housing. We're rocking when it comes to our blight elimination. This is an issue that many cities don't even attempt because the problem of blight and vacant housing has piled up for so long. Many have given up because the challenge is so big and a local foundation just took a look at our blight elimination plan, which is called Vacants to Value which is having our five year anniversary next month, you're welcome to come to Baltimore November 18th and 19th for a nice summit. But when they looked at it, they said it's the most comprehensive blight elimination plan that the city has seen in more than 40 years.

That's big stuff. And to be able to continue that work every single day, to transform neighborhoods. You know, I've noticed this since the death of Freddie Gray and the nation's eyes have been fixed on Baltimore and some of Baltimore's neighborhoods and the challenges. And you hear from people, "My God, there's so much abandoned property and there's so much neglect." Absolutely. And it didn't get that way overnight. Like the frustrations that we've seen in the community is because we've been living with this for decades. The difference is now there's hope that something better is coming because we've had fits and starts of blight elimination plans that didn't give hope that there was real change coming. But with Vacants to Value, we've seen our efforts, our market-driven efforts transform neighborhoods.

And when you can do that, when you can look in the face of someone who has-- is looking at green space instead of trees coming up through vacant properties and see the fact that they-- it's like they say that, "We know that you see us." And that better is possible and better is coming. That's the kind of stuff that is going to-- that I'm going to focus on for these-- and I'm glad I got a head nod from my housing team-- that I'm going to focus on because it is important work to bring hope to our communities and we do that when we focus on making sure that government does what it's supposed to do for the citizens that we serve.

MR. HUGHES: This is a question, in many respects, that pulls together everything that we've been talking about for the last hour. This questioner says that some would argue that without the unrest and protests experienced in places like Ferguson and Baltimore, none of these issues that you mentioned would be even on the table for discussion. How would you suggest that citizens who feel their interests are ignored get their concerns on the national agenda?

MAYOR RAWLINGS-BLAKE: I think that might be true at a national level. But those issues, the issues of police brutality, they weren't new to me. We've been able to drive down the number of excessive force complaints. We've been able to drive down discourtesy complaints and lawsuits that have been brought against the city because we've been focused on improving the culture at the police department and confronting that culture in the police department. So locally, while I think the nation's eye has been turned to Baltimore in the wake of the Freddie Gray-- the death of Freddie Gray, this is

something that is not new to me. I think people are acting brand new about it now that some people feel that they're jumping on the bandwagon now.

Like I said, when I was in Annapolis fighting for reform for the law enforcement officers bill of rights, I think it's great now that they want to have committee hearings and taskforces and all that. Would have been lovely if they would have done that in January when we could have been showing the public that we were willing to confront the police lobby, the police union and fight for progress and reform to hold officers accountable. So, nationally, I think in many places these-- whether it's Freddie Gray or Eric Garner or Michael Brown, these issues are creating opportunities for dialogue in many places nationally that might not have had those conversations. But this has been an ongoing conversation and ongoing work that we've been doing in Baltimore. And it didn't start with the death of Freddie Gray.

MR. HUGHES: Mentioned the police union. There's a couple of questions specifically about the police union. Considering the reaction of the police union based upon the charges into the Freddie Gray case, how does the city government work long term to gain the cooperation of the rank and file?

MAYOR RAWLINGS-BLAKE: I think you're talking about two different things. The rank and file and the police union are two different entities. I think the rank and file officers-- you know, we have officers that very, very proudly serve the people of Baltimore. The vast majority of the officers that we have in our city serve our residents with distinction and respect the oath that they took and the uniform that they wear.

The challenge I have with police unions is that they are unwilling to evolve, you know, to-- when I was in Annapolis fighting for reform for the law enforcement officer's bill of rights, I remember having a conversation with the leadership in the union. And I said, "Listen, we might not get this passed this year. Might not be next year, but it's coming. Change is coming. If you can't see it, you're blind. There is a wave in our country that is unrelenting, that will hold officers more accountable for wrongdoing." And I remember this conversation like it was yesterday. I said that, "You are uniquely positioned." I said, "You can be the first in the nation to be a part of crafting what that looks like. Or you can do the same thing that you all have done for decades in the past, which is to just say no, to block any type of progress and see where that gets you."

And I will say that I think that the action of our police union and many across the country has made them-- has really devalued the power of that union. I don't know of-- based on the rhetoric that they've been spewing on Baltimore who would want the endorsement of the FOP. And they did that to themselves by the way that they've chosen to deal with the charges and the police, the way that they've chosen to deal with our efforts to reform, all of those things.

And it didn't have to be that way. They had with me a partner that was willing to work with them to address these issues. I was very open in trying to find solutions. But

you can't just go back to those kind of knee jerk-- the entrenched behaviors and think that it's going to work in 2015.

MR. HUGHES: We are almost out of time but before I ask the Mayor the final question, or questions, I have some housekeeping. The National Press Club is the world's leading professional organization for journalists. We fight for a free press worldwide. To learn more about the club, go to our website, that's Press.org. And to donate to our nonprofit Journalism Institute, visit Press.org/institute. I'd like to remind you about some upcoming speakers. This Friday, October 9th, GOP presidential candidate and neurosurgeon, Dr. Ben Carson, will address a National Press Club luncheon. On Thursday, October 15th at our annual Fourth Estate Awards gala, the National Press Club will Gwen Ifill, moderator and managing editor of "Washington Week," and co-anchor and managing editor of PBS News Hour. And on Friday, October 23rd, Oscar winning director and actor Kevin Costner, will be here to discuss his new book.

I'd now like to present our guest with the traditional National Press Club mug.
(Applause)

MAYOR RAWLINGS-BLAKE: Thank you.

MR. HUGHES: So the last few questions in the time we have remaining, can the Ravens now 1-3 turn it around? (Laughter)

MAYOR RAWLINGS-BLAKE: Whoa. Yeah, I'm a huge Ravens fan, so much so that I've realized that I blocked one of those losses out and I have had arguments with people, "No, we're not 1-3, it's 1-2." They're like, "No," and they go-- I was like, "No!" I have repressed a whole game because I cannot allow myself to think that we have started this season 1-3. We have to turn it around. There is no other option. I cannot envision a world in where the Ravens don't make the post season. So, we have to turn it around.

MR. HUGHES: We have someone at the head table who's quite interested in books, interviews authors frequently, in fact. Question: what is your favorite book?

MAYOR RAWLINGS-BLAKE: So, I don't have a favorite movie or a favorite book. I will say that I have a favorite author, and that's James Baldwin. I remember-- and I go back to his books often just because of the way that he wrote. It really speaks, it really spoke to me and I can remember when he came to Baltimore to speak to students at a local college. I squeezed my way in just for the opportunity to hear him speak. And it was one of the things that I hope that I will never forget in my life because he had a sensitivity and a way with language that is unparalleled in American literature.

As far as youthful books, I've read-- I mean, I say youth, you know what I mean, not-- (Laughter) books that aren't for just enjoyment, the enjoyment of literature. There's a book that I keep in my office and I think it's by Alan Deutschman. It's called *Change or Die* and it's a book about what it takes to change an individual, what it takes to change an organization, and I've been-- it's been something that has intrigued me about

individuals unwillingness to change even if it's in their self interest as well as organizations. So that's something that-- a book that I go back to a lot.

MR. HUGHES: Ladies and gentlemen, how about a round of applause for our speaker? (Applause)

MAYOR RAWLINGS-BLAKE: Thank you, thank you.

MR. HUGHES: I would also like to thank the National Press Club staff and its Journalism Institute and Broadcast Center for organizing today's event. If you would like a copy of today's program, or to learn more about the club, go to our website, Press.org. Thank you, we are adjourned. (Sounds gavel.) (Applause)

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