

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB HEADLINERS LUNCHEON WITH  
MISS AMERICA CHAIRPERSON GRETCHEN CARLSON + CEO REGINA HOPPER

SUBJECT: CHANGES TO THE MISS AMERICA COMPETITION

MODERATOR: ANGELA GREILING KEANE OF THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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

TIME: 1:00 P.M.

DATE: TUESDAY, JULY 24, 2018

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**ANGELA GREILING KEANE:** Good afternoon, and welcome to the National Press Club, the place where news happens. I'm Angela Greiling Keane, deputy editor of Politico States, and I am a former president of the National Press Club.

Before we begin our conversation today, I would like to remind our in-house audience to please silence your cell phones. And I would like to invite everyone who's watching or listening today to follow the discussion on Twitter, using #NPCLive. If you are in our audience in-house and you have questions for our speakers, you'll find cards at your tables. Please write your questions and pass them to the gentleman right here, who will bring them up to the stage.

Now it's my pleasure to introduce our head table guests. I'd ask each of you to stand briefly as your name is announced, and please hold your applause until all of our head table guests have been announced.

Kiki McLean, advisor to the Walton Family Foundation; Sarah Slocum Collins, an attorney and founding member of the Miss America State Titleholders Association; Kevin Wensing, the National Press Club Headliners Committee member who organized this lunch, and retired member of the US Navy; Lisa Matthews, assignment manager at the Associated Press and co-chairwoman of the National Press Club Headliners Team; Eleanor Clift, Politico reporter at the Daily Beast; Brian Karem, executive editor of the Montgomery Sentinel and a CNN analyst; Abby Livingston, Washington bureau chief of the Texas Tribune and a member of the National Press Club Headliners Team; Nikki Schwab,

Washington reporter at the New York Post; and Laura Curtis, a First Word reporter at Bloomberg News. [applause]

I'd also like to acknowledge additional members of the NPC Headliners Team who are responsible for organizing today's event. In addition to Kevin, we have Gwen Flanders, Noel St. John, and Press Club staff members, especially Lindsay Underwood, Laura Coker, and executive director Bill McCarren.

Now to our guests today, both of whom are working to give the Miss America program a makeover to, as they put it, in their own words, accurately reflect today's modern American women:

Gretchen Carlson, who was crowned Miss America herself in 1989, is a journalist, author and advocate, whose sexual harassment lawsuit against then-Fox News chairman and CEO Roger Ailes helped to open the #MeToo floodgates. She started her career as a political reporter in Richmond, Virginia, and went on to become an anchor and a reporter in several local markets before joining CBS News, and eventually Fox. She's also an author, including most recently *Be Fierce*, which is a New York Times bestseller. She's an honors graduate of Stanford University, and also a violin prodigy from the great state of Minnesota, where she performed as a soloist at the tender age of 13 with the Minnesota Orchestra.

And Regina Hopper is a businesswoman, also a journalist and lawyer, who says she's passionate about advancing issues that make a difference in people's lives. She, too, was a reporter at local news stations before jumping to CBS News where she covered the White House and worked on the news magazine show 48 Hours. She then proceeded to a career in advocacy and organization management and communications strategy at a long variety of major associations. She earned her degrees from the University of Arkansas.

So we're very pleased that both Gretchen and Regina have taken time out of their schedules to be here with us today. I'll kick it off with a few words from you and then we'll go to Q&A.

**GRETCHEN CARLSON:** Well, thank you so much for having us here today. It's our pleasure to be here. I don't think either Regina nor myself envisioned that we'd be at the National Press Club talking about Miss America a year ago. I know I didn't, for sure. But the last two years have certainly been something I never expected in my entire life.

But today we're talking about Miss America. As was mentioned, I was Miss America 30 years ago, and the primary two reasons why I entered the program were talent and scholarship. And those are the two things that we need to make sure that we are messaging better as we move this program forward. So there are probably many of you out there who don't realize that Miss America has always set itself apart from other so-called competitions or pageants for those two very important reasons.

We are a nonprofit organization. We are made up of thousands of volunteers across the country who put on the local competitions, the state competitions and they afford

thousands of young women every year to participate in this program and come to the national scene in Atlantic City. Many people are surprised to find out that this whole organization is grassroots, and without all those volunteers we would not exist.

The most important messaging that we want to give out now, aside from talent and scholarship, is, how do we move this program forward into complete relevancy as we approach our 100-year anniversary just two years from now. And so, when Regina and I got into these positions, we had an organization that we had to make sure would be sustainable financially and also sustainable with relevance.

And so, that is where we are today as we move Miss America forward and made the decision as a board at the end of March that we would no longer judge our candidates on physical appearance. That meant the elimination of the swimsuit category. And we have to say that overwhelmingly the people that we've heard from across this country have really, really— it's really been a positive response. So many people have reached out to us and said as parents or grandparents, Thank you so much because now my daughter wants to be a part of this program.

And so, we're really looking forward to our telecast in September. We'd like to share with you our new mission statement, which is: To prepare great women for the world, and to prepare the world for great women. [applause]

**REGINA HOPPER:** So how I got involved was because I was a first-generation college student. Neither one of my parents had gone to college. And when I got to the University of Arkansas and went through rush, I was a member of Zeta. And at that point, they came to me and said, You know, you don't do much here in this house— because I was kind of the nerd; I wanted to be involved in politics. I wanted to work out in the field and hand out flyers for people who were running for positions from everything from the local sheriff, all the way up to President of the United States. It never crossed my mind to really be a part of the Miss America program.

And so, I entered. And I can tell you that the look on the faces of those at the University of Arkansas when I was announced the winner of Miss University of Arkansas was sort of like this. [laughter] But it ended up funding my way through law school. And as a child from a small town in northwest Arkansas, I was able to go on and do what I hope have been very important things – in New York with CBS News, here in Washington, DC, and trucking, and telecommunications, and energy, and intelligent transportation, and making a difference in public policy in all of those fields.

And so, we want Miss America to be seen for what it really is, but yet hasn't really ever been able to talk about very well. And that is, you can be Miss Minister, Miss Mom, Miss Jet Pilot, Miss Member of the Military, Miss CEO, Miss Whatever You Want To Be. And you can use those scholarships and that experience of being able to talk with people from all over the country and all over the world about why you think that you can benefit from the Miss America program; be it, because I interview better— our candidates, when they go to jobs, overwhelmingly say to us that they get those jobs easier because they've been

prepared because they know how to interview. They know how to walk on a stage, they know how to command a room.

And most importantly, they can define now their own beauty. They can be beautiful because they have a social conscience. They can be glamorous because they want to make a difference in the world. And so, we have made a few changes to be more inclusive, and to welcome young women across the country into this program.

As Gretchen said, every day you get a DM or a text or something from a mom, a grandma, people who've been in this system, and dads. And my favorite one was just a couple of weeks ago, when a young dad sent me a text with his little girl in a swimsuit on the beach enjoying herself and saying, "As a father, I can now look at my little girl and say she, too, could be Miss America."

So we're very, very proud of not just the history and the tradition, because it's extraordinarily important, and we wouldn't have been here without that history and tradition. But we're also very proud of where the products of this system – Gretchen is a product of this system, I am a product of this system, other members in leadership are products of this system – have come together collectively to say, Let's be relevant for the next generation of young women who can use these scholarships to move forward. [applause]

**MS KEANE:** There's a 2002 film title, *Miss America*, and noted feminist Gloria Steinem, who's also spoken here on the National Press Club stage, said in that film that, "The swimsuit competition is probably the most honest part because it really is about bodies. It's about looking at women as objects." So she's clearly not complimenting the swimsuit program, but she's coming at it from a slightly different viewpoint. Is there some truth to that assessment? And how do you respond to that viewpoint from the preeminent feminist from over ten years ago?

**MS CARLSON:** So there takes a tremendous amount of discipline to walk on stage in a swimsuit. Especially for somebody like myself who, if you haven't noticed, I'm short. And my own grandfather told me when I was preparing vigorously to try and win Miss America that I would never win because I was too short. So I had to work incredibly hard to just be decent in swimsuit; I knew I would not win that. So that's discipline that I had had throughout my whole life from practicing the violin five hours a day as a child. Yeah, I had to work out really, really hard to be able to compete in the swimsuit part of it. It didn't mean that I loved it at the time, but I had to do it in order to try to win.

So we acknowledge that discipline that it takes for young women to be fit. And trust me, you have to be fit to do this job. So we're not saying that we don't honor that about women. We're just saying we're not going to judge them on that anymore. And we believe that in handing out millions of dollars of scholarship that you shouldn't have to walk on stage in a bikini and high heels to do that. Ironically, Miss America never wears a swimsuit the day after she wins. And so, it's not part of the job.

**MS HOPPER:** And that's really what we want to do, is we want the broadcast to reflect and competitions, from the local to the state level, to really reflect what the job of Miss America really is. And what is the job of Miss America? Well, the job of Miss America is to be a mentor and a role model. The job of Miss America is to want to advance scholarship and her own education to where after that year she uses it not as *the* most important thing that's happened in her life, but as a stepping stone into those other really important things that are going to happen in her life.

And then secondarily, a big part of this job is to have that social conscience. So let me just go back a few steps. When Miss America was created in 1921 on the boardwalk in Atlantic City – and we want to say thank you, by the way, to Atlantic City for being a supporter of the Miss America organization, even today – when it was born in 1921, it was a bathing suit revue. And it was radical for young women at that time to walk out on the boardwalk in a swimsuit. It was radical. So it was born out of being disruptive.

When talent was added– as Gretchen said, very important to her. Talent wasn't as important to me; I'm not as talented as she is. [laughter] The scholarships were very important to me. But when talent was added into Miss America, everybody was, Oh, my god, that's not what Miss America is; it's going to kill the system. And then a few years later when the platform – platform being the work that you would like to do for your year – was added into Miss America people said, Oh, that's going to kill Miss America.

So Miss America through its lifetime has always been disruptive. And what we like to see, and what we believe, based upon what we've been told and what other people have said to us with regard to their participation, or lack thereof, is that no longer judging on physical beauty – meaning, no longer, as Gretchen said, you don't have to wear a swimsuit to win a scholarship anymore – is reflective of the times that we are in.

And so, Miss America, as it's continuing to move forward in its lifetime, is now making this shift. So I think it's really important to look back at the history of that and to understand where it was born and where we are now. And the reflection of that job in the broadcast will be very important because if you notice– those of you who have watched Miss America, I'm not sure if you've noticed two things. One, you often ask yourself at the end, Why did that young woman win? And secondarily, you say, I don't think I know a whole lot about that young woman. Because you've never heard her say anything. Unless it's what Gretchen loves to define as a gotcha question. Which if you ask the question, 50% of anybody on any side of that's going to hate you. And again, it has nothing to do with being Miss America.

So we now want to have a program that reflects the job, and therefore you know who she is. And whether she may or may not be your favorite at the end, you will have an understanding as to why she won.

**MS CARLSON:** And one other renegade thing that I'll just add to your history line there is that around the same time that a woman who was running Miss America at the time in the '40s put in talent, she also put in scholarship.

**MS HOPPER:** Oh, that's right.

**MS CARLSON:** Now keep in mind, back in that time, not a lot of women were thinking about going to college. And so, that was a very proactive move. And I just want to make sure I add that to the storyline of— so truly, Miss America has really been about empowering women from the beginning and stepping outside of the box. And so, once again, in 2018, as we move towards a more modern program, it's about relevancy as to where women stand in society today.

**MS KEANE:** Now, the swimsuit competition, of course, isn't the only part of the program that's changing. The evening gown portion is changing, too. Can you talk a little bit about how that will look at the competition in September this year?

**MS CARLSON:** We're not going to give away all the secrets. But thank you for bringing that up because there's been a tremendous amount of erroneous reporting regarding the evening wear category. Many outlets reported that we were also getting rid of evening wear, which we are not. So the only difference really in evening wear is, again, that we're not judging on physical appearance, but we're judging on self-esteem and self-confidence when you walk out on that stage. And we're judging what actually comes out of your mouth during that phase of the competition. Substance, the substance of the woman. If she's talking about her social impact initiative or her career goals in life, or her leadership skills. And when some people say, Well, that's going to make the show boring, you know, that's sexist. Because what you're actually saying is that when we add more substance about women to a telecast, that that's boring. And that is sexist on its face.

We want to add more substance to the program because our women have substance. And they are smart leaders, and talented in their communities. And we want the rest of the world to know that about them.

**MS HOPPER:** Plus, I will tell you, that it's going to be a fun show. [laughter]

**MS CARLSON:** And the other change with evening wear is that the candidate — although they've been allowed to do this in the past, but not many have done this — they will have the opportunity to choose whatever they feel most self-confident in regarding evening wear. So you may see some women who still choose to wear a gown, which is fantastic, or you may see somebody who feels more self-confident in a fancy pantsuit, or in a cocktail dress. But it will be their choice.

**MS KEANE:** Now change, of course, doesn't usually come without some blowback. And you've certainly experienced that in both of your roles. So one questioner here asks: How are you dealing with the blowback from the 22 state pageants that don't like the recent changes?

**MS HOPPER:** So with change does come controversy sometimes. And change is often difficult. When you really peel back the layers of how Miss America's constituted, you

have local competitions— first of all, we have 51 candidates. And let me just do a brief detour; I'm not evading the question, I'm going to come back to it.

Notice the change in language that we've made. We are not a pageant. The Miss America pageant existed; we are now a competition. It will not be a pageant. We are not judging on physical beauty. It will not be a pageant.

We no longer have contestants. Contestants go after a prize. Candidates go after a job. And so, our young women are candidates for a job. That job happens to be the job of Miss America. It is a paid job. She is an employee of the Miss America organization. She gets paid for what she does and she will have metrics upon which, if she, like all of us when we go to work, if she advances those metrics and is able to more, she may be in line for a bonus in that position. But at the end of the year, we want people to understand what she wanted to do when she started and where she ended up at the end of the year.

Now let's go back. So we're composed of locals, states, and then of course you come to the national. Our system is comprised of volunteers. And we would not be able to move forward without them. Miss America has had the swimsuit competition for ever. And change is very difficult. And there are people who rightfully believe that it is not a good idea to get rid of swimsuit; they believe that. But let me just point this out:

We have allowed our volunteers to have a voice. And some of them have expressed that they don't like that direction. And so therefore, we will move forward – because it is a very vocal minority, but they believe in what they believe, and we are proud to hear that – but we will move forward in this fashion.

I think I want to say, we are just so— Gretchen and I both served on the board of Miss America prior to these positions. We have both left that board. And one of the things that was important to the two of us collectively was to make sure that people, again, who were products of this program had a voice in what the program looked like; and two, that they could speak that voice.

Now, it's not always easy to respond to some of them when the facts are wrong. And so, we have been trying to make sure that we get the facts out. One, there is an evening wear competition. There is an evening wear competition. [laughter]

Yeah, so there have been a few who have made their voices known that they're not happy with it, but that's okay.

**MS CARLSON:** I think it's important to also pick up on that for the first time ever, when we were reconstituting the board, beginning January 1<sup>st</sup>, that we deliberately went to our stakeholders in this organization for the very first time so we could hear those voices through those representatives.

So there was an open, fair and transparent election amongst former Miss Americas. In a very quick fashion we said, Who would like to be on the board? Ten people submitted their names.

**MS HOPPER:** Of the Miss Americas.

**MS CARLSON:** Of the Miss Americas. We had a fair and transparent election to put three more former Miss Americas on the board, besides myself. Then we went to the state executive directors – who amongst you would like to have a position on the board? They had their own election; they chose two.

**MS HOPPER:** Of which several put their names forward, again.

**MS CARLSON:** Yes. Then we went to the former state titleholders organization and they put forth, I think it was 32 names.

**MS HOPPER:** It was a lot.

**MS CARLSON:** It was a lot. And they had their election and nominated and voted in two people to come to the board. So for the very first time, as we were going through this revision and transition process, it was stakeholders in the organization whose voices were a part of that process.

**MS HOPPER:** Who really had never had a voice before.

**MS CARLSON:** They never had a voice before; they had never been on the board before. It was only about, 12, 13 years ago was the first time that a former Miss America was actually on the board. And it was only because a group of former Miss Americas went before that current board of directors and said how important it might be to have a former Miss America on the board. And it eventually happened.

So that was part of the plan and process, to have stakeholders' voices heard.

**MS KEANE:** Now, correct me if I'm wrong, I think the entire board is female now?

**MS HOPPER:** No, the entire board isn't female.

**MS KEANE:** Then the premise of this question is wrong. [laughter] It is obviously at least a predominantly female board. How will that make a difference in the day-to-day operations of the whole program?

**MS HOPPER:** Well, the day-to-day operations, we have male and female, both on the board and on our staff. I'm glad whoever asked that question asked it because I think it's really important to point out that the grassroots nature of this organization is comprised of females and also males. And in all of this restructuring and all of the #MeToo and people talking about the affiliation of a movement and a change of culture, we don't want to lose



sight that there are many men who believe in this system. When I was Miss Arkansas, we had a male executive director, and there was no one – Sarah is executive director as well – there was no one who cared more about young women getting scholarships than Bob Wheeler. And there are men like that across this country now.

So we want to say thank you to our men and our women, our women and our men, who are supportive of this program in advancing young women's careers and their futures. So on staff and on the board, as well as our volunteers, there are many men.

**MS KEANE:** What about the judges? You talked about how the competition and the criteria is changing. How are you choosing judges? Or are you choosing judges differently this year? Can you tell us who any of them will be?

**MS HOPPER:** We're not going to tell you that either.

**MS KEANE:** But what about the process?

**MS CARLSON:** Let me just say that it was my year was the first year that we brought in celebrity judges. And I was not a fan of that that year. Because I was a really serious violinist and I wanted somebody to be judging me who actually understood classical music. So I remember being disappointed about that. But we've gone back and forth over the years. I think one year we didn't have celebrity judges. I forget now.

We are doing a two-panel process again this year. So we have preliminary judges who basically pick the top 15 candidates. Or top 10. Or top 12. Or top 25. And then we will have a celebrity panel that will come in for the final night.

**MS HOOPER:** Yeah, it's a long week. If you don't know the structure, we have preliminaries. So we start out with 51 candidates from across the country. They're judged all week. They participate in the competition all week. So everyone has a personal interview with a preliminary set of judges. And then they do their onstage question, and they do their talent, and they do the evening wear section. And from that, at the end of the week– so that's Wednesday, Thursday and Friday evenings. So by the time you watch the telecast on Sunday night, on ABC, you will then be seeing the top from those 51. And then there will be another set of judges that come in for that 51.

Now, the last time that we asked a celebrity group of people to do that week, it was hard. I mean, it's sometimes hard to get the celebrities to come in for one day. And many of them fly in on Sunday morning, look at the interviews from the top candidates that morning, go to Boardwalk Hall and rehearse, come back, eat something, get dressed, and it's time for the show. And then they're gone; many of them, when the show's over at midnight, they'll be gone again.

So the reason we have two panels is that. Plus, it allows these candidates to get the opportunity to be seen by different kinds of people that represent different interests. And it

can reflect the totality of a personality when you have that many kinds of different people sitting on the panel.

So yes, we will have two—

**MS CARLSON:** But I do think it's really important to point out that in the judges we want to make sure that we're getting people who are communication specialists because the job of Miss America is so focused on communicating, interviewing, giving speeches. And also talent. Since talent is a predominant part of our program, we want to make sure that our judges are skilled in being able to evaluate that.

**MS KEANE:** In terms of the scholarship, you both mentioned it, the questioner asked: With the financial struggles in recent years of the program, what kind of scholarship can be sustained, grown at this point? And what kind of scholarship will this year's winner receive?

**MS HOPPER:** So the organization is basically in two parts. The Miss America organization, which houses the day-to-day activities of Miss America and also the competition itself is a (c)(4). The scholarships exist in the Miss America Foundation, which is a separate (c)(3). And so, when the IRS allowed this two entities to be created and the Miss America Foundation to be able to use the Miss America name— we could have another whole 'nother NPC on the differentiation. But suffice it to say that the scholarships are held in the (c)(3). And so, that's how we give out the scholarships. And those are funded through the Foundation.

And stay tuned – and Gretchen speaks more eloquently on this than I do, so I'm going to ask her to say it – it's been a while since Miss America scholarships have been raised. And so, one of our missions and goals is to make sure that not just Miss America but all of the other young women who get scholarships get more money in scholarships as we become more fiscally sustainable with regard to advancing those objectives.

And let me point out one more thing, too, and that is, if you compete in the Miss America organization, you win a scholarship. Even at the local level. So look at the broadcast this year, and we're going to try to show you a little bit of that as well.

**MS KEANE:** Speaking of the broadcast, obviously viewership has suffered for some years. Now you're back in Atlantic City. Atlantic City itself is experiencing its own revival. What are you doing to increase viewership of the event itself?

**MS HOPPER:** We are so proud to be partnered with ABC. And back in January, when ABC told us that they were going to run the show again, air the show again, we were so excited. And we were meeting with ABC executives and Gretchen started talking about her vision for the show, and I kind of sat back because I'm not an entertainment person. She is, I'm not. So I was sitting back learning myself as we were sitting in this meeting.

And ABC is so excited about how different the show is going to be that they really think of it as a new show. And so therefore, we're working with ABC on more promotion. But for the first time, we're working with Atlantic City on promotion. And Atlantic City is helping us promote the show in this region. Because remember, we have two different audiences. We have a Boardwalk Hall audience – we hope that everyone in this region will come to Atlantic City on September 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup>, and watch it in person; we hope many of you from the area will do that – but secondarily, for those of you who can't make it to Atlantic City, you'll be able to watch it on ABC. So we really have two audiences.

And ABC has been great and Atlantic City has been great. And quite frankly, the press has been really good about wanting to talk about the changes in the system. So we're hoping that will be helpful.

**MS CARLSON:** And we've had a lot of discussion about Miss America over the last six months, but especially over the last six weeks. So I think people are genuinely interested in seeing what the telecast will be. So we're looking forward to it, September 9<sup>th</sup>, nine p.m. Eastern.

**MS HOPPER:** Live on ABC.

**MS KEANE:** We have a lot of questions about diversity in the candidate pool. With the changes that you're making, is part of the intent to increase the diversity? I guess there's a lot of different questions about various, different factors of diversity. So maybe just address that broadly.

**MS CARLSON:** So the main change about not having swimsuit will start effectively at the national telecast. So the young women who have competed in the local system to make them eligible for the states that just competed, they were doing so under the old rules. So this will be the first– we say that these candidates will be especially adaptable because they have competed under the old system, and now when they come to the national level, they will not be doing swimsuit. And then that rollout will continue as we go through locals and states, moving towards the next year of 2019.

But as far as diversity and inclusion, that was one of the main factors in the decision-making process, was to open this up to more young women who maybe felt like Miss America wasn't for them in the past, but that they wanted to be able to showcase their talents and leadership skills and earn scholarship dollars to go to school, and not have to wear a swimsuit on stage in front of millions of people.

So I do think that that opens up our pool of candidates in a big, huge way. And we've heard from many of them who say that now they will want to be a part of the program.

**MS KEANE:** What about socioeconomic diversity? Obviously the competition doesn't come cheap. Do you have any strategies to reach young women who might not otherwise be able to afford to compete?

**MS CARLSON:** Well, actually you don't have to pay any money to enter. We are not a for-profit. Other competitions and pageants, you do have to spend money to enter. So yes, we're open to everyone. And we actually hand out money at the end to the young women, to say, Here's help to continue your education.

**MS HOPPER:** It's interesting. I like listening to these questions because it's like it's a focus group. Such a Washingtonian, right? [laughter] I mean, it's like just got to love those focus groups. But these questions are a focus group of what we need to hear to understand what's preventing people getting into the system. You don't want to feel excluded or therefore you won't come. You don't want to feel like, for whatever reason, an economic reason, that you can't compete.

One of the things that we've been trying to push down into the system is that if you are really entering the system because you want to advance your scholarship and your education or your social outreach and your social initiatives, you shouldn't have to put a lot of money into doing that. Gowns can be expensive, right? And we want those who are in the fashion industry to be a part of Miss America. But at the same time, even the fashion industry itself has said, How can we be more sustainable. Right? So we want to make sure that people feel as if they are included.

There was a conversation that I had in New York. We were headed into a marketing meeting. Young and Rubicam – there are so many stories to tell, I just keep going off like this. Young and Rubicam – who's probably one of the largest and creative advertising firms in the United States, came to us, and they are actually helping us pro bono. Because they believe in Miss America. And I was sitting in this room with some of the most amazingly talented women – and men, mostly women though – that I had ever met, and there were Baby Boomers all the way down to Millennials and whatever the next one is. And it was this focus group of, why Miss America is important, and why they wanted to give their time and their talents. Think about that, they're giving– they like to say they're giving a few hundred thousand dollars; no, they're not. They're giving a lot of their time and their talent to helping envision, re-vision, re-market Miss America.

So when I was walking into this meeting late, as I usually am, there was a young woman who was sitting at the front desk, and I said, "I'm Regina Hopper." She said, "Who are you here to see?" "Young and Rubicam." "And who are you with?" "Miss America." She went, "Miss America?" I said, "Yes." And her eyes popped out. And I would say she was probably 22, 23 years old. And she went, "Wow." I said, "Yeah, no, I'm not Miss America." She goes, "No, I can tell that." [laughter] She said, "You know, I could never be Miss America." And so I said, "Well, why?" And she goes, "Well, you know, I guess it's like I'm not pretty."

And so, we talked a little bit about Miss America, and then we went up to the meeting, and I called downstairs to say, "Can you tell me who this young woman is, and does she have a manager, and could I speak with her?" Because I would really like to find out why that was her reaction. Did she feel excluded somehow? Or was it just a lack of self-confidence on her part? And it was a little bit of both.

But what happened after that conversation that I was able to have with her is I got to talk to her about what she wanted to do, what she wanted to be in life. And we talked about the scholarships. And when she walked off, she said, "Where do I go to find out more about that?" And that's what we're talking about.

**MS KEANE:** Now, this question is from a former Miss District of Columbia, who says that she, to use her words, "As far as I'm concerned, I'm pretty much every other young woman who has competed and made the deliberate choice to compete in the pageant and to be judged on physical appearance." So her question is, again using her words, "If we just focus on the grades and goals, who does Miss America differentiate itself from every other scholarship in the nation?"

**MS HOPPER:** Well, we're not just judging on the grades and the goals, so there you go. We're judging on women who want to talk about how they are fit for a job, physically fit, because as Gretchen said, you have to be. You travel 20,000 miles a month as Miss America, if not more. You are never in the same city for more than 48 hours, hardly ever. You are constantly in front of people like you, the press. You are constantly having to talk with people who are CEOs and people who are young children.

So you have to be physically fit, you have to be mentally fit, and you have to want to do this job and make a difference. So it's more than—

**MS CARLSON:** And there's also glam; we're not taking away glam.

**MS HOPPER:** We're not taking away the glam.

**MS CARLSON:** A lot of young women, that's really important to them, to feel self-confident in how they look and what they say when they come out on the stage, but showing that self-confidence and sass. So it's not just a scholarship program, but it's all of those things put together.

**MS HOPPER:** You can be glamorous and not be in a swimsuit. I mean, I'm just going to be frank. I don't think you have to wear a swimsuit to be glamorous. You don't have to wear a certain— look at the difference between the two of us. She's looking one certain way, I'm a little bit more casual, but yet we're still doing important work in an organization that does important things.

**MS CARLSON:** It's all about personal choice, really, and what you feel most self-confident in.

**MS KEANE:** What do you see in terms of numbers of competitors? What's the trend on those?

**MS CARLSON:** So when I competed, probably around your same time period—

**MS HOPPER:** I'm a little older than you.

**MS CARLSON:** –there were 85,000 young women a year who started at the local level. Roughly. And those numbers have dwindled. And I would say that we're down now to–

**MS HOPPER:** Well, we're checking. But it's not 85,000.

**MS CARLSON:** No, it's not 85,000.

**MS HOPPER:** When we started looking at some of the entry forms, we were finding that– one of the things we like to measure as a metric is unique individuals; not unique in and of themselves, but in the fact that they hadn't competed before. So what you have is a lot of young women who have come into the system and have just kind of churned through the system; if they don't win one local, they'll go another local, that type of thing. And we want them to stay in the system because when they stay in the system, they win scholarships. So we don't want them leaving the system. However, we want more people in. And those unique had gone down. So we really want to help drive those up. And we're hoping that this will help do that.

**MS KEANE:** One questioner, not me, despite the fact that we discussed this over lunch, asks whether Miss America is having any conversations with Girl Scouts, and the questioner says, and Boy Scouts, which of course now allow girls in their programs, about leadership development going forward.

**MS CARLSON:** There are a lot of parallels between the two programs. It turns out that the woman now who's running Girl Scouts also studied at Stanford University, as I did. So we were aligned through alum recently, so we've had some great discussions with the Girl Scouts.

But it is an interesting parallel because the same sort of leadership skills are taught to Girl Scouts, and Brownies before you're a Girl Scout, from a young age, all the way up through high school. And arguably, the Miss America program then picks up at that point in time in a young woman's life and goes through 25 years old.

So it's something to ponder as we move forward.

**MS HOPPER:** Both organizations are going through their own changes right now. And we have spoken with them, and one of the things that I see as a true sort of affinity between the two is that their age bracket– when we spoke with Sylvia, who's the CEO, she said, "Your candidates, the women in your program, can teach my kids so much." And we, of course, would love for these young children who take part in the Girl Scouts to continue that sort of world approach and intelligence and inquisitiveness, to be able to come into the program. So hopefully, when both organizations get a chance to– us, get through September – we can have more conversations along that line.

**MS KEANE:** It probably won't come as a surprise, but there's a lot of questions about #MeToo, given of course Gretchen's personal involvement and the organization as a whole. Starting broadly on this topic, how did the #MeToo movement affect changes in the competition? That all happened around the same time. So take us through how those movements went together.

**MS CARLSON:** Well, I think they're two independent things, first and foremost. Obviously, we're experiencing what I refer to as a cultural revolution right now. For whatever role I played in kicking that off two years ago in filing my lawsuit, I'm forever grateful that I've given the courage to so many other thousands of women to be able to also come forward, and most importantly be heard, and even more importantly be believed.

Cultural shifts and change do not happen that quickly, usually. And the idea that we've come this far in such a short period of time is incredibly rewarding to me on a daily basis. And it's one of the reasons I wear this bracelet every day that says "be fierce." I wear it to bed as well because some mornings when I wake up and look down, I don't necessarily always feel fierce. [laughter] But when I look down and see, this reminds me that I'm on a mission.

That is completely different from being involved in Miss America. I never envisioned becoming the chairperson of the board of Miss America, but if there's been one constant in my life it's that when there's a challenge in front of me, I usually go for it. And because I was associated with this program and because it's part of who I am, and the benefits that I received from being a part of this program, I determined that it would be important to give my time back. On a volunteer basis, by the way; both Regina and I are working on a volunteer basis in these positions.

So they're really two independent factions, but I think it's impossible to not say that they're somehow intertwined simply culturally. But my involvement in what I did in my life leading up to this point has nothing to do with the changes that have come about within Miss America, at all. This is not a personal thing for me.

**MS KEANE:** Of course, news reports some months back revealed damaging emails that had been sent by the previous leadership within the Miss America organization about contestants, former Miss Americas. I won't go into the details of all those emails; it's all readily available in news reports. But you've had some cultural changes to make in the organization since that passed. So how do you go forward, given that recent history with the previous leadership?

**MS CARLSON:** I think one of the most important things was that women came into the prominent roles. So we have a female CEO. We have the first former Miss America as chair of the board. We have a female former Miss America as chair of the Miss America Foundation. So I think that that was incredibly important for a women's empowerment organization, to have women leading the charge.

**MS KEANE:** Talking a little bit about your lawsuit against Roger Ailes, a questioner asks: When you filed the lawsuit, did you have any idea at that time of the impact it would have and how others would follow?

**MS CARLSON:** Absolutely not. Every day for me has been a surreal experience since that time. Arguably the most difficult decision of my life. And I could have never, ever expected that we would be where we are today. But I'm immensely grateful that so many other women have been given that gift of courage. And when I named my fund that I set up Gift of Courage and called it that, I never realized how important that title would be. And here's what I've learned:

That every day my story gives the gift of courage to somebody else. And that gift of courage, it turns out, is contagious. And that's why we are seeing this revolution that we're in – because so many more women have been given that gift, to know that they can also tell their stories.

One really important thing about my case is that I believe that it was one, a first time in a long time at least, where people saw consequences quickly. And also an apology. Which is rare. And I think that that gave so many other women and men the courage to also come forward. Because they realized, "Wow, I might actually be believed." And before that, none of them were.

But here is the startling reality and the sad reality of what's happened to women in the past who did find that courage. The thousands of them that reached out to me after my story broke, they crossed every socioeconomic line, every profession. It's a rampant epidemic. But when they reached out to me, they all said: "I never worked in my chosen profession ever again, as a result of only having the courage to come forward. I did nothing wrong." And that fact is outrageous, that we have thousands of women, maybe more, across this country who all they did was have the courage to come forward and say, "I'm not being treated correctly," and they never work in their chosen profession ever again. And they worked just as hard to get there, maybe harder, than anyone else. We should all be ashamed about that.

And one of the things that I've been advocating is for companies who let these women go to stand back up and do the right thing and hire them back. Instead of talking so much about whether or not the perpetrators are rehab-able, if that's a word – which is one of the first things we go to, is, Oh, when will Such-and-Such have their job back? – what about hiring back all the women? That would be a true testament to really seeing this revolution through. [applause]

**MS KEANE:** You just used the word courage several times, and this questioner asks: What gave you the courage to take the stand to actually file the lawsuit? And what did you fear most when you made that decision?

**MS CARLSON:** Everything. Courage is not like a light switch. It's not like something you just turn on one night and say, Hey, I think I'll do this. It's a building process. I thank my parents for the way in which they raised me; I'm blessed to still have them in my



life. My mom told me every single day when she put me to bed, "You can be anything you want to be in this world, but it will come with a lot of hard work." And I believed her. And that's the way I've chosen to live my life. And I'm hopefully passing that along to my children.

Of paramount concern to me were my two children, who were 11 and 13 at the time. But I have to tell you that they've also been given the gift of courage. And on the first day of school after my lawsuit, my daughter came home and said, "Mommy, a lot of people asked me about you at school today." [laughter] And she said, "Mommy, I was so proud to be able to tell them that you are my mom." And a couple of weeks later, when some kids had been making her life miserable, she couldn't find the courage to do anything about it, but she came home one day and she said, "Mom, I told this one that, and I told that one this." And she said, "I would have never done that, Mommy, unless I saw you do it."

And my son more recently watched a town hall on CNN that I was participating in, where a very scary stat was used, which is once every 73 seconds a woman in this country is sexually assaulted or harassed. And when I came back in from out of town he was waiting for me in the kitchen. And he had a look of consternation on this face and he said, "Mommy, was that statistic true, that that woman said on the show with you?" And I said, "I'm so sorry to tell you that that is true." And he looked at me, at 12 years old, and said, "Mommy, I want to be a part of fixing that."

If all I've done is given my two children the courage to face this world and respect people in the right way, then my job has been done. But I know it's much more than that. [applause]

**MS KEANE:** You talked about the corporate culture changes you would like to see about hiring women back. What about changes at the government level? We're in Washington, the #MeToo movement's been going on as a movement for a couple years. What would you like to see done from our lawmakers and policymakers?

**MS CARLSON:** Well, I've been spending a lot of time in Washington trying to pass bills, which is another one of my jobs that I've been working on. In December, I was very proud to introduce a bipartisan bill in the House and the Senate. I said bipartisan, which was incredibly important because sexual harassment is apolitical. We've seen titans from both sides fall down.

So I really spent a lot of time on the Hill over the last 18 months advocating with members of Congress to support this bill. What this bill does is gets rid of arbitration in employment contracts or gives women a choice of whether or not, if they're facing harassment, whether or not they want to go to secret arbitration, or if they want to go to our open court system, which is your Seventh Amendment right.

Not to get too much in the weeds, but forced arbitration in employment contracts has basically kept the issue of sexual harassment silent because if you have one of these clauses in your contract, and you're being sexually harassed, and you go to report it, you

automatically get thrown into the secret chamber of arbitration and no one ever knows what the heck happened to you. And you can never tell anyone.

So this bill would give women the choice – and men – the choice of whether or not they want to go public with their cases or not. And here's what happens to the power pendulum within a company when you give women a voice. Here's how it is with secret arbitration, and here's how it is when you give women a choice. And maybe this person doesn't harass anymore, which is the whole objective.

**MS KEANE:** Speaking of politics, you said late last year that you wouldn't rule out running for office yourself some day.

**MS HOPPER:** [laughter]

**MS KEANE:** It's six or so months later; where are you on that thinking somewhere, some day?

**MS HOPPER:** The reason we're laughing is because we– I was one of those people: Don't you want to run for office?

**MS CARLSON:** No. Actually, I was asked to run for Senate in Connecticut where I live now, and then some people in Minnesota where I grew up had asked if I was interested. I'm not interested right now. But my life has worked in very mysterious ways. I'm supposed to be a concern violinist, by the way, which ended at 17, which is how I got into Miss America, because my mom really wanted me to still play the violin and she saw it was worth 50% of your points in Miss America, so that's how she convinced me to do Miss America.

So I never say never about anything in life. I've covered politics for 27 years so I have a keen interest in it. But it's not on my radar screen in the next year or two.

**MS KEANE:** We are almost out of time. So before we ask one final question, I would like to share with our audience, both in-house and our viewership, we have several upcoming Headliners events. On August 13<sup>th</sup>, Sean Spicer will speak about his new book, *The Briefing*, talking about his tenure as White House press secretary. On September 18<sup>th</sup>, Emily's List president Stephanie Schriock will be here to discuss the new field of female candidates who are running for political office in this year's midterm elections. And on September 20<sup>th</sup>, former Education Secretary Arne Duncan will address the current state of our country's education system with his new book, *How Schools Work*.

So Gretchen and Regina, thank you so much for joining us today. And before one final question, I would like to present you each with our National Press Club coffee mug.

**MS CARLSON:** Thank you.

**MS KEANE:** You're welcome.

**MS HOPPER:** Thank you.

**MS KEANE:** And for the final question, it comes from a member of our live audience who identifies himself as a grandson of a suffragist, and he says, When you speak of history, the first Miss America occurred just one year after women got the right to vote in the US. Do you think that matters?

**MS HOPPER:** Yes. Miss America is about women's empowerment. Miss America is about having a voice. Miss America is about achieving your educational desires so you can go on and be what you want to be. Miss America is about making a difference in your community. Miss America is in every town, city, county, state in this country. You cannot walk into anywhere without seeing Miss America. She may not be Miss America, but actually she is Miss America.

We have women who are former state titleholders, lawyers for Boeing. A former Miss Wisconsin performed the first pediatric face transplant in the world, Miss Wisconsin. Former first president of the American Medical Association was former Miss Georgia. We're everywhere. So yes.

**MS CARLSON:** In fact, when I went to California recently to help them with their arbitration bill, the female assemblywoman, who was also a graduate of Stanford University, was second runner-up at Miss Maryland in the Miss America system and paid for law school at Georgetown from participating in this program.

So every place that I go, I meet somebody who has participated in this program through all my travels over the last two years. And we just want to encourage more young women to see it for what it really is, which is a program about leadership and talent and substance and smarts and what women want to be in life.

I want to just open this up to so many more young girls who didn't think that it was possibly for them before. Like the woman you met when you came into the lobby. Or the viral video of the African American young woman who had competed in our system who had an amazing talent, but she was always told that she just couldn't win because she was just ten pounds overweight.

**MS HOPPER:** You should look at that. It is amazing. It is an amazing testament. It really is.

**MS CARLSON:** So we're just really excited about more women having the ability to take part in our program and become the women that they want to be.

**MS KEANE:** Thank you, Regina, thank you, Gretchen. Thank you to our audience in the Ballroom at the National Press Club, our viewers and listeners, as well as our audience online. We are adjourned. [applause]

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