

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH ANNA MARIA CHAVEZ

SUBJECT: CHANGES AHEAD FOR THE GIRL SCOUTS OF AMERICA

MODERATOR: THOMAS BURR, PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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**THOMAS BURR:** (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon, and welcome to the National Press Club. My name is Thomas Burr; I'm the Washington correspondent for the *Salt Lake Tribune* and the 109<sup>th</sup> President of the National Press Club. Our guest today is Anna Maria Chavez, CEO of the Girls Scouts of the USA. I would like to welcome our C-SPAN and Public Radio audiences. And I would like to remind you, you can follow the action on Twitter using the hashtag NPCLive. That's NPCLive, and yes that means I'm giving you permission to use your phones.

In a break from our program today, I would observe that we have all witnessed a very tragic event in Orlando over the weekend. I ask you all now to join me in a moment of silence for those who lost their lives or were injured and for the Orlando community. (moment of silence) Thank you.

Now it is time to introduce our head table guests. I would ask each of you to stand briefly as your name is announced. Please hold your applause until I am finished introducing the entire table. From your right, Lidia Soto Harmon, CEO of the Girl Scout Council of the Nation's Capital; Molly McCluskey, independent journalist, a Press Club governor and a girl scout alum; Fay Fields, president of the board of directors of the Girl Scout Council of the Nation's Capital and a Girl Scout alum; Maria Recio, arts and culture national correspondent of McClatchy newspapers, bureau chief at the *Fort Worth Star Telegram* and also a girl scout alum; Katia Thomas, information officer at the Bureau of Information Resource Management at the State Department and a girl scout alum; Kesha L. Willis, marketing and communications manager for the American

College of Radiology, a girl scout alum and an NPC member. Angela Greiling Keane, former Press Club president and a White House correspondent at Bloomberg News, from whose daughter Taylor I buy all my Girl Scout cookies. She's also a girl scout alum.

Skipping over our speaker for now, Debra Silimeo, executive vice president of Hager Sharp and the organizer of today's luncheon. Thank you, Debra. Frances Hardin, international communications consultant at Hardin Media International, a former CNN White House correspondent, and a former troop member of the Marin County, California, Girl Scouts; Joan Bondareff, of counsel at Blank Rome LLP, and a girl scout alum; Ann Ludwig, communications manager at the National Association of Homebuilders, a girl scout alum, and a current troop leader; Peggy Sands Orchowski, congressional correspondent for *Hispanic Outlook* magazine, and a girl scout alum. Thank you all. (Applause)

Girl Scouts may be known for their cookies, but their most meaningful product is one you can't put into a box. In 1912, when Juliette Low founded the Girl Scouts, women didn't have the right to vote, let alone the opportunity to run companies or countries. She wanted to get the girls outdoors, become self reliant and provide community service. In the process, they formed a circle of friendships, a network that works today to motivate girls to explore what is possible for themselves and to embrace leadership. Many of the organization's notable alumni have done just that; Venus Williams, Lucille Ball, Lisa Ling, Sally Ride, Sandra Day O'Connor, Condoleezza Rice, and Madeline Albright. And presumptive Democratic presidential nominee, Hillary Rodham Clinton, who has broken one of the biggest glass ceilings of them all by becoming the first woman to hold such a title.

Many of these high achievers attribute their early exposure to female leadership to their experiences in scouting. The highest award that a girl scout can earn, the Gold Award, is designed as a critical lesson in leadership. Our speaker, CEO of the Girl Scouts of the USA, Anna Maria Chavez, is here to mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Gold Award, the organization's highest achievement for scouts.

Girl scouts devote as much as two years in a sustainable community service project. They must design, plan and execute to earn the Gold Award. Chavez credits her experiences as a girl scout with kindling her interest in public service, helping her to see possibilities beyond the borders of the small town of Eloy, Arizona. Her career in public service includes several positions in the Clinton Administration, that would be the Bill Clinton administration, correct, and as deputy chief of staff to Arizona governor Janet Napolitano.

Chavez also oversaw food distribution programs for the hungry, shelter and supportive services for victims of domestic violence and the homeless and refugee settlements and services.

Since becoming the CEO of the Girl Scouts of the USA four years ago, this Yale alum has been named one of the world's 50 greatest leaders by *Fortune* magazine. She's

taken the organization into the digital age with her digital cookie initiative, and the addition of badges geared towards cyber etiquette, financial literacy, and science, technology, engineering and math learning. Please welcome to the National Press Club podium Anna Maria Chavez, CEO of the Girls Scouts of the USA. (Applause)

**MS. CHAVEZ:** Good afternoon. And good afternoon, girl scouts. I feel like I'm with family, this is wonderful. First of all, I do want to acknowledge what is heavy on our hearts this morning to our friends and family in Orlando. As all of you, I was distressed and overwhelmed by seeing the tragedy that played out this weekend. For all of us who understand the importance of inclusion and diversity, I stand before you heartbroken. I do want to send my remarks and special thanks to all of the first responders who were there on the scene and to the girl scout families that were impacted this weekend.

So thank you for the opportunity to be here. It is my second time at the National Press Club. Thank you for having me back. I guess I did an okay job the first time, thank you. I want to thank the organizers of today's luncheon, specifically to my friend here. Thank you so much for your leadership and for organizing this amazing luncheon, Debra.

I also want to thank my colleagues from the Girl Scouts of Nation's Capital. I know they're in the room, where are you? Thank you. To their CEO, Lydia Soto Harmon, to their board president, Fay Fields, and of course for their steering committee members, Debra Silimeo and Angela Keane, thank you for your hospitality today. And, of course, to the prestigious members of the National Press Club who are here in the room and on camera this morning.

Again, it is an amazing opportunity to be here actually, with the room full of girl scout leaders. I share this leadership mantle actually with many people. First of all, I'd like the CEOs of our local Girl Scout Councils to please stand up. (Applause) These are representatives of 112 CEOs who are doing an amazing job of continuing this movement that's been around for 104 years. I'd also like to recognize the members of our current and former national board. Would you please rise? (Applause)

And I do want to acknowledge a special person in the audience, somebody who's also worn this title, Mary Evans, the former national CEO of Girl Scouts of the USA. (Applause) Again, as my wonderful host said, we are here to celebrate something fabulous. Tomorrow, we will take on the Capitol Hill with the troop of Capitol Hill. These are women who serve both in the Senate and the House who are going to host us to recognize the major achievement that a girl does and earns when she gets her Gold Award. It is the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this very important honor.

And I want to spend just a few minutes talking about it. Because I can't tell you, I'm sure many of you in the room have experienced it. You know, as you're talking to people, they talk about, "Hey, what do you do in girl scouting?" And you ask them that critical question. "So do you know what the highest award is in girl scouting?" They kind of pause, they kind of go like this, and they go, "Well, I know it's the Eagle Scout for the Boy Scouts." So this is our year to really talk about this seminal award because, again, it

is sort of the hallmark of a girl scout leadership journey. It really encapsulates what she has done in her girl scout career to make an impact on local communities. And so we're excited to be in Washington, D. C. to really mark that hundredth anniversary.

You know, in 1916 when it was established, we knew that it was going to be a hallmark for girls. And today, less than 5 percent of all girl scouts earn this award. They do take action projects that are making clearly important impacts, not only in their local community but all over the world. I've been able to actually travel the world and talk to girls who've made this great achievement happen in their lives, and they're doing incredible things. They're thinking about how we continue to have a sustainable food source in this country. They're talking about how to get girls and boys out of sex trafficking. They're taking on underprivileged communities. They're talking about how do we invest in girls so they can take on the leadership mantle for this country and this world.

And according to our own research at Girl Scouts, the power of the Girl Scout Gold Award, excellence and leadership in life, a report that we recently did, we found that Gold Award recipients exhibit more positive life outcomes including a strong sense of self, life satisfaction, leadership, life success, community service and civic engagement.

And over 90 percent of girl scouts, not only attributed their success in life to their organization that's meant so much to so many of us, they also stated that belonging to girl scouts left a positive imprint on their lives, providing once in a lifetime immersive experiences they could not have enjoyed anywhere else. This year marks a century of talented and selfless girls embracing the opportunity to discover their passions, connect with others to solve community problems and transforming the world in progress. Because we know that girls don't wait until they're 25 or 30 years old, they do it now, even when they're five years old. (Applause) Yeah, absolutely.

So, all of us had some sort of connection, even the men in the room, who were men enough to be girl scouts. You know, whether we bought the girl scout cookie or we were part of a family with a girl scout, we all have our own personal story. I have my own. I grew up in a small local community, a farm town, in Eloy, Arizona. It was an amazing place, I thought it was the epicenter of the universe. I thought everything that was great happened in my local community.

And one day, my best friend came to third grade and said, "I'm going to be a girl scout." Now, clearly I didn't know the significance until I went home and started to explain to my grandmother in Spanish what it would mean to me. And when she asked me, "Well, Anna Maria, what are you going to do in girl scouting?" I said, "Well, I'm going to go camping, I'm going to sleep in a tent." My grandmother said, "Why would you do that? We have a nice bed for you here." And then I told her that I would go on and do great things for people and sell cookies. She said, "Ay mijita. Don't sell those galletas, those cookies. You've got a grocery store for that."

But when I told her that I would help other people in our community, she said absolutely. She knew the power of our brand, and that brand continues to have an impact on all of us. And it also opened up a whole sisterhood for not only me, but for the millions of women who've been in girl scouting; 59 million in the last 104 years. And what does that mean for us, a sisterhood? It means that we can count on other women to be there as supporters, as endorsers, as people who care.

Well, I brought one of my friends in the sisterhood. It's a woman that actually invested in me right out of law school. I didn't know much, all I had was a law degree printed on a piece of paper. But there was a woman here in D.C. who took me sight unseen and said, "I'll take Anna. I'll mentor her." Joan did that for me. I was very young and very naive. Didn't quite know what the law would bring, not only for myself, but for my community. And Joan Bondareff took me on and because of her expertise and being the first woman to serve as the general counsel for the Maritime Administration, she allowed me the experience to go on and actually create an opportunity for others.

I got to go on and work with the Department of Justice on a case that went to the U. S. Supreme Court. Joan is here today at the head table because not only did she support me, she has continued to support me in my life. My family and I always know that she's there to say, "Anna, even in tough times, you're going to get through it." And when you've worn the leadership mantle, it is your job to reach back and help others and pull them forward with you. Thank you, Joan. (Applause)

So, it's obviously an important experience for all of us in this room, but how do we impress upon others about the important economics of investing in girls here in the United States and abroad? Like us, we know what is important for an investment. We all look for the ROI. And people always ask me, "So what's the ROI in investing in girls?" Well, I say not only is it important to understand the return on your investment, but I always talk about and always sort of ponder over the question of what is the return on ignoring a girl and ignoring that investment.

You know, today only seven cents on a dollar, philanthropic dollars that are donated every year in this country, go to girl and women causes. People give more to animal causes today than to girl causes. Now, don't get me wrong. I have a brand new puppy, his name is Codylicious-- excuse me, Cody-- he's a wonderful dog, but he will not be the president of the United States one day, a girl scout will be. (Applause) So we need to look at the economics of both investing and not investing in girls.

What is the economic impact of a girl's behavior when she's making the wrong decisions? What happens when we fail to give that girl a safe place to thrive and to live? And what happens when we don't put embracing mentors in her life to understand the need that girls have every day? They're constantly looking for role models, people to say that you're worth it, that you can do anything, even though the data is stacked against you. This is what you can do. This is your power.

And what are the prospects for girls and families who can't participate in girl scouting when even a \$15 annual registration fee is a barrier? Well, what's interesting today of the millions of girls that are in girl scouting, almost 50 percent of them are on scholarship. That means we're paying their \$15 annual membership fee. We're paying for their uniform, we're paying for them to go to a girl scout camp. But it is amazing to me how hard it's been to convince people in the United States to invest in girls.

But we're not done. We will continue to tell the story about what happens when you do invest in girls and women. Look at what's happening here today in the capital. If you look at the women currently serving in the Senate and the House, 70 percent of women in the U. S. Senate are girl scout alum. More than 50 percent of the women in the U. S. House are girl scout alum. If you look at almost every single woman sitting in a governorship in a state capital across the country, they are girl scouts.

So for me, that's why I love talking about it; because I get it, I've seen the lack of investment in girls and where that investment ends up happening. It ends up happening in our correctional systems. It ends up happening in foster care, in child protective services. Well, I would rather invest in a girl and see them blossom than invest in these systems.

Now for girls, what does it mean for them? Well, I got to tell you that the average age of my boss is eight years old. (Laughter) And they're pretty clear about what they need in life. And what I also get to do is I get to talk to future employers. They tell me the huge gap in the skill set that they're seeing today, and they're seeing, they're looking out into the future in 20 years and saying, "What are we going to do? We have all these STEM jobs, but we don't have enough girls and boys in the pipeline."

So that's where we come in at Girl Scouts. We have developed the most amazing STEM programs in the world. Actually, we've been doing it for over a hundred years. A lot of people forget that. Some of our first badges dealt with it. Our founder, Juliette Gordon Low, who was amazing, audacious, creative. She had girls doing welding, welding, back in 1916. And today, our girls are now working on their nanotechnology badges. They're learning to code, they're understanding the connection between their lives at the local level and how they can actually have an impact on insuring that science creates solutions for diseases that exist today, but unfortunately will continue unless they engage in science and technology.

And, of course, in girl scouting, we're staying relevant. We're listening to our boss. You're saying, "You know what? We love technology. Can you bring it into girl scouting?" So that's what we've been doing. We've invested multi million dollars in the last few years to actually upgrade girl scouts in the technology arena. We built the first multichannel e-commerce platform in the history of the United States for girls. And they've taken it to the next level. They're selling their cookies, and why is that important, that they're selling cookies online? Because with that revenue, they're taking it and taking-- they take action projects onto a higher platform. And for us, that's what's important.

In addition, I also think it's important to understand what girl scouting does off of technology. We teach girls soft skills, we teach them how to deal with uncomfortable situations, when people are trying to talk them into doing things that they clearly know in their gut they shouldn't be doing. And unfortunately, I have seen way too many news articles these days about girls who are hurting themselves, girls who are taking their lives because they cannot stand up to the social pressure of not being pretty enough, not being smart enough, and seeing how people attack them on social media.

But that's where we, again, come in as girl scouts. We create a safe environment for girls to learn those skill sets, about building grit and resiliency so that when people who say nasty things or spread rumors around them, they stand up and say, "You know what? My girl scout family believes in me and I will not believe in that rumor."

So again, this behavior is important to deal with because if we don't deal with those issues at a young level, both boys and girls, and we don't teach them to be inclusive, supportive, empathetic people, what happens when they become adults? And for any woman who's been in the workforce, need I remind you of situations where you've seen yourself confronted with some mean girl opportunities.

But that's what we're fighting here today. We're teaching girls that they don't have to be on that dark side of that argument. That they can actually be the light in their community, in that conversation. They can take the side and be allies to other girls who are being bullied. I loved it, most recently I read online about a girl scout troop in Lake Havasu, Arizona, who did an amazing project at their local Starbucks to raise awareness about bullying in their local community and to take a stand. But that's what we do.

So for girl scouts and for families, this is important. But now I'd like to speak to the parents. Why aren't your daughters girl scouts today? We're the most inclusive organization in the history of this country around girls. And for us, we had to study to see and understand why parents want certain things for their daughters. And what we clearly learned is that actually parents are looking for a group that will help build resiliency in their daughters. They actually want their daughters to take risks so they understand when they fail, and as I tell girls fail miserably, because that's when you learn what you're about. That's when you learn the skill set to pick yourself up and to go on. And so listening to parents across the country and the world, we're building those lessons within the girl scout troop model.

And then, of course, for women. Why do you need to come back home? Why do you need to invest in this organization that has had such a powerful impact, not only in this country but across the globe? And that's because today we need a different framework for leadership in this country. Just watch the news on any given day. Does that leadership model resonate with you, man or woman, boy or child or a girl? Personally, I want to see leaders stand up and take the hard stance on being inclusive. I want leaders to stand up and think about the positive, positive opportunities for this great country versus tearing people down.

And that's what girls want to see. Their leadership preference is actually not top down, it's all together. It's building solutions around a table and then figuring out and delegating who's going to take the lead. But it's going to take the adults not only in this room today but across the country to understand, that's the leadership style that resonates with girls. And we have to continue to invest in this program because we have been doing it the best for 104 years.

And what do we need to do next? Well, once our girls get into these leadership positions, we've got to support them. Like the women who are currently CEOs of the major corporations in this country, the women who are running major research universities, the women who've been brave enough to put their name on a ballot.

So I will end to say that I tend to be an optimist. I've always been glass half full versus half empty. And going back to our thoughts in Orlando, as we continue to try to create a culture of inclusion, a culture of empathy, of possibility thinking, innovation and creative leadership, what a better place to start than in your hometown, in your community, by investing in a girl, by becoming a volunteer and understanding that anything is possible. When you take a little girl's hand and says, you say to her, you are worth it. Thank you. (Applause)

**MR. BURR:** Thank you very much. Now for a few questions. As you might have guessed, I was not a girl scout. However, I was a boy scout and when you started talking today, you mentioned that when you talk about the Gold Award people say, "Oh, that's like the Eagle Scout." How are you trying to change the conversation from making it's the equivalent of an Eagle Scout?

**MS. CHAVEZ:** Sure. And that's part of our opportunity this year, right? That we have to talk about it, and also understand that, again, the name has changed over the hundred years. So we have to understand that it's an inclusive award. So there are women who've earned the Curved Bar. And we understand that they're all sitting out there waiting to also come back home. So I'm hoping that people today will understand it's a very important award and we'll continue to highlight it for girls.

**MR. BURR:** Well, that leads to the second question. What percentage of girl scouts would you like to see earn the Gold Award? Do you want a high percentage?

**MS. CHAVEZ:** Hundred percent.

**MR. BURR:** Okay. Well, there comes the point. Do you want a high percentage or make it more exclusive, that's it's hard to work and to get?

**MS. CHAVEZ:** No, because I think in having talked to our older girls in our program, because they don't see it, unfortunately, in their local communities, they don't see it, unfortunately, in the top news cycle, they don't realize that this is part of their development path. And so if more girls understood that, "If I stayed in girl scouting for eight years, ten years," one, not only would they achieve the award, but they would also

get more skills under their belt. And what we have found, actually, by studying our girl scouts over the years, we've found that the longer they're in our girl scout program, the impact of our program is stronger.

And actually, if you look at girls, especially Latina and African American girls, our program actually has a higher impact for them than most other girls.

**MR. BURR:** Can you tell me a little bit about the Girl Scouts of the United States of America, membership and fundraising trends? Is it harder to get girls to be girl scouts and adults to be leaders?

**MS. CHAVEZ:** Well, actually, what a lot of people don't realize, we currently have a waiting list of girls across the country who want to be girl scouts. The latest count was about 30,000 girls on a wait list. For us, it's getting that adult to volunteer. You know, we realize it's getting harder and harder, families are having to work two jobs, a lot of single parent households, grandparents raising grandkids. So we are trying to make it easier. That's why, again, this technology investment was so critical this year, to allow everything to be simpler. We are digitizing all of our volunteer toolkits online so when you're done with your day and like myself when I tuck my son and my husband into bed at night, I can get online and do my volunteer activity. So we're doing that and we're reaching more girls that way.

**MR. BURR:** This is a question from the audience. I was a brownie and then a girl scout in a suburban area where scouting seemed natural. How do you reach inner city and urban youth?

**MS. CHAVEZ:** Well, we've been doing that, actually, for a very, very long time. We clearly understand that our volunteer model was based on a model where people could stay home without working. Clearly, that's not the case anymore. So again, that why we're investing in technology.

We're also understanding that people want to become episodic volunteers. You may not want to be a troop leader, but you may want to share your expertise with local girls scouts. So we are encouraging both men and women over the age of 18 to volunteer for organization, to actually reach more girls.

I've also, because I happen to work in New York City, where we have our Girl Scout Council there, it's the only all-urban Girl Scout Council in the country, I will tell you, there are a lot of girl scouts in urban communities. And in both rural communities. For us, again, it's meeting their needs now. And most importantly, showing adults that this is a great place to volunteer.

**MR. BURR:** You've set a lot of goals today of where you want the Girl Scouts to be and where you've been with millions of girls who've been involved. How do you measure the impact of the Girl Scouts?

**MS. CHAVEZ:** That's a very good question. First of all, couple of data points. I'm a data geek so I will share with you a few data points. First of all, when we turned 100 years old as an organization in 2012, we did a research study on our alum. Again, like I said, we have 59 million living girl scout alum in the United States, and across the world. And when we compared them to non-alum, we found some fascinating things. And if this resonates to you, nod your head for me.

First of all, we found that our girl scout alum went on to actually get a higher level of educational attainment. They went on to get their BAs, their MBAs, their Ph.D., their J. D.s You know, they had a great time in school.

Two, they volunteer more in their local communities. And if we actually compared our girl scout alum who are mothers to non-alum, the girl scout moms are actually volunteering more in their children's school.

They also, interesting enough, when we asked them questions about are you happy with your life decisions, they said absolutely and they had a higher level of satisfaction in their decisions around their partnerships and their career goals and staying at home and raising their kids.

And what's interesting when I was here a few years ago talking about this to some of the White House officials, I shared with them that our girl scouts are very community and civically engaged, and they vote and they vote often. So it's a great testament to our program that, again, we've been giving these girls an amazing opportunity to give back.

**MR. BURR:** The Girl Scouts of America have a great brand, recognized internationally. But that brand is also very strongly associated with cookies. Other than its asset as a fundraising tool, is the cookie an asset or liability? And how do you move on beyond the cookie or position the Girl Scouts as a leadership organization in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

**MS. CHAVEZ:** So interesting enough, in the last three weeks, *Fast Company* magazine actually published a list of the most powerful, impactful brands in the world, brands that when people saw it, they immediately respond with sort of the ethos around that brand. The Girl Scouts is number seven in the world. And so very proud to say that we-- (Applause) Absolutely. In addition, I think we have been making headway. First of all, we embrace our cookie program. It is the largest entrepreneurship program for girls in the world.

They raise money that stays at the local level, that they reinvest in their local community. Now, they probably fund most of the nonprofits in your cities and towns. And they use that money to actually fund their Take Action projects that lead to their bronze, silver and gold award.

In addition, I think that if you just look over the last three to four years from the media coverage, you can see that, one, for example, we were rated one of the most

innovative nonprofits in the world just a couple of years ago. And they continue to see that we're going to be able to use the technology in a way that's going to not only resonate with girls, but also be an amazing opportunity for individuals, corporations, foundations, to be strategic partners with us.

And we're seeing that more and more. For example, Dell recently invested in us, and Visa also as well, in our digital cookie program because they clearly saw that this is the next iteration of girl scouting. And most importantly, that we do bring opportunities for girls globally.

**MR. BURR:** We both discussed earlier the tragedy in Orlando this weekend. How does the Girl Scouts program help young girls understand and adjust to such terrible tragedies?

**MS. CHAVEZ:** You know, unfortunately, at least in my tenure in Girl Scouts, it's been eight years that I've been working as an adult in this movement. And unfortunately, I've seen some of these same issues play out in other communities, Sandy Hook and other local communities, and it's heartbreaking. Unfortunately today, the girls growing up lived through the great recession. They've grown up during a time frame when we were at war. They've seen how hard it's been for their parents to make a living.

But what I've also been very surprised about, if you take a moment to sit and talk to a girl about issues that she cares about, they are actually very positive about their future opportunities. They don't stay in the dark, they don't stay in sort of ambiguity, they look forward into the future. And what I have found is that girls are very empathetic. So when they see-- again, sitting down around the kitchen table in the morning, they see the news on, and I had the news on this morning with my son saying, "Don't change that to cartoons. We're watching the morning show," he's also very focused. Because kids today realize that the world is consistently shifting around them.

Homeland security issues are at the forefront, unfortunately. But girls want to create solutions, and that's where I see a great connection for them. Because we are developing girls who are going to think about inclusion and diversity very differently. They're not going to see it as a negative, they're going to see it as a positive. They are the ones who are going to try and reunite and unite communities and countries, around solutions for many diverse communities versus trying to segregate and trying to separate people because of differences.

So that's why actually I sleep very well at night, because our hands are in-- our lives are in great hands with girls. They're going to be very vocal and very positive.  
(Applause)

**MR. BURR:** We've talked a lot about the Girl Scouts. Let's talk about you for a second. How do you feel being a minority woman in the professional world and can you tell us of some of your experiences with that?

**MS. CHAVEZ:** Well, Joan saw some of them. I'll tell you an interesting story. Joan is here, she'll allow me to do this. So it was interesting, growing up in girl scouting, I thought I could do anything. I had a family who really invested in me and said, "Anna Maria, you can do whatever you want to do and don't listen to your brothers." (Laughter) And so I just grew up with that mentality, that if I was nice and I was a person of faith that I could contribute.

So I get to D.C. and I'm like gung-ho. I've been waiting to be a lawyer since I was 12 years old in girl scouting, so I'm ready. And as I said, Joan Bondareff picked me up as an [00:35:15] attorney. I was brand new out of law school with the Department of Transportation and they said, "Where do you want to go?" And I said, "I want to go work for that amazing female general counsel in the Maritime Administration." And people looked at me and they're like, "Maritime? You're from the desert." But I said, "No, no, no, I want to go learn from her," because she had spent a career dealing with these issues on Capitol Hill. And if she could have survived Capitol Hill, I'm sure she's going to teach me a few things.

So I went up there and they basically gave me this box that had been in storage, this really old case about a crane that had been damaged in Egypt by one of our maritime administration's ships. And so I rolled up my sleeves and long story short, I did my homework. And before we knew it, Joan was getting a phone call because there were two Egyptian diplomats coming from Egypt to meet with Anna Chavez. And she goes, "Anna, what did you do?" And I said, "I did what you told me to do, Joan." But what was interesting is they came, the State Department officials came over. Joan and I sat there, but we had to pull out a male lawyer from our general counsel's office to actually conduct the meeting because the diplomats wouldn't talk to us because we were female lawyers.

So this was 1995? I think we've come a long way, but this shows you that there's a lot more to be done. And I will tell you, I've seen that progress in my career. I rarely now meet, unfortunately, those situations, or maybe people just don't tell me what I'm missing. But I also don't dwell on it. You know, for me it's about what you make out of a situation, what you learn from that situation. And I hold no regrets.

**MR. BURR:** Let's keep on diversity for just a few minutes here. You were the first Latina CEO of the Girl Scouts. What have you done, and what more do you plan to do to expand the scouts into the Latino community? And is there some kind of resistance with Latino community because of maybe unfamiliarity with the concept of scouting?

**MS. CHAVEZ:** My grandmother probably told everybody, "Don't go camping." You know, here's-- and I'm only going to speak to it as a Latina who group up in our movement. First of all, my family didn't have a cultural affinity to girl scouts. My grandmother was born in Mexico, she was not a gilla [?] in Mexico. My mother, very active in the community, but was not a girl scout growing up.

And so when they thought of opportunities to volunteer, Girl Scouts didn't necessarily resonate with them. But our brand was so strong, that's what allowed me the opportunity to engage. And they trusted the local Girl Scout volunteers.

I think our opportunity with any community that may not have been connected to us over the generations is an opportunity to explain to them what we are and what we've always been. And what I will say is that if you look back at our history, actually some of our first troops since Savannah, Georgia, were made up of very diverse communities. Some of our first troops were actually from the local orphanage in Savannah, and some of our first troop leaders in Savannah were some of the Jewish women leaders in that community.

And we've had girl scout troops in Texas with Latina girls since the 1930s and '40s. And we desegregated troops of girls long before any federal law told us to. So that's just in our DNA. I think, again, we have to explain to all communities and immigrant communities here in the United States that we're inclusive, that we're a good investment, that your daughter, your niece, your neighbor, will have a positive experience and that you're investing in her future.

**MR. BURR:** Playing off that theme for just a second, the *Washington Post* just did a story, there being, I believe, 5,000 boy scouts, members of either a mosque-based troop or troops in other religious or civic organizations. Does diversity-- Is diversity important in troops to learn from each other about cultures?

**MS. CHAVEZ:** Absolutely. And interestingly enough, people may not know this, but we've had relationships with all the faith organizations, again, for many, many decades. And we're in all communities. We're in every zip code in the country, so you could imagine the amazing group of individuals, local community members who are part of our organization. And faith has always been part of it. I'm actually wearing my Girl Scout Catholic Award that I earned and was presented to by Cardinal Dolan on the altar of St. Patrick's in New York City because, again, we not only teach girls about their faith, but we also allow girls to learn about other people's faiths. And that is part of, again, our history and our future and again, it builds girls who are empathetic and also understand that there's strength in diversity.

**MR. BURR:** Recently, the Catholic leader of St. Louis, Archbishop Robert Carlson, urged cutting ties with the Roman Catholics and girl scouting. He said the Girl Scouts USA promotes role models in conflict with Catholic values. What does the archbishop's statements mean for the Girl Scouts and how do you respond?

**MS. CHAVEZ:** Well, as the CEO of Girl Scouts of the USA, as you know, I'm nonpartisan and I represent girls in all faiths. I happen to be a Catholic, and I happen to teach Sunday school. And actually, what's also been weighing on my mind is a future in ministry. And so, for me this is about girls, it's about communities, it's about all faiths. I will tell you that we've had over a hundred year partnership with the Catholic Church.

We have them in Catholic schools, and it's a strong part of our organization, as are girls in other religions.

And so, again, what I'd say to anybody is sit down with us, talk to us about our program, what we do and what we don't do. And you will see again that we're teaching girls about leadership and most of our girls are young girls K-5 and we're teaching them to go camping, light some fires and also sell cookies online. So it is what it is.

**MR. BURR:** This next question comes from Taylor, my 11 year old friend who's my Girl Scout cookie hookup, so thank you, Taylor. She explains that in the D.C. area, most of the troops are community based and not school based. Do you support the expansion of school based troops as a way to reach out to new audiences?

**MS. CHAVEZ:** Yeah, what we found, and again because I ran a local Girl Scout Council in southwest Texas, I knew how hard it was, actually, to go into the schools for many different reasons. A lot of schools are cutting their budget, they're having to shut down the schools after school because of the electricity bills.

But what's interesting, and we had our troops actually in the Tennessee area just pass a bill in the state legislature which allowed them access to all schools in Tennessee, which is great for boy scouts and girl scouts. So I think you're going to start to see more schools see girl scouts after school.

What I also wanted to explain is we currently have girl scouting during the day in schools across the country, in communities where transportation may be an issue, where they may not have a local troop meeting in that elementary or middle school. We actually bring staff and volunteers to provide the girl scout program during the day. And it's been an amazing opportunity to reach underserved communities in a way we've done for many years.

But, of course, those programs tend to be a little bit more expensive. So going back to investment in girls, that's how you can invest in our girls. Support our local councils, donate to them so they can actually go into those communities.

**MR. BURR:** I'm just going to ask a spur of the moment question here because I don't know the answer. But I'm assuming there is more you can do other than maybe volunteering or buying cookies. What more could somebody do?

**MS. CHAVEZ:** So much more. Well, first of all, again we would love men and women to be part of our organization. And because I've traveled the world, I've met a lot of cookie dads, I've met a lot of men who are wearing their t-shirt, Man Enough to be a Girl Scout. But you know what's interesting, going back to girls and to research, so connecting STEM, no longer the niche mark, it is now the future skill set needed in this country and in this world.

And we did a research study around girls in STEM and we found that 74 percent of high school girls love STEM. They love science, they excel in math. But somewhere around fourth grade, they stop raising their hand in math class. That's when they start getting messages that perhaps they're not good at math, or why do you keep raising your hand? And when we asked girls in high school, we found that 74 percent of them, again, love STEM. But when we ask them to rate a STEM career, it actually came at the bottom of their list of potential careers in the future. So there is a disconnect.

But we found that actually the largest sort of influencer in that girl's life on whether or not she decides to go into STEM was the male figure in her household. So that's why it's important to get dads and uncles and cousins involved in girl scouting, because they need all role models, male and female, to tell them what's possible.

**MR. BURR:** Question from the audience. The boys' program requires them to learn how to do things. The audience member says many of the girls' programs only require them to read about, watch, or learn about things, not actually do them. Is there an effort being made to revise the requirements for some of the badges so the girls gain actual skill and activity?

**MS. CHAVEZ:** Well, I know there's a lot of girls in the audience and I would-- pretty sure they would testify that they actually do those activities and earn those skill sets. But I will tell you again-- (Applause) Right? You know, and I've been out in the field with girls, I've done repelling off of many walls and done amazing things in the wilderness. But I've also been with girls who are doing STEM activities who are donating their time to help local food shelters.

So the girls are doing many things. What I think is exciting about the girl scouts today is we're allowing them to actually vote on their badges. And just a couple of years ago, girls did vote on their badges. Over 60,000 girls voted online and it was interesting. They picked outdoors in their badges. And, of course, that means different things for a daisy who's five years old to an older girl scout. But again, they're also connecting outdoors with STEM, so they want to do geocaching outdoors. They want to understand astronomy in a different way. So again, I will tell you these girls are learning not only hard skills, but soft skills in girl scouts.

**MR. BURR:** That leads into the next question, which is an audience member said one of her experiences, best experiences, in scouting was living with nature, the outdoors part of that. But you're also emphasizing career achievement. How do you merge the two? And you just kind of discussed that in some ways. But how do you also include the nature part and the career achievement?

**MS. CHAVEZ:** Well, you know, I've been hanging around a lot of doctors lately talking to the, about what they're seeing in the medical field, in the science field and specifically the impact of technology on kids today. I have a 14 year old son, he clearly has many devices that he's working on. And what I've seen is, unfortunately in the research and talking to the medical community, is that technology is actually doing things

with kids' brains. It's rewiring them. It's shortening their attention span, both for children and adults, right? When was the last time you were able to put your phone down?

And so I think we have a great opportunity to bridge those worlds, of understanding that technology's here and will continue to be here into the future. But that the outdoors are important, that there has to be a balance. Everything in moderation. And I love when I see girls at camp and we're right about to get into camp season for girl scouts, that they enjoy it. They sometimes fight, like, "You mean, I've got to give you my phone?" But three days later, they've forgotten it. They've actually enjoyed getting off the grid.

And as an adult who actually has to do this for work, to be online, to be on Twitter and on LinkedIn, it's a lot that you have to manage. So imagine being a ten year old girl and being pressured into being on these systems. And so what I love again about girl scouting is that we're bridging those worlds and we're allowing them to be a girl as long as they can be a girl.

**MR. BURR:** Speaking of digital, tell us about how successful your digital cookie initiative has been since its release in 2014 and do you plan to do more kind of in that digital space?

**MS. CHAVEZ:** Sure. So, actually digital cookie came from girls. It was an idea that came up when I was sitting with a group of teenage girl scouts in San Antonio, Texas. And we were sitting around the table, they were my kitchen cabinet. I was asking them about the program, what did they need more from girl scouting. And I asked them, so any of you selling cookies next year? And not one hand went up, including the young woman who had been my top cookie seller the previous year.

And when I started talking to them about it, they said, "Well, we want something different. We want an ecommerce platform. We want the ability to sell to family across boundaries." Because, again, they're global citizens. They don't think in geographic, artificial boundaries anymore. And they wanted to think through how they could leverage it into a larger program base for them. So that's what's happened.

That idea in partnership with several organizations has, again, become the largest multichannel ecommerce platform in the world for girls. And within the first pilot year, it was unbelievable. When we launched it in December-- let's see, it's currently 2016. So we launched it in December 2014. And in three days, we had four billion media impressions from around the world.

And the reason people were so excited is they knew the power of our cookie program. They knew the significance of investing in our girl scouts. But they also saw it as an opportunity to leverage technology in a brand new way. And what you're going to see with this platform, it's the first foray into girl scouts digital programming. It's the first of. And so what I'm excited about is to see what girls do next, because we're not designing it, right? We're taking their ideas and we're replicating it and we're getting adults to invest in it. But the end of the day, the ideas are coming from them.

And that's what I think at the end of the day will keep girl scouting alive and thriving in the United States and the globe, is that when we continue to focus on the girl and we keep the girl at the center.

**MR. BURR:** So talk to me about what progress have you made to carry out your mission to close the leadership gap between men and women in one generation?

**MS. CHAVEZ:** That was an audacious goal. I think it's happening in many different ways. First of all, in that same year we launched the most ambitious fundraising campaign on behalf of girls in the world, and we're halfway there to our billion dollars. In addition, when we talked about, again, changing the leadership landscape in the United States, it was also about bringing men and boys in. Because it's not about boys against girls, not at all. Again, I happen to be raising a 14 year old boy, but also two million girls. And I know what happens when you create equality in conversations, when you make people from different communities and areas and towns understand each other over sometimes artificial boundaries.

And so for me, it's an amazing opportunity to talk about what girls can do in the future. And I think we continue to have opportunities to talk about leadership and, of course, seeing the current political landscape and what you're seeing and hearing on the news, our girls are watching, right? They're sitting down in front of the television. They're listening to it on their iPhones and their android phones. And they're watching how it plays out.

But our research also shows that both boys and girls think it's harder for a woman to be a leader today than for a man to be a leader. So I think we've got some work to do.

**MR. BURR:** So someone in the audience is very concerned about our chalet. Does that still exist? And if so, how does one arrange a visit and how does one get to-- can people just show up?

**MS. CHAVEZ:** So just to explain about girl scouts, our founder was very creative, but she also understood that she had to create the largest organization for girls in the world; not just a domestic program. So from the very beginning, we've been part of a global movement of girls across the world, ten million of them. And part of that amazing opportunity to connect with them around the globe. And so we have different global sites and one of them happens to be our chalet. We do have a cabana in Mexico, we have a place in India. Unfortunately, I have not been to those places because I've been focused on visiting our girl scouts here domestically.

But you can go online, you can sign up to go to any of these amazing locations. They're still alive and well and Pack's Lodge is in England, you should go there as well. And again, being part of girl scouting, you're immediately part of this global sisterhood, and it's great. You can go anywhere. I can go to any state in the country, any country in the world, somebody will see my pin and say, "Girl Scouts. Very cool."

**MR. BURR:** On that note, tell us about how the girl scouts are adjusting to cultural norms for its programs in other countries? And has there been much expansion internationally in, say, the last decade?

**MS. CHAVEZ:** What's interesting, so we did see a membership decline in girl scouting over the last 12 years. But we've seen it increase in membership for girl scouts overseas. Huh. I think we can learn something there. Two, what I love about our global girl scouting is we are serving military families, we're serving individuals who are serving the State Department, who are working for American companies abroad. And what I hear constantly about our global girl scouting programming is that it's connecting them back to something that's really important to them. So it's not only a community of American girls abroad, but it's also a group of men and women who are American who are looking for that connection to the United States. And they're great ambassadors for us.

And unfortunately, as we talk about terrorism and issues impacting the world, I remember sitting in my office in New York City and reading about the Paris attacks, you remember this. And thinking immediately, "Oh my gosh, we have girl scouts in Paris." And getting on the phone and trying to figure out, is everybody okay? And luckily our volunteers and our girls were fine. But they were in tears for other people who were impacted in Paris through these terrorist attacks.

So again, I'm cognizant that we have an amazing platform for girls and they're doing great things. But my heart also goes out to them because they're also living in trying times and I hope, again, that they will stay resilient, that they will stay focused on a positive future.

**MR. BURR:** Tell me, how do you keep older girls involved as girl scouts? Is girl scouts-- how do you keep them, like it's a cool thing when you get past middle school into high school?

**MS. CHAVEZ:** Yeah, that's a hard one because even my son's like, "Ma." You know, sometimes he's like, "Ma, that's not cool." And I try to say words that are-- he's like, "Mom, you missed that one completely, don't even try." So I think there will always be that, right, that when things are cool and adults start saying them, they're no longer cool.

So part of our opportunity is to continue to try to channel a girl and what's important to them. We're currently doing research on older girl programming to insure that we stay relevant for girls. I think, again, we need to continue to listen to them. We need to tweak and transform our programming. And I would love, again, for volunteers in the millennial generation to also come back and volunteer. I think it's very important for our recent graduates to come back to girl scouting, to start troops, to be mentors because the younger girls love it and they think they're cool.

**MR. BURR:** So what's next? The girl scouts has had its centennial, your leadership initiative and the Gold Award centennial in recent years. What's the next big moment?

**MS. CHAVEZ:** Oh, well first of all, I think we're going to think about what we've done for 104 years because as girl scouts, sometimes we just keep going, right? First, I want to thank everybody for the amazing dedication, your energy, your passion. For those of you watching today, thank you for your investment in girl scouting over all these decades because you've made a difference, you really have.

I think you're seeing the fruit of your investment by seeing women who are putting their names on ballots. You're seeing them as they stand up for really important issues in this country. I also love the fact that anywhere I go, I do see men and women who are still very focused on insuring that all kids get a step up in life. And the next thing in our iteration of girl scouting is, again, to keep up with girls, to insure that we're thinking five to ten years, fifteen years out. And that's on the cusp.

and for me, eight years into this role, I couldn't be prouder of the legacy of not myself, but actually the hundreds and thousands of staff, volunteers, who've given their lifeblood and soul to this organization to keep it relevant, and to keep it at the forefront of our families. Because, again, it was important for me, it was important for millions of other women and we owe that to girls around the world.

**MR. BURR:** I'm going to take back the podium for just a minute. Before I ask the final question, I have a few announcements. A quick reminder. The National Press Club is the world's leading professional organization for journalists, and we fight for a free press worldwide. For more information about the club, please go to [www.press.org](http://www.press.org).

I'd also like to remind you about some upcoming programs. On June 20, we'll have the Federal Communications Commission Chairman, Tom Wheeler. The next day, Michael Middleton, the University of Missouri system interim president will speak here. The next day, June 22<sup>nd</sup>, Labor Secretary Tom Perez will speak. And on July 14, the head of the National Security Agency, Admiral Michael Rogers will address the club. Now, I'd like to present our guest with the traditional National Press Club mug. (Applause)

I expect cookies in return. My last question. You were selected by *Fortune* magazine as the 24<sup>th</sup> greatest leader in the world. What comes next?

**MS. CHAVEZ:** Well, you know, I've been praying on that, actually. And I think that, again, the world gives us many opportunities. It gives us many paths. I've learned a lot in the last eight years. I think that I'm going to be called to, again, ministry. I think that the opportunities that I've seen, the people I've met, have taught me one thing. And that's the power of kindness and that I hope that what I've learned, what my family's instilled in me, will allow me to take that lesson and have an impact on more people around the globe. And I think being on that list wasn't important to me, it was important

for this organization. It showed that the Girl Scouts is back on the map, that we're doing great things, that we are leaders in many different fields.

And I think my grandmother was smiling in heaven because the Pope was on the list, too. (Applause)

**MR. BURR:** Thank you, Ms. Chavez. Thank you to the National Press Club staff, the staff of our Journalism Institute and all of you being here and our audience on television and public radio audiences. We are adjourned. (Sounds gavel.)

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