

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB BREAKFAST WITH MICHAEL A. MIDDLETON

SUBJECT: MOVING FORWARD AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI

MODERATOR: THOMAS BURR, PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

LOCATION: THE 4<sup>TH</sup> ESTATE ROOM, WASHINGTON, D.C.

TIME: 8:30 A.M.

DATE: TUESDAY, JUNE 21, 2016

(C) COPYRIGHT 2008, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB, 529 14<sup>TH</sup> STREET, WASHINGTON, DC - 20045, USA. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. ANY REPRODUCTION, REDISTRIBUTION OR RETRANSMISSION IS EXPRESSLY PROHIBITED.

UNAUTHORIZED REPRODUCTION, REDISTRIBUTION OR RETRANSMISSION CONSTITUTES A MISAPPROPRIATION UNDER APPLICABLE UNFAIR COMPETITION LAW, AND THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB RESERVES THE RIGHT TO PURSUE ALL REMEDIES AVAILABLE TO IT IN RESPECT TO SUCH MISAPPROPRIATION.

FOR INFORMATION ON BECOMING A MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB, PLEASE CALL 202-662-7505.

**THOMAS BURR:** (Sounds gavel.) Good morning, 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. I would like to welcome our C-SPAN and Public Radio audiences, and I would like to remind you that you can follow the action on Twitter using the hashtag NPCLive. That's NPCLive.

Now it's time to introduce our head table guests. I'd ask that each of you stand briefly as your name is announced. Please hold your applause until I have finished introducing the entire table. From your right, Ferdous al-Faruque, medical device reporter for the Gray Sheet and NPC board member, and a Mizzou alum; Barbara Cochran, professor and director of the University of Missouri School of Journalism Washington program, and the president of the National Press Club Journalism Institute; Chuck Raasch, Washington correspondent for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*; Wes Pippert, director emeritus of the Washington program, and professor of journalism emeritus at the University of Missouri; Angela Greiling Keane, Speakers Committee vice chairwoman, Bloomberg News White House correspondent, a past Press Club president, and Mizzou alum.

Skipping over our speaker for just now, Julie Middleton, the better half of today's speaker, kind of like Mizzou's first lady; Lauren Thompson Starks, senior policy advisor to the Undersecretary at the Department of Education; and joining us in the audience today, Lorelle Espinosa, assistant vice president of the American Council on Education, a center for policy and research strategy. Thank you all. (Applause)

The University of Missouri system's flagship campus has long been known for its iconic columns on its quad; being the first land grant university west of the Mississippi and for its world renowned journalism school, whose founder's creed hangs here at the National Press Club. But in the past two years, the campus in Columbia has been roiled by racial tension and has been in the national news for topics other than journalism and Tiger athletics. Our guest today, Michael Middleton, was named interim president of the University of Missouri system last fall as a result of his predecessor having been pushed out during the protests.

The protests culminated in a hunger strike by graduate student Jonathan Butler, who was one of the founding members of the group Concerned Student 1950, a name that references the year black students were first admitted to the University of Missouri. Middleton received his undergraduate and law degrees from the University of Missouri, where he founded the Legion of Black Collegians in 1968. He had a career in the federal government in the Justice Department, and then named Department of Health, Education and Welfare, now HHS, of course.

He also worked for Equal Employment Opportunity Commission before returning to Mizzou in 1985-- my script says 1885, I'm just going to clarify that. I'm glad I caught that one. (Laughter) In 1985 to join the law faculty. He retired after 17 years as deputy chancellor. Middleton was called out of retirement less than two months later to take over the system. It was thrust into the national spotlight not only by the race related protests, but by the handling of the protests and the media coverage of them.

In addition to the Columbia campus, the University of Missouri system has campuses in Kansas City, St. Louis and Rolla, together serving nearly 80,000 students. Since taking over this position, Middleton has spent time trying to calm tensions and cope with the effects of declining enrollment and the reduction in the state's financial support. Please join me in giving a National Press Club welcome to University of Missouri system interim president, Michael Middleton. (Applause)

**PRESIDENT MIDDLETON:** I don't get the gavel?

**MR. BURR:** You might hit me with it. (Laughter)

**PRESIDENT MIDDLETON:** Well, thank you for that very kind introduction, and thank you to the National Press Club for creating this opportunity for a national dialogue on these very important issues. It's great to see so many Mizzou folks in the room, the Mizzou mafia is in the house, as they say. So it's good to see you, and all the other guests who are so unfortunate as not to have been involved or connected with the University of Missouri.

As many of you are well aware, the University of Missouri system primarily its flagship campus, Mizzou, faced challenging times during the fall of 2015 after the resignation of then-President Tim Wolfe and then reassignment of then-Chancellor

Bowen Loftin, I was asked to take the role as interim president of the UM system, as was said, three months after I retired from serving as Deputy Chancellor on the Mizzou campus for 17 years.

The University of Missouri and I have a long history together. I attended MU as both an undergraduate and a law student, and met my wife, Julie, of 45 years there. And I'm happy that she's here with me today. After graduation in 1971, I got my dream job as a trial attorney in the civil rights division of the Department of Justice, went on to the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, and then served in management capacities at the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and the Department of Education. So, I feel pretty much at home back here in D.C.

I returned to my alma mater in 1985 as a law professor, then transitioned to the role of interim Vice Provost for Minority Affairs and Faculty Development, and then Deputy Chancellor shortly thereafter. I have a strong love for that institution and I've made it very clear that under my tenure as president, I want to see real change, both for the good of the great university that we have, but also so that I can get back to enjoying my much-too-short retirement.

In full disclosure, it's important to provide a little background on what caused what I've called the perfect storm at Mizzou. In November, there was a culmination of issues that arose that previous spring that challenged the leadership on the campus. Lost in the media's near-total focus on racial issues and the action of the MU football team, there were several other factors that contributed to the turmoil. There were concerns surrounding the prospect of graduate students suddenly losing their health benefits. There were very difficult and highly charged decisions regarding our hospital's relationship with Planned Parenthood. Our deans and our faculty had expressed a lack of comfort about their academic freedom and leadership on the campus. And there were very controversial leadership changes at the MU health system and medical school.

Now, acknowledging these other factors simply provides a context for what we've recently experienced. It certainly does not diminish the importance of, nor lessen our desire, to better understand and address the concerns that have been expressed by our students of color and other minoritized students.

The problems our university faces in this area are real. In fact, universities nationwide are facing these same problems, as is our nation as a whole. Since November, I've actively participated in the national dialogue surrounding campus race relations. I've met with leaders at the Department of Education, the American Council on Education, the Association of Governing Boards, as well as the National Association of System Heads, among others.

This dialogue is crucial to the future of higher education, and it must continue as we plan for our future generations. I find it very interesting that based on inside higher ed's recent survey of university presidents some leaders in higher education don't feel

that their campuses are faced with the same racial tensions. The survey shows that 84 percent of presidents characterize race relations on their respective campuses as excellent or good. At the same time, only 24 percent describe the state of race relations at colleges and universities nationwide as good, and none describe race relations at colleges nationwide as excellent.

Obviously, a large proportion of administrators feel the problems we've been facing at Missouri could never happen on their campuses. While it's conceivable that that may be true for some, what the University of Missouri experienced most recently could be attributed, at least in part, to similar sentiments. The prevailing view was that race relations were good, maybe even excellent at Mizzou. But the fact of the matter was that institutionally, leaders were not paying attention and they got caught. Our students were concerned with race relations on our campus and felt extremely marginalized. To put it into context, Columbia, Missouri, as you know, is only 100 miles from Ferguson, Missouri, an inner-ring suburb of St. Louis. And many of our students are from the St. Louis area. They were hurting and needed to be heard. Institutionally, we were not listening to these very intelligent students, passionate students, who were telling leaders to wake up.

What happened at MU, I hope, provides an instructional experience, a learning moment, a wakeup call for all who lead universities. And the lesson is that leaders must continuously assess their campus climate to insure that race relations are, in fact, good or excellent. Likely, they're not as good as you think.

The problems we face are real and they need to be addressed, and that's exactly what we're doing at the University of Missouri as we move forward from the turmoil we faced this fall. I've emphasized to the university community that we must come together and make decisions in the best interests of the university, all of its students, and the future development of our society. And, of course, patience is a virtue in situations like this. It takes time to rebuild confidence and trust. Just as these problems did not evolve overnight, real solutions will not come quickly.

In the past seven months, we have established mechanisms and put processes in place to address the issues, specifically regarding diversity, equity and inclusion issues that we're facing. Those initiatives introduced by our board of curators in November include hiring the first-ever system level chief diversity, equity and inclusion officer. Dr. Kevin McDonald started on June 1<sup>st</sup> and just last week, it was announced that he will have a dual appointment with Mizzou as their interim vice chancellor for inclusion, diversity and equity.

In addition, we've insured that for the first time ever, each of our four campuses has a chief diversity officer reporting directly to the chancellor. We've created a diversity, inclusion and equity taskforce at the system level to develop short and long-term strategies, plans and metrics for the UM system based on an inventory and audit of current programs, policies and practices.

We're conducting an in-depth audit working with Ibis Consulting Group that will provide a comprehensive assessment and inventory of diversity, equity and inclusion policies practices and programs and procedures across the UM system. The audit will include focus groups and interviews, surveys and other data collecting mechanisms that Ibis will use to make recommendations to the chief diversity officer and the board of curators that will help us to continue to effect positive change on all four of our campuses.

We've provided additional support for students, faculty and staff who've experienced discrimination and disparate treatment. And we provided additional support for the hiring and retention of a diverse faculty and staff. As a part of our \$2.5 million investment to date toward these board initiatives, we've allocated \$921,000 to conduct a campus climate survey, provide additional training for campus and system administration, as well as students, and to provide mental health support to our students.

While we believe we've made significant progress since November, there is much, much more work to be done. I'm optimistic about the progress that we've made and will continue to make, and I'm hopeful that our students will have the patience to allow us to complete that work.

MU has its challenges in terms of race relations, just as our nation as a whole has grappled with this cultural, persistent, pervasive problem for centuries. But the challenges that we're facing present the university, all of us writ large, with a unique opportunity. We have an opportunity to take the lead in developing mechanisms for combating racism and promoting diversity, equity and inclusion to change our culture to one that is more respectful and more inclusive.

And what better institution than the university to take on that awesome task? A community of scholars in a wide variety of disciplines dedicated to the creation and dissemination of knowledge for the advancement of society. Our biggest flaw as a university is that we are notoriously slow in doing what we do. My hope is that we can accelerate our pace and that this millennial generation will give us the time we need to develop the permanent solutions we so desperately need.

As I have met with other higher education leaders nationwide, I've challenged them to really assess their current campus climates. I've encouraged them to pay attention to what their students are saying. While it could be that race relations on their individual campuses are indeed good or excellent, there is always room for improvement. I always assure them that their students and their campuses will be better for it.

The University of Missouri refuses to be defined by the events that we faced in November and the months following. The unfortunate circumstances this captured so much attention from the world are certainly not a reflection of the whole of our great 177 year old university, but rather reflect a longstanding societal flaw.

When we're faced with challenges, we have three options. We can let those challenges define us, we can let those challenges ruin us, or we can let the challenges we face serve as learning opportunities for growth. While those challenges are a part of our history, they also have presented us with a unique opportunity that we've embraced. And that is to position the university as a national leader in how we address the social issues of combating racism and promotion of diversity, equity and inclusion.

The process won't be easy. And it certainly won't happen overnight. But we'll be steady and productive in helping create a solution for all of higher education. I thank you for this opportunity, and I suppose we now have some time for questions.

**MR. BURR:** Thank you, sir. We have quite a few questions.

**PRESIDENT MIDDLETON:** Okay.

**MR. BURR:** So let me start off by you mention location of Columbia as close to Ferguson. But why did this happen at Mizzou and why not at any other number of schools with similar racial demographics?

**PRESIDENT MIDDLETON:** Well, as I mentioned there were a number of other difficult issues that the campus was facing at the same time that our African American students, primarily, were very, very much concerned about Ferguson, their home town, their home area. The graduate students were very, very upset about the loss of, the sudden loss, of health insurance. We had just admitted a number of graduate students, some of whom were pregnant women, who learned that they would not have health insurance once they arrived. It was kind of a shock to people who need healthcare.

Our deans had written a letter calling for the departure of the chancellor. Our faculty was very much concerned about what they viewed as threats to their academic freedom. So the entire campus was in something of turmoil when the African American students began their protest. So it was a perfect storm, and I imagine that other campuses near Ferguson, other campuses in Missouri, simply did not experience that perfect storm. But I think you can tell from the way the concerns over inclusion, diversity and equity spread across the country to other campuses soon thereafter, it was under the surface all the time.

We had a couple of-- we had a president of our student body who was a gay black male, elected by the entire student body, who had been called the N word a couple of times during his presidency. He went public. He posted a description of the incident on Facebook and it went viral. So there were several things that happened that pretty much just boiled over and woke us up. His campaign was Ignite Mizzou. And I think the second campaign was Wake Up, Mizzou. So these young people knew what they were doing, and they did it well.

**MR. BURR:** Speaking of that, you're a former student activist yourself. What did you think of the tactics the students used at Mizzou to force the ouster of your

predecessor? And could you kind of compare and contrast your time as a student in the 1960s with what we saw on campus there last year?

**PRESIDENT MIDDLETON:** Well, they were a bit more sophisticated than we were back in the day. We didn't have Facebook and Twitter and Instagram and the social media. I think an explanation for how quickly and how successfully they managed to protest, you can attribute that to social media. They communicate much more quickly and effectively than we did back in the '60s.

The numbers at Mizzou are much greater. We were fairly successful at Missouri in increasing access. We, as most universities, viewed diversity work as improving access, increasing admissions of students of color. And so by the time our situation exploded, we had a fairly decent number of students on campus, students of color on campus, that we certainly did not have back in the mid '60s.

So with numbers, with social media, and I think the times have simply changed. This generation is much less willing to put up with the micro aggressions, the indignities, that people of color experience in this world than we were in the '60s. And so, I think that's why it happened. I think they executed the principles of nonviolent protest very, very well. There was never any danger on campus. No one was hurt on campus. It was a fairly respectful demonstration of frustration with their lived experience on the campus.

Which is not unlike what we did back in the '60s. I think back in the '60s, we probably occupied a few buildings and I think we locked the chancellor out of his office one day. But it was pretty much the same, same techniques.

**MR. BURR:** Well, there were a few different techniques, it seems. What are your views on safe spaces and trigger warnings for students on campuses today? And are you concerned that freedom of speech is being compromised on campus?

**PRESIDENT MIDDLETON:** Well, I don't think it's being compromised on our campus. I understand the call for safe spaces and trigger warnings, but you know, I'm a Missouri trained lawyer and I understand the first amendment and we do have the world's first journalism school. And I cherish freedom of the press. So, I think that we should all recognize the rights that we have, but we all should also understand how the exercise of those rights in every situation might make life uncomfortable for people in our community.

And so I'd like to get beyond the legalisms of the first amendment and those kinds of things and talk about behavior in a civil society. You know, we had an incident where one of our professors got fairly rough with a student member of the press about his attempt to violate the safe space that our students claimed on the quadrangle. Obviously, our students did not have a right to claim that safe space, but that reporter, I think, could have avoided the incident that occurred had he, like the rest of the press that was there, respected the students' desire to have some privacy at that time. It's just the way you assert your rights and exercise your rights, I think, is another level of discourse that we

need to have in our communities. Because you can, it doesn't mean you have to. And if doing it causes too much controversy, it might be wise to consider not doing it. But we are working on campus, on some policies, to try to better find that proper balance and the draft that I've seen so far doesn't quite get it. It's a bit too legalistic.

**MR. BURR:** Let me follow up on that. Are you saying that you'd support areas where journalists should not be allowed in some form?

**PRESIDENT MIDDLETON:** No, I would support folks who want privacy where they cannot get journalists voluntarily not to come in and cover it to go somewhere else. When we formed the Legion of Black Collegians back in 1966, we made the decision that we simply would not have meetings on campus because we knew that you can't have a private meeting in a public space. So we'd go meet in someone's apartment.

So I certainly don't want to deny the press or anyone else the right to attend functions in public places. I would ask that because I'm a student here, and because this room is a university property, but I've got a club or a group that would like to have some privacy as we do whatever we're doing today, would you please not come in? If the public or the press does not want to respect that request, then it's on me to go somewhere else. I don't want to deny the press access to anything.

**MR. BURR:** So the public space, university campus space, is--

**PRESIDENT MIDDLETON:** Public space.

**MR. BURR:** First amendment protected zone of-- you'd have to go somewhere else, you're saying, a private place, actually?

**PRESIDENT MIDDLETON:** Yeah.

**MR. BURR:** You've mentioned Melissa Click. Let's talk about that for just a second.

**PRESIDENT MIDDLETON:** I didn't mention her by name.

**MR. BURR:** Well, that's true, I did. (Laughter) The American Association of University Professors voted Saturday to place the University of Missouri Columbia on the organization's censure list due to the university's firing of Miss Click, whose "I need some muscle," against student reporters went viral during those demonstrations. What is your reaction to this and did the university act properly in firing Click?

**PRESIDENT MIDDLETON:** You know what? That's a difficult question. The board of curators voted with a split vote to take that action. The board clearly has the authority to govern the university. And so, yes, they acted properly. I think it was necessary at the time to do something because the university was really in turmoil and it did not appear as if that turmoil would die down unless something were done with

Professor Click. I think it's unfortunate. There are processes, existing processes in place, for dealing with faculty irresponsibility. Members of the board, some, thought that those processes should be used before the board took direct action. But the board decided to do what it did.

The AAUP, I'm not surprised that they censured us. I don't think that what the university did had anything to do with Dr. Click's academic freedom. And the AAUP couched their sanction in those terms. But, they have a job to do themselves and they did it. We will have to live with it and work to get off the censure list as soon as possible.

**MR. BURR:** One last question on that subject. Dr. Click was not a journalism professor, but she did teach in the school. What was your own reaction to Click's comments and actions during the protest? And what does it say about what the university is teaching and educating about the first amendment?

**PRESIDENT MIDDLETON:** I thought that Dr. Click lost control in a very heated situation. She clearly was very supportive of what our students were doing. She sort of positioned herself as the protector of our protesting students. And as I recall, she had been-- earlier in the day when she tried to block a reporter's camera, the reporter, you know, assaulted her, knocked her hand down. So, she was rather upset. And I think she just lost control, and it's unfortunate that she did. I don't think it says anything about what our journalism school is teaching about the first amendment. I think our students and our faculty are all very committed to the first amendment and all the principles that are associated with it.

I think it was a very, very hot, difficult situation and it was very unfortunate that it occurred.

**MR. BURR:** What's your advice to other university leaders across the country on handling a crisis on campus such as this?

**PRESIDENT MIDDLETON:** Handle it quickly, handle it transparently, try to understand all perspectives on the issue. Treat all of your people with respect. We're all in this together. On a university campus, I like to think of us as a family. We're all in it together and we're all here to learn and grow. And I think if we're all honest with each other and listen to each other and are as transparent as we can be in discussing and finding solutions to problems, we'll all be a lot better off.

**MR. BURR:** The ad hoc committee on protest, public spaces, free speech and the press recently released a draft policy on how the university should regulate public spaces like where last year's protests took place. The student newspaper, *The Maneater*, criticized the policy as too vague. What's your take on their proposal?

**PRESIDENT MIDDLETON:** Well, the proposal is-- I only read it once and it's very legalistic. The chair of that committee was an esteemed law professor. It read more like a brief than a policy written for a non-legal mind to understand fully. So I think it

needs some work, or there needs to be some guidelines under that policy to make it more accessible to all of our students and faculty and staff.,

I think the policy does accurately reflect where the law currently stands on those issues. And as I recall, it doesn't deviate much from where the law and our current rules and regulations of the university stand. So, it has not evolved into something that would recommend any changes to our standard policies in the collective rules of the university, which are consistent with the current state of the law. So I think we may indeed have to do a bit more work with that draft, yeah.

**MR. BURR:** Speaking of *The Maneater*, since I see several students, former student journalists of *Maneater*, how would you describe your relationship with the student newspaper at Columbia?

**PRESIDENT MIDDLETON:** I've always had a good relationship with the student newspaper. (Laughter) I hope. I hope you guys like me. No, they've been covering me for 30 years now and it's always been pleasant. I don't remember the student newspaper ever raking me over the coals. Now, the rest of the local media, sometimes--well, not that much. I have a good relationship, I think, with the media, particularly *The Maneater*, yeah.

**MR. BURR:** I should give the distinguished gentleman from *The Post-Dispatch* a rebuttal, but I think I'll wait.

**PRESIDENT MIDDLETON:** I think he would agree. I mean, *The Post* hasn't hurt me yet.

**MR. BURR:** I'll say dangerous question looking at the audience right now, but a question from the audience actually is are college students today too coddled?

**PRESIDENT MIDDLETON:** That's a loaded question. But it has crossed my mind. And I don't know how this will play. On the race issue, I grew up in the '50s and '60s in Mississippi. And I think I grew a very, very thick skin and my parents, my grandparents, my aunts and uncles, all kept reminding me that the indignities that I was subjected to had nothing to do with me, but had everything to do with the ignorance of those who were imposing their stupidity on me. And that I needed to stand up, keep my head up, and push through it.

So at a very early age, I learned something about resilience. I don't know if our young people today have had to learn that level of resilience and you may call that too coddled. I don't think I would characterize it that way. I would just characterize it as having a different experience than the generations before them. It is what it is. They are expressing what I would have expressed when I was in their position more vocally. In fact, I did express it a bit. But not every time. It was not every time something happened to me. So they're just less willing to put up with the kind of experience that we have all experienced.

**MR. BURR:** It's been reported that applications are down at the University of Missouri with enrollment prospects for the freshmen in the fall being described as grim earlier this spring. This trend has been linked to the discord in campus. What can you say on the problems on campus? Are they affecting enrollment?

**PRESIDENT MIDDLETON:** I'm sure they are. That's not the only thing, though. High school graduation rates in Missouri have been down. We've been predicting a decline in enrollment this year for a long time based on the demographics. Surrounding states have adjusted their scholarship programs and admissions policies so we were expecting a decline in out of state enrollment. We drew a lot of young people from Illinois, the Chicago area, over the past five or six years. That's down. But you can't deny that people's perceptions of the problem at Mizzou is having an impact on our enrollment. And it is grim. I think that the campus is projecting something like a \$30 million shortfall in tuition revenue for next year. And that carries through for four years when your entering class is that small.

So, it's going to have an effect. But I think we'll get over it. I'm optimistic. We've been around 177 years. We've been through problems and ups and downs over that time span. And we generally come back stronger. I'm confident that we will get these diversity, equity and inclusion policies and practices in place. We will change the perception of our campuses, and we'll be much better for it.

**MR. BURR:** Do you think that will hurt you over time? Is there a way to counteract the perception, maybe, that last year's protests had on students, high student students, potentially looking at your school? Is there a way, a campaign or something you're planning to do to counteract that?

**PRESIDENT MIDDLETON:** Oh yeah, we've got communications people who are working on that. You got to get the word out and accentuate the positive and minimize the negative and that kind of thing. We will be doing that. But we can't gloss over it. And I don't know that the target audience is the students as much as it is their parents. And I think the parents are going to be a harder sell. I mean, I'm a parent, I would worry about sending a child to a place that I thought was violent and in total disarray. The fact is, the University of Missouri Columbia campus is not violent and is not in total disarray.

It's interesting, I talked to members of CS 1950 and other students who were involved in the protest. And uniformly, they say they love Mizzou. Their goal was to make Mizzou better, not to destroy Mizzou, not to characterize Mizzou as a horrible place to be. And I had a very interesting meeting with some recent graduates, African American, in Kansas City right after the incident started. They had some high school students who-- very, very bright high school students who were committed to coming to Mizzou, but who were second guessing themselves as a result of the incidents.

So we met in Kansas City and I was just-- it brought a tear to my eye to hear the testimonies of those African American graduates, many of them journalists, by the way. They say, "Yeah, we experienced the same things that the current students are complaining about. But that was a minor part of our experience at Mizzou. Mizzou, I had the best time of my life at Mizzou. Mizzou made me who I am. I would encourage--" this is the students-- "I would encourage all of you to attend Mizzou and I'd encourage everybody else to attend Mizzou."

So, we've got a great deal of support from alums like you guys and if you can just get the word out to people with whom you interact, that would be very helpful in us turning this thing around and turning it into a positive.

**MR. BURR:** Let me follow up on that. Specifically, have the recent events affected diversity in student applications and also in faculty recruitment?

**PRESIDENT MIDDLETON:** I don't think-- I have no evidence that it's affected faculty recruitment. And I think the impact on minority students is about the same as the impact on majority students. You know, I don't think there's a racial or ethnic component to the concern about sending your young person to Mizzou. It's affecting everybody.

**MR. BURR:** When you started off, you're speaking somewhat in vague terms about you coming out of retirement to take this position. How long do you expect to be in this position?

**PRESIDENT MIDDLETON:** I expect to be in this position until the board of curators finds a replacement for me. That's what I committed to doing. They're involved in a national search as we speak. I hear the search is going as well as searches go. I expect I'll be here until probably December/January if the search is successful. If the search is not successful, I'd hate for them to have to find another interim president, so I would probably stay around a little longer.

**MR. BURR:** The dialogue on campus about equality has been largely centered on race relations. What is the university doing to insure inclusion for other minorities such as LGBTQ individuals and religious minorities?

**PRESIDENT MIDDLETON:** Well, we're working on all of those fronts. We have a number of social justice units on campus that are very active. The LGBT community is well represented. As I said, the president of the Missouri Student Association last year was a gay black man, so he was pretty big on intersectionality in those kinds of issues. Religious minorities, we are equally concerned. We had a chancellor's diversity initiative for several years. They, for example, produced a very comprehensive calendar of religious events for various faiths to try to help faculty and students and administrators understand about scheduling and that kind of thing.

So we're doing things, and we will expand those activities. That's why we have this audit going. It's a very comprehensive audit to look at everything we're doing that is diversity and inclusion related. And the CDO that we recently hired has a great deal of experience in the breadth of diversity questions. And so, where we find gaps in what we're doing, we're going to fill those gaps. But it's my impression that we are trying our very best to address all of the issues. Not an easy job because there are so many of them. But we are trying our best to address all of them.

**MR. BURR:** Would that include the possibility of something like seminars or sensitivity training or something like that on campus as part of it?

**PRESIDENT MIDDLETON:** Oh yeah, we've had some of that already in the past seven months. We've had some trainings on implicit bias and that kind of thing. It's not like the university was doing nothing prior to this explosion. We were doing quite a bit. We just had, again as I say, a perfect storm. So even if you're doing something, this could happen.

**MR. BURR:** Tell us, how big of a problem is sexual assault on campus, and off campus, both reported and underreported?

**PRESIDENT MIDDLETON:** I think it is unreported, underreported, and it's certainly a major problem. Two or three years ago, we invested a lot of work and attention to setting up mechanisms to manage that situation, designating confidential advisors. We hired a Title IX coordinator who has got the authority. We hired several investigators to investigate complaints. That was our first explosion that didn't get quite the public attention that our race issues got that was maybe three years ago.

But our response to that crisis sort of set the stage for what we're doing here. When it hits you, you've got to address it quickly, transparently and hopefully effectively. And I think we've done that with regard to Title IX and sexual assault, particularly.

**MR. BURR:** A few off topic questions. Someone in the audience wants to know, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, has a liberal arts degree become outmoded?

**PRESIDENT MIDDLETON:** No, I don't think a liberal arts degree will ever be outmoded. I think we in our society need a very broad understanding of our culture, everything we do; our literature, art, our music. The humanities are extremely important to a well rounded civil society. A lot of people want to talk about the university as a trade school producing people for jobs. It's true that the jobs are in the STEM fields now, but I don't think that that makes a liberal arts degree outmoded. I think students ought to pursue what interests them, and I think universities ought to have programs and degrees that satisfy those interests.

**MR. BURR:** We've been talking a lot about Columbia today, but your university system has three other campuses. what's the climate like at those campuses compared to that at Columbia?

**PRESIDENT MIDDLETON:** They did not have the kinds of explosions that we had. So, I have to say in regard to diversity and inclusion, the climate is somewhat better. But, not perfect. St. Louis and Kansas City have significantly higher minority populations in their student bodies. I think they're a bit further ahead on these issues than we are. It may be because they've achieved something close to a critical mass of students of color, so those students feel probably a bit more comfortable in St. Louis and Kansas City. Certainly, the cities of St. Louis and Kansas City are much more diverse than Columbia. So I think you've got a whole different atmosphere in the cities that makes students of color feel more comfortable.

In Rolla, which is a much more rural city, but a science and technology university primarily, they have issues but I have not heard of an expression of extreme discomfort by the students at Rolla. They're busy with all that scientific stuff. (Laughter)

**MR. BURR:** You talked about the Ferguson effect on last year's events. What about the larger picture, the longer term kind of racial history in the state of Missouri, which was a slave state and also home to the start of the Dred Scott decision?

**PRESIDENT MIDDLETON:** Yeah, Missouri has been the hotbed for centuries. And it's reflected in Missourians' opinions and positions with regard to what happened at the university. We've got some very, very progressive people that are very, very supportive of the students and supportive of what happened and eager to make the change. But we've got a lot of people who think that it was out of control. I've heard phrases like the animals running the zoo, or the inmates running the asylum. Just bitter, angry people over the fact that this happened in the first place.

So you've got a variety of positions in Missouri, as I think Missouri has had since the beginning, since the civil war when brothers were fighting brothers. This situation is a continuation of that fundamental flaw in this country, that grows out of declaring all people equal and endowed by their creator with inalienable rights while at the same time people were held in bondage, black people were held in bondage. And we haven't worked our way out of that dilemma in centuries.

And what you're seeing at Missouri, and at college campuses across the country, is a reflection of that tension, of that imperfection in our union. And we need to find a solution. And as I said in my remarks, what better place to do that than at a university where we're supposed to be an intelligent community of scholars committed to finding solutions? So that's what we're trying to do. But Missouri, yeah, it's right in the center of the country. It's part of the Missouri Compromise, the Missouri/Kansas-- back when we were to go back to football and athletics, back when we were in the Big 8, in the Big 12, we had this rivalry with Kansas. Well, for a person of color in Missouri, and you go back to the origins of that conflict, I'm on Kansas's side, you know? That's where we are.

So we've got to reconcile these differences and come together as a university, as a state, and move forward.

**MR. BURR:** Thank you. 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 visit our website, [www.press.org](http://www.press.org). That's press.org. Also like to remind you about a few upcoming programs. Tomorrow, Labor Secretary Tom Perez will join us. On June 30, National Transportation Safety Board chairman, Christopher Hart, will address the club. And on July 14, Admiral Mike Rogers, the Director of the National Security Agency, will speak at a National Press Club luncheon. Now I'd like to present our guest with the traditional National Press Club mug. (Applause)

**PRESIDENT MIDDLETON:** Thank you very much.

**MR. BURR:** And I saved the toughest question for last. So, one more. In very honest terms, sir, we have a couple minutes, how do you expect Mizzou's football team to do this fall?

**PRESIDENT MIDDLETON:** I have no way of knowing. I mean, there are those who prognosticate about football all the time. I just enjoy watching it, I don't make predictions. We've got a new head coach, a very good guy. We've got a relatively new athletics director. I don't even know how recruiting is going over there at this point, though. So, I respectfully have to decline from making any predictions.

Although in my heart, in my soul, I know we're doing to do well. Go Mizzou, M-i-z.

**AUDIENCE:** Z-o-u.

**PRESIDENT MIDDLETON:** All right.

**MR. BURR:** Thank you, President Middleton. (Applause) And thank you to the National Press Club staff and the staff of our Journalism Institute for their help in putting today's program together. We are adjourned, thank you. (Sounds gavel.)

END