

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH AFL-CIO PRESIDENT RICHARD TRUMKA

SUBJECT: JOBS, TRADE, INFRASTRUCTURE, WORKERS' RIGHTS

MODERATOR: ANGELA GREILING KEANE OF THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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ANGELA GREILING KEANE: [sounds gavel] Good afternoon, and welcome to the National Press Club, where news happens. I'm Angela Greiling Keane, Past President of the National Press Club and Deputy Technology Editor for Politico Pro.

Before we get started, I want to remind our in-house audience to silence your phones. For our viewing and listening audience, please feel free to follow along today using the hashtag #PressClub on Twitter. Again, that's #PressClub.

I would like to welcome also our Public Radio and C-SPAN audiences, and especially to give a welcome to our guest speaker today, Richard Trumka, President of the AFL-CIO. [applause]

Now I'd like to introduce our head table. Please hold your applause until all head table members have been introduced.

From my left, Michelle Amber, reporter for the National Press Club's Wire, and retired labor reporter for Bloomberg BNA; Chris Gentilviso, a journalist and former writer at Working America; Liz Shuler, Secretary-Treasurer of the AFL-CIO. Skipping over the podium, Jamie Horowitz, owner of PR Work, and head of the NPC Headliners booking team. So he's the person who helped organize today's lunch. Thank you, Jamie.

Skipping over our speaker for a moment, Jeff Plungis, lead automotive investigative reporter for Consumer Reports; Michael Smith, a bakery worker at Nabisco in Chicago, and a member of the Bakers Union [applause]; Patti Giglio, senior strategist and principal and PSG

Communications; and finally, Robert Calem, freelance technology journalist and contributor to i3 magazine. [applause]

Our guest today, Richard Trumka, has been president of the nation's largest labor federation, the AFL-CIO, since 2009. Before that, he served as its secretary-treasurer for 14 years, and as president of the United Mine Workers of America. He's a native of Pennsylvania.

The AFL-CIO endorsed Hillary Clinton for President, but many of Mr. Trumka's 12.5 million members voted for Donald Trump last November. After the election's surprise result, Mr. Trumka extended an olive branch to the President-Elect, offering to work together on issues like trade and manufacturing where their views overlap. He has taken a different tack than many Clinton supporters, and has met with the President several times since. They've discussed issues like wages and infrastructure.

Mr. Trumka says the bottom line is jobs. Jobs especially in areas where unions have historically been strong have been in transition or decline and were a major factor in deciding the 2016 election.

Most recently, the AFL-CIO has threatened to sue if the Labor Department tries to water down a boost in overtime eligibility that the Obama administration enacted. Millions of white collar workers were poised to gain an overtime eligibility increase last December under Obama's change until a federal judge blocked it.

Healthcare is another area where the new President and the AFL-CIO aren't seeing eye to eye. At the same time, the nation is experiencing widening income inequality and labor laws are being rolled back by the states, Congress and the courts, making the work of unions that much harder.

I'm pleased now to turn over the microphone to Mr. Trumka, who will lay out the AFL-CIO's political strategy over the next several years, and discuss what he sees as the labor federation's role in this new political environment. [applause] Mr. Trumka.

RICHARD TRUMKA: Thank you, Angela. Good afternoon. I have to tell you, it's an honor to be here on behalf of the 55 unions and 12.5 million members of the AFL-CIO to talk about how to win progress for America's working people.

As I start, I'd like to note that today is Equal Pay Day. And for anyone unfamiliar, this is truly not a celebration; it's a reminder that for a woman to earn as much as a man, she has to work a full year, plus 100 extra days. All of that ends today, all the way up to April 4th. And for women of color, it's even longer.

See, the pay gap between women and men is one symptom of a much larger problem. Our economy is historically out of balance, tilted steeply against working people and in favor of corporations. In each of the last three years, corporate profits have reached record highs one year after the other. Yet, workers haven't gotten a real raise in a half a century. Corporate

CEOs are making more than 300 times the average worker. And despite living in the richest country in the world, at its richest point in history, our overall standard of living is going down.

Now, this immoral and it's an economic crisis. You see, the imbalance in our economy causes real people real pain. Mothers and fathers are forced to choose between paying the rent and paying the doctor. Consumers are being cheated out of hard-earned money. Seniors are taking jobs instead of enjoying retirement. These are the realities for working people, while corporations cart more and more riches to the bank.

So, how did we get here? Well, Republicans and too many Democrats have rigged our economy to enrich a select few at the expense of every-day hardworking Americans. It's been a direct assault on our deeply held national values of unity, justice and broad opportunity. And it's been done under the guise of creating jobs, and justified by a fanatical economic theory that seeks to remove or destroy anything seen as a barrier to the free market, most especially unions.

We see it in our trade deals that create special rights for corporations. We see it in our healthcare system that is a windfall for insurance companies and a complicated, unaffordable mess for patients and families. We see it in our financial sector that's become the master, not the servant, of the real economy. Above all, we see it in our outdated labor laws that allow employers to steal wages and unfairly restrict the freedom of workers to form unions.

But inequality is not inevitable. Inequality is a choice. And we can choose to do better. See, let me be perfectly clear: We will never, never solve the problem unless every worker has the power to bargain with their employer. Nothing else raises wages better or more fairly.

Now, it would seem that the Bill of Rights, with its freedoms of speech and assembly, affords every worker the right to bargain with their employer. But that's not how the system works in practice. You see, the law today only requires employers to bargain with recognized unions.

So we're proposing something bold, something better. Every worker, everybody deserves a job and the power to make it a good job, to bargain for higher wages, safer working conditions and retirement security – whether you're black or white, whether you're gay or straight, whether you're immigrant or native-born, or whether you're union or not yet union. [applause]

If you tend the crops in North Carolina or you clean the rooms in New York City, if you're an engineer in Seattle or an autoworker in Mississippi, you should have the right to bargain with your coworkers for a better life. [applause] And employers should have to abide by that.

Now, some might say that's a pretty radical idea. Quite frankly, I say it's about the most fundamental thing that there can be. And there's never been a more important time for

workers to assert our collective power. You see, when all workers have a say in our pay and working conditions, we'll start to close that gap. We'll lift up more families and communities. We'll build the America that our founders envisioned, that our parents built, and that our children deserve.

Now, this is what the vast majority of Americans cried out for in 2016. Whether they voted for Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton, they were crying out for new economic rules, a new way of doing business, changing an economy so that it worked for them. See, we're closing in on the first 100 days of President Trump's administration, and two very different factions have emerged. There's a Wall Street wing that seeks to undermine Donald Trump's promises to workers, and there's a competing wing that could actually win some progress that working people need.

Now, President Trump needs to decide, decide who he stands with – the coalminers, farmers and steelworkers and other regular Americans who he promised to help in his campaign, or the Wall Street tycoons, who are rigging the economy at our expense? And that decision, that decision will be the single-greatest test and the most defining thing in his presidency.

See, even before taking office, President Trump used his bully pulpit to tell companies to stay put, don't move jobs offshore. And a few have actually listened to him. And that's a good thing. See, every President should fight to keep good jobs here because every single job, every single job saved means one more family can pay down the mortgage, or save for college, or retire with dignity. But that's not enough, simply to demand companies stay in America if the jobs that are ultimately saved provide low wages and little voice.

President Trump should use his office and influence to call for an end to workplace intimidation, reject "right to work" once and for all [applause], and promote and protect the freedom of every single worker to form or join a union and bargain for a better life. Tweet that. Fight for that. Accomplish that. And that's how we'll make America great.

From my very first meeting with President Trump, I let him know that we will judge this administration by its actions. We're watching. We're keeping score. If the President does something good for all working people, something consistent with our values, we'll support it and we'll work hard for it. But if he does something that threatens who we are and what we stand for, then we are going to fight it. We're going to fight it as a unified labor movement.

This isn't just talk. See, we opposed the American Health Care Act because it was an all-out attack on workers' healthcare security – taking money away from Medicare and Medicaid, increasing the number of uninsured and taxing our healthcare plans. We want healthcare for all, not for a few.

So by defeating this bad legislation, we sent a powerful message: that if you pull a bait and switch on working people, if you say that you're with us and then attack us, you're going to fail. And we're applying that same standard to the important issues of the day.

Quite frankly, we were thankful that President Trump signed the TPP's death certificate. But working people killed that unfair agreement. We did that. [applause] NAFTA will be the real test. And despite the President having called it the worst trade deal in history, it appears that the Trump administration could leave its most oppressive pieces in place.

President Trump has proposed a \$1 trillion investment in America's infrastructure. I've got to tell you, that's the right scale to be talking about. And the labor movement is ready to hit the ground running with it. But will he invest the right way? With high wages and standards for the workers who build our roads and bridges? Just last week, the Republican House voted to eliminate PLAs in all federal projects. What will he do with that? Will he sign it? Or will he veto it?

See, quite frankly, I'm concerned that the Wall Street wing of the White House is starting to hijack the agenda. President Trump has already rolled back important federal regulations that keep us safe on the job. His executive orders on immigration criminalize our workplaces and violate our basic principles. And by delaying the fiduciary rule which says that financial advisers must act in your best interest— imagine that, how outrageous that is [laughter]. They have to act in your best interest when they give you advice. By rolling that back, working people could lose more than a quarter of our retirement money.

And then there's the President's budget. In the end, a budget is a more than a set of numbers. It's a values document. It's how we know if you put your money where your mouth is. And this budget fails the test.

See, you can't say you're for working people when your budget starves programs like the Appalachian Commission and the Delta Regional Authority, which train workers and grow local economies.

You can't say that you're for working people when your budget cuts infrastructure dollars for hundreds of necessary projects like upgrading Route 640 in Elkhorn City, Kentucky, their lifeline.

You can't say you're for working people when your budget slashes funding for OSHA and MSHA while 150 workers die every single day in this country from workplace injuries or illnesses like silica dust and other toxins.

You see, those are the wrong priorities, the wrong values. But there truly is a different path.

Down in the mountain valleys of southwest Pennsylvania, where I grew up, poverty and a lack of opportunity were once brutal facts of life. When I was a kid, the local public school gave us a top-quality education, and college was an affordable reality. Back then, our economy worked better for working families, largely because of the wages and benefits bargained by workers in unions like mine, the United Mine Workers of America.

Today UMWA retirees are on Capitol Hill. They're lobbying for a fair retirement deal. Over 20,000 healthcare cut-off notices have been sent out and their benefits are set to expire on April 30. See, we have a responsibility to keep our promise to America's coal miners. And Congress should send the Miners Protection Act to President Trump's desk today. [applause]

Mining was a dangerous and difficult job, and my family wasn't rich by any stretch. But unionism gave us a ladder to the middle class, and I got to climb it. But for too many people, too many people in our country, that ladder is gone. And we have to rebuild it rung by rung.

See, we want to rebuild the ladder and change the rules of our economy for workers like Michael Smith. Michael worked at the Oreo plant on the South Side of Chicago. Yet Mondelez, the parent company of Nabisco, decided to move his job to Mexico. And NAFTA helped pave the way.

Michael is with us today. Mike, would you please stand up? [applause] Thank you, my brother.

See, the members of Mike's union, the Bakery Workers, want to make Oreos in the United States. This isn't just about a few cookies. This factory is an icon. It's a place where you could make decent wages and you could raise a family, and places like that should not be a thing of the past.

Irene Rosenfeld, the CEO of Mondelez, makes over \$9000 an hour – \$9000 an hour. She just went over the 200 million mark that she's taken out of the company. For her, one person. \$9000 an hour. And in that same hour, Nabisco workers in Mexico earn barely more than a dollar. One dollar. That's simply unacceptable.

So we ask that President Trump do what's right. Stand with us. Stand with Michael. Stand with the Bakery Workers. Bring the jobs home, protect our pensions, and invest in America. That's what you said you were going to do. [applause]

Now, building an economy that works for everyone requires putting our issues and our values first. And as a result, we will not be an ATM for any political party. We will stand up to the corporate Republicans who attack working people, and the neoliberal Democrats who take us for granted. See, when our fidelity is to working people and to fair economic rules, politicians will have to come to us. That's how we'll stop choosing on Election Day between the lesser of two evils, and start choosing between the better of two goods.

And momentum has been building for working people over the last few years. People want good jobs. They want fair trade. They want rising pay. A powerful majority of Americans support unions, and our popularity is growing, especially among young people.

As I speak about unionism and the gains we can win and the power we can build, I'm not asking anybody, any one of us to disregard reality. I know it won't be easy. I know we

face long odds. But nothing is set in stone. The future is ours to shape. Because in the labor movement, we understand that quality jobs don't grow on trees. They don't just happen.

Mining and factory jobs used to be dangerous and dirty. We made them better by standing together. You see, solidarity works. Unity actually works. It's as American as apple pie, but better. When we stand together, we win, and our success spreads.

And it's happening right now. As we sit here, workers are organizing for a seat at the table and a chance to improve pay and benefits. EMTs and paramedics right here in DC recently joined the State, County and Municipal Employees. Hard-working women and men at an electric bus factory in Los Angeles won recognition with the Sheet Metal Workers. Employees at Baltimore Gas and Electric said yes to the Electrical Workers. Thousands of teaching and research assistants at Columbia and Yale voted for a voice on the job with the United Auto Workers and with UNITE HERE, respectively. And more and more are on the way.

And speaking of UNITE HERE, Trump Hotel workers in Las Vegas not only secured a first contract, but they won a union at Trump International Hotel just a few blocks from the Press Club. [applause] See, that's our movement – workers of all skills and backgrounds coming together in pursuit of a common goal.

As I close, I want to mention a recent study from Harvard. It showed that only 30% of those born after 1980 believe it's essential to live in a democratic nation. Let me repeat that: Of the people born after 1980, only 30% of them believe it's essential to live in a democratic nation. Now, that's a startling statistic. And I believe it reflects the simple truth that young people are bearing the brunt of our economic imbalance. The American idea that anything is possible if you work hard and play by the rules has been fading away for this generation. And unfortunately for too many others as well.

See, the labor movement can and must change this. We are in the fight of our lives – to reclaim America as a land of opportunity. And we have never been more committed to getting the job done than we are right now. [applause]

In the end, it all comes down to this: Everybody, everybody deserves a good job and the power to win better wages, benefits and retirement security, whether you're in a union or you're not in a union. [applause] That's how we build an economy that works for everyone. [applause]

So President Trump, the labor movement is moving forward. You should join us, sooner rather than later. Use the power of your office to help us raise wages, to help us strengthen unions, and give all workers a better life. You do that, and we'll take it from there.

Thank you very much. [applause/cheers]

MS. KEANE: Thank you. We have, as you might imagine, a lot of questions. So we'll keep you busy with those for a little while. Starting off, you mentioned many ways in which the economy is not working for working people lately. What is the one most impactful move that you call on President Trump to make? One.

MR. TRUMKA: One?

MS. KEANE: One.

MR. TRUMKA: Give every worker out there the right to bargain with their employer for better wages, better working conditions, whether you have a union or not. It seems to me that in a country that prides itself on democracy, the freedom of assembly, the freedom of association, that workers should be able to bargain with their employer for a share of what they produce. Help us do that. Help us arm every worker in this country with the power to increase their own wages, benefits and retirement security, and we'll eliminate the inequality gap. We'll grow an economy because, remember, our economy is 72% driven by consumer spending. Put money in consumers' hands, they will spend, create demand; demand will create jobs; and the economy will hum. And that 30%, the other 70% who don't believe it's necessary to live in a democratic nation will start to come back around and say this system truly does work for us. [applause]

MS. KEANE: You of course had conversations directly with the President. Is this an ask that you've made of him during any of those conversations?

MR. TRUMKA: Absolutely. I normally do not talk about specific things that we talked about when I meet with a President or a Senator or Congressman or with a union leader. I think that's a private conversation that is best kept private because people feel more comfortable in talking with you.

But I did outline for him what we thought was necessary. First, places that we disagreed, and then places that I thought we could work together. And solutions out of this. The solution was giving workers the power to be able to bargain for better wages, better benefits. And we talked about infrastructure. We talked about immigration. We talked about healthcare. We talked about manufacturing. We talk about the safety regs that he was eliminating. And some of it was— it was an interesting, frank conversation.

I then summarized all of those thoughts and sent him a rather large letter outlining all of those issues, so that in fact he knows our position on everything.

The other thing I told him is that, You'll never have to worry about where we stand on an issue. All you need do is ask. And if we support, we will tell you; and we will be a great ally. And if we oppose you, we will tell you; and we will be a formidable opponent. [applause]

MS. KEANE: The President, as many people in this room surely know, has been speaking just now to a union crowd — a different crowd than we have assembled here. What's

your interpretation of him appearing before a union audience, albeit not an AFL-CIO union audience, today?

MR. TRUMKA: Well, first of all, it was an AFL-CIO audience. The Building Trades are a department of the AFL-CIO. So they are part of us. I think it was sheer coincidence. He was invited whenever the Building Trades presidents went over and talked to the President right after the election, before the inauguration. They invited him to come; he accepted. And it just happened to fall today. I don't think there was any sinister plot, or anything else. And I think it's good that he talks to workers. I wish he would talk to more workers. I wish politicians would talk to more workers and hear what's important to them. [applause]

I can tell you, my brothers and sisters in the Building Trades won't be shy about telling him what they need, what they need to turn the country around, the type of jobs that they need, the type of projects that are out there. And I applaud them, and I've encouraged them to talk out and let him know what kind of America we have and what kind of America we need.

So I think it's a good thing.

MS. KEANE: Thank you for that correction on the union affiliations. Next question: you advocated in your remarks against extremism in both political parties and were very clear that you will challenge both the right and the left, when necessary. Yet, the country's political middle has been shrinking for a long while, and we certainly saw that in effect in November. How do you square your goals with our political reality?

MR. TRUMKA: Look, I come from workers. I'm a third-generation coalminer. I grew up with workers, and I associate till this very day with workers around the country. And I know this: when workers get the facts, they don't make the right decision occasionally; they make the right decision every single time when they get the facts. Our job is to give them the facts and let them make the decision so that when the President says, "I'm for you," and he does the old switcherooski, and he pulls a health safety reg that'll hurt us, we're going to let them know. We're going to let them know what he does, how it affects their income, their wages, whether positively or negatively. We are truly going to call balls and strikes. And when you do that, I think you see them come together because workers have one overarching goal right now. And that's to change the rules of this economy so that this economy starts working for the vast majority of American citizens, not a 1% band at the top of our hierarchy.

And so, you give them the facts, they come together. Give them the issues. If we lead with our issues, hopefully both parties will come to those issues. But if one does and one doesn't, workers will know. If neither does, workers will know.

I think the more interesting question, quite frankly, in the long run is that stat that I quoted – 30% of people born after 1980 think it's important to live in a democratically controlled nation. What happens in this country when the majority of people that believe that goes below 50%? What happens at that point? How do you reverse that? You reverse that by

rewriting the rules of the economy. And if they see no way to reverse those rules, they'll find a way. They will find a way.

Our job is to make sure that an economy works for its citizens, that the economy serves the people, not the people serve the economy. And we're working hard at that. And President Trump has a chance to either make it better for workers or worse for workers. If he makes it better, we will say so. If he makes it worse, we will say so. And then he'll be judged by what he does, not by what he says. [applause]

MS. KEANE: The AFL-CIO through everything it had before Donald Trump in last year's election, of course endorsed Hillary Clinton, yet Trump won 42% of union households, which, according to this questioner's stats, was the largest proportion since 1984 and Ronald Reagan. Do you think that the President will continue to be appealing with that same appeal he had during the 2016 election cycle to union households?

MR. TRUMKA: Well, let me also correct your stats. Actually, you said union households. Remember, those aren't union members. They live in a household, may or may not be a good relationship. [laughter] Who knows? Anyway, of union members, Trump got 36% of our members. That's 3% more than Mitt Romney got. On the flip side. Hillary Clinton got 10% less of our members than Barack Obama got. And when you look at that, it's a pretty formidable difference.

But here's what happens. He made promises that people believed. And even if they voted for Hillary or they voted for him, President Trump, they were voting for the same thing – to change the rules of the economy. Because that's what they told us. That's what they want to happen. They believed he would do it. Some believed she would do it.

But when that doesn't happen, or they see the rules being changed to make it worse for them, the support– well, I think they'll become disheartened. Many Americans are already disheartened with the system. You have to ask yourself, why less than 50% of the eligible population actually votes? What do the other 50% think? Does it matter? Does it make a difference? No matter who wins, I lose? That's what they tell us.

So you've got 50% that don't vote and you've got another 50% that gets split up. The more of them that get disheartened, the less vibrant democracy becomes. That's a threat to a democratic form of government that needs to be shored up. The best way to do that is to give them the facts. If we stop endorsing people and we start endorsing issues and an agenda, then they'll have to come. Those that support our issues and our agenda, we will support them. Those that don't support our issues and our agenda, we don't support them. It doesn't matter what party they came from. If you support us, we support you.

Now, the reality of that's been over the last couple of decades, it's been tougher and tougher for us to find true friends in the Republican Party that support our issues. There are some. Frank LoBiondo from New Jersey and several others that stick with working people and really support us. But the number becomes smaller and smaller. And it gets frustrating to us when people say, Why do you support so many Democrats? Give me more Republicans

that support our issues and we'll support them. But we can't find them. We look everywhere, trust me. [laughter] We look under rocks, we look everywhere. We can't find them.

But the more that you give them the facts, it doesn't matter where anybody at the edge. It matters where people in the middle is. And I would say this as well: Just because you're on the edge doesn't mean you can't be right. So some of these could be right. What we do is we have to listen and decide what's best for the country and best for the economy. And I don't care, quite frankly, which side or where it comes from. If it's good for working people, it's consistent with our values, we will do it. If it's bad for working people, inconsistent with our values, we will fight it.

MS. KEANE: Given the results of the last election, and unions were hardly the only entity to mispredict what was going to happen there, we could have a whole conversation on polling and everything else, but given those results, is the federation rethinking the political strategy? And can you give us a few previews of where you might be looking for the midterms?

MR. TRUMKA: Well, of course we are. Not only the strategies in politics, but we completely restructured ourselves. We hadn't been restructured since the mid-'50s, and our structure and delivery system was a little achy. So we restructured how we deliver things, how we deliver issue campaigns, political campaigns, collective bargaining campaigns, legislative campaigns, how we do that, to become more streamlined and more effective. And we're focusing on things. And we'll focus on a number of states. We'll get to be the best we can be in those states. And then we'll bring in another ambit of states.

But our strategy's real simple. And I normally wouldn't give you strategy, but this is our strategy: It's to give our members the facts. The truth will prevail. They will understand who's with them and who isn't. Call balls and strikes fairly. If a Republican does something good for workers, we will say it. If a Republican does something bad for workers, we will say it.

So give them the facts and let them make the decision. And as I said earlier, I personally believe that when the American working force gets the facts, they don't make the right decision occasionally; they make the right decision every single time. It's our job to give them the facts.

MS. KEANE: How much of your strategy do you see as speaking to your members, as you were just talking about, versus talking more broadly to voters, not just your members or union voters in general?

MR. TRUMKA: It's extremely important. If you notice what I talked about today, I was talking about giving the right to bargain, not to my members – we already have that – but to every worker out there. Because you can't really increase wages in this country unless workers get to bargain with their employer for a bigger share of what they produce. I guess you could mandate a wage, but it would work for some and not for others. A good, strong minimum wage or a living wage is important to keep everybody's wages up, but tailoring that

wage between you and the employer, your employer, that's the most effective way and the most flexible way, and the most fair way, is through collective bargaining.

And so, it's important to talk to them. We already started talking to people beyond the labor movement. We have outreach to our progressive friends throughout the community, whether they're an immigration group, whether they're Black Lives Matter, whether they're the NAACP or an environmental group. We've all started talking and planning together. Because for too long, quite frankly, we've allowed ourselves to be beat in echelon. They have a small group over here. They focus on the small group and they beat them while the rest of us sit on the sideline and say, Gee, ain't it great that they're not after me? Sorry about them, but, god, they ain't after me.

Well, you get your turn in the barrel. Everybody will because they'll train their sights on you. We have probably the biggest target on us, the American labor movement, because we are one of the last groups with enough mass. We're the last defense on the playing field, with enough wherewithal to be a formidable defense. And so, they come after us. They come after us in the states, they come after us at local government, they come at us at the federal government.

We've held our own. In fact, we're growing. And people are coming together. Workers are wanting to say, Let's plan together. Let's work together. Let's stop allowing ourselves to be beat in echelon.

And so, we started this before our last convention, which was four years ago, started talking beyond. And I will tell you this about our political campaign. We run three types of campaigns right now. We run a member-to-member campaign, where members talk strictly to members. We run a blended campaign, where members talk to members and non-union members. And we run a non-member campaign completely, where we have people talk to non-members, to educate them. Whether it's a political campaign, an issues campaign, a legislative campaign, or an organizing campaign.

And that's how you're starting to see the momentum come and the power coming, and people being willing to stand up and fight a healthcare bill that they knew was bad. People were upset. We helped provide some of the catalyst to that with our structures throughout the states. And you'll see us do more and more of that, reaching out to progressive friends and allies, and coming together. And you'll see us defending their issues as much as we would ask them to defend our issues. Because when we truly get to the point where it's not my issues and your issues but our issues, then we all win. And that's where we're trying to get to. We're not there yet, but that's where we're trying to get to.

MS. KEANE: According to this questioner's statistic, and I welcome a counter-statistic, union membership last year fell to 10.7% of the US workforce. Do you think the Trump presidency has the potential to give a boost to union membership?

MR. TRUMKA: Does the presidency? Absolutely the presidency can give a boost to union membership. One, create jobs and get our people back to work, and those numbers

will increase. Change the laws of the country so that people can actually, that want a union, can actually form a union or join a union, and you'll see the numbers swell. Right now, it takes a Herculean effort with the laws the way they are to be able to join a union.

It's sort of ironic. Can you imagine this? Let's assume that you wanted to join the Elks club. And what do you do? You walk in, you sign a paper, and you're a member of the Elks club, right? Not like that with unions.

And let's assume that in order to join the Elks club, you had to sit in a room and listen to somebody pepper you for hours about why you shouldn't join the Elks club. And somebody who had the power to fire you if you joined the Elks club. And somebody who had the ability to take your job away and transfer it to a foreign country if you joined the Elks club. How many people here would join the Elks club? [laughter]

You got it! That's how it is for us. That the hoops that we have to go through. You get illegally fired. You get threatened. You get intimidated. It takes some courage for a worker to stand up in this country and say, I want to have a voice on the job. Why do you think that is? Having a voice on a job is good for workers. Why do you think employers spend billions of dollars preventing people from having a voice on the job? Because they don't want a voice on the job. They like it where you go in and don't get a raise.

Say you're working right now at an auto plant in Mississippi. They tell you what your wage is. They tell you what your benefits are. They tell you everything about how to do it, what to do, including what to wear and when to wear it. You've got no recourse.

Why shouldn't you be able to sit down with your coworkers – forget about a union – why shouldn't you be able to sit down with your fellow workers and say, We produce all the wealth here. Why can't we get a little bit bigger share of it? We don't want all of it. We just want a fair share.

As that figure goes down, it gets worse. So let me give you this figure. From 1946 to 1973, productivity in this country doubled, and so did wages. And the people in the bottom two quartiles, their wages were raising faster than the top, so the wage gap was collapsing. Because then, the labor movement represented 35-40% of the workforce, and we drove wages for everyone. Non-union teacher got a raise because we got a raise. Non-union steelworker got a raise because we got a raise.

From '76 to date, productivity has continued up, but wages have stagnated. We're a little over 10.7. But we're still not 35-40%. So we don't drive wages anymore. So when get a raise, a non-union teacher doesn't necessarily get a raise, or the non-union autoworkers or steelworker or coalminer or anybody else out there, electrician, carpenter, bricklayer, railroad engineer, signal switchmen, none of them, they don't get a raise. And so wages stagnate.

It's changing those rules to bring more collective bargaining to people so that we get tied to and get some of the benefit out of all the productivity increases that we bring about and all the wealth that we produce. If you don't remember anything else today, remember one

fact: We live in the richest nation on the face of the earth at our most rich point in time. You want to tell me why our standard of living is going down and not up?

MS. KEANE: We are unfortunately running out of time, but I have a lot of questions about NAFTA. So I'm going to double barrel a few of them together and we can talk about NAFTA for the final big topic.

MR. TRUMKA: What's NAFTA? [laughter]

MS. KEANE: The AFL-CIO of course has come out recently against President Trump's NAFTA draft, comparing to the Trans-Pacific Partnership. What would you like to see? What would potentially make the AFL-CIO support a NAFTA redraft? And how confident are you that will come in this administration? And then one follow-on in the same topic are: Would a order adjustment tax be helpful to the US as part of a revamp?

MR. TRUMKA: Look, the President talked about redrafting NAFTA in his draft last week, what was very, very timid. The Wall Street Journal said it was timid and it was unbelievably timid; it didn't do much except around the pieces. The Washington Post, who has never seen— well, the editorial board, that has never seen a trade agreement that they wouldn't swallow hook, line and sinker said it's so great to see that President Trump's becoming sensible again; he's moving away; this is a wonderful thing for the country. It's sucking up again.

Look, when we look at NAFTA, we have literally dozens of things that we have and will continue to supply to the government. But let me just name a few of them. In the agreement, there's a thing called ISDS. It gives foreign governments the right to attack our laws. No US citizen has a right to use the them, the court. No American corporation has a right to use them. Only foreign investors have a right to use them. And we think that's insane. You have a very, very well-developed court system here. Sometimes I think it needs some changes, but it's still pretty good. It's fair. You have a system that works. So we ought to do away with that.

The labor standards are not part of the core agreement. So they're not enforceable. And they must be enforced by a government instead of the workers themselves.

Investors can enforce their own rights. Then workers should be able to enforce our own rights as well. [applause] We should have the right to do that. Same with environmental standards.

And then there's the Buy America provisions that are riddled with loopholes that allow foreign entities to compete on a par. When we do a stimulus program in this country and it says Buy American, there's all of these loopholes that they've built in to it so you can't use. It doesn't have to be Buy American.

You have Chapter 19, which are these panels. They should be eliminated.

And one of the things that really irks me the most, but there's dozens of these, but this one I will talk about. Other countries, when they prosecute an unfair trade practice, the standard they use is "potential harm." The standard that we use in this country is "substantial injury." So we have to wait until the jobs are last and say, Now we've been substantially injured, now let's bring a trade charge. For what? They stopped the jobs from being lost. We yak about them after the jobs are lost. We need to reverse that so that we get the chance to fight for American workers' jobs as well, before they're lost rather than after they're lost.

Like Mondelez. We shouldn't have to be fighting to get Michael's job back from Mexico. We should have been able to stop it from going to Mexico for unfair trade practices. [applause]

Is that it?

MS. KEANE: Border adjustment tax.

MR. TRUMKA: Oh, the border adjustment tax? It can or cannot be useful. We've talked about using a border adjustment tax. And I'll give you a couple of examples. A lot of our employers in this country try to comply with environmental laws, and they actually do try to clean things up. They compete with employers south of the border who have no pollution control. So by us importing that product, we're actually increasing pollution, worsening the environment, and putting our companies at an economic disadvantage. We ought to be able to have an adjustment tax that says, Okay, you polluted, you had this unfair advanced; here's what we do to even the advantage out.

So we lessen the incentive for people to use the downside. The same with other things as well. So a border adjustment tax could very, very well be an effective means of helping us have fair agreements, depending on the details. It could also be not so useful. Or it could also be counterproductive. We think we have a formula that could make it very, very productive and reduce the incentive to take jobs off site and reward people who take jobs offshore and then send the product back. Because nine times out of ten, they're American companies that just relocated down there and are sending the product back.

I mean, I don't have any particular allegiance to them or any reason that I think we should coddle them. I think we ought to coddle the people that actually work with the American worker and produce things here. And the more we produce, the better off we are. [applause]

MS. KEANE: Thank you. Before I ask the final question, one more for you, I'd like to tell our audience about our upcoming National Press Club events. Tomorrow, we'll host IRS Commission John Koskinen at another luncheon right here in the Ballroom. April 17th, we'll have a National Press Club Newsmaker breakfast with ballet dancer Misty Copeland. And on April 21st, we'll have a luncheon with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Joseph Dunford.

And now, I have the pleasure of presenting our guest today with the traditional National Press Club coffee mug. I think you have at least one of these, so you can have a breakfast for at least two.

MR. TRUMKA: I like it. [shows Ms. Keane bottom of mug]

MS. KEANE: Oh, oh, oh, dear. Well, anyway. [laughter/applause] Or you can choose what to do with it. [laughter] For the last question, you began your remarks talking about Equal Pay Day. So I'm going to close with a question submitted by one of our audience members who would like to know, when are you going to lead a group of women union members to the White House? She says, "I would like to see steel-toed, steel-shank-boot-wearing women in the Oval." [applause]

MR. TRUMKA: As soon as we break up here, we're marching that way right now. So feel free to join in. Actually, that's an interesting question, because we do plan to do some things to not just highlight Equal Pay Day, which today is, 100 days in. So think about that. In our country, a woman has to work an extra 100 days to equal what a man makes for a 35-day-year. That's totally unfair and unacceptable. We will take that to heart. We'll send out some invitations and, with or without the hard-toed boots we'll take you. [applause]

MS. KEANE: Thank you to our wonderful audience. We are adjourned. [sounds gavel]

[applause]

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