

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB HEADLINERS LUNCHEON WITH
NAACP PRESIDENT DERRICK JOHNSON

SUBJECT: THE FUTURE OF THE NAACP

MODERATOR: JEFF BALLOU OF THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

LOCATION: NATIONAL PRESS CLUB HOLEMAN LOUNGE, WASHINGTON, D.C.

TIME: 1:00 P.M.

DATE: TUESDAY, AUGUST 29, 2017

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JEFF BALLOU: [sounds gavel] Yes, I do it with authority. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the National Press Club, where we have trademarked the moniker of being the world's leading professional organization for journalists. And also where I've been saying this year in a challenging time to freedom of the press that we are the Constitution.

My name is Jeff Ballou, news editor Americas with Al Jazeera English, and the 110th president of the National Press Club. Today we are pleased to have as our Headliners Luncheon Speaker Derrick Johnson, the interim president and chief executive officer for the National Organization for the Advancement of Colored People, or commonly known as the NAACP.

A few housekeeping rules. First of all, I'd like for you to at least silence your cell phones and other electronic devices, though we do encourage you to follow us on social media. Just because we were born in 1908, we're not still there. So you can follow us @PressClubDC, using #NPCLive and #Headliners. And you can follow me @NPCPresident.

So as you are setting your phones to vibrate and getting your Twitter questions ready, I also want to, all of you in the house have these lovely white cards in front of you, both on the dais and at your tables. Now's the time to start scribbling those wonderful questions, if you haven't already submitted any. So we can keep the conversation going and healthy. And you can keep passing them up to the front. You don't have to wait for Mr. Johnson to finish his remarks. There are members who will raise their hands and help bring them forward at any time and get them to Donna, who will help sort through them and get them to me.

There's another way you can get me questions for those of you who are not in the house. You can use social media, you can tweet me a question. I do have a smart phone up here and I can follow our Twitter feed; I will follow it from here while Mr. Johnson's up here. And then after we get into the Q&A, I'll be trying to multitask; an interesting thing that we like to do.

Now, without further ado, we're going to get to the head table, and then some more thank-yous, and then on to today's proceedings. I'm going to start on my left, your right, Tamar Hallerman, Washington correspondent for the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, you can stand up and wave; Dominique Bonessi, City Hall reporter for WYPR-88.1 in Baltimore, Maryland; Lottie Joiner, interim editor-in-chief of *Crisis* magazine, the oldest African American publication that there is in the United States, and the official publication of the NAACP; Cory Horton, deputy chief of staff and legislative director for Congressman Bennie Thompson of Mississippi; Soraya Nadia McDonald, senior culture writer for ESPN's groundbreaking multimedia publication, *The Undefeated*. And we have several members from that organization in the Club, and we're happy that you've joined us on the dais today, Soraya. Hilary Shelton, director of the NAACP's Washington, DC, bureau, and a frequent flyer of the National President Club. We've seen you here many times, Hilary.

Skipping over myself, Donna Leinwand-Leger, managing editor of *USA Today*, one of my predecessors as pre of the National Press Club, and National Press Club Headliners team member who organized today's luncheon. Thank you Donna. Get to you in a second, Mr. Johnson. Shawna Thomas, the Washington bureau chief of the groundbreaking *Vice News* that you've all been streaming and watching every night on HBO. Aba Blankson, vice president of communications for the NAACP; the membership secretary of the National Press Club, Michele Salcedo, desk editor for Associated Press; Keith Laing, Washington correspondent for the *Detroit News*, who has something in common with our speaker; and Chuck Raasch, reporter for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. [applause]

I'd also like to acknowledge some other members of the Headliners team who helped with today's luncheon: Betsy Fischer Martin and Lisa Matthews, who are our Headliners co-chairs; team members Lori Russo, Heather Forsgren Weaver and Aprill Turner. And the National Press Club staff, specifically Lindsay Underwood and Laura Coker, who manages the offices of the Club president, and our staff executive director William McCarren.

For our television, public radio and social media followers, please be aware that in the audience today are members of the general public. So any applause or reaction you hear during the remarks and the Q&A is not necessarily those from the working press. Because we like to have a little decorum amongst ourselves and be the fair arbiter when things are happening here at the Club.

Now, the NAACP is the nation's oldest and largest non-partisan civil rights organization. The executive committee of the board of directors unanimously named Mr. Derrick Johnson interim president and CEO during the Association's 108th annual convention in Baltimore last month. He's expected to serve through the end of the year when the board

hopes to announce a new leader. He says his focus will be ensuring local activists are getting enough support because that's where public policy impacts people most directly.

Mr. Johnson formerly served as vice chairman of the NAACP board of directors. He's a veteran activist who's dedicated his career to defending the rights and improving the lives of Mississippians. We'll be talking about the Gulf Coast a little in the Q&A.

As state president of the NAACP Mississippi state conference, he led critical campaigns for voting rights and equitable education. He successfully managed two bond referendum campaigns in Jackson, Mississippi, that brought in \$150 million for school building improvements and 65 million towards the construction of a new convention center, respectively.

With the recent events in Charlottesville and ensuing debates about whether to remove Confederate memorials and the NAACP's recent advisory urging caution when traveling to Missouri, there are a lot of issues for Derrick Johnson to discuss.

Please give a warm National Press Club welcome to NAACP interim president Derrick Johnson. [applause]

DERRICK JOHNSON: Thank you, Jeff. I met Jeff a few weeks ago. I was walking through the DC airport and I was headed to an event, and he was there. And he looked so important, so I just started following him. [laughter] And I have followed him all the way to the Press Club this morning.

I really would like to thank all of the members of the National Press Club for allowing the NAACP this opportunity. We are in trying times. It is a unique place we are in for this democracy. But for the NAACP, a 109-year organization, we've seen this before. In fact, the creation of the NAACP was based on similar set of circumstances, where individuals such as WEB Du Bois and William Monroe Trotter, a reporter, decided to pull people together to discuss what they called "the Negro question." And that call to meet in Niagara was heard by individuals in the state of Mississippi where I reside, and they also sent another reporter by the name of Ida B. Wells to represent Mississippi.

So we're familiar with what's taking place. And in that discussion, they wanted to address the problems with lynching that had been taking place across the country. They established a Niagara Movement. The very next year, there was a lynching in Springfield, Illinois, where a group of whites realized that if we were going to have a true democracy, it had to be one that was met with law and order.

So that group of whites, Mary Wright Ovington, and others, invited members of the Niagara Movement to join them in New York to meet, to talk about a campaign to direct federal policy which would empower the federal government to go into areas to investigate, prosecute and convict those who were involved in lynching. That was the creation of the NAACP. The decision made at that time was that the Association will be an advocacy organization, an organization which would advocate for public policy to improve the quality

of lives for all. That was a successful campaign.

And as a result of that, we began to build an association. We have built our presence across the landscape where we have over 2200 units, from Alaska to Hawaii, to Connecticut to Florida, and all parts in between. We recognize that in order for us to make democracy work, we must advocate for public policy to protect the needs and interests, not only of African Americans, but all disenfranchised citizens.

I have an older member in Mississippi who put it best: The health of any society should be measured by three key measurements – how well do we care for our elderly, are we preparing our young people for a future, and are we protecting the rights of the disadvantaged. That's the measurement we should all look for. And looking at this current administration, we have a long way to go.

But that's why we must continue to have the NAACP. Advocacy for social justice to ensure equal protection under the law is paramount in this time. And just like those individuals who gathered in Niagara and later in New York, and decided that whether you were black or white, male or female, we all should have a voice around the formation of public policy.

But the unique thing about the creation of the NAACP in 1909, black men had a right that white women did not have – the right to vote. It was also recognized in 1909 that many African Americans at this time picked up arms to reinforce Union troops, to ensure that these United States remained as united states and not two separate entities. But the Confederate States of America, with Jefferson Davis selected as the president, was a movement of individuals who committed treason against this nation. It was a movement based on a policy landscape that they wanted to uphold, an agricultural-based economy supported by exploiting people for free labor. We call that slavery.

They also understood that the fight that was taking place post-Civil War would continue, and that to ensure that individuals of African descent would not be exploited for cheap labor, there needed to be policy protections for those individuals.

We were in the middle of a campaign and it was around the right of workers to collectively bargain. And I was asked a question by a reporter, "Why would the NAACP care about organized labor?" And if you begin to peel the onion, you recognize that the fight for voting rights, the fight for quality education is all based on the policy landscape of who is exploited for free and cheap labor. It's about money.

Many people talk about, that if you weaken education, you cheapen labor; that if you suppress the right to vote, you limit the access of those who are impacted by public policy from having a true voice in the formation of that same policy; therefore, they have no say and they can be exploited.

Make no mistake where we are in this democracy. Those who have the right to vote have say; those who don't, don't. Often said in a democracy, your vote is your currency. And

if you're bankrupt and you go to the store you can't purchase anything. But if you're exercising your currency and if you collect that currency with others who have your interests, you can purchase the grocery store.

That's who we are as the NAACP. All of our policy concerns and issues germinate from that raw fact – that individuals who are seeking to exploit us for free labor, and we'd seen after the passage of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments that we had to exercise our right to vote in a way in which we could build quality education systems equal to all, and ensure that we will not be exploited for cheap labor.

So when we look at today's reality, we've been here before. It is nothing new. But what's most important, the founders and the individuals who built out the NAACP understood that all politics are local. And as a result, we begin to charter units all across this country. And today we have 2200 units because of the landscape of public policy oftentimes start in local communities.

So we are in Hilary Shelton's city; we call it Washington, DC. And as you walk up and down the halls of Congress, he, like I, knows many of the policy considerations started in some local community in this nation. Oftentimes I ask the question, have you ever heard of Columbiana, Alabama. Has anyone ever heard of Columbiana, Alabama? Columbiana, Alabama, is where the case we now call *Shelby v. Holder* started from. That was the case that gutted the Voting Rights Act. That was the case that took out Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act. But it's in local communities like Columbiana, Alabama, where the NAACP exists.

It is in communities that nobody thinks of. It is in Bolger, Louisiana, where a redistricting case bubbled up and became a Supreme Court case. It is in all of the areas that many of us come from, or our parents come from. And as a result of that, the NAACP is as relevant today as it has always been. Because it's in these communities where our members serve as the eyes and ears, to ring the bell when no one can hear the noise, to call out the questions of unfairness.

I oftentimes give the example of Miss Dunlap. Miss Dunlap lives in a small community called Shubuta, Mississippi. I'm sure you've all heard of Shubuta. [laughter] It's in Clark County. And Miss Dunlap may or may not have had a lot of exposure to education. But Miss Dunlap, as president of the Clark County branch, she is driven by one principle: I don't think it's right, I don't think it's fair. That value question of fairness. That when she goes and sits in on a school board meeting and she no longer has children in school, she has great-grandchildren in school now, but when she sits there and she's listening to the school board talk about school policy, her comp is, even if she doesn't understand all of the conversation, is the question of fairness.

How can we turn our back on the Miss Dunlaps of the world? It's the Miss Dunlaps of the world who can identify when school districts in rural America are seeking to divert public funds for use that would not benefit all children. And if they perfect that policy, Hilary Shelton, as he walks down the halls of Congress, he will see that policy bubble up as a national policy scheme. That's why we must have the NAACP.

Voting is paramount. With all the schemes to suppress and divert our ability to cast a ballot, not only African American, but young people as well, that the closing of precincts and the redrawing of political boundary lines that will favor one particular political over another, the ability to have a mentis[?] test, called voter ID, of whether or not you can vote. The very nature of voter registration is a vote suppression method. Let that germinate for a minute. Why would someone need to fill out an application to exercise a right? Think about it.

In this day and age, as more states require voter ID, and we are citizens, why should we fill out an application to determine whether or not we should vote? See, a true democracy encourages and allow all of its citizens to vote. Is it so much to ask that we follow the example of Australia and 200 other nations with compulsory voting? Is it outrageous to say restrictive polling places should no longer be in place? What are you talking about? Why should an individual get off at work at five and drive home, and possibly pass three or four precincts in order to cast a ballot? Why should we allow the most sacred part of a democracy only to take place in a 12-hour window? On a Tuesday, when most people go to work?

As the NAACP, those are the questions that we must confront with some critical thinking. Not that we are running behind the headlines of the day, because there will always be headlines of the day. But fundamental to what we pursue is making democracy to work. To ensure that equal protection under the law is afforded to all citizens. And that the uses of devices to discriminate should no longer exist.

Just last week, our state conference in Texas won two important cases, one dealing with redistricting and the other dealing with voter ID. Three months ago, our state conference in North Carolina also won a major redistricting case. And we commend the policymakers in Illinois for making voter registration automatic. Because in a democracy, if our currency is our vote, we should celebrate everyone having at least that one dollar call to vote that they can exercise.

It is the role of the NAACP to protect democracy. It's to ensure equal protection of the law is afforded to everyone. And so, when we look at the headlines and we are compared against the Movement for Black Lives and say, "Well, are you relevant because these young people are in the streets and protesting?" I'll say, yes, and we celebrate and support them. Why? Because we've always had young people in the street protesting. And no matter what platform or vehicle they use, we must encourage young people to have a voice. Because it is those young people who will be the future leaders. And it's through agitation that we find ourselves perfecting this thing called democracy.

As we move forward, it is our goal to truly focus on how do we impact the formation of public policy looking at this current landscape. There are key milestones coming up. The midterm election of 2018 is critically important. I grew up during a time when every election, someone says "This is the most important election of your life." I'm sure you all never heard that before, right? [laughter] For the first time I can agree. This truly is one of the most important elections that's coming up.

With the cuts in the budgets dealing with Census, from this administration, and the removal of the pilot from one of the rural communities, we are facing a Census count where many communities possibly will be undercounted during a time when our technology should allow us to have a more accurate count.

The presidential election, and then this thing called redistricting, perhaps the most significant touch point in any democracy structure like ours. See, the drawing the political boundary lines by which individuals are elected in many ways is more important than the actual election day, because if you understand how to draw the lines, you can determine the winner for the next ten years.

Those are the key things that we as an association will be focusing on over the next five years. Now in between time, there will be many Charlottesvillees because unfortunately this administration has created an atmosphere to allow domestic terrorists to exist. To allow those who understand and have a sense of history that the monuments that have been erected in the 1930s and '40s and '50s for the most part are monuments to individuals who took up arms against this nation, it's treasonous, over the question of exploiting people for free labor.

We shouldn't celebrate that. This shouldn't exist. But we should not get distracted over the question of its existence when the real issue confronting us is, who controls the public policy, and whether or not we have a voice in that process.

I teach a class every so often at Tougaloo College in Jackson, Mississippi, and we talk about public policy. And I had a student one time who actually said, "What's the real deal here with public policy?" I said, "Well, at the end of the day, it's about who gets taxed, who's not taxed, and what the tax dollars are spent on." That's our fight. Do we create a tax scheme to support public policy to ensure our elderly are cared for in their latter years? Will we maintain a tax scheme and make sure it's equitable so that we have quality education for all of our children? Are our taxes being used to create the systems that will support individuals who suffer from some type of mental health issue, or our veterans who are coming home, the disadvantaged, so that they are cared for and protected? That's the health of any society – our elderly, our young people, our disadvantaged. And the value of any public policy is based on the taxes, how the tax policies are written.

We must protect all of our citizens. Domestic terrorists shouldn't exist. We wish we had a commander in chief who would not sow the seeds of divisive behavior, which would allow domestic terrorists to bubble up. As the NAACP, we will respond to that. But the bigger questions for us will always be the question of ensuring that democracy works for all.

Thank you. [applause]

MR. BALLOU: I want to start with current news and Hurricane, now-Tropical Storm Harvey. You've noted several times that you have, even though you were born in Detroit, you reside in Mississippi, you've done a lot of work on the Gulf Coast. What's the NAACP doing in terms of responding to the crisis in the Gulf Coast and Tropical Storm Harvey?

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you. Having been someone who's very active during Hurricane Katrina, it is critically important for the Association to ensure that the recovery is equitable. And so, starting as early as Friday, our state conference president, our Houston executive director, and our staff who reside in Houston, we started convening conference calls to talk about what the evacuation plan looked like, what were the support mechanisms. And each evening, we talk about that so that we can respond timely to communities who may not show up on the radar screen.

Just this morning I had a meeting with FEMA. Our goal is to ensure that resources directed from the federal government don't skip neighborhoods. And if we don't skip neighborhoods, we would ensure a fair recovery.

So that's our responsibility, to make sure that equity is at the table when the discussion of recovery is being discussed.

MR. BALLOU: Just a quick follow-up on that. You were flying it up to policymakers and FEMA, and so forth. Oftentimes people – and you cited Katrina – people say, Okay, it's time for you to evacuate. Not everybody can pick up and leave, because even Katrina, 90%, more than 90% of folks left before the storm. And yet, there were still 10-15% left. And they were stuck, and some of them couldn't move because there was a financial issue; there was an affordability issue. Have you been working closely with policy officials to make sure that the funding is there to get people from Point A to Point B?

MR. JOHNSON: Our state conference president in Texas, Gary Bledsoe, he's on the call two, three times a day, along with Hilary Shelton, with Representative Sheila Jackson Lee and Representative Al Green on that question, to make sure resources are directed to the affected areas, and those resources are directed to communities who are most in need.

People can't evacuate because of resources. Going through Katrina, a small church on the peninsula called East Biloxi. And Reverend Haynes, who has since died, they had gone through so many hurricanes that he will open the church up; it had a second floor. And the senior citizens in that community knew to go to Main Street Baptist Church– Main Street Missionary Baptist Church. He used to correct me all the time. [laughter] Be clear, right?

Because they would go to the church, and if the water began to come in, they would go upstairs. And they would pray the night away, or they'd pray the storm away, as they say. That's the reality for so many people because in that community, Main Street Missionary Baptist Church was their refuge. And you hear individuals who work every day and retire, and because they were low wage earners, they did not have the means to evacuate. And some of them were so stubborn, they weren't going to evacuate anyway. But they had a place to go.

Main Street Missionary Baptist Church is also the hub for our Biloxi branch of the NAACP. And so, we exist where the need exists and where our people exists. And our role is to ensure that individuals who will go to a church or seek us out, that we do all we can to get the resources to support their quality of life.

MR. BALLOU: There's a bunch of questions that have been sent in.

MR. JOHNSON: Only the easy ones, I don't want no hard questions. [laughter]

MR. BALLOU: I'm just going to ask you the fair ones, which are all of them. [laughter] You talked about a number of issues, one of them being about the Confederate memorials, and there's a number of questions that hit on that issue. Do you think that they should be taken down altogether and moved to a museum? You have specific ones in Atlanta, you're talking about whether or not they're going to erect an MLK memorial on top of Stone Mountain; you're talking about any number of configurations of this. What is the approach that the NAACP supports? Is it a locality-by-locality thing? Or an across-the-board thing? What's your view on that?

MR. JOHNSON: Part one, symbol that recognizes treason should not represent a governmental entity, period. If there are those who want to recognize and celebrate that, it's okay to relocate them in a museum or a cemetery; I prefer cemetery. [laughter]

Part two, even if it exists, we believe people have the right to have monuments, but it should not be financed by public dollars, on public display. [applause] It should not.

And thirdly, and this is closer to me, there should be no state that still has a Confederate symbol in the flag, like Mississippi. The symbol that we identify as the Confederate flag wasn't even the Confederate flag. It was the battle flag of General Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. When he died, he stated that the relics of the Confederacy should be buried. He did not want any of those symbols when he died. The Confederate flag as we now identify it as was resurrected in the 1930s during the second reign of terror when whites, particularly in the South but across the country, after watching *Birth of a Nation* in 1914, began to use it as a symbol of terrorism. We quickly identified the burning cross in someone's yard as a sign of terrorism, but next to the cross was always that Confederate symbol. It should not exist. It should not be tolerated. And if there are any entities that have a display of 50 flags, remove Mississippi's flag if you want to move forward as a nation. [applause]

MR. BALLOU: That can answer this question; I can put that one down because that was Benny Thompson. We've had your predecessors here for many years and you hear this question a lot. How do you respond to the criticism that the NAACP has outlived its usefulness?

MR. THOMPSON: Just watch the news. That comes up.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Repeat the question.

MR. BALLOU: Whether or not the NAACP has outlived its usefulness. It comes up for all of his predecessors. I've been here long enough to see it.

MR. THOMPSON: That is a question that will bubble up. When I took the position of state president of NAACP, my counterparts also said the same thing. But if you move across this landscape, in many communities the NAACP is the only vehicle individuals have to raise their voice and ensure that democracy exists in their local community. We are too quick to follow trends, bells and whistles. NAACP has never been a large city operation. It is in communities no one knows of. It is the vehicle for individuals who live in those communities who are so oppressed or trying to prevent schemes of oppression. It is a representative organization, a small-d-democracy, that any number of individuals come together and they make that local unit work.

So for someone to question whether or not a collection of individuals who live in rural communities, or any community, should not come and utilize the vehicle of the NAACP, I often ask, Do you understand who we are, what we do, or are you relevant, or is the question you're asking me relevant?

MR. BALLOU: Speaking of relevant questions, you talked about public policy and the White House. You brought that up a number of times. The Congressional Black Caucus has gone back and forth about how and under what circumstances it will meet with the President. What's the NAACP's take on how it will be engaged with the Trump administration, or not? And if so, why; and if not, why not?

MR. JOHNSON: Well, with any President, our position in terms of meeting is based on substance, not ceremony. And as I understand, the members of the Congressional Black Caucus, as they deliberate the question of meeting, their question is, are we meeting with the President based on substance and not ceremony. No President should utilize an institution like the NAACP as a photo op. If we're talking about substantive outcomes, then we welcome that meeting. If we're talking about a photo op, then that's a meeting that we will not have. [applause]

MR. BALLOU: What's an example of a substantive outcome?

MR. JOHNSON: You want one, five or ten? [laughter]

MR. BALLOU: One. Maybe two.

MR. JOHNSON: A substantive outcome is abolishing the Kobach-Pence Commission. A substantive outcome is not seeking to remove the consent orders in municipalities where police officers have been bad actors. A substantive outcome is not reversing the previous administration's rule that they will not give military equipment to local law enforcement. I could keep going.

MR. BALLOU: In fact, you just talked about yesterday's decision. You released a statement on it. What's the NAACP prepared to do now that the executive order has been issued to give military style equipment back to police departments which happened in the wake of Ferguson?

MR. JOHNSON: In many ways, we're like the press. We can sound the alarm, we can make the noise and we can educate the community, but we have three branches of government. We have three branches of government. So our next step to really change the dynamic is in 2018 to ensure that we increase turnout so that people who come from communities situated like the ones we represent can have a true voice on what the makeup of the second branch of government which is Congress so that they can be better positioned to hold the President accountable.

But executive orders, it is just that, executive orders. And unfortunately, elections have consequences. So we have to deal with some of these executive orders until 2020.

MR. BALLOU: Since you said elections have consequences, and you talked about voting, you talked about compulsory voting, which is not happening in this country any time soon.

MR. JOHNSON: Maybe not.

MR. BALLOU: How do you see encouraging people to get voting levels up to even more unprecedented than there were in, for example, 2008 and other election cycles where they may make a difference towards a 2018 or a 2020 or other election cycles?

MR. JOHNSON: That's the challenge that we're facing as an association. That's why we're going through this interim period. How can we as a national office be more responsive and supportive of our local units and their ability to increase the level of participation. We entered this space understanding that if we continue to do what we've always done, we're going to get what we always got. And so, my challenge and the staff's challenge – and I didn't recognize that our chief operating officer is here, Claudia Withers, and Marvin Owens, who is director of our economic development department – our challenge is, how do we work to ensure that we as national staff are responsive to our local units so they can be stronger in getting the vote out when we need to.

In many communities, African Americans vote at a higher percentage during presidential elections. The problem we're facing, we're not voting in local and state elections when we need the vote to turn out. And so, the challenge for the NAACP over the next year or next several years is to elevate the conversation so people can understand it's not just the presidential election cycle we need to turn out for, it's every election cycle.

MR. BALLOU: Voting rights. What's your reaction to the Supreme Court Associate Justice Alito's stay that's put on the latest voting rights decision in Texas?

MR. JOHNSON: Repeat the question one more time.

MR. BALLOU: What's your reaction to the stay Supreme Court Justice Alito put on the latest voting rights decision in Texas?

MR. JOHNSON: When you look at–

MR. BALLOU: You might explain that to folks that don't know what the decision was.

MR. JOHNSON: I'm going to let Hilary explain because he's brilliant.

MR. BALLOU: Come up, Hilary.

HILARY SHELTON: I'm limping a bit; I made the mistake of playing basketball with my 13-year-old. [laughter]

MR. BALLOU: Did you win?

MR. SHELTON: No, clearly not. [laughter] So our concern over the *Shelby* decision is very clear quite frankly any time you have something that actually dismantles the protections that were put in place for our Voting Rights Act that are very much needed. And one of the most important provisions, of course, is Section 4(b). When we talk about this decision, we're really talking about a roundabout, almost rope-a-dope approach to weakening voter protection in the United States. So it's no surprise the same organization that worked so hard to put the Voting Rights Act of 1965 in place in the first place is strongly opposed to anything that will weaken it. As a matter of fact, even at the time of the *Shelby* decision, the NAACP had already been working on a number of provisions even with the Voting Rights Act very clearly in place to strengthen the opportunity for every eligible American to cast an unfettered vote and make sure, indeed, that vote is counted.

So the only thing I want to add to that, kind of on the sideline, questions were asked about what we want to see happen in any conversation with the President of the United States. We believe in paper, and I apologize to the environmentalists in the room. I've got copies of our full legislative agenda and everything we would ask the President to help support moving forward to make sure our country lives up to its constitutional promises of equal protection and equal opportunity under law. I've got those for you when the meeting is over, by the way. [laughter]

MR. BALLOU: Thank you. Anything else you want to add on that? Or we'll move on to the next question.

MR. JOHNSON: Isn't he smooth? [laughter]

MR. BALLOU: No more basketball. Let's see here. Oh, this is interesting. We just had a big title fight this weekend with Conor McGregor and Floyd Mayweather. Floyd Mayweather has a repeated reputation for domestic abuse charges. What role, if any, does the NAACP have to play in combating domestic violence given that African American women experience disproportionately higher rates of death and injury from domestic abuse? If no such initiatives exist, why not?

MR. JOHNSON: We are a policy-focused organization. We care about all of the

citizens in our community. And if we play any role in that, it's to ensure that women, along with children, along with any aggrieved party has equal protection under the law, that the law is sufficient to provide the protection. And what we've seen over the years is an imbalance in terms of how the law is applied to protect women who have been abused.

Some of that falls into our scope, some of it doesn't fall into our scope. And we recognize we cannot be everything to everybody, but we support those who advocate to ensure that women, along with children, along with anyone else who are being abused, that the law is applied equally, and that's a good law that provides the necessary protections.

MR. BALLOU: I think Hilary wants to come back.

MR. SHELTON: I apologize again. Let me limp over to the microphone. [laughter] Derrick is absolutely right, but let me also say this for the record. The NAACP was one of the organizations that actually introduced the Violence Against Women Act working with now-former Vice President Joe Biden. We worked for every improvement along those lines, making it a permanent agency within the Department of Justice. Very proud of that.

Also, we've worked to make sure, as Derrick said earlier, the real value of a nation is not just what it says, but what it's willing to actually put its resources toward. We've always worked very hard to make sure that the Violence Against Women department within the Department of Justice is fully funded, and we'll continue to work in that direction. It's extremely important to us and our communities, and throughout the country.

MR. BALLOU: Thank you, Hilary.

MR. JOHNSON: Don't sit down! [laughter]

MR. BALLOU: We'll stick with sports. The NAACP has joined the fraternity of Colin Kaepernick in writing the NFL commissioner and demanding his reinstatement and wanting some explanation as to why he hasn't been signed. Have you gotten a response from Commissioner Goodell?

MR. JOHNSON: We have not.

MR. BALLOU: What are your next steps for pressing him for an answer?

MR. JOHNSON: The reason why we decided to enter into that conversation is based on the principle of those who have a platform, entertainers and athletes, have always been a key vehicle for us to raise issues. The issues that Colin Kaepernick was raising are legitimate issues. And we would hate to see the NFL or any industry suppress the voice of individuals who are willing to use their platform to advocate for social justice.

We are mourning the death of Dick Gregory. He was the vanguard of using his platform to advance social justice. I oftentimes work with Danny Glover, who uses his platform to advance social justice. And so, for the NAACP or any group to stand idly by with

the appearance – we don't know the facts; that's why we asked for a meeting – with the appearance seeming to be that the NFL is seeking to suppress his voice, then we have an obligation to support those who are willing to speak up on issues of social justice.

Our next step, we've asked for a meeting with the commissioner. If we're not granted the meeting, we're going to be working with the NFL Players Association to make sure we work with them and through them, because if they can do it to one player, they can do it to all the players. [applause]

MR. BALLOU: Just to remind those in the viewing audience and public radio audience who are joining late, if you do hear applause in the room, it is not from the working press; they are members of the public that are invited to our luncheons.

MR. JOHNSON: The press don't like what I'm saying? [laughter] No, no, I get it.

MR. BALLOU: We like you enough to invite you. Charlottesville. And we'll combine this into one question. You've issued a travel advisory to Missouri. We've had what happened in Charlottesville. Will you issue a similar travel advisory to Charlottesville that you've done to Missouri? And I'll add to that, why do you think white nationalist feel so emboldened to come out of the shadows with tiki torches, and everything else? Is there an upside to now that it's in our faces as opposed to under the rug?

MR. JOHNSON: We can say emphatically that the governor of Virginia and the officials of Virginia, they responded timely and appropriately to the event. They showed the level of concern and empathy that any policymaker should have when you have domestic terrorists enter into your territory. Because many of the individuals who were in Charlottesville were not from Virginia. They traveled from far and wide, from David Duke all the way to the person who drove from Ohio to murder the individual in the crowd. We see these individuals as domestic terrorists. We should not mince our words. They go to incite harm and contact. And for us to say that they're part of neo-Nazi only, or they're KKK only, or they're white supremacists only is not to fully appreciate what they're seeking to do and who they are.

I am not so young that I don't remember Timothy McVeigh. Timothy McVeigh is cut from the same cloth as the individuals here. And prior to 9/11, that was the biggest incident of terrorism on our soil, committed by a citizen of this country. We need to address domestic terrorists for who they are, and not try to excuse away what they do.

And unfortunately, this administration has created a climate where he tries to have false equals where none exist. Where he gives room for individuals so situated as domestic terrorists to feel comfortable to walk in public without the hoods anymore. That the candle ceremony is a Nazi ceremony, and the tiki torch was to represent the candle ceremony. And that this is not simply an attack on African Americans, it's an attack on Americans. That we must stand up and be clear with our voice. We support strengthening the Hate Crime Act, because data matter. Policy should be driven by data, not politics.

And so, when we were able to get the Hate Crime Act passed in 2009, a real important component was left out – the requirement of local jurisdictions providing data. And if we are able to get the data driven and look at hate crime, we will be able to identify almost everybody in that crowd basically local enforcement knows who they are. And we need to identify them for who they are – domestic terrorists.

MR. BALLOU: On the domestic terrorist question, this actually goes to public education, whether or not the NAACP is working with states and schools systems to try and not – in this questioner's, not mine, words – glorify domestic terrorists and people who purposely commit treason glorifying curriculums.

MR. JOHNSON: One of the thing we're going to be seeking to do in the near future is call a meeting with textbook publishers to talk about the content in the textbooks. Because what has happened for far too long, we seek to water down what took place around the Civil War. It was an act of treason, make no bones about it. And to whitewash what took place is only to suppress the tensions that are always bubbling below the surface in this country.

The question of the 21st century is a race question; that's what WEB Du Bois talks at in the *Souls of Black Folk*. He wrote that in the '20s. And we're still dealing with the question of race. We're dealing with the question of race because we won't let go of the past that's based on revisionist history. Revisionist history won't allow us to truly look at our future because we're always going to be stuck in the past. And the tools of race allow people to use others under a false narrative to control their vote.

In the South, if you take a public policy issue and you wrap it around race, you get people to vote against their interests. If you take a public policy issue and you wrap it around morality or religion, you get people to vote against their interests. We need to weaken the tool of race and racism so that we can have public policy that improves the quality of life of everybody, and that individuals are not being used and misinformed or miseducated. And I'm talking about white individuals now, working class whites. To think that they're part of some false narrative of white supremacy when in fact they are being exploited for cheap labor, like many other people.

MR. BALLOU: Another public policy question. You say that the NAACP is for public policy that helps African Americans and their marginalized communities. But the NAACP and other, quote/unquote, mainline civil rights groups have been criticized in the African American press and elsewhere for taking large funds from teleco giants like AT&T and Comcast and then backing policies, like approving megamedia mergers and attempts to kill net neutrality favored by those corporations. How do you respond to those criticisms. And they're referring to a piece earlier this year in the *Intercept* titled, "Civil Rights Groups, Funded by Telecoms, Back Donald Trump's Plan to Kill Net Neutrality."

MR. JOHNSON: I wish the writer of that question was at meetings with me over the last two weeks with two of the telecom giants who are really frustrated or upset or not at ease – is that a better word? – not at ease.

MR. SHELTON: Those are good words.

MR. JOHNSON: Good words, right? [laughter] Because of an op-ed I just authored that was published in *The Hill*. We're very clear that free, unfettered access to the Internet should not be based on a corporate interest, that the Internet now is the public free library, and it should continue to be public and free. So that's our position.

And the telecom industries are not happy about a clear position because— they say, "Well, we agree with you on that point." Well, I'm glad you agree with us. Now, the regulatory scheme to enforce that must be in place. You may not like the vehicle that currently exists, but we're agnostic to the vehicle; we need to ensure a free, unfettered access to the Internet.

And so, NAACP is always seen as, well, we're in corporate pockets, we're not timely on our issues. But if you scratch the surface, we do what we can to ensure a democracy that works. And if you have interruptions in the acquisition of knowledge, democracy cannot work.

MR. BALLOU: Andrew Young, the former mayor of Atlanta, among other accomplishments, pointed out over the weekend that there was a 65% approval rating for the civil rights legislation passed in the 1960s. He says the approval rating for Black Lives Matter and other groups is much lower, in the teens, and groups like the white supremacists, the Ku Klux Klan and others feel much more comfortable in speaking out and marching to make their views known. What should civil rights groups and just average Americans do to deflect the hate speech, not only against African Americans, but against immigrants, Jews, Muslims, and other religious minorities? How do people of color get, quote/unquote, our America back again?

MR. JOHNSON: This is where public policy matters. In 1915, when Woodrow Wilson aired *The Birth of a Nation* in the White House, it sent a signal to terrorists that they should increase their ranks. And we've seen an explosion in the membership of the Christian Knights of the Ku Klux Klan and other similarly situated organizations. That signal created a void that we had to fight against from that period, before that period, all the way up through the '70s with the passage of the Voting Rights Act, the Civil Rights Act, and many other acts. But it was public policy that made it uncomfortable for racial hate groups to exist, and we've seen their membership numbers dwindle.

We've seen individuals benefit from policies we were pushing; i.e., affirmative action. More white women benefited from affirmative action than African Americans. I cannot point to a single civil rights piece of legislation that we've advocated for that it only affected African Americans. No, it makes democracy work. It makes the quality of life for everybody better.

If it's us today, it will be you tomorrow. You, meaning the Jewish community; you, meaning Irish community; you, meaning Italians; you, meaning those with red hair and one earring in the left ear. Because people seek to divide. And if they are successful in dividing,

they can divert from the real questions. And the real question in this country right now is economic security. And when people feel insecure, they look for what tribe they're going to be a part of. And sometimes that tribe are tribes that are misinformed about what history really tells them over this question of white supremacy.

It is our role to unveil truth. It is our role to push for public policy that provides protection. And it is also our role to build coalitions across racial lines so we can make sure that when they come for us today, you are understand that if you allow it to happen, they're coming for you tomorrow. [applause]

MR. BALLOU: Before we get to our last question, just a couple of housekeeping rules. Or notes, I should say, not rules, on future events at the National President Club. On August 31st, journalist Sharyl Attkisson will be here with her book, *The Smear*. On September 7th, the Press Club will host four former assistant attorneys general, talking about the legacy of civil rights and the intersection of civil rights in the Department of Justice.

And on October 4th, our annual Fourth Estate Award will be bestowed upon ESPN's Tony Kornheiser and Mike Wilbon. The Fourth Estate Award is given by the National Press Club to a member of the profession who has exhibited lifetime achievement. And that is a scholarship and freedom of the press fundraiser. We hope you will join us on October 4th.

And before I give you the last question, I'm going to give you our traditional National Press Club mug. [applause] And since we've spent so much time talking about the Gulf Coast, we didn't talk about your native Detroit. So here's a fun question: How far are your Tigers going to go this year?

MR. JOHNSON: They're going to win! [laughter]

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Go, Tigers!

MR. BALLOU: Thank you. For these many questions and other events and information on the National Press Club, you can log on to www.Press.org. We are adjourned. [sounds gavel] [applause]

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