

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB HEADLINERS LUNCHEON WITH NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT LILY ESKELSEN GARCIA

SUBJECT: THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION EDUCATION AGENDA

MODERATOR: PAT HOST OF THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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PAT HOST: [sounds gavel] Good afternoon. I'm Pat Host; I'm the America's aviation reporter for Jane's, and I'm also on the Board of Governors here at the National Press Club.

Welcome to the National Press Club. Our guest today is Lily Eskelsen Garcia, the President of the National Education Association. I would like to welcome our Public Radio and C-SPAN audiences. And I want to remind you that you can follow the action on Twitter using the hashtag #NPCLive. That's #NPCLive.

For our Public Radio and C-SPAN audiences, please be aware that in the audience today are members of the general public so any applause or reaction you hear is not necessarily from the working press.

Now it's time to introduce our head table guests. I'd ask each of you to stand briefly as your name is announced. Please hold your applause until I have finished introducing the entire table. From your right, Kimberly Hall, Communications and Partnerships Manager at the Poverty & Race Research Action Council; Thomas Burr, Washington Bureau Chief for the *Salt Lake Tribune* and former President of the National Press Club; Rocio Inclan, Senior Director of the NEA's Center for Social Justice; Emily Wilkins, Education and Labor Reporter for CQ Roll Call; Betty Weller, Maryland State Education Association President; Lisa Matthews, Vice President at Hagar Sharp and co-chair of the NPC Headliners team.

Skipping over our speaker, Caroline Hendrie, Executive Director of the Education Writers Association; Alex Herrera Ramos, a DREAMer and a sophomore at Duke University; Catherine Morris, writer for *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education*; Linda Feldman,

Washington Bureau Chief for the *Christian Science Monitor*; and Peggy Sands Orchowski, Congressional Correspondent for Hispanic Outlook and Higher Education, and Senior Correspondent for *The Georgetown*. (Applause)

I would also like to acknowledge additional members of the Headliners team responsible for organizing today's event; Betsy Fisher Martin, Heather Forsgren Weaver, April Turner, Mark Scheff and Joseph Luchok.

Lily Eskelsen Garcia is president of the largest labor union in the country, the National Education Association. She is the first ever Latina elected to lead the NEA, and she joins us as students across the country are heading back to school. It's also a time when efforts are under way to further privatize public education and roll back student protections. The NEA represents three million teachers and school employees who work in K-12 schools, colleges and universities.

The union has been a critic of the Trump Administration's proposals for education. Last spring, Ms. Eskelsen Garcia said the administration's proposed budget was a wrecking ball aimed at our nation's public schools. She went on to say the budget, "shows how dangerously ill informed they are about what works for students in public education. Their reckless and irresponsible budget would smash the aspirations of students, crush their dreams, and make it difficult for them to go to college and to get ahead."

We will be interested to hear how she expands on these criticisms and some ideas she has to improve public education in the United States. Ms. Eskelsen Garcia has a long career in education that began by working as a server in a school lunchroom. Within a year, she found a job as an aide to a special ed. teacher, and from there a full time teaching job. Later, she would be named Utah's Teacher of the Year. She is a graduate of the University of Utah, graduating magnum cum laude in elementary education. She later earned her master's degree in instructional technology. Please join me in welcoming the self-described lunch lady turned President of the National Education Association, Lily Eskelsen Garcia. (Applause)

MS. ESKELSEN GARCIA: [speaking Spanish] It is an honor to be here at this, the hallowed halls of the National Press Club. Wow. And I'm also proud to sit up here with some of my colleagues that came to support me, Rocio and Betty, educators, incredible educators. But I want to give a special shout out to a student who came to support me, Axel Herrera Ramos, is an exceptional student at Duke University. He is here, born in Honduras. He came to America with his family as a child, and he is a proud doc-amented DREAMer and activist, and I would ask you to show him some love so that he knows he has some friends in this room. Thank you. (Applause)

I'm also trying very hard to concentrate on the message I want to bring to you today, but that's difficult because I have colleagues and their students and their communities in the path of the storm. And we're just cleaning up after Harvey and in comes Irma. And some of them told me that if the lights were still on that they were going to be watching. So just in case, I just want to send them our love and our thoughts and our prayers for their safety.

I was looking at a Facebook page that was up that several of our NEA staff posted pictures of their own boys and girls, their own sons and daughters, going off on the first day of school and it was so beautiful. Because you had all of these shiny faces smiling, new tennis shoes, backpacks. Really, this time of year is like Christmas for us. I'm a teacher. I mean, there's new tennis shoes and backpacks and teachers and support staff all over the country right now because our kids are coming. It's like Santa Claus is here.

It's just amazing. I have this urge to break into a public school and put up a bulletin board. I was arranging desks. You know, I'd be practicing our class theme song, which was always, "Don't stick your finger up your nose, because your nose knows it's not a place it goes." And we sang it with dignity.

And here I am, here I am, instead of in a classroom. I'm at the National Press Club. But it's actually very fitting. This is maybe poetic justice that I'm here because I always, for 20 years in the classroom, I always started every day with current events. And every morning, kids could get extra credit if they reported on an article that they read in this thing called a newspaper. Remember paper? Remember news? Good times, yes.

And they had to summarize it. They had to explain. They had to give an opinion. They had to know what the article was about, and then the other kids got to ask them questions about it. In my class, you got a jelly bean if you had a good answer. You got two jelly beans if you had a good question. And all my kids had cavities. I want that on my evaluation.

But my kids knew how they could get three jelly beans. Sooner or later, they figured it out and someone would ask, "So are we supposed to do something about it?" About whatever the issue was. There was a blood shortage in Salt Lake City, so maybe we could put on a blood drive. Yes. So, a senator thinks we should all wear uniforms. Should we write to him and tell him he doesn't know what we want? Yes. In good handwriting and be nice.

Cars are parked illegally in the handicapped parking space. Should we egg those illegally parked cars? No. No? We actually should not. Sometimes the answer is no. But mostly, the answer is yes, yes we should do something about it. I think at this point in my presentation, it's only fair to tell you, because I think you only hinted at it, I am a fabulous teacher. I am really, really good. You would want your kid in my class. I'm holding back. I'm really totally full of myself because I know right down to my underwear how important my work is. My teaching work is.

And I have the honor of representing three million National Education Association educators, teachers, adjunct faculty, bus drivers, custodians, the lunch ladies, the counselors, the librarians. If you work in an American public school, college or university, if you're a student teacher, if you're a retired educator, you can belong to the NEA preschool to graduate. We're so full of the importance of our work that we wake up every day saying, "What am I supposed to do about making sure that my kids have everything they need to make their lives everything they should be?"

Our work is the future of everything. And our work is so important, we can't hold it inside a classroom. Our work happens inside and outside. Thousands of people across this country this week took to the streets to protest this administration's cruel, senseless, unnecessary ending of DACA. Many of them were our NEA members supporting our students. And those same educators ended up going right back into their classroom, they were there for their kids giving them hugs and homework.

We have to be both in this world. We have to be activists and we have to be educators. And in this speech today, I have to do both. I have to talk about policy and politics, but somehow I have to leave you with not just what's in our heads, but what's in our hearts. The importance of the work that we do. We are facing a reckless, irresponsible administration that creates chaos and confusion, which is bad.

But he does something worse. He creates fear in children and that is unforgivable. For the first time in our country's history, and I've talked to these teachers, we have had to comfort crying children because they are afraid of their president. There were current events about Muslim bans and educators had to assure frightened children, little girls who wore hijabs, little boys name Mohammad, that the president couldn't hurt them.

There were current events about border walls and keeping out bad hombres. And educators had to assure frightened children with names like Alfredo and Juanita that the president couldn't hurt them. There were current events about humiliating transgender students who just wanted to go to the bathroom by removing protections against their discrimination from the Office of Civil Rights. And educators had to assure these transgender boys and girls, who so often struggle to be accepted, even in their own families, that the president could not hurt them.

And this week, there was a current event; that the president was stripping away protections from our DREAMers. He cruelly said, "Don't worry, be happy. Congress can fix it, no big deal." Donald Trump is playing games with the lives of a 100,000 young people, and he himself risks nothing. These undocumented young people were brought here as children. They graduated from high school, they have no criminal record. They're young people who did not make the decision to come, they followed their parents. They applied and were granted protected status because of their special circumstances. DACA allowed them to get a driver's license, to go to work, to go to college, to serve their country in the military.

DACA is an unqualified success on every level. It's humane, it's just, it's pumping billions of dollars into our economy to have educated, hard working, enthusiastic young people paying taxes, buying homes, working, studying, starting their own businesses. They are our students and we want to comfort them. But it's so hard to tell them that the president can't hurt them. They know the truth.

But we've taught them well, and so they know, and we know, the right question to ask. What are we going to do about it? If this were business as usual, we would have naturally turned to the Department of Education. Business as usual, no matter what party the administration would have had me think about how I could reach out to Betsy DeVos, a

woman who had zero experience in public schools with the exception of using her billions of dollars in Michigan to take public school dollars away from public school students to funnel it to private schools.

She actually did ask me to meet and I asked her to take a standardized test. I made it very, very easy; three questions. Will you hold privately managed voucher and charter schools to the same standards of the school transparency, conflicts of interest, as public schools? Will you privatize programs like special education, or Title I? Will you protect all our students from discrimination? Our students of color, our English language learners, our immigrant students, our Muslim students, our girls, our LGBT students?

I've never received a written answer, but her actions scream. On her watch, protections for transgender students against discrimination from the Office of Civil Rights of the Department of Ed. was rescinded. This week, she's supporting rolling back Title IX protections for victims of sexual assault on college campuses. She halted loan forgiveness protections from students who had been defrauded by the growing scam for profit higher education industry, the Trump DeVos budget proposes \$10 billion in cuts from programs like special education, Title I, after school programs, college work study.

There was one thing that they added, there was one thing they pumped millions of dollars into; a brand new, shiny, multi-million dollar federal program for vouchers for private schools. Instead of investing and improving the public schools where 90 percent of our students go, she continues with the career that she's made diverting scarce resources to fund private schools. So no, we do not turn to the Department of Education. NEA and those three million members will do something about it. We'll fight this agenda to take resources away from our students, to frighten our students will not ever be acceptable to us. And that's probably obvious.

What might not be obvious is that for me, this is not partisan. I'm from Utah. I have worked and played well with Democrat and Republican politicians all my life. I know how to find common ground on education issues, regardless of party. In my experience, most people are good people. They really do want something better for kids, better for families, better for their communities. We argue and argue and debate about what's a good idea and what's a bad idea. But time and time again, I have seen people of both parties come together when you can show them a plan, when you can show them a way forward that makes sense.

This administration is different. I do not trust them. And yet, I can say that and the next second say I am full of hope. I am full of the energy of hope. And that confuses some of my friends. I talked with people who tell me, "But there is no hope that Congress is going to get its act together in six months," that artificial timeline that Donald Trump set for Congress to pass a law to protect our DREAMers. They said, "When's the last time Congress got together and did a good thing for kids?"

Actually, it was December 10th, 2015. I watched it. I watched Democrats and Republicans who cannot agree on the time of day, sit down and undo the toxic mandates of No Child Left Untested. I watched President Obama take a pen and sign away an old law that

judged human children on a standardized test score and replace it with the Every Student Succeeds Act, ESSA, a law that gives us the opportunity to deeply measure whether students have access and opportunity and how that impacts their achievement. States and local districts, even as we speak, are completing their ESSA plans, plans that must, by law, be developed with educators who know those students so that we do something that makes sense, so that we can use the information to guide our instruction. So that we can advocate for real solutions for our students.

Because having good information is actually a big part of our secret plan. We have a secret plan, you'll want to write this down. Tell everybody about our secret plan, please. Our secret plan is we plan to make every public school as good as our best public schools. Now, here's what I rarely read in current events. Some of the best schools, bar none, on the planet, are found amongst American public schools. Think of the best public school in your state, usually they're in really nice neighborhoods. And that's where, you know, parents sold a kidney because they wanted to afford a house next to that school because that is an amazing public school.

That's where the kids are succeeding and getting scholarships to Ivy League colleges. That's where parents are excited and involved. That's where kids love their theater class and technology and sports. Those schools are not successful schools because of test prep. It's not successful because of cutthroat competition and fear that some private charter is going to close them down. They're good because they have highly trained, career professionals and support staff who have collaborative authority to be creative, to make instructional decisions for their students.

They have technology that works. They have books in their library. They have after school programs and a choir and field trips and a debate team. Our plan is to use our best public schools as a living model. There should be no reason why every public school doesn't look like our best public school. What works with our most advantaged students will work for every student. Equal access, equal opportunity, equal respect for that child.

The National Education Association and our affiliates like in Maryland, are just all up into the business of ESSA and getting it right. It is the letter of the law. We are taking advantage of it. The educators are using their voice to develop those state plans. There's dashboards of multiple services and support indicators, not just standardized tests. We're calling over an opportunity audit of each school across the nation. We're organizing at the local level to hold leaders accountable for all those promises that they make to students and parents and educators. It's the letter of the law, it's exciting, and it's not enough.

Our plan actually has to incorporate that and the spirit of the law, the spirit of the law that says every student succeeds at my school because I have a respected voice as the teacher. Every student succeeds at my school because I have a great idea, because I can bring people together, because nobody is going to stop my school from doing what it can do without anyone's permission.

Did I mention how good I was? I really am a great teacher. I was the Teacher of the Year. I really, really am quite full of myself. But I need you to know it wasn't because of my kids' test scores. I really remember what my kids' test scores were. It was because I made my kids work their little butts off and love it. My colleagues and I thought our reading basal was boring so without anyone's permission, we just put it up on the shelf and out of our own pocket and our troll book bonus points, we bought classroom sets of *Old Yeller* and *Charlotte's Web* and *Bridge to Terabithia*, and *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, and kids got mad at me every single day when I said, "Reading's over, time to close your books." "No, I want to keep reading." Because I made them love reading.

And guess what? If you love reading, you read a lot and you become a better reader. Rocket science, right? So, yes, we've got to worry about funding, we've got to worry about policies. We've got to organize to make sure we have what we need to make every public school look like our best public school. But in the meantime, nothing stops us today. Nothing stops us, with whatever they gave us, we will create something amazing, something unique that works for our children.

The Texas State Teachers Association asked me to come to San Antonio so that I could walk through and talk to the students and the parents and the educators at their early college high schools that are popping up all over that they're helping to organize. They are directly linked to community colleges so that kids in high school can graduate from high school having already earned an associate degree. They found a way of debt-free college for kids whose parents never dreamed they'd be able to afford to send them to college.

I went to Las Cruces, New Mexico. Educators in our local affiliate there wanted to find out what kids wanted in their school, and they interviewed them and they had focus groups and they surveyed them. They wanted to know what kids were thinking. Kids were thinking, they found out, "I'm hungry. I didn't have dinner last night. I didn't have breakfast this morning."

They were amazed at how many children lived on the edge of being hungry. And so they decided that they would change their name and now they're the Lynn Community Middle School, and they partnered with the Food Bank and healthcare providers and after school programs in the arts and sports and leadership clubs and the Chamber of Commerce cut the ribbon at the ribbon cutting ceremony of the new school. Everybody is all in.

And attendance is up and homework completion is up and parents are showing up. In Minnesota, our affiliate took me to some of their community schools. And in some of the ones that were hard to get teachers to want to teach because they were so lacking in resources, they were able to find training for every single one of those educators in the elite, international baccalaureate program. And now they've got educators lined up saying, "I want to be a part of that."

In New Jersey, in their most challenged communities, teachers are being trained in AP physics instruction through a program sponsored by the New Jersey Education Association. In Tennessee, they're using social emotional learning as a way to support

students who come to school with trauma from the violence that they have personally experienced in their own little lives. Everywhere in this great country, educators and their unions and parents and advocates and community leaders are embracing that public school in powerful, human, creative, loving, transformative ways, big ways that make the headlines. And lots and lots of small ways that you'll never hear about.

One year, my kids read a newspaper article about a school in our district called the Hartvigsen School for multiply severely disabled students. And a hand went up because Jason wanted three jelly beans and he said, "What if we're pen pals with the Hartvigsen kids?" We were pen pals with everybody, so what if we're pen pals with the Hartvigsen kids? I went, hmm. Went down to Hartvigsen School and talked to their teacher and she explained to me, "Most of my kids can't write their own name. Some of my kids can't hold a pencil. But, some of them can draw a picture, and we have high school kids that volunteer. Maybe they could write some of the letters."

And we made it happen, and we wrote to them and they wrote back. "I am Adam. I like snow. Write me back." "I am Karen. I am beautiful. Everybody loves me." And my kids fell in love with their pen pals and they said, they said, "Miss Lily, can we have a party? We want to invite our pen pals to a party." Now, if there's anything that Utah is famous for, it's that we like to party. Work with me, people. (Laughter)

I was a little worried because nothing in these letters that we were receiving really would have prepared my students for the reality of the lives of these beautiful little boys and girls. Most of them wore diapers. Some of them couldn't speak. Most of them wore harnesses to hold them up straight in their wheelchairs.

But we're Utah, we don't get out much. We are going to have a party and we decorated the multipurpose room and we had balloons and we had white sugar cookies and we had red Kool-Aid and we had the Hokey Pokey on the stereo because that's what we have at every Utah party. And then the bus pulled up, and we stood on the sidewalk waiting for our pen pals. And the bus ramp lowered their wheelchairs one by one. They had big name tags.

Now, I had told the kids, "Don't hug because it might frighten some of these kids. Put their hand out and maybe they'll shake your hand. But if they don't, then just wave at them." And so as one little boy came down and his name tag said, "Adam," and Jason said, "That one's mine." And he runs over and he throws his arms around Adam, and Adam hugs him back. And then everybody came over and said, "That one's mine, hi." And they started to meet their pen pals. And they hugged and they shook hands and they waved and they giggled. And we rolled everybody into the party and we danced the Hokey Pokey 472 times.

And we were bad. I wanted to take a group picture, so I get everybody together and I'm ready to snap. And then one little guy goes walking away. So we say, "No, no, no, I'm going to herd you back over here." I got everybody together and I'm ready to snap and this little girl turns around and hugs the person behind. "Okay, let's look over here, everybody look at me," and I'm ready to snap. And Jason says, "Wait a minute, wait a minute." And he

runs over to the cookie table and he grabs a napkin and he comes back, he said, “Hey buddy, you want to look good for the picture?” And he wipes the drool off his pen pal’s chin.

For the life of me, I cannot seem to remember Jason’s ranking on the Stanford achievement test that year, but I will never forget that that tough little boy wiped the drool off his pen pal’s chin.

I will tell you this. There are very few things in this world that frighten me. But I have been frightened in this last year. I've been frightened by attacks on the crown jewels of our democracy. Attacks on the free press, attacks on elections. And I have been frightened that people who don’t know Jason, who don’t know my kids, who don't understand the importance of what I do, who don’t understand what it is to teach and what it is to learn, people who don’t know what they're talking about, will destroy the brightest jewel in that crown. They will destroy that public school.

Our plan is to do something about that. Our plan is to fight for a public school that is worthy of our children. And in the same breath, our plan is to dedicate ourselves as professionals so that we are worthy of them. There's no reason to think that joy is on the agenda of this administration, but we are educators and finding joy is our vocation.

Our plan is to inspire, to include, to teach our students what it means to be a critical, questioning citizen of this beautiful, diverse, interdependent world. To be creative problem solvers, to be compassionate human beings. And we know what our reward will be, because it’s a perq. of our profession, that we so often become better people because of the lessons we learn from our students. They teach us how to teach them. They teach us to serve the whole, happy child and the reward is that we get a whole and happy adult. And that changes everything. That is the most important work. That is the future of everything and we don’t intend to let anything stand in our way. [speaking Spanish] Thank you. (Applause)

MR. HOST: Very nice, Lily. Anyone has questions, make sure to pass them up. I'll start with this first question. Do you have any hopes for a legislative solution with DACA in Congress over the next six months?

MS. ESKELSEN GARCIA: I don’t want to be flippant and just say yes, but I do have hope. And as I explained, I believe that ESSA was a model for bringing people together. Senator Alexander and Senator Murray, who probably have never agreed on anything, said, “We can do this.” And we know that there are Republicans out there that want to help students like Axel, that want to help our DREAMers. So that will be job one for us. The clock is ticking.

MR. HOST: I'm from Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Betsy DeVos is also from West Michigan. As you know, she's been very influential in education in Michigan. What are your impressions of what has gone on in Michigan?

MS. ESKELSEN GARCIA: If you Google Michigan charter and the word chaos, you will get thousands of hits. Which means that they have put those three words in the same

article that many times. A lot of people who actually support charter schools were not supportive of Betsy DeVos because she is the cautionary tale of what happens when you have unregulated privatized charters with no accountability. There's no cap, so that if you-- think about it this way. A public school that has an elementary school that serves 500 students cannot walk down the street and just start building another school because they feel like it. You have to make a case that that school is necessary, that it's an investment in the community.

What you have in Michigan and the reason it says chaos so often is up can pop dozens of schools in that community and they can all fail because there's no rhyme or reason to why you would have that many schools. Some schools have 10 or 50 or 100 kids and no one has a critical mass to actually have a decent program. So the public school closes down, the privatized charters are also each other's competition. No one has enough students to make a going concern.

And without regulation, you also have a lot of scam schools. You have people that have good intentions sometimes but they don't know what they're doing and so the schools fail. Michigan is what our country would head for if Betsy DeVos has her way.

MR. HOST: What should educators say to DREAMers in their schools?

MS. ESKELSEN GARCIA: What they're saying to them right now is we are here with you. We are fighting for you. You can go up to an NEA website, NEAedjustice.org, I believe that's what it is, and you can see our plan and what we're doing right now for our DREAMers. Anybody can go up, it's an open website. You can click in your zip code and up will pop your senators and your members of the House. You can write from that website. Let them know that you want our DREAMers protected. You want them to pass a law.

And what we're telling our DREAMers is that we're working for them, we're not just hoping for the best. We have a plan and we are working with so many other organizations integrated in a way that is astounding. So many people have come forward to say, "We will make this happen for you." There are no guarantees in this world, no one is going to make a false promise to these children. What we are saying is it will take all of us. You have our hearts and we are going to be fighting for you.

Our DACA students are, and young adults that used to be our students, know that they have a role to play in this as well. No one is sitting this out and hoping for the best. The hurricane's coming, and we are going to batten down the hatches and we are going to protect those students, and we are going to do whatever it takes to weather out the storm.

MR. HOST: The Education Department is in the process of reviewing state plans under ESSA and have already approved a number of them. How do you think the department is handling this process?

MS. ESKELSEN GARCIA: The few have been approved, we know that there's a deadline looming and so far, it has been moving along smoothly. And so we have great hope

that plans will be approved. That will be a small part of making every student succeed. And so now, the work will begin implementing those plans.

And as I said, the plans really are about what are we going to measure and what will we do for those that are at the wrong end of those measurements? But we don't want this to be about the bottom five percent of schools and what we're doing there. We want every public school to look like our best public schools. So we will have measurements now, depending on which state you live in, there will be different measurements. But looking at our most successful schools, we can then go in and take an inventory of what are your programs? What are you doing for your students? Why are you successful? And then that will become our rallying cry. We will say that is the model school. I wouldn't take one thing away from those students.

Our job is to say every school now must use this as a standard and if they can't, if they don't, then they are letting those students down. We will have a very powerful tool in equity and equality if we do our DACA dashboard the way it should be done.

MR. HOST: Do you fear that DREAMers will stop showing up at school for fear of being pursued by immigration?

MS. ESKELSEN GARCIA: Yes. I'm always afraid that someone who is afraid will hide. And it would be foolish of me to tell those students that they have nothing to fear. They have everything to fear. And this is the time that we have to be fearless. Them staying home will not solve their problem. Hiding will not solve their problem. But I understand a parent that would say, "I'm worried." I understand a college student who might say, "Someone knows where I live now. Someone knows where my family lives now."

Of course they're going to be frightened. But we have to stand with them and we have to be arm in arm so that they know they're not alone. It's got to be their decision, their family's decision. But whatever they decide, they will have to come through us first to get to those students.

MR. HOST: What types of conversations have you had with lawmakers in regard to the fiscal year 2018 budget, particularly in the House? Are there any areas you feel are underfunded now that you are confident will have more funding in final legislation?

MS. ESKELSEN GARCIA: We're actually quite pleased that the Trump-DeVos budget seems to be dead on arrival. Neither the House nor the Senate has picked up on vouchers, that we have money to prioritize in funding private schools. It would be hard to say pleased to any education budget that still continues to underfund special ed. We've never lived up to half of our commitment to special education on the federal level.

But we see movement. We see movement and the Senate bill being more generous than the House bill. But movement has to continue. And so we are meeting with our legislators, with congressmen and senators, even now because we've got to make the case for why education is the best investment on every level that we could be making.

We were devastated during the fiscal crisis and a lot of programs were lost, a lot of services to students were lost. We need those back. Times have changed and we need those students to have their programs, their teachers, their librarians, their school nurses, all of the people who were let go, and now's the time to do it.

MR. HOST: If you're glad that the Trump-DeVos budget is DOA, does that mean you support the three-month CR and would you like to see a longer one?

MS. ESKELSEN GARCIA: Oh, that's a good question. I have to think about that one, I do.

MR. HOST: It would be continuing last year's budget.

MS. ESKELSEN GARCIA: Yeah. When you've been facing a budget where you're talking about \$10 billion in cuts to essential programs, that has to be stopped. But the work that we've got to do right now is to make sure that people see education as that number one priority investment in this country. And I think that would send a resounding message to the Trump-DeVos administration as to what Republicans and Democrats wanted to see.

MR. HOST: What are the three communications goals of the NEA today, other than coming to the Press Club?

MS. ESKELSEN GARCIA: Oh, wow. I hope I made it clear. We have to be multifaceted. This isn't just about policy. This isn't just about passing a law or a budget. That is in service to our students. It's not in and of itself our goal to pass a law or even funding until you finish the sentence and say, "Because it's important to what we're trying to achieve with our students." We have spent 13 long, horrible years under No Child Left Untested. Some states, even before that, were doubling down on high stakes testing. If it doesn't show up on a test score, it's not important.

We lost the arts, we lost sports, we lost foreign languages, we lost clubs, we lost everything that you couldn't measure on a standardized test. That includes things like science, social studies, civics. And so now that we've got a chance to actually rethink what it is that children need, we believe that folks can picture in their head the best public school in their state.

I did have a reporter when I said, "That's our goal, whatever that looks like." Not taking away from those kids. Their parents were right, they fought for their kids to have everything they needed to get into an Ivy League school. And this wonderful reporter said, "Lily, that's nice, it's a dream. But we can't afford that." But we did afford that. I've walked into those schools, so have you. They're gorgeous. We afforded it for those kids and they're usually wealthy kids. They're usually kids in the suburbs. They're usually kids whose parents could subsidize piano lessons and ballet class.

What we have is a system that systematically and institutionally disadvantages kids in some zip codes. And that is wrong. And that is often racist. And what we want to do is to say what you did for those who have the most, you do for everyone. Where is that program? Where is that funding? Where is that change that we need to see? It is possible because it exists, now we need it to exist everywhere.

MR. HOST: What do you say to people who accuse teachers unions of only being interested in protecting the system as opposed to individual students?

MS. ESKELSEN GARCIA: I can tell you the names of my individual students one by one, hundreds and hundreds over the years. I've got pictures of all of them. Let me see my pictures. I would think that was a setup question. But, my NEA team said, "Oh, it's too bad you don't have pictures of that party." I got pictures of everything. And these kids are a lot older now, but these are my babies. I took these pictures.

And so whenever someone wants to denigrate teachers who actually organize themselves to have the collective power that we need to have our voice heard, and they say, "We don't care about the children," I want to know if those folks can tell me the names of the children that they love that don't live in their house? Because I can. And I'm the president of the NEA.

And I have the honor of serving with leaders like Betty over here, and she talks about her kids like it was yesterday. These are people who do what they do, we do what we do because we love our students and we honor our profession. And so, I would challenge anyone personally to meet me behind the school and talk to me about what I fought for all my life, what I fought for for my babies. Because they can't touch that.

MR. HOST: Congress has 22 days before the Children's Health Insurance Program funding expires. Do you think Congress can pass an extension?

MS. ESKELSEN GARCIA: They have to. They have to. These are those kids that fall into-- and I was around when the CHIP program first started. And I had kids that-- I taught at a homeless shelter for a while. That was the best teaching gig ever because I had a team around me. We had a health clinic, we had a dentist that came in. I had social workers that worked with the families. We had the kitchen down the hall. That school was in the homeless shelter. And I had all of the support that I needed as an educator to reach those parents and the students.

There's kids that have enough, they get by just fine with their parents health insurance from their work. Kids who are in the depths of poverty have access, hopefully, to programs. And then there are these kids in the middle who aren't wealthy enough or poor enough to get their own health insurance. And so I taught a lot of the kids in the suburbs of Salt Lake City who couldn't go to the doctor when they had a sore throat when I told their mom. "You know, you really should get that looked at." And they would cry. "I can't, I can't afford it."

So that Children's Health Insurance Program is helping real kids in real time. And Congress, yes, can do it. They've done good things before. It's time for them to do a good thing for students in so many ways. Thank you so much.

MR. HOST: We have about five minutes left, so we have some housekeeping I'd like to do. Coming up next week, we have an event on trends in how cities can better improve public transportation. And we also have the FDA commissioner, his name is Doug Gottlieb.

I'd like to present you with the honorary National Press Club mug because, of course, we ran out of apples this morning.

MS. ESKELSEN GARCIA: Thank you so much. (Applause)

MR. HOST: I do have one more question for you. Can you give me an example of some of the most fun that you've had in your teaching career?

MS. ESKELSEN GARCIA: Oh, Lordy. Wow, that's a lot of fun that I've had. I think the year we put on the blood drive. We put on a blood drive because you have never-- because I taught little kids, right? And you have never seen children more excited about seeing their teachers bleed because they had to donate their big brothers and their parents and they made us all give blood and they chased the principal around the multipurpose room dressed as vampires.

And so yes, we had a Halloween vampire "I want your blood" blood drive. It was fabulous.

MR. HOST: Well Lily, I'd like to thank you again for coming to the Press Club. I'd also like to thank the National Press Club Headliners team and staff for putting together today's luncheon. And we are adjourned. (Sounds gavel.)

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