

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB HEADLINERS LUNCHEON WITH  
REP. ELIJAH CUMMINGS (D-MD), CHAIRMAN OF  
THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

SUBJECT: THE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE'S INVESTIGATIONS  
INTO THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

MODERATOR: JEFF BALLOU OF THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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**JEFF BALLOU:** [sounds gavel] Good afternoon, everybody!

**EVERYBODY:** Good afternoon.

**MR. BALLOU:** I'm sure that gavel woke you up, right? Welcome to the National Press Club, the world's leading professional organization for journalists. My name is Jeff Ballou, news editor with Al Jazeera Media Network, where my colleague Mahmoud Hussein has been unjustly imprisoned by the government of Egypt for 957 days. And we call for his immediate release, along with other detailed journalists.

I am grateful that you all came today. I'm particularly grateful for my fellow members to have been asked to come back and pinch hit for our 112<sup>th</sup> Alison Kojak, who is getting some well-deserved rest while she prepares for her new duties leading the investigations unit at the Associated Press, having just left National Public Radio. And I thank the members, as always, for putting their trust in me to have served as their 110<sup>th</sup> president in 2017.

Today, we welcome our Headliner, Congressman Elijah Cummings, Democrat from the state of Maryland and Chairman of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. Before I get into the formal introduction, we're going to introduce the head table and a couple of housekeeping rules, the latter first. If you do have a question for the Chairman, those of you in the Ballroom, you have your cards on the table; please write them down and pass the up front, and we'll try to ask as many of them as time permits, and so forth.

Also, if you have a mobile device and you have slipped in here in the past few minutes and did not hear my earlier warnings before we went live, please silence your cell phones. We encourage the use of Twitter and other social media to follow along and to even post questions for today's Headliner Luncheon, but we would rather not have that accompanied by the usual beeps and tweets and sounding like R2D2 from Star Wars.

Now I'd like to introduce the head table. From my left, Mike Smith, a member of the Club, CEO at GreenSmith Public Relations, and a member of the National Press Club's Headliners Team member, and a volunteer at New Era Academy in Baltimore, which the Congressman has a lot of involvement with.

I should say hold your applause until the entire dais has been introduced. And to those who are listening on radio and watching on television, if there are applause or other expressions of approval or disapproval – we hope not the latter – it is a reminder that the general public is invited to our luncheons and not a symbol of any journalistic bias one way or the other.

Next to Mike, Lisa Matthews, news assignment manager at Associated Press and a member of the National Press Club Board of Governors; Jonathan Salant, Washington Correspondent at New Jersey Advance Media and one of my predecessors who served as president of the National Press Club; Ferdous Al-Faruque, who loves to simply be called Danny around here at the Club, medical regulatory reporter at MedTech Insight and member of the National Press Club Board of Governors; Jeff Barker, Washington reporter at the *Baltimore Sun*; Robert Costa, national political reporter at the *Washington Post* and host of *Washington Week in Review*, and a member of the Club as well; Dr. Maya Rockey Moore Cummings, chair of the Maryland Democratic Party and spouse of Congressman Elijah Cummings.

Skipping over me and skipping over the speaker for a moment, Lori Russo, president of Stanton Communications and co-chair of the National Press Club's Headliners Team. Sam Feist is the Washington bureau chief at CNN, is a member of the Club; he's rushing over here. It's been a very busy news day, as we all know, but we'll introduce him when the time comes. Alayna Treene, White House reporter at Axios; Bob Weiner, president of Weiner Public News and the National Press Club member who organized today's luncheon; thank you, Bob, for you and Lori and the team. Jennifer Cummings, daughter of the Congressman; Nikki Schwab, my fellow Southwestern, Pennsylvanian, and Washington reporter at the *New York Post*; and Jennifer Jacobs, White House reporter at Bloomberg News. [applause]

Now, as I said today, we welcome our Headliner, Congressman Elijah Cummings, Democrat from the state of Maryland, Chairman of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. His remarks today come in the wake of President Trump's comments about his district. He called Baltimore "a disgusting rat and rodent-infested mess, the worst in America." Mr. Cummings will also address the Oversight Committee's investigations into the Trump administration, the prescription drug industry's pricing practices, and other topics before his Committee.

Now serving in this 13<sup>th</sup> term in the House, Representative Cummings has been an outspoken advocate for affordable healthcare. He's been a leader in the fight against drug abuse, as well as the push for urban revitalization and assistance to lower income Americans.

I thank Headliners committee members, again Bob Weiner, the organizer of today's event; Headliners co-chairs and past president Donna Leinwand Leger and Lori Russo; Club member Ben Laskey; Gene Waskow of Congressman Cummings's office; and National Press Club Headliners liaison Lindsay Underwood; Club executive director Bill McCarren; Laura Coker from the office of the Club president; and many other staff members of the National Press Club who I thank for helping put together today's luncheon. Usually luncheons in August are a bit sleepy; not so much today. [laughter] About 230 of you in here. Thank you.

So with that, I am going to introduce Congressman Cummings who'll give some remarks. We'll have some Q&A, and we'll have some fun this afternoon. Up to you, Mr. Cummings. [applause]

**REP. ELIJAH CUMMINGS:** Thank you very much. God has called me to this moment. I did not ask for it. As a son of former sharecroppers from Manning, South Carolina, who plowed the fields, picked the cotton, picked the strawberries, I am indeed humbled by this invitation. I want you to fully understand that this invitation and this date was set a long time ago; two months ago, as a matter of fact. It just so happened that destiny has brought us to this moment.

I would like to thank the National Press Club; your president, NPR's Alison Kojak; Bob Weiner; and Jeff Ballou. I want to thank all of you for inviting me to join you today for this conversation. It is my hope that our hour together will be a conversation among citizens about the state of our government and the future of our precious country. And our democracy, by the way.

But before we begin, I want to take a moment to address the recent mass shootings that took the lives of people this past weekend. I've got to tell you— first of all, let me express my sympathy and condolences to the families. I also want to thank our first responders, those who go into dangerous situations to save lives. I thank God for you. [applause]

I'm truly heartbroken for these families and communities who are suffering at the hands of gun violence. I'm sorry that once again we are mourning the lives of those who were stolen from us before they reached their potential or their destiny. Gun violence seems to know no bounds; none. None – a school, a shopping mall, a movie theatre, a park, a church. Sadly, the only things that have changed is the location. The only thing.

I'm a man of deep faith and I believe that prayer works. But the American people are begging us for more than thoughts and prayers. They want action. And guess what? They want it now because they know that this is a critical moment in our history. That is why I've co-sponsored a bipartisan Background Checks Act which will require background checks for firearm transfers between private parties. This bill passed the House and I call on the Senate

and Mitch McConnell to take it up and consider the measure. And then I want the President to sign it. [applause] We want action.

We must also stop the hateful, incendiary comments. We've got to do it. Those in highest levels of the government must stop invoking fear, using racist language and encouraging reprehensible behavior. It only creates more division among us and severely limits our ability to work together for the common good.

As a country, we finally must say that enough is enough. That we are done with the hateful rhetoric. That we are done with the mass shootings. That we are done with the white supremacist domestic terrorists who are terrorizing our countries and fighting against everything America stands for and everything our phenomenal military has fought for. [applause] And when I'm speaking of that, I'm just reminded of a conversation that I had with my ten-year-old niece this weekend. She said, "Uncle Elijah" – ten years old, now – "Uncle Elijah, are they going to put us in cages?"

Are they going to put us in cages? This is coming from a ten-year-old. We are better than that! We must stand together with those who we do not look like, with those who we disagree with and recognize that we have more in common than we have that separates us. [applause]

We all are sick of this. We all want decency and respect. Decency and respect. We want our communities to be protected. And we want all to live in a country where our children are safe when they go to the mall or to the Walmart or to the local school. We must stand united and demand change.

One of the things that I've always thought about, and I think about it a lot, it's one thing when you have a government where the people are afraid of the government. Did you hear what I said? Afraid of the government. And we need to switch that around where the government is afraid of the people. [applause]

And I have some hope. I have hope because I know that so many people at home in every city in this country are watching the communities of El Paso and Dayton in pain. And we are grieving with them. We feel your pain. We really do. We feel it. As you prepare to bury your own, who were simply trying to live a life of peace, doing what Americans normally do. They are in pain, and we are in pain.

And from that pain though must come passion. And from that passion, we must do our purpose. We must shift that pain into action and demand that our government finally take serious action to prevent people intent on killing from obtaining guns and put an end to this senseless violence.

Now, let me turn to our discussion for today. I will touch upon the great work – and I do mean it – the great work my Committee is doing and trying to do – to eliminate waste, fraud, and abuse of this administration and our efforts to address critical issues like prescription drug prices. I will also briefly address the blatant attempts to attack my

community in Baltimore, and in so doing to divide us as a country. And to distract us. And I want to emphasize that – distract us from all the understanding that unites us and combat the dangers our country faces.

I was born along, with my father, my six brothers and sisters, in Baltimore. Still live in Baltimore. And I want my neighbors to know how humbled, and oh, God, I am so proud that they have trusted me to represent them in the Congress of the United States of America. Thank you, Baltimore. Thank you. [applause]

My neighbors by large are the most determined, hard-working and deserving people I know. People, anyone, and especially our national leaders, should be proud to commend as their countrymen and women. They are no different than the people of Texas or Ohio or anywhere else in our great nation. We have honest and candid conversations. We do not hesitate to critique and protest what is lacking and is wrong with our city. These criticisms are necessary for they are the birthing ground of constructive change.

At the same time, however, unbalanced criticism can be self-reinforcing, causing us to doubt our ability to improve. And we are improving every day. When I hear a criticism from anyone about the city, what bothers me the most is that we have people stepping on hopes of our children and the hopes of our people. When I have my niece asking "are they going to put us in cages," there's just something wrong with that.

Our children must know that we are doing everything we can right now to ensure they will have a better future. I will do my part until I die to make sure that it happens. Time is precious and I will not waste it on anything attempting to distract me from my purpose and my mission.

When I became the Chairman, I said I wanted to conduct rigorous, responsible oversight and address the issues that matter most to the American people. That is what my committee is doing and trying to do. We are addressing issues like prescription drug pricing, voting rights, criminal justice reform, opioid abuse. Each one of these issues is dear to my heart. And I have been addressing them a long time.

My committee's first hearing this year was on the rising cost of prescription drug prices. We heard from a mother, a lady named Miss Worsham. Listen to this. This is the first witness that appeared before my Committee as Chairman. Miss Worsham told us about her 22-year-old daughter who was rationing her insulin because she could not afford it. It was \$333 a month. She died. She died, do you hear me? Twenty-two years old. She will never reach her destiny. She's gone. \$333 a month.

I convened another hearing before the August recess where we heard directly from patients who described the devastating of not being able to afford their life-saving medications. They represent the millions of patients all over this country who need our help. And they need our help desperately. That's why I've launched an investigation into these high drug prices.

The American people simply want to know why drug companies are increasing their prices so drastically; what happens to those proceeds? And the steps Congress can take to make drugs and much more affordable: Oversight is the first step to finding the building and support for effective, lasting solutions that can really address problems. Oversight starts with gathering facts. And you all should know about that; this is in your self-interest, members of the press.

If we are being blocked and not getting the information that we need to hold administration accountable, then we've got a problem. And that's exactly what's been happening. Oversight, gathering facts. The Committee has collected tens of thousands of pages of documents in response to our requests to these drug companies. Our staff is analyzing the materials we have; we've received quite a bit so far, and we're expecting to collect even more.

But it's interesting that the Republicans on my Committee – listen up – wrote the drug companies and told them not to cooperate with us. You hear me? They told them not to. And that's unheard of.

And by the way, let me put a footnote right here. Don't let the Congress off lightly. And everybody keeps running around talking about the presidential race, which is very important. They talk about Congressional seats; that's important. But do not let the Senate go. Do not. Zero in on the Senate. Every single last one of them. We act like we don't have the power to change the Senate. We do. And we need to act now, right now. [applause]

So we also are investigating reports of voter suppression. And let me tell you why that's so near and dear to me. My mother on her dying bed, at 91 years old, uttered some words to me that I shall never forget that are part of my DNA. She's lying on her deathbed and she didn't say, "Elijah, I love you." She did not say, "Elijah, I'm proud of you." The last words that she spoke before she died was, "Do not let anyone take our votes away." Those were her last words.

So we also are investigating these reports of voter suppression. And let me say this. I get tired of people – and you in the press, again, should appreciate this – they want to be blinded by what we see. Blinded by what we see. And I submit to you, we are so much better than that. So I hope that we can learn from events of the past.

We are also making strides to improve the criminal justice system. The House passed my bill, The Fair Chance Act. The bill would prevent the federal government from requesting criminal history information from applicants until they reach the conditional offer stage. Very, very important in helping folks get jobs.

We also are addressing the opioid epidemic. I introduced the CARE Act with my colleague, Senator Elizabeth Warren because it's time for the nation to take a comprehensive approach to providing the resources we need to treat those who suffer from addiction. More than 200 groups have endorsed the bill. More than 100 members of Congress have co-

sponsored the legislation. I say, let's get it done. You can clap. [applause] You clap whenever you're ready to.

Very soon, I'm going to be traveling to West Virginia to talk with advocates and medical professionals about the challenges they face every day when addressing this epidemic. These are just some of the ways my Committee is working hard to improve the lives of all – and I emphasize all, I underline *all* Americans.

At the same time, we have launched investigations to combat waste, fraud, and abuse, which is our job, by the way, under the Constitution of the United States of America. That's our job. [applause] For example, we are investigating the administration's inhumane child separation policy and the decision to add a citizenship question to the census. And you all need to really evaluate – you in the press – what happened here. Let me tell you, let me give the rest of the story.

The problem is, the administration refuses to give us the documents we requested and have instituted a delay and stonewall approach. This administration dictated this approach the day after the Democrats took control of the House when he threatened a "warlike" – hello? – a "warlike," end of quote, posture against Democrats. This is frustrating and it takes up a lot of time and a lot of effort. We need to ensure that we don't let the administration's attempts to delay and obstruct us go unchallenged. The American people voted us into the majority with the expectation we will uncover, expose, and ultimately fix these abuses.

The Oversight Committee is a primary investigative body of the Congress. And our job is to ensure that the same requirements – same requirements – of transparency and accountability that have applied to every other administration applied to this one.

So now the question we must ask ourselves is this: What do we hope to leave for the next generation? That's the question we've got to ask. It is a major question. I say to the American people that if you want your government to do more to address the issues that matter most to you, then you need to vote. And you've got to vote like you've never voted before. [applause]

If you want your elected officials to work for you, and not for their own self-interests, then you need to vote. If you want more from the highest levels of government, if you want more – only if you want more – you need to vote. You need to get up and vote. It's time for America to wake up and pay close attention to what this administration is attempting to do. For example, despite warnings– now, listen to this carefully: Despite warnings from internal experts within the Commerce Department, that adding a citizenship question would be costly and harm the accuracy of the enumeration, this administration used the Voting Rights Act, of all things, as a pretext to try to add a citizenship question to the 2020 census.

New documents revealed this spring suggested the administration wanted to add the citizenship question in order to gerrymander legislative districts to help Republicans. That's not fair; that's not right to any of us. That means the billions and billions of dollars that are

allocated through formulas to redistricting to make sure that we have fair representation will not be accurate. We would not get what we have paid into.

And I want to remind the taxpayers of America: By the way, you pay taxes. And you deserve the very, very, very, very best from our government. We must have high expectations of our government. [applause]

Transparency about these facts ultimately led to the President dropping the citizenship question at the very last minute. Imagine what would've happened if activists, Congress and the media turned a blind eye to their efforts. I urge everyone to take a long look at the actions and policies of the administration to determine how they will vote in the next election.

I want to leave you with this thought: We are engaged in a fight for the soul of our democracy. I said that before our present administration won. As a matter of fact, I said it to the Democratic caucus. I said to them: This is not about Trump, this is not about Hillary. It's much bigger than that. This is a fight for the soul of our democracy, and we have to understand that. [applause]

So we in the Congress and you in the media must confront and overcome continuing attacks on our constitutionally created and protected institutions from sources both foreign and domestic. Those of us who were raised up to adulthood and citizenship in the time of Dr. Martin Luther King are not naive – we're not. We are not afraid. Above all, we will not be defeated. We endured and overcome such threats before, and we understand our duty to restore and perfect the evolving story of our American history – the good, bad, and ugly.

Dr. King so often reminded us that our nation's darkest hours have often been just before the dawn. Come on, now; go ahead, you can clap. [applause]

And let me remind you that he also said something that I think about every day. He said so often our silence becomes our betrayal – betrayal of future generations; betrayal of people like my niece; betrayal of those who have worked hard all their lives to be the very best that they can be, giving everything they have got. And the promise still rings true. If we stand together, if we march together, if we vote together, we can restore the light of democracy.

Now, I want to refer you to one thing. I know brother Ballou said don't use your cell phones. But I want you to Google. And I'm saying this to every preacher, every evangelical. I'm saying this to every speechwriter. Everybody. I want you to read this article because it sets in place where we are now. It's by President George W. Bush's former speechwriter, and it's from the August 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the *Washington Post*. And it's Mr. Gerson. He detailed the racist history of our country and those who victimized by it, making the point that racist comments reopen scars of so many past wounds. He also made a critical point that the President's racist comments expand the divide in our nation, and that those who allow those comments to go unchecked are enabling them.



I want to thank my wife, Maya Rokeymoore Cummings, *Dr. Maya Rokeymoore Cummings* – [applause] amen! – and my daughter Jennifer Cummings for being with me today. [applause]

And make sure you read that article. Everybody, make sure you read it. Every preacher, you need to preach from it. And I think what we need to do is be about the business of uniting our great country. We are a truly, truly, truly – truly, truly – a great country. But we have to keep it. We have to keep it.

And with that, I thank you. [applause]

By the way, I understand there is a sold-out crowd. And I really appreciate that. You've got press all up in the gallery. [laughter]

**MR. BALLOU:** And the questions have been flowing, Mr. Chairman. They indeed have. With your permission, we're going to have a little fireside chat, with your help because many of you have sent many napkins.

Just a couple of housekeeping reminders for those of you who may have tuned in late. You are watching the remarks of Chairman Elijah Cummings, Chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee of the United States Congress, 13-term Congressman from Baltimore, Maryland. And to our audience both here in the Ballroom, and those who are listening and watching, signs of applause are signals that we do invite members of the public to our luncheons. And therefore, it is not necessarily coming from those of us in the audience and on the dais who are members of the press who have to maintain our neutrality.

You had a lot to say, Mr. Chairman.

**REP. CUMMINGS:** Yeah, I did. [laughter]

**MR. BALLOU:** On the President's visit to El Paso and Dayton, just for the sake of trying to move things along since you very much want something done, should Congress cancel recess and come back to address gun control legislation?

**REP. CUMMINGS:** Yes. You have people are dying, come on, now. People are dying; do you hear what I say? People are afraid. They're afraid to even go to the movies. They are afraid to go shopping. They're afraid to go about their daily lives. I have so many of my constituents– and by the way, I represent a very diverse district; very. I have the richest of the rich and the poorest of the poor. And I literally have all people coming up to me, literally with tears running down their face: "Please, please, I do not want to turn on the news anymore. Please help us save our country." And they are very serious about it. So I think we have a responsibility, Mr. Ballou, to do whatever is necessary to save lives. So I'm prepared to go.

**MR. BALLOU:** You talked about your bill that passed the House and awaiting Senate action. In recent days, have you actually spoken to anybody in the Senate, Senate Majority Leader McConnell, in particular, to move this background check legislation?

**REP. CUMMINGS:** I'm constantly trying to talk to my counterparts, the folks over in the Senate. But no, I have not talked to Mr. McConnell, and I am asking him to allow the many phenomenal pieces of legislation that we have passed in the House to help the American people move forward, that he opens the door. Right now, he's blocking and doing everything in his power to do that. And so, I just ask him, humbly, to move away from the door.

**MR. BALLOU:** Do you think the President could move that along? Before he got on a helicopter, he very much said – whether you believe it or not is a different discussion – but he very much said that he thinks there's a lot of momentum converging around background check legislation actually making it to his desk.

**REP. CUMMINGS:** I'm so glad you asked that question. I think we really need to be careful when listening to politicians talk about what they're going to do. [laughter] No, I'm serious.

**MR. BALLOU:** [simultaneous conversation]

**REP. CUMMINGS:** I don't care. But let me be clear – you have a lot of talk – talk, talk, talk, talk, talk – but in the end, nothing happens. I remember after Sandy Hook, I joined with Congressman Rigell of Virginia, a Republican, to try to get some meaningful legislation passed. After sandy hook; you remember that? And nothing happened.

I think the question has to always be the bottom line – either you do it or you don't. And I think we play a little game here. When I was a kid, they would play the little game where you shuffle things and put them under stuff. So I think what's happening is that Republicans – and listen to me carefully – they're going to make all of these glorious statements, they're going to make a lot of glorious statements, say, "Oh, we love gun safety, we love it." But I guarantee you, the people want action. The people simply want action.

So what they'll do, I think, is they'll make these glorious statements and they'll know they can make these statements without any repercussions. And they figure the President's got their back. And even if the President says some nice things, I believe it's a situation where McConnell's got his back.

So again, what we have to do is demand results. And I would say to every editorial board in the world, you must ask for action. What have we resulted in? What has come out of it? I do believe, as I said to Michael Cohen, do not ask a question in these difficult times of why did something happen to you. Ask the question, why did it happen for you. And I do believe that this is a moment in our history that journalists – journalists – will be the ones who open the doors of government and bring us to a new sense of normal. [applause]

**MR. BALLOU:** Let me just nail that down. Has Speaker Pelosi told you that she plans to call back Congress?

**REP. CUMMINGS:** I haven't talked to her about it. But I would wholly support her if she did that. By the way, I think Speaker Pelosi is a phenomenal woman. I really do. [applause] She is courageous. And she is one of the few people that I know of that can galvanize this Congress to address the issues of the American people. Her conscience is in sync with her conduct, every single day. And so, I believe in her. I trust her. And I think if you're looking for signals as to where we should be going, look to Speaker Pelosi. [applause]

**MR. BALLOU:** I don't want to spend too much time on gun violence, but there are a couple things that have been popping up in the questions. As you know, the President is making his visits to Dayton and El Paso. He said before he got on the helicopter that his rhetoric "brought people together." [laughter] How would you size of the remarks, either this morning or his former remarks recently. Sufficient as consoler-in-chief?

**REP. CUMMINGS:** Let me be clear: I want the President, as these many families begin to bury their dead, to be a consoler-in-chief. It is so important. And that's what I want from him. That's what people expect from leadership. I remember when President Obama was President. We had a big meeting of the Democratic caucus. And somebody was complaining about him not speaking up on certain things. And President Obama said something that I shall never will forget. He said, "I didn't speak about it because I realized that every syllable that comes out of my mouth affects the world." And he said, "So I'm very careful about what I say." And I would hope that the President would consider that, and I would hope he will embrace these families. I was watching the news this morning, thanks to you all. And there were protests and what have you. So again, that is all I want from him right now. And to sign the bills, of course.

**MR. BALLOU:** Do we have a gun problem, an anger problem, a race problem or a mental health problem when you have these sorts of [simultaneous conversation]

**REP. CUMMINGS:** You have all of it. I mean, you've got people who need to have mental illness treatment. You've got people who are bent on doing harm. And you've got people who are there, they're like on the edge, and I think sometimes these comments push them all further. It's rarely that I go through a week without getting a death threat. Rarely. And I'm just trying to do my job. I'm doing what the people paid me to do. I'm doing what I swore to do. I'm doing what the Constitution says I must do.

Some people get it confused. I remember when I first was being interviewed by the *New York Times*. This is before I became Chairman. And they said, "They say that you are the President's worst nightmare." I said, "That hurts my feelings." I said, "I'm not about the business of being the President's worst nightmare." I said, "You know, I'm doing my job. I have these duties. But," I said, "guess what?" I said, "The President is probably a nice guy, but I love my democracy. I love my country. And I love my countrymen more." In other words, I love what has brought me to this moment.

And let me tell you something. From sharecropping parents, to the Congress of the United States of America, to a sold-out Press Club event, that's coming a long way. But only in America, and only because of democracy. [applause] I get that.

**MR. BALLOU:** As you indicated during your remarks, between the time you agreed to come here and today, the President made your appearance a bit more newsy from his remarks, targeting your district. But your own governor has recently said, Larry Hogan, that you cannot put all the blame of Baltimore City on the President. In fact, you can say I don't think you can put all the blame—

**REP. CUMMINGS:** Remind them that he's a Republican, okay?

**MR. BALLOU:** Yes, yes. Republican. And he prides himself on being the son of a member of Congress who helped advance the impeachment proceedings of President Nixon. But he did say that you could do more to help. And everything that you've been trying to do at the state level, you'd love to have more help from the White House and from the Congress to help the state help the city. What more do you think can be done?

**REP. CUMMINGS:** Lots can be do. All the cutbacks that would affect cities have been significant. And you know what? I want President Trump to come to my district. Oh, God, I want him to come so bad.

**MR. BALLOU:** Have you spoken to him? Have you asked him?

**REP. CUMMINGS:** No, I can't get to him. You are all doing a good job of that; put that in your editorials. I want him to come. I want him to come. I want him to come and look at my entire city. I'll ride with him for hours if he has to. Then I want him to go into Baltimore County where the richest of the rich are. Then I want him to go into Howard County where the richest of the rich are. And then I want him to see the wonderful things that are happening.

You know, when he beat up on people who have had difficulties and challenges in their lives, it doesn't help them. Nobody in this room would do that. And so, I invite him to do that. Again, there are many things I would talk to him about when he comes. Again, if we're talking about results, then you all need to see when he comes.

By the way, I want all of you all to be there.

**MR. BALLOU:** Oh, we'll be there.

**REP. CUMMINGS:** Let me tell you something. Baltimore is a beautiful city. Our former mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake is here with us. And I've got to tell you that we work hard every day. And she knows. We work hard every day. But when you have the poorest of the poor, it's difficult. I'm not going to kid you. It's not. But at the same time, we've done some wonderful things.

**MR. BALLOU:** Well, speaking of wonderful things, our good colleagues at the *Washington Post* did an interesting piece about all of the efforts that are under way, including yours – New Era Academy and so forth – one of the things that jumped out of the piece is that Michael Cryor who was tapped to head One Baltimore, one of his deputies said, Hey, you have all these wonderful things, but they're moving in so many different directions that not a lot is getting done. How do you get all the oars to row in the same direction to get things done? Not just in Baltimore, but take it up a few thousand feet, about urban challenges nationwide.

**REP. CUMMINGS:** Sure. You're right, we all have to be rowing together. And one of the things I challenged all of our organizations– and by the way, Michael Bloomberg has been phenomenal for Baltimore. And so many; Weinberg Foundation; I could go down the list. And what I have encouraged them to do, all of the philanthropists and people who want to help us, is not act in silos, but to bring together the resources so that they are made readily available to people. I've often said that there's nothing like an opportunity that you don't know about. And so, again, I would encourage our true leaders to continue to urge folks to come together and to work hard.

You know, when you have people in your district who are drug addicted, it's tough. And I would ask people, since you are all here, I want you to look at Mulvaney's former district; look at the stats on that. Just take a look at it. Take a look at it, and you will see it's an interesting comparison. It really is.

And so, again, we have to take people to higher ground. One thing I do agree with regard to President Trump, he said it's no time to be politically correct. And he's right, think is no time because we're trying to save our nation.

And so, we need funds with regard to drug addiction. We need funds to build up our communities. Listen to me, Mr. Ballou. There are thousands of people in Baltimore who are working hard every day. Some of them are not operating on a shoestring because they don't have a strong. But they are coaching the basketball team. They're tutoring children after school. They're doing everything in their power to allow our children to reach their destinies.

And I want to take him to the Fayette Outreach Center, something that I've worked on for 20 years. And he will see little children in a very depressed community sitting there learning code with regard to computers. I want to take him to all the different things that we need. And perhaps he will help us. But we need somebody at the top – at the top – making our cities– and by the way, rural areas, don't forget them, don't forget the rural areas. Don't forget them. Because they are very, very, very important. Every time statements are made about the city, they forget that there are many suffering in Appalachia, where I'll be going to Appalachia in a week or so. They've got a serious drug problem in West Virginia. serious. And guess what? I am just as concerned about them as my next-door neighbor

**MR. BALLOU:** We have just about four minutes left so I'm going to run through some quickies here. One, since you talked about Appalachian opioids, any prospects for further legislation on opioid abuse?

**REP. CUMMINGS:** If the Congress— and again, I want all your editorial boards, all of them, to look at the CARE Act, which Senator Elizabeth Warren and I co-sponsored, because it makes sense. Instead of the 10 billion that we're now spending, it would give us 100 billion. This drug problem is serious everywhere. And it would allow local organizations that are working on this issue to have access to those funds. We will work on making sure that doctors are trained and sensitive to drug-addicted people. And it will, again, bring more naloxone, which is a very important life-saving drug, we want to make sure that we get them to the people that need it.

The problem with naloxone, by the way, is that the supplier of the drug company of naloxone went up on the price, big time. And so, we're trying to get that in the hands of people who need it.

**MR. BALLOU:** Two quickies on prescription drugs. The Canada proposal the President announced caught Canada off guard in terms of reducing prescription drug prices. That's something you've talked about before your Committee. And conservatives in Congress seem to be bucking it, calling it socialism? How are you going to get a deal done? That's something that the President said he wants to get done.

**REP. CUMMINGS:** Let me tell something. Remember what I said a few minutes ago? Hide and go seek. If the President wants to get it done, it will get done. Hello? If the President wants it to be done – understand that – it will be done. This hocus-pocus stuff doesn't work when people are dying. It doesn't work.

And by the way, let me say this. I've got to say this. I know we've got a minute. But let me be clear: To our presidential candidates, don't get it twisted. Do not get it twisted. You must read the article that I referred you to. I'm hoping that in the next debate it will be a part of the discussion. It is so important that you go for higher ground. I must tell you that Barack Obama was a phenomenal President, a phenomenal president. [applause]

I've got 15 seconds. A lot of people may think that I did not cooperate with the Republicans when I was chairman. I cooperated to the Nth degree. I signed 700 letters with the Republicans investigating the Obama Administration.

**MR. BALLOU:** Two last questions. but before that, I'm going to present you with our National Press Club mug that we present to all speakers.

**REP. CUMMINGS:** Oh, wow! Just what I needed! [applause] Thank you.

**MR. BALLOU:** You can drink your tea.

**REP. CUMMINGS:** Thank you very much.

**MR. BALLOU:** Last two: Any closer to impeachment? And are your Ravens going to be my Steelers this year?

**REP. CUMMINGS:** Let me start with the second question.

**MR. BALLOU:** Do you want to wage something on it?

**REP. CUMMINGS:** I'll wage. We're going to beat you, man! We're going to hurt you. [laughter] What was the other question?

**MR. BALLOU:** On impeachment, any closer?

**REP. CUMMINGS:** I got so excited about that one. I have said over and over again that the time for impeachment may come. And I take the guidance of this phenomenal woman, Nancy Pelosi, because I'm on the inside. And the day that any administration disobeys a court order, then I'm for impeachment. Because you see, by that time we're in trouble; I mean, we're in big trouble.

What that says is that the laws do not matter. And I want you to understand the guys on my block, you know, the regular everyday guys, they asked me the question over and over again, "Is there two forms of justice?" Is there two forms of justice? And again, I'm going to do everything in my power to lift up our nation to make at the very, very best that it can be. And may God bless you all. [applause]

**MR. BALLOU:** Thank you, Chairman Cummings.

**REP. CUMMINGS:** Thank you.

**MR. BALLOU:** Thank you to President Alison Kojak in her absence. Thanks to the staff of the National Press Club, members of the Headliners Committee. We are adjourned. [sound gavel]

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