

Center for American Progress



FAITH AND PROGRESSIVE POLICY SERIES

“RENEWING THE CIVIC COVENANT: STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITY”

OPENING REMARKS:

MAYOR GEORGE HEARTWELL, GRAND RAPIDS, MI

MODERATOR:

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6:30 PM – 8:00 PM
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2005

TRANSCRIPT PROVIDED BY
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MARCO GRIMALDO: Good evening. My name is Marco Grimaldo and I'm serving as the director of Faith and Progressive Policy Initiative at the Center for American Progress. I'd like to welcome you this evening to "Renewing the Civic Covenant: Strengthening Our Community," the fourth in a series of national conversations on faith and public policy. The Center for American Progress is a new two-year old research and educational institution--a think tank, if you will. We're motivated by a belief in the common good to articulate a vision of America that is strong and just and that meets the needs of families in every community across the country.

We'd like to think that we're doing things in new and different ways, not the least of which is the radical idea that, well, that not all thinking happens in Washington, D.C. (Laughter.) So here we are with you and in communities across the country talking to people like you about the issues and concerns affecting your community and our country as a whole. To that end, working and relating to people of faith has been a part of the Center's work from the very beginning.

And that brings us to our conversation this evening, as we talk about job loss and the stress on individuals, on families and communities that results from a changing economy. Let's explore together through a moral, ethical, even a spiritual lens, as much as an economic analysis, how we are responding to these challenges. What are the responsibilities of individuals, of civic groups, churches, employers and government? What are our obligations to one another?

To help us think about these things and to frame our conversation this evening, we'd like to begin by inviting Mayor George Heartwell to open with introductory remarks. I'd like to introduce Mayor Heartwell. He took office as mayor of Grand Rapids on January 1st, 2004 and previously served as third ward commissioner. Mr. Heartwell is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ and for 14 years served as the pastor of Heartside Ministry, a program serving the homeless community of Grand Rapids. Mayor Heartwell currently serves as the executive director of Pilgrim Manor Retirement Community. He is married to Susan Heartwell, who is the executive director of the Student Advancement Foundation. Ladies and gentleman, please welcome Mayor George Heartwell.

(Applause.)

GEORGE HEARTWELL: Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you, Marco, for that nice introduction. I'm sure we'd all be a lot happier as a people if there were less done in Washington, D.C. (Laughter.)

Civic engagement: politicians talk about it, bureaucrats resent it, activists long for it. What does it mean--civic engagement? Is it a lost art? And what would happen, what would be the consequence of seeing it restored? Tonight we're here to talk about civic

engagement. And the very fact of your presence--our presence here tonight--is witness to civic engagement. Civic engagement is the active involvement of citizens in shaping the future of their communities. Civic engagement is politics. Not in some partisan sense, not even in an electoral or governance sense, but politics in its original meaning from the Greek word *polis*; that is, the city in all aspects of the life of a people within a city.

Writing as a dissident in Czechoslovakia before the fall of communism, Vaclav Havel stated, "I favor politics as practical morality, as service to the truth, as essentially human and humanly measured care for our fellow humans. I favor anti-political politics; that is, politics not as the technology of power and manipulation, but politics as one of the ways of seeking and achieving a meaningful life." This is the kind of politics that we want to engage in tonight, and on our best nights and days as citizens of the *polis*.

These politics may be characterized and actually must be characterized, I think, by vision, action and hope. First – always first – is vision. Our politics must be visionary. My cosmology suggests that the world as we know it is a far cry from what it should be. It's flawed and it's close to broken. The good news is that we have been given all that we need to improve it, even to save it. We have big brains capable of solving large problems. We have perseverance to get through tough times and hold out for better ends. We have strength and we have tenderness in roughly equal measure. We can change the world. Now, if my cosmology identifies the world as messed up, then my theology points a way out of the mess. I won't use this civic meeting to preach at you tonight, but I believe that the vision of a perfect world is embedded in the Hebrew prophets and it paints a world that is worth working for, worth living for, worth even dying for.

So that raises for me the second element of our politics of civic engagement; it must be grounded in concrete action. It isn't enough to have a vision. It isn't enough to imagine a better future. We have to orient our actions to accomplish that end. The future begins today and the future may either be just and equitable or not. It's up to us. There isn't a God who will swing down from Mount Olympus on a chariot and make it all better again. We will do it, or not.

So what is there to say about our action? It must be grounded in justice. It must be utterly selfless. Its aim must be the common good and its means must be equity and mercy and courage. It must be collaborative. We can't do this alone; not as individuals, not as congregations, not as neighborhoods. We have to find ways to build new collaborative structures. This will require a deep and careful listening. It will require bridging of cultures that we're unaccustomed to doing. It will require a willingness to take risks and not to assign blame to others when our ventures don't fully succeed. It demands that we go beyond rational thought. As rational thought brought us to the point we are today, it demands that we go beyond rational thought and that we incorporate spiritual discipline in our action.

Again, Vaclav Havel, this time writing as president of the Czech Republic: "There is a destructive impatience that grows out of a vain belief in the primacy of reason and it

assumes erroneously that the world is nothing but a crossword puzzle to be solved, that there is only one correct way, the so-called objective way, to solve it, and that it is entirely up to me whether I succeed or not.” Well, what hard work this is, acting for a better world. What superhuman strength and patience and courage are required. But I tell you, there’s no other way. We either act for a just society, or we and our children’s children to seven generations suffer the consequences.

But finally, we cannot believe in visions of justice, we cannot act to make the world a better place, without the third element of our politics of civic engagement, and that is hope. Now, here is what we know about hope. It’s not simple optimism: a happy-face attitude in the face of raging injustice. No, hope is a fundamental way of approaching the world that imagines a better future and then lives as if that future were reality.

Let me ask President Havel to tell you what I mean. “Hope in this deep and powerful sense is not the same as joy that things are going well or a willingness to invest in enterprises that are obviously headed for early success, but rather an ability to work for something because it is good. Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well but the certainty that something makes sense regardless of how it turns out.” If such a spirit of hope motivated our work of civic engagement, would we not have more energy for organizing, more confidence in our untried tactics, more perseverance against overwhelming odds? Would we not have less burnout?

On my best days, I have this hope. I can spit in the face of injustice, knowing full well that I’ll get a baseball bat upside the head. Why can’t I have it every day, this hope? I could blame it on being human. That’s convenient and it’s true, but the fact is when I act in concert with others, I am strengthened in my hope. We need each other. We need to shape and hold a common vision. We need to hold one another accountable, to lift the other up when he flags, to cheer the other on when she excels. We need to adhere to a common hope for a bright future. That’s civic engagement. That’s community politics. That’s the hope for our future.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. GRIMALDO: Thank you, Mayor Heartwell, for this inspiring vision of civic engagement and how we might work together. And now we want to invite our panel into the discussion. I’ll introduce them briefly, but I also want to call your attention to their biographies listed in the packets on your chairs. After about 30 minutes of conversation here as a panel, we’re going to invite you into the conversation. This will be a town hall process. That means that we’re going to ask each of you to try and keep your remarks brief and to make your questions as clear and to the point as possible, so that we can invite as many people into the process as we can and keep the conversation flowing well.

I also want to take this opportunity to call your attention to two other things. In your packet is a resource list. The resource list includes many of the community and service organizations here in the Grand Rapids area. That's important because we don't think of this as a final list. You may know of organizations or resources, and we'd like you to feel free to tell us that as the program ends. We'd like to add to the list and make it available on our website.

The program is being videotaped. Transcripts and video will be available on the American Progress website.

We also want to call attention to an invitation. A group called ACORN is having an event about a week from now called, "Michigan Needs a Raise," and they'll have someone here later in the evening to tell you a little bit more about that and to have information on the table in the back. I hope that you'll see this as an important next step in an ongoing dialogue to strengthen the community.

So without further adieu, our panel for this evening. First I'd like to introduce to my right Beverly Drake, executive director of the Area Community Service Employment and Training Council. Welcome, Beverly.

BEVERLY DRAKE: Thank you.

MR. GRIMALDO: Also Jose Reyna, assistant to the city manager of Grand Rapids. Jose.

JOSE REYNA: Thank you.

MR. GRIMALDO: And then Lisa Mitchell to my left of the Grand Rapids Center for Ecumenism and a representative of Call to Renewal. And then to my far left, Norman Christopher, director of sustainability, Seidman College of Business, Grand Valley State University, and a member of the West Michigan Strategic Alliance. Welcome to all of our panelists.

Bev, if I may, I'd like to begin with you and then pose this question to our panel for conversation. In the past few years, Grand Rapids has really been hit hard by loss of jobs, especially manufacturing jobs. This has affected white-collar and blue-collar workers alike. Probably everyone in this room knows someone, perhaps several people who have lost their jobs. In your view, what are the effects of joblessness on individuals and their families, but maybe also on the community? How widespread has this impact been?

MS. DRAKE: Well, you know, we have a workforce development board in Kent and Allegan Counties, and I also administer the Michigan works programs for Kent and Allegan Counties, and my chair, Win Irwin, I see sitting out there. So we see it firsthand. We have a rapid-response team that goes out if there's a plant that's going to close. We have the largest amount of trade dollars in the state of Michigan in Kent County because

of the issues with manufacturing.

One of the things that we found that we needed to do is to provide hope for these people, and we needed to do that by way of bringing in professionals who would do workshops to talk about problem-solving, to talk about what it means to lose your job, these kinds of things, because these are people who were middle class, who have middle-class economic values, who are losing their jobs and they are losing hope. So in the workplace that pushes everybody else down just a bit because they do have a work equity. They know how to work. Then we've got the younger people who are just starting. We have a very depressed, in my view – in Kent County right now, a depressed economy. And I think there are many agencies in this area that offer help. That's one of the strengths of Grand Rapids, Kent County at least, is that we do have a collaborative effort among all agents who are helping people to work together.

MR. GRIMALDO: Thank you. Lisa, have you seen things differently?

LISA MITCHELL: What I would comment on is that just working with the different congregations in the city and listening to some of what the pastors, the clergy and the staff are telling me and the people that they're seeing, that they feel that people who have lost their jobs and come to them for help, they can counsel them and they can pray with them, but what they've pointed out was, I can't tell them where to go to get a job. That's what they need. They feel it's affecting the family structure. That people in families, if they have to make a decision to either get another job and that job pays less than what they received, that affects the whole family structure; puts some stress on them if they have to move or the children have to move schools or they have to change even from where they're living in the neighborhood that they were living in. So those are some the things that I've heard. The impact that we see and that we're talking about is that the poverty rate has increased as a result of this.

MR. GRIMALDO: How do you see that from the city manager's office?

MR. REYNA: Certainly there's the individual experience that some people have talked about already, but there's a sense of despair that many have experienced. From a city perspective or community perspective, we've seen the cumulative impact of that in us losing – when we lose jobs, high-paying jobs, whether it be in manufacturing or other high-paying sectors, we're losing some economic base through loss of income tax, through loss of property taxes and so forth, and what that does is it puts a strain on the systems that are in place to support the people who are losing work. We also see what's happening with the school districts as well, losing revenue, so we're having a system failure in a result of the economic downturn.

That really creates for us – concurrently to tonight, we're having another group that's meeting – a citizen budget advisory group – who's talking about those challenges the city has in dealing with our economic downturn, our financial challenges, and just providing basic services to our citizens. And that's not unlike any other large city in Michigan. We have to deal with those challenges with diminishing resources and yet an

increased need for service. So that's a challenge for us to systemically support that.

On an individual basis, I think there are support mechanisms for people to go to, although not necessarily to get what they want but to get what they need, and that's difficult for somebody to accept when they've been in a position to have an income that they've been able to rely on or have a lifestyle that they've worked for and earned and now can no longer sustain it.

But again, our systems right now are failing, and we're looking down the path and we don't see any quick or easy solution. It's going to be very difficult. And we need to engage the community to help us identify resources and solutions for that.

MR. GRIMALDO: Norman, you've been a part of a group that's been trying to assess some of the problems but also think about some responses. Can you tell us how you've seen this problem?

NORMAN CHRISTOPHER: Yes. First of all, as I look out there I see students, and this to me is one of the most critical issues that we have, because if you look back to our families, I remember with my own father – he'd been with the same company for 40 years. And I lost my first job in the '80s. I have been in the chemical business. And woke up one day – sold. Didn't quite know what the word outplacement meant. And there was a huge stigma. And I won't go into the personal story, but I wore a stigma for a while because, first of all, you must have done something wrong. And I lived with that being wrong for quite a while. And then all of a sudden you take a look at the situation today and it's very commonplace. And when parents look at their children and now say, gee, you may have four or five different jobs in your lifetime, maybe five to seven, I don't know what the statistics are, but they're over a half a dozen. That's a whole lot different than being raised as just go to work for one company.

Setting that as a background, I call Grand Rapids kind of my home but I've only been here for about seven to eight years. Why I call it home is I arrived here in the business world and entered what I call the perfect storm. When I asked people about how they were dealing with this in the late '90s, the answer was, well, we have a business model and it's worked before. We may get wet a little bit but – our feet may get wet, we may get water up to the knees, but the model is going to work. Well, the model really didn't work, and we now are seeing the aftermath of the perfect storm. So the question is not only are we going through this, but we ourselves have to change. And maybe we'll get into a little bit of that discussion, but it's a two-way street. It's not just where you go, but there is hope. And I think we're blessed with having a mayor with vision, but we also have to change and have an inward look at what some of these changes mean to us, and I think that's where some of us are right now.

MR. GRIMALDO: Well, I'd like to talk more about that. I'd like to talk about both some of the challenges, but perhaps some of the opportunities. Are there ways the community has begun to respond to these issues?

MR. REYNA: Absolutely. Again, as we're looking ahead to plan for our limited resources, Grand Rapids really – and Norman has been here for seven years and is now calling it home. I've been here for a little bit longer than that. And certainly I've recognized the Grand Rapids community as being one that's very generous, one that's very supportive for people who are in challenging positions. So with that, there's the hope that the mayor spoke about that in spite of all the despair, there's the sense that we're going to make it through and the ability we certainly have to make it through. So we see things like the Sustainability Initiative; how we as a sector or as a community are going to pull together to transition our economy from what used to be manufacturing/industrial to medical sciences and academia. We're seeing that transition and that's going to occur over a period of time.

What the challenge is going to be is of course – Lisa and I were talking about this – is what happens to those people that are outplaced right now and how do we find a place for them that still maintains a value in their being, and then also moves us systemically to become that strong community on a sustainable basis? I think that there is that opportunity out there. And this community has always been strong in that regard, and I've been here long enough to see a few cycles of that, and it's always been able to sustain itself.

MR. GRIMALDO: Bev, you represent and work with a lot of workers who are sometimes struggling. Is that how you see that or is the change coming fast enough?

MS. DRAKE: I'm an incrementalist and that's the only way I can survive. But I also know that we in this community can work together. This is exciting to me, to have this kind of conversation, but yet someone from the outside had to come in and bring it, which is good. And I hope we can continue it because what my biggest concern is – my job is a mission. Every day I can see helping someone. But the biggest thing that I have in my mind right now is valuing jobs. We talk about the people who have lost their jobs, that is a new middle class, but what about the people who are working every day in \$7-an-hour jobs, which are essentially crucial to our economy? If you pull out the dry cleaners, the people who are in restaurants, the people who drive taxis, all these kind of things – that's very, very essential. And I hope that this conversation tonight starts us down a path of talking about not just high wages and high jobs but also those folks who have to work two jobs to make it.

One of the things that's very interesting is our workforce development board is reading, *Nickel and Dime in America*. That book is so interesting. Everyone needs to get that because it gives you the feel of a person who gave up their life – middle class – and went and worked in those kinds of jobs that are essential and crucial to this economy and to this nation. And also, I think that people don't really know what it takes to be economically self-sufficient. One of the things I've done is brought a book that the chair of my board, Win Irwin, was responsible in getting together, *Economic Self-Sufficiency*. And this one is dated, but did you know that it takes – no, this is new. It takes \$18.65 an hour for a single parent to become self-sufficient. How many jobs do we know like that?

MR. GRIMALDO: Lisa, this has got to have an impact on community. When you talk to clergy, when you talk with folks in the neighborhoods that you relate to, does that present a real challenge to get past when you've got two jobs for one parent?

MS. MITCHELL: Yeah. I'd say from the faith community we look at it and say that this is the working poor we're talking about, that they're working all day long, but don't have enough money to make ends meet. So we're seeing people who don't have enough – they're asking for more assistance, whether they're at a congregation asking for that assistance, whether they're going to one of the nonprofit agencies, or an agency like DHS, just to get help. And what they're saying is, we have enough money maybe to pay the rent, and maybe not even to do that, so we need extra help with food and medical things – just anything related to that. What I would add, too, I think Grand Rapids is a very generous community. I've lived here all my life. And I see that generosity in lots of ways and I think we tend to be able to respond quickly and generously to something in crisis.

MS. DRAKE: Right.

MS. MITCHELL: When something happens in crisis here, we're really good about that. What our challenge is, is that we need to look at, as Jose said, to look at this systemically, and how do we get to the root causes instead of just doing the Band-Aid approach or the charity. From my faith tradition we call it, how do we get to justice and look at programs that are – in ways that we can work together to be able to work at those issues.

I would point out a couple of things. There's a group right now that is working on a vision to end homelessness in this community. I look at that as a systemic approach to that--yes, we have a very good system here that manages the homeless that are here, but we don't want to manage, we want to end it. This group has been meeting with people from all over the community, holding forums, putting a document together, so that we can look at this as a vision as we move into the future, how do we end this and work at that. That's a systemic approach to me. And we do things like that. Like I work for Grace and we've been working towards ending racism. Racism relates to poverty. How can we make this a racism-free community? Well, there's been that kind of looking at gathering people from all the sectors of the community so that we can come together and look at the issue and come to solutions together. That's a systemic approach to me.

MR. GRIMALDO: And Norman, you have the word sustainability in your title. That seems to be somewhat of a burden.

MR. CHRISTOPHER: Can you help me? (Laughter.)

MR. GRIMALDO: I can't, but I'm going to ask you to help us think a little bit about how we approach an economy, a new way of working together that is sustainable that works both for workers and also for business leaders that want to make things work here in Grand Rapids.

MR. CHRISTOPHER: If you can help me define my job, that would be really helpful as a starter. (Laughter.) Yeah, it's a really interesting question. I've always been a metric-driven manager and I always – what you measure is what you finally wind up looking as the results. And when we came through this perfect storm, one of the blessings I had was a few CEOs that spent some time with me, so one of the take-homes is, if you have a chance to have a good mentor and a coach, regardless of where you are, take it because the only thing you can really leave with here is a relationship. And I think that's what we're seeing here now is we need to rebuild some relationships to get this job done.

But when I looked at this perfect storm and what happened, I know others had gone through it, and so the question is, what did they use? I spent a little quiet time and ran across this word sustainability. The mayor calls it the next step in quality management, and that's a good way to look at it. We'd been lean. We maybe have done things on a scorecard before, but then the question is, what's this next step of what works? So I went and looked, and I found some things about businesses. You can go up today on the Dow Jones sustainability index and there's 350 companies around the world that issue, besides their normal bottom line, a triple bottom line report. That's sort of interesting. Do you think they're required to do that? No. So one of the things about this word sustainability, you don't have to do it, but then why is all the fanfare about sustainability? And in fact, you've got 350 companies out there that want to be measured now. Well, it's all about interconnectedness, and it's about this people, planet and profits, or the economy, environmental, social. But what it is, it's the interconnectedness in all three. And we got ourselves in boxes. And I have degrees in a box, and they're not good things to have because they're by themselves and not related.

And what I found out inside there was the opportunity to get this job done. I found that, gee, there were a number of sustainable businesses. We have a couple here in our room that have been really, really – or in our community that have been absolute leaders in this. Fred Keller and Cascade Engineering has his triple bottom line report. We have the furniture industry that has made great progress. So there were these elements. And I said, well, that's interesting. So we have businesses. Is there such a thing as a sustainable city? And I found there was. There are about 40 of them that are tracked and measured on sustainability. I said, wow, now we're crossing (really?) the public and the private sector. I wondered if there's such a thing as a sustainable university? And I found there were.

So what I gleaned from all of this, there were these best practices that worked. And now what we're trying to do is to figure out how they apply here. But the real answer to your question is sustainability is about what you're passing on to the next generation, and that's the students because the gray hairs and no-hairs – we need to do a better job of passing on some things to you all out there so that you can become better global citizens both today and tomorrow, and that's what it's all about.

MR. GRIMALDO: I'm interested in a couple of things that were said where we

talked a little bit about the gathering this evening and how this is something new for a couple of you. And I'm wondering if you can see as you think about the ways in which you – I know some of you have engaged in conversations in the past or you've worked together before, but are there other opportunities that you can see for ongoing dialogue beyond this evening or in other of the relationships that you have?

MR. REYNA: You know, there are a few things, but I want to respond a little bit to what Norman said. And I've worked with Norman and I have a high degree of respect for the work that he's doing as well. He's working in conjunction with the city and other entities as well. But as we look at the triple bottom line, one thing that concerns me personally is a sociable equity piece. For example, there's recent legislation that was placed on the ballot or will be soon, the civil rights initiative. There's also a slew of legislation that deals with anti-immigrant laws as well where benefits are restricted to people who are not U.S. citizens and so forth. So that's part of what we need to look at in an overall context. How can we be a sustainable community or society when we're doing that to people?

MS. DRAKE: Yeah, exactly.

MR. REYNA: So that to me seems like there's a double standard or an inconsistency in terms of what our goals are as people, but we are doing things. Now, what are we doing? We from the city have engaged the community with working through community-oriented groups. That is, we partner with our residents, with our business owners, to get them involved, to get them involved in decision-making, whether it's what going on in the community, to identify their issues and help garner resources – city and other places, too – to deal with their issues, and then most effectively to take ownership of what's happening there because that's the best way to do it. We – from the city, if we did it, it would be a short-term fix I imagine. If the community takes ownership of it, it's long term.

Beyond that, we also – with the Hispanic Center and other groups, also have done leadership training for grassroots leaders because that's what we need to do is have people engage whether it's in running political campaigns, running for office, doing voter registration drives, and just becoming engaged in the political process. So we need to do much more of that and have the community engage in this type of dialogue, and that's occurring.

MR. GRIMALDO: Any other thoughts on that subject before we move on?

MS. DRAKE: Yeah. I would think that the churches can move from their work in racism to this level: talking about jobs and poverty. I mean, poverty needs to be raised in this community. We've raised racism. We're working on that. We need to look at poverty because it's a never-ending cycle. And again, I thank you all for coming here and inviting us here to talk about that.

My agency is a \$25-million-a-year agency and a drop in the bucket to what is

needed, and we have got to work together as a community to get everyone engaged.

MS. MITCHELL: I think that some of the role that we do with our West Michigan Call To Renewal, which is a program of Grace that really tries to look at issues of poverty and advocacy and how do we do that as community, as people of faith, but also how do we build justice and address what you're saying, Bev. But I think as – we see this as – it's a complex issue. Everything kind of – everything, all these issues, are interconnected. And right now I think the faith community is in a place where they really want to contribute to what can change the community to make it a better place, to help people, all of that. What's happening is that congregations have been hit pretty hard I think by people's being laid off, and there's only so many things that you can contribute to when you're not employed, and so congregations have been hit hard. I think the nonprofit organizations have been hit hard. And when they're at a time when they need the resources to do this they don't have them.

Some of the things that happen in this community that I think we do well are bringing people around the table to address the issues, and that's what we need to continue to do. I think a vision that I would see when we say all these different groups that are represented up here and also out there is wouldn't that be a wonderful thing, is that everybody comes around the table to talk about this issue and saying, these are our limitations, whether I'm a congregation, whether I'm part of the government, this is my limitation, but these are my resources, this is what we can do to work together.

MR. GRIMALDO: Well, I hope we'll continue to talk about these same issues, but I also want to be conscious of our time and invite the rest of the folks in this room into our conversation. We'd like to welcome you into this discussion and ask you to keep in mind that I want to have you raise your hand. As you raise your hand, Theo, who's in the back of the room with the microphone, will come to you. There's Theo. And he'll bring a microphone to you. So speak clearly, speak concisely, and we'll try to keep our conversation flowing and include as many people as possible.

Also in your packets are, and if perhaps I can find one, some small cards that you should be welcome to fill out. If you don't want to ask your question this evening or if you think of something sort of toward the end of the evening and we can't get back to you, please feel free to fill that out, include your question, and we'll be doing our best to get those up on our website in the near future and perhaps try and get a response to you.

So that said, please raise your hands and we'll try and acknowledge you. We've answered everything? (Laughter.) We've solved the problem.

Q: My name is Connie Bellows and I'm the director of the Delta Strategy. And I would like to offer an opportunity for everybody in the community to come and dialogue about these issues next Saturday, November 12th. We're having an all-day work session, something that we offer every year. And yes, we do convene the community on a regular basis in this community around very complex issues. We have hundreds of people working on very serious things, including poverty and others, so come and join us. It's a

lot of fun, a lot of work, a lot of work to be done.

Q: When is it?

Q: November 12th. There're brochures in the back.

Q: What's the Delta Strategy?

Q: The Delta Strategy, what is it? It is an initiative of this community. It's all of working together around a common vision, using data to see what kind of progress we're making over time. It's continuous improvement. It's the triple bottom line. Actually, I'd like to add, the newest now is the quadruple bottom line.

MS. DRAKE: Oh, wow.

Q: Australia has added spiritual or – what is it – spiritual or ethical issues in addition which would get at some of the issues that Bev has as well. So feel free to grab some literature in the back. We produce the annual report card measuring our progress as a community and tackling some of these tough issues over time.

MR. GRIMALDO: Thank you for the invitation. Anyone else with a question? A question in the back.

Q: Hello. My name is Jonathan Bradford. I'm the executive director of the ICCF, the Inner City Christian Federation, nonprofit housing development in the area. For a good ten years or 12 years we have been watching the increasing economic segregation of our general Grand Rapids community. Of late we've been paying a lot of attention to challenges that our GR public schools are facing. I don't have the exact numbers memorized, but roughly speaking, while the suburban school districts around greater Grand Rapids have been building buildings like there's no tomorrow, probably spending well over a half a billion dollars in the last six or eight years on new school buildings, our GR public schools are trying to figure out – I think it's probably the third round of how many of our buildings we should be shutting down because of declining student enrollment. Basically a lot of what's going on here is economic segregation. And we were told about ten years ago by the urban observer David Rusk that if we don't make some changes real soon, we're going to be Detroit all over again.

My question is, as we see these indications, the challenges of the school districts, as we see declining tax base because of the loss of industrial employment and all that means, what does that say for our community, particularly the faith community? We are often known as a community of churches. And Bev Drake observed how our community is a very caring community. This is a giant problem that transects a huge number of systems. I would like to know if either of the panelists would like to observe where they see particularly a large, vibrant, diverse faith community coming to challenge this, meet this issue of suburban and urban, of upper income and lower income, and so forth.

MR. GRIMALDO: Any of our panelists?

MR. REYNA: I'd like to respond a bit, and not necessarily, Jonathan, to the issue of the faith-based community because it's not just one that they're responsible for. There's an assumption that they're the ones that ought to care. We do have a very strong faith-based community, but we also have one that's strong in other areas as well. And the onus of the responsibility for what we need to do shouldn't rely just on that. We have a lot of systems, a lot of institutions that we ought look to as well because we can't do this in isolation with just the faith-based community. We need to look at every institution, every entity working together. That's the only way out of this problem. The government has a role in this, educational systems do, our economic base has a role in this, as well faith-based institutions. In order to have a long-term sustainable problem, that's the only way to do it.

MS. DRAKE: And you know, where there's a will there's a way. And there has to be the will from all levels to deal with this issue. That means that people they call the stakeholders to the people that they call the grassroots. We all have to come together and work. And sometimes we shy away from dealing with hard subjects. It got popular to deal with racism for a while, and then I think it's kind of slacking off a bit. We need to talk about these subjects. We need to bring them to the forefront. And not just talk, we need to act. We need to take actions. We need to have plans. Talking is fine and workshops are fine, but where are the plans?

MS. MITCHELL: Well, I'd like to name a plan I think. I mean, I can't answer that specifically either, Jonathan, to all those aspects you said. I think the faith community is one part, but if we look at some models, and I would call them best practices/good practices that work in this community, I mean, I'm just going to use the Grand Rapids Dominicans as an example. There are others who are studying this and looking at implementing a livable family income. And I think when we look at all these issues, it starts there. If people are – it's not just the wage they're paid but it's everything that's part of it. Looked at holistically, what do people need to live the life they should live, that they should have the house they need to live in, go to the schools they need to go to, all those things are part of that. And benefits--childcare, healthcare, looking at just the affordability of the area they can live in, and whether they can take a vacation and send their children to college. All those things are what they looked at in the study, and then implemented it, and that's what they use for all their employees.

I think that's one of those issues that it's hard to talk about here in Grand Rapids, and I'm not really quite sure what all the issues are around that, but we're afraid to talk about living wage or those things. It's easier –

MS. DRAKE: Self-sufficiency.

MS. MITCHELL: Yeah, self-sufficiency. So I mean I just think all of us, all the different sectors, including the faith community, need to look at some of these issues, and how do we do that in the community and support each other so that we can have all those

things that you listed, that there isn't the economic segregation.

MR. GRIMALDO: There's a question back here in the back.

Q: Hi. I'm Ike Mike Eichberger. I'm one of the admissions counselors here at Grand Valley, and so I have the privilege of speaking with thousands of students each year about college and the importance of college. A lot of the same questions come up each time, and that's about jobs and what's the future outlook. I was just wondering from the panelists what you guys feel would be maybe the future five-year outlook or ten-year outlook for jobs, especially Grand Rapids, the state of Michigan, and even at the national level, too.

MR. GRIMALDO: So what should freshmen be taking as future majors?

Q: Well, of course business, but beyond business, what are some of the other greats – no. But what would be the future outlook?

MS. DRAKE: Healthcare occupations. That's definitely the growth area. And we have two what we call regional skill alliances, and Connie is one of them and I'm part of one that are working with healthcare trying to get structures developed that will progress people along on a segment basis so that they don't have to spend four years in school, they perhaps could spend six months and do this and a year and do that. But we've got to get all of the educational institutions on board, too. And so we are working to do some of that, and healthcare is one of those areas that is growing.

MR. GRIMALDO: Norman, you had a –

MR. CHRISTOPHER: Yeah. This is something I've spent a little time in because I see a number of the mature industries going through a transformation.

MS. DRAKE: Yes.

MR. CHRISTOPHER: I think that's the hope for employment, and I actually believe it's where the student focus will be in the future. I can give you a few of these. First of all, if we go back to furniture and you look at some of the furniture made today that's called sustainable furniture by Herman Miller and by Steelcase, two examples are the "leap chair" and the "mirror chair." These are made with materials that are highly recyclable, reusable, and when the product is finished they actually can be disassembled and reused again. That lifecycle design is an interesting concept because when I was brought up in a box, I was told to make money, and we did, but it was all based upon a specification. Nobody really cared how that product was made, or more importantly, where it was going to go, and after it lived its life what was going to be done with it. So what's changed now is lifecycle analysis, and that's the interrelationship.

So to your point, furniture – eco-industrial furniture is where it's at. I stopped by Paul Plakowsky (sp) just up a few floors and I said, how's the engineering world? I

noticed in here we had an engineer finding a hard time finding a job. Well, Grand Valley is just expanding because – you don't expand unless you have use for your engineers – we can't make enough of them right now. And they're being employed where? Here. Sixty-five percent, roughly, of Grand Valley's graduates were made in West Michigan. The number is even higher for overall Michigan. So they're being consumed by Smiths and Aerospace. So engineering here is still a good thing. Construction.

Chatting with the mayor, a couple of things, I think we've learned something here myself is the glass half empty, glass half full. We've lived in this glass half empty for quite a while, but the question is if Grand Rapids has anything with the glass half full. And we have a couple firsts here of which we should be proud of, the first of which is we have more of these new lead buildings. How many of you all know what a lead building is? Great, I don't have to explain it. What a knowledgeable audience you have today. (Laughter.) We have the highest per capita of lead buildings anywhere in the United States. Isn't that an interesting statistic? It's not mine. It comes from the U.S. Green Building Council. Rick Fedrizzi came here and he made mention of that fact. So if you're wondering where a good thing is and we're building all these buildings, and I have 30 if these that we've kind of made a list of in West Michigan, lead construction is a good thing.

Speaking to a couple of other things, just on the automotive side, advanced precision manufacturing, automation, robotics, those are skill sets that are going to be used to make the same products. So there're some quick transformations for you in regards to some very basic industries that we have, and that to me is where the skill sets will come for tomorrow.

MS. DRAKE: But given the fact that productivity has lessened the number of individuals that will be holding these jobs, there is still the concern of what happens to the masses.

MR. CHRISTOPHER: Understand. Few of the other jobs – and I looked this up, because if you have to look up one skill set that we all must have – all of us – it's computers. We still only have in Michigan – half the people have availability for computers, so how can you get at this information in this knowledge-based economy? But if there was one skill set that we would all need, including myself, and I have come partway in this computer literate world, only partway because I have good students that help for the rest of the way, but the point being is that computer literacy is probably the one skill set that we could all take home and do a better job of that will open the doors for us.

MS. DRAKE: Agreed.

MR. CHRISTOPHER: But on some of the other paying jobs, I think retail jobs are still going to be there. It may be part-time, but retail is still a strong sector. Waste – and here's a very interesting statistic on just waste, 94 percent of all the resources that we make for a product go out as waste. Only 6 percent are actually used. We just learned

that yesterday. So the question is, people who are looking at life cycle and waste and conservation management; there's going to be opportunities, too.

MR. GRIMALDO: I want to move on to our next question. Theo, you have someone in the back.

Q: My name is Eric Sapp. I'm with Common Good Strategies that does faith and policy work with the Democratic Party, and so I'd like to ask a question that brings it a little more back to the faith part of the faith and progressive policy title. Specifically, to talk about an issue that I think gets at a lot of the implementation of these fixes and something that I've been deeply concerned about, which is the kind of red and blue divide that's beginning within the church and the effect that that's having on the ability of the faith community to respond to progressive policy positions.

And it seemed to me that since this last election a lot of my Democratic friends will stand up and say, why did so many faith voters not vote Democrat? We're doing all these progressive things, we're trying to help the poor, et cetera. And then I pose that question to moderates and evangelicals, what I often hear back is that there is an issue with kind of understanding the two great commandments and that progressive policy people and Democrats are very effective at the second one, the love your neighbor part, but because they don't really understand or articulate effectively the first, to love God with all your heart, mind and soul, they're not given credit by people within the faith community for the second. And a lot of people in the faith community don't feel they can support these progressive policies because they see them as political, as Democratic, et cetera, and that in the process of that we kind of split a community that could be very effective in addressing a lot of these issues and then create all kinds of other partisan divides.

But what I was hoping you call could talk about is, first, if you've had similar experiences, and then secondly if you have ideas for how we can address this issue without also alienating the more secular people who were involved in progressive policy who wouldn't want to see progressives jumping out there with a lot of kind of openly religious dialogue.

MS. DRAKE: Well, let me just say that I think that we've had a personal experience at my church, and that's St. Luke African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, with First Church, which is a white church, and ours is an African-American church primarily, and with First – African Methodist – First Community AME Church. We didn't look at who was red and who was blue. There was a job to be done and that was to help build a Habitat for Humanity house, and we worked together to do that, and from that we have developed further relationships. Because of the ministers having that relationship, we are now going to be doing other things together, getting to know each other better, and planning to get over that divide of racism, which is really, really big whether it's red or blue. (Laughter.)

MR. : Thank you.

MR. GRIMALDO: So Lisa, is this a circumstance where there is a red and blue divide or is this one where people have come together to cross any divides?

MS. MITCHELL: What circumstance? Which one are you –

MR. GRIMALDO: No, I meant as we've been – our conversations of this evening, the subjects that we've talked about, the economy and the changing situation. Is this an area where there is a divide or is this an area where people have come together to cross any divisions?

MS. MITCHELL: I'm going to say right up front I'm not going to speak for the whole religious community when I answer this.

MS. DRAKE: Right.

MS. MITCHELL: I mean, I have my own congregation that I go to and from that I can give a personal answer. I think my first reaction or response that I wanted to say to the question is I think if we want to label people red and blue we're not going to get anywhere.

MS. DRAKE: Exactly.

MS. MITCHELL: I think these issues are so important that, again, that we keep stressing that we need to bring people together and not label ourselves in one way or another, but to say if this issue is important to you come around the table and let's figure out a way to address it. My background is I'm Roman Catholic. We're really strong on Catholic social teaching, and that's building a just community, and we try to do that with respecting the dignity of every person, however they believe. So I guess that's all that I would say on that is that we just need to address the issue and bring people together and not have people come in the room saying I'm already divided.

(Audio break.)

Q: – structural deficits within the state and how so much of our policy has been focused on a product economy where we're really shifting to a service economy. So I'm wondering if there's any kind of work being done to really bridge the gap on this whole issue of really having a shift in policy that will bring more revenue into our community to address these issues.

MR. REYNA: Sure, absolutely. Actually, our city chief financial officer, Scott Burer (sp) is appointed by the governor to serve on a task force on local, municipal or municipal finances, to look at our system of funding our operations on both a state and local level. As you know, we've been losing – as we lose manufacturing jobs, and that's where we derive our income tax from, or sales taxes – that's what our tax base is from, and we get more service products, we can't tax that, we don't tax services such as

attorneys or physicians and so forth, so we're losing that. So there's an examination occurring right now about where we derive or what the basis of our income is for support of our services. So we're looking at that right now.

What's important about our policy is also what we've decided and what the state has decided they're no longer going to do, and I think that's what we need to engage the community in saying these things are important to us, we need to maintain these or these things – for example, for the building of prisons. Maybe we ought not be spending that much money. That's a policy decision we ought be engaged with, but that's something we allow legislators to make for us, or at least we allow that decision to occur in a vacuum, so we need to start having a bit more impact on those sort of things because those policies of where they do spend is as important as what they don't spend in. So we, from a city standpoint, are very concerned about what's happening with certainly state revenue sharing, but also the tax structure and property tax structures and so forth. But it's a complex issue, but, again, it's one that affects community services as well.

MR. GRIMALDO: Next question is the one right up here in front or almost in front. Closer to the front than we've been in a little while. (Laughter.)

Q: Hi. My name is Anna (Aguilera?). I'm a student here at Grand Valley State University. I want to say two things. The first is I think I'm happy to see initiatives like this. I come from a society where I think we ignore social problems or we just fail to address those issues. And the second one would be just to say that do not shut the doors closed. Like problems are so big, I know that our resources are really limited, but there is so much to be done and this is just a way to start doing things about social problems.

MR. GRIMALDO: Thank you, Anna.

Q: I have a question about the provision of services. I understand that the services for the deaf community are going to be drastically cut. And I don't want to get my facts wrong, but I know there's a planned protest tomorrow. And in the adult foster care home where I'm presently working, I know two of the women are deaf and they will lose services. And I'm just wondering if we know how to help. What do we do when the services are going to be cut?

MR. REYNA: There's probably as many questions about that because I'm not familiar with what proposal there is to reduce services or where those resources are getting cut from, if it's state or federal. I don't know. Certainly there's a community of interest that will lose service from that, and also a group or groups that provide services or advocacy for that group as well, that aren't mobilized to make their concern known to those people who are making decisions about that. And I think by doing that effectively and mobilizing aggressively is probably the best way to do it, and let them know that they're eliminating or reducing a very critical service.

MR. GRIMALDO: Over here. Yes?

Q: Hi. My name Emily Vanderwood (sp). I'm also a student at Grand Valley. And I just wanted to pose a question about youth involvement, and in particular like young adult involvement in this community discussion about race, about poverty, about policy decisions, about all of these things that I certainly know that myself and my community of students are very concerned about, but really it's sometimes difficult to know how to learn about the sustainability of our future when we don't have the opportunity to talk with the people who are acting. And I think this is a very exciting opportunity for us to be able to listen, learn, plan for the future, become active players in the community, because I think – I don't know – this is the hope that we have is to collaborate on all levels.

MS. DRAKE: And I think that as a follow-up, Connie Bellows indicated that the Delta Strategy has a community work group – work time on November 12th, so that would be a good time for you to be involved also.

MS. MITCHELL: I would just invite you to – I know you mentioned race. There's a summit on racism that Grace has been part of the planning and implementing each year. This will be our seventh year. It's March 24th this year at Calvin College. And we actually have a youth summit, too. That's really more engaging the high school youth to actually put the day on, and they do everything for that. But since you're in college, we just invite college students to be part of that because what they look at is the different sectors in the community and where you may want to be part of a discussion and look at solutions for that, so you're more than welcome to come to that. We also have Institutes for Healing Racism. We want all ages and all races to be part of those, too, and there's a flyer on the back table on that.

MR. GRIMALDO: Norman?

MR. CHRISTOPHER: Yeah. I'd just like to mention, one of the things that's transpired over the last year, and it's taken us almost a year to get here, is what they call this community sustainability partnership, which Jose made mention of. It's very unique because it brings together the city of Grand Rapids, the Grand Rapids public schools, Aquinas College, Grand Rapids Community College and Grand Valley; a private, a community and a public university. And the reason why that's happening is to get at this issue we just talked about of sustainability planning and the importance of it from an educational point. So to answer your specific question, this is new for us, too. We're in some new grounds here. All I can tell you is just to ask the questions, and I'm not sure we all have the answers but we're going to collectively walk away from here tonight, as we are in others, and try collectively to get this job done.

One of the interesting things about this partnership is the question is what does a partner really mean, and it took us quite a while to understand is that 51/49 so when the vote gets down I got the final vote even though you're a partner? And the answer to it is, we work to become equal partners. And when you get into this equal partner space, now transparency happens, sharing of best practices, and you actually start to support people, and this is an interesting one that we're trying to all learn more about, but it takes time. It

just takes time.

MR. REYNA: I have a couple suggestions as well for involvement, and one is there's a group here locally called the Grand Rapids Young Professionals. Regrettably, I discover I'm too old for that. (Laughter.) But that's a group that – there's several hundred young people who come together to talk about issues, whether they be racism or policy – public policy, and their goal is to try to recruit and retain young professionals here in the area. So they're people just like you who are either in college or just graduated from school who want to find a network here, and a very excellent group. I can give you some information on that. But Young Professionals – Grand Rapids Young Professionals, you can look that up on the web. You're find their blog site as well, so I kind of sometimes invade that site. (Laughter.)

The other thing is the Leadership and Development Training Program that's run here in Grand Rapids as well. If you go to the Delta Strategy session, you're going to see some information there on that program, and you're welcome to participate in that. One of the things that I'd like to do with that is ultimately replicate that, because I've done that now for two years here. I did it in (Holland?) for about seven years, but it's something that fosters grassroots leadership. And whether your issue might be, whether it's bike paths or if you want to do a computer center, it doesn't matter what it is, but it gives you the basic tools to do what you want to do and get involved. And this kind of – it helps you to establish that, so you can run your own leadership program as a result of this, but then get involved in something that's a passion to you.

MR. GRIMALDO: We have a question back here.

Q: I'm Elizabeth White, and I'm adjunct faculty member here at Grand Valley State University, and I should introduce my students who are here. There's 20 of them. They're all graduate students in the School of Public Administration here, and studying conflict management, and so we thought this was an appropriate topic for us. (Laughter.)

You have the privilege, as I do every Thursday night, of being among the best and the brightest among future leaders and public administrators that I think certainly Western Michigan has to offer. Part of our exercise every week, these young people turn in to me their conflict journals saying, what is it that you have dealt with this week in terms of conflict and how you have applied some of the concepts that we've discussed in class. Overwhelmingly those journals tend to mention things like underemployment and unemployment among the young people that are sitting here in this room. It's extraordinary to me that when you've had a chance to hear from them their questions have not been, what can Western Michigan do for me, what can the city of Grand Rapids do for me, what can GRACE do for me, and what can Grand Valley do for me; their questions have been, how can I contribute, how can I learn more, how can I participate? But I think the discussion that you're having cannot be had without the input of the young people that are here in this room, and I appreciate your taking the time to talk to them. If any of you, each of you, has one piece of advice for someone who is training themselves in public administration as a future leader making decisions and policy, I'd be curious to

hear what that would be for these people in the situation that they're in presently.

Thank you.

MR. REYNA: For those that want to get into this field of public administration, if you truly want to do that you should talk to me first. (Laughter.) But if you do get into that, one of the critical things is experience you get from that, so I would volunteer in a city office, city department, or get involved with a community project as well. There are four cool city projects here that would be very, very grateful to have you as a resource, and take that on and learn about how a city operates, how a community operates, how you deal with conflict as well, so I would recommend either one of those things. But certainly volunteer your time because even if you can't find a job, that experience is invaluable as you go a future or potential employer.

MR. GRIMALDO: I'd like to invite you to visit Campus Progress, a website that provides resources to young people on campuses around the country that are interested in public service, that are interested in community service, that are interested in organizing themselves in ways that they can respond to their community and to one another.

Another question? We have a question in the back.

Q: I'm Ken Pomykala. I teach at Calvin College in the Department of Religion. In thinking about unemployment and how to address it, it would help me to hear more about the forces that are generating unemployment. There have been references in passing to a changing economy, but about funding education or tax policy or federal, state local policy, how does that contribute in terms of solution? It would help for me to know a little bit more about the nature of the problem and its causes.

MR. GRIMALDO: So what is generating the problem? Where has the push been?

MR. REYNA: I think the driving force gets to the issue of sustainability that we've had. Our economic base has been manufacturing and industry. And the bottom line for industry has so far been profit, and for people to maximize their profit and to best be able to do that is to drive down labor costs, so they're finding options for lower labor costs, whether it's in Mexico or China, and that's really what's driving the change here in our economic transition.

What we're looking for in changing from a manufacturing base to a medical base or a technology base is that that work or that – that can't be exported for somebody who would do it cheaper. We want to retain it here, or we want to grow it here and retain it here, and I think that that's a formula for sustainability as I see it in the long term.

Now, certainly one of the things we should look at – and a question earlier was, what should young people to get into as a career – and I think international relations or international business is one thing as well. We're becoming a global economy. We

ought not ignore that. And we have I think a lot of resource here, intellectual capital, that we can export but yet be able to retain some of the benefit of that exportation as well. But that's really been driving this changing economy.

MS. DRAKE: The increase in productivity, too. There's been a tremendous increase in productivity due to technology advances, and less and less people are needed to do the work that was done ten, 15 years ago, as we all know that. And I think we have to look at that and we have to look at the fact that we missed the boat. We didn't look at globalization the way we should have. We didn't look at the fact that productivity would eliminate jobs, and we let that go too long. And in Kent County we had a very high – 23 percent of our workforce was manufacturing. So that's one of the reasons that we have been hit so hard. But again, I think the broader picture to me is looking at all of the jobs. A lot of people talk about high wages, high skill jobs, but there's not that many of them going to be around and we still have to look at all the levels in our economy.

Q: My name is Simona Goi. I teach political science at Calvin College. And I'm interested in applying this concept of sustainability to healthcare. As Beverly was saying, the healthcare field is booming here in west Michigan. We are seeing more and more research institutions being funded here. But how about the accessibility to healthcare? For instance, I don't know if any of you have information about what percentage of the population of the greater Grand Rapids area have access to healthcare and what can be done to extend that access. Maybe we're really doing well compared to the rest of the country. I really have no idea. I'd be interested in knowing what you think.

MS. DRAKE: I don't think we're doing that well as it relates to accessibility. We did have the fortune of a new plan that was developed about three years ago. I can't remember the name of that plan right now. But it was for people – what was it –

MS. MITCHELL: The Kent Health Plan?

MS. DRAKE: Kent Health Plan. It was for employers who had few participants – few employees and they couldn't really afford it. But that plan, I don't know if it's open now or not, but only one has evolved in this community and they're looking at how to sustain it. But I believe that I read some statistic not too long ago that there are 30 to 40 percent of the people who do not have access to good healthcare.

Q: Jose, you mentioned as one factor that businesses are leaving Michigan is the high cost of labor, but there's also a huge debate going on at the state level in the Senate and the House about us as Michigan being an unfriendly business climate because of our tax structure for businesses. And there's an entire side of that argument that says that there needs to be a complete overhaul and a complete destruction of the single business tax. Are we as Michigan an unfriendly environment for businesses to come in here and put down roots because, frankly, the cost of doing business is too high?

MR. REYNA: On a relative scale to the other states we are probably on the higher end with regard to that, but it's because we provide a lot of services from the state

as well. We also have a – there's some structural things that are happening with a number of municipalities we have, how the state supports them as well, or how they don't support them. The other thing is that proposition to restructure or at least to impose or eliminate the single – the business tax is also political as well. Nothing occurs without some sort of political motive, so that we also need to understand. It's not just a matter of where does it stand, where does it stack up to the other states because if you look at what other states might provide versus what Michigan provides, we get and our citizens expect a level of service from our state, so that's the difference. That's what Osborne and Hutchinson would term to be the price of government. We have a certain amount of amenities that the state provides. Citizens pay for it and they're willing to pay for it. And so it's just a matter of balancing what are people willing to pay for. So there are multiple factors in that.

MR. GRIMALDO: We have a hand up here in the front.

Q: My name is Susan Morales-Barias and I work for United Way. And I kind of agree with one of the comments which was made much earlier in the evening about not having enough discussion as a community about economic self-sufficiency because we're in the funding business, and what we see is we fund basic needs requests every day, and that does not decrease. And the only way for us to address that is to address economic self-sufficiency at a more systemic level, working on using our monies to prevent people getting into poverty situations in the first place. So if there's any conversation on that that might happen after this, I'd personally be interested. I was really interested in that discussion.

But the other thing that got my quite excited is the talk about metrics and looking at – (laughter) – you know me, right? (Laughter.) They know me. It really gets me excited. And I do agree that the only way you get results is if you articulate what results you want to achieve in the first place, right? And I think that's where we have not had some discussion about what things are we willing to change in this community. What I wanted to ask is really just to give hope to the person who really loves metrics, is when you talk about the sustainability, these best practices and all that, can you give us a snippet of what things have been really successful in communities? I know it's relationships and people talking and agreeing, but also you have to (unintelligible) towards certain indicators, certain metrics. But can you just give me a little bit more flavor on that because you really mentioned it in two sentences.

MR. CHRISTOPHER: Sure. If you take a look the triple bottom line, the easiest ones to get around is things that deal with energy, things that deal with conservation, with waste, air quality. And what happens is if you just look at those by themselves, you don't necessarily look at the social impact of what those pollution issues might be. I think one that kind of brings them all to light is what the mayor discussed this past week with lead poisoning. If you take a look, there's a program in Grand Rapids called Take the Lead Out. Depending upon what community you're in – I know the Delta Strategy report overall talks about a lead level that's still fairly high, but if you get inside communities it could be as high as 30 percent in some neighborhood areas. That's an extremely high for

– now the question is, that’s an economic issue, but then the other issue is what’s that socially going to mean to that child or that individual that now has it?

So the question is, before we look at the metric we have to get to the categories, and then the categories will then drive – and this is where it will be headed is kind of like the socioeconomic indicator, not just looking at a pure raw number by itself. That work is still to be done. But there are others that are out in front, other cities, other communities, sustainable communities that have done some of this work, and that’s some of where we will be looking at, but this will be a bottoms up process.

MR. REYNA: The work that we’re doing here with sustainability partnership, it includes, for example, for the city a set of 34 indicators that are specified in Courtney’s work, “Taking Sustainable Cities Seriously.” And in there in talks about those three categories. One that I can mention to you, for example, is employment. If you look at employment and stratify it on not only income but what types of work and how people are split out ethnically and from national origin, you know, what sort of equity do we have in that area. How are we doing as a community in terms of providing opportunity truly for people generally? We look at water quality. Where do we have good water quality? And there’s just a variety of metrics there. So those are specified, and you can use that system of metrics as benchmarks to say, where are we at right now.

Norman and I actually are compiling those benchmarks at this point, and then as we go through these turns of the cycle see to what degree are we achieving those goals. And this is something that through the community partnership we can say this is our report card and how we’re achieving our goals.

MR. GRIMALDO: We’ve got time for two more questions. I’ve got one up here and I think there was one in the back as well, but let’s take this one first.

Q: My name is Nadia Brigham. I also work for United Way. And I just wanted to comment on what you just talked about and what Ms. Drake talked about a little bit earlier, and that is that as you develop the metrics and those indicators across, whether you’re looking at healthcare or education or lead poisoning, in what area, poverty, whatever the case may be, that there has been a lot of folks in our community around race and disparity; however, we haven’t taken that to scale to look at structural and policy-based racism that is keeping the disparities in every single area. And so as you develop the metrics, I would encourage that you would look at race across the board. My husband always likes to say that we’re winning in all the wrong races. (Laughter.) So as you develop those metrics, I would encourage us to just continue to look at race not only from a relational perspective, because that is important, but also from how it impacts the quality of life of everyone.

MR. GRIMALDO: I’d actually like to take another question as well, and then I’d like to give the panel a chance to wrap things because there’s been so much that’s offered tonight that I think maybe it’d be a chance to pull this all together if we give one more round to the panel.

Was there another question in the room? There's one beside you there.

Q: Would a single-payer healthcare system help both our manufacturers, that of high-wage paying manufacturers, help take the burden off of them and to help to keep and retain many of the jobs that have been – they're hanging on by a thread right now. Would that help in any way both the people that don't have healthcare and the ones are still working and still fighting over that?

MR. REYNA: I'm not familiar with that.

MS. DRAKE: I don't know enough about it to comment.

MR. GRIMALDO: Let me regroup here, because I think it's interesting to me that race and healthcare and education and housing, the future of our young people that are in college in this community and sort of trying to find new areas for their work, all of these things have bubbled up in a variety of different ways that are powerful ways, I think, in terms of the emotions and the commitments that I've heard in people's voices. I wonder if we could put all of that together to our panel and ask you to help us regroup, but then also help us think about a vision for the future that you would offer us, one that encompasses not only sort of socially but spiritually, economically, even politically, how you would have Grand Rapids look in the future. Maybe that's a way to start thinking about all of these things and maybe a way to sort of take us into an ongoing conversation when we leave this space today. I'll open that up to any of you.

MR. REYNA: When we were working through the sustainability partnership and drafting the framework for that, when we discussed the mission for that, and I think that really is – I get excited about it. And when we talk about it, we talk about creating a community that's desirable for future generations. And if you think about doing your work in that context, it doesn't matter what you're doing. If you're doing it for the benefit of others, regardless of who they are, what race they are, that's a great vision.

I also think that you need to look at yourself personally, what you consider to be your personal vision or mission as well, what you want to achieve in the end when you're done. Mine I look at as being one to create opportunities for maximizing somebody's potential. I look at how I might be able to help somebody else. And I think that's really what we all need to do in order to make things better for others and for future generations as well.

MS. MITCHELL: I was given that question to think about it. I love to vision and create this community that I would like to see. And part of that community is – for me, it's a faith community that really respects and values each other and listens to each other. I would love to see a racism-free community, a community that has affordable housing for all, a community that everybody has a liveable income, an education system that is equitable. And really we didn't talk about transportation, but a vibrant transportation system I think is integral to all of this. And so when I look at this, I know that there is not

one solution to anything that we have talked about tonight, that we need to come together and be a collective body to come to what the solutions are, and there're many solutions, and all of us need to have ownership in them. And I'm just very happy that the students were here from Grand Valley, but that we need to include students as part of the discussion and we also need to include those that we'd say that are living in poverty as part of this discussion, and just to keep that vision before us.

MR. CHRISTOPHER: I'd just add a couple more inside that space. I think living and working together in harmony, whether that can really be achieved. But I think one of the things that strikes me is a Covey principle, which I've always tried to live by a little closer, and that's seek first to understand, then to be understood. And I think from my own personal vantage point that's a space that I'm going to look forward to at my young age because it is still a life-learn process for all of us, regardless of what age we're at.

MS. DRAKE: And I'm glad I'm last, because they've said it all. (Laughter.) Except that I grew up in Grand Rapids. I was born here. And the one thing that I would like this community not to do is to raise the question that was raised in my mind when I was a little girl, and that was we were known as the city of churches, yet at 11:00 in the morning on Sundays we had a most – what do you call it – yeah, I was going to say something else – but the most segregated community that can be, and I always wondered why that was. And I'm old, and I still wonder why that is.

MR. GRIMALDO: I want to take this time then to thank everyone that's been a part of this. There are so many folks – I mean there are certainly our panelists and others that I want to mention by name, but there are so many of you in this audience that were a part of bringing this group together and making this event happen that's certainly an appropriate place for us to begin our thank yous. I want to call your attention to the groups that have listed and put information in the back of the room. There's information about ACORN. There's information about Delta Strategies, Call to Renewal, and other. I do want to call attention to these cards, but I think I've told you that they were in the wrong place and they're outside on the table. Please feel free to fill them out if you've got any questions you want to leave with us. We're happy to collect those and post those after that.

Please join me in thinking Mayor Heartwell for his remarks and for his leadership.

(Applause.)

(END)