

FAITH AND
Progressive Policy
PROUD PAST, PROMISING FUTURE

CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS

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LUNCHEON KEYNOTES

MODERATOR:

**MELODY BARNES, SENIOR FELLOW,
THE CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS**

SPEAKERS:

**FATHER CHARLES CURRIE, PRESIDENT
ASSOCIATION OF JESUIT COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES**

**REVEREND WELTON C. GADDY, PRESIDENT
THE INTERFAITH ALLIANCE
AND PASTOR, NORTHMINSTER CHURCH,
MONROE, LOUISIANA**

**DR. JAMES FORBES, MEMBER OF THE BOARD
THE INTERFAITH ALLIANCE FOUNDATION**

**IMAM HENDI, MUSLIM CHAPLAIN
GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY, BETHESDA NAVAL HOSPITAL**

*Transcript by:
Federal News Service
Washington, D.C.*

MS. BARNES: If everyone will please be seated, we'll start our program, and then you can start your wonderful lunch. I hope you're enjoying today's conference, we're certainly enjoying having you here. My name is Melody Barnes, and I'm a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress, and I have the privilege and the honor of introducing Father Charles Currie. Father Currie is an accomplished scholar and scientist, and his work really defies categorization. He has served as the president of two wonderful institutions, Wheeling College, which is now Wheeling Jesuit University, and Xavier University, as well as serving as the rector of St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia. He was drawn to El Salvador after six Jesuits and two co-workers were murdered there, and since that time Father Currie has maintained an active commitment to the needs of that country's people.

Today, Father Currie serves as president of the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, where he draws upon his many and varied experiences to bring people and ideas together. Father Currie will now offer a blessing for our meal.

Father Currie.

FATHER CURRIE: This is more of a reflection than an invocation. Reflection of Oscar Romero, the Archbishop of San Salvador, one like us, deeply committed to the social reality of his time, and willing to give his life in service to the poor and the oppressed. In the midst of his fierce and courageous advocacy, he was able to prayerfully and peacefully put things into perspective, something each of us are challenged to do.

So, let me quote Oscar Romero: It helps now and then to step back and take the long view: the kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision. We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is the Lord's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us. No statement says all that should be said, no prayer fully expresses our faith, no program accomplishes the church's mission, no set of goals and objectives includes everything. That is what we are about, we plant the seed that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities. We cannot do everything, and there's a sense of liberation in that. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the results, but that is the difference between

the master builder and the worker. We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future that is not our own.

Lord, help each of us to imitate Oscar Romero, to have his insight into contemporary reality, and his courage to commit ourselves to lives in the pursuit of justice and peace.

Amen.

MS. BARNES: Is everyone enjoying lunch? I grew up in the Baptist tradition. Is everyone enjoying lunch? Thank you.

I now have the privilege of introducing our next speaker. There are few here today who don't know Reverend Welton C. Gaddy. He serves as the pastor of Preaching and Worship at Northminster Church in Monroe, Louisiana. But, because Reverend Gaddy has also added another day to his week, he also serves as the president of the Interfaith Alliance. I simply don't know how he finds the time to do all the good work that he does for us.

Reverend Gaddy ensures that the broad faith community speaks to critical issues with a united voice, and his leadership is critical and invaluable. He's also an important commentator on religion and politics, and he's the author of over 20 books, and can often be seen on national television, and heard on the radio. Please welcome Reverend Welton C. Gaddy, who is going to give us brief remarks, and then introduce our next speaker.

(Applause.)

REV. GADDY: It's so good to be among so many faith-based patriots who value the term "progressive" as a concept that is in the best interest of our democracy. Two realities related to religion in this nation translate into two challenges for preserving the integrity of religion and the vitality of democracy.

First is the multifaceted identity of the religious community in the United States. We're the most religiously pluralistic nation in the world. Either the religions of this land will find common ground morally, and work together cooperatively, or contribute substantially to the deepening divides among our population and to the contentious, often uncivil actions of many of our leaders.

Second is the challenge of the changing relationship between the institutions of religion and the institutions of government. An historic, brilliantly prescribed by the Constitution, separation is now being rethought from perspectives ranging from interest in a public square completely devoid of any appearance or reference to religion to preoccupation with a public square in which the clamor for an established religion, or the utilization of religion for political purposes makes the interests of faith and the initiatives of politics almost indistinguishable from each other. Nowhere is the changing relationship between religion and government more dramatically in evidence than in this

year's national elections. Religious communities are being divided politically while political campaigns are posturing their respective superiorities religiously.

So, what are religious leaders and houses of worship to do? One option is to sellout to the lure of politics. Turn the house of worship into a pseudo-precinct convention, replace the confession of unique doctrinal affirmations with rigid compliance with a social political agenda that serves as a litmus test for measuring religious authenticity, endorse candidates for public office, and ignore the Constitution. In other words, do politics as religion. Tomorrow, on Capitol Hill, members of the House of Representatives will mark up a piece of legislation that so eases restrictions on political partisanship in houses of worship that it is sure to encourage houses of worship to function as political action committees, turning their pulpits and lecterns into stumps on which religious leaders band to deliver partisan political messages and endorse specific candidates with a special spiritual blessing.

A second option for religious leaders in houses of worship is to remain true to the essential nature of their respective religions, supportive of the religious liberty clauses of the Constitution, and responsible in their functions as good individual and corporate citizens, claiming liberty for themselves, protecting liberty for others.

Our keynote speaker, the Reverend Dr. James Forbes, and the congregation that he serves as senior minister, the great Riverside Church of New York City have courageously stood at this intersection of options and made an exemplary decision of wisdom, not bringing partisan politics into its ecclesiastical life, but moving its ecclesiastical life beyond its sanctuary to engage politicians and the issues at the center of their campaigns with the moral wisdom of its religious tradition for the purpose not of advancing that tradition, but strengthening the core values of this nation.

Recognizing what is at stake in this election year, the Riverside congregation has committed itself to a year-long study of the issues at the center of this year's political campaigns in preparation for casting informed electoral ballots. And it has freed Dr. Forbes to crisscross this nation with his call for interfaith cooperation based on the core values of all religions and to sound his prophetic and patriotic challenge for Americans to be done with religion as a political strategy, and to respect, if not appreciate and embrace, the value of religion with a passion that will persist long after the votes in the November elections have been counted.

Who better to speak to us at this moment than Dr. James Forbes, whom I'm pleased to say is a member of the board of the Interfaith Alliance Foundation, by all estimates one of the five or ten best religious spokespersons in the nation, and a man who knows that winning an election, even winning elections decisively, pales in importance if that political victory is won in a manner that erodes the nation's commitment to religious liberty and civil rights, and compromises both the independence and the integrity of religion in a manner that eradicates the capacity of religion to be a voice of conscience, an advocate for the poor and the weak, and a presence for healing in the nation.

Reverend Dr. Forbes.

(Applause.)

REV. FORBES: I do not always enjoy introductions, but Welton Gaddy helps me to understand what I ought to be saying, if that was not what I was going to say. Thank you so very much. I'm glad for my association, and our work together with the Interfaith Alliance.

Brothers and sisters, there is a kind of deja vu experience. I used to go to a lot of meetings during the civil rights movement, and after a while people from all over the nation would convene at the major events. And it was almost like a family reunion when you got together. And we said we thought movement was over when we got through, and here we are all over again. In fact, it's a good thing to be together, for I have not experienced in the last few years the sense of real critical mass of those with a perspective that we call progressive. In fact, I think for a while I was feeling like we used to feel in the days in the South where I grew up where Ebonics had to do with the way we were speaking down there. You've heard of "ain gwine lay my lignon down" (sic), another way of saying I am not going to lay my religion down. One boy used to talk like this in school, and he used to say, I ain gwine to do this, and I ain gwine to do that, and the teacher said, come, you will never make it speaking like that. So, she conjugated, I am not going. She said, you say, I am not going, you are not going, he she or it is not going, we are not going, they are not going, do you get it? He said, yes, look like there ain nobody gwine.

(Laughter.)

For a while in regards to justice and peace, and a sense of genuine compassion, for a while it looked like nobody gwine. But in meetings like this you discover, oh, yes, there's somebody who is going to commit to a world in which we can live out the dream of this great democracy.

And so, today, I want to talk to you, I really have two titles for what I'm going to say, as if I could not decide which was right. The first title for my comments today would be, God Bless America as a Solemn Prayer. And the other title would be How the Progressive Movement Can be a Blessing to America. Either way you want to go, let's work with it.

Shortly after 9/11, all of us remember that in addition to all of the other responses to this new season of extraordinary vulnerability, everybody was singing God Bless America. You know it, while the storm clouds gather far across the sea, let us swear allegiance to a land that's free. Let us all be grateful for a land so fair, as we raise our voices in a solemn prayer. God bless America, land that I love, stand beside her and guide her through the night with the light from above. From the mountains to the prairies, to the oceans white with foam, God bless America, my home, sweet home.

This could be heard at baseball games, in New York City even during plays or musicals, you could hear it. I saw it on TV as our leaders on the Capitol steps sang God Bless America. Question: was it really just singing a song, or was the singing of this song in the season of our post-traumatic stress disorder, was it actually, as Berlin said it was, as we raise our voices in a solemn prayer? All over America we were singing it, and I got the impression that it was not just a nervous singing in the darkness of the shadows that were cast from all of the smoke and debris, I actually believe that it was not traditionally establishment religion, but a deep American proclivity in the hour of need to kind of think about God and maybe, maybe, if we don't go to church every Sunday, we don't go to mosque every time the door is open, but I got the impression that although we were living in the advanced stage of secularization in this nation, and that the death of God movement in the '60s had now been transformed into practical theism in general, there was still a residual spirituality in the nation, in the expression of God Bless America.

Now, here's the issue. I think heaven, and I can say this as a preacher, politicians can't say this, but increasingly they risk it anyway, I think heaven heard that song as a prayer. America felt a need to be blessed in this very, very strange season. But let's look at what happened after we were singing that song. Did the religious right actually look forward to discover how God might bless America? Did the religious left look forward to how God might actually bless America? I have learned; be very careful characterizing people when they act in the midst of extraordinary anxiety and vulnerability. I believe most of us here would say that whatever else was prayed in the song, 9/11 was seized as an opportunity to advance a program and a perspective that may not necessarily have come fresh from heaven in the light of our singing that song. Something about the way the right used the event left us wondering was there such anxiety and was God so slow to respond that our other side decided to answer the question, to use this tragic moment to pursue evil around the world, to find out who did it, to ask the question quickly, why do they hate us so, but then to move on almost as if to say, I don't care, we're going to kick butt, we're going to take care, we're going to move, and also the dominionists found this to be the ideal time to uncork the champagne and begin to get the world right for the coming back of Jesus Christ in the rapture, and in order to get it ready, there had to be the seizing of the power of the whole earth so that Christ's regents, having consolidated the earth, would then provide a convenient turnover to Christ when he comes back to rule the world. And that whatever took place in order to gain the hegemony, in order to bring the control, in order to make sure that under this banner we could say, here it is Jesus, take over the world, we've got it right ready for you, this is what seemed to have happened after the singing of God Bless America.

Now, while that critique should be very clear. What did the left do? Well, the left left up to the right the responsibility of even imagining that the song had a spiritual prayer in mind, and in general it has been said, even by as much as Zogby in their polling, that we who are a part of the progressive movement would probably not even notice that the song says, as we raise our voices in a solemn prayer. We weren't expecting God to do much, because after all the earth belongs to the prince of the air, and that God's jurisdiction does not quite reach the places where we serve. It is almost as if the

irrelevance of God in the advanced stage of secularization pushed God to the corner, and nobody was expecting God to hear the song, or if God heard it would not hear it as a prayer, and if God did hear it would not act in any particular way, and so we were, so far as I can see, significantly dispirited, and we did a lot of sucking air through our teeth.

Well, here's why I am here today. I have come here today to say that I think that this meeting, Dr. Podesta, is evidence that little by little those of us of the progressive movement are beginning to believe that it was a prayer, that although everybody is not religious in the traditional sense of the word, and although we do not all have cards that identify our religious persuasion, there is a fundamental spirituality that recognizes that in the course of life itself there are times when the foundation upon which we were build has to be called into play, that all of us, even if we do not call ourselves religionists, have some sense that if we are to face the future, and if our nation is to be blessed, particularly in the light of current trends, we need to allow our religious sensibility, no matter how we talk about it, to be a part of what animates us in our efforts in the days ahead.

So here we are, and this is the way I put it. I think we who are of the progressive movement are sensing that things are out of balance, and I think that a genuine progressive never would say our perspective is the only perspective. A genuine progressive takes the wisdom of Elton Trueblood, who said the most important word in the Bible was and. We are aware that although we would like to take the lithium treatment, and cut off the extreme right, and the very extreme left, and hang into some glorious balanced middle, the truth is that conservatives and right wing people are onto something important.

That may sound strange in here. You cannot completely dismiss 50 percent of the citizens of the United States as being crazy, just because they don't believe what the rest of us think. They're onto something, but if what they are onto becomes the central reality propelling the policies, domestic and foreign, we are in real trouble. In the midst of polarities, when one pole prevails, and there is no critique, it is as if, as my professor used to say, a fool shouted in the marketplace, and because no one challenged his thesis, it became incontrovertible. Oh, lord, may that not be the case amongst us. In fact, why don't we all acknowledge that the real issue is balance.

There is a need for personal piety, but there must be societal dimensions of addressing the issues of the day. There are exclusive celebrations, and yet there is a need for inclusiveness. There are tribalistic identifications, and sometimes it's nice to circle the wagon and to enjoy the tribe. Yet, somebody had better be concerned about the common good. There is a need for nationalistic impulses, and yet there had better be somebody with a global vision. There is the power of the free market, but somebody had better be trying to restrain it sometimes, somehow. There is the recognition that in life some things are just simply black and white, and yet somebody had better go to the university of complexity to deal with the reality of the world in which we live.

(Applause.)

And what I want to say in a spirit of reconciliation, way down the road, I want to acknowledge that the right has done a better job in the last 20 years than we have done holding up their side. They've done their side, now what I want to talk about is that God heard the prayer of America. God bless America, land that I love. And God says, yes, I'm going to bless America, and one way I'm going to bless America is that I am going to raise up progressives, who will finally figure out that their perspective is essential for a beautiful America.

So then, let me suggest what happened to me. I was in New York preaching the day I heard that 9/11 when they were digging out, first looking for dead bodies, and maybe at first for survivors, then no bodies, and then they just began to remove the rubble. And as they were removing the rubble, two weeks ago I must have said this in a hall down there, a strange thing happened. Did you hear that out of the rubble that a white pigeon just flew up out of nowhere. And people began to wonder how could that be, there was no life down there. And I, being Pentecostal by background, that's why I understand the right a little bit better than some of the rest of you all do, I recognized that this was part of God's answer to God bless America prayer, because the pigeon reminded me of the fact that in my tradition the holy spirit is symbolized by a dove. But, in times of crisis if you don't have a dove, then a pigeon will have to do.

(Applause.)

So I became convinced that what God is saying is that there needs to be spiritual revitalization in the land, and it does not have to be respecting, or establishing any particular religion, and it doesn't have to set aside the separation between church and state, it just means that there are some values that need to be recovered, to put alongside, to either critique, or counterbalance, or sometimes replace other values that have had good life for a period of time. So what I really wanted to say to you is there are some ways in which we are here, because whatever you call your divinity, the creator believes that our -- (inaudible) -- breaks category, and our conditioning, and our angle of vision is an important ingredient. And if it is not promoted, clarified, extended, the nation will not be blessed.

I usually at my church, occasionally walk away from the platform, but I don't have a lavalier mike on. So let me just say -- (inaudible) -- may be a blessing to America. First of all, by the way, we have to, as has already happened here this morning, we have to acknowledge the role of the religious impulse in the humanizing elements of the progressive movement. That's been made very clear. In fact, when we talk about great awakenings, they all were not just religious activities, they were always balancing, a good Republican even said so. Robert William Fogel talked about the fourth great awakening, and in it he said, there are always awakenings, I mean, they have a lot of religious fervor, but fundamentally they are dealing with variations on egalitarianism in America, and they deal with how people have energy that will make changes in the culture, so that the culture is more faithful to its founding DNA.

Understand, we have to do that. Forget it, somebody didn't report it right. There has never been a major religious movement in America that did not get energized from a somewhat spiritual or religious motive. Secondly, we need to become sophisticated, come on you all, sophisticated enough to distinguish between narrow and broad expressions of a sense of the ultimate reality in forming our world. Just because some folks mess it up does not justify casting it out.

I was telling somebody I sometimes stop by in the country, using a bathroom right next to where a mechanic works on cars. And sometimes I've gone in to use the bathroom, and then I want to wash my hand. And the soap is so nasty, it's so slimy and grimy, until I'm normally willing just to wash my hands without the soap. That's what people do. Just because another religious tradition has made such a mess of the kind of way we think of things, we simply cast it out, and wash out hands without soap. Progressives, we're going to need some soap. If the soap is dirty, wash it up, and then use it that we will be able to be strong in our activities.

(Applause.)

We can bless the nation if we remember the role of religion. We can bless the nation if we're sophisticated enough to distinguish between the narrow and the broad. Even the Bible says, try the spirits to see whether they be of God. And also, let's move beyond spending all our time giving advertisements free for the perspective we do not believe in. We cannot build our movement primarily as being over against somebody else. I know that's the slogan these days, anybody but him, but come on, that is not getting it. We cannot specialize in talking about how badly they are doing what they are doing. We must speak about how well we hope we will begin to do what we are doing.

I have a brother in law who is in Congress, I'm not going to call his name, I will not mention that he's from Brooklyn, and I will not mention that he is the husband to my sister, whose name is Gwen Towns, I will not mention his name. Anyway, Ed was saying the other day that he was on the subway, and he said he was so disgusted that these young people have no respect anymore. He said the subway was full, a pregnant woman got on the subway, and as she got on the subway he says, he waited and waited for one of the young men to get up and have his seat. He said, not one man got up. He said, he sat there in amazement. Do you understand?

(Applause.)

The reality of the world today is that we must emphasize what we are doing. In fact, become so fascinated and excited about our new and fresh vision of how our nation can be the nation that it's called upon to be, that we actually critique the other by the excitement and the feasibility, and the wisdom of that which we propose. We can be a blessing to America, if we will recognize the prophets as charter members of the movement that we are now joining.

We didn't start the progressive movement. Listen, have you not heard of Amos, Amos the brother who was not even educated, was not a Northeast liberal, was not nurtured on the banks of Berkeley over there. No, Amos was just a farm boy, but the Lord called him, and he was given a plumb line to hold against the patterns in the culture. You and I need to recognize that if we want to think we are starting a movement, that we are not likely to really look to the rock from which we were hewn. Amos got it started. Michael was there. Isaiah, read Isaiah 58, that's a magna carta for a progressive movement.

In fact, there are even later prophets, inspired founders. She doesn't believe me when I tell Heshol (sp) that I think she is a modern day saint. Her daddy got it right, and it's in her DNA, and Dartmouth can't do anything about it, it's in there. Martin Luther King, Kennedy, Malcolm, Mandela, and the Bishop's Pastoral Letter, the best kept secret in religious literature in America, a very powerful witness to what this world ought to look like in regards to economic reality.

Well, let me just say to you, there are several other things we can do. This is the third category, I said first, bring us to maturity, then talk about the prophets as charter members, but there are some practical considerations. This year, brothers and sisters, since the religious right has claimed the patent on God and religion, we cannot concede it to them. Almost, if you don't believe it, even if you don't believe it, you'd better find out where there is a commonality with the religious perspective, that deals with ultimate reality, that has the capacity to deal with purpose and meaning, writ large, and how that helps us to deal with fear in the midst of our terror and tyranny at home. We have got to find a way not to be embarrassed. I'm so sick and tired of folks being embarrassed when somebody that has a progressive religious perspective comes around. We're no step children, we're part of the family. And if you can't deal with us, that is the religious part of the progressive movement, how do you think you're going to join up and bring healing with the vast majority of the folks on the other side.

It would be a Pyrrhic victory indeed if we win as a movement, and can have no creative dialogue with those who are on the religious right. We need to be able to make this paradigm shift. We need to encourage people to know that the wedge issues are just that, but that we have a responsibility to learn how to talk with people who believe completely opposite to what we think. In fact, in here we've learned to do it ourselves together. We must learn how to delve beneath the political expression, and get to the religious values that inform even the perspective our adversaries.

Also, this is going to be good now, we need as a movement, though we are young. We're not young, we're old; we're just a renaissance of a movement. We need to get a CAT scan of our movement. There is some foolishness in our movement just like there is in the other. But, if we work on ourselves, and got critical distance on ourselves enough to look at our strengths and weaknesses, then we can take our strength, and then we could also do a better job of really doing a CAT scan on the other side, and tell them, we are not against you, we would just like to get the best there is from you, put it together with the

best there is in us, and then we've got a country that's getting ready to be beautiful all over again.

Well, I won't get a chance to come before meetings like this if the word gets out that Jim Forbes is long-winded. So I had better find a way to sort of bring my little comments to a focused conclusion. First of all, let me say, we who are of the progressive movement need to remember that you don't have to be worried about the issue of faith. We are a part of it. If you talk about the Declaration of Independence, I looked at it all over again, do you understand that in the very first paragraph they're talking about the laws of nature, and of nature's God. They were not ashamed of their faith connection. And they also talked about that folks are endowed by a creator with certain inalienable rights. And those folks that signed that, they didn't all have the same perspective. Some of them were atheists, some of them were deists, some of them were theists. Some of those do not know exactly what they were, but they had at least a humanistic bent. That represents the various folks that are represented in here.

That was in the Declaration itself, and at the end of it also, it's still there, with one minor problem, and I'm going to raise that one. It says, we therefore, the representatives of the United States, and general Congress, assemble, appealing to the supreme judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions. It's right there, brothers and sisters. So what you've got to recognize is the founding documents of our nation reflected a fundamental religious sensibility. What's happened is we have lost that in the culture. Now, we who have depended upon it, as it was implicit, now within our ranks must find a way to make common cause.

There is one negative statement I found in this Declaration of Independence, and that is in the middle of it. It talked about our founding members of our society. It says something about old King George having excited domestic insurrection against us, and endeavored to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless, Indian savages, which is a good thing to point out. That even the Constitution made black folks three-fourths of a man, and the Declaration called our native brothers and sisters savages, which means to be American is always to examine where were there flaws in our past that we've got to deal with in our present. If this movement is going somewhere, it's going to have to stop this tribalistic assessment that everybody that ain't European is somehow a second class brand of existence. We've got to overcome that racist and classist dynamic if we're going to rule enough to get our perspective where it begins to be a part of the blessing.

(Applause.)

I think you need to be aware -- well, here's the way we're going to be able to bless. By the way, there is no significant social movement in this country that did not develop a sense of camaraderie, a sense of hope, a sense of joy, a sense of being family, and certainly you can't be a movement without some songs. And America has had its song. And we, as the movement are going to have to get so excited about the work that we are doing, that song writers will rise up, and we will learn the song, and we will sing

them. If you sing them in the black church you're going to do it to the Hammond organ, if you come to Riverside, of course, we've got one of those mighty pipe organs, or it may be just a drum roll, or it may be just a little bit of guitar. But, we will have to be a movement that learns how to sing together, because we are determined that we are going to be the people that God would have us be.

I close with these words, then, to you. We've got to work so hard together, and be so excited about the blessing that we can be to our nation, that we will be able to help America release her song again. And that America will be blessed by God, and America will be beautiful. Then, if we do it, we will discover it was because God's grace called us together from the multiplicity of our perspectives, and made of us a mighty witness in the time when this nation has to make up its mind whether it wants to lead down into degradation, or upward and onward toward the global leadership that history will record as the brightest hour of our nation.

So here we are, mixed up together as we are, here is what's got to happen, the same thing I tell almost everywhere. One Sunday afternoon, you know this one, Jim, when I was preaching in my pulpit in Richmond, Virginia, I got a call saying that Sister Baldwin, there is it, Sister Baldwin was very ill and I should hurry over. So I stopped preaching, every now and then you've got to stop preaching. Every now and then you've got to stop preaching. I went over to Sister Baldwin's house, but several members of my church joined me. When we got there she had profuse nose bleeding, and what we did, we went to work.

First of all, Sister Coleman got a brown paper sack, tore off a piece, and rolled up the paper sack, and stuck it under Sister Baldwin's lip. Brother Majet (sp) got a medicine bottle, caught three drops of her blood in the medicine bottle, put the cap on it, and put it on the cupboard and said, that's what grandma used to do when we kids had nose bleedings. And Sister Randolph, a practical nurse, got a towel, got some ice, and applied an ice pack. And I, the charismatic pastor, put my hands on her shoulders, and I prayed that God would stop her nose bleed, and he would restore her to health. And in about a minute, Welton, Sister Baldwin's nose stopped bleeding, and we went back to church rejoicing, our only problem was, we didn't know which method had worked.

God bless you.

(Applause.)

MS. BARNES: I've been in Riverside Church many times to hear Reverend Forbes, and he's always amazing. So, thank you so much for this afternoon's message.

Of course, I was sitting in my chair, just like the rest of you, and I was laughing at your jokes, and clapping, and enjoying the message, and all of a sudden in the middle of it I thought, I have to speak after Reverend Forbes. But thank you so much.

The first thing I would like to do is thank the many, many staff at the hotel for making today possible, and for all of their hard work. I hope you join me in thanking them for what they've done.

(Applause.)

And I also want to thank my many colleagues at the Center for American Progress for making today possible, those who moderated, those who really helped put today's conference together, sat through all the meetings, made the many, many decisions, thank you for all of your hard work.

(Applause.)

If there is one overarching theme to today's conference, it's that faith is about much more than simply believing in peace and justice. It's taking advantage of the opportunities that God gives us to build a more just society, and a more peaceful world. It's that faith is more than a set of beliefs, it's the way that we act on them. And just as that progressive tradition guided us in the past, we're affirming that it's going to lead us now and in the future.

I don't think any of us here believe that our faith, just as Reverend Forbes said, I don't think that we believe that our faith, our sense of morality gives us any more of a right than other citizens to influence policy. But I think we all understand it gives us a special responsibility to try. It gives us a special responsibility to speak out for those who suffer in poverty; a special responsibility to speak out for tolerance; a special responsibility to speak out for those whose lives have been scarred by violence and war; a special responsibility to speak out for the right of future generations to live in a healthier world than the one we live in today.

And if we want to be effective, truly effective, we know that our words must not only be heard in the synagogue, in the mosque, in the church, but also in the public square, and wherever important decisions are made. And that's our next step, taking the ideas we discussed today, and moving them onto America's agenda. Letting legislators and opinion leaders and our fellow citizens know that combining faith and politics need not be a formula for intolerance and extremism. Let me say that again, it need not be a formula for intolerance and extremism. But that instead it can be a catalyst to rebuild a progressive consensus in America, and building that progressive consensus is a priority that simply will not wait.

Today, for example, the United States is still the only developed nation that fails to provide affordable healthcare to all. Each year, millions of our friends and our neighbors are forced to go without the healthcare they need because they simply can't afford it. As we meet here today, there are children who cannot obtain the medical treatment that they need to live because their parents don't have insurance, and they don't have the money to pay the bill. That's more than a failure of public policy, that is a moral outrage, and we have to start talking about it that way.

At the Center for American Progress, we have the audacity, the audacity to believe that our national priorities can be reshaped to ensure that everyone has access to affordable healthcare. But if that's going to happen, the religious community and healthcare activists must first join forces, and that's why later this year we will be convening religious leaders and healthcare experts to discuss how we can bring our nation together to solve this crisis once and for all.

And we also want to build on the work that you started today in our policy discussions. This isn't a one-time conference, we've all been to those conferences, you go to the conference, and everybody enjoys it, and then you leave, and it's over, and you don't know what happened to all the things that you discussed. You don't know what happened to your ideas. That isn't what this is about. For us, and I think for all of you, this is a serious commitment to work together as a community of caring, as a coalition to make serious changes. So we want to build on the conversations that you started this morning to go forward and to do good work.

But our agenda has to go beyond policy. In essence, what we have to do is fundamentally reframe the discussion about politics and social action in America. We need to remind Americans of the heritage of faith and activism that you represent. This month, here in Washington, we'll be hosting an event with author David Chapell. Many of you may have heard about his book, *Inside Agitators: White Southerners in the Civil Rights Movement*. And his book talks about the church movement in the South Civil Rights Movement that many of us have discussed today, and certainly that our first panel eloquently discussed. And we're planning other programs in the future to highlight the remarkable contribution of men and women of faith as they have made their way through struggle to social justice. And in that regard, I would also like to solicit your ideas and contributions for the new Web site that we've established at www.AmericanProgress.org/religion. And since nobody was writing anything down, let me say that one more time so you remember it, www.AmericanProgress.org/religion. We hope that that Web site can be a crossroads where religious leaders and other progressive activists can meet, become more familiar with each other, and strengthen our movement as a whole, moving the discussion from the church, the mosque and the synagogue into the public square, and beyond.

Will it be easy? No. After all, if it were easy, it would have happened a long time ago. But what I hear you telling us is that we don't have a choice. Like you, I'm convinced that God has given us the tools we need to turn this country around. It's our ability to organize, we've done it before. It's our ability to mobilize, we've done it before. It's our commitment and our will to make change happen. That's the progressive tradition we're honoring, that's the progressive tradition we're renewing today.

Now, that doesn't mean that we're not going to face difficult obstacles along the way, but if we stay true to our vision, if we stay true to our morals, if we stay true to our values, if we stay true to our faith, and if we stay true to God, we will not be denied.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

To conclude our conference, I would like now to turn to Imam Hendi. Imam Hendi is the Muslim chaplain at Georgetown University. He's also the Muslim chaplain at the Bethesda Naval Hospital. He serves as a member and a spokesman of the Islamic Jurisprudence Council of North America, and he also directs the Public Education and Assistance Conference of the Muslim American Society. He earned a B.A. degree in Islamic Law and theology from the University of Jordan. He holds two Master's Degrees, one in Comparative Religion from Hartford Seminary in Connecticut, and he's also a Ph.D. candidate in the Comparative Religion at Temple University.

Imam Hendi was one of the Muslim leaders who met with the president after the September 11th attacks. In May 2002, he was chosen by Hartford Seminary to receive its annual James Gettemy Significant Ministry Award for his dedication to promoting interreligious cooperation.

Imam Hendi.

(Applause.)

IMAM HENDI: Aren't we all proud of the Center for American Progress?

(Applause.)

I'm very proud of the Center, and I have a lot of hope in tomorrow, because of the Center, and its mission, may God bless the center. It is an organization that has, indeed, committed itself to the principles and ideals of our forefathers -- I mean the ideals that made America great, I mean the ideals that gave birth to Martin Luther King, whose dream changed America; a dream of no racism, a dream of no poverty, a dream of no militarism, a dream shaped by religious conviction, and guided by a true sense of religious values, shaped by Matthew 25 and 30 to 46, shaped by blessed are the peacemakers. It was a progressive dream, and a proactive dream. He took the lead, many years ago, now I call on myself, and all of us to also take the lead.

We, with our religious values, must continue to keep America in the forefront in the fight for inclusively, unconditional love, liberty, and freedom for all. We must take the lead. I believe to reclaim the spirit of American religious values, we must work together, as you heard, even with our opponents, to free the values hijacked, and kidnapped by those who claim to speak on behalf of our religious traditions, as we include even them in the dialogue for a better America.

A true America, is that which gives voice to the voiceless, and offers shelter to the homeless. A true America, for which we have to fight, is the America whose budget reflects its true faith in the significance of working with allies, and building coalitions.

Our true American religious values can and must lead us and have led us to believe that we have to love, and work for justice. Our American religious values tell us that our foreign policy must operate with the might of humanity, and not the sadness of -- (inaudible) -- our American religious values proclaim, honor work, build strong communities, and foster a good representative government.

Our true religious values teach that our government must always be by the people, and for all the people, a government that protects our civil liberties and provides equal justice to all. Our religious values, and the progressive religious values unite, not divide, wage peace, and not make war, say the truth, and don't give lies.

My friends, my brothers and my sisters, my partners on the path to a better America, let us all get on board, to protect America, and foster in the public life a true sense of religious values, as we maintain the separation between church and state. Let us work together for a powerful, just, safe, and free America, for all the people.

Now, join me in a prayer.

(Speaking Arabic.)

Thanks be to God the lord of the Universe. Almighty God, source of love and compassion, the one of justice, goodness, and generosity, we ask you, in your most holy, and beautiful name, to bless this nation, to help us advance goodness, and restore peace to the nations of the world, as we do that with love. Make us instruments of peace, strengthen our communities, make us advocates of mutual respect and understanding. Almighty God, when there is darkness let there be light, when there is loss, let there be discovery. God, the destiny of all the people around the world is tied up with our destiny in America, and freedom everywhere is bound to our freedom in America. And progress everywhere is connected to our progress, and our progressive agenda in America.

So we pray that you may give us the wisdom and the light required to move ahead, to give voice to the voiceless, and home to the homeless. The dominion is yours forever, and ever, and let us all say, amen.

(Applause.)

(END)