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MR. CAMMARIERI: Levity is the order of the day.

I have to admit I'm probably by nature a skeptic. I'm not a cynic. I get accused of that sometimes, but there's a real difference between skepticism and cynicism. Skepticism is rooted in some empirical experience.

And while my optimism is always guarded, I think all of us here, despite our pessimism, have hope. We wouldn't be here if we didn't have hope that we have to address these issues. So I think that's something that really needs to be always acknowledged.

I think of the old preacher slogan, you know, we're not where we were, but we're nowhere near where we want to be. And I think about the Kerner Commission Report and what has happened in this country. Yeah, we've had some -- in the context of Newark, we've had some gains in political representation, although the -- I'm sorry.

We've had gains in political representation, although the achievement of our black elected officials in over the last 36 years has been disgraceful. It hasn't changed the material condition of African Americans in the city and all people in the city.

We've had some limited economic advance in terms of a slightly growing middle class among African Americans. Clearly there's been an improvement in police brutality. That's not as serious a problem as it once was, but these things are nowhere near where we need to be.

I mean economically, if you look at all the socioeconomic indicators, we are still pretty much in the same situation we were 40 years ago.

It's interesting in going through the Kerner Commission Report, this isn't -- my old raggedy copy. This isn't rocket science. It's just common sense.

What these people did was simply common sense in looking at our society from a historical point of view. Not an ahistorical point of view because one of the problems with the American society is that we're ahistorical. We don't like to look at our history. We might see things we don't like.

I do -- this is common sense that's rooted in the notion that we should, we should address the issues of racial disparity and equity oppression.

I would take issue with one of the premises of the most famous quote in this that we're moving towards two societies. I would respectfully suggest that we never were one society in this country. If you look at -- I'm sure most African Americans and Native Americans -- hell, you can ask Mr. Shays from Shays' Rebellion, this never was one society, although we've tried to promote that in terms of an ideology of some kind of a mythology of our country.

It's also fascinating to me that it's such a typical American irony that in 1968 when this was published, was the same year that the republican party initiated its southern strategy, which resulted in an incredibly profound racialized realignment of politics in this country, which still affects us today. We see it in '68. Track it. Willie Horton in the '80s.

It's a little more sophisticated in these times in terms of -- in these days in terms of the no tax rhetoric because when people talk about no taxes, the subtext is usually we don't want to spend money on these colored people in the cities. We're wasting our money.

So that's something that has been here -- that has taken root and it was just fascinating to me that it was the same year.

The result -- and that strategy resulted in the erosion of the political will and of resources that deal comprehensively and substantively with the kind of issues we need to deal with, issues of race and of poverty.

Because -- the issue of poverty began to be promoted and presented strictly as a racial issue. Now statistically it is and clearly this purports to impact on people of color. However, it is also an issue for white people, but unfortunately too many of our people have responded to the racial pandering politically where they don't even see the collective interest they have in terms of a working class, for instance, although you can't use the word class because, of course, we have no classes in the United States of America, right? You know, if you use that word, some of your -- you're tainted as, you know, indulging in class warfare. It's rich people who say that and power people who say that.

But they're -- and you can see that in the fact that so many of our -- of my people, white people, who are working class, moderate middle income, they'll vote I guess in their own interests because of issues of race, and the subtext of every major issue we have in this country is -- usually can be devolved in some way to racial perception.

There are a couple things I think we need to do. One is how do we -- and this basically comes down to us progressive-minded people forcing, you know, these -- the democratic party because I don't have too much hope for the republicans. I mean I'll work with anybody who wants to do the right thing.

But, you know, we've gotta make the democrats a lot less cowardly and progressive in terms of dealing with issues of race and poverty. We need to develop some kind of -- politically sort of a multi-racial collective unity.

Getting through this type of ahistorical nature of how we see things, that's clearly one thing that needs to be done from a political and community organizing point of view.

I mean they're obviously -- what the Kerner Commission presented is the idea of present policies, enrichment of our conditions here or integration. Those -- that's a context that could be examined, re-examined and still used I think, but clearly we need to move beyond that into a more substantive look at how do we engage some sort of collective self-interest and collective interest so that people start to see that we're all in this thing together.

Finally, the most profound thing -- and I have no idea how to do this, but there are -- I guess there are ways, and I'll try to (indiscernible) organizing in neighborhoods throughout Newark, is this country has simply never confronted the issue of race. We have dealt with it through obfuscation and denial. Race is, I guess to use a religious term, the original sin of this country. It is the psychological barrier beyond which most citizens of the United States, residents are not allowed to go through.

Genocide and chattel slavery were the central developing cores and principles of this country. You're not going to hear that very much. You know, we try to get it through into our schools, but that's something that is just who we are, where we came from, and yet we never deal with that. We never confront it. Until we confront that, analyze it and then move beyond it, we just will not get to where we want to be.

You know, for intensity and duration, I would defy anyone historically to identify a group -- groups of people who have gone through more historically than what African Americans or Native Americans have in this country.

You know, and I'm not pandering. I mean I'm not -- I don't need to say that to get on anybody's good side. That's just my analysis of history. And until we -- as I said, until we address that, acknowledge it and somehow study it in a constructive way, we're not going to move very far.

So with that, I'll move on.