



NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES
Institute for Youth, Education, and Families

*Rising to the Challenge: A Platform for City Leadership on Behalf of Children, Youth,
and Families*

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Moderator: **Clifford Johnson**, Executive Director
Institute for Youth, Education, and Families
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Speaker:

Vice Mayor Daun Hester, City of Norfolk, Virginia, 2006 Chair of NLC's Council on
Youth, Education, and Families

JOHNSON: Thank you. And welcome to you all to the latest in our monthly series of free audioconferences sponsored by the National League of Cities and its Institute for Youth, Education and Families (YEF Institute). I'm Cliff Johnson. I'm the Executive Director of the YEF Institute. We're delighted to have you with us today to talk about a new city Platform for strengthening families and improving outcomes for children and youth that was prepared during 2005 by the National League of Cities' Council on Youth, Education and Families, which was chaired last year by San Jose, California Mayor Ron Gonzalez. And the Platform as prepared by the Council was subsequently endorsed by the National League of Cities' Board of Directors at its last meeting on December 7, 2005 in Charlotte, North Carolina as part of the NLC Annual Congress of Cities -- the annual meeting for the National League of Cities each year.

I want to draw your attention to the fact that the Platform we'll be discussing today is posted on the NLC website. You should have received a link to that. If not, you can go directly to www.nlc.org/iyef. And at nlc.org/iyef, you will find right there on the main Institute home page an icon with the "Platform for Strengthening Families and Improving Outcomes for Children and Youth." So you can pull that up on your screen and be looking at it while we are talking.

The Platform was also mailed directly to mayors of every NLC member city over the holidays. It should have arrived at your city or town in early January, accompanied by a fifth anniversary report describing the initial five years of work for our Institute for Youth, Education and Families. That Platform mailing included a request that cities formally adopt the Platform, and we will be talking more about those opportunities as this call progresses.

We are very fortunate today to have with us the Vice-Mayor of Norfolk, Virginia, Daun Hester. Good afternoon, Daun.

HESTER: Hello to everyone.

JOHNSON: Daun is the newly appointed chair of the NLC Council on Youth, Education and Families for 2006. She served as the Vice-Chair of YEF Council last year, and has been a founding member of the Council. This goes all the way back to when the Council was first established by the National League of Cities in 1999. So one of our stalwart members and leaders in the work that we're doing around children, youth and families. Daun was first elected to the City Council in Norfolk in 1996, so she's been on the council for ten years now. She's been Vice-Mayor, chairing the City Council for the last six years, going back to 2000. And she has a long personal background and professional background on issues related to children, youth and families. She served in a variety of capacities -- as teacher, principal, administrator in the Norfolk Public School System for 22 years, and now works as an educational consultant in Norfolk, doing career development training work, working closely on a number of things with Norfolk State University, being engaged in GED program work there in Norfolk. So Daun, thank you so much for taking the time to be with us today and talk about the work of the council on the city platform.

Let me start, Daun, with a very basic question, which is to ask you why. Why did the YEF Council go down this road and decide to advance a city platform of this nature?

HESTER: Well, a lot of it had to do with the five years of work that we've been doing since the Council started and was formed, looking at youth participation, afterschool programs, providing technical assistance, and just trying to find out what our cities and counties were doing all across the country. And we wanted to -- I guess at the end of five years, it's "Where do you go?" And we wanted to elevate and challenge our cities to do more for the children that we serve, the families that we serve. And because we concentrate so much on the needs of our families, that's why we wanted to get to this point where the Platform was designed so that we could give our colleagues some examples of the research and work that we've done and think that they could do it within their own communities, no matter what size their community happens to be.

JOHNSON: And I know that this discussion about the importance of strengthening families has been going on for a while within the Council on Youth, Education and Families. It was a main topic of discussion in 2004, when the Council prepared a joint statement on the importance of strengthening families. And my sense was that a lot of folks on the Council felt it was time to put some meat on the bones through that statement. Is that a right way of thinking about this?

HESTER: Yes, it is. Because children and families are constituencies primarily -- you know, the people that we're serving every day and trying to make sure that our cities are run the best way they can be. And we wanted to try to do what we could and share the information that we've learned working with Council member from all across the country, that if we're going to really have an impact on our families, specifically, our children -- you can't do one without the other -- then we were going to have to heighten the awareness and call on our colleagues to help us with that, and then help them to do that if that was a need, too.

JOHNSON: Yes, absolutely. So let's walk our listeners through the Platform for just a minute and talk about how it's structured. How did the Council decide to lay out this Platform?

HESTER: Well, one of the things we didn't want to do was scare anybody away, to make it seem like there was too much to do. Because we know that we're all different sizes, different populations with different needs and things going on within everybody's city, that we wanted it to be general so that you could pick out what would work for you and fit into what your priorities were.

But we wanted to also give you options to -- if you're like many cities and you set your priorities and you have four or five areas that you're going to concentrate on, we wanted to encourage everyone to make sure that children, youth and families were high on your agenda. So we just wanted to lay out simple things that you could do -- an infrastructure that you could put in place, which is one of the key components. And then the other was to just show a series of things that you could do in the seven areas that we have found to sort of encompass really all of the work that we've done and the things that we've learned over the past five years. And those topic areas, we've just given some things that you could do, realizing that they're not all-inclusive and you could do other things and not do anything that's on this list. But we wanted to give everyone something to think about as a way to begin the process. Or if they were already in the process and working on these things, then how they could maybe take it to another level or take another step.

In Norfolk, in my first involvement with the Council, each year I tried to add on one additional thing that I have learned over the course of time. And so when I first got on the Council, we formed the Norfolk Youth Council. And then second and third year, we applied for two technical assistance grants. We're dealing with afterschool programming, and then youth participation. And then in the fourth year, I was finally able to get my colleagues to agree to form a Division of Youth Development. We had one in the past, but they had done away with it. So now we have one in place with five people on staff, concentrating specifically on issues for our youth and families and putting them in place in our strategic plan. In 2006 we will adopt a strategic plan for youth that has been a community-wide effort, from all of our sectors.

And so the Platform I think gives you things that you can think about that you could possibly do to realizing that if our families are strong and our cities are going to be strong, we won't have to spend as much money on public safety and, unfortunately, jails, which seems to be where the growing population is. I know I'm going on quite a bit on this one.

JOHNSON: It's interesting to hear how you have tried to anticipate concerns on your own city council there in Norfolk that this would be too much to do all at once. How can you ask us to go down this road by sort of systematically chipping away at it year after year and layering this work to the point that over a period of time, you really build a strong and broad foundation for this work there in Norfolk. I know, I remember very clearly the discussions among members of the YEF Council this past year, and their concern that this not be understood as an attempt to have a cookie cutter, one-size-fits-all approach and to not, as you said, scare people away by thinking that this was a message that you had to do all 25 of these things right now or else you can't sign up and you can't

commit yourself to the effort. In some cases, it has to be a longer-term, incremental effort.

You know, the other thing that really stays with me from thinking back about the Council meetings during the course of 2005 was how much discussion there was about the process that needed to happen in local communities. When I started this work with the Council, I was expecting most of the discussion to be focused on specific action steps -- you know, "every city or town needs to do X or Y." And especially in the first discussion we had, most of the members of the Council, as I recall, wanted to spend time talking about what is framed here in the Platform as the "essential infrastructure" -- the mechanisms that you have to have in place to get these tasks done.

HESTER: Right.

JOHNSON: And then the action steps often flow out of that. Have you found ways of thinking about those sorts of essential tasks in your own community there in Norfolk? I know that you do a fair amount of this already in terms of mechanisms for identifying needs and opportunities and ways of working with the school system. Some of that comes second nature to you, I'm sure.

HESTER: Yes, but a lot of that is just because of my career in working with children and families. But unless we collectively figure out what it is that we think we need to do -- what do families need? What do children need? -- then you really don't know where you're going.

And so we have a wonderful partnership with our planning council and the United Way and one of our larger foundations. And many years ago, we looked at our community and looked where we needed to have some gains and began to put some funds so that we could begin to make a difference. And children were a big part of that. And now there's a major focus for us as we go to four-year-olds where we're looking to do some more promotion with that, and education and putting some programs in place.

The steps that we have laid -- the four infrastructure pieces are, I think, if we're able to get them in place and just leave it in the community, then even when we're gone, it can be sustained and become institutionalized. Because a lot of it has -- you know, you have to help people to see how, of course, one thing impacts the other. We have a wonderful relationship with our school system, thank goodness. Of course, we can't give them everything that they need, but we do have regular meetings. We meet with the entire board twice a year. And the Mayor and I and the Chair and the Vice-Chair, Superintendent and City Manager meet every other month so that we know where we're going, so that nobody is surprised with budget things, so that facility needs, maintenance needs, all those things are discussed.

And once again, if you're able to sort of infiltrate these things into even all the decisions within your city, even in our planning department, our housing department, things for children, open space, all of that becomes part of what they have to think about. You know, we didn't get there overnight.

JOHNSON: That's right. Quite a bit comes from part of the way the city does business, right?

HESTER: Right, right.

JOHNSON: And that is so important. For our listeners, I want to sort of sketch process a little bit more for them. The Council met last May and put together its initial thoughts on the Platform in terms of essential infrastructure as well as specific action steps. But then as part of our process last year, we took a draft platform to the NLC 2005 summit on Your Cities' Families in San Antonio, and structured a number of sessions at the summit, including a closing Town Hall meeting where we had audience response technology. Everyone had their little handheld device and had a chance to vote on the various aspects of the Platform and give us very concrete feedback about the Platform.

One of the big findings out of that was when the Council, I think as you have already noted, was worried in its comments that maybe this was too broad, too ambitious a platform. And so we put those questions directly to the participants -- several hundred people who were with us at the summit in San Antonio. And the feedback came back very clearly, yes, it's ambitious, but don't pare it back. This is the breadth and the kind of things that we need to be doing -- which was very gratifying, very reassuring. And if anything, some of the back-and-forth feedback we got in small group sessions at the San Antonio summit was about pushing us to go even farther and reminding us that even if you took some of these action steps to set up initial programs or to get started in a particular area, that that wasn't the sum total of everything that needed to happen for our families and for our children and youth in cities and towns across the country.

And I know you've thought about this, too, in terms of why the Council picked these specific action steps that it did and how it tried to distinguish between starting points or points of entry and a list of everything anyone could ever hope and dream to do for kids and families in cities and towns across the country. But I want to give you a chance to reflect on that further, in terms of what was your sense that there was an opportunity here to push people who hadn't gotten started at all? What do you think the Council was trying to do with cities that were farther along? And how would you respond to people who might look at this platform and say, "Well, there are some good ideas here, but this is only part of the agenda, part of what needs to happen"?

HESTER: I would say that that's true. In looking at what you have in your own city, we found that we had many organizations, some of them have been doing the same thing. So we tried to bring them together to see how, with money that was already in the community, how could we sort of reposition collectively, with everyone agreeing on how you spend the dollars that we already have in the community to advance issues for our children and families and make things better.

So I think with the action steps that we have taken or that we have selected, they primarily come from our five-year conversation. But you can be at the beginning and you could have a council that really doesn't have children high on their agenda -- even though I hope that we don't have this anywhere across the country -- you usually have one or two people who are trying to push these things. And so it's either have somebody who is just beginning to somebody who is really far beyond and doing things I guess the way we would want to see them done all across the country. And that's part of the reason for the Platform, so we can get a better idea of where people are, where we can maybe look to see how we can either provide resources or technical assistance in some kind of way, or help people find those things, to be able to do some of the things

that they envision in their communities.

JOHNSON: What impressed me was the Council's focus on being very concrete and practical as well -- you know, to try to craft that action step. They weren't broad and vague and general -- "Get everyone off to a good start in life" and whatever else -- but to really hone in on some specific steps, some very concrete things that could be done, recognizing that if a city or a town did that step, it would probably lead, and should lead, to other things and more things down the road.

In the little time we have left before questions, Daun, I want to talk with you for a few minutes about how you hope city leaders will respond to this platform, how you hope they will use it. What are you thinking and what is the Council hoping that city leaders will do with this platform?

HESTER: Well, one thing is make it a part of their agenda. Talk about it in their communities. Bring community partners together -- people that you work with and even those that you haven't worked with before. To look at your community and determine how you can through measurable goals improve the lives of your children and families. And I think that's the bottom line because we just keep going back to, if our families are strong, then our cities are going to be strong. And stronger -- with the employment end, making sure we have leaders ready to take over our spots and individuals able to work and educated and with the ability to be successful, so that we can, instead of putting dollars behind the curve, that we can figure out how to move your money to the front end so that you are successfully working with a family and you don't have to spend as much money on the deterrent side or once negative things have happened to your families and/or your neighborhoods. Because the stronger your families are -- then of course you get into home ownership. In some communities like mine, you've got neighborhoods where people are struggling and the neighborhood is struggling. You've got that mix so that we're able to strengthen all of them. So the Platform is to raise the awareness, to hopefully get more of our colleagues and people throughout the country to take the time to really look at what they have already in their community and what they think that they can do additionally to continue to add onto that, realizing that it is work. It takes time.

JOHNSON: So city leaders can use the Platform in part as a checklist, a sort of self-assessment tool, to say, well, how are we doing here? How do we measure up against these four essential tasks, essential infrastructure? And looking across the 21 action steps in the second part of the Platform, how do we measure up? How many of these are we doing? Have we been down some of these roads or not? And also in that process, you were discussing driving local discussions with key stakeholders about the city's current activities as well as its future possibilities, right?

HESTER: That's right.

JOHNSON: What would it mean for a city to actually adopt the Platform? I know that this has been part of the Council's hope, is that the city leaders would consider adoption. How have you thought about that in Norfolk? What kind of path or course do we hope people will go down related to adopting the Platform?

HESTER: Well, it's been Norfolk adopting the Platform, which we have already agreed to do, and the resolution will be coming forward, and we're going to have a big community kickoff because we're also going to open on February 1 our first afterschool program located in one of our middle schools. We've never had this before, and we've got a big day planned with all of these activities. And as a part of that, in the Mayor's "State of the City" message, which he's giving the following day, which is February 2, and it's also going to be part of his comments of raising the awareness of making things better for our children and our families. So it will be a part of his message that's delivered for the entire city. That's one of the things that we're going to concentrate on and talk about the things that we have done and where we want to try to go.

JOHNSON: So you have a formal resolution coming forward to the City Council. You're asking the City Council to take formal action on it and to go on record embracing this platform and its action steps.

HESTER: It's always better when you go on record, I think. That's just how we work in Norfolk. It helps to hold us accountable if we say we're going to do something. I do think that's important. And then to be able to share it with NLC -- you know, I'd love to have a long list of everybody that's on this conversation accepting the Platform and encouraging all the people within your region to accept the Platform. Because then I think it also helps us to heighten issues at other levels, whether it be at the state or the federal level, that this is something that collectively our cities are working on and the impact that it's having just locally. Just think of what we could do if it were even broader.

JOHNSON: Yes, and we're eager to have that kind of feedback here at NLC and at the Institute for Youth, Education and Families, so that we can monitor, track and support efforts to adopt and implement the Platform across the country. So if you go to the NLC website, to the Institute's page on the website, www.nlc.org/iyef, and you'd click on the icon that says you want to adopt the Platform, it takes you to a page that includes an option for "Click here to adopt the Platform in your community." And there is actually an online response form that will pop up and immediately give you an opportunity right online to fill out a very brief form reporting back and letting us know here at NLC that your community has adopted the Platform, giving us a sense of specific areas or parts of the Platform that you're focusing on initially and any sense of next steps going forward. And that can also be done the old-fashioned way, with paper and mail and fax and whatever else. But there are multiple ways at this point to be engaged in reporting back on adopting the Platform.

And then I know going forward, Daun, there is a strategy among the members of the Council on Youth, Education and Families at least for reaching out to neighborhood communities, to state municipal leagues. Can you give our audience a sense of that outreach effort as it looks right now?

HESTER: Well, we have been in contact with many and are planning to either become a part of the state conferences, where we can go in and talk about the Platform throughout the city because we have members from all across the country. We're prepared to come to your state league to share the information, to get a broader

understanding and a greater buy-in at the state level. So that's a resource that's available to you, that we're willing to do that and the staff is willing to do that, too. And then we're also trying to make sure that if we can support you in any way or you can give us some ideas, then we're looking for that, too, as to what we can do for state leagues to help them to make it an agenda item.

JOHNSON: There are never too many champions for this kind of work, right? So to the extent that people on this call are in a position, or other city leaders across the country gets to the point where they're not only willing to adopt the Platform themselves and use it as a starting point in their own community, but also to reach out to peers and colleagues in their immediate area, their immediate region, or to approach the state municipal league directly and try and get it on the state municipal league agenda. That will help elevate the visibility of this work and help continue to build a movement really around the Platform for Strengthening Families and Improving Outcomes for Children and Youth.

We have two e-mail questions, and then I'm going to ask our operator to solicit questions directly from the audience. The first one is simple and quite appropriate. It asks whether there are financial resources from the National League of Cities for technical assistance to help with community mobilization around specific goals within the Platform. Unfortunately, the answer to that is no. We don't have financial resources to make planning grants or other sorts of funding available for community mobilization. We do have the capacity to provide lots of advice, resources, access to materials and national experts, city examples -- how other communities have undertaken work. So there is a lot we can do, I think, both in guiding and helping to frame opportunities for community mobilization. But all that stops one step short of being able to pass along dollars to NLC member cities for that service.

HESTER: I'd like to throw in that the technical assistance was very important to us on the two areas -- afterschool and youth participation -- because it helped us to look at what we already had as far as resources. So all of us are spending dollars in various areas for our children and our families trying to do things. And so it just made us take a look at what we were doing and how we were doing things and helped us to shift dollars so that we're still able to do those, but we're able to add some additional things into it, too, especially for our afterschool providers and training that we're doing for them now. We have that now being underwritten, where it just started out with the city putting up a little bit of money. Now we have companies that are providing the funding for us to be able to do the training for our afterschool providers.

JOHNSON: That's great. And as you know well -- you've done this over and over in Norfolk, I know -- city leaders, mayors, city council members are in a great position to bring key stakeholders and community partners to the table for conversations. And while the money issues come soon enough in terms of capacity to address needs and whatever, an awful lot of good discussion and planning and community mobilization can happen with little or no financial resources.

HESTER: Right.

JOHNSON: I'm going to pose the second question that we have via e-mail to Daun

here just to see what her reaction is. The second e-mail we have is from the mayor of a relatively small community that is closely linked to four others in their immediate geographic area. And while they don't have a municipal organization directly in the middle of this work, they have a community coalition called "Bringing Everyone's Strength Together." And the question is, do you see the Platform as being appropriate for such a non-governmental group, a non-governmental organization, a community-based coalition working in their area?

HESTER: I'm glad you asked the question, and the answer is a resounding yes. If you already have a coalition in place, then yes, I would love for your coalition to respond to the Platform because to me what you're saying is that there are many people that are coming to the table and bringing everybody's strengths. Then you have four or five, six, seven -- depending on how large the coalition is -- organizations who are already working with you. So that already broadens or at least helps us to show others when you're bringing these groups together that if you're trying to get everybody thinking and working together, then you've already done great things. So I just want to be able to help you strengthen that and expand that even beyond. So it's a resounding yes.

JOHNSON: It's a resounding yes. When I think back, there was so much conversation in the YEF Council discussions over the past year about building on what you have and sort of pausing long enough to understand strengths and assets in the community and then using that as a starting point -- in essence, a platform -- on which to build. And so what you have to say there is just along those lines of not reinventing the wheel. If you've got a good community coalition already in place, using that as a starting point for discussions about the Platform.

Operator, do we have a question on the line?

FACILITATOR: Yes, your first question comes from Debbie Pilch.

JOHNSON: Hi, Debbie. Can you tell us where you're from?

QUESTIONER: Hi. Yes, Debbie Pilch from Greeley, Colorado. And we do have a question from one of our listeners that's sitting in the room with us.

QUESTIONER: I'm Michael Muskin with United Way of Weld County. And you kind of answered this a little bit, but my question was in some of these that are highlighted, especially in the youth transition and family economic success, you've got down support. And I was just wondering, are you really looking at the city taking the lead from a financial standpoint, or a facilitation standpoint. I know you talked about that there are many things that can be done without a lot of money and just bringing people together. But is it the city that's really taking the lead as a facilitator, or supporting some of those things that are already going on in the cities through some financial support?

HESTER: For us, in Norfolk, it's a combination of both. We don't specifically have a mentoring program. But of course, within the community, we do. And so we try to -- it goes back to what was just said -- if somebody has the tools and the knowledge, the skills and ability, then we want to support that effort. But then there are some things that from

our perspective we want to get in place and get going from the city side that we're willing to put money into, and then help it expand from that point and maybe bring others on to do the same thing. So I think that it is not always from just the city pushing it or a partner pushing it. It's all of us, because we have worked together to talk about the things that we need and have identified the needs in the community. Then whoever has the ability to take the lead, we stand with that partner if they're taking the lead on it. Does that help, Mike?

QUESTIONER: Yes, thank you.

JOHNSON: I think they are very aware of the way in which that word "support" can be read a lot of different ways. In different communities, it will mean different things -- sometimes financial, sometimes not. But the most important thing for many folks on the Council was to signal that in many of these areas, the city may or may not be in the lead role. It may be something already going on, and the right step will be for the city to figure out how it can contribute to that effort that's already in place. In other instances, it may be that the city has to be in the role of developing or sponsoring or launching an effort because it doesn't already exist.

JOHNSON: I have another question from e-mail. And one of our listeners asks whether it's possible to receive a copy of the resolution -- the city council resolution adopting the Platform. Daun, I think this is probably posed in your direction in terms of the resolution that you'll be taking forward to the Norfolk City Council.

HESTER: And of course, the answer is yes. And I guess, Cliff, I can get your e-mail so that I can send it out to you. And if there are others who would like to have the draft of what we're doing, and you can shape it to your own community, then that will be fine. Or we can just use the same one, because it really is -- it's generic, but it still states that we're supporting the Platform. So I'd be happy to send that to all of the listeners.

JOHNSON: And I think we will have pretty quickly a good collection of sample resolutions -- actual resolutions that different communities have used. And I know that the two vice-chairs of the Council on Youth, Education and Families, who are from Bastrop, Texas and Tualatin, Oregon, two smaller communities, are bringing the Platform forward to their city councils. I know that Mayor Otis Johnson down in Savannah, Georgia, who was Vice-Chair of our Council last year, has already done so with the Savannah City Council. And so I think what we will be able to do at the Institute is to put together several of these samples or examples and send them out to everyone who has registered for this call. We can do that by e-mail, I'm sure.

Operator, do we have someone else on the line?

FACILITATOR: Yes, your next question comes from Archie Maddox.

QUESTIONER: Hi, this is Archie Maddox. I was just going to ask Daun how we can get in touch with her as far as an e-mail address to request copies of the resolution.

HESTER: My e-mail address is daun.hester@norfolk.gov.

QUESTIONER: Thank you very much.

JOHNSON: And Archie, you may not have heard if you were in the queue for questions, that we're going to try and send out several examples of resolutions to everyone who registers for the call. So if you give us a few days, we'll see if we can follow up with you directly on that.

FACILITATOR: Your next question comes from Joanne Denham.

QUESTIONER: Hi, I'm Joanne Benham from Spokane, Washington. And my question is how are youth involved in the Platform in Norfolk?

HESTER: Well, I have formal meetings with the Norfolk Youth Council once a month, and we met this past Saturday. And they reviewed my draft of the resolution and offered some suggestions and changes. And at the bottom of the resolution where it usually says "from the Mayor and the Council" and what have you, ours will say "from the Mayor and the Council and the Norfolk Youth Council." I've added their changes to it. Our youth council comes from all of our schools, public, private and parochial, throughout the city. So they're sort of the representatives from each of their schools. And then we have representatives by wards, so it kind of covers everybody. So they have given me their suggestions and changes and approval to move forward -- (laughs) -- so to speak.

JOHNSON: And I said, Joanne, to sort of remind our listeners, about the NLC process here, too. Because our Council on Youth, Education and Families is unique among NLC committees and councils because it's the only one that has youth members serving as full voting members of the Council. And so this past year we had three young people sitting on the YEF Council who, I think Daun would agree, kept us honest throughout the discussions about what we were doing. And also, when I think back on the discussion about essential infrastructure for sustained progress, the four items here on this list, and probably all the other specific action steps, I think clearly some of the greatest intensity of the discussion and the passion around the essential nature of these tasks was around Item 3 on the essential infrastructure -- this statement about encouraging and supporting youth voice, youth engagement and youth leadership. And so many members of our YEF Council think that's a central piece of it, in terms of making sure that the perspectives of young people in the community come through in everything that you do and having mechanisms to support that.

QUESTIONER: Thank you.

FACILITATOR: At this time, there are no further questions. Are there any closing remarks?

JOHNSON: Daun, what do you think? What haven't we covered here for our listeners about the opportunities going forward and the challenge that's ahead for the Council? I know obviously you're beginning your year as Chair of the Council, and the Council will

meet on several occasions throughout the year to figure out how to move this platform forward and to build momentum over time. Do you have closing thoughts about your hopes for the year and where you see this going?

HESTER: Many thoughts, and I'll keep them brief. First, I just want to thank everybody for taking the time to listen and to ask questions and to talk and collaborate amongst yourselves. That's always the first step -- getting people together and then talking about how you can do it in your community and how you can make it work, looking at everybody who's in your community. And so I really do appreciate that, and members of the YEF Council appreciate that.

Elevating the Platform to strengthen our families and our children is, as far as I'm concerned, one of the best things that we can do for our economy. And I hope that you will join us in signing on to the Platform and know that the members of the YEF Council and the YEF Institute, all of us, no matter where we are, are available and willing to talk to you, either e-mail or other conference calls that we can set up amongst ourselves, to help you move an agenda forward for your children and families in your communities. So just please get in touch with us. And I have to tell you that this staff -- the staff of the YEF Institute -- is just phenomenal. So if you haven't had a chance to work with them one-on-one with your community, take advantage of the opportunities that we provide and the expertise that we have with them. Because they can -- because of the resources and how much time they've taken to build partnerships and collaboration, they can help you get through whatever it is that you're trying to do, or think you would like to do, for your children. So if you need us, call us.

JOHNSON: What a great paid commercial announcement for the Institute. (laughter) Thank you for that, Daun. Those words of praise mean an awful lot coming from you. And we are very eager here at the Institute to figure out how to be helpful to communities if they embrace this Platform and try to play it out and move it forward. I think many of you on the line probably know that we've been working intensively in a number of program areas, including early childhood success, K-12 school improvement, afterschool programming, youth leadership and youth participation, the needs of disconnected youth, the safety of children and youth, work on childhood and youth obesity and efforts related to family economic success. So we're really covering a very broad range of issues at this point. And there are staff here at NLC who can be helpful on all of those topics.

And also this will be a learning process for us if the Platform effort moves forward over the year. But we're very eager to hear your questions, your requests and needs as you think about the community mobilization part of this platform work. And we'll be eager to help in any way we can. The right starting point for that here on the Institute staff is Michael Karpman. I believe you have his e-mail address, as he sent to you the information about this audioconference. Michael is our Program Associate for Outreach, and he can be reached at karpman@nlc.org, or by phone at (202) 626-3072.

Before we leave you, I want to remind you that we have upcoming audioconferences in the next few months that will be of great interest, and hopefully you'll be able to join us for them. On February 23, 2006, we have an audioconference on strategies that work for our disconnected youth. That audioconference will begin at 2:30 Eastern, 11:30 a.m. Pacific time. We will be focusing there on a series of case studies that we've done from communities across the country on steps that those communities

are taking to help young people who are out of school, out of work, otherwise not connected in strong and lasting ways to community, family, caring adults. So you'll hear a lot of discussion about cross-system collaboration between school systems, workforce programs, police departments, juvenile justice, foster care, child welfare agencies, other human service agencies, with city leadership in this challenging area being the focal point. So that's February 23, 2:30 Eastern time.

In March, we have a March 16 audioconference on afterschool entitled "City Leaders Engaged in Afterschool Reform: Lessons from Across America." It will showcase some of the lessons learned emerging from our ongoing work on afterschool issues. It will also help set the stage for a big event on our calendar for 2006, which is the upcoming NLC Afterschool Summit. The Afterschool Summit will be held May 22 - 24 here in Washington, D.C., co-sponsored by the Institute for Youth, Education and Families and the Afterschool Alliance. So the March 17 audioconference, which will be at 12:30 Eastern time, 9:30 a.m. Pacific time, will be focused on afterschool.

And then our audioconference series will continue with other sessions -- April, May and June -- and you'll find them all listed on the Institute's website, which you can get to through www.nlc.org.

Daun, I want to thank you again for taking the time to be with us and for all the leadership you're providing with our Council on Youth, Education and Families. I wish you the best of luck with your efforts there in Norfolk to move the Platform forward.

HESTER: Thank you.

JOHNSON: And thank you to all of our listeners for joining us today. I hope you found it useful. Please let us know how we can help and absolutely get online or send us a fax with this response form and let us know what you're doing in response to the Platform so that we have your feedback and so that we have a way of following up and supporting and monitoring your progress going forward in 2006. Take care, everyone, and we'll see you back next month for the February audioconference.