The Special Meeting of the Board of Fire Commissioners convened Tuesday, April 11, 2006 at 1:37 p.m., African American Firefighter Museum, 1401 Central, Los Angeles 90021

1. ROLL CALL

Present: President Dalila Sotelo, Vice President Jill Furillo, Commissioners Genethia Hudley-Hayes and Andrew Friedman. Deputy City Attorney Janet Jackson and Fire Chief William Bamattre.

Absent: Commissioner Casimiro U. Tolentino

The flag salute was followed by a moment of silence in honor of past and present members of the Los Angeles City Fire Department who devote their lives to the protection of our community.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Abdul-Kareem Muhammad commented on his 911 call for medical assistance of March 16, 2006, at approximately 6:15 a.m.

3. PUBLIC HEARING PERIOD REGARDING THE FIRE DEPARTMENT AUDITS

Refer to Meeting Transcript of Proceedings by Melinda Bates, Hearing Reporter, Job No. LFD9704, Court Reporters - Lynden J. and Associates, Inc. - Attachment A.

4. CONTINUED DISCUSSION RELATIVE TO THE RECENT FIRE DEPARTMENT AUDITS INCLUDING FURTHER CONSIDERATION OF THE BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS’ DRAFT ACTION PLAN

Refer to Meeting Transcript of Proceedings by Melinda Bates, Hearing Reporter, Job No. LFD9704, Court Reporters - Lynden J. and Associates, Inc. - Attachment A.

[Note: Commissioner Friedman exited the meeting at 1:50 p.m. and returned at 1:55 p.m. Commissioner Hudley-Hayes exited the room at 2:36 p.m. and returned at 2:38 p.m.]
5. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 3:30 p.m. (Hudley-Hayes/Furillo)

ATTEST BY:

__________________________________________________________
DALILA T. SOTELO, President           BLANCA GOMEZ-REVELLES
Commission Executive Assistant II

Date: June 20, 2006

Note: Actions of the Board shall become final at the expiration of the next five meeting
days of the City Council during which the Council has convened in regular session,
unless the Council acts within that time by two-thirds vote to bring the action before it or
to waive review of the action.
BEFORE THE LOS ANGELES BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS

In the matter of:

SPECIAL MEETING

_________________________________

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Los Angeles, California

Tuesday, April 11, 2006

Reported by:
Melinda Bates

Job Number:
LFD9704
PRESIDENT SOTELO: Good afternoon, everyone.

We're going to go ahead and start the meeting, and call the meeting to order. Commissioner Friedman -- never mind. Commissioner Friedman is here, welcome.

So, we are going to go ahead and call the meeting to order, Miss Jackson, can you please open the roll call.

JANET JACKSON: Yes. This is Tuesday, April 11th, 2006, Special Meeting of the Board of Fire Commissioners. Roll call, Commissioner Sotelo.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Present.

JANET JACKSON: Commissioner Furillo.

JILL FURILLO: Present.

JANET JACKSON: Commissioner Hudley-Hayes.

COMMISSIONER HUDLEY-HAYES: Present.

JANET JACKSON: Commissioner Friedman.

COMMISSIONER FRIEDMAN: Present.

JANET JACKSON: Commissioner Tolentino is absent.
PRESIDENT SOTELO: Okay. Thank you.

Chief Bamattre, can you please lead us in the flag salute and moment of silence.

(flag salute and moment of silence led by Chief Bamattre)

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Let me first open the meeting by thanking our wonderful host here, Armando Hogan, here at the African-American Museum. This is a wonderful venue, and we really felt it important that we hold a public hearing in this venue to really, you know, celebrate the legacy of African-American firefighters and their contributions to the fire department.

So, thank you very much, Mr. Hogan. I appreciate it. Oh, and thank you very much President --

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Brentford.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Thank you. I appreciate it. Before we go onto open public comment, I just want to, you know, open it with a few comments, just again celebrating the contributions that African-Americans have made to the fire department and to the City of Los Angeles. On February 1st of this year, we actually celebrated our 120th year as a fire department.

We started back 120 years ago with 15 firefighters in the City of Los Angeles, and now we've grown to more than 3500 sworn officers, and more than 300
civilians. So this department has really grown, and
today is a new day. It really is. It is a very
different day from where we were a 120 years ago.

And what the Commissioners and I have spent the
last 60 to 70 days doing is going out and listening to
the various members of the department, both civilian and
sworn, in a whole different variety of settings. We've
gone to public hearings like the one here today.

We've had our committee meetings, and more
importantly, Commissioners have gone out to fire stations
and fire houses and really been at the table with
firefighters, listening directly to what they celebrate
about their jobs, and the opportunities for making their
jobs better, and we've heard it, and we heard a variety
of opinions that really run the spectrum, and we want you
to know that we are listening.

Today, we are going to be listening. That's
what we will be doing today. We want to hear directly
from you. The Commissioners won't respond to any of the
comments, but we really want to make sure that you know
that we're going to be able to take in what you are
saying, and really appreciate your candor, your honesty,
and your commitment to making this department the best it
can be.

So, we want to thank you for that, and with
that, I'll go ahead and open up our first period of public comment, which is not relative to the audit, but just in general. We have a public comment period that's just on general items relative to the fire department. And our first speaker is Abdul-Kareem Muhammad from Skid Central City, East Resident.

Mr. Muhammad, if you could please state your name for the record.

ABDUL-KAREEM MUHAMMAD: My name is Abdul-Kareem Muhammad. With God's name, the merciful benefactor, the merciful redeemer, the most gracious, the most merciful master of the day of judgment.

Dear honorable Fire Commissioners and members and Fire Chief. My name is Abdul-Kareem Muhammad. I come before you and this great city of ours, Los Angeles, as a first Downtown Los Angeles Neighborhood Council Leader for the residents of Central City East, better known as "Skid Row."

I speak today of an incident with the Los Angeles Fire Department and Paramedic Unit. On March the 16th, 2006, at approximately 6:15 a.m. hours, in the morning, I, Abdul-Kareem Muhammad, residing at 905 East 6th Street in Los Angeles, California, called 911 emergency number, requesting medical help and assistance.

The paramedic, firemen, arrived at my front
door, and I said, "Come in." They, three paramedic, firemen entered my room with no gurney, after I complained of excessive stomach and abdominal pain. Upon entering my room, they, the paramedic, asked me, "What was wrong." I, Abdul-Kareem Muhammad, said, "My stomach ached and was from the top of my chest to the lower portion of my stomach."

They assisted me up after they refused to help me get my cane. I requested a gurney. They, the paramedics, said, "We cannot bring a gurney up here," and forced me to walk down two levels of stairs with my tennis shoes. I had my tennis shoes on, but my tennis shoes they were tied. So I was standing with my tennis shoes like this, and I had stomach pain from my chest to the lower portion of my stomach.

Okay. They've forced me to walk with my tennis shoes on my feet, but tied up. I had my cane for assistance, and the firemen had one arm under my shoulders. They, the paramedic firemen, forced, under duress of physical, medical and mental stress and pain, me, to walk down the longest hallway instead of using the near, closest exit, which one of firemen had opened the door, and the other fireman, said "Go this way."

They refused, the firemen, to lock my door, so I Abdul-Kareem Muhammad, with my cane, knocked on the
manager's door, Jerry Hopkin's door. He came out, and I said, "Lock my door, Jerry." As I struggled, limped down the hallway onto the gurney awaiting me, but first --

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Mr. Muhammad, you have a minute. I'm sorry.

ABDUL-KAREEM MUHAMMAD: I know, I'm almost finished. But first, I had to walk down more stairs before sitting on the gurney in the upright position. Once in the vehicle, the ambulance, they, the firemen, made my trip miserable by hitting various bumps. I requested to be taken to Los Angeles Angel's Hospital, but they took me to L.A. County USC Hospital.

They changed my gurney in the cold weather outside of the emergency department, in the freezing cold, before bringing me inside the emergency room. This is signed by me, Abdul-Kareem Muhammad, date March the 23rd. I c.c. copied, a handwritten copy was delivered to the Chief's office, Mr. William Bamattre's, Fire Chief, LAFD.

Now, let me just say this in closing. As the former neighborhood council leader, elected by the people to represent that community, I feel like the abuse, discrimination, the pain and suffering, the mental and psychological anguish -- do you know what the word "anguish" means?
JANET JACKSON: Madame Chair, we are beyond the three-minute public comment limit.

ABDUL-KAREEM MUHAMMAD: One more second, and then I'll sit down. "Anguish" means --

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Mr. Muhammad, I'll have to ask you to stop.

JANET JACKSON: Thank you, Mr. Muhammad.

Mr. Muhammad.

ABDUL-KAREEM MUHAMMAD: -- physical, and mental -- okay. Okay.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: If you could please submit your letter for the record.

ABDUL-KAREEM MUHAMMAD: And I'm very dissatisfied with the service of the Los Angeles Fire Department at this time, and with their treatment to the people on Skid Row. This needs to stop immediately.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Thank you, Mr. Muhammad. If you could please submit your letter for public hearing, that would be appreciated.

ABDUL-KAREEM MUHAMMAD: What was that again?

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Just submit your letter in writing to Miss Revelles.

ABDUL-KAREEM MUHAMMAD: No. No. The Chief already has a copy of it, okay, and I'll come to the next meeting, and let you guys know about it also, okay.
PRESIDENT SOTELO: Great. Thank you very much.

Miss Revelles, do we have any more public comment cards, for this item, open public comment? Okay. With that, the public comment period is closed.

We're going to go ahead and proceed to our public hearing relative to the audits, both the personnel audit, and the city controller's audit. Again, let me remind everybody that we do have a three-minute limit on public hearing comment, but again each of the commissioners are more than happy to talk you after the meeting.

We'll all be around for another 20 minutes after the meeting. And we encourage you that if you did not get a chance to say anything during public comment that you come to us. We have about 25 speaker cards, so we are adhering to the three-minute regulation. Okay.

Thank you so much. Dan Hibma, please, followed by Tim Holloran.

DAN HIBMA: Good afternoon, my name is Firefighter Hibma with the Los Angeles Fire Department. First of all, I just want to say thank you for allowing me to come and speak today, the opportunity. I'll make my statement very brief. I'm here mostly in support for my friend and former Firefighter Jim Smith, who I was an academy member with.
Jim embodies all the passion for the job, and all the skills necessary to perform the job to a standard that's well beyond the minimum, and I wish, in his particular case, that he would be allowed to continue on in that process. As far as these hearings, I hope that comments sent reign supreme. Thank you very much.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Thank you very much.

Can I hear from Tim Holloran, please, followed by Chris Mattson.

TIM HOLLORAN: My name is Firefighter Tim Holloran. I've been with the Los Angeles City Fire Department now for almost two years. I was born in this fire department, raised in it. My father was a firefighter for 30 years, and he loved this great city, from the people of Skid Row, to the people in the Valley, to the Harbor. He loved this city, and I've grown up with that same love for this city.

I'm also here to represent my friend of ten years, Jimmy Smith. He has been a great friend to me, in times of need, when my grandmother passed, through the drill tower. We've lived together. We supported each other.

And unfortunately, a little while ago, a short time ago, he resigned from the fire department, because of an unfortunate event that happened to him. He is
trying to get back on the job, and I believe that maybe
he was forced to resign under a little bit of duress.
Jimmy, like Dan said, embodies the attitudes and the
principles of this great fire department.

He served his country as a marine for over four
years in Iraq and truly cares for people, and not only
the fellow firefighters, but people of this community.

This fire department, when I grew up in it, I
think was more family-oriented, and I think we're losing
that. And that's sad for me, because that's one of the
main reasons I wanted to come on this job. I remember
going to the fire station, going on family trips, growing
up with other children of firemen, and guys really took
pride in each other and their job and taking care of the
citizens of this community. I think we're losing that.

I work in a community that doesn't typically
reflect who I am culturally, and I've learned to loved
that community. A captain of mine, who is here today,
and he's always told me that when people call 911, they
don't have the opportunity to choose who they get to
respond to them. They get who comes, whether it be a
black fireman, a white fireman, a female fireman, it's
all -- they have no choice, and when I use the term
fireman, I don't necessarily mean it as a
gender-specific.
It may sound kind of weird. I was always taught that a fireman is somebody who takes pride in their job. That could be a male, a female. It doesn't matter. A firefighter is somebody who just comes to work for a paycheck, and then we also have some people who don't even care that much sometimes.

I kind of have a loss for words. I'm not much of a talker. I'm sorry.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Okay. Then very well.

TIM HOLLORAN: I think I'd like for the Commission and the Chief to take a look at Jimmy's case again, and think about what they've done.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Okay. Mr. Holloran.

TIM HOLLORAN: He's a good man and just give him a chance. That's all I can say. Thank you.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Thank you very much, Mr. Holloran. May I have Chris Mattson, followed by Eric Mattson.

CHRIS MATTSON: Thank you, Honorable Fire Commissioners. My name is Chris Mattson. My husband worked for the department for over 30 years. We have a son currently on the job.

Laura Chick's audit makes public the fact that for years the LAFD has had inconsistent training and safety objectives -- directives. It refers to the
preventable on-duty death of Jaime Foster, the first LAFD female firefighter to be killed in the line of duty. The investigation revealed that the safety procedure that would have saved Jaime's life, if it had been enforced, had been routinely and institutionally violated for years.

In response to this, Chief Fox is quoted in the audit as saying that because it had long been the informal, accepted practice of not utilizing the safety strap on the tailboard, Department Management felt they could not hold the supervisors accountable to the formal written policy requiring the use of the safety strap. Obviously, what is missing and is desperately needed are protocols to ensure that accountability at every level is accomplished, starting at the top and including Chief Officers. The Fire Chief is responsible for administering the fire department, and Bureau, Division, Battalion, and Section Commanders are responsible for the enforcement and application of all practices and procedures and rules and regulations of the Department within their command.

One more example, no chief officers have been disciplined or otherwise held accountable for the longtime informal, accepted practice of Drill Tower staff fraternizing with recruits, even though the Department
has a formal written policy for training staff that
mandates a zero-tolerance no-fraternization rule.

This denied a countless number of recruits their
right to the protection of the formal written policy. It
created an ongoing atmosphere of indiscipline in a
program that is supposed to teach discipline to the
recruits. It continually placed recruits' graduation in
jeopardy. It squandered enormous sums of public funds,
and finally it needlessly destroyed the careers of top
recruits.

These are only two examples of the serious
mismanagement by Chief Bamattre. It is especially
outrageous when recruits and rookies are the victims.
They are the most vulnerable members of the Department.
In both cases, Management knew or should have known, that
for years members were being denied the protection of
important formal written policies.

Clearly, Management had ample opportunity, years
in fact, to address and prevent these events, as well as
to enforce and apply the formal policies, as is one of
their primary responsibilities, but they did not.

It is long past time for the Fire Commission,
the Mayor and the City Council to hold Fire Chief
Bamattre and the responsible chief officers accountable
for repeatedly --
PRESIDENT SOTELO: Thank you, Mrs. Mattson.

CHRIS MATTSON: -- putting the safety and welfare of fire department personnel at risk.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Thank you, Mrs. Mattson.

CHRIS MATTSON: Hold them accountable now.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Miss Mattson, I have to ask you to stop.

CHRIS MATTSON: If you don't, aggrieved members will, one lawsuit at a time. Thank you.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Mrs. Mattson, thank you.

Mr. Eric Mattson.

ERIC MATTSON: My name is Eric Mattson. I put on over 30 years on this job. First of all, I would like to give an "Atta-boy," to all the members that had a backbone to get up here and speak in front of this Fire Commission about the serious problems and the double standards they have experienced by this administration.

In each of their cases the facts will speak for themselves, but it is undeniable that two audits have now confirmed what employees already knew.

Laura Chick said her audit found a Fire Department that lacked strong and decisive leadership, and that the decision of calling for Chief Bamattre's resignation is now up to the Mayor and the City Council.

In his public statement in January, Mayor
Villaraigosa said, quote, “I commend City Controller Laura Chick for her audit of the Los Angeles Fire Department's management practices. The audit findings shine a much-needed public light on the internal structures of this important department.

The audit details many issues I have discussed with the Fire Chief over the past six months as part of an ongoing review of the department, his performance and the management goals and objectives. I will continue those discussions. The women and the men of the fire department deserve the most effective internal management and accountability structures. I have directed the Fire Commission to ensure that they have them.” End quote.

When many members have had good reason for losing respect for their leaders, and are forced to do their jobs under the threat of retaliation and in fear, and are denied the protection of formal written policies by Management, that's a sure sign that an organization is in serious trouble. Chief Bamattre has run out of excuses for dropping the ball that was handed to him more than ten years ago.

In closing, I ask you to address a very important issue in your Action Plan that was referred to in Laura Chick's audit. The Department has a duty to properly expend public funds budgeted each year. How did
Chief Bamattre spend the many millions of dollars of public funds budgeted for human relation issues since 1996, that were to be monitored by the HRDC? Thank you.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Thank you, Mr. Mattson.

Ms. Abby Liebman, followed by Jennifer McKenna.

ABBY LIEBMAN: Good afternoon, I'm Abby Liebman, and as you know, my colleague, Jennifer McKenna, and I have spent months reviewing the work of the LAFD and that of other Departments with regard to the hiring, retention, and treatment of women and of minorities.

We want to share with you this afternoon some of our initial findings and recommendations. This is our opinion as to the best practices we have identified in firefighting in the United States based on our more than 20 years of experience working to create organizational cultures that are premised on inclusion and acceptance.

The findings of the audit are supported not only by the work done by those auditors, but by the extensive interviews we have conducted, our observations of the implementation or failed implementation of city policies and practices, and our observations of the dynamics between department personnel of all ranks.

The failure of the controllers' auditors to survey the entire department is a serious failing, but it neither undermines nor diminishes the experiences of
those who were surveyed. In fact, it is our belief that among those not surveyed, there are likely to be many who have witnessed racism, sexism, or homophobia; thus, increasing the percentage reporting such experiences. In fact, we have interviewed several of them.

It is just as clear to us that there are department personnel of all races and both genders for whom it is a priority that this department move away from a culture that is rife with suspicion, distrust, and disfunction to one that exemplifies the best of those in the LAFD of integrity, acceptance, and professionalism.

This city has framed it's firefighting culture as paramilitary, a description that is both inaccurate and is at the root of what much of the many firefighters we talked to loath about their treatment in the LAFD.

According to Websters, "paramilitary" means designating of, or having to do with forces, working alongside of, or in place of a regular military organization, usually as a semi-official often secret auxiliary, hardly a description of a fire department.

Simply using this descriptor, which I heard at the drill tower by recruits on their very first day of training does nothing but begin a process and approach to this work that is quite simply at odds with the mission of a fire department.
No one disputes that there is a need to follow a command structure and the importance of following orders in an emergency, but we contend and other departments have succeeded in achieving such goals without the extraordinary overemphasis on the rigidity of the military embraced by the LAFD. This drill tower is not about training, teaching or mentoring. It is about screening people out.

Among the immediate changes that can be adopted are:

All trainers, all training materials, all preceptors should seize to use the term paramilitary when describing the LAFD.

All trainers, in particular all preceptors should be told that their role is that of teaching and mentoring, helping recruits to succeed.

All training materials should emphasize that the LAFD is teaching and mentoring rookies, not only in tone but an actual approach.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Miss Liebman.

ABBEE LIEBMAN: I know. Stop using the word "preceptors," call them mentors. I have extensive written testimony, because I knew I would never get this out in three minutes, which I will leave with your staff.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: I appreciate it. Thank you
very much. Miss Jennifer McKenna.

JENNIFER MCKENNA: Thank you. My name is Jennifer McKenna. Thank you, Members of the Commission, Chief Bamattre, for this opportunity to appear before you.

I'm going to pick up where Abbey left off and say that in addition to the recommendations that she articulated, we found that there is not a fire department in the country that has successfully moved to a culture of inclusiveness in an authentic way, in a systematic way, without the vigorous commitment of -- to such principles on the part of leadership, at every level.

We know the auditors placed a great deal of emphasis here, and we want to agree with you that it must be so. We also would like to suggest ways to make it so. Certainly this starts with the Chief. He or she must clearly articulate that inclusiveness and professionalism are his and here core values, as well as those of the Department's.

The Chief must be the messenger or the highly visible and continuos messenger of these values. Department's that have succeeded in diversifying their workforces have very active -- have to have Chiefs playing a very active role in this way. They are visible in recruit school. They are visible in promotion
process. They are visible in the field in re-articulating the values of the Department over and over again, and in connecting those words with deeds.

This is what it means to realize the values of this Department, and you will be held accountable too, for realizing those values. It is not enough, however, for the Chief to embrace these values. All leaders in the Department must do so, whether they are leaders by virtue of rank or by virtue of their relationship with their peers.

It is axiomatic that a good leader is one that sets goals and values and lives by them, and most importantly holds others accountable to them. There is no accountability in this department for failure to live by their values.

Like it or not, captains must embrace these values and be held to them. Leadership means taking responsibility, as well as meting out discipline to others. We've believe that all leaders, beginning with captains, should be evaluated based on their demonstrated commitment to the values of inclusiveness and professionalism that this department should be professing.

Third, there is no one that we have met in this department who has any confidence in the discipline
system. It must be changed. In fact, it needs to be completely changed. We will propose model systems that can be considered at a later date, but the new system must be one that meets the following criteria:

Independence, expertise, consistency, credibility, clarity, responsiveness, effectiveness, predictability; it must be a progressive system.

Departments that have succeeded in creating discipline systems that seem to work are departments that have been inclusive in the process in which they have developed that system. Stakeholders have been at the table and involved in developing the system.

Fourth, the workplace and its relationship to family responsibilities employees at all levels has evolved over the last 20 years, so that virtually all employers in all sectors of our society now underscore the need, address the needs to working parents, individuals who must care for aging parents and alike.

The fire department stands out as one among a handful of employers that has not involved in this way.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Thank you.

JENNIFER MCKENNA: This is key. Child care center. Re-visiting the child care center --

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Thank you, Miss McKenna.

If I can please have you submit your comments in
writing. Thank you. Julie Wolfe followed by Bassanio Peters, followed by Gary Mellinger.

JULIE WOLFE: Good afternoon. You're going to see very shortly that I'm not a public speaker, but I speak from the heart. My name is Julie Wolfe. I've been a member of this fire department for 19 years.

I currently hold assignment of engineer. I've been an engineer for eight years. To tell you a little bit about myself, I've spent 11 years as a firefighter in Battalion 11, which is in the Metro Area, promoted in as an engineer. I worked in South L.A., Hollywood and now Venice. So I have worked around the Department, and please don't cut me off, three minutes.

If there is just two things that I want to make sure you hear before I leave that door, and this is not to insult anybody in this building, but you need to know that the Sirens, they are not the voice of every woman on this department. Okay, that's the first thing.

The second thing that is very important for you to know is that I am so dang proud to be a member of this fire department. This has been 19 years of just a great experience. With those two things said, I want to start by apologizing to Chief Bamattre and to the members of the fire department, because I boycotted the audit.

I have a philosophy that I have lived by, and I
hope you understand it. I'm not a female firefighter. I don't consider myself a female fireman. I consider myself a firefighter that just happens to be female. I'm not sure if you understand that, but I'm just a member of this fire department family, period, and that's one of reasons why I did not participate in the audit.

Personally, I'm not going to participate in anything that singles me out because I'm a woman. I didn't think that the audit was going to be fair in the first place, because you are not getting representation from the entire fire department.

And the day that the audit was due, the deadline, Captain Villanueve worked an overtime day at Fire Station 63 with me, and I expressed to him my mixed feelings about the audit, how I felt guilty for not participating in it, and he gave me a phone number of the people that were running the audit.

"Give them a call. Let them know how you feel, from the heart, what you felt, and your experiences of the 19 years." So, I called them, and they didn't want to hear what I had to say. They just wanted this piece of paper with numbers on it. So that's why I'm here today, to tell you, from the heart, what I feel about this fire department.

And I know that you, the Fire Commission, so
far, have been different than previous Fire
Commissioners, and I thank you for that. I know that you
have gone out to the field and talked to members at the
fire stations. I know that you have -- you're making
things happen, that you're forming committees, and we,
the members, appreciate that.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Before you move on, I'm
sorry, your three minutes is up.

JULIE WOLFE: No way. Are you kidding me?
PRESIDENT SOTELO: So, if you have something in
writing that you would want to submit, and like I said,
we'll be here afterwards.

JULIE WOLFE: I stayed up all night working on
this.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: And you can come at our next
Fire Commission meeting. Everyone can come at our next
Fire Commission meeting during public comment. We just
have a lot to get through. I'm sorry, Miss Wolfe.

Bassanio Peters, please.

BASSANIO PETERS: Hello, Members of the Board of
Fire Commissioners, Fire Chief Bamattre. My name is
Bassanio Peters, Jr. I've been a member of the
Department for 28 years. I'm a task force commander at
Fire Station 94. I've been a captain for 17 years. I've
been a Captain II for seven years. I want to talk about
the disciplinary process, or lack of.

I can speak on two issues that I'm very well
acquainted with. In the past, ten years ago, I testified
before the Personnel Committee, and a letter was
supposedly put in my file, preventing retaliation against
me. Obviously, that letter isn't around anymore, but I
will have a copy of it for you a little later.

One issue was, I'm just going to talk about the
differential treatment. I had a member who was asleep at
the station. The lights come on. We're on radio watch.
Someone puts a radio in his ear. He pushes the radio
away, and that same member comes up and then pushes his
legs out of the bed, and tells him, "Hey, you need to get
up."

Now, most of us would think of that as, you
know, kind of stupid, stupidity, rather than anything
else. But if I also preface that by saying that the
member that was in bed was African-American and that
earlier in that day he had a conversation with this other
individual.

The other individual said, "Hey, there's no
reason for a Stentorian organizations. What do you guys
do anyway?" And they had a little dialogue, and he
basically, the other member, basically said, "You know
what. I'm going to start my own white firefighters
organization."

So now, does that make this a little different later on, when this incident occurs that same day? To me it does. And the bottom line was, the member who had been assaulted, basically, said the only thing he wanted to happen was the member to move on and be transferred out of the station. Well, according to our department, unwritten policy, if you move one, you need to move both members. So, that's one issue I want to talk about.

Second issue, I was charged with using profanity in a fire station, and allowing the member of my crew to use profanity in the fire station. Basically, the initial charges were unfounded by their own investigators. So then they got another group to investigate the investigation again, and they came up with charges.

Now, I went to a Board of Rights, and every chief officer, which was eight, that came through and testified stated that they had used profanity in the fire station, and they have heard profanity in the fire station and did nothing about it. So I'm just wondering why I am held accountable to a different standard than the Chief Officer's Association.

I have a copy of a letter that was written by my defense rep, given to the Fire Chief, and it says that
under oath, eight chief officers stated that they have used profanity and heard profanity in the department and they did nothing about it. So I have a copy of these letters for all of you, and I want to know why the Fire Chief hasn't acted on it. Thank you.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Thank you, Mr. Peters, and if you could please give those to Blanca. Thank you. Gary Mellinger followed by Tom Hoegh, and thank you, again, everyone for your patience.

GARY MELLINGER: My name is Gary Mellinger. I'm a 30-year firefighter with the City of Los Angeles, and recently retired. This is quite a significant meeting here at this location, the African-American Firefighters Museum. My grandfather was on this job in 1927, when racism was prominent and prevalent in this city, and there were two fire stations where African-Americans were housed because they were segregated. So I do feel it's quite significant.

I want to let you and the African-American community know that racism is rampant on this job, not only is it rampant, but it's also supported by our chief officers. The three top officers in the City of Los Angeles, Chief Bamattre, Chief Rueda, Chief Fox.

I worked at a fire station, a lily-white community in the fire station, where my fire station was
located. It was in Chatsworth, California. It was lily-white for many years. It had a lot of actors there throughout the years.

However, we had a firefighter come into our station. Her name is Brenda Lee. She's the first African-American firefighter assigned to that station, first female firefighter assigned to that station, in its inception, except for rookies.

At that station, I saw my commanders at that station, race -- I saw racism propagated against Brenda Lee and when my captain, Captain Bressler, reported it and I reported it, I was retaliated against and forced off this job by Andy Fox and Mario Rueda, and I assume that it's promoted by William Bamattre, the chief of this department.

We are in a lawsuit right now. I want to let you know that just recently, as we speak right now, there are three more lawsuits being filed right now, two of them addressing Mario Rueda, and also Andy Fox.

Also, we are contacted by three other firefighters this last weekend, two other firefighters, I'm sorry, and they are also interested in filing a lawsuit because of retaliation promoted by Andy Fox and Mario Rueda. I think it is significant we are here. I feel the African-American community also aught to be
incensed that these Chiefs are here in this room, and
they do promote racism. I think it's wrong that they are
here. I think they ought to be ashamed to be here.

Also the African-American chiefs who did not
step up to Brenda's aid in this, I feel that that is
wrong, absolutely wrong. And I feel that they shouldn't
even be -- they ought to be repulsed to be in this
building also. The African-American community needs to
speak up and address this situation of these white and
black chief officers. Thank you.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Thank you, Mr. Mellinger.

Tom Hoegh, please, followed by David Raya.

TOM HOEGH: Good afternoon. Thank you. I'm an
attorney. I represent Gary Mellinger, and Brenda Lee,
Steve Bressler. I also represent the Mattson son, and I
also, I represent Jaime Foster.

To some degree they stole my thunder tonight,
this afternoon, but what I'd like to say is that in the
case of Brenda Lee, she was assigned to Fire Station 96.
Many of the problems that were raised in the audit were
ongoing at Fire Station 96, and she was put under the
command of a captain who was coming off a suspension,
ten-day suspension, for being racially insensitive toward
African-Americans.

She was put under his command, and when Steve
Bressler and Gary Mellinger said the treatment that she was receiving, the outright racist treatment that she was receiving was inappropriate and reported it. The investigation that ensued cleared everyone at Fire Station 96, but Gary Mellinger and Steve Bressler were then recommended to be suspended without pay for 30 days for having made the complaint, and I find that outrageous, quite frankly.

In the case of Jaime Foster, she was a rookie. She was working a SOD day. It was the second day she had worked. She was run over by a fire engine at an incident scene. When they did the autopsy of her, they found she had nothing to eat for virtually 36 hours. She was --

The investigation was just not even done. To this day, we don't know who the driver was of the engine. We don't know what happened. We don't know anything. And yet, people complain that lawsuits are being filed, but how else are we going to find the truth? How is the Department going to take responsibility for what's occurred here?

There really is no other way to do this, but through the legal means that we're entitled to bring as members of this community. But I would just like to say that the Department has some serious problems ahead of it. It needs to address these problems. I support the
Commission. I support the the public discourse.

The legal system is one avenue to resolve these issues, but it's important that we get to the bottom of this, we sort this out, and that we make improvements.

Thank you.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Thank you. Mr. David Raya followed by Steve Ruda -- Stephen Ruda, sorry.

DAVID RAYA: Thank you, Honorable Commissioners for allowing us to speak today. Thank you, Fire Department Staff. My name is David Raya. I'm a firefighter/paramedic assigned to Fire Station 44 on the B-Platoon, which is in the Cypress Park Mount Washington area of Los Angeles. I've been a paramedic and a firefighter for over 25 years.

My roots run deep in this department. I have two brothers on the job, and my father was a 30-year firefighter, spending all of his career in East Los Angeles, Downtown, and El Sereno.

I came to this job as a single-function paramedic. You see, my mother was a nurse, so I liked medicine, and entering the LAFD to follow my father's footsteps was a dream come true. But reality soon set in. I had run-ins with firefighters who called me "parapuke," and also racial slurs because of my Latino heritage, but I was prepared.
My father told me when he was a rookie, an old-timer told him, "You may have been a captain and a B-24 bomber pilot in World War II, but here, you're not even dog feces." I cleaned it up. But he loved this job, and he had a satisfying 30-year career with L.A. City's greatest.

As for our recent past, single-function paramedics fund fought and have won relative respect within the Department, but I'm not here to talk about the past. I'm here to talk about the future of the LAFD.

Ours is a great department. We've come a long way, even since the earlier 1990's.

A fire fighter once told me, "A firefighter is a jack of all trades, and a master of none." Meaning he knew about construction, electrical work, mechanic, plumber, so he could mitigate an emergency at hand.

Well, the same is true today, but also specialties have evolved, such as arson, aircraft rescue, firefighting, hazardous material emergencies, Swift Water Rescue Teams, emergency paramedicine, and now mass disaster and chemical biological terrorism.

Our Department is on the cutting edge of firefighting and firefighting technology. As a young paramedic a bull engineer once told me -- he left me with a -- we were talking, and he left me with a bit of
advise. "Dave, make it a goal every day at work to leave
the place you're working at a little bit better than it
was before." I tried to do that and tried to live by
those words my whole career. Today you have that
opportunity to make the LAFD better than it is now.

I'm asking, as a ranking fellow firefighter,
that when a firefighter candidate goes to the drill
tower, that the drill tower staff be given the authority
to fire unsafe and bellow-standard candidates, as needed,
and not sent to the field, so that when the rookies hit
the field, we are able to mold them into firefighters and
not have to continue training him on the way it should
have been done in the drill tower. Give us the tools for
a better fire department.

In turn, the ranking fellow firefighter will
know this rookie made the field on his record, not
gender, not ethnicity, not a paramedic, or not --

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Mr. Raya, I'm sorry. Your
time is up.

DAVID RAYA: Thank you for your time.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Thank you very much, Mr.
Raya. And we have Firefighter of the Year, Stephen Ruda.

STEPHEN RUDA: Thank you, Commissioners, Chief,
brother and sister firefighters. I'm a station commander
in one of the finest cities in this nation. Fire Station
27, Hollywood. It is an honor to be in this room as well, because these are hollowed walls where men of color, regardless of their adversities still took the oath to serve and serve well.

I think members of our job have forgotten our oath to serve and have exchanged it to a demand of "to be served." I have just left the bedside of one of our finer captains, Lane Kepper, who is going to be suffering from cancer. He has never forgotten his oath to serve, and to serve others well.

I am here to support our young firefighters, Jimmy Smith in particular. In 14 months, a greater number of our officers that are in this room will be leaving this job. They will be retiring, and who will take their place? Young firefighters who have an example to look up to me as a fire captain, to our chiefs -- and I believe that -- would I have Jimmy Smith in my fire company? Absolutely. Would I have Jimmy Smith as a former marine officer in my platoon? Absolutely.

If he had an opportunity to do it over again, I'm sure Jimmy would do it, but we all make mistakes, and we need to reemphasize the fact that we have duties and responsibilities and not privileges that we need to just cash in on. We have duties and responsibilities, not rights and privileges.
So I believe that we, as captains, the first level of management have a responsibility to work, to understand our young people, to understand our seasoned firefighters, to work with them, to understand their needs, and I look for the leadership in our department to help me as a captain, to give me the training and necessary responsibility, so that I can pass it along when our fire chiefs are gone, when our administration are gone.

We have a duty and a responsibility, and I think sometimes our firefighters, when they get disgruntled and angry, they feel that they have rights and privileges.

The firefighters that took oaths and served in this fire station now, and all the fire stations across the city, just like Lane Kepper, who believed that he had duties and responsibilities. And as your captain that worked for you in your fire station, that's how my command is in Hollywood. We work together as a team of all races, of all genders, and I don't always see everything that's being spoken here.

So as a firefighter, that's my duties and responsibilities, to be committed to this Department, to the firefighters, and the bottom line is, when people call me, we respond in the best way with the tools and equipment that we have.
PRESIDENT SOTELO: Thank you.

Can I please have Mr. Bill Finn followed by John Hagerman, and Donald Jones.

BILL FINN: Commissioners, Chief. My name is Bill Finn. I'm a captain at Fire Station 14, which is right up the street here, at 34th and Central. I've been on the fire department since 1962, and been at my present assignment my for 25 years. I worked in Battalion 3 for over 40.

I attended a commission meetings a couple of weeks ago and chose not to stand and speak, but later I regretted the fact that I didn't. The articles in the Times and the Daily News and what I heard here two weeks ago doesn't represent the fire department I know.

I've come in contact over the years with hundreds of firefighters. I want to tell you that harassment and hazing is not rampant on this fire department. Those articles have tarnished reputations, and worse than that, many of us haven't come forward to defend our positions.

The people that I have worked around deserve better than that. They're hardworking, provide a service to our community that is outstanding. I came here today to tell you that race, gender, bias, or retaliation is not what this department is all about.
This is my personal opinion that race -- it is my personal opinion that race and gender does not make a difference to most of us. If the person is hardworking, trainable, and possesses a good attitude, then that will work just fine for us.

On the other hand, if that person doesn't have these qualities, they don't belong on the fire department, and we cannot keep unqualified people on this job. The firefighter's job can be dangerous at times. It's paramount that we have confidence in each other, and know that we have the support of one another on the fire ground and in the station.

What I would be interested to know is the results of the audit of the people that didn't turn them in, and those of us who didn't get them. I think it would tell a much different story. Thanks for your time, and anytime you want a free meal, conversation, come to 14's.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Thank you. And he's right. On Friday, I was at Station 14, and they were great. Thank you very much for the free meal.

JOHN HAGERMAN: John Hagerman, 26 years. Once again, there's a man I truly love, Bill Finn. He was burned in a fire when I had three weeks on the job, unfortunately. It was a backdraft, and I happened to be
inside that fire.

The reason why that man can stand up here and honestly tell you that he has never seen racism, he has never seen disrespect, is because that man there is a leader, and he never accepted it, and his men knew it. He would not allow that anywhere around him, which speaks to the heart of this whole thing.

It's -- we've torn the house down, how can we rebuild it? The Commission has one hell of a stack of bricks it's got to rebuild from. I admire your job. Good luck. I'm sure you're going to be able to do it. I think what will pull this family together, it seems as though we all have a need for proper investigation as to what transpires inside our home.

I've lived with an investigator. I grew up with one. My dad was in the FBI. My best friend reports directly to the head of the FBI. Firemen are different people. Don't expect them to investigate properly. Straighten that aspect out, so things can be addressed in the home quickly, and we won't have all this emotion. We won't have the court cases we have. Good luck.

JOHN HAGERMAN: Thank you, Mr. Hagerman. Donald Jones, followed by Jerry Thomas.

DONALD JONES: Duties and responsibilities, interesting. My name is Donald Jones, and my effective
date of retirement was February 2003. I retired after having my second back surgery due to injuries sustained on the job during my 21 years with the City of Los Angeles.

I'm a recipient of a Medal of Valor for my actions during the '92 riots and numerous accommodations. My dedication to the job and to the people of Los Angeles goes without question. As I stand here, I'm reminded of my first house. My Captain I was Robert Hoffman. I remember him very clearly. He was, without a doubt, the best man that I ever worked with on the job.

He told me, as a first-house rookie, "to learn the job, work hard and be the first in and the last out."

He took a few minutes out of his day, every day, to talk to me about a piece of equipment. Not just how to operate it, but how it worked inside.

I never got a chance to let him know what that meant to me. He did a great job preparing me for the physical side of the fire department. What he could not prepare me for was the mental side of the fire department. This is, without a doubt, one of the racist, bigoted, and sexist, discriminating organizations I have ever been a part of.

This organization will allow a white member to refer to a black member as a "nigger," and then receive a
suspension three days for that. It will allow a member's mouth wash to be replaced with urine in an effort to have him drink it, and then retaliate against him and prevent him from saying anything about it by threatening his livelihood.

This brotherhood, if you will, is the only organization that will place dog food on the plate of a black firefighter and allow him to eat it and then call it a joke, and I will read the rest very fast, because I want to complete.

I was always amused when I used to hear the phrase -- the phrase -- when I used to hear phrases like you people, those people over there, or the service provided for that white community versus the black community.

I know I can hear right now some heart-felt white person out there ready to stand up and say that, that's not what happened at my fire station, or that's not what happened on my shift. This attitude is pervasive throughout the fire department and is getting worse, and I'm reminded of the '94 hearing, where the City Council provided a vehicle for members of this department to be heard on these same issues I spoke.

A few lawsuits came from that, some new manuals. A little over ten years later, we are revisiting these
very same issues. I don't blame these sick, twisted 
little people on this job, who only have a sense of power 
from holding their position over others. I blame people 
like you, this Board, who have, right now, today, an 
opportunity to do something about this, as they did in 
'94.

I also place some blame on black members of this 
department for not stepping up and revealing what is 
really going on behind this facade for fear of losing the 
crumbs that they've been handed.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Mr. Jones.

DONALD JONES: You are willing to continue to 
sell out not only yourself but your race.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Can I please ask you to 
submit your testimony in writing to us. Again, you can 
also come to our public meeting on Tuesday.

DONALD JONES: No. I'm going to finish.

JANET JACKSON: Sir, excuse me. Your time is up.

DONALD JONES: You're willing to sell yourself 
out --

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Mr. Jones.

(Inaudible discussion)

JANET JACKSON: Call the next speaker card.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: I'm sorry?
JANET JACKSON: Mr. Jones, if Mr. Thomas would like to give his time to Mr. Jones to finish.

JERRY THOMAS: I'll give him a minute of my time.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Okay. Well, give a minute -- Mr. Jones, hold on. We'll give you a minute of Mr. Thomas' time so you can finish up, and then Mr. Thomas will have two minutes, okay.

DONALD JONES: Thank you. Stentorians, as for you, as far back as I can remember, individuals have been using this organization as a stepping stone to captain, chief and higher positions. It used to stand for something. Now, well I don't know what to say. I hear you give great parties though.

Has the current President of the Stentorians spoken on behave of black firefighters regarding any of the issues before you today? Probably not. Got to protect that position on the Chief's list. I can sit here and rehash all the racist and discriminating things that happened to me throughout my career on this department, like being suspended for looking at a white chief with the intent to intimidate, because I would not change my answer during a hearing. Yes, that's how it read, but what I want -- excuse me. But I don't have enough time to do that.
You knew exactly what's going on here inside this department. My sincere hope is that the individuals continue to follow through with their law suits against the city, the fire department, and the individuals that are practicing and allowing this racist, sexist, and discriminatory behavior --

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Okay. Mr. Jones --

DONALD JONES: -- and atmosphere --

PRESIDENT SOTELO: -- that was a minute.

DONALD JONES: -- to exist with the Los Angeles City Fire Department --

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Mr. Jones, to be fair --

DONALD JONES: -- so they may have some resolution.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Thank you, Mr. Jones.

Mr. Thomas, you have two minutes.

JERRY THOMAS: Two minutes?

Commission, Fire Chief, as you can see in this room, it's a lot of pain in this room, very indelible pain that -- he was on the job for 21 years. I knew him when he was a rookie. We've got retired members here. We've got people of the community that didn't have time to address the Commission today. I hope they will have time later on. We have the CEO and President of the Urban League.
The Los Angeles City Urban League is here. We've got a representative from NAACP. It's a lot of pain, but what I want to tell the Commission, because I've commented every time that we've had a session that, stay diligent, stay focused.

You know, I'm not going to speak relative to the audits, because we know what the audits have indicated. We have to have radical change, because these people are feeling it. We need closure. Even people in retirement need closure, but you have a responsibility.

You've been mandated, and just like Bill Finn, I was a rookie under Bill Finn. But you know, Bill Finn, you couldn't protect me 24/7, because where I was assigned, you weren't there, Bill, and I did and have experienced racism and discrimination, but he is a good man.

But stay focused. You know, we have a job to do, and let's do it. With my help and your help, I'm here to solicit my assistance, if you want, but let's stay focused. We do a good job in emergency operations; we're not talking about that. We're talking about civil rights, human resources, responsibilities, and that's why we have to have radical and substantive change. Thanks for your time.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Thanks, Mr. Thomas. May I
have Ricky Terrell, please, followed by Melissa Kelley.

RICKY TERRELL: Good afternoon to the Board of Fire Commissioners, to the Chief, everybody at hand. Let me just give you a little bit of my background. Before coming on to the fire department, I have worked for three years as a school teacher in education. Five years with the private sector for AT&T, then 20 years with LAFD.

The fire department is the worse in terms of how management allows supervisors to treat its employees. There is bias and there is bigotry in the disciplinary process and in the promotional process, along with the day-to-day routines that firefighters have to go through.

I have documentation to support my comments. You're welcome to contact me at any time, and I'm glad to share with you my experiences. This is a reminder that the audit is definitive. I don't have to defend the audit. The audit has spoken.

As far as people saying that we have disgruntled employees, things like that, I'll just say for myself, I'll just put my resume, my stability up against those who oppose my comments at any time. And to the Commissioners, it's a reminder that you are charged to run the Department. The Department does not run you.

One of the problems that I see with the discrimination and retaliation that goes on in the
Department is that when it happens, these supervisors think that these things happen in a vacuum, and they don't. When it occurs, it goes home with the members and their families. They discuss it. They discuss things that take place with their neighbors, and whoever their neighbors may be.

It hurts the Department in terms of recruitment. Because when we take these problems home, and we discuss them with people, we have others and young people that hear this, they don't want to become -- qualified people don't want to become a part of this type of family, and I'd just like to say to you that, keep doing what you are doing. Don't let anybody persuade you to get off of course. And again, I'll leave my card with you, because I have pounds of documentation to support my comments.

That is all. Thank you.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Thank you, Mr. Terrell.

You can just give it to Miss Revelles.

Melissa Kelley -- oh, there you are, followed by Alicia Mathis.

MELISSA KELLEY: I just wanted to say that, at the beginning, that I love this department as well, and my heart is beating so fast with so much love for this Department. As you said, my name is Melissa Kelley. I'm a firefighter with Los Angeles City.
I have faithfully served this City of Los Angeles for five years, and served five years with the California Department of Forestry in preparation for this job, along with the attending numerous academies, classes and certifications, as many of us on this fine career have done.

I've always taken my duties extremely seriously and consider things like a solid work ethic, integrity and loyalty to my teammates, the cornerstones of our important career.

The years I spent preparing were to ensure that I was able to perform my duties as a Los Angeles firefighter. I knew what to expect. I was fully aware of the duties of this career and the challenges I might face. I was aware of the dangers involved and that I might be injured. I did not expect to be injured the way I was on June 19, 2004.

On the morning of June 19, two captains from another shift were scheduled to work with me and my crew. I heard about the extreme drilling taking place on their shift. I had heard detailed accounts of a drill called, by others, "the humiliator."

The proposed purpose of which was for only four of us to engage in a successive firefighting operation drill, in full firefighting gear, including breathing air
from an SCBA, our breathing apparatus, until you puke.

During the drill, I was the only one who was
ordered to perform the specific tasks, the first of which
was to throw the top member position of our largest
wooden ladder, the 35 foot extension, weighing 180
pounds, a ladder I've successfully thrown numerous times
in the past.

As I raced to push the ladder over my head and
put it into position, I lost the ladder, and it came
crashing down on top of me. My head and my helmet was
pinned. My chin pressed forcefully into my chest. The
mask of my SCBA askew and leaking air, as all eight named
safety members of my crew watched and did nothing.

I later found out that when a few members of my
crew saw me struggling and attempted to come to my aid,
they were ordered by the captains in charge to, "leave
it." In the weeks and months that followed, I became
involved in a version of an investigation in which I
received phone calls telling me to watch my back. I was
questioned at 10:00 o'clock at night, and was eventually
involved in a Board of Rights, our version of the
disciplinary hearing.

During the proceedings, I was forced to sit with
the very people directly involved in my ordeal, as I
waited for three days to testify. During my testimony, I
was scrutinized and openly ridiculed. In this manner, I felt the Department let me down a second time. The members involved were given, virtually, no punishment, which sent a message to the field personnel that you could literally violate the number one rule of safety and receive no appropriate disciplinary action.

My grandfather is a retired officer with the Los Angeles County Fire Department. I grew up with and around the fire service. I was exposed to the family atmosphere that people speak of. I was witnessed to weekends spent to helping each other move, building garages, and enjoying family softball games. But most importantly, I saw teamwork with each visit to my grandfather's station.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Ms. Kelley.

MELISSA KELLEY: This is a wonderful career that I dreamed about for many years and worked vigorously --

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Ms. Kelley.

MELISSA KELLEY -- to make myself an asset. If I could just finish my last sentence. Someone recently asked me about the audit, and specifically what I wanted to come out of it.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: I'm sorry. Can you please submit your testimony in writing, or that last portion.

Thank you very much, Ms. Kelley.
ALICIA MATHIS: Good afternoon. My name is Alicia Mathis. I'm a 16-year member of the LAFD. I cannot express how disappointed I have been with this Department's lack of integrity. What happened to Melissa is appalling. Unfortunately what happened to her is not unusual. As a member of this department, our main focus is safety for ourselves and for our co-workers.

It is outrageous to me that a captain would jeopardize a firefighter's safety. I had an opportunity to hear Colin Powell speak last night. He spoke of entire nations changing with the right leadership. By providing vision and leadership, we can transform this Department's past history of abuse.

By putting collaboration and teamwork first, we can set priorities for firefighters. By creating a system of discipline with justice and consistency, we can rid the Department of the lack of accountability that now plagues us.

Firefighter injuries have sky-rocketed over the last couple of years. Let's not injure another firefighter with our lack of respect for members on our own team. We must stop this cycle of abuse. Thank you.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Thank you, Ms. Mathis.

Mr. Pat McOsker and Mr. Tennie Pierce followed by Blair Taylor.
PAT MC OSKER: Thank you, Madame President and Members of the Commission. I just want to start by complementing all the speakers that have come to the microphone today. As you know, in most Fire Commission Meetings, I'm the only ranking firefighter that goes to the microphone, and it's good to heard from others, other than just me today, and I know it takes a lot of courage by the way. It really does.

I can remember the first few times I went to the microphone. It's not easy, and especially the issues that they're talking about. These are hot-button issues. People are talking about things that really cut to the core of all of us, and I compliment. It takes courage. We all love the fire department by the way, too. I heard a couple speakers say, "I really love this fire department.

I think everybody that has come to this microphone, everybody that's in the room that's involved with the fire department, all the men and women taking risks every day, risking their necks, you know, love the fire department. So I don't think that is an issue.

We come from different places and have different perspectives about all these issues. I think everyone's opinion is valid. Everyone walks in a different set of shoes. So, I think that's important to say. I wasn't
going to come to microphone today, because I've said so much on these issues already at previous fire commission meetings and in committee hearings.

One thing that I heard though, and I think as a housekeeping measure needs to be said. A couple of speakers talked about the Jaime Foster tragedy, about her death, being run over by a fire truck, and that was in the audit. I just want to point out that nobody was responsible for that. Nobody should be taken attest. Nobody should feel -- go way from what they heard today, or the audit that they are responsible for that.

You know that was a policy, yes. That was universally not enforced. Nobody on the fire department followed that policy, and when that's the case, no mid-level supervisor -- low-level, mid-level should ever be held accountable. If you're going to hold anybody accountable, it would be at the very top. But that's such a heavy thing to put on anybody.

I think that's kind of a bad example to use, but I do want to say something. The audit finds a lot of failings, whether you agree with them or not. I tend to not invalidate, you know, what the audit found. I believe that we do have problem, and we can improve our fire department. But if you read both audits, they find fault with management about policies that aren't enforced
and lack of accountability, and those kinds of things.

What they don't find fault with, necessarily, is individual firefighters, rank and fellow firefighters. So far, in the months since the audit, the only thing that's changed in the fire department is that rank and fellow firefighters are feeling the heat, if you will.

Discipline has been ratcheted up, you know, in a politically correct way. There has been a knee-jerk reaction, and the people on the bottom right now are feeling the pain. They are being pitted one against another. The audit is being represented by supervisors out to the field in the wrong way, portrayed in the negative light, I believe, and those things are happening.

And again, once again, just like I feared, the outfall of this, the outcome of this is the people on the bottom are paying a price for a failing at the top. So I just urge you to continue to do what you've been doing, and that is to get to the root of this and that is to come up with real solutions to get that action plan to the Mayor on time, and I hope that the action plan, at the end of the day includes a whole lot of fact finding and meeting of consensus building among the stakeholders, so that we come up with the proper way of fixing our fire department. Thank you.
PRESIDENT SOTELO: Thank you, Mr. McOsker. Mr. Tennie Pierce followed by Blair Taylor, and if there is anybody else that would like to submit a public speaker card, we're happy to do that.

Also, it's unconventional, but we are probably not going to go until the very end, so if there is anybody that wants to finish up their statements that they made and were cut off, we can go ahead and open another minute for that if you want to submit you public speaker card for that, okay.

TENNIE PIERCE: Thank you for having me come up here, Fire Commission and Chief Bamattre. Basically, and I kind of agree with Captain Finn. He's a strong leader. I've heard a lot of things about him, and what he said is true. A lot of people said that if it happened in his station, it wouldn't have happened.

Years ago I was at Fire Station 61, where possibly the biggest race fight was going on, and it was so bad where the engineers and the firemen were fighting, and it got to the point that the chief wasn't doing anything about it, up Downtown wasn't doing anything about it.

So I had to write a letter to the advocates, stating that if they didn't come in and do something about it that I would send a letter to the Urban League,
to NAACP, to CBS, and three days later three advocates came in and emptied out the whole station.

And I believe, with my incident, it's unfortunate but it happened. Coming from outside, eat like all members, a plate of dog food made for me, guys laughing. Family knows about it now. My daughter knows about it. It's just time for the Commission and the Mayor to get it straight. My name has been abused.

I love this department. I went to Foshay Junior High School, Crenshaw, Northridge University. I've been in this city all my life, love this city, love this Department, great department, greatest department. If you want to get certified firemen, I mean, it's here for you. I just think that it's time that the Commission takes, and the Mayor, take a look at this and hold these guys accountable for what they do. That's all I want to say.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Thank you, Mr. Pierce.

Blair Taylor.

BLAIR TAYLOR: Members of the Commission, my name is Blair Taylor, President of Urban League. To the wonderful esteemed firefighters of this city, I just want to say, thank you. We appreciate you and the hard work that you do. Thank you very much, on behalf of the Urban League. I will just stand up here today and momentarily
quote one of my favorite scriptures, which says "That a
house divided against itself cannot stand."

And I think there is a great deal of dissension
in this room. There is a great deal of different
perspectives on issues that have happened in this
department, and I just want to make it clear that this
City has come a long way over the last many years, in
terms of race relations.

We clearly have a long way to go. I think the
incidents that are outlined in the audit need to be taken
incredibly seriously, and I know they will be by this
Commission, and we appreciate that. They are disturbing,
and there is a great quote in one of the documents that I
have, and it says, "It is simply unacceptable that racism
and sexism remain, and retaliation remain in the Los
Angeles Fire Department," and I would extend that to
remain in this city at all.

And I am confident that you will take this as
seriously as we need you to take at this point, and also
look for an opportunity for public involvement and public
oversight in the process, as you get into your solutions.

To the firefighters in this room, I will just
tell you, you are the face of this city to many people,
all of you, not some of you, all of you, particularly
true in the post-911 era, and we are very proud of what
you have done and what you do everyday, in terms of
putting your lives on the line.

This is not an us-versus-them theme, and
diversity in any organization, and I've been in many over
the course of my career, is a strength, not a weakness.
It always strengthens an organization, and I would just
encourage those of you in this department to embrace that
concept, and I think we will all be the better.

The Urban League stands ready to support the
fire department, the Chief, the firefighters in ferreting
out racism and doing our part to help you find solutions
that are meaningful, and I thank you today for your hard
work.

I know sometimes that it's a thankless job to
sit up there, and I thank you for the work that you are
doing in making certain that we address the issues that
have been brought forth in these reports. Thank you.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Thank you, Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Armando Hogan followed by Willis Edwards,
and Jorge Espinoza.

ARMANDO HOGAN: Madame President, and Honorable
Members of the Fire Commission, Fire Chief, and the
Staff, and the City Attorney's Office. My name is
Armando Hogan, I'm the President of the Stentorian, and
first of all, I'd like to thank you all for being here at
this historical facility. More importantly, I do want to
stress one issue, the issue of leadership.

The Stentorians have, will, and will continue to
be always in a leadership position. There is a gentleman
on this wall here, if you look all the way in the back,
his name is Bob Craig. He was the first President of the
Stentorians, because upstairs in the dorm, in 1953, is
where they began to speak about it.

In 1954, the Stentorians came into existence,
and I had the honor of speaking with him on more than one
occasion when I was a young member on the board, once
again in a leadership position, and he told me, "Never be
guilty of what you accuse." The best way to deal with
that is always educate folks around you so they
understand how to treat you, and how you want to be
treated.

As I said earlier, the Stentorians will always
be in a leadership position. We appreciate what we have
been able to work with and accomplish thus far, even
though we know it's a long road ahead.

I'm proud to be here. I'm proud of the work
that we are doing now, and due to the complexity and the
nature of the issues that we're facing, look forward to
coming up with a suitable resolution. Thank you.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Thank you, Mr. Hogan.
PRESIDENT SOTELO: Mr. Edwards.

THE WITNESS: Fire Commissioners, Chief, my name is Willis Edwards, and I'm with the NAACP. First of all, before I get started, I want to acknowledge someone here who is part of us and about us, and who has fought racism all these years in the fire department and the City of Los Angeles and that Mr. Arnette Heartsfield, and I just want him to stand here, because this is the reason why we have this fire station.

Well, I chose to be last, because I wanted to say a few things. I am just a citizen of this city, and I am in pain now, a lot of pain, because all of you are in pain, those for, those against. So how do we solve this problem? What I'd like to know from the Fire Commission, how many of these people who spoke up today will be protected, so we can get to the root of a problem? The problem is like a cancer. We got to do something so everybody will feel like they're safe.

Chief Finn, I think Finn is his name, I thought he was excellent today. I thought he was very good today, and I think that maybe there could be a committee of community people and firemen to come together, to see how we could help solve some of these problems, because no one likes racism. Nobody like to be discriminated against, but we are here to fight for it.
I got involved, the NAACP got involved because there was a young man named Johnny Green who was charged with something that he did not do, and we fought very hard until the charges were dropped, because we did the investigation. We made sure that there was an investigation.

But what appalled me was that once the charges were dropped by the District Attorney, then he got charged by the Department and had to go -- got some disciplinary action, and I never understood that, and maybe somebody can explain that to me one day.

The other thing is that the young man, when we heard about the young man who had dog food put in his spaghetti and was bought by the captain, I just couldn't understand that. I didn't understand why that happened. Somebody needs to explain why that happened, and if people in that type of position, that are captains, and are putting dog food in spaghetti should not be in the department, period.

The issue is, how do we solve all of this? The Chief can't solve it all by himself. Everybody else can't solve it. But when the troops are in pain, all the way through, and feel that they are not being treated fairly, somebody, somebody has got to step up and say, we are going to solve this, and all of them that don't want
to solve got to go, because it's a common sense thing.

It's a community thing.

We in the community, all we look for is if the fire department is coming to my house to put the fire out, period. We didn't think you all had any of these other problems, about dog food in spaghetti, or this and that. We thought you all were our super heroes. I mean, my little niece and nephew say, "Here come the firemen."

The fire's going to be put out.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Mr. Edwards --

WILLIS EDWARDS: So, let's put this fire out. Let's put this fire out and come back together as a family. Thank you very much.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Thank you.

Mr. Jorge Espinoza followed by Miss Brenda Lee and Mr. Steve Bressler.

JORGE ESPINOZA: Good afternoon, Members of the Board, Chief, Fire Department Family. I'm Firefighter Jorge Espinoza. I'm from Fire Station 39 B-Platoon in Van Nuys. I'm here today to bring to your attention that I'm not a minority on this Department.

I'm in the majority, actually. I'm not speaking of race, gender, or creed. I'm speaking of a group of people that come to work everyday, to risk their lives for the lives of others; one who shows compassion toward
the community in their time of need; one who considers
his or her co-workers, not only somebody they have to
hang around a few hours a day, but as family; one who
takes pride in their work, their character, their
appearance, and their reputation; one who acknowledges
that I am fortunate to have been trained and mentored by
some of the city's finest firefighters, who themselves
were guided by generations of tradition.

In closing, I'm not a minority. I'm the LAFD.
I'm simply a member who would like to keep the LAFD where
it belongs, and that's one of the Nation's elite fire
departments. Thank you for your time.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Thank you, Mr. Espinoza.

Miss Brenda Lee.

BRENDA LEE: Good afternoon. I'd like to say
that yeah, the fire department is a great job. It's a
wonderful opportunity to help those people who need the
help, and that's what most of us love about our job.

But on the other hand, we have to deal with that
monster that exists in the fire department; that might be
that captain; that might be that chief; that individual
who wants to pass on their own feelings about someone
else, and just because they are in their high rank, they
feel that they have a right to treat you one way or the
other.
When you are in a fire station, and the captain says to you, "Yeah, that's right. They're after your black ass." Okay. Everybody substitute white ass. Everybody substitute Asian ass. Everybody substitute that. How does that make you feel? He's a supervisor talking to you, telling you that. How does that make you feel.

On the other hand, does that member have a right to be a supervisor and be on the L.A. City Fire Department? I don't think that's a person that I want to deal with, that I want to see, and that's not a person that I want my family to see, most of all when they are hurting, when they are sick, because why? Because I don't know how they are going to treat them.

I want people who are going to come out there and help people, not people that are going to make judgements on how someone looks, how someone talks, how someone walks. I want compassionate people. I believe in the fire department. I believe in helping a community. But right now, I believe in you Commissioners.

I know that you have a difficult road ahead of you, and I wish that I could help you. Once again that's the helper in me wanting to come out. So to you I say please force forward. Thank you.
PRESIDENT SOTELO: Thank you, Ms. Lee.

Steve Bressler followed by Wilson Davis.

STEVE BRESSLER: My name is Steve Bressler, retired captain for 36 years. I have seen the racism and the retaliation and the hostile working conditions and so many people said that people should stand up and make a statement, so here I am. I think the solutions are, you need discipline to be handled by a civilian board with absolutely no ties to the fire department.

You also need the three-hole score done away with, because that is used to subvert the selection process for promotions. I think what we have here is a dysfunctional family, and we got the father beating some of the kids. Of course, the ones he doesn't beat, they love it, but the ones that do get a beating, when they can go nowhere else for help, they either go to the newspapers, or they go to attorneys, and you probably noticed that a lot of them are going to attorneys.

The most hazardous situation police find themselves in is going to dysfunctional family events. That's where people shoot each other, and a lot of times they shoot the policemen. So if things are not corrected, this organization is prime for a big event.

Thank you.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Thank you, Mr. Bressler. And
I'm sorry, it was Dilisa Davis. Is Miss Dilisa Davis here?

DILISA DAVIS: Good morning -- afternoon rather. My name is Dilisa Davis. I've been on this department for 21 and a half years, and like a lot of the other speakers, I truly do love and believe in this fire department.

We are a premier fire department, and the only ugliness that comes out is when we have some of the -- some of our participants in the fire department or employees that do not abide by the rules. And that ugly had -- because they do something stupid surfaces, and they'll have a black eye on our premier image, and I think that is what destroys the anti-workings of the fire department.

Julie, thanks, I really appreciate it. Sirens is not the voice of the females on this department. I've said it several times, and I hope you hear me and believe me, because they are not our voice. You have to speak to the ladies individually.

We have been so spread out, where we don't even trust each other. So you have to speak to them individually to get a real feel of what's going on in this department.

A lot of employees, every time you hear it is
always, I think is the catch word, catch phrase, angry,
disgruntled, it's not. We're tired, we're dissolutioned,
we're disappointed, because we're not treated fairly.
Discipline is totality -- we don't even want to go there,
okay. Ask me. I've been disciplined several times, and
a lot of times it's for speaking up for someone else, and
that's our discipline process.

It's not the perpetrators that get disciplined,
it's the person who speaks up. You're hammered,
crucified, fried, died and the whole thing. But what I
want to say is that we used to have a family atmosphere
here. We actually really had a family atmosphere, and
that has been totality destroyed.

A lot of the leaders that were instilling that
concept in us when we were coming on, when I came on,
they're gone. And now, the only people that you have
here now are the ones that are bucking for promotions,
that will sell their souls for a gold badge, and for
anyone that will lie and deny, and as someone so
eloquenty stated, you know, this is a paramilitary
organization, which is a bunch of bull shit, to be pretty
frank.

I'm prior military, and the only thing that is
even closely similar to being military is our chain of
command, and that's it. Everything else is a total
force, but we do have strong and decisive leadership. It
doesn't matter what the audit says, but they forgot to
add retaliatory, biased, and vindictive, very vindictive,
especially if you don't follow the rules, or play by the
games, or any of the catch phrases that are around the
department.

But like I truly said, I love this department.
I gave up a uterus and two knees for it. That's how much
I love the Department.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Thank you, Miss Davis.
And again I'd like to offer that anybody who
didn't get a chance to finish their statement, you can
submit a public speaker card for an additional minute.
We're going to go ahead and go to two individuals that
didn't finish their statements, but if there is anybody
else that would like to speak, please give your card over
to Miss Revelles.

Miss Julie Wolfe followed by Miss Melissa
Kelley, so you can finish up.

Miss Wolfe, you have one additional minute.

JULIE WOLFE: Okay. Thank you.

I'm going to ad lib this now, please continue
doing what you're doing, going and visiting the fire
stations. Do your own audit, not just from a small
minority of people, and I think what you will find that
there is just a small percentage of this fire department family that aren't happy. That's truly what my belief is.

Why am I so different from any other female on the job? I'd like to say it's because I've proven myself. I've been accepted. I was accepted as a rookie on this job. Once you show the fire department, the members that you work with, that you are capable of doing the job, you are accepted.

Unfortunately, there is a small group of people that are yelling the loudest, and that's what we are listening to, and I just want to ask you "not to let the tail wag the dog."

Some of the cases, where people are suing, don't take their word for face value. Please check up on their files, and you will see that -- what you are going to find are employees that weren't star employees in the first place.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: I'm sorry, Miss Wolfe.

JULIE WOLFE: Thank you.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Miss Melissa Kelley.

MELISSA KELLEY: I wanted to finish my statements, because it really does mean a lot to me to be up here, and it was difficult to do in the first place, and I just wanted a quick finish.
As I was saying, my grandfather was a retired officer. I was exposed to the family atmosphere that people speak of. I was witnessed to weekends spent, helping each other move, building garages and enjoying family softball games, and most importantly, I saw teamwork with each visit to my grandfather's station.

This is a wonderful career. One that I had dreamed about for many years, and worked vigorously to make myself an asset to the citizens of the City of Los Angeles.

As a firefighter, we are public servants. I think that's important to remember. When someone calls us, we do whatever is necessary to mitigate the emergency at hand. We rescue homeless. We rescue animals. We rescue regardless of race or creed or gender. We rescue each other, because it's our job to do so. That's why it is unacceptable to me that on June 19, 2004, I was involved in a training drill that taught me nothing about firefighting.

On June 19, 2004, I needed help and no one came, and that is unacceptable to me. On June 19, I believed that the department that I dedicated my life to would uphold the standards of discipline, and I feel like they did not.

Someone recently asked me about the audit, and
specifically what I wanted to come out of it all, and
after a quick introspection, I wishfully answered that I
want the Department that I thought I joined.

I'm asking you today to give that to all of us,
to see this through to the end, to give us the mission,
the purpose, and the vision that we all crave, to set
boundaries, and to enforce discipline, to restore our
trust and most of all, to keep us all safe.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Thank you, Miss Kelley.

Okay. With that, we have no more public speaker
cards. What I'd like to do is go ahead and conclude the
public comment period for this particular item on the
audit. I did want to thank every single one of you for
being here today, for listening, for really hearing what
was said by everyone in this room.

We've had so many various opinions that run the
spectrum within the Department, and it's only through
these public hearings, and the one-on-one interactions
that we've had that really enable us to make an informed
decision as we move forward.

So we want to really, sincerely, appreciate all
those first-time speakers, and all those repeat speakers.
It helps to make our process a lot more informed and
moved along.

So with that, I do want to let you know that we
will have a commission meeting, in which we will be
discussing the audit at length at our next Commission
meeting on Tuesday.

We meet at the 18th Floor City Hall East, and
our Commission Meetings run from 3:00 to 5:00 o'clock,
and we will be focused on the audit at our next meeting,
with anticipation that our final draft of the Action Plan
will be published on April 25th.

So again we want to hear from every single one
of you. If you feel more comfortable talking
individually, you can contact our Commission Staff and
speak to any one of us, and also you can come to our
committee meetings and our public hearings. Thank you
very much, and this concludes Item Number 3 and Number 4
of our agenda, and if I could have a motion to adjourn,
if there is nothing else.

COMMISSIONER HUDLEY-HAYES: So moved.

PRESIDENT SOTELO: Thank you. This meeting is
adjourned, and I appreciate all your help.

(Meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m.)