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## PRESS CONFERENCE – Notes

Members of the media - Thank you for coming today.

I have invited you here today to address statements made in regards to the 2014 production of Gilbert and Sullivan's Mikado, Opera Providence, and targeted at me personally. This may seem like an odd topic for a press conference. Freedom of speech is one thing, uninformed opinions that are an assault on one's character and community are hateful and damaging. In these volatile times in our world we seek honesty.

My motivation to speak out is in response to the reaction of my family, friends, and colleagues who know me best. I also speak as a professional educator and producer of an art form that many may not know, Opera. Misunderstood and often made fun of because of that fact.

I have provided actual photos of the performance of the Mikado that was presented at the Columbus Theatre on Broadway in 2014. For those who know Gilbert and Sullivan as authors/composers, it was written in the early 20th century. It is satire based on British politics of the day. As an "exotic" location for the piece, it was set in Japan by the authors, this made for a more interesting Opera for British audiences.

Protesters of the Opera Providence performance of Mikado accused me, as President of Opera Providence, of being against Asian Culture with "yellow face" make-up and criticized the casting, without ever having seen our production. Protesters in front of the theatre were invited to view the production. They refused. Personal attacks on my character have been made, publicly and on social media. This projection of hate is blatantly wrong.

I fully realize that this is election season and hatred is used in many ways to defame people and their character. This issue was eloquently brought to life by

Councilwoman Nirva LaFontaine this week in a Facebook post which said, “I am truly disheartened that hatred vandalism was discovered in my ward. Although I cannot control what people do, I can control how I react to it...I removed the insensitive vandalism and left a more positive message that hate will not be condoned in our community.”

As I am given the opportunity to be heard, hear me out; this is what I am all about.

I have served my country and my community as:

- Lifelong educator
- President of Opera Providence and OPERAtunity
- Current President of Resources (Recycling for RI Education)
- Current Lifetime member of the NAACP - Providence Branch (Former Treasurer)
- Member and Chair of the RI Ethics Commission
- Former President of the RI Association of Secondary School Principals
- Former President of the RI School Committee Association
- Former Board Member and Chair of the RI Urban League
- Supporter of After School Programs with Providence After School Alliance, as well as a presenter of programs for students.
- Sponsor of “Jazz is a Rainbow”
- Donor and supporter of the “Back to School Backpack Program” contributing school supplies for 15,000 backpacks each year
- Support 3 orphanages located in South Africa, India, and Haiti
- Proud recipient of the Roy Wilkins Award from the NAACP
- Proud to have received the “Philanthropy Award” from the Providence Performing Arts Center

My blended family is culturally and ethnically diverse. I am married to Nanci DeRobbio. Together we have 6 children, and 11 grandchildren. Together our family unites heritage, history, and roots in Ireland, Italy, Scotland, Poland, Portugal, Brazil, and Japan. Our family continues to blend religious beliefs in the Jewish faith, Christian faith, and Buddhism. We are blessed.

This is love in a world that is so harsh and hurtful in these toxic times. We must be the change that we wish to see in the world. We must work together for our children, our future depends on it.

My name is Robert A. DeRobbio. Thank you for your time. Thank you for listening.