

6-2013

Farmville's WFLO (95.7 FM) interviews President Reveley

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Recommended Citation

Reveley, W. Taylor IV, "Farmville's WFLO (95.7 FM) interviews President Reveley" (2013). *Speeches, Interviews, and Communications*.
1.
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Transcribed by Alexis Moody

Francis Wood: You're tuned to WFLO AM or FM in Farmville, VA. Our time is 8 ½ minutes after 8:00.

numbers dialed and phone rings

Francis Wood: Good Morning! It's the Call FLO Radio Show and you're on the air!

music

Francis Wood: Good morning everybody and welcome to the Call FLO Radio Show for today This Tuesday June the 18th, the 169th day of the year. You have 196 days left to go in 2013 but I think I'm the only one counting. Settle back, enjoy that cup of coffee, and spend the morning with us right here on the Call FLO Radio Show here on WFLO. And remember the lines will be open after a while 392-8881 or long-distance 1(800)825-5356. Well you woke up to a cloudy morning and already rather warm, 70 degrees and expect some clouds and thunderstorm activity today. Tell you what, we're gonna hold off on the calls until about 8:35 this morning. We have a very special guest with us today. As a matter of fact we have the new president of Longwood University, W. Taylor Reveley IV. Taylor it's great to have you with us today. Welcome to our WFLO microphone for the first time.

President Reveley: Well Francis it's wonderful to be here.

Francis Wood: Well, listen. You know I was thinking back and of course read the interview in the Farmville Herald about you and I've heard so much- so many good things about you and everything. I was thinking when I came to this station in 1971 there was another Reveley down the road from us at Hampden Sydney College. Tell us about that guy.

President Reveley: Yes my granddad Walter Taylor Reveley II was the president of Hampden Sydney from '63 to '77. So this has been like a homecoming for me.

Francis Wood: Well, you know, that makes it- you're bound to have been coming to Farmville at various times over the years, right?

President Reveley: Oh yeah, absolutely.

Francis Wood: Do you remember very much about him being there? I know you were very small at the time, but do you remember anything about him being here in the Farmville area.

President Reveley: Yeah, I really do very well because he and my grandmother, a Longwood graduate Class of '40, they stayed at Hampden Sydney until the early '80s. So I was really here a lot as a kid.

Francis Wood: Well you know, and of course your dad is the president at College of William and Mary. I mean there's lots of educators in your family. Did you ever think that you would be in any other career other than something to do with education coming along? I mean, I know you have a lot of interests and all, but didn't you think somewhere along the line you would end up in education?

President Reveley: There was a gravitational pull.

Francis Wood: Well tell us a little bit about yourself. Now you came from UVA's Miller Center where you were the former Managing Director there right? Some of your activities there?

President Reveley: So the Miller Center is a really neat place. It focuses on U.S. policies and U.S. governance in a very bi-partisan way. And I worked very closely there with Jerry Baliles, the former governor of Virginia. He's been a great friend through the years.

Francis Wood: Has your family-I guess they- did they urge you in the direction that you- that you're heading. How did you feel about that? I mean, what was the talk around the table? I mean, was it "Dad, how are things going you know as president of William and Mary" I mean, what was that like? You know, what sort of conversations were you having?

President Reveley: Well, when this job at Longwood came on the radar screen, it seemed like it might be a neat thing to consider. Especially given all of the great connections that I have, family has, with Longwood. My grandmother graduated in '40, her sisters graduated a couple years after, her mom had graduated from here as well. Her dad had taught here, taught Biology, in the early 1900s.

Francis Wood: Yeah, so I mean you have a real connection to this area. You know? Let's talk a little bit more about your association, you know, you were at UVA, you were working with Gov. Baliles and former Secretaries of State Jim Baker and Warren Christopher. What do you bring to the table from those experiences?

President Reveley: Well, so much of public higher ed. these days, and Longwood is a public university, entails government, understanding government officials and I think that's something that- knowing and working with Jerry Baliles and Jim Baker and Warren Christopher has helped with a lot. Roughly a quarter of Longwood's budget every year comes from government sources.

Francis Wood: Taylor you're an advocate of liberal arts and education and why is that important to you? Why would that be important these days to students?

President Reveley: You know there's been a trend over the years to focus more and more and more exclusively on technical skills and professional preparation. I think what that misses is the fact that over any given person's career, the economy is likely to transform four or five times. And so if you're prepared just for a narrow set of skills right when you graduate, those narrow set of skills might well be almost obsolete by the time you're 20 years out of school. And the great thing that liberal arts do is they give you that breath of perspective, you know wealth of ideas that allow you to kinda transform with the times.

Francis Wood: Gotta ask you what you think of the area of Farmville in general, of Longwood University. I know you of course know the long and rich history of Longwood in this town and from the time it started as a private school and all of that. What is your feeling coming here and walking over the campus and looking at the town and everything and saying, “You know what, I’m here. This is what I’ve walked into here.” What is it to you?

President Reveley: Oh, Farmville is just a- it’s a jewel and it- Farmville and Southside are where I always just feel most at home. Always have in life. Something about Farmville that doesn’t usually get accented is; it’s one of the oldest two college towns in the whole country. Its kind of like Farmville, Boston and New York are the places that have had two colleges for a couple centuries.

Francis Wood: Well, Farmville is a college town. And all of us that live here and have been here for many years, we know that. And we miss the kids when they’re not here and we like to see them come back. You know, that’s just the way it is. Challenges in higher education, I mean, there’s all kinds of challenges now you know, sometimes people shake their head about it and sometimes people gripe about tuitions at colleges and universities and all that. What are some of the challenges that you see coming in?

President Reveley: I think the biggest challenge people talk about student debt and I think about that a great deal. It almost has a moral dimension to me. Student debt is a particularly acute problem for the people who don’t wind up finishing their degrees. And that itself is a problem. Roughly only, if you look at national trends, roughly only half of the people who start college eventually finish. And that’s where you get real problems with student debt, if somebody has been going to college for four, five, six years, doesn’t finish and in the process gets \$20-30,000 in student debt, that can be crippling. By contrast if they have roughly that amount of student debt and they do finish, they’ve got an asset and they’re on their way in life.

Francis Wood: Uh, this generation of young people, as I said sometimes people say, great great things about them. Sometimes people shake their heads and everything, but you know what? They’re our future. Where are they intellectually and where are they headed in this changing world, this changing environment of ours that’s just constantly changing from day to day-

President Reveley: A fascinating thing to think about is the vantage point they have on kind of our life and times. The rising freshmen were born in 1995/1996 which is kind of an amazing fact just in and of itself, and their first recollection is of a news standpoint is 9/11. That’s what they remember when they were 5, 6 years old. And their life sense, their childhood was dominated with news of war, terror right when they were starting, getting ready to start high school they saw the economy crash in 2008 so they’ve got this visceral understanding that these times are challenging. And I think they’re eager to rise to the challenge too.

Francis Wood: Social media and all of that, that plays a big part in not only their personal lives, but with education too doesn’t it?

President Reveley: Sure, I mean, on the good side of the ledger it's a very democratizing tool. It's much easier for people to engage with each other through social media. On the flip side it's an abbreviated format and it's- you don't quite have the same depth of engagement with social media.

Francis Wood: So many times the old cliché is what goes around comes around. What do you see going around and coming around as far as education is concerned these days? Are there certain things that- certain principles, certain principles, certain fundamentals that just don't change or that just become enhanced with time?

President Reveley: I think the thing that doesn't change is education is a person to person, in person phenomenon at root. And something that is very vogue these days is the prospect of online education. And technology is constantly, you know, now and for decades, and if you look at it, for centuries, has been transforming the way education works. But, at the irreducible core is that person to person engagement; both with students and teachers and professors and students with their peers. And I think online education at the end of the day is not going to anymore fundamentally alter that person to person engagement anymore than printing once upon a time did or radio once upon a time did or TV. All of which at one point or another had been alleged to be bringing in a new utopian era.

Francis Wood: Well, you know, I can't help but think as we're talking here and I'm looking at you, you're not the typical university president. You don't have gray hair, okay? You're not talking with that aged voice yet. Thirty-eight years old, correct? Thirty- eight years old. I don't know if that's among the youngest of the university presidents in these United States, but I would think so.

President Reveley: It is, it is, though Longwood has had a tradition of young presidents.

Francis Wood: What advantage do you think you bring with your age?

President Reveley: A couple things: it's easier for me to relate to the students, perhaps. I'm the oldest of four kids and my sister is just 22 years old right now and so I, just on a pretty elemental level I kind of know what they're thinking about. I've probably got a perspective on technology that's a little bit different than somebody who would be a generation older than me. Those are probably two. And just the energy of youth I guess too.

Francis Wood: And so far no student has looked at you and thought that maybe you were one of the older students who is taking a course, right? Well, you know, a lot of what you have done in the past has been sort of behind the scenes. Now you're out in front, you're out in the forefront here and you have to- I know that in your alone time you have kind of thought it over and thought about 'Okay, Taylor this is my time to step out and to shine here. And have you really wrapped your brain around the fact that you are the president of Longwood University and what that really means for the rest of your life?

President Reveley: It has begun to sink in. it didn't sink in right away, but it has begun to. And the biggest change from what I used to do to today is, like you said, being right at the center of attention. And I've learned sat the knee of plenty folks who know how to do that well, but it is a change.

Francis Wood: Taylor, let me ask. What is the change that this brings to your family? You have a young family. A wife and twins I believe. How old are they?

President Reveley: They are 11 months old.

Francis Wood: 11 months old. Boy and girl?

President Reveley: Boy and a girl.

Francis Wood: Boy and a girl, okay. Well, what's it like? I mean, all of a sudden for them to move into the- what I call the White House over there. I mean, it's gonna be a big change. The kids aren't aware of it yet and to them you're just always gonna be dad, you know?

President Reveley: One of the most exciting things to me is the prospect of the kids, the twins, growing up here in Farmville, in a college town, with that great big backyard. That's gonna be wonderful. And they've been nice to their somewhat aging parents. They sleep through the night these days.

Francis Wood: Oh that's great! Gotta ask you this, your dad, is he giving you a lot of advice?

President Reveley: It's been fun to- we've talked about education and higher education kind of always. But prior to this in somewhat more of an abstract and theoretical way, and now we talk about it in a pretty nuts and bolts practical way, which is fun.

Francis Wood: Well that's good; I mean you share something now that even that's even closer than whatever you might have had coming up because you can throw ideas back and forth a little bit. And you know what; it's not a bad idea to throw some ideas back and forth with a guy who's the head of William and Mary. You know that? You know I was thinking about this the other day too, there is a cohesiveness that has to occur in a college town. Whether it's a college town or a college city, between the college, the university, the town, or the city. And sometimes that has to be challenging. What is your approach to that? How do you feel about that? I know that you've already gone around and met the town manager and the local officials and all of that. How are you feeling about that, real positive at all?

President Reveley: Yeah, very positive. When you distill it all down, so many things in life, especially that, are just a matter of relationships and that's gonna be fun. And then there's some things that a college and a town relationship can focus on. And one of them, Longwood specifically, could do even more maybe than its done is do some programming and events, speakers that are really geared for the community as much as just for the university itself. And the Miller center in a way, what I was doing at UVA has probably helped give me some good ideas about that because it has a very successful town speaker series every year.

Francis Wood: Well, you know, I think one of the keys to that is to- for the college or universities to make sure that the people in the area know that these various programs that are offered by the college or universities are open to the public. And I think so many times the public hears about it and they go "Oh, well that's Longwood or that's Hampden-Sydney, that doesn't include us.", when it really does.

President Reveley: Yeah, sometimes it's a function just of making sure that the invitation is really clear in that regard. That is really is open. Taking care of some of the practicalities too, just like where to park, things like that.

Francis Wood: Yeah, absolutely, which is always a problem in Farmville. Parking, that'll always be a problem. I'll tell you what. We're gonna take a break right here, and then we're gonna come right back and talk a little bit more. Alright we'll be right back and of course we're talking with President W. Taylor Reveley IV, the president of Longwood University. We'll be back in 30 seconds.

break

Francis Wood: Alright and back here talking with Taylor Reveley the president of Longwood University. And you're hearing that a whole lot these days Taylor, probably after a while it's just gonna be old hat, you know? It'll just be old hat. Within the realm over there are you referred to as president Reveley? How do they respond to you? Does it just depend on where you go?

President Reveley: It depends. I respond to most anything.

Francis Wood: I had asked you before about your family and everything and of course fitting in here to this area. Now before you were actually, were you in Charlottesville, was that where you were living or-?

President Reveley: Living in Richmond and a lot of travel with that job too.

Francis Wood: Well, you know, Farmville there's not a lot- you don't have to get up in the morning and plan too much about travel and your route to work and everything because it's pretty much right there. Let me ask you this, and this has been something for years that, you know, you think about higher education in the next few years and you know we talk about the social media and online education and that sort of thing. I feel that, from what you're saying, I feel that you still think that there is the importance of that student/professor relationship and probably always will be. I mean, let's just face it, you know there's a lot of us that learn better in the presence of someone who is the teacher. And that face to face relationship with a teacher. I know that there's a certain detachment from online anything as far as I'm concerned. Plus, I've always been a visual learner anyway so I need to kind of show me, 'Well here's the way it is' and you know, I can hear somebody talking and, you, know, I can think 'They know what they're talking about, I can click into that right there'. You don't think that in the next 25, 50 years that it'll be all online, everything's digital, no more use for colleges and universities.

President Reveley: I really don't and the strange thought experiment that I think might bear that out is to think about West Point, could West Point be an online college? Obviously not, so what is it about West Point that is inherently an in person exercise? And some of that translates to all colleges and universities, I think. Now I do, at the same time think that we are in the midst of a real transformation of the way higher education is going to fit together and that 30 years from now things will be different from today and that it's a turbulent time. If there are roughly 4,000 colleges and universities across the country right now, 30 years from now I'd be surprised if there were that many.

Francis Wood: No smart pills in the future, right?

President Reveley: Probably not.

Francis Wood: That's not gonna work out, that's science fiction. And you don't have a science fiction course over there, right? Well Taylor it's been great having you here with us today and taking time out of what I know is a very busy schedule. We here at WFLO want to welcome you not only to Farmville, but to Longwood University and wish you just a long and prosperous stay in this area and at the university. And I can tell by your enthusiasm here that you're bringing a lot with you. And everybody over there is very happy. I've heard very very good reviews on you.

President Reveley: Well thank you so much Francis.

Francis Wood: it was great having you here with us and if we can help you in any way just let us know, okay?

President Reveley: This has been wonderful, thank you.

Francis Wood: Okay, you take care.