



Taylor Sarman Oral History Interview, November 16, 2015

Title

“A Student Leader for the Twenty-First Century”

Date

November 16, 2015

Location

Valley Library, Oregon State University.

Summary

In the interview, Sarman describes his family background and upbringing in Union, Oregon, commenting on the ways in which growing up in rural environment impacted his worldview. He likewise traces his early interest in politics and describes his ascension within the ranks of Future Business Leaders of America, culminating with his election as national president of the organization.

Sarman next discusses his transition to college at OSU and his earliest involvement with the Associated Students of Oregon State University, beginning with his first job as a congressional clerk. He likewise reflects on his involvement in fraternity life, and on an internship that he completed in the Oregon House, working for Rep. Jeff Reardon. From there, Sarman recalls his move into the role of ASOSU Executive Director of Government Relations and, after that, his appointment to the OSU Board of Trustees. In recalling his stint as a trustee, Sarman makes particular note of his engagement with other trustee members as well as OSU President Ed Ray.

Sarman's experiences as ASOSU President are the next focus of the session, and in this he describes running his presidential campaign and reflects on a few specific highlights of his term in office, including his veto of an identity-based representation bill forwarded by the student legislature, and his work to realign the student fee allocation model at Oregon State.

The session concludes with Sarman's thoughts on the impact on student groups of the Student Experience Center; his memories of influential classes and professors; his sense of contemporary student concerns at Oregon State; and his hopes for his own future following graduation.

Interviewee

Taylor Sarman

Interviewer

Chris Petersen

Website

<http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oh150/sarman/>

Transcript

Chris Petersen: OK, today is November 16th, 2015. We're in the Valley Library with Taylor Sarman and Taylor is the former student body president, he's still a student here, an undergraduate in Political Science. We're going to talk to him about his student experience, his experience in student government, and also his association with the Board of Trustees. But I'd like to begin at the beginning and talk about your upbringing. Where were you born?

Taylor Sarman: So I was born in La Grande, Oregon, over in the northeast corner of the state, and then I grew up, all of my eighteen years, fifteen minutes east of La Grande in Union. A super small town, population of 1,196 people – at least it was when I left, I doubt that it's grown much since I've been gone. But a very rural community, kind of small town niche kind of place.

CP: What were your parents' backgrounds?

TS: So my father works for the Union Pacific Railroad on maintenance, so he was home seven days, gone seven days. And my mother is a United States Postal worker, she's a rural carrier in the area.

CP: So was it the train that led your family to situate themselves in Union? Why Union?

TS: So my great grandparents moved to the Union area, right in between Cove and Union, shortly after they got married. And that's where they raised their kids. And so that's where my grandpa met my grandmother, was at Union High School. And then, from there on, that's where they made their life. Both of my parents are UHS alumni, so they went to Union High School and met at Union High School, and so we've just kind of been rooted there ever since. I mean, I had teachers that taught both my dad and his brother, my uncle, so a very small town, very rural vibe. It definitely contributed a lot to how I viewed the world, I think, and the way that I view a lot of things, growing up in a very rural part of the state.

CP: Can you expand on that a little bit more, how it impacted your worldview?

TS: Yeah, so for me, community is really important and I think when you grow up in such a small place and you have twenty-five other students in your graduating class, knowing people and understanding and just being in community with people is really important. For the small community, when bad things happen, when good things happen, there's a cause for celebration and a cause for really coming together. And I think that's one of the reasons, really, that drew me to Oregon State. I had applied to other places and been accepted to other places, but when I set foot on campus at Oregon State, there was a sense of community here. That was just my first initial reaction as soon as I got here. People open the door for you here, people smile and ask you how your morning is going and all those great things. So I think that is really one of the driving reasons why I chose Oregon State, having grown up in such a small place.

It's a very different part of Oregon too. Having now lived the past four years on the west side of the state, I understand, definitely, our urban-rural divide in the state, and that's not something that's just specific to Oregon. And so that's something that's really sparked a lot of interest to me is, how do – as a political science student – how do governments and how do communities just in general meet the differing needs of folks in John Day versus the folks in northeast Portland. So that's kind of an area of interest for me that stems from being over in Union.

CP: Rural and also isolated. Can you talk about that?

TS: Yeah. So when you live in eastern Oregon, when you live specifically in Union, you become very used to making the four-and-a-half hour drive over to Portland for whatever it is that you need. I think the closest bigger city is probably going to be Boise, maybe the Tri-Cities, that's where a lot of folks go to do big shopping trips. I remember every summer when we would buy school clothes, there's not a lot of places in eastern Oregon, where I grew up, so we would drive two hours to go to Tri-Cities, Washington and get everything that we needed and bring it all back. It's also a very sustainable place. A lot of people really try to grow what they need and use what they need locally, but it is very isolated from other parts of the state.

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Like I said, I mean, a four-and-a-half-hour drive to Portland, you get very used to making it, because that's where everything happens. Especially with sports teams. I did cross country in freshman year in high school, but my sister did basketball all throughout her high school education, and so you get very used to making drives all across that part of the state, and also on the west side of the state for championship games. Just because, that's where the people are.

CP: What were you interested in, growing up as a boy in Union?

TS: So I was kind of a weird kid. I have always had a passion for politics. And now that I've reflected on it, I think it really comes from my appreciation for community and helping and serving the people that are around me. But the first kind of instance of me being politicized that I remember, I was walking in this local café that we had in Union – it was 2004, so I was in the fourth grade – and somebody had a John Kerry/Edwards button. And I'd been watching the news and was really interested in the election and specifically in John Kerry, for whatever reason, at the time. And I stopped him and was talking to this gentleman, and he ended up giving me the button that he was wearing. So I would wear that button to school all throughout the fourth and fifth grade; wear it on the playground. And so for me, politics was always what I was interested in, early early on. While everybody else wanted to be a firefighter or policeman, I would always tell people I wanted to be President of the United States. I have since changed, I will settle for a Senate seat, if that's the case. But I've always been interested in politics.

So growing up, I had that interest. I got into high school, obviously student government was something that I was interested in, and I did that throughout my time at UHS. But I also had gotten bit by this FBLA – Future Business Leaders of America – bug, and so I got involved with that my freshman year of high school, and I immediately knew that I wanted stay involved and kind of move up in the organization. So I ran for state office in Oregon and served two years as a state officer, and then served a year as national president of the Future Business Leaders of America.

And at the time, I didn't think about it this way but I think about it now, again, my interests in community and how we can serve the urban/rural divide in Oregon. So CTE, career and technical education, was something that, when I was in FBLA, it didn't necessarily click in my head what the connection was. But the reason I was so drawn to FBLA is because of the way that I saw it change other people's lives. I've watched other national officers and met other state officers, and for me it was kind of my thing all throughout high school, was FBLA. And I got to travel the country, my senior year, which for somebody growing up in Union, being able to – I traveled and met Bill Clinton at a conference in New York City that was focused 100% on education, and got to experience things like public transportation in other places, because we don't have that. And so for me, that was just an awesome and amazing opportunity to see what I normally otherwise probably wouldn't have seen, just growing up in Union, but really found a way to get out and learn about the rest of the world too.

So I've always been a political nerd. I would attend city council meetings, starting in the sixth grade, and always wanted to get involved in the local government arena as well.

CP: Was there an example of somebody that set you on this path at all? Or was it mostly self-driven?

TS: So my parents are apolitical; not political at all. In fact, when I was sixteen, I re-registered my parents to vote, because they hadn't voted five or six elections, and so they were off the voter rolls. I think it was the 2008 election, so right around that area, I kind of really attempted to politicize my parents and talk about some of the things that I was frustrated with in the election. And then inevitably, I ended up sitting them down at our dinner table and saying, "here are the forms, all you need to do is fill them out," and then took them back to the high school and registered them to vote.

So I don't know where I got it from. There's not a long line of people who have an interest in politics in my family, it's just been something that, growing up, it's always been something that I've been interested in. And the interest has just grown and expanded throughout my life.

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CP: I'm interested too in teasing out how you moved up the ranks at FBLA. It's such an unlikely story, someone from Union becoming the national president, let alone a state representative.

TS: Yeah, so Oregon's only ever had three national presidents, and they've been pretty spaced out. I think for me what it was is, when you grow up in a small town, you become really good on connecting with people and talking with people on

a human level. And I think that's honestly how I ended up being so successful in FBLA is that while other people would run for offices in FBLA and talk about their fifteen-point plan on how they were going to change something that was never going to change, I was more interested in how is it that FBLA has impacted my peers and their experience? And what can we do to keep that going?

I remember when I was running for national president, our conference was in Orlando. I never got to go to Disneyworld, I was super bummed about that. But I remember somebody coming up to me and saying – because people would come up to our campaign booths, they'd shake your hand and ask you all your questions and give you the opportunity to ask them questions. And I would ask questions like, "have you gotten to go to Disneyworld?" Or "have you gone to Universal Studios?" because at the time I was a big Harry Potter fan and they had just opened the Harry Potter rides and I was like, "you've got to tell me how they are," and all that stuff. And at that time, somebody came up to me and said, "you were the only person at this conference who has asked me about me and about what I enjoy," so they gave me some appreciation for that.

Again, I didn't connect the two until much later, but growing up in Oregon and growing up in the part of Oregon that I did, that just came second nature to me is to talk with people and not at people, really. And so now that I think about it backwards, that's definitely – I think I was a folksy guy in high school, I guess, and just had a passion for talking with people. And I think that's inevitably how I moved up in FBLA. The year I ran for national president, I think, to this day, is still the most competitive race that FBLA has ever had. We had eight candidates: one from Washington state, some of the other bigger states. There was an incumbent – somebody who was already on the national officer team – that was running to be president.

And I think too, one of the things that I have reflected on as well, I almost didn't run for national president. I knew I wanted to be a national officer, and since freshman year, I'd watched the farewell speech that the president, my freshman year, had given. My teacher had it on video, so we watched it one day in class. And I knew from that moment that I wanted to be FBLA national president – that was my dream in high school and I set my sights on it. And then I went through high school and got to the point where you actually have to decide whether you're going to do it or not, and at the time I just didn't think that a guy that grew up in the middle of nowhere in rural eastern Oregon could ever be national FBLA president. And so I had gone back and forth on whether or not I was going to run for a different national office that was less competitive and eventually obviously decided to run. And what really moved me was this idea that if I didn't at least run, I would never know how it would have turned out, obviously. And I realized that if I ran and lost, that still might mean a lot more for people that come from very similar backgrounds as me from Colorado or Texas or in Virginia where we have chapters. And I realized that that would mean something to them, that some small town Oregonian could get up on stage and speak in front of 10,000 people and ask them to vote for him.

And so I kind of entered the race with that idea and that's another thing that really carried me through is that I talked about coming from a small town and what that was like. And I think that for people that are from small towns and involved in FBLA, that meant a lot to them. And for people that attended school districts with 1,000 people in their high school – which is mind-blowing to me – it gave them some different insight on what it's like to grow up in a different place and be involved. And I think too, there are a lot of advantages that being in a small town and going to small school really provide you, because there's a set number of responsibilities and positions and things that need to be done in a rural community, and typically that's bigger than the number of people you have to do it. So you become very flexible and are willing to take on multiple roles. So I think that's really what helped me elevate in the organization.

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My campaign was all about – the speech that I opened with – was, there was a joke that had come up with me during my years as a state officer about my covered wagon. Because I actually had to fly – we traveled back and forth between Portland so often that I would actually fly out of Pendleton into Portland, because especially during the winter, you can't get through the pass. And so the joke was that my mode of transportation was actually a covered wagon through the pass over to Portland. And I remember telling the joke, I can't remember the exact words, but I told the joke in the first thirty seconds of my speech and 10,000 people started laughing, because it's a covered wagon and I'm from Oregon.

And so, that's been a thing that has been carried on for me and has been symbolic of, I guess, my leadership style and my own personal mascot. So when I was student body president, I had a covered wagon that sat on my desk. It was a

birdhouse, but it was a covered wagon that sat on my desk and it just kind of reminded me of who I am as a person and where I come from. When I tried to get art from the archives, believe it or not, the MU's archives had no covered wagon art. So the closest thing I got was a Fairbanks painting of two gentlemen with like a horse-drawn wagon, and they're like bailing hay off of it. And I was like, "ok, that's very eastern Oregon, I'll put that in my office." Roundabout answer there.

CP: Tell me about the progression into college. I assume you were anticipating going to college from early on?

TS: Yeah. So I'm first generation, I'm the first one in my family to ever even go to a university. But my parents both, it was an expectation that I was going to go to college. So I never thought for a second that that wasn't in the cards for me.

I had been accepted into another school in Rhode Island. I was already in Boston for a conference, so I took the train to Rhode Island and did a campus tour. It was ok. And then came back to Oregon and then toured Oregon State and then also did a tour of the University of Oregon. And like I said, when I set foot on the campus at Oregon State, that was a done deal, I knew this was the place for me. And from that moment on, that was later in my senior year, it really finally set my sights on OSU as the place for me. Which has been something that's interesting, because everybody that I talked to said, "oh, you need to go to the University of Oregon because if you're going to be in Political Science, that's where you want to be." But again, I don't think my success here on this campus would have been possible at that campus. I think there's something special about Oregon State and my connection with it that really allowed me to do the things that I've been able to do here. So yeah, for me college was always an expectation from my parents.

And I actually – it's funny – I got involved with student government before I actually set foot on campus at Oregon State. So my FBLA background is really active and I couldn't imagine coming to Oregon State and just taking classes, I needed something else, I was used to such a jam-packed schedule. And so I started to look at all of the student organizations on campus and, of course, found the student government and thought, "oh, that's really interesting, I want to get involved with that." So I got on their website and they were hiring a student position for September of 2012, when I was coming to campus. And this was July, later in July, maybe early August. And I said, "well, I'm eligible by all of the criteria that's one here." So I submitted my application, resume, all that good stuff, and sent it over. And a week later I got an email saying "we want to interview you," and I said, "ok, well, I'm in the middle of nowhere over in Union, can we do a phone interview?" So we did a phone interview and this was for congressional clerk for ASOSU's legislative branch, so the person who takes the minutes at all the meetings and makes sure that everybody has their folders; very clerical.

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And the person that I was applying through was the speaker of the house at the time, who had grown up in Umatilla. And so immediately there was – I don't know what it is, but when you meet somebody from eastern Oregon, if you live on the west side of the state, it's just the coolest thing because we don't get to meet a lot of people from eastern Oregon over here all the time. And so immediately we connected on the phone, we were talking, he was a Political Science major as well, so immediately we connected and he asked me standard interview questions, and a week later I got offered the job. I said, "yeah, absolutely, I'll take it." And so this was before I had ever come to campus as a student and gone through START or any of that, I was already working for the student government. Which I, now having served as president, I will always appreciate my experience as the person who took the minutes and did the clerical work right out of the gate. Because it was not an easy role to transition from being FBLA national president and being able to talk in a room and then, obviously, the congressional clerk doesn't do a lot of talking in the legislative meetings.

And so I learned a lot and I would often reflect on lessons that I had learned as the clerk, when I was doing things as the president, that really resonated with me. Like sometimes you don't have to talk all the time in the room, sometimes you need to leave the space open for other people. And then also, in any organization, everybody plays – arguably, I think – and equal importance in the success of the organization. So whether you're the president of the student government or the person who takes the minutes at the student government meetings, each of the roles are integral to the success of the organization. So I definitely reflect on and appreciate going from the minute taker to the student body president; it was a really good opportunity and experience for me.

CP: We'll talk a lot more about that here in a second. I want to ask you about something else first though, and that is, you pledged a fraternity, is that correct?

TS: I did, yeah.

CP: Can you tell me about your experience in Greek life?

TS: So I, interestingly enough, the person that did my phone interview for the congressional clerk job was in a fraternity. And so I worked very closely with him and had an affinity toward him, just because he was from eastern Oregon. And so I ended up joining the fraternity that he belongs to, so Alpha Sigma Phi. And he kind of brought me around the house. And for me what was so rewarding and has continued to be rewarding about the experience of being a fraternity man, we're a newer fraternity, so for me I was really drawn to the idea of, I could help lay a foundation that could last for hundreds of years, hopefully. And I've met some of the greatest friends and brothers that a person could meet when they come to a college campus. Jacob, who is the person that was speaker and hired me as congressional clerk and gave me my first gig, is one of my best friends to this day.

And it's interesting because in a fraternity you have a variety of different interests in degree study, different goals and aspirations, and maybe most interestingly for me is different political ideologies. My best friend at Oregon State, Jacob, is a Republican, very conservative. I'm more of the liberal in our house, which most people don't expect since I grew up in eastern Oregon. But for me, being in a fraternity is really proof that, no matter what you believe or how different your lives can be, there always can be something that binds you together and allows you to be in community with each other that supersedes everything else. And for me, that's what a fraternity experience has been like at Oregon State. And outside of the fraternity as well, in Greek life, I have so many friends in a variety of different houses across campus. And same thing – we all have this idea of, in one way or another, we want to make the world a better place through service to each other and to our communities. And so that, for me, has just been a remarkable experience that's been a huge piece of my undergrad experience.

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CP: Well at some point, I gather, during your freshman year, you began an internship in the Oregon legislature. Is that correct?

TS: I did, yep. So this was really when I started to think about my experience at FBLA through a career and technical education lense. I had been involved with FBLA and had met a lot of folks, and some of the leadership in the Association for Oregon FBLA were interested in some of my interests as well. So in 2010, the state legislature did away and cut funding for the Student Leadership Development Center, SLDC, and so when I was an officer in FBLA we tried to organize a big Capitol Day and had done a lot of outreach and created some programs to help the association be more prevalent in government and public service. So when I had come to Oregon State I said, "probably not going to be involved in the collegiate level of FBLA, I'm gonna try to do my own thing," and then this opportunity came up to intern with Representative Jeff Reardon.

And his interests, and one of the things that he ran on when he ran for the legislature – and his race was historic as well because he's one of the only Democrats in the last twenty years to primary another Democratic incumbent and win – so I was really drawn to his election for that reason. But one of the other reasons that he ran on was this idea that Oregon really needed to expand our investment in career and technical education, and then obviously a career and technical student organization component needed to be a part of how the state was going to invest in a strong economy for Oregon. His background is in Skills USA, which is another career and technical student organization that focuses on a different skillset than the business sector that FBLA focused on. But he was a CTSO advisor and had come to the legislature and was really excited and really energized to pass a bill to get more funding for career and technical student organizations.

And so one of those was organizations was FBLA, so I had gotten an email out of the blue from the executive director of Oregon FBLA saying, "hey, we have this gentleman in the legislature, we've been working with him, and we'd really like for you to reach out and connect with him about the possibility of an internship, and work on the legislation with him and do some of the advocacy work with it." And being the political science nerd that I was, I said, "yeah, absolutely, that sounds great." And so I started my internship; it was the short session of the legislature, towards the end. And so I got to spend a while there working on the bill that ended up providing more funding for career and technical student organizations and also career and technical education on a whole.

And so that was just an amazing experience. It taught me a lot about politics and specifically about the Oregon legislature. I recall, one of the biggest moments I can remember is, so the bill ended up passing and the funding was awarded, so that was a huge moment. But there was another moment when we were doing meetings with legislators on the bill, because there was some contention about there's seven career and technical student organizations in Oregon. FFA – formerly Future Farmers of America – is one of the biggest ones. There's the other six that have been prominently run by the same association management company. Then there was a lot of conversation about how does FFA – when we would talk to people about this funding, the only thing, for the most part, that most legislators were asking is, "how is it going to impact FFA and how is it going to affect FFA? Because those are in my district and I know about them."

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So I learned very quickly and very carefully how to tailor your message to who it is that you're talking to. So for legislators that we knew had huge FFA presences in their district, that was what we opened with, and talked about the benefits there, and that made a lot of sense. But the story that I took with me the most is that there was one time we had scheduled Representative Reardon and I to meet with another legislator, and Rep. Reardon got called down to the floor to speak with the Speaker about something at the time, so I had to go to the meeting by with myself, with this other representative. So I was a freshman in college, I had never been more nervous in my entire life, so I walk in and wait in the waiting room, and the representative opened her door. And I walk in and talk with her and immediately she says, "ok, where's Representative Reardon." And I'm like, "oh, he's not actually going to be able to join us." And she totally shut down the conversation at that exact moment. She's like, "ok, well I only want to meet with Jeff on this, that's what it said on the meeting schedule." And I said, "yeah, I'm so sorry," gave her the one-pager and quickly got up and left the room.

But I learned a lot about how to interact with other elected officials, and that obviously was a huge role that I had later on in my college career. But that was probably the most scariest thing I've ever have happen to me in the legislature.

CP: What district did he represent, Reardon?

TS: The 48th District, so Happy Valley.

CP: So during this period of time, you also were moving up, gradually, in ASOSU, from your initial clerk's position to Executive Director of Government Relations. Tell me about how that came about and what the duties were there.

TS: So I had really been interested in the advocacy work that ASOSU had done at the state capitol, so I'd been following some of the work some of the other executive directors had done while I was the congressional clerk, and had been really interested in that role and doing advocacy work for ASOSU. And then once I got to Salem and was up there twice a week doing my internship with Representative Reardon's office, I was like, "oh, absolutely, I need to apply for this." What is interesting, again I did a phone interview for the job that applied for, and I actually got to do it in the interior office of Representative Reardon's, his office in the capitol, because I had to be in Salem that day for testimony on one of the bills that we were working on. And so, I think that being able to say, "well, I have to be in Salem that day and I can take a phone interview from the state capitol," I think that definitely helped me in my application to be, basically, one of the core student lobbyists for the student government at Oregon State.

And so I ended up getting the job and going to work for a year as the Executive Director of Government Relations. And that was really an amazing experience for me as well, because it allowed me to use some of the connections I'd already made in the state capitol with my internship with Representative Reardon's office. And then I'd spent that whole time with Reardon's office kind of getting a feel for how things work around the legislature and knowing who was really important folks to meet with – the actual legislator, not the student working on the bill, and things like that.

And so I did a lot of really cool things with ASOSU as the student lobbyist, essentially. The biggest thing that I think we achieved, we obviously had a tuition buy-down that year in the session, which was a huge win for students. I learned a lot about how the state invests or doesn't invest in higher education, given what funding looks like in the biennium. But the biggest thing that I think that we – that was really a tangible win for students, besides the tuition buy-down – we worked to pass a piece of legislation that focused on medical amnesty. It was kind of an idea that had been floated around in the legislature in the previous session, it didn't get any traction, and then I had heard it was coming back in the next session, when I was Executive Director of Government Relations.

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And so ASOSU is a part of a state-wide student association called the Oregon Student Association and they weren't really following the legislation and weren't really active, and I thought that was just a huge disservice to the students on our campus. Medical amnesty is essentially providing amnesty for students that may be drinking underage and need to call for either themselves or a friend, to get medical attention. And I had already started some conversations on our campus about how was it that we could, at the very least, institute this as a campus policy? Because I've always been interested in campus and student safety, and for me it was a huge no-brainer that students are going to partake in sometimes risky and dangerous behaviors, and we need to make sure that we have mechanisms in place to support students and keep them safe, given what we know to be reality on a college campus.

And so I spent a lot of time building connections on our campus, working with Rob Reff, who is our drug and alcohol prevention coordinator here, and Carl over in the Student Conduct Office, talking about why it was that Oregon State students needed this, and then eventually why we needed to be advocates for it in Salem. And so eventually it worked its way through and you provided testimony, and we got endorsements here on campus and were able to be a huge supporter for why medical amnesty passed through the Oregon State Legislature and is now the law of the land in Oregon. And we got the Oregon Student Association also to get involved, so it connected us with people at PSU and the U of O on really a no-brainer. I learned in my time in student government that sometimes when you get a bunch of student body presidents around the table, they can't agree on anything, even when they agree on everything. But medical amnesty was really a bridge for us to change the dialogue about student government in Oregon, at least from my perspective. So that was a cool experience to be able to see it from the Executive Director of Government Relations level, and do the advocacy work at the state capitol.

Also, there's always going to be proponents and opponents, and I had learned a lot about how to talk about that legislation specifically, when you're talking with legislators. And I think when I ended up running for student body president, we talked a lot about medical amnesty as a big victory, so I think it also inevitably helped me when I campaigned a year later. But yeah, looking back, that was one of my favorite roles that I've had on campus, I think, just because you got to do all the fun stuff of political advocacy and that was just a huge impact on me in my undergrad.

CP: Well, if my chronology is correct, a couple months later there was another big moment for you - the Board of Trustees. Am I right about that?

TS: Yeah, so that was kind of, I think it was fate honestly. At the end of the day, the way that I ended up hearing about it – so I worked directly for the student body president at the time, and he walked down the hall to our office. At this time, we were in Snell, so I was killing an average of about three cockroaches a week in that building. But he walked down the hall and knocked on my door and said, "hey, there is this seat that's going to be open," and I followed the legislative side of it on the passing of institutional boards, and basically the conversation being had about, should there be student? Should they be voting? And I didn't really think too intently about, like, that was something that I wanted to do, because in my head, I had already decided – I had decided freshman year that I wanted to run to be student body president. And so I was kind of that trajectory and the student trustee seat was kind of in the peripheral for me.

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But Brett, who was the student body president at the time, walked down the hall, knocked on my door, and said, "hey, basically I need somebody to do this and I think you would be the best person that we have, will you apply?" And I said, "well, what do I have to do to apply?" And he said, "well, you basically just have to send your resume to the governor's office," and I said, "oh, well I should probably update my resume then." But I said, "yeah, absolutely, I would love to do that," and applied, which is another cool experience for me. Even at this point in my undergraduate career, I never thought that a small town kid from rural eastern Oregon would be sending his resume to the governor of Oregon, who was Kitzhaber at the time. And I ended up getting the nomination and going through the Senate confirmation hearing, which was another really cool experience. And being able to see your name being voted on, on the Senate floor of the state legislature, was just a really cool experience for me. Especially being one of the first people in my family to go to college, being one of the only ones I know interested in government and politics, for me that was a huge thing that I reflect back on; just like a moment of awe for me that that was actually happening.

And then obviously there was the delay of when the board actually got started, because of the delay in the confirmation hearing. Which, again, I had done a lot of work around the Senate bill 270 and institutional governance, as the Executive Director of Governmental Relations, so for me that was a good background to have on this conversation about should we have – there were some people, ironically at the time, who thought there's no way that the student body president should be allowed to sit on the Board of Trustees. And I didn't think too much about it at that time. And then ironically, a year later, that's exactly what I would be doing.

But I definitely had come into the role with, at this point, I had already worked closely with so many administrators and had a vast amount of knowledge, comparatively, to the conversation that was being had about why institutional boards were needed. The Oregon Student Association originally was not in favor of institutional boards, very much opposed to them. And Brett and I – the student body president at the time – had both been on the Board of Directors for the Oregon Student Association and been involved in those conversations. And we definitely helped shepherd it closer, I think, once we realized that they were inevitable, we weren't stopping them, about how could we be a part of that system and make sure that students were represented. So that was the background that I was glad that I had when I applied, and I think I mentioned that in the letter to Governor Kitzhaber as well.

CP: Well the board eventually got going and up and running and met periodically. This is a room full of very powerful people, it seems like an intimidating place to be from my perspective. What was it like for you to be a member of the board?

TS: Yeah, so obviously, like you said, so many folks with really really impressive backgrounds. Pat Reser is the chair of our board. The closest thing to Reser that I had ever got prior to meeting Pat was Reser Stadium, and so being now in a room and participating in conversations with Pat, for me it was an adjustment because it was something that I wasn't exactly 100% used to. I had served on the Board of Directors for FBLA in high school and had obviously done the advocacy work, but the folks who around the table for OSU's Board of Trustees are just remarkable, intelligent folks with just impeccable resumes. So the first couple meetings, I was hesitant to speak up. I remember though, in one conversation we were having, Patty Bedient said, "I'd really be interested to hear what you say, Taylor, about how does this impact students?" So I got very good at answering the proverbial question of, "Taylor, what do all 26,000 Oregon State students think about this issue and how will it impact them?"

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But what's so interesting to me is that, after those first couple of meetings, I've grown really close with many of the folks that are on the board, and definitely view many of them as folks that I have similar career interests and I've networked with them on that level. But many of them too, I would consider good friends who I've asked for advice on a variety of things. I think it comes back to this idea that OSU is, we're a different place. We are very special. And I think it stems from our responsibilities as a Land Grant institution. But regardless of whether it's Pat Reser or Mike Thorne or Patty Bedient, whatever career you come into, when you're in the room talking about OSU, it's almost as if everybody's on this equal playing field and we're all trying to move the ball down the field to get OSU our next touchdown and our next victory.

And for me, that was a really – it's a humanizing experience too, right? When you meet so many successful and impressive people and realize that they're humans just like you and like to travel and do other things just like you. So that was a cool experience and I think – and I've shared this with so many of the trustees during my time – PSU and U of O, over the course of their founding years as an institutional board, they've had challenges with students that disagreed with the way that they would handle policies. U of O's second student trustee, her resignation becomes effective in two days, because she didn't feel like she was valued on the board. And for me, I never felt that in the two years of service to the board and to OSU, I never felt like my voice carried any less weight than anybody else that was around that room.

And so I think it was intimidating at first, but once you really get into your element and understand that everybody is just as passionate about OSU and everybody is bringing different experiences into the conversation, that's why the board has been so successful. Just because everybody is on equals when you're there. Even, you know, Ed Ray; everybody is just on an equal playing field when we're having conversations about the university.

CP: Tell me about working with Ed Ray.

TS: President Ray has become one of my role models, I would say, and I've grown very close with him over the course of my time on campus. I've been very lucky, I think, to be able to work with Ed on a variety of different campus issues. I think one of the reasons that OSU is the place that it is, that it is so different, is because of his leadership, and I've always had a great amount of admiration for the way that he leads. Right now we're at this point in conversations on university campuses about race relations and how universities handle those, and it never ceases to amaze me how amazing a leader we have in President Ray.

He just sent out that email about how OSU is going to address it by having a community dialogue. And for me, as soon as I got that email, it just resonated with me. I said, "yeah, that's exactly the type of president that I've worked with for the past two years: 'how are we going to get everybody around the table and talk about the issues that we have?'" And so working with him, in the same way that I never felt like what I'd said to board members in Board of Trustees meetings carried any less weight than anyone else around the table, I always viewed my relationship with President Ray as, he was always genuinely interested in seeing what my opinion was or my thoughts were.

I think one of the defining moments that I can think back is when we had the conversation about tuition setting for Oregon State. Oregon has a very interesting way that we choose not to necessarily invest as much in higher education as other states, and so when I would talk to Ed about, "this is really a legislative problem as well, right? We're not getting the funding and I'm going to do my best to talk to students about that's where we have the conversation." And I really leaned on him for guidance and support in that as well. When I inevitably end up voting to approve the budget that the Board of Trustees move forward to the HEG [?], which included a tuition increase for most students down the pipeline, I really remember having a conversation with President Ray about integrity and his appreciation for what I did was not, in his words, "an easy decision," and might very well have repercussions when I go back to my office as student body president. And it did; I certainly had conversations with folks about that vote.

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But working with President Ray, it's one of the highlights of my experience as student body president; definitely something that I will always look back on in my years at OSU. He wrote my letter of recommendation for the White House internship that I applied for, and I haven't gotten to read the letter, because he submitted it directly to the White House. But I found out two weeks ago that I was accepted to intern at the White House in January through April, and I really believe it's in large part because of Ed's letter to the White House.

CP: Congratulations.

TS: Thank you, I'm pretty stoked. It's another one of those moments where it's like, ok, the small town kid from eastern Oregon is now going to be in D.C., working with the White House.

CP: Do you have any specific idea of what you'll be doing?

TS: The department that I'm interning with is the President's Commission on Fellowship, so the President appoints a variety of different fellows who are year-long appointments that are paid to work in different departments in the federal government; the executive branch. And so we help with, basically, the running of that program, helping staff support the professionals that run the program and then also, as well, with the fellows. And we'll also be helping to staff all of the selection process for those fellows, and these are some remarkable individuals, you know, Ph.D/MD folks that are on the cusp of cancer-breaking research. So I'm really excited for that opportunity to be in D.C. and to be able to basically serve my country in that capacity and, in some distant way, indirectly serve the President himself.

CP: Well back to ASOSU, it sounds like you had this notion of running for president from pretty early on, once you got to OSU. I'm interested in what it was like to put together a campaign when you were running for the office.

TS: We have a spending limit on campus as well, so I spent a lot of time fundraising and saving money to be able to afford the campaign. And then, actually being out and talking with students was what I loved the most about the campaign. So obviously, we spent – my vice president and I, Brian – had spent weeks and weeks and weeks prior to actually starting our campaign, planning out what it was that our platform was going to be. I think I hold the record for the longest written platform of any candidate that's ever run for ASOSU; we had a twenty-three page platform that walked

through five different focus areas that we wanted to focus on as an administration. And I think that really spoke to our passion that we really had, and it was a great resource for when we talked with folks about why it was that we wanted to be president and vice president of the student body.

There were weeks and weeks and weeks over that break as well that happens right before the campaign for Spring term – late nights, planning, scheduling meetings, and sending out emails to anybody that we could get their email, we wanted to talk to them about our campaign. So being a Political Science student now who is involved in politics, I don't mind getting all the emails from Hillary Clinton or Bernie Sanders or whoever, that come several times a day, because I was that person on the other end when I ran for student body president with Brian. We wanted to talk to as many people as we could, and sometimes we wouldn't take no as the first answer on the first go-around. And that got us into a lot of places, I think.

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One of the things that I think – the best part of running – is that, you know, we had a twenty-three page platform, but sometimes you hear issues from students that you would not ever have thought about, that just didn't make it in to the twenty-three pages of your platform. And for me that was something that was a really rewarding experience, because it reminded me that you need to be humble and that sometimes you have to tell people, "I can't necessarily speak for all 26,000 students on this campus, but here's what I'm hearing from students and here's what we think would be a solution or here's what we're working on at the table." And I think I really learned that lesson when we were running because, like I said, we had a twenty-three page platform and we missed a whole ton of things.

And that was something that carried over into serving as student body president – I looked for a lot of counsel on a lot of things that I didn't necessarily have the answers right off the top of my head. And so I had grown a really big network on campus with other students who were involved in other areas and would very frequently call on folks and say, "this is where we're at, I need your insight or what you think about this issue." And I think, bringing it all back to where I grew up in rural northeastern Oregon, this idea of community and talking to each other about issues, that ended up being a theme of my administration: How can we all talk about this and figure out the way that it's going to serve the most people in our community, and really have a dialogue?

And so leading up to the actual campaign, it was a very, very intense campaign, because I was running against a fraternity brother. He had served as IFC president and my background was in ASOSU, and I'd gotten a lot of pressure from folks early on about whether or not I should run, because I was going to be a junior as student body president. And some folks had suggested that it might be wise for me to play the background for a year; that in some way, being older or having been on campus longer made you the inevitable heir to the ASOSU presidency. I didn't agree with that and inevitably ended up running. And there was definitely a lense of that in the campaign as well, having to navigate somebody that is your fraternity brother – who was my grand-big in the fraternity – and navigating how do you make the campaign about the issues and the people you want to serve? And definitely that was our focus in the campaign and that was something that Brian and I and everybody else who was working in our campaign, I always told them that it could be really easy to get down in the mud on this campaign.

But for me, what was most important to me was that ASOSU had – ASOSU had had a couple of bad years. Not immediately, the two presidents that had preceded me had been great leaders on our campus and, as well, was Tonga, who was the president three years before me...four years maybe. She came before me and had been impeached by Congress. And I have this theory that when student government president is impeached, sometimes it gives you a really bad taste in your mouth for student government on your campus and your belief in their ability to actually achieve results. By the time I was running, we were just getting in a place where, just by the nature of being on a university, where folks leave every four to five – sometimes six – years, we had an opportunity to talk to a fresh new population about student government on our campus and why student government is effective and why it best serves students, and really give people some faith in our ability to achieve things.

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And so during the campaign, like I said, it would have been really easy for it to have been a match-up of brother against brother, which the *Barometer* covered it that way, "there's an article." But I knew that students needed this fresh idea about student government. They needed something that wasn't partisan and wasn't just really horrible, and so that was

something that was one of the most important things for me in our campaign, was that we're not going to go down that road, we're going to be different and we're going to talk about issues and we're going to talk to students. And I think that obviously made a big impact, it helped us to be elected, but there were definitely bruises that came with the election.

CP: What are some of the standout memories of your year as president? Some successes or disappointments, or maybe points of controversy that arose over that year?

TS: For me, when I came in to the role, again, we really needed a fresh face and some fresh ideas. And so I had spent a lot of time working with our team to figure out how we achieve that, and so we rebranded the organization. That's a very face-level, surface-level way of doing it, but I think that, for us, it was so important that students had this new idea about student government, and we spent the first couple months of our term really focusing on how do we change the external of how we appear? But also, how do we talk about what has always existed in our 113 years – and it's been the core focus of student government – and that's this idea of, we serve as a protector of students.

And so we had gone through renditions and renditions, and through logos, we had gone through vision statements with our staff, and ended up coming up with this idea of, we're still going to have our mission of ASOSU but what's our vision? We created a vision for ASOSU that's still being used – I hope it's still used – and it's really centered on this idea that you're a student, you have a voice, and you need to make it known on this campus. And the way that you do that is through your student government, through ASOSU. And so, besides getting a new logo and getting a vision statement – these aren't necessarily big things, but what we did with them is we used them to dialogue for our conversation when we talked to people and went out to meetings. And we really took it out to students as well. We said, "we want to do a reintroduction and talk about how this year is going to be different."

And so, being able to achieve that to start the year off, to spend those first couple months doing that, is something that I've reflected back on. I'm so glad that we did that because I think it helped lead to some of our other victories throughout the rest of the year.

Thinking about tangible kinds of victories that we achieved, or highlights, towards the end of my term – so, what's interesting about being student body president, is that you don't necessarily get a lot of people that, or at least this was my experience, that are knocking down your door. You know, students that were not involved with ASOSU or may not be involved with student organizations on campus, you may not get a lot of folks sending you emails or coming to your office. Towards the end of my term, that had really been the theme; I didn't hear a lot from other folks, students on our campus, necessarily.

But a controversial bill had come into our legislative branch about ASOSU's representation. And ASOSU has always struggled, at least in recent history, with this idea of how do we really represent every student on campus, or all the student populations, when our elected officials are very homogenous? And so there had been an amendment passed in the previous year, when we were running, in that same election, to basically allow for the changing of seats and making them either population-based or organizational-based. So that was something that the responsibility was directed to the legislative branch to figure out, and I had pushback to that and said, "I want this to be an initiative that you all bring to the students."

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So a lot of time had passed before that conversation had actually started, and we were running up onto the statutory deadline that the amendment had created. And so essentially what we ended up with was a piece of legislation that created seats specifically for identity-based populations. So the bill that they had introduced and worked through the legislative chambers created a Pride Center seat and Black Cultural Center seat and 4C's seat, and I thought that that was exactly what we needed to do and I thought that was a great piece of addition to our legislative branch.

There was also an amendment in the legislation that required that students who serve in those seats to basically provide proof of their affinity or membership to the community. And so what was challenging for me was that a piece of legislation that's intent was to make our body more representative and make it more open to people and students on campus, in my opinion was going to do the opposite or at least deter those results. And so I had conversations with the vice president, who had authored the legislation – so add that intricate level of the relationship into what would later come

– and the speaker of the house of the time, and really had those conversations because legislation wasn't making it to the executive branch. It was being passed in Congress. And so I raised all of these issues – "I'm not getting your bills and I can't sign them, and until the president receives them, they can't be enforced."

And it really came to a head with this piece of legislation because, in the waning weeks of that term, when we were for all intents and purposes out of time to change anything – and there were some people in Congress that believed very passionately that you needed to prove you were a queer student if you were going to represent the Pride Center or that there needed to be some sort of way to prove your identity as a student of color to serve in any of the other seats. And so I fundamentally disagreed with that. And I reflect back on this as one of the most stressful and one of the most really challenging decisions that I had to make as president. And we waited; it had been waited and waited and waited. And what eventually made it to my desk – I had already alluded to this idea with both of the authors that I wasn't going to sign it and that I was going to, for the first time in my term, issue a veto. And then that sent notice to them that that was what I was considering, unless they could amend it.

We communicated that on a Friday and then, over the weekend, inevitably, when they ended up voting to approve the legislation on that next Wednesday, not taking into any consideration my concerns about the amendment, so I vetoed the legislation. So the president has seven days upon receipt of the legislation to sign, veto or do neither, which is a "pocket sign" in our body. So they passed it on a Wednesday and I waited and waited and waited. Seven days later, on that next Wednesday, right on the cusp of the deadline, I believe I vetoed it at 11:55 on the day that we needed to, PM. I had issued a veto saying that this just didn't make sense for our body. And I had spent those whole seven days talking with as many folks in cultural centers, with folks on our staff who have identities that could be impacted or affected. And I also weighed with it personally, as a queer student on our campus. I really was challenged by this idea that I needed to provide a letter to somebody validating my identity. And then also looking at it through the lense of a student in that identity might not be willing to do that, who might have an affinity to sit on that seat.

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So I spent a lot of time thinking and there was some relationship damage that had been had, because the vice president authored, the speaker – who I had worked very closely with – had also authored it. And I think they felt very challenged by this idea that I was going to ruin, in their eyes, all this work that had been put into it. So for me, I reflect back on it as one of the most challenging decisions that I had to make, but it's also, I think, one of the best decisions I made as student body president, because of the impact that it would have had on a variety of community members on our campus.

And I alluded to this earlier, how the student body president doesn't get a lot of emails and doesn't get people walking into their office, typically. The day after the *Barometer* covered the veto, I got several emails from students saying, "thank you, we appreciate this, let's figure out another solution on how we can serve the goal but not do it in such a horrible way." And so this was when I started to get a lot of communication from students; had two or three folks walk into my office and say, "I just wanted to stop by and say thank you, because what you did, it took a lot of courage and folks were really appreciative of it." So I think back on that as really something that was a highlight of my term and I'm really glad I did it.

We also had some really conversations about the way we do student incidental fees on our campus. And I had been center to that controversy as well in the last year, because, ironically again, when we changed from the system to the institutional board and the university no longer operated under Oregon revised statutes and then started operating under Oregon State University policies, there were some things that were in statute at the state level that had really defined that the student government is the only body on campus that can set the student incidental fees that students pay. And then that policy had been carried over as well when we changed to the university policies as an institutional board.

So at this point, when the Board of Trustees and the student body president had been very interested in why ASOSU has a Student Incidental Fee Committee, which for all intents and purposes acts as the fee-setter. And so essentially, they mandate budget requirements to our units – Student Affairs units mostly or student fee-funded units – and we had a lot of conversations about why that process wasn't working and who actually had the authority to change it and make it better. And so, what's funny is that, initially, I didn't want to touch this issue with a ten-foot pole, because I knew how divisive it would be. And several months later, we were on a trip to Pullman, Washington for a student government conference, and Brian and I had been talking about it and I said, "yeah, it's really horrible, we need to find a way to fix it, but I don't know

if it's going to be this year." And he really pushed me in my thinking and I said, "well, I don't want to do it. It's going to be an opportunity to really have some angry conversation, I don't know if that's what we want to do."

Fast forward a couple months and that's essentially where we were at is having this conversation about not having a Student Incidental Fee Committee and really allowing ASOSU to really have the ownership in the fee-setting process for students and not just being a rubber stamp. Because that's essentially how it had been operating. And what ended up moving me into why we wanted to have the conversation was because we heard from units and we asked Student Affairs units that were serving students, that were student-fee funded, what their experience was. And so many of them would tell – so the student body president sits on the Student Incidental Fee Committee, so I had an interesting interest there – but they would say, "when we come before the Student Incidental Fee Committee, it's like we're begging for these funds that we've had for so many years."

And they would also say, "we're totally willing to come forward and validate that what we're doing is what we're saying, and so forth," but it was just such a divisive – we didn't set the student fee as a community, we set it authoritatively. And I just didn't like that, I wanted it to be more of a community conversation, because what we had was units competing for resources. So Recreational Sports might not tell Student Health Services what's in their budget ask, because they might change their budget ask, knowing now what they're asking for. And it became this divisive pool for limited resources, and the Student Incidental Fee Committee had gotten in this habit of – and this is my opinion, personally, as well – had gotten in this habit of picking and choosing what got funded for arbitrary reasons. And I had this belief that, whether or not you're hiring janitorial services at the Memorial Union, you need additional funds for that. Or you need additional funds to support the SafeRide program on our campus. They both have very integral roles and you can't apply an equal unilateral look at it. They have importance to each of the units and we need to fund them accordingly.

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And so we ended up issuing a task force that was comprised of all the stakeholders – units and elected officials in ASOSU – I said, "you all are experts in these areas, tell us what it is that you think our student fee process is like now, what we need to do to make it better, and what are other models that student governments are using." All the meanwhile, there were a lot of challenges with the Student Incidental Fee Committee leadership, who is an elected body, that's elected separately from the ASOSU. And there was some disagreement on who had the authority to issue the commission and who had the authority – so much to the point that we ended up having to sit down with general counsel on this campus and really define who had the authority in the statute. And meanwhile, this process has operated since the '80s, the way that it is now, and it was not a conversation that a lot of people were happy we were having from the Student Incidental Fee Committee standpoint. But from my take, when we talked to other people in the units, when we talked to other students, it totally made sense.

We ended up running out of time to actually institute a new process, but he had gotten a review report from the commission that outlined, "this is how we think we should move forward." We ran out of time, the session expired, we couldn't actually get legislation passed. We opted not to hold elections for the Student Incidental Fee Committee seats, the judicial council – because this was the question, was whether or not the ASOSU president had the authority to not hold the elections and have any say in what the Student Incidental Fee Committee did. So I have a passion for United States constitutional law, I soon would get a passion for ASOSU constitutional law, because we identified the Student Incidental Fee Committee, in our statutes of the constitution, as a committee; an independent committee. In our constitution and our statutes, they give the authority to basically manage, operate, appoint, do all of the administrative needs of committees, is delineated as a responsibility of the student body president.

And so there was this constitutional question that folks had about whether or not an independent committee was different from a committee, and which ways it was, and how the work relationship with an independent committee was affected by our three branches. Nobody could agree on whether or not the independent Student Incidental Fee Committee was a member of the legislative branch, because that's where they would take the budgets for approval, but then they would come to the president's office to sign, just like any other legislation. Then the president also sat on the Student Incidental Fee Committee as a voting member, and we at this point agreed they weren't under the judicial council branch of our government. So a lot of confusion and a lot of things that were simply impossible to figure out of the course of a year.

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All the meanwhile, what became an interesting dynamic to the conversation, is that we were asking for a huge increase – SafeRide, the campus safety program, is administered by the executive branch of ASOSU, and we wanted to bring on additional vans and additional support faculty, because the program had just exponentially grown, and we needed to meet the needs of students. What ended up happening is I got a lesson on politically charged environments, because the same body that I was having conversations with about how we were going to move forward, something different than what they currently were used to, we were still operating under that process because I had chosen that we were going to try to get through this process with the Student Incidental Fee Committee operating like they currently do and then any changes we'll make will happen the next year. Because there were some people that the student government could just unilaterally say, "thank you for your service Student Incidental Fee Committee, we're going to approve these budgets and handle them our own way."

I believe that to be the case, but I digress to say that we ended up going through – after having very difficult conversations with the Student Incidental Fee Committee, and had people that just, quite frankly, were not happy that we were actually thinking about removing the Student Incidental Fee Committee. Now all of the sudden, we were taking our budget to those folks and asking for them to do the pre-approving of that budget that would be sent to Congress later. It didn't go as well as we had anticipated, and I think there was a lot of politics that came to play when they initially slashed our funding, or chose not to approve two of our decision packages that would have expanded vans and hired an additional faculty member.

And so I was the center of some campus conversation when I sent out an email to our 6,500 users of SafeRide, really letting them know about this urgency that folks explain to the Student Incidental Fee Committee why it was that SafeRide was important to them or why it wasn't serving them to the best capacity. And a lot of folks were challenged by my email, because it did create a sense of urgency for folks to act, and I believe that not getting those decision packages would very radically change the way that we were operating our service. Because if the Student Incidental Fee Committee wasn't willing to give us that money, then we would find it internally or we would move things around – budget authorities have the ability to do that.

So the *Barometer* ran with some great articles about that email and the conversation about the Student Incidental Fee Committee. And all the meanwhile, I had been working very closely with the vice provost for student affairs to manage all of this and figure it out. What we wanted to achieve was a budget setting process that was had in community, and where we were at currently was this fight – like, throw-out, punching fight. So I have reflected a lot back on that experience as both a highlight of my term and also an area that I wish we would have been more successful, and I wish we would have had more time to achieve and get it done. And I think now, the current student government this year is trying to figure out how they do that as well. They just held an election for those committee members – a temporary special election for a year.

And the reason that I reflect on it as a highlight is because when I would meet with administrators and other student leaders, I always said and have always been kind of up front that we're probably not going to get this done in a year. This is a big institutional change and it's going to take at least two to three years to really usher in something that serves and achieves it. And that's exactly what's happening. We helped move the boulder initially and the boulder is picking up some steam, and I think eventually we're going to get to a place down in the valley that's green and great for everybody to participate in. But it's a process.

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So for me the lesson was that – a really big leadership lesson was that you might not get to reap the benefits of your work and your blood and your sweat and your tears, because there was a lot of those three things in these conversations leading up to change in the Student Incidental Fee Committee. But even if you might not get to see the benefit while you're on campus or while in your role, that's probably reason enough for you that you should be having that conversation anyways, because it's going to take so long to change. And I think that that's been a huge thing that I've thought about after I left as well was, you know, was it the right thing to do and are we going to get to where I hope we do. And I think that, yeah, it was totally the right thing to do. I'm glad we had that conversation, I learned and grew a lot, and I think, as we see it play out over the next couple of years, I think it's going to get to a place where people are talking about their budget and the student fee in this community sense, and it's not divisive. And we've seen units already starting to do that. So for me, it was all worth it in the end. I look forward to having back five years for Homecoming and there being a process that

people can really say, "yeah, we own this process as a community and it's a community responsibility to make sure that our units are funded." So all that wind to say that that was a – and I think it's important to spend that time, because it was a huge part of my term and a huge part of my development as a student leader.

CP: Something else I want to make sure I ask you about – your time here has straddled two different buildings. I want to know your perspective on the SEC, the Student Experience Center, and the impact that you think it has made and will continue to make on student groups.

TS: So it reminds me of that lesson again too, right? You might start and work for something that you might not ever get to experience and for so many student body presidents and student leaders before me, for *them*, it was the Student Experience Center. This had been a building that had ten years of student body presidents saying, "we need the space." Ten years ago, people were talking about getting out of Snell. So for me the biggest thing was I was so glad that I didn't have to be in Snell anymore, but also appreciative of just the way that student leadership happens on a campus. It's really that idea that you are leaving your campus better than you found it, and ten student body presidents, and other student leaders, and various other folks had made that commitment to open the Student Experience Center.

I talk a lot about community and I think that's what the Student Experience Center really embodies, is this idea that the Memorial Union Program Council was in the MU but ASOSU was in Snell Hall and SSI was clear over on Western. And students – we know, there's empirical studies that say that students learn better when they learn and work together, and people also achieve more, typically, when they come together in a community and can collaborate. And the Student Experience Center allows that because most of the student organizations are all in the same space, and that's the ethos of the building – the building is supposed to be communal. And for me, being able to experience that after being in Snell Hall, I was the really lucky president in that I got to see what being student body president was like when you're in Snell Hall and then also when you're in the Student Experience Center. And I so much appreciated being in the Student Experience Center because there was just this sense of collaboration.

Before, it was really easy when we were in Snell to just be there. There's not a lot of foot traffic in the building, not a lot of people knew about where their student government was housed, and then those that did know didn't want to spend a lot of time in the space, because there were cockroaches. I think that the Student Experience Center is really going to be a huge transformation on student life here at Oregon State, and we've already seen that. The amount of collaboration that's happening now between – just in my experience of student government – we have so much more collaboration once we've been in the Student Experience Center, and now, currently, with all of the other student organizations, than we ever did when we were in Snell, because we see these folks every day. We share coffee and hang out with them now, and we see each other when we're walking around in our work, and we didn't have that before.

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So I think that was a huge victory for students as well. The reason that building exists is because students paid for it; students put up the additional bond money to get the state to approve it. And the biggest thing that I can reflect on – there's this story that Tonga, who was the student body president when they got the bond approval, some legislator in one of the committee meetings said, "why do you even care about this building? You're going to graduate this year, it's going to be another four or five years before the building is actually built, you're asking students who will never ever get to experience that building to start paying for it." And her answer, very short, was "that's the point. This is students investing in future students' experience." And I think that's the whole point of student government on campus but also the other student organizations – how do we make the experience better for all the people that are going to come after us? And I'm so appreciative that ten student body presidents before had helped to lead that conversation.

And the office is some pretty sweet digs too, because it's a corner office on the second floor, so you can literally see under the plaza, you can see students walking by. It's much better than in Snell, because you had a glass wall in the president's office, but during the summer your office would get up to ninety-five degrees. So I didn't work a lot at that office during the summer.

CP: Well, I have a few more questions for you. I want to make sure I'm not stepping on your toes as far your schedule.

TS: Oh no, you're good.

CP: OK, because we're at ninety minutes right now.

Tell me a bit about school, the classwork that you've done here, and maybe some teachers and classes that have been influential, and as a Political Science major, your ability to sort of apply what you're learning to a real world situation.

TS: My coursework here at Oregon State has been something that I've been really passionate about, and I've had a lot of really great professors. And I think that's one of the reasons why I'm glad that I came to Oregon State, because our professors, they focus a lot on research, but specifically in the Political Science department, they care a lot about their students. When you're a political scientist, what tends to happen is you become this generalist on all things politics; you take a constitutional law class or you take an international relations class, you get a little bit of everything. So I've really appreciated that learning, because I've gotten to experience so many different things.

I've definitely had instructors that have made huge impacts on my own learning. Dr. Solberg – she's the infamous constitutional law professor on our campus – when I first enrolled in her class, everybody told me that I should be afraid for my life, because she cold calls. By this point, I had been used to this mentality of, "ok, I'll just go to class, I'll do the reading later." That doesn't fly in Solberg's class; she will cold call on you. So there's three series in the constitutional law – not very many people take all three of them, because most of them get scared and don't come back the second year or the third year – and I remember the first couple weeks of constitutional law, my strategy was, "don't draw attention to yourself and don't let her learn your name. Because if she doesn't learn your name, she can't call on you in class." Until the day that she called on the kid with the green sweater in the front row, which was me, and she said, "you in the green sweater, tell me about this case." And I was like, "oh, my whole strategy is out the window now." Thankfully I did the reading that day.

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But the way that she set up that class – I never thought that I would be passionate about constitutional law, because my interest in political science is the more political side of things – but she has kind of really opened up how I understand and how I perceive the Supreme Court as a very political being and institution. I'm frequently going into her office or shooting her an email about things that I have just random questions about the Constitution. So she's been a huge influence on my own academic career, and she's really given me this passion for the Constitution and how it impacts our politics, specifically with the Supreme Court. Everybody gets a professor that, it doesn't matter what they're teaching – they could be teaching underwater basket weaving – you're going to take their class with them because it's a great experience. And for me, that's Dr. Solberg. It wouldn't matter what class, if I had the time in my schedule, I'd enroll.

CP: Well, I've interviewed a handful of current students for this project, and one question I've asked all of them, and I'm particularly interested to ask you, is the idea of institutional self-esteem for students these days. Speaking for the 30,000 OSU students now, what do you think students these days think about OSU and their experience here?

TS: That's a very interesting question, and from my lense, I've had such an amazing opportunity to be student body president, to serve on the trustees, and a variety of other different roles. And so I have this strong affinity towards Oregon State. All my career aspirations and everything I want to do in my life is rooted in this idea that I might one day be better able to serve Oregon State as well or contribute in some way to help other people here. And maybe I'm wearing rose-colored lenses on Oregon State, but for me, that's been my own experience. I love this place. I think that for a small-town kid in northeastern Oregon, OSU really made me – it made higher education more accessible when I came to Oregon State, because I felt that there were less barriers here for me as a small-town rural kid.

Now granted, there's still barriers that other students face on this campus. And when you talk to other students as well, you get a mixed bag. You get a lot of nerdy folks like me that just love orange and black and are die-hard Beavers. But the one thing that I would reflect on is that, as higher education gets more and more expensive, I think what we are seeing is students – people like to throw around the word "apathetic" in student government, students just don't care. And I've never bought that theory, I don't believe that. Students today have so much more that they're concerned with and have to take care of, whether it be paying for college, paying for childcare so that they can attend college. At the end of the day, sometimes there's just not a lot of energy left to be energetic about the place that you're getting your degree from.

So my reflection is that I've been extremely privileged to experience the university in the way that I have. I wish we could extend that, expand that, to all the other 30,000 students that we have who are part of the OSU community, because I don't think that everybody gets to take advantage of it. Which is sad, because when you do really get to buy in to this community and be a part of the conversation, that's when you feel like your voice matters and that's when you realize that, even on a campus with 24,000 people, you can make a big difference and you can matter just as much as everybody else. So that would be my take on my own experience and how I think other students also view it as well.

CP: Are you graduating this year?

TS: Knock on wood, that's the plan. So, like I mentioned earlier, the White House internship might actually complicate my ascent to degree completion because it's a semester program and, bless our hearts, here at OSU we're very sold on the quarter system. It might complicate the way that I'm able to come back in spring term, but it sounds like I might be doing a term in fall to help get everything back and centered. But I don't want to leave this place too. That's the other thing that I joke about; I've had such an interesting experience, because I served as student body president my junior year and in a very real way I peaked too early, because once you stop being student body president and go back to just walking around campus, you get a lot of awkward questions from folks. Like, "oh, I thought you graduated," because I spoke at commencement, right? So people just assumed that I was also one of the people getting a degree that day. But no, I was a junior and this is my senior year.

There's something great about OSU and I'm in no hurry to leave, but at some point I would like to start making some money and be in the work force.

CP: What is the vision for the future for you?

TS: That's a great question. I've always had an affinity to our state and, for me, I want to make sure that whatever career path I go into, whatever position I find myself in, I'm able to contribute to the people of Oregon. So for me, a career in politics is something that I'm very interested in pursuing, because I think that my experience as a rural Oregonian, I say living in a bigger city – Corvallis isn't actually that urban – but I want a public service career that allows me to serve Oregon. And I'm flexible because that's the goal, is being able to do that. It's very broad; I'm leaving it open for any possibility that might come out of it.

CP: You've got some time to figure it out.

TS: Yeah.

CP: Well this has been great, Taylor. Thank you very much. This is a very valuable contribution to our project and I appreciate you spending your time with us.

TS: Yeah, absolutely.

CP: Thanks.

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