**You Might Be Right – What Do Univerisites Owe Society? With Ron Daniels- Transcript**
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**Marianne Wanamaker:** Welcome to "You Might Be Right," a place for civil conversations about tough topics. Brought to you by the Baker School of Public Policy and Public Affairs at the University of Tennessee, with funding support for members of our Producers Circle. To learn more about how you can support our work, visit youmightberight.org.

The social contract between the American higher education system and the American public is strained and calls for reform are coming from all parts of the political spectrum. In exchange for significant public funding, what are higher education institutions to provide? How well have they lived up to the public's expectations and what needs to happen next for higher ed to fulfill its contract?

In this episode, our hosts, former Tennessee Governors Phil Bredesen and Bill Haslam, speak with Johns Hopkins University President Ron Daniels about these topics and more. This episode was recorded live at a convening of the Tennessee Higher Education Commission in October 2025.

**Emily Reynolds:** We are also all about encouraging life-long learning, active and engaged citizens, which brings us to the special treat we have in store, two remarkable governors, two statesmen who have obviously not only made their mark in higher education for us, but who also know how to get things done. If you don't mind a personal reference, this is very personal to me, as I had the honor of working for Senator Howard Baker, whose 100th birthday anniversary we will celebrate next month, and he encouraged all of his young staffers to be active listeners. In conjunction with the Howard Baker School of Public Policy and Public Affairs at UT, Governor Bredesen and Governor Haslam have picked up another piece of sage advice that Senator Baker was fond of using. Remember, the other person just might be right. So with that in the hope that everyone's ready to go, let's be active listeners and please join me to welcome with this treat, their popular podcast, You Might Be Right, Governor Phil Bredesen and Governor Bill Haslam.

**Bill Haslam:** Thanks. People don't normally stand up when we walk in rooms anywhere, it must be Ron. Hey, welcome. Emily, thank you for the wonderful introduction and it's so great to see so many folks here today. We have a great discussion ahead, I hope, and we have a wonderful guest and he had some travel issues, but we're here now and ready to roll.

**Phil Bredesen:** I'm looking forward to it and it's great to be back here with you all. I already see a lot of friends here.

**Bill Haslam:** Ron Daniels has served as the 14th president of Johns Hopkins University since 2009, so you've outlived the average tenure here by about two and a half times. So well done. He's championed need blind, no loan undergraduate admissions, helped out by a $1.8 billion

gift from Michael Bloomberg, so you might let us know how we can get those. But before joining Johns Hopkins, he was provost and professor of law at the University of Pennsylvania and dean of the law school at the University of Toronto.

By the way, happy Thanksgiving Day. How many of you all knew it was Thanksgiving in Canada? Raise your hand. All right, a few. All right, not bad. Okay.
He's the author of, What Universities Owe Democracy, arguing for the indispensable role that universities play in sustaining democratic societies at a critical moment in history. A native of Toronto, he has a B.A. in J.D. from the University of Toronto and an L.L.M. from Yale.

Ron, thank you very much and welcome. We're really thrilled to have you here.

**Ron Daniels:** Just delighted to be here. Thank you. Thanks for the invitation.

**Phil Bredesen:** Ron, I'd like to start out. You've become a national spokesperson really for the subject of what universities owe to the public, to the larger public. You've written a very influential book on that subject and described a framework to put some structure around it. Maybe for everyone's benefit, could we just start out by having you talk just a little bit about what that framework is and what you think universities do owe the larger public?

**Ron Daniels:** Sure. Thanks for the question. Again, thanks for the privilege of being here, particularly in a state that really has been at the forefront of taking investment in education and higher education seriously. It's real honor to be here.

So the book that I wrote with two co-authors five years ago, What Universities Owe Democracy, was motivated by a few different things. First and foremost, though regularly people within universities will say, "Universities are essential for democracy, we're it's lifeblood." And for a lot of people, when they think about the key institutions of democracy, they'll think about legislatures and courts and media, independent media and so forth, but universities don't jump to the top of the list. So despite the fact that we often invoke this idea that we're essential for democracy, we don't really argue through what that case is. And in particular, what we have not done well is to specify precisely the things that we do that are implicated in the democratic project.

So first and foremost, I thought it was just important to lay out the foundation for how we think about universities, what are the ways in which we contribute to democracy, and then importantly, to evaluate critically, courageously even at times, what is it that we are doing that perhaps, or not doing, that perhaps compromises our capacity to fully contribute to the democracy of which we're a part.

So just moving from that, let me go back and just say a few things about what I think at core, the case for universities and their connection to democracy is. First and foremost, when we do it well, and all of these things go to when we do it well, when we do it well, we are just such a powerful place for concretizing demonstrating the power of the American dream. That is the

idea and a Jeffersonian themes that we offer equal opportunity and take people across the spectrum – backgrounds, socioeconomic status and so forth – and give them the opportunity to become educated and of course to transcend their economic circumstances.

And again, one of the things that we know so well when we look at the college premium is the power of higher education in catapulting people out of lower socioeconomic circumstances to much higher ones. And we know that people who receive higher education are more likely to remain employed, they live longer, they have better health, they have more stable families, quite apart from the income benefit. So we know this is a privileged asset. How well do we do in actually ensuring that that promise of equal opportunity is achieved? So that's one piece of the story.

The other piece of the story that I think is important is that universities, I think, are implicated in the enterprise of ensuring that the students who graduate from our institutions are able to be responsible, effective, constructive, democratic citizens. And as we know, democracy and an ability to function effectively in democracy isn't inherited in the gene pool. You've got to educate for it. You've got to give students substantive knowledge, values, skills for them to be effective, democratic citizens. And so that's another key element that I think is important and implicates universities.

Thirdly, we're a place where we are committed to truth seeking, committed to the advancement of knowledge, committed to critically evaluating claims to truth by people within the academy and certainly people outside of the academy. And I think that too becomes an important site for what it is that democracy looks to us to do in the university, which is ultimately to mediate against competing claims to truth, to bring expertise, independence, critical analysis to ultimately to be able to decide who's getting us closer to the truth and who's steering us away.

And then the final way in which I think we're implicated in the democratic project is in respect of the incredible opportunity that we have to educate students in a very intense, particularly undergraduate, experience where you're drawing people from across the political spectrum, from across background, that we really become a microcosm of democratic life.

And to the extent that, particularly as we know this, the great sword in this country, and we know that particularly across the political spectrum, Republicans live and marry with Republicans and Dems do the same thing. We have an opportunity in universities to really be quite intentional about saying, "How can we do this better in this microcosm of American society?" And hopefully those are the habits and the experiences that students will take from the experience. So that's the framework. And then what I did was to go critically through each of those things and say, "Are we doing okay or have we fallen short?"

**Bill Haslam:** I love that idea. You write about there should be a social contract between higher ed and society. But if I'm one of the folks in this room leading a higher ed institution or I'm on the board, a fair question might be, "Who's on the other side of the contract?" Because it keeps changing. Three or four years ago, climate change was of major importance, now not so much.

Two or three years ago, DEI was very important and a good thing, now, not so much. If I'm in leadership, how do I know who's on the other side of the contract I'm supposed to be making with society?

**Ron Daniels:** Boy, it's a great question, particularly in this moment. It's not surprising that probably a lot of folks in this room have a sense of whiplash as we're moving from one extreme to the other and how we think about our mission. Let's start with, who's the social compact with? And I keep saying this to my colleagues, the social compact is with our fellow Americans. It's less with government. Of course, we have to comply with government regulation. But I like to think of the compact in a metaphorical sense as fundamentally being with the American people and looking to them for the sense that first and foremost they see us as institutions that advance Americans of the national interest in a number of different dimensions.

And so I think that's helpful, particularly as we see the political gyrations and particularly acute in a time of polarization, is trying to keep your eye on where do we think the consensus lies in America. Now I know that's become harder and harder. We're all aware of that. But nevertheless, I think if one looks to sort of fundamental values that we subscribe to, and I think our republic subscribes to, and this really goes to my point about the lack of civics education, that I think we can find ways to understand where the heart of America lies, what are the core values, and then I think it allows us to understand how we properly earn and re-earn the public's trust.

**Phil Bredesen:** When I read your book and took notes about your framework, which you've described very nicely here, one of the things that seemed to be missing to me was your obligation to the process of governance and the operations in the public square. When I was governor, I had, as Bill did, a lot of interaction with higher education, but never was particularly successful in being able to tap into that expertise in a way that was useful for decision-making in the public sector. And that seems very different from at the time of founding of our country, that expertise, that intellectual expertise and the process of governance were tightly tied together. I mean, think Thomas Jefferson and John Adams and Benjamin Franklin and people like that, whereas today it seems to have bifurcated somewhat. There's the academy over here and there's all elected officials and appointees over here. Do you see that? I mean, do you think that higher education has that obligation still and how might that be resurrected?

**Ron Daniels:** Look, I think it's absolutely essential that, to the extent that we have expertise, we have data, we have capabilities. I think first and foremost in terms of the research that our faculty conduct, I think it's important that that be shared with public decision-makers. That's our obligation to pursue things that are of relevance to key decision-makers and then to offer the best advice and counsel we can.

At another level, I think it's reflected in the seriousness of intent around the education of students who ultimately can go off to careers in public service or in NGOs where they can advance the public wheel. So I think that's a really noble and important part of our tradition and established, as you say, it's gone back for centuries. And we see it in things like the Wisconsin

model, a university that really should be a laboratory for ideas for advancements in the public sector and on the part of public decision-makers.

For me, this is one of the reasons why we recently decided to start a new school of government and policy at Johns Hopkins, very much because I had the sense that, although we had expertise in a number of different substantive areas, and despite our proximity to Washington – Baltimore's 45 minutes from Washington – we weren't making that accessible to public decision-makers. And I think that's really an important part of what we do. And it's actually, for me, I always found as my background in law and policy, it was always among the most exciting opportunities that I had where I could take expertise that I developed in a particular regulatory area and share that with government and help inform better outcomes in the public sector. So I don't think that's an option. I think that's essential to our work.

**Phil Bredesen:** What do you think that a university group like people in this room ought to do to advance that agenda?

**Ron Daniels:** So I mean, I'm looking at two governors who at least my experience has been very much seeking to knock on the doors of our elected representatives and saying, "Ask us. We'll convene. We'll draw expertise together." Even being able to set up certain ad hoc groups that in this or that policy area, seek to harness expertise and get faculty and students working for the public interest. I think those are really exciting opportunities. And so my experience has always been it's a failure to properly convene, structure the conversation, but I actually think there's tremendous willingness and interest on the part of colleagues, and again, I say this across the higher education sector, to be part of the conversation. I mean, I think there's no greater flattery that you get when a public leader phones you and says, "I really want to tap your expertise on this or that issue." I've never known any faculty member to hang up the phone and say, "Not interested in that one."

**Bill Haslam:** Let me ask you a practical question again along those lines. I always said it's a long, long way from the legislative plaza to the faculty senate, politically, typically, in most places, okay, definitely in Tennessee, but in most places it's a long way. How do you shrink the trust gap along the political spectrum to make it to where folks go, "I care and value about what higher ed can add to our city, our state, our country"?

**Ron Daniels:** So I think it starts, and you've alluded to it, and on a what I feel is a really important issue around, we're now calling it viewpoint diversity and thinking seriously about whether we in higher education, and I start with my own institution, have been properly attentive to the need to have people on our faculties who have standing, who are embedded in departments, and particularly in a place like a school of public policy, who tap into the great conservative tradition that lives in this country and have scholars. And I'm not interested how they vote. I'm interested in whether they're taking conservative ideas seriously, tapping into the wellspring of tradition we have in this country in that domain, and seeking to bring that perspective to a number of different contemporary problems. And I think here that data are pretty robust that we have not done what we need to do in terms of ensuring an openness to

conservative perspectives on our faculties and on our campuses more generally.

So I think it starts first and foremost with ensuring that people see that the university is struggling to really span the different divides in American society and give the best arguments one can to each of those perspectives. And then I think from there, once you've got faculties where at least you can see that there are representatives of different viewpoints, I think our credibility in going to government saying, "You're going to get a fair hearing here because we've started first and foremost in our own institutions and we're modeling the behavior that we can't just be institutions in the case of policy that are relevant for democratic administrations." We've got to be there for both the democratic and republican–

**Bill Haslam:** But wrapped up in there are real practical issues around tenure, around free expression, around students' right to protest, but wanting to make certain that all those voices are heard. So as a leader who has to actually deal with all that, give us some practical ways you've tried to make certain that there truly is viewpoint diversity on campus and different thoughts and perspectives are welcome, recognizing free speech rights, but also protecting the university.

**Ron Daniels:** Right. So it's a huge question you've asked there that we could spend hours talking about, but let me just jump on a few themes. I think one, what we've really sought to do, first and foremost, and it's not Hopkins alone, I see this across our institutions in higher education America. I think we've really learned over the last several years, particularly as we see the level of polarization increasing, that we really want to be a bulwark against that. And that starts literally from the first moments that the students come on a campus with basically educating them, training them, modeling for them, this idea that difficult, contentious discussions, disagreements are part and parcel of what it means to be at a university. And we shouldn't regard that as pathological, but rather as that's normal. And what we want to figure out is, and give you the skills to do, is how do you actually see the best in your opponent's position and respond to that, clarify your own thinking, but basically to have that sense of engagement that we see as constructive.

So I think that's a really important part of the equation. And again, so many different institutions are taking a different approach to that, but I think there's really been a sea change with the collectivity of institutions recognizing, excuse me, that this is an obligation in this period of time. I think going beyond that, the whole issue of how we understand academic freedom, institutional autonomy is a subject that's been debated for generations. At least for me, the way I see this is you have to ask the question – it goes back to what I talked about a few moments ago – "What is the university's role in contributing to knowledge and to the advancement of truth?" And it seems to me here that what is really essential is that you create the broadest possible space for debate and for the possibility that people are going to say really provocative, contrarian things that people will get angry about, but over time we'll realize they were right.

And that's, I think, the role of the university. So for me, the magic of the university is that our accountability to the public emanates from our capacity to really be intentional about creating

that space for vigorous debate where people can say things and know that their job, their standing in the institution is not put on jeopardy by virtue of their claims to truth. So I think that's a story that I believe is not just rhetorical or self-indulgent, but I think it's really an important part of how we discharge our role to America as being that site for hard conversations that meet skepticism that sometimes provoke anger and dissent and understanding that's not pathological.

**Phil Bredesen:** Let me change to a different path, but I think deeply related topics to what we've been talking about and that is that the idea that America is a place of social mobility is deeply embedded in our DNA and in the founders', I think, dream for the country, yet by a lot of measures, social mobility in this country today is not what it needs to be. I think a lot of people look to higher education as one of the vehicles to permit that. It certainly was for me personally. What can the higher education community universities across the limits of it, what can it do to do a better job of enabling social mobility for young people in this country?

**Ron Daniels:** I totally concur with you in terms of how fundamental this is for our standing in the country. And I think, again, to the extent that we see a significant decline in the level of trust and confidence in higher education both on the part of Republicans and Democrats. I think it is this cost and access issue that is really central to the story in the sense that we say we're about equal opportunity, we say we're about social mobility, but it looks like it's really, the whole thing is hardwired for a lot of privilege, particularly among the Ivy plus group of institutions in the country.
So a few things, what do you do? I feel very strongly about the following, and that is legacy admissions. The idea that at the time that a student applies to a university that they get a leg up in the admissions process because they're the son and daughter or grandson or granddaughter of an alum, I think is indefensible. I think it runs nakedly in the face of our commitment to equal opportunity and lacks any justification whatsoever. We ended it at Johns Hopkins. Still a number of universities in this country, it's dwindling, but still are hanging onto legacy admissions and I think that's something that really has run its course and is quite anachronistic.

Secondly, I think the effort to be very intentional about financial aid and access. And here again, I've been in the United States for 20 years as provost as mentioned before and as president, but just seeing just the shift in the effort that's been placed on recruiting students from across the socioeconomic spectrum into our institutions. And it started first and foremost over the last 10 years with a focus on so-called Pell-eligible students, students whose house, families, of course, earn about $60,000 or less, and then it's broadened from there.

But in the case of Pell, what's really striking – it's long been the case for a lot of the public institutions represented in this room, but it's not been the case for private institutions – that we've actually seen value in watching our Pell population and actively working to increase it. In the case of Hopkins, over the last 15 years, we've gone from about 10% Pell to about 23, 24% Pell, real intentionality, focused on financial aid and so forth to make that happen and seeing real bragging rights in calling out the percentage of students who are in your institutions who are the first generation their family to come to university. So that's part of the story.

I think the other thing is, and again for institutions like Hopkins, is recognizing that for all the money we put into financial aid, for all the marketing we do and reach out to students from across the socioeconomic spectrum, the story about our financial aid program is way too complicated and we keep hearing about this. Yeah, we got needs-blind financial aid, and yes, you could come tuition-free, but the students and their families just don't know really what they're going to be eligible for. And what's been really interesting, and we're about to announce this move at Hopkins in the next couple of weeks, but the number of privates that have actually moved to a really simple financial aid arrangement.

If you earn less than 150,000 or $200,000 of household income, you pay no tuition. If you earn less than whatever, $125,000, you come on a full-ride. Just simplicity. And I think that simplicity and the way in which we tell our story, and more institutions are moving there, should hopefully increase the rate of access. And this is just the last thing I'll say on this is that if you look at, for instance, households that earn less than $200,000 of income, you're talking about 84% of American households. So if we're at the place where we can say just very simply, it's not just the Pell-eligible population, but we're well into the middle class and upper middle class, you're coming tuition-free, that's a great simple story that I'm hoping again will restore the confidence that these places are available and within reach, even without the financial circumstances.

**Phil Bredesen:** You have focused on the financial side of that, which is important. And Bill here, of course, has made huge steps forward with accessibility with the free community college here in Tennessee, which I really, really admire, as are you at Johns Hopkins as well. My own experience was that when, for example, first generation college students go to school, their problems, they may have a financial component, but it's much broader than that. It's such a cultural shift for them. At a time in your life when you're probably as crazy as you will ever be into stress sometimes–

**Ron Daniels:** And we deal with that.

**Phil Bredesen:** Yeah. What else can higher education do to promote this besides simply making checks available?

**Ron Daniels:** So I think it's the outreach, of course, that makes sure that these students know there's a path and they apply to us and that we're able to see these students quite naturally end up in a class. But I think you're right that beyond that, you really got to think about what are the distinct barriers, some of the cultural shock that you face when you come to our institution. So I'll say, at Hopkins again, so as we have this much larger Pell population, larger population students of the first generation of their families, they're cheek by jowl with students who've come in with several APs. They've come from private schools in various parts of the country. They've just had a level of advantage that is really hard to get to a level playing field in one week or less.

And so I think here, in part, it's recognizing that the students whom we admit from these backgrounds or challenge backgrounds, it's going to take a minute to get them to the point

where they're really at a level playing field and thinking about the opportunities for supplementary tutoring, for other types of support that will ultimately, I hope, by the end of the second year that they're there, you have hit the level playing field, but you've understood the kind of educational disadvantages that they've suffered in comparison to these other students. And what you want to do is just quickly give them the opportunity to catch up.

The other thing I would say that's really neat in a place like Hopkins, and I've seen this at other of our peers, is the extent to which there's a real pride now on campus of being the first generation. When we called out years ago, the students were the first generation and how wonderful this was, I would do this at welcoming convocation when we welcome the students into the class, and you could see there was kind of a sort of shifting or uneasiness with being identified that way. Now on campus, we have these so-called FLI groups, first generation, low income. They wear shirts, they have events, they're proud and are able to advocate for the kinds of things that they need in order to be able to excel. So it's a really encouraging thing. And again, we're seeing this across higher education, just a sense of confidence and the sense that this is our place, too, and these are the things we need to really flourish.

**Bill Haslam:** I want to shift, I guess, back a little bit, but sort of a new topic. You talk a lot about the importance of intellectual diversity and civic discourse. And in your book, which is four years, five years old, so I can only assume you would agree that it's gotten maybe more so, you say this is a perilous moment for democracy. What did you mean by that?

**Ron Daniels:** Well, I think first and foremost, just seeing internationally, the trend away from democracy and towards autocracy. I've still very much remember the triumphalism after the Berlin Wall fell down which was just this sense, this is Fukuyama's famous The End of History. We thought it was all inevitable. It's all going to move in this direction. And turns out not so much. Internationally, seeing the decline of democracy and the shift to autocracy from fragile democracies and so forth. But just seeing even in our own country the extent to which the pathologies that we see internationally in terms of distrust of institutions, not just higher education, but all institutions, perhaps save for the military, seeing the polarization. I mean, one of the things – I imagine you folks have talked about this in the past – but one of the most startling statistics is just the shift in the percentage of Republican and Democratic families who don't want their kids to marry into a family of the opposite political party. I mean, how did we get to that in America?

So I think it's a sense that this is a moment with growing distrust, alienation, openness to autocratic leadership, just all these things seem to coalesce in a way to say, this issue of educating for democracy is something that we can't take lightly. And here again, one of the things I'm really struck by is when you look at the global statistics, it's something like only 25% of American students graduating from high school have taken proper grounding in civics. And the truth is, at a place like Hopkins, my institution, when we checked in with the students to see what they're coming with, what their backgrounds are and so forth, and how familiar they are in the core institutions of American government, what the underlying values and aspirations of the democratic project are, they are as unfamiliar with some of these concepts as would be

revealed in that 25% statistic. So we got remedial work to do at universities.

**Bill Haslam:** So specifically, what can higher ed do? And like I said, particularly on my side of the aisle, there's sort of a distrust that it's always going to be leaning left. What can higher ed do to restore that trust? And I don't mean just the left versus right, but in general.

**Ron Daniels:** I think it really starts with this sense that, first and foremost, we've got to acknowledge we have a key responsibility here, that we can't abide another generation leaving our institutions being indifferent to the democratic project, not knowing what's at stake, not understanding what our founders bequeathed to this country, how it connects to the broader enlightenment project, all these things, as well as giving them the skills to be able to do more than simply vote, but to be effective and articulate and persuasive democratic citizens. So I think if you take that ideal seriously, there's so much one can do in terms of how you program for that. We start off on our first week of orientation with a so-called Democracy Day, where all those aspirations get played out in a day where we're doing training for how you negotiate difficult conversations to understanding the role of the university in democracy and just even the nature of what the next four years will mean for them in terms of advancing that.

We're bringing it into the residence halls, where we're very intentionally creating conversations mediated by faculty across hard, contemporary issues – everything from affirmative action to reproductive rights to gun control, one can multiply, but these are all things that we should be talking about and the students get that opportunity. And then the last thing is, we've actually created a democracy requirement that every student graduates from Hopkins with an undergraduate degree, has to take at least one course from a curated set of offerings in that area. So we're really trying to reinforce this idea that we have a responsibility and that this is a precious opportunity with our students for the four years they're with us.

**Phil Bredesen:** So to just follow up on the line that Bill was taking here, when a student comes out of high school and comes into yours or any other institution, civics is a very broad word. What would you like that student to have in their toolkit when they show up as a freshman in your school?

**Ron Daniels:** Well, I think if one looks at some of the work that organizations of educating for democracy, American democracy, and so forth, I mean, there's a really great, and I'm impressed by the bipartisan curriculum that's been sent out where students are able to understand the democratic idea, the extent to which the aspirations have or have not been met, what we learn from our darker moments of our history. And essentially with that knowledge, then being able to give them a sense of the choices they can make, the values that they hold dear, so they could be more effective upon graduation. And then just even thinking about the ways in which they, apart from, as I said before, voting, they can contribute to the democratic experiment. I think that's something that could well be done in high school, not just– And again, the truth is, our work would be less necessary if we knew we were getting that out of America's K-12 system. But the curriculum, as you know, is there, and I think it's pretty robust, and again, strikingly bipartisan, so it's actionable.

**Bill Haslam:** We always ask all of our guests to think back about Senator Baker's quote, "Always remember the other person might be right." Can you think of an example from your career, your perspective, where you go, "I didn't really have that right, now that I've thought about it, the other side of the argument was, right?"

**Ron Daniels:** I love the question. And for me, there's no shortage of times. And I feel good about the fact that I'm capable of shifting. But for me, probably one of the most important moments where I think I've really shifted, and it really goes to the contemporary circumstances. When I was a young faculty member, one of the first things I did back in Canada was to do a lot of work about thinking about the challenges that Canada would face when we entered into the free trade agreement with the United States. And we went into this knowing that if we opened up the border, we were immediately going to see a number of communities just devastated by the competition. Coal mining in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, the textiles industry in Quebec, we knew they were not continentally and certainly at that time, not globally competitive. And so there was this real sense of, how would we deal with job displacement, with the community disruption and so forth.

And at that time, I wrote a lot about it and made passionate arguments for mobility assistance for taking seriously people whose investments in their housing and even in their careers would be jeopardized by entering into the free trade agreement. And it was a sense that we can have our cake and eat it too. We can get the efficiency gains that come from continental integration, but we can also be respectful of the people who suffer these losses and who will lose their jobs and their communities impacted. And I think in hindsight and particularly just watching what's ensued in this country over the last five, 10 years, I think we were far too cavalier about what those losses look like and how incredibly devastating they would be to communities and just simply writing checks and providing for mobility or retraining couldn't really capture the magnitude of the loss those folks suffered. And that was something where I think I was quite naive when I wrote it first.

**Bill Haslam:** Since it's Thanksgiving in Canada, let me ask you a bonus question. You make the point, I think it's in your book, that there's an aspirational difference to what the United States are about, about life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness versus, I can't remember how you–

**Ron Daniels:** Peace, order, and good government.

**Bill Haslam:** Peace and think about that. There's life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness versus peace, order and good government are pretty different. Give us a final comment on that and maybe what we've lost in the aspirational sense in the United States.

**Ron Daniels:** Oh, look, for me, I still am here for a reason. I mean, just the ideas that animate the republic and just the commitment to excellence and to this individual freedom, I continue to find deeply stirring. And for me, coming here and particularly being able to participate in this

incredibly dynamic, heterogeneous, creative, innovative, higher education sector was a real gift. And so I still feel that peace, order and good government, of course, is a desirable state of affairs, but what I love about this country is the way it unleashes ambition and creativity and stokes it in a way that I don't see in any other country in the world. And so I still feel powerfully attached to the opportunity to be part of that experiment.

**Phil Bredesen:** I would love to ask you one more quick question as we close this off. We are sitting in a room here full of much of the leadership of higher education here in the state of Tennessee. And like any job like that, you're always consumes day in and day out with the issue du jour as to what's happening and the like. What would you tell these people that when you go home and you're sitting quietly in the evening and having a glass of wine or something and thinking about higher education, what should they be thinking about, maybe that doesn't rise to the level of that day-to-day kind of problem solving?

**Ron Daniels:** Well, I guess I'll answer it two ways. One is, I always found I got this advice early on when I went into a leadership position as a dean before provost and president was just the point you just made, Governor, that is that there's the hurly-burly, every day you're reacting, but these jobs, if they're going to be meaningful, what you want to be able to do is to say, what are the two or three things you really want to do while you've got the opportunity to lead an institution or a division and keep those. Literally, I write those things down. They're on a sheet of paper, they're in my right-hand drawer, and every so often I pick it up because you want to make sure that the urgent doesn't overwhelm the strategic and your opportunity to truly make the institution stronger during your run of leadership. So I think that's an important discipline.

And I think the other piece of it is just, despite the extent to which we're in a moment where we know the levels of distrust, skepticism, cynicism about our cause is quite intense. I think, nevertheless, I feel we are institutions that still are so important for this country and for the students we serve and the communities in which we're embedded.

Last year, I'll finish on this story, it was through much of the spring, it was just a hard time in terms of the level of criticism we were experiencing from a number of different sources. And it was week after week that we were dealing with one other challenge or another and we got to commencement. And you look out at tens of thousands of families and you see for a lot of the families, this is kind of in the natural order of things. They're the ones who have been sending their kids to university for generations, but there's so many families that this is the first. And you can't help but feel in that moment, the nobility, the power of the institution. So yeah, we got flaws, we have things that we have to work on, but the critique is so shrill and overstated right now compared to the reality of what we do, how we connect with our communities, and what we do for the next generation Americans that come into our institutions.

**Bill Haslam:** That feels like a good place to end. I think everybody in this room has had the joy of watching that first generation, the first person in their family to graduate, walk across the stage. And if that doesn't send a tingle down your spine, you need to get your heart checked. President Daniels, thank you very much for joining us. We've been honored to have you here.

**Ron Daniels:** Thanks so much for the opportunity.

**Marianne Wanamaker:** Thanks for listening to "You Might Be Right." Be sure to follow on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you listen to your favorite shows. And please help spread the word by sharing, rating and reviewing the show.

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