

Transcript

Chad Hasty

Alright, welcome back to the Chad Hasty show. Appreciate you tuning in today. You can follow me on social media at Chad Hasty Radio. Joining us right now here on the program, we get to go in depth with the president of West Texas A&M, joining us on the Chad Hasty show Dr. Walter Wendler, who joined us about a about a year ago. At this point, I was going back and looking at the last time we had you on the show, sir, and it was about a year ago. It's great to hear back from you and hope everything's well up in Canyon.

Dr. Wendler

Hello. Everything is well up in Canyon. We've got the year kicked off here, we have students coming back next Tuesday and we're all ready to go.

Chad Hasty

Excellent. Well actually, glad to hear from you. And you know, before we again before we, you know, kind of get into everything happening at West Texas A&M and you know education, tell folks about your background. Just you know ,who you are. Where you know, just kind of your your biographical information.

Dr. Wendler

Sure. I'd be pleased to. I was born and raised on Long Island, about 40 miles outside east of New York City on the North Shore of Long Island. Just a regular that was a son of working parents. As a matter of fact, my mother and father both worked in the high school I attended. My mother was a cook and my father was a janitor, and I started school at a Community College in New York at a two-year School, State University of New York, at Farmingdale. And got a degree in a construction management and transferred then to Texas A&M to study architecture. And by the way, I had never been West of New Jersey before I got out, and I'm telling you what I got off the plane in College Station, TX and I said to myself, Lord, what have I done? What have I done?

Chad Hasty

It's a different world, so what made you choose Texas A&M? Because that's a big jump.

Dr. Wendler

It is a big jump and I'll tell you what, it's interesting how this kind of thing works, Chad. From my community college, a couple of guys have gone down and transferred to A&M

because they took all of our hours. They took everything we had. I took 72 hours of course work for my associates degree. Now they're 60 hours, but the old days when you know people walk to school in the snow both directions uphill, you know, that kind of thing. It was 72 hours and the only two hours that didn't transfer were two hours of PE and at Texas A&M you had to take it, but you didn't get any credit for it. So then I lost two hours and it was cheap when I went. Tuition at Texas A&M was \$200 a semester for all the hours you could take, that was out of state. Wow. Of state tuition. And. It. It was a very good deal and and that was one of the reasons I went there and they had an architecture program that would seem to be pretty good. And I was, you know, as excited about all that. And that's why I ended up in Texas A and. Mi I had also applied to the State University of New York at Buffalo and then was cheaper and I was an in state student. And the University of Cincinnati, na. Then was cheaper. So I I made a it was a very thoughtful decision. I looked at the cost of the educational experience and said I'm going to A and M. And that's that's what I did. Sight unseen. And that's not I never visited the campus. Didn't. Anything. If I had, I might not. Come back. But anyway, now I've never left. I mean, I'm. I'm I tell people I'm born again in Texas. I mean, I just love Texas. But yeah, that was that was gummy to Ann. Then when I finished there, I went back to New York to work for a year, and I went to the University of California at Berkeley to get my professional degree. Architecture I'm. And that was that, again, was a new experience for me, completely different than College Station, but turned out to be, it turned out to be invaluable. Then from there I started to teach at LSUI practice architecture, Baton Rouge for a number of years. Came back to A and M on the faculty and also soon thereafter went to pursue a PhD at the University of Texas at. Awesome. So that you know that's. That's my kind of education.

Chad Hasty

That's your road map.

Dr. Wendler

Yeah, this is a road map.

Chad Hasty

Yeah, yeah.

Dr. Wendler

It's been a great experience. I, you know, studied basically on three coasts, the East Coast, the Gulf Coast and the West Coast. And and it's been a very. And here I am now. In the heartland of America, and in many ways to me, you know the the people used to refer to this as a pile of the country were those poor souls that never been here and understand

what the what the Panhandle of the South Plains. Do for. They feed it, they clothe it to some. They power it and people just don't understand how important this region is to the to the economy and the well-being of the United. Of America.

Chad Hasty

Now.

Dr. Wendler

And I love it. Love it so.

Chad Hasty

It comes through that you love it, which which I think you know, everyone feeds off of that when you because you you you went to school to be an architect. What made you go from OK? I want to. I want to be an architect and now I want to be in the university system. I want to be in education. What was that? What? That that exit like.

Dr. Wendler

Well, I was interesting. I. I practiced and I was teaching. At LSU, and I was busy. I don't. I don't know how many hours. Whatever I say, it's going to be an exaggeration, but it was at least 11 or 12 hours every day, six days a week, and my wife told me one day, she said. You know, you need to think about doing one or the. Either practice or teach, but trying to do both, you kill yourself. My two sons are going to grow up and you're going to know them. And she was right. So I said OK and I thought about it. Reflected on them. Prayed about. It and I decided I was going to leave practice and go into education. Full time and that's what I did. And at the same time, I got a job back at Texas A&M now on the faculty. I went there in 1981. As a junior faculty member, and then I stayed there for 20 years. And it was, you know, in many ways the best 20 years of my life. And the kids, both our sons, graduated actually from the College of Architecture. But in construction management. And you know, they both have done well with all that. Been a good experience for them but. I I never look back on the decision to get into teaching and university life. Somebody asked me not long ago, how do you? How do you become a university president? I. You get there before everybody else in the morning and you try to be the last one to leave. And anytime somebody says, hey, who can take care of this, raise your hand. If they'll do that. And before long you turn around one day and you're the university president. I wish there was some secret to it or some, you know, magic formula. Do. Take this. You know, whatever doesn't that way. It's a matter of being willing to work and, you know, being committed to it. Saw. I saw Ted Mitchell. I was over in Austin for the for yesterday, for the opening of the legislative session. I happen to see Ted Mitchell over there and he's got a lot of energy. For,

you know, for university leadership and he. A position. So in some ways we have that in common and and you know he's a smart guy and a good man and he has energy too. Can feel it when you talk to him and you know it's it's maybe it's this part of the world.

Chad Hasty

Yeah.

Dr. Wendler

Don't know, but I I just I. 'M taken with it and I get the feeling that Ted is too, Chancellor Mitchell.

Speaker

No.

Chad Hasty

Before we, because we're going to have to take a break here and just before we do that, when, when, when you and your family, when y'all go on vacation, even though you you took. Exit. Towards education, when you go places that just have beautiful architecture, do you get that bug and you start pointing things out to your? Family.

Dr. Wendler

Well, once in a while I have to admit that I do.

Speaker

Yeah.

Dr. Wendler

And it's just the way things. But we, yeah. And we'll and both boys are involved in construction. They, you know, they and they're they're. So they're they're doing construction management though rather than design.

Chad Hasty

There. Go.

Dr. Wendler

Was kind of on the front end and those guys like. They like being. They like working with their hands and all that, but they both have. One of them went on to become an attorney, but nobody's perfect. And the other one is still in the construction business and he's, you

know, he does very well. He's got a lot of responsibilities and so on. But they they have that sort of building in their background. Know it's always been part of who we are. Yeah, we do that. Do.

Speaker

Yeah.

Dr. Wendler

You know, we we look at things sometimes from an architectural perspective.

Chad Hasty

Yeah.

Dr. Wendler

It happened.

Chad Hasty

Yeah, well, one of my favorite things that we did when we went to Chicago years ago was the architectural tour. Absolutely loved. And I've gotten no background whatsoever in it. When we come back, we're going to continue our conversation with Doctor Walter Windler, President of West TX Stadium. Be right back on the Chad HT show. Back to the chat E show. We are going in depth to day with the President of West, TX A and M Doctor Walter Windler joining us on the Chad HT show and when we when we went to break, we were talking of course, about about education, about your, your, your, your decision to go. The educational field. You're. At. Texas A&M. You're doing a great job at West TX A and M and. The question I have what what what? Or, you know what are some of the biggest issues that schools like West, TX, A and M and even West, TX A and M. What critical issues do you guys face?

Dr. Wendler

Oh. That's a very good question. And there's a long list. OK, oddly enough, that the probably the most significant. And of course, that affects universities like this one. Are the declining birth rates in the United States? And actually, it's worldwide according to the. I just read some about a few weeks ago. And on top of the birth rates going down, so there's fewer people to go to school and they're attracted, they just need students. Many of the students, especially the traditional age students. Those that graduate out of high school and then immediately go to the university. They they want universities, bigger universities, you know, with a good name brand and all that. In spite of the fact that we have a mixed up very good

programs here, but we just don't have the name recognition so that the declining number of students and this is not a lament, this is not a complaint, it's a reality that places like West, TX a. Face that it's going to require. Fire. I'm gonna call it West. TX ingenuity to survive into the future. But these birth rates are tough. On top of that, there is. Declining. College readiness. In many, many parts of the country, in many high schools, the students are just not graduating as well. Prepared for college level work. This this is a problem also. So there's a there's a number of issues we face, but to me top, top, the top of the shelf is our enrollment. You know, we're we're staying even, but it's we are investing so much time just to stay even. That it it it's a it's a very, very strong. Commitment that we've made to trying to. Our enrollment. And it's it's causing us to be more thoughtful about how students attend college. Obviously, more and more students are taking studying. Online. This is especially true of the nontraditional students you know, people that are in their 30s or even in their 40s, many times, single parents or working parents, or all kinds of. Life circumstances that makes very challenging. We're trying to find ways to get in touch with those students and reach them. For. The improve the life, professional improvement and opportunity that good educational experience provides. So we're working hard at that too, to try to be flexible, you know do. The flexible scheduling competency based education micro credentials module degrees where we're doing a lot of things. We just started a program. That's in full swing. Wait, we offer eight associates degrees on our campus? That are they're not technical degrees. They're stop out opportunities for students who maybe get started and feel like they can't. Continue their maybe they're going into debt. They're, you know, they're. You're a little bit cautious about these things and this gives them a chance to at 60 hours when their core curriculum is complete. It gives them a chance to take a break and have a credential.

Chad Hasty

Yeah.

Dr. Wendler

And they, you know, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board was, I want to say they thought this was a very good proposal that we made. The WT made and it's been approved and we've got 8 associates degrees now that we've begun to offer on campus just this year just now. Window it's flexibility, Chad. Flexibility. Just like in your business, you've got to, you've got to be flexible.

Speaker

Just.

Dr. Wendler

Now the big can sometimes do whatever they want. Don't have that. We have got to be right on our feet.

Speaker

You know, we've got.

Dr. Wendler

To be able to move quickly. And and work diligently to serve students and I'm very comfortable with that. I I think that's what public higher education is all about.

Chad Hasty

So when you when you when you have a. You know, let's say you you have, you know, parents and, you know, students are maybe attending a, let's say, a town hall for West TX A and M and these students, they're hearing from their friends. You got to go to Texas Tech or Texas A&M or you got to go to the big, you know, the quote. Name school that's out there.

Speaker

Which?

Chad Hasty

What? What is? What is the pitch of of West TX A and M saying? Here's why you need to trust us. When, when it comes to education.

Dr. Wendler

Well, we're typically lower cost. Typically, as a matter fact, we have a program called will beat any offer if somebody shows me an offer from tech or Texas AM or the University of Texas or University of California at Berkeley. They're from, they show us an offer we're going to. Our best to match. That or beat it and we we can do that pretty well. We started this program last year. Have been on our website. It's if you go to wtamu.edu back slash, beat any offer, it'll tell you exactly how to do it. A. You know you fill. A few lines on the thing and. On the form and understand what the bottom line is, cost and attendance and all that, and you show us what you've got from somebody else or side by side. And that comes from a a mindset of service that I'm trying to instill on the campus that we want to serve these students. You know, I I for a long time would tell people that if they can go to a Community College and not borrow any money. That's not a bad thing to do. That's what I did and it. It worked for me and it worked for my brothers and sisters too for my brother. Well, he didn't actually. My sisters all went to Community College. To start out with, my parents couldn't

afford it. And we don't want. Talk about that in higher. We don't want to tell people look, this is expensive. But you know what, Chad? People have figured it out. That's one of the reasons that. The interest in college has become the best opportunity when you finish high school, it's that is decreasing. More and more people are concerned about the high cost and at times the low return on the investment. You know, they get a degree in a subject area where there just isn't a lot of Employment Opportunity. And I always tell students, look, if you've got somebody writing a check and you want to study a subject where there may not be a lot of Employment Opportunity. Then by all means do it. But if you have to borrow money, you've got to you've got to ask, is this worth it? And I'll give you an example from when I was down speaking at Lubbock High. This is a number of years ago now. We had that big, you know, the old auditorium and it's big one. I must see the thousand kids that was pulled full of seniors and juniors and I talked about all this stuff about money. One of the administrators and assistant principal, I believe, came up to me afterwards and he said, you know, I talked to my wife last night, who is a loan officer at a local bank and does mortgage pre, approves people for mortgages. And she told me last night when we were visiting that supper. She said that she had two positions. Our husband and wife. Come in and want to get pre approved for a mortgage but they had over \$400,000 in medical school debt and they they couldn't. Couldn't in good conscience pre approve them. Any more? And these are physicians. And he told me he says this is an important message to get out to, to young folks and to families. So we've worked very hard on this sort of the financial side of a higher education. Investment and next to buying a house, it's probably the best investment that anybody could ever make. If it's well thought out and and, you know, borrow a lot of money and you know, just go into too much debt and so on and so forth.

Speaker

Right.

Dr. Wendler

I I spent a lot of time talking about that. Sometimes I know people get tired of hearing about it and I know a lot of people get tired of writing a check at the end of the. For 20. 30 years. You know that they wonder, was this worth it? And I want to be honest.

Chad Hasty

Yeah.

Speaker

We're.

Chad Hasty

Visiting with Doctor Walter Windler here on the Chad Hasty show when the last time I had you on it was right after a piece had come out from the Texas Tribune where you had said that you were one in West, TX A and M university to be. Champion of ideas rather than ideology, this fits very nicely into. The culture of the Texas Panhandle. It's a tough place, a very tough place, and it's a place that champions conservative values. That was about a year ago that you said that. And we've seen since then you know the the dei stuff and some of the major universities, even across Texas, while we've seen sort of the expansion, those conservative values that that at West TX AM has that helped.

Dr. Wendler

Yes.

Chad Hasty

At West Texas, A and M has that been a selling point for some of the more rural areas when they're looking at what school to send their kids to?

Dr. Wendler

Chad, you're right on. That's exactly what we're trying to do, is appeal to folks from rural areas and not just West TX or the High Vall South Plains, but these rural areas in Central California, the San Fernando Valley, upstate New York, Central Florida. Pennsylvania and there's rural areas all over the nation and most universities. I'm gonna say this is strong language, but I believe it's true. Turn their back on the rural students. Thereafter, the students are not densely populated areas and. They appeal to those students with I'm going to call them metropolitan views rather than reinforcing the views that these young people learn from their parents. They learn from school teachers. Uh. Learn them at their places of worship. And those. I tell students all the time. I don't want you to come. Come to West, TX A and M university and check your values at the campus gate. Don't do it. And by the way, if somebody tells you that you should, then that in itself is a value that should have been checked at the campus game, you know. We're clear with a clean. Tamar. Rosa. You know, it just doesn't make sense. And I I think people should test their own values and work hard at them and and. And our students do.

Chad Hasty

Right, you know.

Dr. Wendler

And you're right, Chad. This is a tough place. This is a very tough place if you're trying to make a living scratching at the ground or door or feeding animals off the ground, or trying to get oil or gas out of the ground. This is a tough place and people, I think people appreciate a pragmatic. Sense of things. But by the way, I know a lot of people that as you do in this part of the world and these people are not. Mindless, these are smart people and they work hard.

Chad Hasty

Yeah. Doctor. Windward. We need to take one more break. Stay with. We'll be right back with Doctor Walter Windler. All right, back on the Chad Hasty show as we go in depth today with the President of West TX A and M Doctor Walter Windler, I think we could go for another hour, to be honest with you and and cover so much more grounds always a a PLE.

Speaker

Yeah.

Chad Hasty

You on we got to have you on again. Very, very soon. Doctor wendler. Just real quickly, a couple of things here. 1:00 we we had somebody who wanted me to thank you for creating an environment where small town kids can feel comfortable. Can excel? Which I think is exactly that's what you like to hear. That's what you all are trying to do, it sounds like. What is the? What is the future? For education, what does the future look like? Education. Maybe not only in higher Ed, but also in high school. Do you believe the future is for education?

Dr. Wendler

Well, I think I think responsive institutions and I'd like to think that WT is such an institution are going to be much more interested in tailoring educational experiences to fit the individual needs of students. That's one of the things I think that. Makes a smaller, more flexible university like West, TX, A and M university appealing to students in in basically, in contrast to the to the bigger institutions and I've I've been to them. Mean I understand them and they have a lot of value. But for many students, that's smaller, more personal kind of high contact environment is very, very helpful to them. So I think and I think at every level even in high school I think. Let's see. Tailoring of educational needs is going to be much more directed outward towards the students rather than just, you know, we offer these programs and if it doesn't fit, go somewhere else. Not doing that.

Chad Hasty

Now you mentioned earlier the decline of college college readiness for you know for in those schools.

Dr. Wendler

We are not doing that.

Chad Hasty

Do you think that's one of the ways to tackle it in high school in junior high is to get to those actual needs.

Dr. Wendler

I think so, and I think encouraging students not just to take the easy way out in classes while they're in high school, take good solid math and science classes, take good English and history classes. Learn how to write. Read. You know, I I always tell students. As much as you can. And read a variety of things you know, fill your head with ideas and insights from other people to gauge your own on. Know you mentioned this. This contrast between ideas and ideologies, and I think ideas are absolutely critical in a university and I think. Ideologies are a waste of time in an academic setting. That's not what we're about now. I won't worry about.

Chad Hasty

We have about a minute left. What advice would you give to parents of high school freshman today?

Dr. Wendler

I would say make sure you pay attention to the academic side of the high school experience. Know there's a lot of other forces at work, sports, and extracurricular activities. All very important. But make sure the academic basics are pursued and do a good job in those classes, and that includes all of the sort of you know, I could say reading, writing and arithmetic. Mean it's that kind of approach to study I think is very important. I would also encourage them early on to look at Univers. Please that provide a good fit for their interests and their proclivities and I. You can do that. Can start. You can start early, I'd say to anybody in Lubbock that has a kid in high school, children in high school. Are they're going to drive up the Canyon just to see WT and talk to a few people? A is time well spent. And that's. I mean, you know, you can get a great education at Texas. There's no question about it, but you get a good education right here too.

Chad Hasty

Absolutely, doctor Walter.

Dr. Wendler

And.

Chad Hasty

Thank you for your time.

Dr. Wendler

All righty. You.