

Kirt Jacobs: Welcome to MoxieTalk with Kirt Jacobs. This is an archived edition when our program was called Leadership Landscape TV.

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Kirt Jacobs: Welcome to a new partnership between Metro T.V. and Y-PAL the Young Professionals Association of Louisville called Leadership Landscape where we go inside the minds of local community leaders and allow them a chance to offer some keen insights into how they see themselves and most importantly explore just what makes them tick. I'm Kirt Jacobs a current Y-PAL board member and host of this program. Today our guest is Kentucky Secretary of State Trey Grayson and for those of you who may not know of Trey let me read a little bit of his bio to you. He is the youngest Secretary of State in the United States.

Trey is a fifth generation Kentuckian and lifelong resident of Northern Kentucky. He is the first Northern Kentuckian to be elected to statewide office since 1919. As a 1989 Governor scholar, it was just the beginning of his academic achievements. Trey went on to graduate with honors from Harvard College in 1994 with an AB in government and he received both of his jurist doctorate and M.B.A. from the University of Kentucky in 1998. He also is a founding member of a group called Legacy which he is a young professionals organization similar to Y-PAL based in Northern Kentucky. Trey has been named a rising star in the Republican Party by united leaders, a non-partisan, nonprofit action tank based in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He's one of the leaders of a Civic Literacy Initiative of Kentucky which presents strategies to enhance long term civic engagement and civic literacy within the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

The list goes on, Trey has also been recognized as one of the top young leaders in the United States by being selected for the inaugural class of the Aspen Rodel Fellowships in public leadership. There's a mouthful. Which recognizes the very best of the nation's emerging

leaders to discuss broad issues of democratic governance and effective public service. Recently named a member of the senior advisory committee to Harvard University's Institute of Politics, Trey is also the chairman of the Republican Association of Secretary of States. Trey and his wife Nancy have two beautiful daughters named Alex and Kate.

Trey Grayson: Save the best part for last.

Kirt Jacobs: Of course, of course. Welcome Trey to Leadership Landscape. Our first question, at your tender age of 33-34?

Trey Grayson: 33

Kirt Jacobs: OK. What drives you to do all this?

Trey Grayson: Kind of a combination of a real deep sense of community, a desire to serve that was instilled with in me by my parents at a very very young age. And then a desire to excel at whatever it is that I'm doing. Whether it's parenting, being a good husband, or serving citizens as Secretary of State or working with some of these nonprofits.

Kirt Jacobs: Whom do you credit most influential in your life. If you can name one or two people.

Trey Grayson: My parents and I kind of take them as a unit because they you can't separate the two of them. My dad was a banker, is a banker, just came out of retirement again

Kirt Jacobs: Really

Trey Grayson: And was a strong community leader in Northern Kentucky. And one of the goto guys, especially in the late 1980s early 90s. And Mom was always there with them right by their side they were a dynamic duo and a dynamic parental duo. And then my wife Nancy, she is my best friend and my soulmate and we click on so many different levels and she sacrifices a lot to help me do this job. As you mentioned, I live in northern Kentucky and com-

mute to Frankfort. Wherever it is that I'm going Louisville or anywhere else during the day and she takes care of our girls and helps pumps me up when I'm having a bad day and knocks me down a notch or two when I'm having too good of a day.

Kirt Jacobs: Too good of a day.

Trey Grayson: Yeah.

Kirt Jacobs: Yeah. I can relate to that.

Trey Grayson: So those two. That's what that's how I would answer that question.

Kirt Jacobs: That's great. what was the most defining moment of your life?

Trey Grayson: Probably the the... I'll tell you a little story. When I was in...2002, in the fall of 2002, I was having a burrito with some friends, peers of mine. Who were involved in the community and involved in politics. I love burritos.. My favorite place in Frankfort is going to go have a burrito at Qudoba for example and so we're having a burrito one day and the topic came up of me running for Secretary of State. And there was a strong encouragement. I hadn't really thought much about it and the people at lunch were making the case that it would be a great opportunity to serve and we started talking about some ideas and what you could do if I held the office. And the whole campaign kind of had its genesis with a burrito. That was certainly a defining moment. Burrito Joe's is the name of the place...

Kirt Jacobs: Really.

Trey Grayson:... that we went to up in back home. And then I just the birth of our children Alex and Kate just an extraordinary time and for parents who are watching, they know exactly what I mean. You know for those of you who don't have kids yet it is indescribable.

Kirt Jacobs: Some of our views don't yet but that is a good answer.

If there is one, what is your biggest professional regret? In other words, is there something you would have done differently at the tender age of 33?

Trey Grayson: Well, this is a small thing I'm sure I have some big credits as we go on but one of the regrets I have especially since I ended up as an elected official I wish I had spent a summer in Washington D.C. working in the nation's capital. One of the things I tried to do since and is encourage younger people. In fact I was talking to a student today who's at University of Kentucky. He interned in our office last summer and I'm trying to help him get a job in Washington for the for this upcoming summer because it's something that I didn't do and I really would have enjoyed it. The experience.

Kirt Jacobs: What is your biggest professional triumph?

Trey Grayson: Probably... I'll share a story was this is something that wouldn't have been in the papers necessarily but this is something that my best day at work and my professional career was this particular day. We had a contest where we ask students around Kentucky to participate in where they can submit slogans for kind of get out the voter participation topics or write an essay on on the topic and sometimes a whole class will participate or sometimes just individual students will participate. We, the Kentucky Educational Association, gives us money to the winners. It's a \$1000 to the winner of the slogan contest.

My first year in office, we invited the winning slogan student or asked if I could go present the check at the school's honors night. Called the school and found out that it was at the alternative high school and that they didn't have an honors night but they did love to bring up the winner His name was Kyle and all his classmates up to Frankfort. So they did some of the parents came up some of the teachers and some of the local folks came up. They didn't tell Kyle that he had won. They told his mom that she really ought to get off work and come up. So she got off work and came up with them. And I was kind of giving him an overview our office, just like I would for any other group that came to the office. It was the end

of the day and they were kind of tired they're probably wondering why are we here. Why aren't we on the bus headed back and I mentioned the contest and some kid piped up all you know we did that and I said that's right in fact the winner is right over here to my left.

I can still picture Kyle standing over here. And he just about froze and then he came up and he started muttering to myself. I've never won anything in my entire life and he was kind of shaking and I showed him the check and showed him the certificate and the kids just erupted in applause and were patting him on the back. They wanted to see the check. They wanted to see the certificate. I mean these are kids in alternative high school who hadn't really plotted anybody's academic achievement in a while if ever and that moment seeing them acknowledge and appreciate somebody's academic achievement just sent goosebumps through everybody in the room and then when I was walking out with Kyle and his mother and a teacher I overheard the following conversation they were talking about the award its impact and the teacher said so are you going to come back next year and Kyle said yeah I think I will now I need to go follow up and find out what actually happened but that particular day possible changing his life and to me and even a day like that that's a great professional achievement.

Kirt Jacobs: That's a great story. I like that. What do you find exciting about all this that you're doing right now in your life Trey?

Trey Grayson: I find all of it exciting. What is fun right now we're taping this in the middle of the General Assembly session I don't know when it's going to air. But I suspect it will air some time while the session is still going on sure but seeing all the but the energy of all the folks who come in on a particular issue or project or something just to just to visit. The school kids that come through and learn about the democratic process. I love that energy. I love seeing all that and I love participating in that. And as Secretary of State, what's great is one of my roles is to help administer the state's election system and we want to have a system where people can feel empowered and feel engaged that they can make a difference and that they believe in the system and so knowing that

I have a piece of that and play a large role and or a small role in helping that that dream to be achieve the dream of a country that's democratic, a state that democratic with a small D. That people can believe in and they feel like they can make a difference. That's exciting and that charges me up and when I have to get up early and drive somewhere its my caffeine along with the Coke Zero that I drink.

Kirt Jacobs: Cool. What is what is your favorite word?

Trey Grayson: Democracy. Would you expect to hear a different word from the secretary of state? But it's true it is what we're about and in our particular, my particular job but also has so many levels. At that Rodel Fellowship, when you were mentioned in the bio. We actually had a seminar series and we read, we read some great philosophical works and some great works in this country and we're talking about what does American democracy mean. Let's go beyond that where what does it mean what are our failures what are our strengths. How, how have we changed over the years. And how can that be shared with other countries and what can we learn from other countries, And so one of the great things about democracies is they generally, they get along. They don't fight one another. And so seeing the spread of democracy in the last 20 years has been extraordinary. I mean watching the Berlin fall. I mean I still remember when that happened and watching those people stand on top of the Brandenburg Gate and ripping it down and and seeing apartheid fall in South Africa and seeing those folks in Iraq hold the purple finger and the woman in Afghanistan who'd ... they never even had an election ever. In Afghanistan here they had one in Afghanistan and there are a whole host of other countries seeing that democracy spread hopefully will be the hallmark of the 21st century and so that's why that that's not just personal it's that word means a lot more to me to just being Secretary of State

Kirt Jacobs: With our next question I think this is more of a personal one.

Trey Grayson: Yeah.

Kirt Jacobs: Can you define leadership in one word? Of the great lexicon of the English language can you pick one word?

Trey Grayson: That's tough. Probably the best word I think if you can only have one word would be honesty. I think if people could get that from from a leader that this is critically important to them.

Kirt Jacobs: In this day and age.

Trey Grayson: In this day and age people want. I think people want to believe and if you're in but unfortunately sometimes where we if you want to call me a leader in elected official sometimes we're not you know we're not honest and became believe somebody can take somebodies word and value their word what good are they. And so I think that if just one word I think I would choose honesty.

Kirt Jacobs: Honest. If you could change one thing in the short 33 years anything? Looking back just one thing not necessarily regret just anything in general. It's pretty good so far.

Trey Grayson: It is pretty good so far. I think there's some there's some little things here and there probably I don't want to broadcast on TV. You know somebody I may have wrong back and in the playground...

Kirt Jacobs: ...sixth grade or what have you.

Trey Grayson: You know I've got a lot of little things that I don't like I prefer not to look back with regret.

Kirt Jacobs: Right exactly

Trey Grayson: I want to look forward and and all this all the situations all the stories I probably don't want to tell because I'd be kind of embarrassing and and when I left one law firm to go to another I could've handled it a lot better. I should have handled it in a more professional manner should've should've been more quiet about the reasons for leaving. It was a great lesson and so it was one of

the things that I've learned is...

Kirt Jacobs: Burn bridges...

Trey Grayson: Yeah you know you don't want to..

Kirt Jacobs: You don't want to do that.

Trey Grayson: You don't want to burn bridges and sometimes it's better to not say now that one doesn't politics sometimes. It's better to be precise with what you say in and be careful with what you say and don't talk too much.

Kirt Jacobs: Don't elaborate..

Trey Grayson: Yeah

Kirt Jacobs: It's a good point.

Trey Grayson: It's good, for it's good for everybody. And that was that's one that I do regret without going into too much detail.

Kirt Jacobs: And our ultimate question -- Last question, when the great day comes Trey. How do you want to be remembered? Which may be tough at 33.

Trey Grayson: Yeah hopefully it's way down way down the road. I think comes early and you know I've had family members who've passed away or had an uncle passed of cancer of that very early 40s and I remember seeing people standing in line. To get into the church for his funeral service and he touched so many lives and even 20 years later people still talk about how many lives he touched I think if people could say you know. Trey was a role model. He was a leader he was a great and he was a role model leader because he was a great father.

Kirt Jacobs: Right

Trey Grayson: He was a great parent and he said he tried to do

what he could do to help out our community and our state. I think that be pretty good to have on a tombstone. Don't you?

Kirt Jacobs: On that note Trey we want to thank you for being on Y-PAL's Leadership Landscape.

Trey Grayson: You're welcome.

Kirt Jacobs: Thank you very much for being here today.

Trey Grayson: Thanks you. Good luck

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Kirt Jacobs: Thank you for listening to MoxieTalk with Kirt Jacobs. This episode was archival audio from when we were known as Leadership Landscape TV. If you have any feedback, general comments, or a recommendation for a suitable guest feel free to email me at kirt@moxietalk.com or catch us on Facebook under MoxieTalk with Kirt Jacobs, or on Twitter under [@kirtjacobs](https://twitter.com/kirtjacobs) or our extensive website at www.moxietalk.com