

## Democracy's College, Episode 59

### A Journey to the Presidency with Terry Wilkerson of Rend Lake College



*The Journey to the President panel at the 2023 Illinois Community College Leadership Institute. Left to right, Lorenzo Baber, director of the Office of Community College Research and Leadership; Terry Wilkerson, president of Rend Lake College; and Pam Lau, president of Parkland College*

**Sal Nudo:** Welcome to the Democracy's College podcast series. This podcast focuses on educational equity, justice, and excellence for all students in the P-20 educational pathways. This podcast is a product of the Office of Community College Research and Leadership, or OCCRL, at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Learn more about OCCRL at [occrll.illinois.edu](https://occrll.illinois.edu).

In this episode, OCCRL senior research assistant H.M. Kuneyl, who coordinates OCCRL's yearly [Illinois Community College Leadership Institute](#), talks with Terry Wilkerson, the president of Rend Lake College who partook in the institute's Journey to the President panel in 2023. Kuneyl and Wilkerson discuss the challenges and benefits of working in the field of postsecondary education at a rural community college, President Wilkerson's career trajectory, the qualities that make a good leader, and other topics.

**H.M. Kuneyl:** Welcome, listeners. I'm your host, Kuneyl, Ph.D. student at the University of Illinois and aspiring community college historian. This is the second podcast centering the Illinois Community College Leadership Institute. The institute started two years ago and focuses on

bringing community college leaders from all levels across the state together for a collaborative learning and professional-development opportunity.

Today I am joined by President Terry Wilkerson of Rend Lake College, who served on our first Journey to the President panel back in 2023. That panel has since become very popular and we bring it back every year, with different presidents each year highlighting different institutions.

Thank you so much for joining us, President Wilkerson. Would you like to introduce yourself to our listeners?

**Terry Wilkerson:** Thanks for having me. My name's Terry Wilkerson. I'm born and raised in southern Illinois. Interestingly enough I wasn't going to go to college. I live on 1,000-acre farm and decided to leave my options open; went to college at Rend Lake and transferred on to SIU (Southern Illinois University) and worked on my bachelor's and master's there and then came back and started teaching part time at Rend Lake. And so, I tell everybody that to tell them for somebody that wasn't going to go to college, I never did get out. But the clock's ticking. I've got eight more board meetings, so I'm counting on getting out.

**Kuneyl:** (Laughs) Yes, it's with mixed feelings that we welcome your retirement. I know it's well earned, but we do enjoy having you in our larger community college community. I also resonate with what you're saying there. I started at community college when I was 17, and it still baffles me that there are folks who *don't* plan their lives around the semester calendar.

**Wilkerson:** (Laughs) Yeah.

**Kuneyl:** Okay, so our first question is just thinking about the location of Rend Lake and it asks, you know, from your perspective, what are the unique challenges of working in postsecondary education in a rural area, and then moving from that, you know, what are the unique benefits?

**Wilkerson:** The challenges probably are relatively obvious, I guess, but maybe not everybody's thought about it. There's a lot of advantages to being in a rural area. There's also a lot of disadvantages. So we truly are a commuter college, which was, you know, the initial intent for the community college system. You know, you think about tuition and you think about cost for education and those kind of things being barriers, but honestly, surprisingly even for myself, you start seeing the challenges that our students have of, you know, to make the drive, gas money, day care, working, you know, part-time jobs or full-time jobs and then trying to go to school part time and so, I would argue what we considered traditional students and used to consider nontraditional students really kind of look the same anymore, and that's a little alarming or a little concerning in that education isn't necessarily, when I went classes were the priority, and then you worked your work schedule around your classes and you worked everything else around your classes. Now it seems like our students are having to work everything else first and then work the classes and their education around the rest of their life, and so there's a lot of barriers and challenges out there that we don't necessarily see from the education side at first glance. You think about tuition costs, you think about lab fees and books and those kind of things that we've got a lot more control over. And then there's things outside, exterior pressures.

Big advantage, I feel like, for our rural students and being in a rural location is you do have that community piece to it that people are genuinely glad to have students here. We're very student

friendly or we always try to be, and if we're not, we're trying to figure out what and why and what we can do more for the students. I think that's a big crux.

Now, I'm an ag guy. We're out in the middle of a cornfield, so, you know, I'm right at home. Might be a little bit of a deterrent for some folks and some of our students that do transfer out of district into our location. But I think the sense of community and the sense of belonging are high-value and are relatively easily found on our rural campus.

**Kuneyl:** The community college world in Illinois has 48 community colleges in it, and we're spread pretty far apart, especially in our rural areas. But we do get to see each other a little bit, and earlier this year, you [presented at the Forum for Excellence](#), and I was able to hear you present along with some of your colleagues who are also community college presidents.

**Wilkerson:** And you still invited me to the podcast?

**Kuneyl:** Absolutely! I think I wrote down my questions to ask you from your presentation.

So, we were talking about community colleges in the modern context, and you said that community colleges are not built for the challenges that they face today. Can you expand on that and then maybe think about what are the ways that these institutions could adapt to better meet those challenges?

**Wilkerson:** We're seeing a lot more need and/or expectations for the college system to provide services for mental health. We deal with gas cards, we've got a food pantry on campus. The pandemic, we were the high expectation of not only providing education about vaccinations but providing an ability or a method for vaccines. Just things that, on the surface, when you look at the scope of what education is, you know, we were a commuter college, and so you came here, you got your classes, you got your information, you took your tests, you got your credentials, and you went on.

And now I feel like there's a lot of things we need to address and to do. It's a big lift for institutions to start looking at the expectations that we have. There's medical resources we're supposed to help provide on both physical and then on the mental health piece, and making sure that you've got the ability to evaluate. I don't want to get into being in the doctor business, but also, by the same token, providing resources and opportunities and contacts and information for our students of what they need.

That's where I was kind of alluding to and we just really weren't built for that. I'm out the middle of the corn field, again. But by that same token, by that isolation piece, when they're here, students are here, they need some of those services. Who would have thought we would be worried about a food pantry and providing food. And so in our cafeteria, we've got a very low-cost lunch that we maintain. Sometimes to the distress of my food staff, we maintain that low price and then we have a thing we call 'lunch on the lake,' where we bring out and just provide a free meal. Students can contribute a little bit to it if they want to. Anything that comes off that fund we put back into student resources and student things.

We've provided a space on campus for students to go and just check on their mental health. If it's just a space to get away for a little bit in a quiet space or if it's where they need resources.

Something we started pre-pandemic and didn't really get a lot of ground or a lot of movement out of it until we hit the pandemic, but we started a thing called RL Cares. So the RLC (Rend Lake College) part of that, and really, what the idea behind it, or the crux, was to have a resource on campus for our faculty, our staff. You run across a student who has a need, whatever the need is. So, the idea is we care, here's a resource, send them to RL Cares, let RL Cares then help direct them and guide them to the path, whatever that path may be. If it's trying to figure out how we help them with a foundation. Maybe they don't need a scholarship, but maybe they need four tires for their car. Maybe they need gas money or gas cards and stuff. Of course, we try to put checks and balances and that to make sure that they're legitimate needs and things that students need from that standpoint, and real concerns.

Not to get into the idea of practicing mental health, but have staff that can help kind of evaluate and say, okay, here's some resources and some directions – we can take you there. Here's some opportunities for you, here's some online options. That was one of those center clearinghouses for us during the pandemic and since then has still been that clearinghouse to really point students, and point our staff and our faculty, in a direction of, okay, you have a student that's got a concern or a need. You're here to teach science. We probably don't want you, necessarily, trying to handle that either. Hand them off and make sure they've got some follow-through and some follow-up with them behind them with RL Cares.

So that's one of the ways we're tackling it. We are not doing a bad job, but we're in uncharted water. Again, we're not built for this. And so, we're going to make mistakes and there's going to be hiccups along the way and opportunities that we learn from, from that. But that's the crux of it. And that's, I think, a challenge for all of us. We care about our students. We want them to be successful. They're why we're here. And a lot of those things, those challenges and expectations, have just kind of bled over way beyond the credit hour and getting your classes out of the way and getting graduated.

**Kuneyl:** When I think about resources that institutions provide, especially in rural areas, sometimes those can be very far reaching and community centered. Everything from food pantries, like you mentioned, to, I've heard, student farms, rideshare program. The list goes on and on. And I'm thinking about rural communities in terms of financial availability. Do you have any advice to offer folks at other rural institutions who may have greater need than they have the finances to meet? RL Cares, or RLC, sounds like it's *really* doing something here. But I'm sure that it wasn't easy to get started. What are your thoughts on working with limited funds and getting something like that started?

**Wilkerson:** As presidents, we get together in our different meetings and we talk about some of the unfunded mandates that we get that come down legislatively from the state. It's a little bit, not a lot of guidance. Here's an issue, we want you guys to address it, and then there's not much guidance on how to address it and/or definitely not the funding.

I guess I would argue that funding's important and critical. However, we put a lot of money into a tutoring program now. And part of the argument at one point in time was, you know, our, one of the questions was, are our students, are they college ready? And I would counter that with, as a college, are we student ready? And so, it matters but it doesn't. At the end of the day, we've got to meet the students where they are, address the needs as best we can, and get them to where we

think they need to be, where the expectation is what industry wants for the workforce, that the universities need for their transfer programs and those things. So the onus is on us to deliver. And it's just not something that's necessarily always, there's no funding tied to any tutoring hours that we put in. There's no credit-hour reimbursement for that. There's nothing that comes back from that standpoint, so.

I guess I'm a farmer, so you know, I throw money out on the ground and then I see what I get, and I reap at the end of the harvest. And so for me, a lot of us, that same type of philosophy: You've got to invest in your students and invest in your infrastructure to help those students. And if you get them through, or you get them started, or you make a difference, that somehow is going to come back around and help justify that. If you don't, I think you're going to lose. Sometimes it takes money to make money type thing. It's one of those things, financially, yeah, it's a burden. But financially, can you afford *not* to do anything?

And so that's where we found ourselves and the direction we've taken. And you can get creative with things, and I think that necessity is always the mother of invention, as they say. And so that's where we are. And again, it's not a perfect model, but the reality is our students need to feel like we're vested in them and we care for them, and there's ways to do that beyond just, 'We don't get paid to do this, so we're not going to do it.' Well, then, they're not going to be successful on the other end. And your success rates, your completion rates, your retention rates, your graduation rates, all those things that measure a college are going to suffer. So, I guess I would argue to think longer term and long range and look at it as an investment in people and in community.

**Kuneyl:** Looking back over your tenure as president, what are the some of the things that you're most proud of?

**Wilkerson:** Well, when my marketing crew, when they got a hold of me, you can imagine probably marketing me as a president might be a little bit unorthodox from that standpoint. So, they said I wasn't trying to be a president – I was trying to change what it was to be one. And maybe I've impacted and made people think a little differently, brought some practicality to education, brought some practicality to what we do for our students and how that impacts our communities through our workforce, through educating folks.

Our biggest challenge, I think we've done a lot of work, especially here in southern Illinois, for a while we had what I would call little kingdoms or whatever. You were in competition with each other. We were fighting over a student, let's say from Belle Prairie or from Hoodville, places you've never even heard of. And it's one of those things where, okay, so I got two kids from Eldorado the other day while another president was trying to get two kids from Vienna. And the reality is we need to all work together.

And so I've had an opportunity to partner with a fellow colleague, Dr. Jonah Rice, who retired last year at Southeastern. We created kind of an alliance. We've done a lot of work bringing Southern Illinois and bringing, I think, even the Presidents Council closer together where we're not competing. We're trying to work more closely together, realizing that there's benefits for us to work together and not compete over these little enrollment blips here of trying to get the handful of students here, out of this area, or someplace else.

And so, I guess that's probably one of the things that I would highlight is that we've taken a more mature, and maturity should not ever be confused with me in the first place. The people that know me that know that I cut up and have a lot of fun. But I think take an honest, authentic look at education saying, look, we need to help the region, we need to work together. So, if there's a service I can't provide, we've got Continental Tire in our district. And so they're the largest employer south of Peoria in Illinois. They pull from 150 zip codes as far as their employee base. So, if there's training that I can't provide or can't do a satisfactory job of being able to provide for them, then we've worked together with other colleges to bring that training to them and to work together because industry doesn't understand or appreciate our district boundaries. That doesn't really matter to them. We need training. We need people to work, and I don't need to be a barrier to keep or prevent that training just because they sit in my district.

And so, we've started really working together broadly here in southern Illinois and I think have a much better communication. I even see the entire president's council, and at the state level, we do a lot better as far as talking together, working together, looking at state initiatives and there's a lot of power in a group of people across the state, that many colleges, with one voice, one mission, really trying to promote education and promote where we are. So, I guess that would probably be my thing that I'd like to get, I get some credit for, that I take some pleasure in the fact that we're working together and talking and trying to figure out solutions jointly versus I'm just trying to have more students than you have.

**Kuneyl:** As you were talking, you had mentioned that you were kind of changing what it means to be a president. And I thought about –

**Wilkerson:** That's what my marketing bunch said. I don't know that I've changed anything, but that was what marketing was, the way they was going to try to present me to the public.

**Kuneyl:** Well, I appreciate their effort.

**Wilkerson:** [Laughs]

**Kuneyl:** But I'm thinking about, you know, your background in agriculture and the community that you serve, and I'm wondering if you feel like growing up on a farm has helped your students see themselves in you, as a leader, but also as a member of the community with a similar background to them.

**Wilkerson:** I hope so. I think there's a lot of value in being authentic. Owning who you are, being good with, who you are, and if you're not, then how is anybody else going to be okay with that? And so I own my background. I'm proud of it. It's helped me. You know, there's big decisions to be made on a farm. What field do we plant next? What's the weather gonna do? Should we mark it? Should we not? There's a lot of pressures all the time. And so I think that's been very beneficial for me in this seat, to say we've got a large decision to make – we need to make it. The worst thing you can do is sit there and not do anything. And so overanalyzing and kind of paralysis by analysis, as they say, is, you know, and I try to be thoughtful of what we've done and I'm not afraid to replant. Sometimes you make the wrong call, and it is what it is. We did the best we could with what we thought was going on at the time. So, I think ownership goes a long way and being authentic and not trying to put

on airs and be something I'm not. I hope our students and the community and stuff appreciate that and relate with that to some extent.

Like I said, I wasn't gonna go to college. I'm a farmer and I'm very proud of it. I just got stuck in the system and, lo and behold, I started as a student at this place and now I'm president. So caught the board in a weak moment – what can I say? The place has been very good to me, and so, you know, that's worth a lot.

**Kuneyl:** As you're thinking back about some of those tough decisions and your upcoming eight board meetings, is there anything that you're looking back at and you're thinking, I wish I would have been able to accomplish that in my tenure, or a goal you want to pass on to the next president.

**Wilkerson:** You're never done. I don't know that I've got any one thing that I want to saddle a person with from that standpoint. They gotta walk their path. And to be fair, you know, there could be two things and I'd say these we've got to absolutely do, and then there'll be five other things, shove that out of the way because that's what's got to take the priority. So sometimes you gotta take care of the fire that's right there by you versus the one that's on out there. And so would I do things different, do I have regrets? I guess everybody does, but at the end of the day, all that stuff got me where I am today and I'm pretty happy in the state I'm in.

So, in my window of time as president, you know, we've all inherited campuses that were turning 50 years old, except, now, Joliet Junior College will be sure, if you ever interview them, to let you know they were the first college in the country. And they're definitely proud of that, and they should be. But for a lot of us, you know, we all turned 50 here in the last few years. And so a lot of our campuses turned 50. And so, not that anyone neglected anything, there's a lot of roofs, there's a lot of heating and air, there's chiller systems, there's infrastructure that, you know, you need to do and take care of, and we've done a lot of that. We've been able to expand in certain areas and grow in some and get smaller or smarter in other areas and kind of pivot and move in the direction they need to do.

I guess I would probably challenge at the presentation you were talking about. They asked for insight and my challenge was that the credit hour is dead. That doesn't mean that we won't nurse it along and there's a transition that's got to happen. It's an old system that we've been built around and on, but at the end of day there's nothing magical about you and I sitting in the classroom for an hour a week for 16 weeks, and then if we sit in that same classroom for three hours a week for 16 weeks, we earn one credit, we earn three, and we've learned three times as much. I don't know that that's necessarily the case or a corollary that we can hang our hat on and, quite frankly, industry and society doesn't have time for us to live everything by semesters.

And so, I think competency-based. I think there's badging or micro credentialing and things like that. We're starting down that road and have made some progress in that. I just think we got to think about who we serve and how we serve them differently and how they're changing. We talked a little bit about that, you know, where early on, some of the challenges for rural students. Those same challenges are up in the urban areas as well. We're not that different and poverty really doesn't know color, race, ethnicity, orientation. It doesn't really care. And so a lot of our students, that's a big equalizer. If we all have those struggles in our areas, and they're more similar than we give them credit sometimes I think.

But that might be the only thing I'd lay out is we've got to look differently as a system and everything else. The rest of the society is still not dealing with the 100- to 200-year-old system. I'm not farming with the same equipment, Continental Tires [is] not making tires the same way they did. You know, everything is advancing and moving, and so education, that's my one concern is the relevance for education. How relevant is it? I think it's very valuable and very relevant, but we've got to make sure and market ourselves and present ourselves in a fashion that gets that.

You're in a time now where information's at your fingertips, and so can they do these competencies, can they do these skills – they can go to work. And that's what the industry needs. That's what society needs. I'm an old-fashioned guy from that standpoint, but I just think that's the one challenge is to look down that lens and move that direction, or at least move *a* direction. We can't stay where we are.

**Kuneyl:** So, I want to kind of shift directions a little bit here. When you first came to the Illinois Community College Leadership Institute, you talked a little bit about your journey to the presidency, and it was the thing everyone was talking about when they left the room. So, could you share with our listeners, just maybe a shortened version? You already mentioned about your farm and how you grew up in the community and started as a student, but a little bit about your career trajectory from faculty to president.

**Wilkerson:** So started as a part-time instructor, adjunct instructor in ag. Got the opportunity to go full time in a couple of years. That was in '97. And then in 2008 I was named division chair for basically everything that we've got here that's career tech, with the exception of allied health. And then, like I said, I caught the board in a weak moment in 2012 and they made me president.

The place has been very good to me and we're *heavy* career tech here, kind of our cornerstones are the ag, the manufacturing, the allied health piece, and then the energy sector. At the time, when I first started, coal mining was far more prevalent. Energy is not going to go away, and so if it's green energy, if it's pink energy, if it's, I don't care what color the energy is, we're gonna need and want probably all of it; because we don't seem to lessen our appetite for that.

But basically part-time instructor to a full-time instructor. I taught for about 15 years and then was division chair for about four. And then then been president now for 12, gonna be thirteen I guess in the spring.

**Kuneyl:** I love the story of you starting off as a member of the community and then becoming a member of the college community as well, being committed to the institution and then rising up to be president. That's something that doesn't traditionally happen at the four-year level, you know, having –

**Wilkerson:** Sometimes you just gotta outlive 'em!

**Kuneyl:** [Laughs]

**Wilkerson:** [Laughs]

**Kuneyl:** And forever humble.



**Wilkerson:** Just don't go home. Just keep showing up for work and eventually they'll, you know, have pity on you and here you are. So, like I said, the place has been good to me. The place has been understanding. They understand my background and I've tried to work hard for the place. There's a lot of pressure to grow up at the place because I don't have really anywhere else to go. So if this didn't work out, and I started *fairly* young. I was 39 when I first started. And so, to be president that long, my options was to go back and teach ag at the same place I guess. I had tenure, but you want to be good there. I'm not moving out of the community. I can't move my farm. The math's impossible on that and so there's a lot of pressure. You want to do good for your local area because that's where you're going to be.

**Kuneyl:** Yeah, and I would imagine that just folds right perfectly back into what we were talking about when we started the conversation about, you know, the unique challenges and benefits of a rural community. You *can't* move the farm, so if industry leaves the area, then it's really up to the community college to *adapt* to the new needs or the new economic structure that is *in* the area because –

**Wilkerson:** That's where a lot of, where a lot of kids get their start. And a lot of adults get their second start or their third. We've had a lot of returning students and a lot of incumbent worker training, and we're definitely in an age now, the old adage was you never stopped learning, but we're truly, you know, careers and stuff are being reinvented five to six, seven years. The career is different, maybe it's even gone, and you're relearning or retooling and advancing so why wouldn't the education system have to do the same thing?

**Kuneyl:** Absolutely. So as you're thinking about emerging leaders in the community college field, what advice do you have for folks trying to navigate these upcoming challenges, whether they're in a rural or urban area across the state?

**Wilkerson:** So, I probably don't come off as a rule follower, but I got a few rules that I always try to guide things by. And I start with number three because I went to [indecipherable] into grade school and Crayola only had eight colors, Pluto was a planet, and we got to play with Mercury. That may explain a lot of things to you.

But rule number three: Be careful what you put in print. Take a lot of time and a lot of thought. You would think it couldn't be twisted, but it seems that, and in today's society, with as much social media as much presence of things, it just doesn't go away. So think thoughtfully through what you're writing. Does it come off the way you want it to come off? Try to be cognizant of that.

Rules one and two are trust and loyalty. I think dance with those that brought you. I think trust is a very fundamental thing of what you're dealt with. And so, you'll get more mileage in a leadership forum and position than you would think. You should expect it. But when people see it and you've earned it, that'll go a long way for you. So, the fact that it isn't necessarily the answer you give them, it's how you give the answer, and if they can trust what you're telling them, the best that you know at the time, that'll go a long way with people and their expectation of you.

Others, number 16, if someone thinks they have the upper hand on you, break it. And rule number 54: The more you run over a cat, the flatter it gets. Hope you don't get any calls when it's just physics, and no cat was harmed in the filming this podcast.

So, I mean, just have some fun with some things. Enjoy your time, be authentic, build that trust piece, and that'll take you further. Whatever challenges you're gonna have, and you're gonna have challenges; my time, we had two years no budget at the state level, which everybody said that'll never happen. They'll just argue over the budget and then eventually it would come through. Well, we went two years without one.

And then we had a pandemic. And don't forget the pandemic itself, then, was politically charged because everybody had an opinion about that. Your institutions were caught in the middle of people very, very, very afraid of it. People that didn't think it even existed and it was all a hoax and everything in between in the middle. And your institutions were thrown right in the middle of how do we safely take care of everybody and navigate that? The politics of that was very rough. And so at the end of the day, people needed to think they could trust you, believe they could trust you, and ultimately *trust* you to make those hard decisions and to ask people to say, look, try to social distance; to ask people to wear a mask or ask people to consider all these things. You had to have a *high*, super-high level of trust.

With the budget impasse. What do you mean we don't have a budget? A budget's just a budget. What do you mean we don't have any money? But you've got money somewhere. Where is it? And still, how do you function and how do you still do things you need to do? We spent \$100,000 on Wi-Fi and the budget impasse because the expectation was when you went to the campus, you'd have good Wi-Fi. And so, it seems a little frivolous at some point to say, well, that's a lot of money and with no budget to spend, but that was the expectation for our students. They could go to any McDonald's or any place else and get Wi-Fi. And so out here, we're in places where that might be the best and only place that they've got a good chance to do their homework for internet connectivity and those kind of things. And so, fundamentally, it was key for us to do that. That was a lot of money to spend, in a time where money was tight. And so, I think it just goes back to being authentic, owning who you are builds that trust. Maybe they don't *like* what we're doing, but they at least understand or appreciate it or can respect the fact that we're doing the best we can with what we've got, where we are. Which is also rule number 23 in case you're keeping score.

**Kuneyl:** [Laughs]

**Wilkerson:** There's at least 86, but we won't go through all of them today.

**Kuneyl:** Huh. Well, that's a shame.

**Wilkerson:** [Laughs]

**Kuneyl:** No, as you were talking, again, I just kept thinking about how in, you know, some rural areas, the community college *is* the place where you can get Wi-Fi.

**Wilkerson:** Yeah.

**Kuneyl:** And it's there for a community resource just as much as it is an institutional resource. The community college campus that I went to as an undergrad was in a rural area that had been annexed by the city, so we had this kind of living-in-both-worlds system, but one of the things that I can say – and kind of brag on the institution – was they made sure that the library was integrated with the public library in the area. So as a student, I could check out a book while I was on campus

and then turn it in to my local branch that might have been closer to me. I could pull resources from across the county, and that really helped make the institution not just a campus, but also a community resource.

And I think about, you know, flooding was a huge issue where I grew up. And sometimes you couldn't get to your local library because it was underwater. But you might be able to get to the college. In the same way that you're talking about Wi-Fi, yes, it was a gamble financially, but how can students continue to be students? How can the *community* continue to have this resource if the college chooses to look at finance over the needs of the community?

**Wilkerson:** Something that stuck with me at the time, and there was an individual, he'd give a presentation just on technology in general, and his name escapes me, but he made the connection of we had the interstate system come through the country, and towns that got an exit or were in crossways with two interstate systems or whatever, look at how they flourished. And the towns that didn't have interstate access, look how they struggled. And he likened the access to technology in the same fashion. I really think he was right. If you don't have the connectivity, you don't have the ability to get, then you're, not to being on the interstate's all there is to it, but the fact that you don't have an ability to get on that. And so access to that. I thought that was a good visual, at least in a mindset to think about technology and what the next thing is. What we're talking about is probably on the tail end of it. There'll be something newer and faster, better, or the expectation is coming. I just don't know what that is.

**Kuneyl:** I don't either, but I'm excited to find out!

That about wraps up my questions before we close out. I just wanted to give you an opportunity, if you have any closing thoughts or anything you were hoping I would ask you if you wanted to address.

**Wilkerson:** Flattered that you'd spend some time with me, and anybody that wants to brave through and listen to the podcast and stuff, appreciate their time that they committed and hope it was worthwhile.

**Kuneyl:** I'm sure it was. It always is. Thank you so much for joining us. I'm gonna go ahead and sign off now. Until next time.

**Wilkerson:** Thank you.