

Huan-Cheng (Thomas) Liu

Interview with Fairfax County School Board Member-at-Large: Ryan McElveen

April 3, 2017

Q: Mr. McElveen, what led you to run for public office?

I was interested in giving back to the community. I had gone off to graduate school and I was coming back to this area. I had a job lined up, but I did not really have any community involvement. So I just wanted to be more involved in the community locally because my day job is more international.

Q: Did you hold any elected office before running for School Board?

No, I did not. School Board is my first elected office.

Q: What goals did you have before you decided to run for School Board?

I really had nothing to lose, I was really young. I didn't know people in the community, so my goal was just to get to know more people and to get involved. I was really lucky to get as far as I did.

Q: What is your greatest success, so far, at the Fairfax County School Board?

I think I have helped to change the dialogue around school food, we brought in a new Food and Nutrition's Service Director who has really changed the dialogue and brought in more fresh food and things like that.

Q: Are there any thoughts on politics or leadership you will like to share with us, the younger generation of leaders?

Leadership is really about listening, doing hard work and making tough decisions. Most of the people do not realize the hours of work that leaders put in and the difficult decisions that leaders have to make. They often just criticize them on the surface issues. So leadership is really about getting out into the community and really listening to people and making hard decisions based on all the information that they have.

Q: What was your greatest challenge since you've been in office?

One of the greatest challenges was making those tough decisions. We had the transgender issue, and that was something that I brought forward. This issue is critical to the students, but at the same time a lot of people in the community were against it. There were two constituencies battling each other, so reaching the middle ground is difficult.

Q: Lastly, I guess this is a good way to end the interview, what advice do you have for people who want to get involved in politics and public policy? What advice can you give us?

So my main advice is to take risks, most of life is about the courage to do the difficult things. So my advice to the younger people is to run and go out into the community and make themselves noticed as much as possible.