

Interview Transcription of Chancellor Victor Boschini

March 2nd, 2021

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

This is Sylviane Greensword, today is March the 2nd, the year is 2021. I am in the Harrison with our chancellor, Dr. Victor Boschini, and it is 11:13 AM. Chancellor Boschini, thank you so much for taking the time to meet with us and share some of your stories and your insights on what's going here academically, administratively. And we're just looking forward to hearing all that you have to say.

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI:

(laughs) Thanks.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: (0:38)

Maybe we can start with a little bit of biographic information, can you tell us a bit about how you were born? You told us a very interesting story earlier about the challenges you had to overcome and how you got to go to college thanks to the help of others. So, can you speak to that a little bit?

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI:

Okay, I was born in Cleveland, Ohio. Grew up Cleveland and in a very like lower income area especially compared to all this; and I went to most of my education at Indiana University, kinda like you did LSU [Louisiana State University], mine was Indiana University. And while I was there, I was lucky enough to work for the chancellor, and I kind of got to see like what they do, but I also got to see what they shouldn't do, and he would always say that to me too. He said, "that's the best part, you do the good things I do and don't do the bad things, and you'll be better." Not better than him but it was a great way to see how a university is run.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm that's interesting-

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI:

And I've been here 18 years and before this I was president of a big state school in Illinois.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: (1:46)

Very good, now how diverse were your surroundings growing up, you were talking about Illinois?

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI:

Yeah, they were more diverse than most people, but they weren't like, it wasn't a hub of diversity in that, it was diverse in this sense, we were all poor (laughs).

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Which is a form of diversity absolutely-

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI:

But I did have in my high school, African American teachers. In fact, one of my favorite teachers was Ms. Bean, and she was a Black woman who taught English and- but I always say this, it was way more diverse than anyone I went to college with because when I went to college, I realized some kids, they never saw a Black person except on TV.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Wow

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI:

And I'm like, "where did you live?"

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Wow

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI:

'Cause being from Cleveland, but most people are from suburbs and fancier places I guess, or something like that. And we lived in this little part of Cleveland called Seven Hills, which yeah. So, I'm not saying it was a hot bed of diversity, but it was way more diverse than any kid that was in my fraternity, when I went to school.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: (2:47)

Gotcha. So, if you're gonna compare like high school versus college, was discussing things like race taboo or are these things that could be discussed openly? I know that sometimes here it's kinda like walking like-stepping on eggshells whenever you mention anything about race. How comfortable were you discussing issues of race growing up?

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI :

I was because I had a dad who was really into that. You know my parents were children of the sixties and so they were gonna fix the world, and you know no matter what happened. My dad was a day laborer, he worked at Ford, and he worked on the line. And he worked in a very diverse environment, and so he was like, no big deal. And I remember in our neighborhood once, this little, we were little boys- you know boys get in fights all the time. And there was a fight and some, one kid called another kid the n-word and we had never heard that before. And that kid's reaction made it real clear to all of us that that is not oh- And so we were talking about that at dinner tonight and I was saying that, and my dad and we, God bless, he's dead now; but we

would tease him sarcastically about this the rest of life because we were like 8 or 9 and he said, he explained what it means and why its bad, and he said, “you don’t have to worry about that because by the time you’re older all these problems-“ and he really meant that. You know he was like, “this won’t be-races will get along, and you won’t have to worry about the Black kids and the white kids.” And you know like 50 years later, he was 86, and we’re like, “dad, we’re still waiting.”

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

(laughs)

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI :

But so, we talked about it in our house, but it wasn’t talked about in general.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: (4:20)

Right, right. And whenever you were working in that other institution that you mentioned prior to coming to TCU, what was the racial climate and issues of diversity? Was it similar to the college when you attended?

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI :

It was much worse-

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Oh.

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI :

And I thought. But because I went to undergrad at a smaller school, and so the problems were all more manageable, even as a kid you would find that. But at the last university, it was a big state school, very, with lots of different issues, but it was not horrible, it was just not-it was worse than where I went to undergrad.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI :

If that’s what you’re asking.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: (5:07)

How does it compare to TCU?

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI :

It was worse than that too, but again it’s a big state school and so it was- What I love about TCU, is if I see, I meaning anybody not me, see a problem you could actually fix it in your lifetime. In

a big state school like that, you can't, there's too much bureaucracy, there's too much state stuff, there's too much going on that inhibits real change, in my opinion. And that's why I'm here.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: (5:31)

Right. So, did you, when you talk about this is the reason why you're here, was this your reason before you came here? Did you react to TCU's reputation, did you manifest interest for this position knowing about the racial problem that you might encounter?

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI :

Oh no, no, I'm sorry, what I mean the reason why I'm here is because its more manageable. Like I saw at a big state school, I could never see anything happen that I wanted to happen in my lifetime. It was too slow and considering this is slow here too but its more manageable. There are only 11,000 of us and it's much more, like also I could know you, I could know who he is, and I don't even know him but I know him. And at my other school, I never knew a real student and I rarely knew a graduate student because I was too busy in all my committees, and unions, and it was a much different environment.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: (6:32)

So, what is your interpretation and your assessment of the current situation at TCU, when it comes to race relations?

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI :

Okay, well first I would say these are only my opinions, so they're only worth that. Second, I would say I'm the wrong person to ask because I'm an old white guy at the top of the pyramid.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Which perspective- It's still valued, yeah.

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI :

Oh, I appreciate that. And so, what I would say is we have, we've made great accomplishments, at least in the 18 years I've seen it, but we have a way far way to go. I always say it like this, it's like world peace, you may never reach it, but you better damn well be working towards it everyday of your life. And I think that's what this is like too.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: (7:15)

Right, so can you tell us a little bit about those victories?

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI :

Oh wow. Well, I'm really proud that we established the whole DEI office, and we have a whole staff in there, that was never here when I first came, and I love that. I'm really proud that every year in the 18 years I've been here we've had more diverse student body than ever before. And

for the past 18 years we've gone up in the number of non-white people here every year. I'm not against the white people either, I don't wanna say that, but I just think you can't have a real world with everybody that looks like me. And that's definitely not gonna be the world you're going to live in.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: (7:54)

True, that's true. Now, you have always said that you wanted to see TCU more racially diverse, and you know we can't quote you on x number of times, you've made it very clear that this is something you want to see happen. So, talking about the Race and Reconciliation Initiative, since that's the entity on whose behalf we are, what prompted you and the Board of Trustees to dig into the issues that go as far back as slavery and the Confederacy? How does that impact the present, you know in your understanding of things? Let's say, for example, we live in the South, we already know slavery happened in the South, we know that you know the South was on the side of the Confederacy, so why do you think it's important to grapple with such connections to slavery and the Confederacy among the TCU founders?

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI :

Well, because you're right, we do know that it exists, but it's very- for most people, especially in my opinion, for most white people its very surface. Like I can say the Civil War is 1861-1865, the Emancipation Proclamation blah blah blah. But that's really all they know, and so I think we have to face it because 1: it's reality, 2: it did happen, we're not making this stuff up. And I never think it hurt- I like history, I'm a history guy, so I think its always good to know the history of wherever you are and whatever institution you're involved in because the past shapes the present shapes the future. And you also asked what motivated us to do this? Everything around us. All of sudden there was so much popping in this whole social justice initiative, all these initiatives, and it just one day I'm like, not me personally, but a lot of us were like: we have to do this, we have to face this, we have to expose it, and we have to not celebrate it, but we have to make sure people understand it, if only so it never happens again.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: (9:59)

Very, very interesting. If you compare TCU with other institutions, in terms of race relations, how do we compare to them? Do you think we're better off, are we worse? Where do we stand in that whole fight for social justice, and also in terms of the problems and challenges that we are facing now as a multiracial community?

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI :

Right. Well, I've only worked at seven schools and gone to four, so I only have experience at eleven schools, out of the 3,500 in America; and I always say it like this, its better here than any place I've ever worked or gone, but that doesn't mean it's good.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Mhm.

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI :

It just means it's better. And again, remember you're taking that from an old white guy, yeah.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: (0:06)

(laughs) Okay. So, I want to address a quote from Chancellor [McGruder Ellis] Sadler, back in 1964, which is the year when TCU got integrated. He said, and some people say he predicted that, despite the integration being made official, he said quote, "We will never have very many negro students enrolled, our admission requirements and course requirements are being raised increasingly and very few negro students will qualify for admission. Our tuition and fees will be raised from time to time and relatively few negro people will have the funds necessary to finance the kind of education we offer here." He also talked about institutions that are primarily Black institutions and said that Black people would prefer to attend these institutions rather than TCU. What do you make of a quote like that, a statement like that? Especially knowing that the Black enrollment is still relatively low, tuition has increased as he said, so what can we make of what former Chancellor [McGruder Ellis] Sadler stated?

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI :

Okay, I like to say a lot of things about that. Two things I want to point out is: one, I think that the 29% of people who are on campus now, who are non-white prove that what he said isn't true or isn't reality. And two, especially the end part of what he said, I always think it's interesting when someone else tries to speak for Blacks, that's not Black. I also think that nobody can speak for an entire race in general anyway, but it'd be much easier for me to speak for that race if I was a member of that. So, I just think that he was a product of his times and I think we've proven that what he thought was not correct.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: (2:02)

Okay, and what about raising tuitions and things like that, do you think that it's a deterrent to African American applicants?

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI :

I don't and for this reason. I don't like when people equate poor with minority because that's not always true, and so I don't like that. And the other reason why I don't like that is you have to look at how much institutional aid we have now. And so, really who do you know here that really pays \$60,000, lets be honest, and so, my opinion is if you really wanna go to TCU, you could find a way to make that happen. And maybe it's because of my background, I just feel like you can find a way. Now when I was a kid, I could work all summer and make enough, not to pay for college even, but to pay for myself to live all year, now a kid can't do that I totally get that, but that's why we have better financial aid.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: (3:01)

Now, thanks for that. You talked about your childhood; can you elaborate a little bit on that 'cause you just throw it in here like you're teasing us. What do you mean when you're talking about your background and your childhood?

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI :

Well, this shouldn't be about me, that's why I don't like to do that-

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

No, it is about you!

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI :

Okay.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

(laughs).

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI :

But I would just say this, hard workers will always succeed no matter what race you are, no matter what socioeconomic category you are, if you work hard, you're always gonna succeed 'cause you'll find a way to make that happen. And I had a dad who was a ta-, my dad worked seven days a week 'cause he had to not cause he wanted to. Literally he worked Friday, Saturday, Sunday every day and then there were times when he would go on strike because he was part of a union. Those were scary times because you didn't have any money coming in, and he would have to move to another city and get a job during that, which he did. And so then, so I mean I just think it affects your whole world view and the world view I got is that I shouldn't let anybody put limitations on me except for myself. And so, how do I do that, I just work hard, and I make everything happen. Now, I had the advantage of being white and I totally get that, and that's the other difference I had, but I still think it works for everybody nowadays.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: (4:16)

Thank you. Now, you mentioned the allegation of racism and you know the whole media coverage a few minutes ago. Now these have been, although you know the summer 2020, the social justice movement just became even more massive, but we know that such allegations or such media coverage, you know it has been going on for several years now in regards to TCU. Can you discuss how a chancellor can intervene in such situations? What is a chancellor's role when it comes to race relations and what specific action can a chancellor perform? I know that there are always limitations in terms of power and authority, but in the same framework what can be done from your office?

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI :

Well, I think the main thing is something you said, I think the limitations are much greater than people think on any one person, and I also am not a person who wants power because I don't think that's lasting. I want influence and so what I'm trying to do is set a tone, and my tone on this whole race thing is that there's room at the table for everybody. And what is good about that is other people on campus then will self-select out, especially staff and faculty members, if they don't like that because they are like "Hey, if the top guy thinks that." And so that's, I think my main impact on social justice is I can limit, and I can constantly reaffirm it, and I repeat the same three things over and over again on those issues, and I don't care if people get tired of hearing it. But what happens then is eventually it self-selects some people out and it brings voice to some people who thought they didn't have a voice, I hope.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: (6:12)

Mhm. In a previous interview a few years ago, you said that whenever you're trying to implement something, funding is always a problem. It's always a hinderance, it's always something that can slow us down or speed up the process. In the case of race relation, what can money do?

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI :

Well, it can bring a critical mass of non-white people to your campus, and that's what it's done. That's-

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

By way of scholarships or financial aid-

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI :

That's financial aid, right? That helps a lot. It can also pay for institutional programs like the whole DEI office, and it can also do things like that. And I also don't like when people say, "oh you always say its all about the money and blah blah," like you know what its not all about the money but it's a lot about the money, let's be honest. And so, I'm just honest about it and I'm like we have to find people that are willing to fund these efforts, and so far, people have been falling over me to fund these efforts, which has been great. Which I think is also a reflection of what's happening in society.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: (7:14)

Mhm, and you know one of the things you have said that you like about TCU is how pleasant the community is. I remember you said that this place is an icebreaker.

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI :

Right.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

I love that quote. What do you think that the social justice of summer 2020 does to our image and reputation as an institution, especially the media coverage? Do you think it's bringing to

light things that are really happening in that's it offering more transparency, or do you think that instead it presents a distorted image of how agreeable TCU campus can be?

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI :

I don't know that's a good question. I think it presents what is and so whether I think it's bad or not, doesn't matter, or whether I think it's distorted doesn't matter, it is what is. And so, I actually think it's good because I think people today, students are looking at colleges, they want honesty they want transparency, and a lot of them want to go to a place where they can make a difference. And I'm like hey come on down to Fort Worth, 'cause we got plenty of problems here that you can fight. And the thing is like I'm saying, what the campus are saying is you could actually make a difference. I actually think you as a student could make a bigger difference than I as a chancellor could ever make.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: (8:41)

So how do we change a culture?

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI :

We already are, just by doing this the whole Race and Reconciliation- even if we did nothing, which we're doing tons in Race and Reconciliation, except for establish it, sends a message. The fact that we actually have real substance behind that message, makes it even better.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Very good. I only have just a few more questions. The position of, he's now a retiree, Cornell Thomas-

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI :

Yes.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: (9:13)

Can you tell us a little bit about the circumstances for his departure and what is- because people are talking on campus, but what is the Chancellor's word on it?

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI :

Yeah.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Why did he leave?

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI :

Wow, because I was here for the first couple years when he worked with me-

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI :

Because he got a job as president of another school, yeah so. If there's something more to that I didn't know that, and I knew him pretty well, and then he even came back here and was on our faculty when he retired from that job.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: (9:42)

And what is kind of puzzling me is, what his position in your office was, was you know important, but why has the position been evaporated? Why-

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI :

It didn't, what that position eventually evolved into was the position that Dr. [Darron] Turner had, and that's why I was kind of taken aback when we had a group on campus demanding that be a cabinet level position. I'm like, see I'm not a big person that kind of symbolic stuff doesn't mean a lot to me, so I'm like sure we'll put him on cabinet, and we did because he'd always been there anyways, he'd been doing all those functions and I was like "Well, that's fine." But obviously it wasn't for some people. But yeah, I think it just kind of evolved into the office that Dr. [Darron] Turner ran.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: (10:27)

Oh, thank you for clarifying this. And then on a different topic, freedom of expression. So we had those surveys with RRI and people been giving us feedback as to the value or the relevance of RRI, most of that feedback was pretty positive. We had a few that were not so positive. We saw that there's been some controversy also with some people in the TCU community's social media for example, and freedom of expression has been a controversial topic, especially when you know social media is involved its always amplified. And some have argued that people should be able to state their views without fear of retaliation. Is there or should there be a space for students and faculty who still oppose integration, and if so or if not so, what is your message to them?

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI :

Wow, first of all I'm like, "hello honey"-

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

(laughs).

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI :

To them. "It's not 1950, what the hell are you talking about, that train left whether you like it or not, and that train's about to run over you," if you're that person. So, I would say no, there's not a space for non-integration on our campus. I do think though, and this is the hard grub, I'm a big believer in free speech, and I think free speech actually protects those who are in more disadvantaged groups. They may not realize that, but in the long run, I think it protects you more

than it protects me as an old white man, but I'm all for free speech and that's where the grub comes in, but I'm not for hate speech and that's the difference. And I'm more than willing to call somebody out on hate speech and get rid of somebody, and I've done that in the past. But I would have to say, I think my opinion of hate speech is much more, I don't know, what evidence towards I'm pointing, than someone else's might be. Now, if you're inciting violence or if you're against categorically trying to physically harm one race or the other, that's definitely hate speech, but I think what happens nowadays because of the media, there's a lot of mean speech. I call what people do mean speech, and they are more than happy to publicize their every word on social media, and I try to just ignore a lot of that, but again I'm old, I'm an old white guy. Maybe if I'm a 19-year-old Black man, that's harder to ignore, I totally get that, but I rather help you through that then squelch free speech.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: (13:11)

Thank you for saying that. And my final question, there's a lot of talk about white privilege and white allyship, and as a Caucasian administrator in a higher ed institution, how do you start that constructive discussion on race with fellow white educators and administrators? How do you start dialogue with employees, with students, with community members, without sounding like you know elitist, or dismissive, or even judgmental?

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI :

Right.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

'Cause I mean we have to provide free space as well.

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI :

Right.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

So.

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI :

That's really hard and I face that every day because I feel like I get too preachy and too judgmental a lot of the time on that, seriously. And then what happens is the person I'm trying to "convert" I actually turn away or whatever that right word. You know they get mad and they just take their toys and go home, and that's not what I want. So, I don't have the answer to that but again I'm gonna keep trying. But it is hard because you do feel like, at least I do feel like whoa, I listen to myself and I'm like oh geez I would hate that guy, you know, but I don't know if you have better ideas, I'm open to them. And I think the RRI will help do that too because it just makes people talk about a lot of the stuff that we wouldn't have talked about.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD: (14:32)

Well, thank you. Is there anything else that you would like to share with the Race and Reconciliation Initiative, or with the people who will be watching this video?

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI :

Oh gosh, how much time do you have? Number one: that this is not easy stuff. Number two: that this is a long-term thing not a short-term fix, and so we all have to be patient and I understand, again it's easier for me to be patient because I'm at the top of the pyramid, I totally get that. But we've made great changes in the 18 years I've witnessed it here, but if you're a student you really only are involved in two or three of those years and so it doesn't seem like that fast to you, whatever, and so I would ask for your patience. I would also say there are a lot of Karens out there right now on both sides of every issue and so to everyone I would just say, give everyone you work with a little more grace. You know, I just think that if you would give me a chance to prove I was a fool to you before you assumed it, everything would be much better; and then if you still think I'm a fool, tell me and let me change 'cause most people don't wanna be fools. But I just think everybody outta like take a deep breath, step back a second, and you know try to work with one another a little better.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

That's beautiful. Well, Chancellor Boschini thank you so much for your time, thank you for sharing, and we truly appreciate your contribution to this project.

DR. VICTOR BOSCHINI :

Thank you, thanks for doing this.

END