

In order of appearance:

Terry Cowles, Office of Customer Focused Government

Darcy, student

Hayley, student

Jordan, student

Mike Ledyard, who also works for the Office of Customer Focused Government

Elizabeth, student

Present but not seen:

Charles Burkett

Katie, student

Conversation between Terry Cowles of the Office of Customer Focused Government; Mike Ledyard who also works for the Office of Customer Focused Government; and students Darcy, Jordan, Elizabeth, and Hayley.

The video starts with Cowles in the middle of a sentence, after Darcy has asked why he thinks that facilities workers are not part of the core mission of our university.

Cowles: . . . that are not, directly student-based. And we're focused on the fact that we have an opportunity to help this campus be able to save some money, with regards to what is not student-based versus what is student-based.

Darcy: Ok well so, as a student here, at UT, I would have to say that my experience on campus is directly influenced by the workers who are here. And I know for a fact that I wouldn't be here and I wouldn't have the experience that I'm having if I didn't have workers who were there supporting me and working for me and for the campus community as a whole. Hayley also had a question.

Hayley: Yeah, so I've been following this issue for the past two years and have been really frustrated because I want to believe in my government; I voted for Governor Haslam. And I just want to believe that our government would be transparent and work with constituents and listen to them and hear their concerns. And I'm just curious, I know that there were two different public comment periods about this process, and over a thousand Tennesseans have commented, the large majority of which are against outsourcing and against this plan. So I'm just wondering, when is the governor's office going to respond to those comments? And if they're going to respond in any way?

Cowles: Well, we saw the comments, and we did go through those in the office. But I think you need to appreciate that what we're working for is all 6.5 million citizens in this state. And so we have an opportunity here, and we believe it's a real opportunity, to be able to help our citizens save some money, by delivering as good or better services that are being provided today. And so we're gonna explore that and see where that ultimately ends up. Based on everything we can see at this moment in time, it looks very real, at this stage. But we've still got to go through a number of steps. We just had a very productive meeting, with leadership here at the University of Tennessee in

Knoxville, and again I want to emphasize that at the end of the day that it's gonna be their decision, as to whether to go forward with this or not. We've been very clear about that; nothing's changed.

Hayley: I was curious about that too. I've heard different dates for when the university will be able to opt in or out—somewhere in May or June. Do you know more specifically-

Cowles: There is no deadline. Period. When we have a contract, which we're very close to having completed at this point, when we have a contract my expectation is that campuses and for that manner general government facilities all through the state will be coming into that contract at different points in time. It has to be when they're ready to do that and it makes the most sense for them to do so. They've gotta do the business case justification for it, at the end of the day, and the Trustees in the case of the University of Tennessee, and also the Boards that are in the case of the other universities that are the former TBR [Tennessee Board of Regents] universities, will be the ones that will also want to see, you know, how is the outsourcing coming together, and is this a good business decision for us to make or is it not?

Hayley: I've also heard, sorry-

Darcy: Last question.

Hayley: I've also heard that other states have been interested in learning more about how this process has gone and about privatizing their own states. Is that true and have other states expressed interest? And how do you feel about that, when this has not actually gone through yet?

Cowles: Well, part of it has gone through. Don't forget that we already have this implemented in all the office buildings in downtown Nashville, it's already in place. It's been in place now for-three years?

Off-camera: Three and a half.

Cowles: Three and a half years. So we've got quite a bit of history with that. And you are correct, there are a lot of states watching us and very interested in what comes out of this whole process. Last count, there's about 15 of them that are really interested in seeing what's transpiring here. From all over the country, no particular region or anything; literally spread all over the country.

Jordan: I have a question. Do you have any comment regarding Governor Haslam's previous holdings in Jones Lang LaSalle?

Cowles: No I don't. I think that's been completely blown out of proportion as to what is serious there. Anybody's got a mutual fund probably has JLL in their portfolio.

Ledyard: Actually it's in your retirement [inaudible].

Cowles: We just learned all the retirement system is holding JLL stock, so you know if you've got any kind of mutual fund, there's no telling. You may be holding it yourself if you have such a thing. I'm gonna have to run, I've got an appointment with these guys. But I appreciate your questions. I certainly hear you in terms of your interest in this. And we're trying to be as transparent as we can. Now we went through a period of time with the procurement where we had to be a lot more closed door; that's how procurement works. We're not in that anymore, so we're really moving in a process that's very different at this point. And I would suggest to you that the emphasis is going to start shifting to the campuses, in the case of higher education. It's going to shift to the departments, in the case of general government at this point. All we're putting in place is a contract to use; it'll be up to those entities to decide whether to use it or not.

Elizabeth: Do you not think making a contract pressures the universities to go ahead and be part of it? Since you're making a very large contract with JLL?

Cowles: I don't think, when we are so clear that it's up to the campuses to make the decision, I don't see how that's the case at all. I mean you won't ever hear anything different about that.

Ledyard: Statewide contracts are the standard operating procedure. UT uses a statewide contract for rental cars, ok?

Elizabeth: Well, there have been some issues with the rental cars, also. I don't know if y'all wanna get into that right now.

Hayley: In your meeting, I was curious, because you spoke with [inaudible] were you able to hear a little bit about how our campus runs, as far as facilities services, about how holistic and just how differently it runs than just outsourcing custodial or something like that?

Cowles: Yeah, of course we did. You know, and every campus has its own little nuances that are, that exist from [inaudible] and this is the very, this is the largest of all the campuses so it obviously has a very different need than certainly some of the others have at this point. So yes, we have a very active, ongoing dialogue.

Hayley: And one more thing.

Cowles: We are, we are listening.

Hayley: One more thing. You said you're going to be as transparent as possible. Have you guys been able to speak to any campus workers, state workers that would be affected by this? And would you be willing to have kind of an open forum? Some way to get face to face time with the people who would be directly affected.

Cowles: I think we're heading toward that. We're, to be perfectly clear, up to this point, since we've been approaching this thing from the standpoint of, what you can, every campus has the decision whether they're gonna be part of it or not, why spend a lot of time on that if you're not gonna be part of it? Well, if you're gonna be part of it there's gonna be an opportunity to engage. And quite frankly I think that would be a problem if we didn't get that done. We had an open discussion about that today as well.

[Darcy and Jordan speaking at the same time]

Jordan: So you mentioned-

Darcy: So for the past two years you've had the corporations having a seat at the table involved in this, writing this contract process, and now is actually the time that you feel that it's necessary to start hearing the voices of the workers being affected. I would think that those were the voices you should have been listening to from the very beginning, and not almost two years into the process.

Cowles: Well. That's your view on it, of course.

Darcy: Well we appreciate the fact that you've said you're going to start being more transparent, because we still have plenty of questions. And we appreciate that you heard from us today, and this won't be last time you hear from us. We still have quite a few more questions from now until the end of this, so.

Cowles: Ok.

Darcy: We appreciate your time.

Cowles: Ok and thank you. Nice to meet you.

Darcy: Nice to meet you as well.