



PHOTO CREDIT: HOPE RAWLSON

Citizen guest panel on air

# A MORNING WITH FOX

Fox News films segment at PHC ahead of midterm election

Thud, thud, thud. My 3-inch heels hit the ground in rapid succession as I raced down the sidewalk towards Founders while dressed in business casual at 5 a.m.

A crisis was unfolding. Ainsley Earhardt needed some eyelash glue, and I was going to get it to her.

PHC hosted a live segment of Fox and Friends, the network's daily morning show, in the library last Friday. Junior Hope Rawlson, senior Grace Torgerson, and I were "runners" behind the scenes, charged with the job of helping in a pinch with anything the staff or crew needed.

I never could have guessed that my main task would be to locate eyelash glue. Earhardt, one of the hosts, had forgotten hers. When we realized that none

of the drugstores in town opened until 8 a.m., we frantically called around campus until we found someone with a bottle. I dashed off to D1, got the glue, and then hurried back through the darkness.

I could hear Thomas Ziemnick, PHC's VP of Advancement, laughing at me as I ran up, waving the bottle. Crisis averted.

Fox and Friends is hosted by Steve Doco, Brian Kilmeade, and Earhardt. The show reports on a variety of topics including health, politics, news, and celebrities. Earhardt was hosting a town hall segment focused on the issues that most concerned parents in Loudoun County as midterms approach.

Torgerson, Rawlson, and I arrived on set at 4 a.m. and found the library com-

pletely transformed. Wires and cables ran in every direction. Large cameras and lights strategically placed at various angles focused on a tall chair for Earhardt and ten seats for guests. I could hear a steady buzz of equipment in the air.

"That's the frequency to help us tune into the stations in New York," explained Jim, one of the technicians.

Three men controlled the cameras, checking the lighting and ensuring that the picture was on target. Torgerson sat in Earhardt's chair and read from the teleprompter to check the sound.

At 5 a.m., guests began to arrive and were ushered into the HSLDA breakroom where they chatted and snacked on a spread of pastries, fruit, and coffee.

“I’m not nervous,” said Cheryl Onderchain, a guest parent who had appeared on Fox a couple times before. “And I do prefer being on live TV because they aren’t able to twist or edit your words.”

Ten parents comprised the panel, several of whom had been on the show before. Among them was Fred Rege, who emigrated from Kenya as a child, Ram Venkatachalam, who plans to run for Loudoun County Supervisor, Xi Van Fleet, who witnessed Chairman Mao’s revolution, and Will Estrada, president of the Parental Rights Foundation.

“Usually, the producers find people for their shows by scanning the papers or social media to see who’s an active voice on an issue,” Jim said. “Then they’ll reach out.”

The guests were brought into the library and seated as a panel a little before 6 a.m. They chatted amongst themselves until Bailey, Earhardt’s producer, walked into the room in a smart pink suit jacket and signaled that the segment would begin soon. A moment later, Earhardt entered with a bright smile as she inquired in her slight southern drawl, “How all y’all doing?”

The show ran live from 6 to 9 a.m., and

the segments were filmed in short sections over that period.

Earhardt opened the segment with a nice shout-out for PHC. “We’re here at Patrick Henry College, a beautiful campus with a lot of amazing students ... some of our panel have hired them and they say they’re great to have in the office because they’re really good individuals.”

Torgerson, Rawlson, and I sat right behind the main cameras. We watched the interviews unfold live and then air seconds later on national television. Periodically, we turned to mouth to each other, “This is so cool!”

Earhardt briefly touched upon issues of climate change and recent hate attacks against police, but the bulk of conversation remained firmly centered around education.

“We’re all here for different reasons, but I truly believe that education should not be a partisan issue,” said Bonnie Myshrall, president of Fairfax’s County Parent’s Association.

For some parents, COVID revealed the technological inadequacies of the school system.

Tracy Compton witnessed her kindergarten cry from the stress of attending

school through a screen each day. She fears her children lost two years of their education due to Covid and distance learning.

Myshrall’s biggest issue is the lowering of academic standards. “Teachers are told they can’t fail students,” Myshrall said. “We’re lowering our standards, and that’s what will hurt our kids long term.”

Another major concern consisted of the political agendas pushed through school curriculums.

“We should not be doing as much of the social engineering and psychiatry in the classroom, but just focusing on what students are there to do in the first place: reading, writing, math—period,” said Amie Bowman, a local parent.

Van Fleet fears that the ideology being propagated in schools will produce a society similar to the one she grew up in in Communist China. “The education of our children is a matter of national security,” she said. “Right now we’re making our kids, the future of our country, activists.”

Estrada summed up why many parents desire to be an active participant in their child’s education and the reason why their request is valid. “We[should] fund students and not systems,” he said. “We love our kids more than any bureaucrat on earth.”

“These are issues we feel strongly about,” Onderchain and Myshrall said after the show. “We discuss it 24/7. We just know what we think and want to share it.”

After the show, we talked to Earhardt who explained how she balances a heavily politicized field with her own beliefs.

“Fox gives me a lot of freedom,” Earhardt said. “They don’t tell me what to say so I can pretty much share where I stand on issues.”

All in all, Fox appreciated PHC lending them our library as a venue and extending our hospitality. “You guys are great,” Bailey said. “We appreciate all of you at PHC.” ♦



From left to right: Torgerson, Earhardt, Rawlson and Jones