

Tulane alumni Douglas Hurley, Lisa Jackson discuss breaking barriers in Presidential Speaker Series

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Tulane alumni Col. Douglas G. Hurley, NASA astronaut and spacecraft commander on the first crewed test flight of the SpaceX Crew Dragon, and Lisa Jackson, vice president of Environment, Policy and Social Initiatives at Apple. (Photo graphic by Melinda Viles)

On Thursday, Feb. 11, Tulane University President Michael Fitts hosted alumni Lisa Jackson (E '83) and Col. Douglas G. Hurley (E '88) in the third installment of the

Presidential Speaker Series. Titled *Mindset: Breaking Barriers*, the episode focused on the distinguished speakers' accomplishments in breaking barriers and opening doors with what President Fitts called a "growth mindset."

Jackson currently serves as vice president of Environment, Policy and Social Initiatives at Apple, and in 2009, she was appointed by President Barack Obama as administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. She is a member of the Board of Tulane and the School of Science and Engineering Board of Advisors. Hurley is a NASA astronaut and was spacecraft commander on the first crewed test flight of the SpaceX Crew Dragon. He currently serves on the Board of Advisors for the Tulane School of Science and Engineering and is an alumnus of Tulane ROTC. You can read more on the many achievements of Hurley and Jackson [here](#).

President Fitts started the episode off by asking about both speakers' career beginnings. Jackson noted that she had the public service impulse from a very early age, namely due to her father's work as a mailman. She grew up wanting to be a doctor but eventually veered toward environmental engineering out of a desire to serve the public good.

"Industry has a responsibility. If you're going to be an engineer, you have a responsibility not just to create the future but to ensure we do so with a level of care that protects future generations."

Hurley attended Tulane on a scholarship after speaking with a Navy recruiter at a college information night. Having grown up in upstate New York, he felt that it was important to experience more of the world, and Tulane and New Orleans gave him the opportunity that would shape his career path, from Navy flight school all the way to the Astronaut Corps.

"I don't know if I'd have ended up in the same career arc had it not been for the personality of the university as well as the personality of the ROTC unit," Hurley said.

For the rest of the discussion, Jackson and Hurley answered questions from President Fitts, students, graduates, and School of Science and Engineering Dean Kimberly Foster. Topics included work-life balance, teamwork, stress management and diversity, among other things. Both offered sage advice. On having to work harder throughout her life to achieve her goals, Jackson stated, "The challenges are really just investments to make you better." On overcoming obstacles, Hurley urged the

importance of staying optimistic and focused.

“You focus on the things you can do, focus on the things that you can improve, and accept the things that you can’t change right away,” he said.

President Fitts closed the episode with a virtual king cake send-off to thank both guests for their time. **You can watch the full episode [here](#).**