

9-1-2015

The Insider

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Recommended Citation

Lee, M. Linda (2015) "The Insider," *Furman Magazine*: Vol. 58 : Iss. 2 , Article 8.
Available at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine/vol58/iss2/8>

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"POLL" VAULTER

Jessica Taylor, NPR's lead digital political reporter, is going above and beyond the horse race of the upcoming election season to provide necessary news.

The winter of 2004 was a turning point for Jessica Taylor '07. That was the year she was assigned to cover the Democratic debate, which Furman was co-hosting, for *The Paladin*. "It was such a cool experience, seeing the candidates up close," she says. "There I was, just 18 years old, and John Edwards, John Kerry, and Howard Dean were answering my questions!"

Fast forward 11 years and the would-be music major who ended up with a degree in political science is again covering candidate debates in her position as lead digital political reporter for National Public Radio (NPR) News in Washington, D.C.

"With the rise of social media, everyone wants to be a journalist these days," says the woman who, in second grade, started a school newspaper called the *Pirate Press*. "But it's not just about writing 140 characters or writing what you see." Reporters, Taylor

The Insider

As the 2016 election heats up, the campaign trail has a new guide.

BY M. LINDA LEE

believes, shoulder a greater responsibility. "We play a vital role in informing the public. NPR audiences want to go behind the story and we try to take them there." This means going places others don't have access to and asking tough questions to get to the bottom of the issues.

How does she identify the important stories in an arena that contains 14 Republican and 5 Democratic candidates? "You have to triage them, in a way," she explains. And being non-biased is key. "I try to

put aside what I think, so my opinions don't bleed into my reporting. Above all, it's important to tell both sides of the story." To do this, Taylor has built good relationships with both Democrats and Republicans over her years in D.C., and she credits her liberal arts education for enabling her to look at politics in the broader context of history.

Going into the 2016 election, Taylor says voters are most concerned with the economy and foreign affairs. They are distrustful of politicians and want to know where the candidates stand on the issues—what's true and what's not. It's her job to plumb the candidates' backgrounds to find out why each believes what they do. Taylor says what she thrives on most is the unpredictability. "From one day to the next, I never know what I'm going to be covering," she admits, "but I know it's going to be exciting." **F**

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