

BELOW THE LINE

USC UPSTATE CHANCELLOR **BENNIE L. HARRIS** SPEAKS WITH
SOUTH CAROLINA LT. GOV. **PAMELA EVETTE**



*South Carolina Lt. Gov. Pamela Evette with Chancellor Bennie L. Harris, Ph.D.
Photos by Myles Alston*

Welcome to Below the Line, a monthly question-and-answer column in which Chancellor Bennie L. Harris, Ph.D., of the University of South Carolina Upstate interviews a leader about change, technology, education, and leadership. This month, Dr. Harris spoke with South Carolina Lt. Gov. Pamela Evette. (This interview has been edited for content, clarity, and length.)

Harris: Let's start at the beginning. You were born in Ohio, the granddaughter of Polish immigrants, and your parents instilled in you the values of hard work and civic involvement. How did those early family years influence and inform your leadership and your ideas today?

Evette: Most of my calling to serve came from my grandparents. My grandmother lived with us while I was growing up. She left Poland at 15 and sailed here seeking the American dream.

Harris: That took a lot of courage.

Evette: Today, you would never let your 15-year-old cross an ocean, but she did. She had an amazing passion for this country. It was not her birthplace, but she felt honored to be here. She told us that if we could ever serve and make this country better, we should always take the opportunity.

My dad always wanted to be an entrepreneur, but times were tough. He had immigrant parents, grew up during the Depression, and was afraid to risk the stability he had. He had a good job with health insurance, and he was putting his kids through school, so why rock the boat? But he always wished for more. He encouraged us to pursue whatever we wanted and not be the roadblock to our own futures.

He told us three things: work hard, do good, and aim higher. I put

that on my challenge coin when I ran for lieutenant governor because it motivated me. My grandparents and parents were a solid foundation, and my dad's unfulfilled desire to become an entrepreneur gave me the push I needed to step out and build something.

Harris: After earning an accounting degree at Cleveland State University and starting your career in finance, you moved to Travelers Rest, South Carolina. What drew you there, and how did relocating influence your personal and professional growth?

Evette: My husband brought me here. We were in the same industry. I traveled to this area for clients, and he introduced me to South Carolina. I loved the weather, the people, everything. When I started my business, the Southeast was growing quickly, so even though I planned to start in Ohio, the growth here made South Carolina the natural home base. I was glad because it was where I wanted to be.

My leadership today comes from what I learned in business. You always have to think five, 10, 15 years ahead. If you are not looking 10 years ahead, you are looking in the rearview mirror. That shaped how I view the state. In my payroll and HR company, we shifted from being payroll-heavy to being a technology company by the time we did our M&A. It showed me the advantages of investing in technology to give clients easier access to information.

That experience drives how I view government. If we harness technology and AI, we can save an incredible amount of taxpayer money.

Harris: You've raised your family on a horse farm in Travelers Rest. How has that lifestyle shaped how you balance work, community, and family? What lessons has it taught you about leadership, resilience, and community?



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Evette: It was a dream. We had little kids and a growing business. Somehow everything fell into place. We had property and built our offices in front of our horse barn. Employees loved it, and our horses were spoiled with treats.

Being close to home let me stay involved with my kids. When I speak to women thinking about starting businesses, their biggest fear is balancing family and work. I tell them that controlling your own schedule is a game-changer. My kids knew we had a business, but I was still the room mom and could go on field trips.

My kids joke that I do not know work-life balance, but I built a calendar that made sure I was intentional about being present for them.

Harris: Sometimes labels like work-life balance create fear. You end up working against the label rather than seeing the glass as half-full. It is like students who become afraid of math; once they believe it is hard, it becomes harder.

Evette: Absolutely.

Harris: You built Quality Business Solutions from the ground up and transformed it into a high-growth company recognized among the nation's fastest-growing women-led businesses. What leadership principles from your entrepreneurial journey have most influenced your approach as lieutenant governor?

Evette: Being present. I was always present at work and built strong relationships with clients. That separated QBS from competitors. We met people where they were and tried to offer something different.

As lieutenant governor, I have spent seven

years traveling the state, listening to people, hearing what works and what needs improvement.



I thought (Gov. McMaster) wanted me for a board or commission, and my husband said to say no because our schedules were full. But the governor told me he wanted a businessperson with a fresh set of eyes. That resonated with me. Being the first Republican woman lieutenant governor and the first elected jointly brought a huge sense of responsibility. I wanted to set a high bar and be a good example for my children and for young people.

Harris: I do not know many lieutenant governors by name, but I know yours because you are the most present lieutenant governor I have seen. You speak in classes here at USC Upstate, come to talent forums, and add value everywhere you go. Thank you.

Evette: Thank you.

Harris: You made history as South Carolina's first Republican woman to serve as lieutenant governor and the first to be elected jointly with the governor. How has that unique path shaped your priorities and the way you serve?

Evette: I got to know the governor during the presidential election because we both supported President Trump. When he became the first governor allowed to pick his running mate, he called me. I thought he wanted me for a board or commission, and my husband said to say no because our schedules were full. But the governor told me he wanted a businessperson with a fresh set of eyes. That resonated with me. Being the first Republican woman lieutenant governor and the first elected jointly brought a huge sense of responsibility. I wanted to set a high bar and be a good example for my children and for young people.

A month into my term, a father brought his young daughter, Fern, to meet me. He said he brought her because she asked if any ladies worked in the Capitol. That moment hit me hard. Young eyes are watching.

It reminded me that I must lead with grace and remember that elected officials represent everyone, not only those who voted for them. You can run with a party label, but when you serve, you serve everyone.

Harris: As a former business leader, you have championed small businesses and public-private partnerships. What do you see as South Carolina's greatest strength in supporting small business innovation and growth?

Evette: I think our greatest strength is our colleges, technical colleges, and community colleges. When businesses from around the country and the globe talk to us, they talk about workforce.

We have the ability to create an amazing workforce, which is why the governor and I pushed for more people with secondary degrees and certifications. That is how we developed the WIN scholarships, which have impacted 121,000 South Carolinians.

I would love to see a day when every high school student graduates college-ready, military-ready, or work-ready. We need to expand certifications in K-12 for students who do not yet see themselves in college. We have many jobs to fill, and we want to keep students engaged by giving them a pathway.

We need to view learning as lifelong. When I was young, you picked a career and expected to retire in that career. That is not how life works anymore. Technology is changing fast, and careers are changing with it. You have to go in understanding that.