Nungesser shares lessons in business, politics in appearance at Freeman School

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Lieutenant Governor Billy Nungesser answers a question from a student during an appearance at the Freeman School on March 26.

Louisiana Lieutenant Governor Billy Nungesser visited Tulane University's Freeman School of Business on March 26 to share lessons from his life and career with students.

Speaking to Professor of Practice Larry Merington’s Business Capstone class, Nungesser, who has served as lieutenant governor since 2016, began by describing his first venture, General Marine Leasing Co.

While working for his father’s catering company serving offshore drilling rigs, Nungesser got an idea to transform shipping containers into living quarters for offshore workers.

“People told me it’s not going to work, and you can’t do it,” he said. “But I was able to get a 20-foot container and put in six bunks, a kitchen and a bathroom.”

Nungesser was so dedicated to the idea that he sold his house and moved into one of the containers.

“Everybody asked why I waited so long to get married,” he quipped. “Well, it was tough getting a date living in a shipping container.”

Nungesser started by building 50 lodgings for Shell and 50 for Chevron. By the time he sold the company, he had 1,000 buildings in the Gulf.

“Today, they even build homes out of these containers,” he said. “You have to be passionate. They told me I couldn’t do it, but I was determined to prove them wrong.”

After selling General Marine Leasing, Nungesser purchased 2,000 acres in Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana, and built Pointe Celeste Therapeutic Riding Center to give individuals with physical or mental disabilities the opportunity to ride horses and improve their physical and emotional well-being.

“I saw miracles happen on the backs of those horses,” Nungesser said. “There was one little girl who was told she was paralyzed and would never walk again. I watched her dance at her wedding a couple years ago.”

Nungesser’s frustration over the government’s slow response to Hurricane Katrina spurred his decision to enter public service.

“We rode out Katrina because I didn’t want to leave the horses,” Nungesser said. “After the storm, we rescued hundreds of animals and people, and I never saw a politician the whole time. So, I decided to run for office.”

Beginning with his election as Plaquemines Parish president in 2006, Nungesser has made environmental protection a cornerstone of his career. As a public official, he saw firsthand the devastation that the Deepwater Horizon oil spill wreaked on his community and local wildlife.

In the aftermath of the spill, Nungesser appeared frequently on cable news shows, imploring federal officials to act. “I was on CNN every night with Anderson Cooper,” Nungesser recalls.

While some criticized Nungesser as a grandstander for his frequent TV appearances, he eventually garnered the attention of President Obama.

“I called the president twice,” Nungesser said. “Everything we asked him for he implemented to help us save the birds and the animals. That was a time in my life when I learned that standing up for the right thing, even with all the criticism you get, can make a difference.”



Nungesser spoke to students in the Business Capstone course, which puts Freeman School senior to work on consulting projects for local and regional companies.

The Business Capstone course was designed to put seniors to work on consulting projects that enable them to apply all the skills they’ve learned in the BSM program. Adjunct Lecturer Elia Brodsky, who helped arrange Nungesser’s visit, said students could draw on Nungesser’s insights while working on their capstone projects.

“The lieutenant governor emphasized the importance of bold thinking, persistence and leading with purpose — lessons that are directly applicable to students’ capstone work,” Brodsky said. “Whether they are building strategies for local businesses, analyzing public health data or launching community-focused initiatives, students are encouraged to approach their projects with creativity, confidence and a genuine desire to serve. Nungesser’s story reinforces the idea that impactful work often starts with a strong vision and the courage to pursue it, even when others doubt you.”

“The capstone’s ultimate goal is to produce the best prepared businessperson possible and someone who can have a lasting impact in an organization,” added Merington, coordinator of the capstone program. “In sharing his career story, Billy Nungesser showed a crowded room of capstone students what hard work, preparation and a never-give-up attitude can accomplish.”