

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH JAMES TAYLOR

SUBJECT: ELECTION REFORM: LIFE AS A POLITICAL SURROGATE

MODERATOR: THERESA WERNER, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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**THERESA WERNER:** (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon, and welcome to the National Press Club. My name is Theresa Werner, and I am the 105<sup>th</sup> President of the National Press Club. We are the world's leading professional organization for journalists committed to our profession's future through our programming and events such as this while fostering a free press worldwide. For more information about the National Press Club, please visit our website, [www.press.org](http://www.press.org). To donate to programs offered to the public through our National Press Club Journalism Institute, please visit [press.org/institute](http://press.org/institute).

On behalf of our members worldwide, I'd like to welcome our speaker and those of you attending today's event. Our head table includes guests of our speaker as well as working journalists who are National Press Club members. And if you hear applause in our audience, we would note that members of the general public are attending so it is not necessarily a lack of journalistic objectivity.

I'd also like to welcome our C-SPAN and our Public Radio audiences. Our luncheons are also featured on our member-produced weekly Podcast from the National Press Club available on iTunes. You can also follow the action on Twitter using hashtag NPClunch. After our guest's speech concludes, I'll have a Q&A, and I'll ask as many questions as time permits. Now I would like to introduce our head table guests, and I'd ask each of you here to please stand briefly as your name is announced.

From your right, Michael Phelps, Publisher, President and CEO of the *Washington Examiner*; Doris Margulies, President, Editorial Associates; Jerry Zremski,

Washington Bureau Chief, *Buffalo News* and former National Press Club President; Laura Lee, Producer, NPR, and a new member to the National Press Club; Kim Taylor, former director of press for the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and James's wife.

I'm going to skip our speaker here, and next we have Donna Leinwand Leger, *USA Today*, and former National Press Club President; Marilou Donahue, host, "Artistically Speaking," and Speakers Committee member who organized today's event; John Crumpler, guest of the speaker; Jonathan Salant, reporter, Bloomberg News, former President of the National Press Club; Marc Wojno, Senior Associate Editor, Kiplinger Personal Finances. (Applause)

Thank you all for joining us here today. I really don't need to introduce James Taylor to you in that we all feel that we know him and his music. But I'll take a moment to remind you of how and why we've come to feel we know him. Mr. Taylor's music embodies the art of songwriting in its most personal and universal forms. He is a master at describing specific, even autobiographical situations, in a way that resonates with people from everywhere.

For more than 40 years, Taylor has been a compass for his fans, articulating moments of pain and joy and letting his listeners know that they are not alone. James Taylor has sold close to one hundred million albums in his career. That is a very big number. Look up to the stars on a clear night, that's what a hundred million looks like. And he's sung at iconic and American locations like Carnegie Hall, Fenway Park, at President Barack Obama's inauguration, and at the Academy Awards. He is a five time Grammy Award winner, and he was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2000. He is the recipient of the National Medal of Arts. And even with his busy career, Taylor has found time for politics.

Among the most active in the Obama surrogates in the 2012 campaign, James Taylor crisscrossed the country in support of the President performing alongside with his wife, Kim, spreading the campaign message wherever and whenever he was called upon to do so. James' work for the President springs from a lifetime of engagement and service to progressive causes and began in 2008 when Taylor performed in large rallies in five cities in his native North Carolina. His efforts there generated thousands of volunteers and helped win the state for the Democrats for the first time since 1976.

The last year has been especially busy for the Taylors on the campaign trail. Over 50 radio and television interviews and 40 events in 12 states, from concerts in living rooms and field offices opening to the final night of the Democratic National Convention, and rally in the closing days of the campaign with the President in New Hampshire. And just yesterday, he helped brighten up Washington, D. C. by performing at the lighting of the national Christmas tree. In that moment, as in many others, his music was with us as we celebrated the season, our families and our country. Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to welcome James Taylor. (Applause)

**MR. TAYLOR:** Thank you, Theresa, thank you very much. And thank you, Bill, and thank you, Susan, for these delicious cupcakes, Fire and Rain cupcakes. It did not go unnoticed. I've got a fire one myself, mighty tasty. You know, I titled this thing today "Election Reform" because I thought I needed to have a title. But actually, I probably know less about election reform than pretty much everybody in this room. So I will talk a little bit about it towards the end.

Really, what I wanted to do is describe a pilgrim's progress through the political as a citizen engaged in the political process as a surrogate. But I'll start, actually, as I used to start, and have started, many of my performances in the past with a song. This is a song that I-- it's the earliest of my songs, not the first song that I wrote because that's unlistenable (sic). But this is the song that I played for-- I'm nervous today, but on this occasion I was clinically nervous. I played for Paul McCartney and George Harrison in 1968 in London, in February, I guess, of '68 in London. I had been lucky enough to get an opportunity to audition for Apple Records. They were signing acts at the time, I was 19 years old. I had my guitar and I had this song that I played for them, and I'll play it for you now.

[singing]

**MR. TAYLOR:** So it turned out well. I was nervous. It was faster and higher in pitch than I just played it. I was younger, and I was having an out of body experience being in the same room as two living Beatles. It was amazing because I was a huge Beatles fan. And McCartney liked it enough that he signed me to the label and George Harrison liked the song enough that he went home and wrote it himself. (Laughter) But actually, I've ripped off so many Beatles tunes in my life that turnabout is fair play.

So, how do I get into politics from being basically a sort of professional autobiographer? I think I just-- and is it false advertising to sort of attract people for one thing and then ask them to pay attention to something else? I suppose a little bit, it is. But I feel so motivated, particularly in these past two elections, by what a wonderful President I feel Barack Obama is and by how important I think it is that he get a chance to govern, if that's possible with this Congress.

But anyway, my father really gave me my politics, probably that happened with a lot of us here. And we grew up in North Carolina. I'm a yellow dog Democrat, as he was, unapologetic liberal, a definite progressive in my politics and my beliefs. And in a way, I sort of think that I was defined, and I'm surprised to hear myself say it, but defined by Jesse Helms to a certain extent. Because in North Carolina in those days, Jesse Helms owned the only TV station. It was WRAL in Raleigh, and he would go on. Programming was thin on the ground and he would go on and deliver these screeds or harangues, these rants. And those of us living in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, where my father worked for the University of North Carolina, he had studied medicine in Cambridge, in Massachusetts, and had met my mother there, but he had moved the family back to North Carolina.

And, you know, Chapel Hill was sort of a progressive enclave in those days, and Jesse Helms would refer to it in his TV editorials as Communist Hill, he'd call it Communist Hill. And in a way, that sort of defined-- was an early point as an antagonist, I feel as though he helped define me politically. And over the years, I've tried unsuccessfully a sad succession of North Carolina Democrats trying to unseat Jesse Helms. I never managed to do it, we never managed to do it in all those years. My friend, John Crumpler, who is from North Carolina here tonight, actually got my wife, Kim, and I, deeply involved in the Obama campaign, and he's nodding his head because as a North Carolinian, he knows about Jesse Helms.

Anyway, my father and his generation, I remember the first political campaign that I'm aware of being-- my family being enthusiastic about Adlai Stephenson over Eisenhower back in '56. And my father and his generation in Chapel Hill were really-- they built a bridge and sort of a bridgehead, how they were pro higher education, pro infrastructure, they were liberal in their politics and progressive and they were deeply anti-segregationists and anti-Jim Crow. And they built in the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill area something called the Research Triangle that depended a lot on education, on higher education, which has really paid huge dividends and in a way opened the road to the new south, as we think of it today. My father would have been, in 2008, would have been so fiercely proud to see Barack Obama elected in North Carolina, to see the state go for Barack Obama. Sadly, it wasn't to happen again in 2012, although we worked really hard at it.

But anyway, my first campaign that I actively was involved with was McGovern in '72, and I think my wife, Kim, still has the bumper sticker that says, "Don't blame me, I'm from Massachusetts." I think Massachusetts was the only state to go for McGovern, sadly. But Kim also took a year off between high school and college and rang doorbells and called people up for that as a field office hand there in upper state New York, upstate New York. But I worked with Carole King and Barbra Streisand, we did a couple of concerts, 3 4 McGovern, although if you actually say McGovern over and over and over again, it's in 6/8 time. It was ¾ McGovern as a time signature there. Me, Carole and Barbra Streisand.

And in the years since then, I've gotten involved with a number of people in Massachusetts, Gerry Studds, Ted Kennedy, I worked on his campaign, I worked for Elizabeth Warren this past time. I worked for-- see, I've written it down here, if I can find it-- I worked for Dukakis and Mondale and Gore and Kerry and really a long list of-- Clinton and Jimmy Carter. I've worked on John Anderson's campaign, the only non-Democrat in the bunch.

So, you know, it was sort of natural being so politically active over the years that I would get involved in the campaign of 2008. I was hugely motivated also by eight years of Cheney-Bush, and I say it in that order on purpose. (Laughter) It was a tough time for me. I really suffered. It made me deeply ambivalent about my country, that we would choose that, even if we may not have actually chosen it, but that that's what represented us in the world. And I felt as though after September 11<sup>th</sup>, the diversion, the distraction of

the nation's concern and energy into Iraq was unpardonable. And I felt that it was inept, corrupt and opaque. Those were tough years for me. And I was very deeply motivated in 2008 to see Barack Obama, this wonderful sort of a surprise, really. I couldn't believe our luck, that we had gotten such a real person to make it through the filter system of our politics. So it meant a lot to me, and I know that it would have meant a huge amount to my father because I think of him often.

And so, again, in 2012, Kim and I went on the road for Obama. We did, as Theresa said earlier, we did about three dozen different events. It really restored my faith in the country to meet these people who had committed themselves to this reelection campaign. It was the largest grass roots event that we've ever seen in this country. And the people involved were such-- just fundamentally such good people, I felt, that it really meant a lot to me to be involved in it. They were smart, too, the people who handled this campaign. They did it really well and they were committed to this mission and they really carried it out beautifully.

I should say also that although I am a sort of relentless Democrat, I do believe that a dialogue between-- a reasonable dialogue between Republicans and Democrats is what keeps this country on course and in balance. I think that, you know, by ourselves, liberals, would probably steer us towards a sort of paralyzed, nanny-state European style and Republicans left on their own would head towards oligarchy and inherited wealth and power. So, I think that we really do need a strong Republican Party and a good dialogue between left and right. But paralysis seems to be the order of the day, and politics of fear. Anyway, I will rant on and on and I promised Kim I wouldn't do too much of that.

It was a delight being involved in the campaign, the Obama campaign. We had a wonderful time. And we went back to North Carolina. We played this song a lot. I'm not going to play the whole thing, it's too long.

[singing]

**MR. TAYLOR:** I've written very few, actually, overtly political songs, so here come a couple of them. I'll play you the first verse of a song called "Line 'Em Up," which actually is just a song about how things in this life tend to line up.

[singing]

**MR. TAYLOR:** Not really a song about Nixon, a verse about Nixon and how he left office. I was fascinated by-- to watch him on camera, he was at the podium saying, "Goodbye, I'm not a crook, farewell." And then he had a staging problem. And I was interested in how they handled it. Nixon didn't have a great walk. It was sort of-- if you've seen those depictions of the evolution of man from the sort of-- coming from the primordial ooze to-- and then slowly becoming walking on all fours, and then finally ending on the extreme with Cro-Magnon man walking along there sort of analyzing everything. Nixon's walk was a couple of characters back from that guy. So they didn't want to focus on it, and he had a long walk, so they lined up all of the White House

employees and he went down the line as sort of like a receiving line and saying goodbye to all of them, which was really quite moving. And saying hello and goodbye perhaps for the first and last time. And then at the end of the line, he was on the helicopter, Bob was his uncle, he was out of there.

This next song is a more political song, it's called "Slap Leather," and the first verse is about Ronald Reagan leaving office. Which the first thing, if I'm not mistaken, someone can perhaps enlighten me on this, but it was my impression that one of the first things that Reagan did after leaving office was to accept a speaking engagement in Japan for two million bucks. Is that's right? And for some reason, that took me back. Today, it would just flow off my back like nothing had happened. Sure, what's more natural? But at the time-- so.

[singing]

**MR. TAYLOR:** Big Mac falafel being sort of code for the oversimplification of the Arab world and the tendency of American foreign policy at the time to think that you could fix a watch with a hammer, yeah. Big Mac falafel.

So, we did, we went on the road. We, in many ways, had our faith in the American process and our country restored by meeting some wonderful, committed people who really mean extremely well and have the future of this country in their hearts and minds. But, we raised the better part of \$10 million and it ain't right, you know? Again, I don't know a lot about election reform, but it seems to me as though it breaks into two areas. One is the campaign and the other is the actual election itself. Fixing the campaign is going to be tough, trying to get the money out of it. Trying to get some forums for our-- in the place of our debates that actually give us a clear idea of who the candidate is and what they intend for the country, that's a difficult and tall order. Trying to streamline it so it doesn't take two years to run for public office.

These are difficult things to accomplish and I don't know how we go about it. But it seems as though there is a side of election reform, the actual election process itself, the day of elections, that would be reasonably easy to do something about. For me, I've just come through an election so as, of course, all of you have and probably as intensely, if not more so, than I have because you're with the press. But, it seems as though to me the vote is sacred. It is the democratic moment, it is the moment of the actual act of self government, is when we choose our representatives.

And in the American experiment, this democratic light of the world, it seems to me as though the vote is the moment and why we have a day off for the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, for Independence Day, Patriots Day, Washington and Lincoln's birthday, Veterans Day, we have MLK Day. Why can't we get a day off to go vote so that people can really make it? (Applause) There was something like 60 percent, 63 percent participation of eligible voters this last election. Off-year elections it's more like 40 percent. So average them out, we get 50 percent of our voters to the polls and that's not good enough for what America is and for what it means. For some reason, we're dropping that ball. I think we need a day

off for polling, we need to open the polls for a week. When we identify people, when we officially identify people, they should be registered as soon as somebody has an official name and address, they should be able to get a note in the mail that tells them where to go to vote. This business of the question of gerrymandering for congressional districts is a profound conundrum. I don't know how we fix that.

But we can at least get people to get to the polls in greater numbers. There are a lot of people in the country who do want to go in the other direction, who want fewer people to vote. And these voter I. D. laws that are in the name of preventing voter fraud, I think it's a solution without a problem. The voter fraud in this country is pretty much equal to either side. And is so low that the amount of people who are discouraged from voting by these new I. D. laws, it's just a bad idea, in my opinion.

Also, if you're concerned about voter fraud, a paper trail for Diebold Voting Machines, which one-third of our country votes on, some kind of accounting possibility for Diebold machines so that we can check every 100<sup>th</sup> machine against its actual paper trail, is a much better and a much more effective way to insure against voter fraud. You can go on Google, you can find 20 different hacking experiments that people have performed on these machines. And Diebold wears its political heart on its sleeve, they're very political there. You know, they contribute hugely to political campaigns.

So a paper trail for Diebold machines would be an excellent idea to make sure that that was not being hacked, because it's been repeatedly proven that it is embarrassingly easy to hack the returns of Diebold machines. So that needs to happen.

Anyway, that's the election reform part of my speech. And I'm going to end with another song that Kim and I sang when we were out on the trail. Kim actually thought until she was about 12 years old, she thought that the picture of FDR on her grandmother's mantelpiece was her grandfather. (Laughter) They did look a lot alike. But her grandmother was such a fervent New Dealer that she also inoculated Kim in no small way into liberal politics, it's true.

[singing]

**MS. WERNER:** So you've shared with us your love for politics and how passionate you are for it. Have you ever thought about running for public office?

**MR. TAYLOR:** With my personal history? (Laughter) That would be a massacre. It would be fun to cover, though. It would be fun to cover. No.

**MS. WERNER:** Within the last year, Bonnie Raitt made the following comment: "As far as I can see, we have an auction instead of an election." Would you comment on her observation?

**MR. TAYLOR:** You know, this Citizens United decision is a disaster. It's really the wrong direction to head in. It's pollutant. The fact that we can go through two years

of paying very close attention to who these two men are and have no idea what Mitt Romney's plan for the country was, you know, a billion dollars spent on advertising? Citizens United is a disaster. I talked to Jim Messina, who was so instrumental in Obama's reelection organization. He feels as though, gee, I hope I'm not speaking out of school to say this, but he feels that we need a constitutional amendment to protect voters' rights and to also protect our elections from the pollution of this amazing amount of money. I agree with Bonnie. I don't know if it's an auction, but it certainly is-- the money is a distraction. It doesn't give us good information about who these people are.

You know, Noam Chomsky, who-- forgive me, I love him-- Noam Chomsky says that the size of a piece of information, to make it as short as it is today, is an effective way of censoring, that it's a censorship to shorten our pieces of information because it basically gives us the opportunity just to say something that people already know. But, the amount of time that it takes to contradict a sort of known, perceived consensus of reality and received wisdom to sort of disassemble that and to build in someone's mind and with a discussion and an argument another, an alternative way of seeing things, it just takes much too long for the way we communicate today. I don't know what to do about that.

One of the main problems that liberals have, and one of the questions we ask ourselves so frequently, is how do we communicate our message? It's such a good message, you know. Why can't we communicate this to people? Why can't we tell them what we have in mind? I think it's because people are looking for simple answers to complex questions. And when you rush in with a simple answer, people will flock to you, you know. That's what I meant when I said fix a watch with a hammer. So that's off of the point about the question.

But that's another amazing thing that Reagan taught us in those debates. You'd ask Ronald Reagan a question, and he'd answer the question that he knew the answer to or that-- he just absolutely no problem whatsoever, smooth. And, you know, you'd say, "Yeah, that's great." (Laughter) It's amazing, we see it more and more often, too. You answer the question you know. Ask me the next one, please.

**MS. WERNER:** Would you be upset if President Obama compromised too much with the Republicans in order to avoid going over the fiscal cliff?

**MR. TAYLOR:** Oh, yeah, I would. You know, I think it's remarkable that's right after the election we get this thing that comes right up in our faces that basically outlines in bold relief the differences in the two ideas about how we go forward in this country. It's really excellent timing and I think that we may have to go over the cliff, you know, if it's forced into it. But this idea that you bring down the cost of Medicare by making it unavailable to more people is a terrible idea of Mr. Boehner's. And the idea of-- I would be terribly upset, along with many of my friends, if Obama compromised too much on what needs to happen that's called the fiscal cliff. Please, carry on.



**MS. WERNER:** Do you think that a prominent third party would help our country?

**MR. TAYLOR:** I certainly felt strongly about that when I supported John Anderson in '79. And a large part of Anderson's campaign was to sue the state ballot procedure into allowing third parties to have more access to the electoral process. I would like to see a third party available, but that, too, seems like a really tall order, yeah.

**MS. WERNER:** What do you think is the appropriate role for actors, musicians, and other celebrities to play in the political arena?

**MR. TAYLOR:** You know, I think if you are a really motivated, committed citizen who feels very strongly about either an issue or a candidate you get involved. You know, you go out and do it regardless of what it means. As I said, I've got this long history as a yellow dog Democrat liberal and I don't think anyone's surprised to see me. And I think my Republican friends tolerate it and largely forgive me for it. But, I know there are other people who take a real hit. I think Bruce Springsteen is very brave to support Obama because I think a lot of his audience is angered by that. In a way, it seems like a form of selling out. I think you have to feel really strongly about it. It can feel like a betrayal to people to see something politicized. Maybe that speaks to how low politics has sunk, that people think of it as a betrayal. But, again, if you feel strongly, I think you get involved.

**MS. WERNER:** Can you tell us a little bit about what it was like to perform at the Democratic National Convention?

**MR. TAYLOR:** Well, it was in North Carolina and so I knew what song to play. (Laughter) And it wasn't being carried at that moment by the national networks so I felt as though-- I didn't feel the stress and the extra burden of being on television, which always affects me negatively. So it was good. It was nice to be home. It felt like the right thing. Charlotte was electrifying for that week. It was a great convention, we loved being there.

**MS. WERNER:** I'd like to shift a little bit to music, a few music questions here. And you mentioned that your first record label was Apple. And was wondering how much did the Beatles help launch your musical career?

**MR. TAYLOR:** Well, I think just being signed and allowed to make that first album, and being the first artist signed to their label, was a huge amount of attention for me to get. It allowed me to make my first record and that got me my next deal with Warner Bros. So, I don't think that the Beatles themselves were in any way charged with the mission of publicizing James Taylor. I think signing me was enough.

**MS. WERNER:** What do you think is your secret for your long success?

**MR. TAYLOR:** I've got a great audience, and I love them. I love the people who come and see me. They've supported me for such a long time, and they're so-- you know, they as well are lovely people. And I feel very at home, very comfortable with them, as I said, increasingly grateful as time goes by. And that and just the great, good fortune of being healthy. And again, it's also a kind of music that doesn't tear you up to sing it. There are some people who hear Kurt Cobain sing and you say, "How's that going to feel at the age of 50," you know? Sadly, we didn't get a chance to see, and I'm sure that it would have changed into something that would have been beautiful and worthy. But, you know, it's a kind of music that lets you carry on with it. So it all comes down to good luck.

**MS. WERNER:** You're known for your incredible solo career, but you've also done duets such as with Tony Bennett, Natalie Cole. Who is your favorite duet partner?

**MR. TAYLOR:** Do I get in trouble for this? There haven't been all that many, so I can mention all of them. I loved working with Mark Knopfler on "Sailing to Philadelphia," with Alison Krauss on that beautiful Louvin brothers tribute that she did. Linda Ronstadt. Oh, there are many. Of course, Carole King, Joni Mitchell. I don't know, it's impossible to choose.

**MS. WERNER:** Is there anyone that you would like to perform with that you haven't?

**MR. TAYLOR:** I'd like to perform with Harry Belafonte if I could. I asked him, we did a series of concerts at Carnegie Hall and I asked Harry if he'd sing one of the songs that I grew up listening to of his, but he's pretty much decided he's not going to do that anymore. Yeah, Harry Belafonte.

**MS. WERNER:** What was the first song that you could truly play on the guitar?

**MR. TAYLOR:** "Keep On Trucking, Mama."

**MS. WERNER:** Can you still play it?

**MR. TAYLOR:** Can I still play it?

**MS. WERNER:** Uh-huh?

**MR. TAYLOR:** You don't want to hear that. (Laughter) This is where things go south, yeah.

[singing]

**MR. TAYLOR:** Et cetera. (Laughter and Applause)

**MS. WERNER:** Did you take lessons or are you self taught on the guitar?

**MR. TAYLOR:** I'm self taught on the guitar. But a lot of people showed me stuff. They weren't formal lessons, but they were-- that's how it worked in the great folk scare of the mid '60s, as we call it. But, we did, we would sort of share licks and everybody'd walk around with a guitar all the time. We thought that was normal.

**MS. WERNER:** Your playing style has always seemed deceptively relaxed, using your thumb, forefinger and middle finger in your picking. Did you develop that style on your own or were you influenced by anyone?

**MR. TAYLOR:** I was influenced by a guy named Travis, Merle Travis, and he had something called Travis picking, although he probably learned it from someone else himself. It was sort of a kind of walking bass, like--

[playing]

**MR. TAYLOR:** I threw in this finger. So that was the beginning of it. But it allows you to play a bass line and it's sort of a pianistic (sic) style because you can play the left hand with your thumb and your right hand with your other fingers.

**MS. WERNER:** What gave you the idea to do a slow version of "Handy Man," originally by Jimmy Jones?

**MR. TAYLOR:** It was really funny. You know, we were in the studio making a new album. On our first day of tracking, we got three different songs, recorded songs that I had written and were ready for us to put down what we called basic tracks. And then you come back and you sing the finished vocal on it, or put other elements on it in an overdub. But we finished these three songs and we still had like an hour and a half of studio time left before the meter ran out. And my friend, Danny Kortchmar, said, "You know, you always liked that song 'Handy Man.' Why don't we do a version of that?" We whipped up there in about 15 minutes, just came up with a quick James Taylorized (sic) version of it and that's how it went down. It was really off the-- just off the cuff, off the top of our heads.

**MS. WERNER:** What inspired you to write "Sweet Baby James?"

**MR. TAYLOR:** Well, it was a song for my nephew, who was the first child born in our family in our generation named after me by my brother, Alex. I had been overseas, I'd been abroad making my Apple album. When I came home, I was really keen to see the little baby and I drove down to North Carolina and kept thinking about wouldn't it be nice to have a sort of cowboy lullaby to sing this little new baby James? And like Roy Rogers or Gene Autry kind of, there'll be blue shadows on the trail, or go to sleep you little buckaroo kind of thing. And that was the idea behind it.

[singing]

**MR. TAYLOR:** Sorry, I turned off my amplifier. If this is live or three minutes, is that how much time we've got left?

**MS. WERNER:** I'm told we're all so enthralled with you, can we run a little longer if you want to keep going a little bit. (Applause)

[singing]

**MR. TAYLOR:** Thank you. People dashing for the door. Lock 'em in!

**MS. WERNER:** Most songwriters will say that their songs are like children, but do you have a favorite song that you've written?

**MR. TAYLOR:** That one, I think, yeah.

[singing]

**MR. TAYLOR:** Yeah, that is my favorite. (Applause)

**MS. WERNER:** Do you still write your songs down with paper and pencil?

**MR. TAYLOR:** Yes, I do. I carry a little-- I've always carried a little recording device of some sort. They used to be pretty big, but now they're quite small and I always carry a pen and paper and I'm ready in case something occurs to me.

**MS. WERNER:** You mentioned Merle Travis influenced you on your guitar playing style. What other musicians were influences on you?

**MR. TAYLOR:** Ry Cooder is still my favorite guitar player, although there are many, many to choose from. There's an album of his called "Paradise and Lunch" which was such a-- so formative for me. There was a guy when I was coming up named Tom Rush who played here at the Cellar Door, and he played in Boston at the 47. I really patterned myself after Tom, just a guy with a guitar, folk musician, unapologetic folk musician. And I'd say those two and the Beatles.

**MS. WERNER:** What do you think of current pop music?

**MR. TAYLOR:** You know, I guess I don't like it a whole lot. (Laughter and Applause) I sound just like my dad. I sound just like my dad. There are great people out there, I know it, and I don't mean to condemn it, blanket condemn it. But, you know, I think it's passed me by a little bit. I still have a wonderful career and a beautiful audience that I really love. But, you know, the spotlight is elsewhere now and I'm a sort of known quantity now and that's fine with me, to sort of play out this hand. You know, but I don't pay a whole lot of attention to-- I never did listen much to the radio. When I was a kid, when I was really young, I did. And I don't listen to music much. Kim works with the Boston Symphony and therefore, we get a lot of classical music in the house. I have two

11 year old-- Kim and I have 11 year old twin boys, and they have their preferences. Maybe it's because they're playing most of the popular music I'm hearing in the house I've got such a negative take on it. Anyway.

**MS. WERNER:** Do you have an iPod?

**MR. TAYLOR:** Not an iPod, no, an iPad.

**MS. WERNER:** iPad? Do you have music collections on there?

**MR. TAYLOR:** No, I don't listen to my music on computer, really. I listen on CD and vinyl.

**MS. WERNER:** So it's said that singer Taylor Swift is named after you. What do you think of her music?

**MR. TAYLOR:** I do like Taylor's music.

**MS. WERNER:** Because she's got a great name?

**MR. TAYLOR:** Yes, I like the name, too. I do think she is a creative singer songwriter. She's a remarkable sort of marketing phenomenon and if she can survive that, and I mean it, it's a hard thing to survive, I think. But she seems to have a very clear head on her shoulders and I think if anyone can, she can make it through and continue to evolve as an artist. Because sort of the marketing hit is if you're lucky enough to be successful, that particular passage that an artist has to make, if he's lucky enough or she's lucky enough, it can be a real jarring, life changing event. It can really shake you up, you know. But going from being very private to being very public, yeah.

**MS. WERNER:** Many people have said that Daniel Day Lewis's portrayal of Lincoln in the current film reminds them of you. Do you have any comment on that? And I hear you've seen the movie?

**MR. TAYLOR:** I have seen the movie. He doesn't look like me to me, but I live in here. I live in here, so I'm apt to notice the difference, you know. John Williams, who is a dear friend and this generation's remarkable musician, orchestral musician and composer, John wanted me to play that part. He actually stood up for me there, suggested me at one point. It was never going to happen, so I don't know. I'm flattered. Of course, everybody loves Lincoln, I do. But I don't see other than the fact that we're both tall and somewhat skinny. He speaks much better in public than I do.

**MS. WERNER:** Is there a role you would like to play?

**MR. TAYLOR:** No, this is fine. This is fine. It is very unusual. I've spent my life being myself for a living, and I think more than really-- more than anyone else I think I know, that I-- I think there are performers who develop and assume a character that they

then play for the public, but I don't know anyone who is as much to themselves publicly for a living as I am. So it's been an interesting ride. But I don't think I'm qualified to really understand it well, no.

**MS. WERNER:** Several people sent this question up so I feel obligated to ask. Do I you know who Carly Simon was singing about in "You're So Vain?" And will you share that with us?

**MR. TAYLOR:** I think it's Warren Beatty.

**MS. WERNER:** And he says not.

**MR. TAYLOR:** Okay, so that's what my information was. But again, that information has not been updated for 40 years.

**MS. WERNER:** Now that the turnpike from Stockbridge to Boston extends past the city to the airport, thanks to the Big Dig, any thoughts about revising the song?

**MR. TAYLOR:** Oh, you mean the turnpike no longer ends in Boston, it goes all the way to Somerset? No. Quincy? What town is the airport in? Stockbridge to Chelsea? It's got a ring to it, but it doesn't rhyme with frostin'. See, that's the thing, is the internal rhyme. That song, it has four rhyming schemes going at once. First of December, it's covered with snow, so was the turnpike from Stockbridge to Boston, frostin', the ten miles behind me and ten thousand more to go, to rhyme with snow. So, it's got to be Boston. Unless they take it to Austin, Texas. (Applause)

**MS. WERNER:** I want to thank all of you for joining us this afternoon. This has been absolutely terrific. And I want to remind you of our next upcoming lunch. On December 18<sup>th</sup>, we have Leon Panetta, the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Defense. I'm sure if you have some advice on how to solve the fiscal cliff, he'd be happy to hear that. And while you're writing your next song, I'd like to present you with our famous Press Club coffee mug. I think that will go well with your songwriting and guitar playing. It might give you some inspiration.

**MR. TAYLOR:** Thank you so much. Thank you, Theresa.

**MS. WERNER:** So thank all of you for coming today. I want to thank the National Press Club staff including our Journalism Institute and Broadcast Center for organizing today's event. And a reminder that you can find more information at [www.press.org](http://www.press.org). And I was wondering if you had one last song that perhaps you'd like to sing us out on? (Applause) It looks like he's up for a--

**MR. TAYLOR:** You want to sing?

**MS. WERNER:** You want to come join him? Oh sure, come on up.

**MR. TAYLOR:** Can she borrow your stool? This is my wife, Kim. And here's a song we sing to our twin boys. Actually, about two years ago, we went in to sing them to sleep with this lullaby and we got the guitar out, sat down on the side of the bed, and we're about to play the opening chords and Rufus looked up at me and said, "You know Dad, we don't have to do this anymore." (Laughter)

[singing]

**MR. TAYLOR:** She's a game gal. (Applause) Goodbye, and thank you very much.

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