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INTERVIEW OF AMBASSADOR GREG FRAZIER

BY

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I N T E R V I E W

MR. QUINN: Today is January 17th, 2001. I am Larry Quinn with the Office of Communications at the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Washington.

Today, we are talking with Ambassador Greg Frazier, who is the Chief Agricultural Trade Negotiator for the Office of U.S. Trade Representative and the former Chief of Staff at the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

First, I would like to talk about the early years of your career prior to USDA. For many years, you worked on Capitol Hill with then-Congressman Dan Glickman. Tell us about some of those experiences.

AMBASSADOR FRAZIER: Well, Larry, it is difficult for me to know where to begin after spending, as we were talking about, 23 years with the Secretary and Congressman; and as I look back at the waning days of the Administration, I think about my own experience.

Maybe a way to answer your question is to

say, on the way in, I was handed this note. It's very nice and it's very generous, and I would like to think that part of what I did and what I was able to do in my role to have somebody write a note like that was in part, in large part, from the lessons and the examples that I learned from the Secretary.

I think that we went through a lot of legislative battles together on Capitol Hill here at the Department, some very tense, trying times. I can think of maybe one, maybe one or two episodes where I ever saw the Secretary truly angered, truly angry where he lost his temper. But above all, what I remember about him is what he taught me was to be fair, to be fair to everybody, and how important it is, no matter what your differences are on policy or legislation, or anything for that matter, to treat whomever you're dealing with with fairness and respect.

It sounds like a simple, trite lesson, but it is a profound one. It has been one that means a great deal to me, and I hope that is part of the

legacy that he leaves here. There will be the usual things, the he did this, he did that, the Department did this, the Department did that, and those are all important; but there is also a humanity in this place and in this government that transcends that, there are people that will be here long after he leaves, and I hope that they learned that from him.

Anyway, to get to the point of your question, we were both young--younger--young when we started working together. As he tells me, he said, your hair wasn't gray then; and I tell him, at least I had hair, Dan.

I worked in his personal office for several years. He became chairman of one of the subcommittees on the House Agriculture Committee. It was the Grain Subcommittee. It no longer--they've since reorganized. It exists, but not in name any longer, and it was sort of the heart of the Agriculture Committee. It was the one that did the big row crops. When people think about farm programs, that was the subcommittee that

did it.

We had a central role in the writing of the 1990 Farm Bill, which was a very good experience for the work that we did together in the '96 Farm Bill here at the Department and then implementing that.

Again, I'm not--you know, with that, it is a rather open-ended question. I'm not sure I answered you directly, but at first blush, that is how I would respond to you, and there are lots of specific episodes and examples that maybe will come to mind. That's what strikes me first of all.

MR. QUINN: And you came right away with the Secretary when he came to the Department?

AMBASSADOR FRAZIER: I actually got here before he did.

MR. QUINN: Okay. And that was the time when the Department of Agriculture was being reorganized on a large scale, wasn't it?

AMBASSADOR FRAZIER: That was an issue that he actually, when he was in Congress, was very interested in. But it was. Congress had passed a

law requiring the Department to be reorganized, and Secretary Espe had set a lot of that in motion, the Deputy Secretary carried through that, and was extremely important in the time that I was here and the time that the Secretary has been here in doing that.

But you are right, that was going on, and it was a period of I think enormous stress on the institution. It was a large change, it was a consolidation. It came in the midst of a general reduction or downsizing in government overall, and, of course, it comes in an atmosphere unfortunately when a lot of people not intimately familiar with the Federal Government take potshots at the Federal Government because it is the Federal Government.

I think it creates or I saw a great deal of personal stress and tumult on the employees who have to carry out the mission of this Department or any department. So in that context, and then for us to be involved in a massive reorganization was difficult, but it was something that the Secretary was committed to. I know Secretary Espe was, and

Deputy Secretary Rominger was. I also think that Congress was. But above and beyond that, I think it was, from our perspective, certainly from my perspective--it's difficult to--easier to say this when you are not on the receiving end of it, but I thought it was the best thing for the Department.

Times are changing. The Department needs to change, be more modern, perceived as more modern, and on the other side of that will be a healthier, stronger institution. So that is why I personally was committed to it. I thought it was good for the Department.

MR. QUINN: It was quite different coming from a congressional staff to a department that has over 100,000 employees. It must have been a dramatic change for you.

AMBASSADOR FRAZIER: Yes. It's interesting. It would be an--that's an understatement, to say it was a dramatic change.

As it so happens, over the last few weeks, I have been giving gratuitous free advice to people who may be coming in in the next administration,

many of whom have backgrounds not dissimilar from the one that I had at the time, was at the time knowledgeable about farm policy, how it works, how it operates, sort of the milieu within which the Department finds itself. I knew it as well as most--as many. Certainly not the best, but I'm comfortable with it.

But the level of responsibility from the position I had to the position I got myself in six years ago was exponential, it was geometric. I did not expect it to be that way. I did not expect the change to be as big as it was.

I try to describe it to people that's kind of my way of putting it, is when you're on Capitol Hill, there are times when you get extremely busy writing for the Department. A good example is when you're writing a Farm Bill, going to work six, seven days a week for weeks at a time, ten, twelve, 24 hours a day; but then there is always a break and you rest, or Congress goes on recess.

There is no break in the Secretary's office in my job. There was ~~no~~ break at all, and

every day, every day, even the slowest days, even the day after Thanksgiving or Christmas Eve was busier than the busiest days that I had on Capitol Hill.

I am not complaining. I enjoyed it. It was a wonderful opportunity, and just a wonderful opportunity. It was very demanding. I think if you talk to anybody else who has had that job, Republican, Democrat, will agree with that. It is just a demanding job.

It is very rewarding, though. To be the chief of staff at a Cabinet agency, particularly one as large and as varied and as involved as the Department of Agriculture and working with the Secretary, with whom I worked so well, professionally it was a tremendously rewarding experience.

MR. QUINN: The wide diversity of issues I'm sure would contribute to that, everything from farm policy to food policy to nutrition policy. So when one was maybe lighter, another one was heavier?

AMBASSADOR FRAZIER: Sometimes. Not always, but sometimes. That certainly contributed to the intellectual breadth and demands, which I enjoyed; also I think fits this Secretary's personality. He's got wide-ranging interests, and so he was able to express those well here, probably better here than he would have at another Cabinet agency like Education. Whereas at Education--again, I don't know anything, but you've got grade-school education, high-school education, college education, vocational education. It is different, but it is basically the same thing. That is not the case at the Department of Agriculture. You've got forestry, you've got food-stamps, you've got farm policy, you've got trade, you've got research, you've got all of these different things.

Actually, as I was thinking about this session, I was thinking that, again, it may seem a little nebulous and a little amorphous, but I think that was one of his achievements, and what I mean by that is his ability to raise the profile of the

Department in a wide range of subjects. Just in the last week or so, the attention that the Department got for its study about diets, all the focus, whether you agree or disagree about what the President has done on forest policy, that's all Department of Agriculture, and I think that it has sort of branched out and blossomed beyond just the farmer department.

The farmer department, the farm programs, no matter how they get overshadowed by more people in other agencies, by more dollars being spent, it will always be and should always be the heart and soul of this place. It should be.

MR. QUINN: You alluded a little bit to the personal energies to the job for a secretary of agriculture and someone like yourself, and I don't know that that's always recognized. There must be a tremendous amount of personal energy that goes into a job like this.

AMBASSADOR FRAZIER: I would like to think that the only person who devoted more personal energy to this job than me was the Secretary, and

he did. He spent--you know, he was traveling, doing all sorts of things. But yes, it takes its toll after a while.

MR. QUINN: What would you think were some of the highlights of the achievements of this Administration here at USDA?

AMBASSADOR FRAZIER: Well, I think in general what I alluded to earlier; that is, to branch out, for the Department to be more than just the farm department. I think that was also important given the Secretary has had the pleasure and the displeasure of presiding over some of the best times and the worst times in the farm economy, and I think that he has remained popular and well regarded, to a certain extent because of his own personality, but also because of the other activities that he has been involved with.

I think that some of the signal achievements of this Administration for this Department--clearly the work that has been done on food safety. It has been a lot of work by a lot of people and a lot of dedication for eight years, and

it has been difficult, but I think it has worked, and I think we will look back on that as a real achievement. And I don't think it will be too terribly controversial; I think there will be widespread opinion about that.

I personally believe that the work and the changes that were done in terms of natural resource policy will be some of this Administration's legacy. It is more controversial clearly in the area of forestry, but I think that the new philosophy and the changes that were brought to bear on the Forest Service and the way that we regard our national forests is a real turning point. It will be very controversial.

At the same time, less visible but no less important is the work and the dedication the Administration has taken to the National Resource Conservation Service and the Farm Service Agency. Unfortunately, most people don't recognize when they talk about--when you talk about the land agencies or conservation agencies, people think about the Environmental Protection Agency or the

Interior Department. They don't hold a candle to what the Department of Agriculture does. It is not even close to what the Department of Agriculture has done and what it has achieved. So I think that that is a real accomplishment as well.

I think the work also that--some of the work that has been done internally. You alluded earlier to the reorganization. It is not done. I presume not everything was done in the time that I've gone, but it is not done. More work needs to be done, more work can be done. In my opinion, more work ought to be done.

Clearly another important part of this time will be the work that was done on civil rights at the Department. It is something that was completely unexpected by me and I believe by the Secretary. I think, of many things, I think it is a record to be proud of.

I am not pretending everything is fixed or solved and that there weren't a lot of unhappy people on all sides of this issue, but he is the--and it was the Secretary/personally who really

led this, spent an enormous amount of his personal time on this. He is the first Secretary in a hundred years to pay any attention to this subject, and it was tough, real tough, but I think that he has a record that he can be proud of in that regard, too.

MR. QUINN: You worked very closely with him, as you said, for over 20 years, and he has a reputation for having a good sense of humor. Has that carried him well through this period of time?

AMBASSADOR FRAZIER: Well, yes. I mean, it--you know, a little bit to what I said earlier, yes, he does have a very good sense of humor. He is very personable, he is very easy to get along with, to know. I think that, again, part of that is his sense of humor. Part of that is his perspective on life, his position, his view of life. His sense of humor--I'm certain that some of that comes to him naturally, but a lot of it comes from his family, his father, his mother. Their influence is--I can see a lot of that influence in the Secretary. I think he would say the same

thing.

MR. QUINN: Let's talk about your experiences here. Obviously you dealt a lot with trade issues when you were the chief of staff, and now you have gone on to become the chief agricultural negotiator. What kind of furthered that interest and that experience for you while you were the Department of Agriculture?

AMBASSADOR FRAZIER: Well, correcting the question a little bit, because I had the good fortune when I was here to have extremely capable people who were working on trade issues, and, quite frankly, of the many issues that confronted the Secretary's office, it was one that I didn't spend as much of my personal time on as I did on others, and I attribute that to Paul Drazig [ph], who was here, and to Isi Siddiqui, who is still at the Department, and their work, as well as to Gus and to Tim and to others, and Jim Schroeder [ph].

But it was always an issue, an area which interested me. We spent a great deal of time and attention to it on Capitol Hill. Even though it

kind of wasn't directly our jurisdiction, we sort of made it our jurisdiction and made it our interest. So it was an area which always interested me, and I followed it and I was involved with it. A lot of the hands-on, day-to-day work, I was not so much involved with there.

And then a year ago, I was presented an opportunity by Ambassador Barchevsky, which was, you know, as they say, an offer I couldn't refuse. I am glad I didn't refuse. It was a very difficult personal decision for me to make but one that I know was the right one and one that I am glad I did.

MR. QUINN: And trade for American agriculture is so very critical to the success of the American farmer and rancher.

AMBASSADOR FRAZIER: Well, there is no question about that. There is probably few other if any other sector of the economy so reliant on exports and a successful trade policy and success in having access to markets and customers overseas, and very few sectors as sensitive to imports as

agriculture.

So it is--again, I think that, you know, broadly speaking, part of this Administration's legacy overall will be the role that trade policy has played in the President's economic policy, and certainly part and parcel of that has been the role that agricultural trade policy has played in that.

So I think a lot of that is due to the world has changed, but also due to the personal commitment of the President and the personal commitment of Ambassador Barchevsky, and to the Secretary.

MR. QUINN: What are the key issues in this past year that you have been working on in the trade area?

AMBASSADOR FRAZIER: Well, I think probably the largest issue which American agriculture has in front of it right now is the next round of multilateral trade negotiations. We have done a great deal of work this year preparing for that, laying the intellectual and policy framework that will carry the next negotiator or

negotiators through to the conclusion of that round, and that has tremendous opportunity and potential for American agriculture.

A lot of my time was devoted to that, and then a lot of my time was devoted to any number of specific bilateral trade problems, whether it's questions about sugar policy in North America, whether it's our access to the European beef market or bananas or any number of different things.

MR. QUINN: Is the future bright for American agriculture in the trade sector?

MR. QUINN: Absolutely. I mean, it almost--it has to be. But yes, I believe it is. I think that the future for the American economy, notwithstanding what people may think today, is good. I think the future of the American economy lies in successful trade policy in exports, further integration of the American economy and the global economy. Again, I understand that it causes problems, but I also think that it has been a powerful engine driving the growth and the development of the American economy, and it is

essential to the American farm economy.

At the same token, I also think the extent to which we buy goods from overseas is important as well, because it helps integrate our economy into other economies, and as poorer countries are able to sell to us and to raise their standard of living, it doesn't--and what concerns me is I think a lot of people mistakenly believe that they then close their doors to the United States. That's not the case. When you have more money, you buy more things. It's kind of like a natural thing, you know. When people get a raise, they go out and buy more stuff. So I think that it is critical, and especially to American agriculture.

MR. QUINN: Finally, you must have many memories that you will take with you from your time as chief of staff and as ambassador. What would be some of those that come to mind?

AMBASSADOR FRAZIER: Yes, I've got, you know, 23 years of memories. You know, in all honesty, one of the most rewarding is this. Again, you know, I think about a lot of specific things,

but, you know, I kind of didn't change the world, but maybe changed or helped influence somebody's life, made it a little bit better in some way, some small way, set a good example. Those are the things I think at the end of the day are the most important, at least to me.

MR. QUINN: Thank you very much, Ambassador Frazier, for being with us and talking about your time as chief of staff at USDA and as now the Ambassador, as the Chief Agricultural Trade Negotiator at the Office of U.S. Trade Representative.

I am Larry Quinn with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Office of Communications in Washington.