The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

KEITH CURTIS

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INTERVIEW

Q: So, today is January 9. We are beginning our interview with Keith Curtis. Keith, when and where were you born?

CURTIS: Well, like any good Foreign Service officer there's even a story there. I was born in San Diego, California on May 30, 1954, or May 31, depending on who you believe – the California records or my mother. So, being born at five minutes before midnight on a holiday, the records didn't necessarily get the right date in them. So, that's where I was born.

Q: Is that where you actually grew up?

CURTIS: No. I grew up for the most part – my wife would say probably that I never grew up, but, you know – here in the Washington area, though I didn't settle down there until I was about five years old. In 1959, we came here. Before that, we lived – My father was a pilot, and we were travelling around, so we lived in California and Michigan and Ethiopia, when I was a little tot.

Q: Now, was he a military pilot, or civilian?

CURTIS: No, he flew in the war, but after the war, he became a civilian pilot. He was flying for Hawaiian Airlines. There was kind of a glut on the market of pilots after the war, so he moved from job to job, flying in the Berlin Airlift and under contract with TWA for Ethiopian Airlines in Addis Ababa. Eventually he got a job here with a charter airline that flew out of the National. So, he would fly senators and congressmen on their campaigns, and he flew the original Mercury Seven astronauts, and he flew Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, John F. Kennedy. So, it was an interesting job.

Q: Wow. Did he ever come home with stories of those people?

CURTIS: Oh, yeah. I'm not sure if we can publish them, but maybe. Yeah. Well, he was sort of Republican, so for the most part he would come home with, you know, these stories about the Democrats and how they behaved on the airplane. There was one story about John F. Kennedy, where he got on the airplane and demanded coffee even thought there was turbulence. Dad said, "Mr. Senator," – he was a senator at the time, working on his campaign – "please be careful with the coffee." And then later in the flight Kennedy proceeded to accidentally spill the coffee on his pants, and he then took his pants off and gave them to the stewardess and said, "Clean these, please." That's a story that's probably never been told in a publication before.

Q: Oh my goodness. That's great. Now, when you say the Washington area, whereabouts? Maryland? Virginia?

CURTIS: We moved into – Our first home here was in south Alexandria, and that was kind of the place in Fairfax county at that time. In fact, it was in a community which was built by a famous designer, Charles Goodman, who was in the school of Frank Lloyd Wright. So, it was in the Mount Vernon area, and actually, the community was called

Hollin Hills, which was once described as the limit of the liberal community, and was a favorite site for Foreign Service officers to live in. There were such people as Ambassador Ron Spiers and Bob Moose and others who were high in the Department. Ambassador Pickering lived there later as well. So, I think that's where I got some of my interest in the Foreign Service.

Q: So, talk a little bit about your family. Brothers and sisters?

CURTIS: So, I have one brother, and I have an older half-brother and a half-sister from my dad's first marriage. So, that would be it for brothers and sisters. My dad had four brothers and one sister, and my mom had one brother.

Q: So, a reasonable size?

CURTIS: Yeah. We weren't Catholic or anything.

Q: Would the whole family gather at Thanksgiving or at July Fourth? Would you see them kind of regularly?

CURTIS: Yeah, they would come to visit. It was always nice to be in the Washington area, because you would always get visitors. I had a number of cousins and they would come to visit. We had fun together. A couple of times a year we'd get some visitors. My mom was in the theater, so they had great friends, and we loved going to the theater all the time. Sometimes, she'd take me to the theater; she kind of brought me up in the theater. She was in the Red Cross during the war.

So, she was doing off-Broadway productions before the war, and then she went to the Red Cross, and then to Hawaii, where she met my dad. He was flying, as I mentioned, for Hawaiian Airlines, but he also flew in the Berlin Airlift, after he got called back up again because he was in the reserves. So, that was an interesting story, yeah. That was quite a heroic act, I think, as anyone who's studied that history would know. So, they met there, in Hawaii, and honeymooned and were married in Hawaii. It's nice when you don't have to go too far for a great honeymoon.

So, we used to go back there regularly. My brother's godmother was in Hawaii. So, then after he left Hawaiian Airlines, they moved to Phoenix for a while, and then from Phoenix to San Diego – because he was in the Navy during the war. So, San Diego being a big Navy town, I was born in a Navy hospital. In the war dad flew sub watches in the Caribbean – he flew P-3 surveillance aircraft, basically trying to protect the Panama Canal from German U-Boats.

Q: Now you said he flew in – Oh, the Caribbean, not the Mediterranean, sorry.

CURTIS: Yeah, he flew in the Caribbean, and I think he was based out of Trinidad and Tobago, which used to remind me – It may be one of the reasons I grew up with a fondness for rum and coke, which supposedly was invented there in Trinidad. So, after a

while, as I mentioned, he worked for a company called Fairways Corporation, which flew charter flights in the Washington area.

Q: And that was his career for the rest of his professional life?

CURTIS: Yeah. He worked for Fairways Corporation, I don't know, probably 30 years. Eventually, he actually moved down to Florida – my mom and dad were divorced when I was about 13 – and flew basically business jets with General Acceptance Corporation. The Caribbean was always sort of his home – that's a nice place to fly. It's easy. He never got caught in the Bermuda triangle, so… If you don't get caught in the Bermuda triangle, it's a pretty nice place to fly. He flew everything from the old prop planes to Falcon jets – At one point he had more hours in the DC-3 than any man on the planet, I think. Which was not necessarily a great distinction, given that it was the Jet Age and that was one of the earlier prop airplanes. But he also flew the Falcon Lear jet, which was a French version of the business jet. I had a great time going down there, spending time with him and flying with him and taking some lessons of my own.

Q: Now, to go back: You resided with your mother in the D.C. area, and she stayed there.

CURTIS: Right. She stayed here, and again, we would go see a lot of theater, and she had a lot of friends around here. She did a lot of volunteer work. She worked with the Laubach Literacy, which was teaching adults to read. There were some low-income communities right around the corner from us, and I think that was great for me, growing up, because I got to have friends from the African-American community, while a lot of other people from my generation didn't have that kind of mixture. So, that was good. I grew up going to services at the Mount Vernon Unitarian Church, which was a wonderful estate down there in Mount Vernon among a fairly liberal community.

Q: How many years between you and your brother?

CURTIS: Two years.

Q: So, you both grew up in the same house?

CURTIS: Yeah.

Q: Now, what about school?

CURTIS: So, I went to school in the public school system actually until junior high school, and then I went to St. Stephen's, which is an Episcopal school in Alexandria. I went there until my sophomore year, when I went to Groveton High School, which was a public school in Alexandria. I was active in the chess club. I wasn't the star student, but high school was pretty easy. St. Stephen's was a tough school, which was good – they had a demerits system, coat and tie every day, and chapel on Wednesdays. But, I was also an athlete. I ran cross country, played soccer. At Groveton, we won the Gunston District

Championships, and I was the right wing. So, that was good. Then I graduated, and I went to Dickinson.

Q: Well, wait, while you were in high school, were you in drama club?

CURTIS: I didn't do any – I did do some drama at the Unitarian Church, and I do remember, actually, that I did some drama in elementary school as well. Later I performed in a couple of plays and musicals in college.

Q: So, your mother was not a stage mother?

CURTIS: No, she wasn't pushing me, although – Yeah. But I ended up doing some drama in college as well. I think she knew I was going to do whatever I wanted to do; there wasn't a whole lot of effort trying to tell me or push me into what to do. But we went to see a lot of drama. We loved it. And I'll never forget, like, I saw *Camelot* with Richard Burton and Julie Andrews and Robert Goulet. And Mary Martin as Peter Pan. Those were great days.

Q: Okay, now, the other thing in high school: Were you involved in any other – Well, you did the sports and chess. Any other particular recollections that were early indicators of where you were going to go in life, as a profession?

CURTIS: I participated in Model United Nations for two years in High School. But I think one of the main things, as I mentioned earlier, was that many of my friends in the neighborhood were Foreign Service children – we endearingly called them "Foreign Service brats" back then.

Q: A common term.

CURTIS: I'll never forget when my best friend, Peter Spiers, moved when the family was assigned to London. That was kind of, you know, a heartbreaking moment, but I shortly thereafter went to visit him in London, so it was actually a lot of fun. My mom travelled all the time, and she just liked taking trips. I remember they covered her in the *Alexandria Gazette* when she took an early trip to Burma and Thailand

Q: Did you go?

CURTIS: No, I didn't go. She would get somebody to sit with us or we'd stay with the neighbors. But she liked to go all over. But I did take some trips to Europe with – We did take one trip to Europe together. We went to Spain. She loved Spain. She bought a – I'm now remembering – condo on the Costa Brava on the Mediterranean. It was one of those things where, it was inexpensive, and it wasn't built until 2 years after it was supposed to be built, but yeah. We took a trip there. That was just my brother and I, and we loved it. It was this beach right on the Mediterranean. We had chicken rotisserie and sangria. That's back when the drinking age was 18, not 21. later in my 20's I took a trip with her through Southern France, serving as her chauffer.

Q: Exactly. And when Spain was still kind of off the map – it wasn't a member of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), and it was still –

CURTIS: Yeah, they still had the "Guardia Civil" (Civil guard) there. Yeah, it was very interesting times. So, I think in terms of my career – I also was very interested in Russian literature when I was in high school, and I loved – to this day, I'll challenge anybody that they're the greatest writers on the planet. Dostoevsky, or Tolstoy, or Turgenev, or Pushkin. Just the depth of their writing entranced me. So, I think I remember reading *Crime and Punishment* when I was in eighth grade, on my own, and I was just overwhelmed by the power of it. So, I just started consuming all of the Dostoevsky's novels I could find.

I think those are a couple of the early influences on my life. I've always been an outdoorsman, so in high school we were into spelunking and caving. We would go to West Virginia and do rock climbing and spelunking and caving, and it was a lot of fun. They were great adventures. We'd leave at the crack of dawn and go out there, drive out two or three hours and cave all day and then come back at midnight. It was a lot of fun with a good group.

Q: Now, I imagine your mother and your father both assumed you were going to go to college, but were there discussions about what kind of college or where? That kind of thing?

CURTIS: I think it was pretty much up to me, and I obviously had a very powerful interest in international studies, but I was also very interested in writing, so I was looking at schools that had strength in that area. So, my SATs were pretty good, but my grade point average wasn't that great. I applied to University of North Carolina, Northwestern and Dickinson.

Q: As a resident of Virginia, nothing in the old Commonwealth?

CURTIS: That's a good question. I don't know why I didn't really – You know, part of that was because, I think I've always been a bit of a counter-culture person: If everybody went skiing, I didn't want to do that, and if everybody went to UVA (University of Virginia), I wasn't particularly interested in going to UVA with all of the people I went to high school with. Not that I didn't like my friends in high school but, you know, that was the thing to do. No, I didn't apply to any of them. My mom didn't push me one way or the other; I think I was fortunate that she paid for my education, so there wasn't really a big question of – College wasn't all that expensive back then compared to what it is these days. So, no, although I think my dad didn't really finish his college degree, my mom did. She went to somewhere in Ohio.

Q: Oberlin?

CURTIS: Well, I was going to say Oberlin, but it wasn't Oberlin.

Q: Bard?

CURTIS: No, it's a small school like Oberlin in Ohio. It may have been Ohio Wesleyan, but I don't know.

Q: So, where did you end up?

CURTIS: I ended up at Dickinson College, in Carlisle, which is a nice liberal arts school not too far away – not that I cared about being nearby. I actually got in everywhere I applied, so I probably didn't set my sights high enough, but it was a good school. I enjoyed it very much. They had a great recruiting program, and they had a very good international relations program there as well. They had a junior year abroad.

Q: Did you take the trip?

CURTIS: No, I didn't do junior year abroad. When I did my masters, I did a semester overseas. So, yeah, I was an international relations major with a specialty in Soviet studies and Russia literature. I took Russian language. I've always had these careful, grand ideas of the future of the world, and the world has never cooperated. But at that time, it was very obvious that the Soviet Union was the future of the world. They had all the great resources, a third of the world's landmass, all of the uranium and gold and oil: everything you could imagine. They were the other great superpower, they were the first in space. They were brilliant writers, brilliant scientists. So, I figured that was a good future to… In addition to the fact that I just loved the Russian literature, and Russian history is fascinating. So, those were my majors.

Q: And in college, again, were you involved in any of the extracurricular stuff that college students do?

CURTIS: Yeah. I was president of the Outing Club for two years, so I continued my outdoor fascination. We taught rock climbing and rappelling, and then I would take trips back to my old haunts in West Virginia and take everybody caving, hiking or climbing in West Virginia. So, I was a leader in that. There wasn't an international relations club. So, I started at Dickinson in '72, and of course in '73 was the war in Israel. We were involved in a lot of discussions on campus.

I do now remember – I'm sorry, I forgot – that I did a semester overseas my senior year. It wasn't overseas, though: it was to the United Nations. They had an exchange program with Drew University, which involved a semester studying at the United Nations. So, we were part of the international relations club, and I'm trying to think if there's anything that I'm leaving out. I didn't get that much involved in student government, but I was on the soccer team, and that was my main sport. It was a small school.

Q: Fine.

CURTIS: Oh, and I forgot to mention that yeah, I was in three performances. I was in *Fiddler on the Roof,* and I was in two Eugene O'Neil one-act plays.

Q: At that point, were you now thinking about an international career? Or, actually, before we leave college, to what extent did the counter-culture and the politics hit Dickinson? Was it like Ohio State, or –

CURTIS: It wasn't like – It was no Stanford or Kincaid or UC Berkeley (University of California, Berkeley) or anything like that. But, yeah, there were actually – I don't remember any demonstrations. Oddly enough, it was actually my high school, which was really a little more radical – I do remember that when Nixon invaded Cambodia, there was a big group that went downtown and got gassed trying to close the Memorial Bridge. It was kind of winding down, the Vietnam War, at that point. I did have a draft number, and the deferment was up, but my number was really high so there wasn't really a risk. I mean, it was part of everything. You couldn't avoid the anti-war movement.

Part of my challenge was that my mom was such a flaming liberal that it wasn't possible for me to be the normal radical; I would just be following in mom's footsteps. She hated Richard Nixon with a passion. But growing up in the Washington area was so rich, you know, because for a relatively small city you have so much intellectualism going on all the time, so much discussion of how the world works and how our government works and how our country works. At the same time, there's great theater and there's great museums that are all free. But I don't remember anything, really, at Dickinson that was particularly mainstream radicalism. There were the drugs around campus, there was a fair amount of pot smoking and that stuff, but I think we were just, kind of, having a good time and watching the events of the world, in our country, rather than being leaders.

Q: So, now the question: Did college prepare you, then, for what you were beginning to see as an international career, or were you still formulating your ideas about –

CURTIS: I knew I wanted an international career. I don't know how specific that was or what form it was going to take, but it was always a dream of mine to be in the Foreign Service.

Q: From early childhood?

CURTIS: From the early days. I know I loved travelling; it was in my blood. We kind of skipped over the fact that I lived in Ethiopia when I was younger, but, my dad got a job working with TWA, who at that time owned Ethiopian Airlines and stood it up. So, they were training Ethiopian pilots to fly. He was a pilot, and at the same time he was training somebody in the co-pilot's seat to fly. So, we lived there for two years. Emperor Haile Selassie ruled the Rastafarians. He ruled the country. I was very young. The only memories I have are of – I do remember when Haile Selassie's motorcade would go by, and everybody would have to pull off the road, get down, get out of the car, and bow down while the emperor went by.

But anyway, I travelled from an early age, in addition to many of my friends being in the Foreign Service. In high school, I also got very interested in the concept of – well, as you say, the counter-culture of the time was anti-war – more practical peace and how that would be achieve. I'd forgotten; I was very active in Model United Nations in high school. We represented Belgium at one time, and Ethiopia. I remember, actually, designing and getting passed an anti-war resolution at the Model United Nations, which was kind of based on the Kellogg-Briand Pact, which I did a paper on when I was in high school. So, all those things early on were preparing me. I was pretty much – It was really just a question of what would be practical, because I really had two main loves, and that was literature and writing, and the international environment. I really felt like I wanted to do something on a larger stage, so, international relations was the place to do those things and make a difference.

Q: So, now, you graduated college in '76?

CURTIS: Yes. I graduated college in '76; I did the first semester senior year at the United Nations. That was a great program. I loved it. I always remember Idi Amin coming to address the United Nations and extolling the virtues of the guerrillas in his country. So, yeah, it was interesting times. I graduated in '76, and then after I graduated, I didn't want to go right into grad school, because I wanted to first have some kind of more practical experience of the world. In fact, actually, what had happened was that, at the United Nations, my roommate there and I hit it off, and we conjured up a plan to travel around the world together after we'd graduated; see what the world is made of firsthand.

So, we devised – I worked that summer after graduation to make some money, and we figured out all of the cheap ways to do it. I took off for France – I had some friends in Paris – and then I went down and worked in the grape fields of southern France, cutting grapes. By then my friend Peter was back in London, so we stayed with him for a while. Then we worked our way up north, to Scandinavia. I remember that we went to the U.S. embassy – what do you call it? Election party! The election party for Jimmy Carter in '76. So, then we went from there, into Russian. Since I was the Russia expert, our trip was really kind of built around – The centerpiece of taking the Trans-Siberian.

So, we went and took the train up through Finland and then crossed into the Russian train system and went to Leningrad and Moscow. Then we took the train across Siberia, and there are some interesting stories there. I think basically the "in-tourist" guys were helping us along the way, wherever we were. Those were kind of the black market days. It was fascinating, learning a lot, because they didn't really have much respect for their currency, the ruble, as compared to the dollar. Everybody wanted the dollar. You could sit down in a restaurant and order a meal, and if you paid in rubles, the ownership and the waiter would be very unhappy that you hadn't illegally paid with dollars.

Q: Did you speak enough Russian to get around?

CURTIS: Yes, definitely enough Russian to get around. But I wasn't fluent. I never tested, but I was probably about a two plus. It was fine. I enjoyed it, and I enjoyed using

it. And of course, there was a lot of – Actually, it was a bit of a mixture. At that time, it was very controlled. You know, you had to book everything in advance, and they wanted you to spend a certain amount of dollars every day and of course you stayed at the hotels that were English-oriented. But we could get out and walk the streets.

So, it was definitely interesting times. I had a few adventures there, which I already told the security folks about when I entered the Foreign Service. The Trans-Siberian was a fascinating experience, and going across Siberia – there's really nothing quite like it on the planet. There were other Westerners on the train, but also lots of Russians, so we'd get to know them and talk with them. There was this one experience involving some friendly Australians, who were great, open-hearted Australians – you know the way they can be – who were in the regular class. They made some Russian friends, and they gave them their jeans – they wanted their jeans, because that was a thing back then, selling them your jeans. The Russians insisted on giving them some rubles for it, and it was a friendly experience.

And then when we were dining with the Australians a day later, they said, "Oh no, we're in trouble. We're afraid what's going to happen, because the Russians came to us and had to give us our jeans back. They said they're going to want to question you when we get to Novosibirsk." So, we sort of cooked up this plan about how we were going to link arms when they came to arrest our Australian friends. What happened, interestingly enough is, mysteriously, this "Latin" teacher got on board who kind of ended up talking to all of us and getting to know us and finding out the real story, which was that we were really pretty harmless people. So, nothing ever happened with that.

Q: How long did it take, roughly, from Moscow?

CURTIS: It was a nine-day trip, including one overnight in Irkutsk. Then, when you get to the very end, they don't let you go into Vladivostok because that's the navy submarine port. Instead, they got off the electric line and they had this wonderful old, sort of Tsarist train that took you from Irkutsk down to Nakhodka, which was the foreigner version of the port. Then you took a ferry from there to Japan, basically.

So, it was just – You'd look out the window in Siberia, and it was just this endless landscape of tundra. And then you'd go by the Chinese border, and at that time – This was basically the – It was in the wake of "glasnost" (openness and transparency; refers in this case to a Soviet policy), the opening of the Soviet Union. They were trying to be more open, so they were very interested in tourism. But at that time, the Chinese and the Russians were not very friendly, so there'd be all these big posters exhorting the people to be on guard and be vigilant against the Chinese.

It was a wonderful trip, and really gives you the feeling of how vast and massive – It kind of fits into the psychology of the Russians, this untamable land. So, I do remember getting into a huge argument with one of the Soviet captains. Interestingly enough, you can say what you want to say, but I was basically trying to convince him that his government was a dictatorship. It was not long after the famous incident of the Czechs

beating the Russians in ice hockey and I used the story to illustrate to him how the Czechs wanted to be free of Russian domination.

Q: Right, in 1980.

CURTIS: So, we were talking about how they were subjugating all of Eastern Europe, and how they let these guys go free, and he was basically saying that, no, that was all us. The whole Czech team was paid off by the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) or something like that. But it was a great education, I think, and a great experience in that kind of psychology. It was learning how, when you think you see things a certain way in your world, you can talk openly and try and convince somebody, but it doesn't matter. If that's the way their psychology is, they'll just – They believe what they believe, and they'll martial whatever facts they want.

Q: So, you leave the Soviet Union, and you go to Japan?

CURTIS: Right. So, I went to Japan on the Baikal and, again, it was another interesting experience in life, because at that point, I had no interest in Japan. But from that moment, it became one of the central interests for the next 10 years of my life. My friend who I was travelling with, David, had a good friend that he went to school with who was a Lutheran missionary outside of Tokyo. So, we went and stayed with him, which was great, because the big problem at that time was paying for housing. We got a job teaching English, and we were paid the equivalent of about 12 dollars an hour, back in 1976, '77.

It was great. I quickly fell in love with the Japanese culture. It was the first time I'd ever really experienced something that was a fundamentally different way of thinking. Because Americans are so independent, and we are a me-oriented society, and here is a classic ethnocentric or homogeneous culture that had been closed for hundreds of years to the outside world. It was 3,000 years old.

It was really about thinking about the whole. It was about the groupthink. There was very little individualism, and it was beautiful in a lot of ways; the aesthetic sense is so highly refined. The sense of propriety, peace, place – and of course it was after the war. Americans were still king. We had brought the emperor down, so we must be above God Himself. But they were very friendly to Americans, and we were constantly invited to people's houses. It was a wonderful time to be there. We travelled all over the country. Got to know a lot of Japanese, and I still have many friends today from that experience. I started learning the language then, so – not to get ahead, but my first post was in Tokyo in the Foreign Service.

Q: But, before we get there: You finish your trip. Do you actually get as far as Australia?

CURTIS: Once we were in Japan, David got accepted into Columbia for grad school, so he left there, and I kind of had to decide if I was going to go west or east or whatever. But we had originally planned to go the classic overland route. Australia was never really in the plans. I went on to Southeast Asia, and I had always wanted to go to Nepal, so I did

hook up with some Australians and we went up to the Annapurna Himal, which was the Annapurna base camp at 16,000 feet. That was a wonderful experience.

I traveled around India, and then after that – The whole experience was pretty exhausting, especially being in India. I got a little sick. So, then I came home through Korea and Hawaii. I ended up back home in about 1978. I was travelling from ’76, through most of ’77. So, once I got back home, the job market was pretty thin.

But here’s something else I’d like to mention: In high school, I was a bit of a leading computer guy, back in the dawn of the computer era. We brought the first teletype machine into the high school; we had the paper tape, and my friend, whose father went to Dartmouth – We went up there and took a course in basic – I was the only one in the school who knew how to program, so we would teach courses at a high school level when we were in high school. So, after I came back from this trip around the world, there were no jobs in international relations without a masters or an advanced degree, and even then, they were few and far between. It’s a tough way to go.

So, I figured, “Well, I should try to get a job as a computer programmer.” I did take some courses to brush up; there were plenty of jobs in computer programming. I went to work for a small time-sharing company, which was time-sharing on computers, not time-sharing in condos. They were bought by Burroughs Corporation, which was one of the leaders then in minicomputers (way before the advent of the personal computer). I did that for a while and enjoyed it very much.

Q: Whereabouts was that?

CURTIS: It was here.

Q: Oh, in D.C.?

CURTIS: In McLean, yeah. Because my mom was here, so I came back here, lived at home with Mom. Then I got the computer programming courses and went to work as a professional computer programmer and technical help. I did that for about a year before I realized I didn’t want to do that for the rest of my life. I wanted to get back into international relations, so I decided to go to grad school.

At that point, I felt that I’d had plenty of experience. But I wanted to make sure it was practical, so the American graduate school Thunderbird – you know of it - rated number one by US News for many years in International Business? – came to my attention. They had a very strong international network and I figured with a good practical international business degree, plus my business experience, that I wouldn’t be throwing my money away. So, I went back to grad school there, out in Phoenix, Arizona, in Glendale. It’s a great international community, and I pursued my interest in things Japanese, because Japan was big then. Japan was rapidly becoming the number two economy in the world. So, I took Japanese courses, and then I did a semester in Japan, at the International

Trading Center near Mount Fuji. It was beautiful. You'd wake up every morning and see Mount Fuji looming over the campus.

Q: That's interesting. The American Trade Center had a teaching program?

CURTIS: No, I'm sorry, it was the International Trading Center, and it was basically run by the Japanese government. They invited people from Thunderbird to go for a semester. We were basically, kind of, the opportunity to observe the "gaijin" (foreigner), as they're called, up close, and make some lifetime friendships, which I did there. They were all the crème de la crème. They were all Tokyo University or Kyoto and were picked because they were going to be leaders.

Q: Let me go back one second. You did take some Japanese when you were there, and I imagine you did take a little more now, when you were at Thunderbird. How long – Did you ever become reasonably fluent in Japanese?

CURTIS: Well, after I had my first posting, they did get me a 2+ in spoken Japanese, though written is a whole other story. Then at Thunderbird I formalized the education a little more. So, I think I tested, actually, a 2 level before I went into FSI (Foreign Service Institute) here, before going out… before I entered the Service. But that was a while later, because I did almost a total of 10 years in the private sector before entering the Service.

Q: Okay, we'll get there. But not too quickly.

CURTIS: Don't want to go too slow for you.

Q: No, that's fine. So, you're in Thunderbird, and you have your semester there. This is approaching, now, the end of your graduate program. So, now what are you thinking about?

CURTIS: Yeah. Well, I had the experience in the computer field, and I had the experience in international, around the world. But I think I started taking the Foreign Service exam, and that was always kind of the thing in the background. As I've advised many people over the years, never put many of your eggs in that basket, but when it comes, it'll come at the right time and in the right place. But I was thinking about getting a job with a good computer company that had an international department, so that I could either start there or work my way into the international department.

So, that was my plan. After I finished my graduate degree, a number of my friends went to work for Mitsubishi and for Japanese companies, but I was not quite as interested in doing that, because, to a large extent, the skills they really wanted them to work with were their English. So, it was kind of – They had a lot of editing jobs, for the Japanese that were trying to break into the U.S. market. So, I came home after graduate school.

Q: And this is?

CURTIS: 1980. Yeah. That's when I met my wife to be, when I got back. I don't know how much you want me to go into that story, but she had been working for GAO (U.S. Government Accountability Office), and we met through a friend on July 5th. I took her for a hike, and then we enjoyed each other so much that we went to a meal after that, and I remember writing her a note saying, "We've started a trail that I hope will never end."

Q: Wow. Already? Just from that one day?

CURTIS: Yeah, it's amazing, you know, when you're both out of work. She'd been working with GAO, but I think she was off that summer. She'd been kind of interning there. So, we were both more or less unemployed for the entire summer, so we would get this book of 10 tickets for 10 dollars at the Circle Theater downtown. They were double features. So, that was basically 50 cents a movie. We saw all these great old classics: *Seven Brides, Swept Away,* all those old movies. We just walked around, enjoyed the free things in the city. She lived on Capitol Hill, so I spent a lot of time up there. Sometimes we would walk into the Capitol building to see congress in session. We would go together to the regular candle-light vigil at the Iranian Embassy to bring our hostages home.

Then in the summer, I started picking up part-time jobs. I got a job with the Sears Corporation for a while, and then worked my way into a company – I'm sorry. I probably got that a little mixed up. Before, I'd been working for Burroughs Corporation, and then I started with another timesharing and time-networking company, which was based here in Rosslyn, and they had a big international division, so I was hoping to get into that. But I started in their federal sales.

Q: Now, the early '80s were also a time when a lot of the big banks had entry-level programs in various financial areas, because they were essentially beginning to reach out a bit more in loans outside the U.S. Did you think about that?

CURTIS: No, as I mentioned, the Mitsubishi guys, the big Sogo Shosha trading banks and traders, were all really looking for people like that, based in New York, for the most part, and that was not so interesting to me. I didn't pursue that very much. The '80s were a big, roaring buyout time. Business was going strong, and people were buying each other left and right, and I remember that they made three or four runs at the small company I was with for a while. But no, I didn't really look at getting into the finance business. I was more oriented towards international marketing.

So, it wasn't too long before I was able to actually – Well, here's an interesting and kind of an old networking story about how I worked my way into the international section of the company. I knew, in the same offices I was in, that there was an international office at the other end of the floor. So, I went down and introduced myself to the guys. I got to know them and told them about my international experience. Then they said, "We could really use a guy like you." They said, "We'd really like to hire you, and we have an opening and everything." And then they said, "But, as usual, everything's held up by corporate Cupertino, California. So, we don't know."

So, I'd go back there, and they'd say, "No, nothing yet." So, finally, and, you know, this is maybe a lesson in being brazen, I figured how – I was researching the CV (curriculum vitae) of the president of the company, Warren . Turns out he went to Thunderbird. So, I wrote him an email or something, with no response, and finally I just picked up the phone and called him. They put me through, and I explained that I was a T-Bird and had all this international background and everything, and that they really wanted me in this and I knew that I could do a lot for the good for the organization. I talked about markets we could open up. But he was very noncommittal, didn't really say anything. I said, "Thanks for the time, I really appreciate you talking to me." It was probably a 10 or 15-minute conversation, and then he hung up.

The next week, the paperwork came through and they hired me. So, I spent several years, then, in international marketing. I was working on – It was a fascinating field, telecommunications. We were talking about all of these interconnect agreements, so we had to work with the PTTs, the Post and Telegraphs, for all these countries where we were opening up. We were selling a lot of equipment to the former British crown Colonies; we were working with Cable and Wireless a lot. Those were the days of the breakup of AT&T and MCI, and so we had ITT and MCI and AT&T and Western Union International, and we had to have these regular meetings to coordinate our interconnect agreements with the PTTS, as well as how we were opening up markets and how things were going to be priced around the world.

It was fascinating. It was all about data; these were the early days of – This was before the Internet, believe it or not! There was a time before the Internet. But it was about data interconnection for companies, mainly, and even for individuals, to some extent. The kind of individual market was open a little, but the mobility market was open even more. So, we were very much about selling interconnection between any kind of terminal, and allowing the communication from mainframes to terminals, and mainframes to mainframes. There was IBM (International Business Machines Corporation), but our company really had a lead on being able to do that packet-switching better than anyone else.

Q: This was the moment for it. You were right there.

CURTIS: Yeah. It was heavy times. It was exciting. It was very interesting, though, to watch, I think, how markets could change. The core of the business of the company had been timesharing, selling time on mainframe computers. But when the PC (personal computer) came out, that business went away almost overnight. But the underlying structure of the company was a packet-switching network, which allowed all these different devices to communicate with each other.

We hadn't really given it a second thought, but all of a sudden that was golden, because now the PC (personal computer) era was on, so all these PCs wanted to talk to each other. There was no Internet. So, we sold that all over the world, and we could get terminals. Back in the Caribbean – Oddly enough, I went back to the Caribbean and did a lot of my

selling there, to have computers there connect to mainframes in the United States. Yeah, the point of sale banking business was just taking off, and it was somewhat developed in the United States, but it wasn't internationally. All these tourist places, where tourists wanted to use their credit cards without exchanging dollars for whatever the local currency was.

So, yeah, it was huge business, and it was crazy, because there were a lot of people buying and selling. Eventually, we got bought by McDonnell Douglas. We were actually bought three different times, that's how heady it was at those times. McDonnell Douglas decided that they were too dependent on the defense business at that time, and so they decided they wanted to get into the information systems business, because they had the largest in-house computer system in the world, because they needed that for all of their aerospace products. So, McDonnell Douglas bought us in the mid-'80s, and they bought at the same time 15 other different information systems companies. They moved into it in a big way. So, yeah, we spent a lot of time out in St. Louis, getting training and everything.

Q: Now, at this – We're talking about from 1980 to 1990, more or less?

CURTIS: Yeah, they bought us in maybe '84, '85, and then they actually didn't hold us that long before were sold, I think in '89, to British Telecom.

Q: No, but I mean for you, in terms of the period of time in your life when you are working in this field, you begin with your company in '80 or '81?

CURTIS: Yeah, '81. And as soon as I had a good job, I proposed to my wife.

Q: That was my next question.

CURTIS: Yeah, so, I proposed to her in '81 on a mountain top, and we were going to get married at the end of '81, but that got pushed off to '82, where we were married on Mother's Day, here in Comus, Maryland on a mountaintop on a beautiful spring day when the dogwoods were out. We were married by – she was Jewish – by a rabbi and an episcopal priest. My priest and a rabbi, who both happened to be named Harold White. It was outdoors, under a canopy on a beautiful spring day. I broke the glass, and we went to honeymoon in my old hiking and caving ground in West Virginia and Virginia. She was a great sport. It seemed everybody from my life was there at the wedding at the beautiful Stronghold Mansion estate. It's a wonderful day in your life, when everybody comes together at one point, just for us. There are all of these people from your life, from your different walks, who have never met each other, and they get to see each other for the first time.

Q: Now, when you got married, was your wife also contemplating a career?

CURTIS: Yeah. My wife was an extremely accomplished person, having already been on Good Morning America with her accomplishments at Junior Achievement. She then went to work for Common Cause.

Q: And that was in the early days of Common Cause.

CURTIS: Yeah. It was when they invented the check-off for public financing. My mom worked there as a volunteer and she introduced my wife and they immediately hired her for a full-time job there.

Q: Well, wait. Take a second and just describe what Common Cause is, because I'm not sure a lot of people realize.

CURTIS: Well, I don't think we even called them NGOs (non-governmental organizations) back then, but they would be called an NGO today. They were a government watchdog organization, whose principal goal – Well, and they were called "grassroots organizations," if you remember, which meant that basically, their membership was all individuals for the most part. They paid membership fees, and their strength came from that. They took on key political issues, and their number one political issue was public campaign financing. They were really responsible for getting the checkoff public campaign financing into law, which has unfortunately sort of gone by the wayside, after all that wonderful progress we made.

So, they managed it throughout the country, and they were involved in political issues. But they were nonpartisan, and for many years they were headed by Archibald Cox, after he was fired by Richard Nixon. Or quit, I guess, because he wouldn't carry out Nixon's order. He was a wonderful figure. He would always wear a bowtie, and he had at that point argued more cases on the Supreme Court than any living human being. So, anyway, that's Common Cause. They were a really fun organization. They believed passionately in what they did. So, she worked there for several years. She had been very active in an organization called Junior Achievement.

Q: Right. That's very interesting.

CURTIS: Yeah. In fact, in high school she was the only person to have received their top three awards. She was president of the organization, and best company organization, and best speaker.

Q: I'll just tell you one thing about Junior Achievement: I was a political officer and then a public affairs officer at the time when the Soviet Union collapsed, and the East Bloc became free. Junior Achievement was in every one of those former communist countries, and they loved them. It was really heartwarming to see how Hungarians and Romanians and Poles just loved this notion of high school kids and college kids building little businesses and learning how to do it that early.

CURTIS: That's a great story, yeah. I didn't know that, but it makes a lot of sense. I mean, in Commerce we were involved with the whole government effort to set up business centers throughout the former Soviet Union, but there's nothing like when they do it themselves, on their own level, like that. So, yeah, she was on *Good Morning America*; they interviewed her as a representative of Junior Achievement. So, yeah. I always kind of felt like I destroyed her career as a multi-millionaire, because she had such great business drive and acumen. But she loved the Foreign Service career, so she was happy to be a part of it.

Q: Okay. Well, to go back to your business career: It was busy. Did it also take you out of the country? Did you do a lot of travel with it?

CURTIS: Yeah. It was kind of a classic international business career, in that you were all over the place, dealing with a lot of different countries. At one level, it was a lot of fun, kind of sexy. At another, it was totally exhausting. All you do is see the inside of an airplane and a hotel and a business office and a taxi. And if you got one or two days where you could actually experience the local culture in-country, you were lucky.

Q: So, now, a very important question: All this travel, all this international marketing, did you use any of the Foreign Commercial Service services while you were in the private sector?

CURTIS: Yes, I did, a couple of times, but not as much as I should have. But there is a very interesting story, because we did participate in a trade show in Mexico City that was run by the Department of Commerce, by the Foreign Commercial Service, and I always remember that because of a guy who became a good friend and future colleague. He was running it down there, a guy named Tom Kelsey, and we had a booth that we had signed up for. I went and manned the booth, and it was a telecommunications show, and there was only one problem with our booth at the telecommunications show, which was that our phone didn't work!

Q: Isn't that always the way.

CURTIS: So, my agent, who had fixed this all up, comes to me and goes, "Yeah, I've been trying to get it to work." So, I was, in like the typical ugly American way, like, "Show me who runs this darn thing. I'm gonna talk to him right now." So, I go storming into my future colleague's office, Tom Kelsey, and I say, "What kind of an organization is this, anyway? I'm at a telecommunications show and my phone doesn't work!" He's all apologetic, like, "Yeah, we've been trying, and we can't fix it." It was the usual, stuck-in-the-middle kind of poor Foreign Service guy who is relying on the PTT but can't get them to focus on getting it fixed.

But in a classic diplomatic solution, my phone didn't work, and the show was opening, and the Minister of Commerce was coming around to tour the show, and of course Tom, whose show it was, was taking him around, with all the press in tow and everything. So, to make up for it, he brought him right to my booth. He said, "This is Keith Curtis," so of

course I end up on the front pages of the paper and in all the pictures, here's my product and here's my name. That's the way you solve things in the Foreign Service. We could never be angry at the guy. Who cared about a little phone when our product was getting all this free advertisement? So, that's how you solve things. So, yes, I did use FCS as a businessman, but should have more.

Q: But, enough to sort of form an opinion or be aware of it as a tool?

CURTIS: Yeah, it was great. We had agents all around. We also worked very closely with Cable and Wireless, and then when the British bought us it was kind of a different story. I worked for the Queen there for about a year. And actually, when you think about it, it was still pretty early. The Service was only formed in 1980, and we did have some active trade shows out there, but not a lot.

Q: Now, in this period, while you were in the private sector, what are you thinking about, or what experience are you having, that would make you want to switch to public affairs, or public service, I should say?

CURTIS: So, I still had that dream in the back of my mind, and I would still, every other year or so, take the Foreign Service exam and see what would happen. I always enjoyed taking it. It was free. I considered it a fun test to take. I would take it regularly, but I would usually stumbled on the English part.

Q: Of all things.

CURTIS: Yeah. Because the rest was easy – history, politics, and they were even starting to throw some business questions in, too. So, those were easy. But what I found was, I loved the job and I was being paid and I was getting commission, going to Sales Club every year… I was very successful. But that frustration of being in these cultures and seeing these parts of the world and being able to look but not touch was not what I wanted out of an international career.

So, I really wanted something deeper. I wanted to be able to have more impact in a meaningful way, and so I always kept my eye on the Foreign Service. I think I had also applied for jobs in Treasury, and I was very close to getting a job at Treasury in the International Department. The guy really wanted me, but it was the usual story about, "Yeah, I'm gonna hire you, but first I have to get an exception to the freeze."

So, whoever's reading this, there will be probably be the same thing going on. It hasn't – It's not just this administration; it's been around since forever. So, I kept taking the exam, and finally – Well, actually, I came in the first time and I passed it. I passed it a couple of times, then took the oral and didn't pass the oral. So, I guess it was probably over a period of about six years that I took the exam, or didn't take it, and then would pass, and then would take the orals. Then, I passed both the written and the orals in '89, and then in '89 there was the long, drawn-out process of getting on the rolls and all that.

Q: And with all your international travel, the security check was going to be a very long process.

CURTIS: Right. "Name somebody in every place you were, that can verify your –" What? I remember, I had to do this for Berlin, for when we took the Trans-Siberian across Russia. Yeah. It was 10 years of international travel, and I had to account for it all. Yeah, it was going slow. It took at least six months. So, the funny thing was that the State Department offered me a job in the A-100 class in the fall of 1989.

Q: Did they offer it to you in a particular cone?

CURTIS: That's a good question. I don't think they were coning back then. I don't think they coned until after you were hired. But there was this a very able person over at the Foreign Commercial Service, who ran HR (human resources), who was cherry-picking off of the State Department rolls. He would go over to see who had passed and cleared everything, and he'd look at their resumes. He looked at my resume, and he said, "Wait, this guy has almost 10 years of business experience."

So, I got a call. I think somebody had recommended to me the Commercial Service to me. A Foreign Service officer had said, "You know, Keith, with all of your business experience, you really ought to look at FCS (Foreign Commercial Service)." So, I called them. I guess, actually, I called them first and then he went over, and I told them, "I passed everything." And they gave me an offer to enter the A-100 class.

So, he said, "Hold on a second." State was going to start me at an FS-6, and Commerce started me at an FS-4/14, all the way at the top. The absolute maximum they could start me. That was still a 20% salary cut for me. The vice president of the company came down and tried to keep me in the company; he offered me a 10% raise, but this was what I had always wanted to do, and there it was. I mean, you calculate the savings in housing, and the security in the pension… It wasn't a difficult decision for me. This was what I wanted to do.

Q: And you're about 30 now?

CURTIS: Yes. I joined the Service in 1990, and I was born in '54, so, yeah. I was 36. I had gotten married and we'd had our first child; I skipped over that. Actually, we had our second child in 1990. We had our first child in 1987. Aaron Gordon Curtis was born on January 27th, 1987, and was just a perfect joy. Best thing that ever happened to me. Then, after I entered the Service, our second child was born on St. Patrick's Day, 1990, which sort of slowed things up a little bit, because of course, until my wife was cleared, we couldn't go anywhere. So, there was her pregnancy and then after the child, Jason Russell, the second great joy, was born. But they picked me, with all my Japanese experience, to go to Korea first.

Q: Of course.

CURTIS: But then the guy who was head of our Japanese operation, a wonderful officer who was extremely capable named John Peters, somehow again got word of me and said, "Wait a second. We're priority. I need somebody like him; he's already got Japanese and he knows the Japanese market." So, they recruited me for Japan and I went to FSI (Foreign Service Institute) for some brush-up on language, and I started in Japan in 1991.

Q: Before we follow you to the first tour, is there anything – Did you go through A-100?

CURTIS: Yes. Right. At that time, they were including Foreign Commercials. There were certain windows where FCS was included in the – I went through the A-100 with State Department colleagues, so, yeah, it was great. I loved it. Good colleagues, a few of whom who I've kept in touch with to this day.

Q: We left off just as you were going into your first tour, if I remember right.

CURTIS: Yeah. I think I was just entering the service, and I started to tell you that they wanted to send me to Korea, even though I had a strong Japanese background. I'd studied the Japanese language and everything. So, they sent me to Korea. Fortunately, the guy who was head of our Japan operations, John Peters, saw my background qualifications. And that's the nice thing about the Commercial Service: It's small enough that you can have somebody with some influence call in and say, "Why are we assigning this person to Korea when he has Japanese? I badly need –" And those are the days, interestingly enough, when we had a huge trade deficit with Japan, so it was a political priority to have us well staffed in Japan.

Q: Now, what year again are we talking about?

CURTIS: It was 1990 that I entered the service, so they changed my assignment from Korea to Japan, and sent me to DLS, the Diplomatic Language Services, for a brush-up of my Japanese since I'd been out of it for about a year. So, as you know, we used that instead of FSI in the Commercial Service a lot. It was very convenient, because you could take somebody like me, who already had extensive Japanese but didn't fit into a set course. So, I did that for about six months, and then – It did take me a little longer than I thought, because I developed an ear infection. So, John Peters was famously calling me the Jimmy Hoffa of Japan, missing in action. So, anyway, I went out in February of 1991 to Japan for a four-year tour. Just as I was arriving, Mosbacher, who was our secretary of Commerce, was coming out for a visit.

Q: What city were you assigned to?

CURTIS: I was assigned to Tokyo. So, at that time, I think Japan was our largest overseas operation in the '90s. We had operations in Nagoya, Osaka-Kobe, Fukuoka, and Tokyo, just for commercial operations.

Q: Let me ask you, before we get to Mosbacher coming out, were the assignments to each of those cities, in essence, the same kind of Foreign Commercial Service officer, or were some of the officers specializing in something particular in the different cities?

CURTIS: No. I mean, we were all generalists in terms of the Commercial Service. The Commercial Service would vary; sometimes we would have just FSNs (Foreign Service Nationals) in a location, and there might be a consulate there, or an econ officer that was managing it and no officer. But I think all of those – Well, Nagoya was one of these cities that went up and down. It was open, and then it was closed. There was clearly a big need – Nagoya was the headquarters for Mitsubishi, which was one of the largest companies in the world at that time. It was where they had built the famous Zero Warplane, and aircraft, and they had years of manufacturing, before the war, as an aerospace center.

They were anxious to get back into it again. And that's a story because, eventually, Boeing decided to build the wing of the 777 in Nagoya. So, there was a lot of reason to have commercial operations there. So, I think – There was always a tension, in our service, between our main role, which was to support U.S. exports, and the secondary role to support investment in the United States, which was of course of interest. But the controversy of supporting investment overseas was a whole other issue.

But as we had found, investment leads trade. If you build something like a 777 wing in Nagoya, not only does that mean that they're importing a lot of aerospace products for that wing, but it means Japanese will be buying Boeing airplanes and completed projects. It sort of locks in that, so that was an interesting issue while we were there. I was going to tell you about my first week in Japan, because it was interesting. I was in charge of the general commercial outreach to U.S. companies and to small and medium sized companies, which of course has always been a big target of the Commercial Service, to get small and medium sized companies into the exporting business.

So, we actually had a library, you just mentioned earlier, there, but it was a commercial library. Back in those days, people could still walk into the U.S. embassy to use the commercial library. That was what I was in charge of, then. I was also in charge of – This was the big era of Japanese auto-manufacturing investment in the United States. So, during my first year in Japan, I was control officer for 17 different governors, who were all trying to woo the Japanese auto-manufacturers into setting up in their state.

Q: Do you recall what a typical governor would say to the Japanese, in order to attract them?

CURTIS: Well, a lot of it was about tax and setups, as it always it, about what kind of infrastructure… Interestingly enough, there was a lot of concern about wages, and therefore a concern about unions, and union rules. So, I know that when, for example, the auto-manufacturers set up in the South, they really were non-union shops. So, that was always a big issue. But there were also – The Japanese were always very thorough about any decision that they made like this. They would make several visits, they would want to

really get to know you. They wanted a level of trust. They wanted thorough detail and information about what all the costs were.

But I think in the end, they really did want to have a level of confidence that the partners they were working with were people that they could trust and people of integrity. Also, the Japanese always felt that they wanted to be connected at a very high level. That's why it was so important to have the governor come out. For a long time, our history of ambassadors to Japan were at the very top level, either senators or – In fact, when I was there, when I arrived, it was Armacost, who was more of a professorial type. That was during the Bush administration, and he was followed during the Clinton administration by Walter Mondale, who was a former vice president and presidential candidate.

So, those things were important; they wanted to assure the Japanese of an access to a very high level, and that they would be extremely welcome, that they could have a high level of trust and confidence, and that there were sound financial reasons for coming. Toyota ended up in California, with a joint venture with General Motors at the NUMMI (New United Motor Manufacturing, Inc.) Plant, which was famous. Then, of course, Honda ended up moving a lot of its manufacturing to Marysville, Ohio, and in the end, there were a lot of joint venture operations to get into the business. So, there were 17 different governors, so there were a lot of different receptions going on.

The week I arrived, my first week as a junior officer, there were seven different receptions over three days. My mentor said, "Well, Keith, here you go. Here they are. Just go there and wave the American flag and meet people and find out what's going on." I was like a deer caught in the headlights, going to all these places and all these receptions. One night, there were three different receptions in the same night. So, I went to the first two. I knew it was going to be late and I had to slice my time thin, and I'll always remember the experience of going to the third one. It was a really nice line; I went through the reception line and introduced myself, "Keith Curtis, U.S. Embassy."

They said, "Oh, so great to have you." It was a tremendous affair. The Japanese do these – There were seven harps on a stage, playing simultaneously. There were violins, too. As it turned out, after I got into the reception and started meeting a lot of people, I realized that, actually, I was at the wrong reception. That's how I think it is in the Foreign Service sometimes you have to go with the flow and quickly make the best of mistakes; almost like being on stage. Of course, they were delighted to have me; it turned out to be the reception for the major shopping market chain in Japan.

So, it was quite lavish. It was a nice reception to be at, and I made some great connections on the consumer side. But I think it's kind of an example for the listeners of how hectic it can be. It's hard work. The Foreign Service often gets a rap for just being a lot of receptions, but really, meeting people and getting to know how the economy works is critically important.

I remember, when I entered the Foreign Service, one of my Foreign Service mentors said, "Whatever you do, Keith, the key to having a good career that is interesting and

productive, and to getting ahead, is to get out of the embassy. Get out and talk to the people and learn firsthand what's going on." So, these kinds of events were very important for that reason. So, there were a lot of them, while I was there my first year. There were, as I mentioned, 17 different governors, like the governor of Virginia, Baliles, and Governor Hunt of North Carolina.

One of the highlights was that Governor Cuomo came at the end of the year, and he was being talked about as a Presidential candidate – Nobody knew that other governor from Arkansas. Nobody knew of him. But everybody knew of New York, and Cuomo had an incredible profile. When the governors would come, they would speak at the ACCJ (American Chamber of Commerce in Japan). They usually had a large forum where they would speak, and then they would meet with the top auto-manufacturers, as well as with other main companies like Mitsui and Mitsubishi. Then they would meet with the ambassador. And all of that was something that I had to handle, so it was a busy year, for my first year as a Foreign Service officer.

Q: At that time, when you were trying to get American exports to Japan and Japanese investments into the U.S., were American jobs a major concern for you the way they have become now? The reason I ask in part is because two of the factories you mentioned that the Japanese opened, one in California and one in Ohio – Those are both union states, or have been union states.

CURTIS: Well, jobs were number one, but obviously there was a difference in the approach to unions between the Democratic administration and the Republican administration. But in the end, these decisions were made by the Japanese manufacturers. We just were very – The deficit was growing, and that was because we were buying so many cars. The Japanese understood the idea that you should be close to your customer, and we were their largest market by far.

So, yeah, jobs were extremely important, and they always have been in my entire 30-year career. It's about the – I mean, it's also about the consumer, and they're connected. Consumers are workers as well, and also, if you have low costs in the manufacturing cycle, then you can produce more competitive automobiles and then you can have more jobs. But yeah, it was always an important consideration. We were constantly, throughout the career, producing statistics on how each one of our efforts and our commercial efforts would lead to more jobs in the United States. Having more Commercial officers created more exports, which created more jobs and higher-paying jobs. But in this case, we also were very much interested in having this manufacturing done in the United States because it created jobs and investment.

Q: Very good.

CURTIS: So, kind of the highlight of that – I'm trying to think. Of course, 1991 – Was that the election year?

Q: '92.

CURTIS: ’92 was the year that Bush was elected.

Q: And then took office January ’93.

CURTIS: Right. He took office January ’93. President Bush came to Japan in a very important event, and that was after he was – So, yeah, it was actually over – It was in January of 1992.

Q: So, literally –

CURTIS: Right at the beginning of the election year, when the calendar year was beginning. He was the hero of the Gulf War. His ratings were in the 70%, the highest of any president ever. He decided to come down, because you know the New Year’s period in Japan is a very important holiday, and they generally shut down for a week. Even the – It’s called “shogatsu” (Japanese New Year), and even the Japanese wives and mothers make all their meals for the week ahead of time, and they stack them in these great “bentos” (single-portion home-packed meal) so that nobody really has to work for most of an entire week, during “shogatsu.”

Unfortunately, this was the time that the president decided to come. It was the only good time. He brought with him 20 CEOs (chief executive officers). We had at that time a program called the Japan Program, which was part of the long-term debate about the deficit, which was, Is there a structural problem with the Japanese market? Are there real impediments? Are you purposefully keeping them out? Or is it just that the American companies don’t do the right thing, and they don’t make a right-hand driving vehicle in enough quantity, they don’t come to the Japanese market, they don’t make enough investment in the Japanese market to sell their automobiles?

So, we developed a program with the Japanese that was called the Japan Corporate Program, where we said, “We will get you 20 really good companies who will commit to doing exactly what you think it takes to get into your market. We will bring them, we will make the announcement, we will have a big program, and we’ll see what happens.” So, obviously it was a multi-year program, but a key kickoff for this program was the president’s coming to Japan for the Japan Corporate Program and leading these 20 companies.

He also brought the CEOs of the Big Three: Lee Iacocca, Jack Smith, and Red Pauling. These were the captains of the industry. They, interestingly enough, sat down with Nissan, Toyota, and Mitsubishi and Honda representatives, and talked about the future of the market and how some things should be structured. So, it was a huge event, and the Commercial Service, of course, had a big lead in it, because we were responsible for the companies. We set them all up at the Okura Hotel, and I’ll always remember to this day and my interactions with the head of Chrysler who worked for Lee Iacocca, and how nervous he was about having the right room for Lee Iacocca when he arrived. It generated

a lot of press, and there was even talk at that time, I think, about him being a presidential candidate.

Q: Right, because he had turned around Chrysler and so on.

CURTIS: Yeah, he turned around Chrysler. Right. He was a charismatic individual. So, this was a massive operation. There were 800 support people that came for this event.

Q: Between the President's entourage and all of the private company entourages…

CURTIS: Yeah. So, they completely booked the Okura Hotel, and there were three cabinet individuals: the secretary of Commerce, the secretary of the Treasury, and secretary of Transportation, as well as the president of the United States. So, we had control officers, and I remember I was a control officer for the hotel when all the CEOs arrived. So, each of these companies were represented by their CEO. We tried to treat them all equally, and they came in and they checked in and we took their credit cards and assigned their rooms. They all had the same rooms.

The only exception to that was Lee Iacocca, who didn't bother giving us a credit card, just met the head of the Okura Hotel at the front door and was escorted to his rooms. But that's the way it is. We try to be as fair and even as we can, but it doesn't always work out perfectly. It was a huge event, and one that was effective in a lot of ways but is mostly remembered for the fact that the president of the United States got sick – He went to Korea first, and then he came to Tokyo, and when he was in Korea he caught a flu. We were at the prime minister's residence, where the dinner was given in honor of the president of the United States. He was, as those events are, working himself to death.

We had the responsibility helping get people from the right places at the right time, from the stand-up reception to the sit-down dinner. And this is actually not classified, but a little-known fact that I witnessed directly, and it was that the president was standing up in the reception room with the prime minister, and everyone was going through the reception line; he was greeting everybody. We were right outside near the bathrooms, and while I was there with my fellow officer, suddenly there was a huge commotion at this bathroom that was next to us. It turned out that the Secret Service came in, and then the doctor came in, and then the president of the United States came in, and we were like, "What is going on?"

Apparently, he got sick, before he got *really* sick. And that's kind of a lesson to us all: You think you've cleared it out once, you know, and you think you're going to be fine to go on. But it hit him the second time after he'd gone and sat down and still had a speech to do next to the prime minister. It hit him extremely hard, he got sick on the Prime Minister and he passed out, and there was pandemonium at that point, because the president of the United States was now unconscious. Only momentarily, but…

It was interesting, because we had done the whole advance work for the event, and during the advance work, the advance team discovered that the press was planning to film the

event. The team didn't want that, and there was some discussion at the time. We made an agreement with the press that this would really only be for historical purposes. Well, when the president of the United States threw up on the prime minister of Japan, it was on the news within minutes. So, that's how much you can trust those agreements, given the notable and unusual events.

But I think the other lesson from that was that building personal relationships is extremely important. We had long discussions with the Japanese government and security, especially the local police, about how to handle the CEOs, how to handle the secretary of Commerce, and how to handle the president of the United States and all of the different priorities. During that, I made a couple of good, close Japanese friends with the Japanese federal police and with the local police.

When that event happened, and they completely locked down the entire residence while they got the president into an ambulance – which he didn't really need, but of course just for caution's sake – and got him out of there, nobody else could come or go. We were very concerned about the secretary of Commerce, that he was kind of waylaid there with the CEOs. Fortunately, I saw the guy who I had been working with for weeks in advance on all of the security, and I went up to him and I talked to him and gave him a Japanese greeting. I think it was that relationship – He said, "Oh, yes, of course, we'll get him out right away."

So, we got the CEOs on the bus with the secretary of Commerce and got them out of the residence. But that was a tumultuous event for a junior officer. So, it really is a career of trial by fire. They throw you in, and you got to swim. I loved the Japanese culture. It was a very rich culture at the time, but it was a time of some real tension with the United States, because of the deficit primarily, and because the Japanese economy was growing so strongly. They had that double-digit growth for almost 20-plus years.

So, at that time, a famous book came out, *Japan as Number One,* about how they were going to overtake the U.S. economy. And then there was a famous writer, who later became prime minister of Japan. Ishikawa? I can't quite remember his name. But he wrote a famous book about "a Japan that can say no". This was about the fact that, basically, they were, to a large extent, starting to control the microchip manufacturing market, and that if they weren't treated with some respect, they could cut all this off at any day and bring the U.S. economy to its knees. Those were interesting times. The primary effort that we had, over many years, was to get an agreement with the Japanese over the sale of automobile parts, because it was about jobs.

Not only was there considerable loss of jobs in the U.S. auto-manufacturing, but particularly at the next level, at U.S. parts manufacturing. For us, we felt – again, this was about access to the market – there was this huge market, and the Japanese would use U.S. parts in the U.S., but great, recognized companies like Delco, with their batteries and their parts, wouldn't be used in Japan. So, the Japanese agreed to make commitments and to make efforts to buy a certain level of U.S. parts for their manufacturing. That was a

long effort and discussion that was led by – Well, once it got into the Democratic administration, it was led by Assistant Undersecretary Jeff Garten.

Q: Undersecretary of Commerce?

CURTIS: Yeah, because Commerce actually had the lead on auto negotiations, so we sort of broke up industries between State Department and Commerce in terms of trade negotiations.

Q: And even USTR (United States Trade Representative)?

CURTIS: Yeah. USTR certainly had the overall lead of any legal trade agreement that was made with any country anywhere in the world. But in terms of the details of the industry and knowing what goes on in the industry, when it got to a really heavy level, Commerce took the lead in automobiles and also in semiconductors, which was a huge issue at the time as well.

Q: Now, at the same time as the issue of Japanese buying U.S. made car parts, you also had the movement of – Oh, not quite yet. NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) hadn't been signed. Sorry.

CURTIS: What was really key then, actually, was the birth of the WTO (World Trade Organization). So, the WTO was just getting started – I couldn't tell you the exact year that it went into formation, but it was the early '90s – and the Japanese had signed off, of course. So, this was supposed to bring a whole new regime to the idea of trade agreements, because now there was an umbrella, worldwide organization which set minimum standards for trade and to which any violations could be brought for resolution. So, really in the next phase of the whole automobile trade conflicts was that the Japanese were now moving upscale in the automobile manufacturing and sales in the United States. They created their whole Lexus organization, and the whole Nissan Infinity organization, and the – What's the Honda one? I forget. But the, you know, upscale Honda; Acura.

Q: Accord, and –

CURTIS: Yeah. The Accord, actually, interestingly enough, while we were there was the number one selling automobile in the United States. And of course, they would always point out to us that the Accord had more – It was the Accord and the Ford Taurus, and they would always point out to us that the Accord had more American-made parts in it than the Ford Taurus. Because the Taurus used a Mitsubishi engine – Or, actually, Chrysler used a Mitsubishi engine for a lot of its manufacturing. A lot of the engine parts were made in Japan.

So, they were moving into this kind of upscale – It was one thing when the Japanese had their small Civics or CVCs or the Sentra or whatever, these cheap, light, compact cars. But now they were moving into the luxury market, and so that was actually, in some

ways more of a threat because actually there was a lot more value in the luxury automobiles. So, this was after – Well, of course, we started with the story of President Bush coming to Japan in January of 1992, and we all know the story: Surprise, surprise, by that November, some governor from out of the blue from the small state of Arkansas had defeated one of the most popular presidents in our history, according to poll ratings. And it was all about the economy. So, he picked Walter Mondale, who was a union man from day one, to replace him. And I had responsibility for the auto portfolio. So, we were right in the middle of everything.

Q: Wow. Okay, a very quick question here, not particularly on point in terms of substance: While you were in Japan did you drive a right-hand vehicle?

CURTIS: Yeah. I hate to admit this on tape, but I drove a Toyota, and the reason for that was very curious. Oddly enough, the Japanese – One of the ways they protected their market was that they had a very tough inspection regime, which was called the Shaken. So, you could not get your annual inspection passed, unless you were really using authentic, OEM equipment-manufactured part. And after 10 years, for the most part, you just couldn't pass, so you had to buy a new car.

So, it was a nice way to keep you in the Toyotas, or whatever, the Nissans. I think beyond that, there was a real level of loyalty that we just don't have in the United States if you live outside of Detroit. However, U.S. diplomats were exempt from the Shaken, because, as you know, under the Geneva Convention, even though we made an effort to live by the laws, we were not required to meet all those standards. So, when a perfectly good car couldn't pass the Shokan, we diplomats would pick it up for a song. I think I got this Toyota station wagon for about 500 dollars and drove it for 5 years. Of course, it never had a problem, because the Japanese over-engineered their cars, especially Toyota. I mean, the CEOs of the Big Three told me this once. They said, "You know, they make them to aerospace specs."

Q: But you learned, then, to drive on roads on the wrong side of the street?

CURTIS: Yeah, of course. You get used to it. It was more difficult if you went outside of Tokyo. Reading the signs in Kanji, knowing which way to go and with the maps – It was a difficult system. But we never had any big problems. My boys were very young; we lived on a compound, which was right in the Roppongi area… At that time – this was right before the bubble in Japan – it was the most expensive real estate in the world. The compound we had was right in downtown, at Roppongi and Akasaka. It was worth millions by the square yard.

We had three towers there. We had tennis courts, and we had townhouses. It was a great place to live, and for the kids to roam around and grow up inside of a perimeter. We loved the Japanese culture; it was a very rich and beautiful culture, and I had lots of Japanese friends from my studies in Japan. So, it was a tour that we really enjoyed. But the work was hard, and the Japanese worked very hard. They had this – They would work from nine in the morning until nine at night and then get on the train for an hour to get

home, and then they'd go to sleep. And they would drink. They always wanted to go out drinking to drink some sake or some beer, and there were plenty of those places around. But we loved the food.

It was great. The Japanese culture is a very rich aesthetic culture. But most of my time there was a lot about the auto wars. I was leading up to this: Once Vice President Mondale got there… He was a wonderful individual. I loved him. He was a great guy, full of self-deprecating humor. He used to like to say that the country team – He used to quote that line about Wagner. He'd say, "Well, you know, it's like with the –" When he heard some policy he didn't like, he'd say, "Well, it's like they used to say about Wagner: you know, he's not as bad as he sounds."

Then he loved to say that line from Churchill about, "Oh, Japanese experts are kind of like what Churchill would say about the history in the Balkans: "the problem with the Balkans is that they have a tendency to create more history than they can absorb." So, he was focused very much on the auto issue. I remember this today: He called me into the office today to review one of the major issues, and there was a real issue about imposing tariffs on Japanese luxury automobiles.

So, we were debating whether he should go ahead, and the pros and cons, and he was sitting in his office and he said, "Well, let's call the president and see what he thinks." So, that was just one of the wonderful things about being in this career. And sure enough, he picked up the phone and called the White House. The president wasn't in; he was going to call him back at some point. But it's that kind of access that they really wanted.

Q: It's interesting that at the same sort of moment, 10 years earlier, with Reagan, the voluntary restrictions were agreed to, completely outside any trade organization or trade regime. You know, the Japanese – and again, it was the auto industry – agreed to certain amounts of restrictions on exports of their cars to the U.S. I don't know how this issue was resolved, but I don't recall tariffs being used.

CURTIS: No. So, the voluntary agreements were a great success, we thought, and we wanted to continue them forever. But the Japanese weren't so keen on them. And we shifted them from automobiles to automobile parts, and a lot of the negotiation under Bush was about how to continue the voluntary restraints. Everybody would say they were "voluntary," because if they didn't do it, there would be problems in the relationship.

But this all sort of came to a peak under Walter Mondale, because now, with the WTO, these kinds of things weren't really – At least, the Japanese were claiming that, "No, this is really not the way the WTO is supposed to function." There were huge meetings about this in Geneva. To give you an example of the pressure that was on us, we were talking about imposing the largest tariffs in the history of the world – two billion dollars' worth of tariffs – on Japanese luxury automobiles coming into the United States. The largest auto-dealerships, who were selling these cars… The top five of them came to Japan to meet with the ambassador, to tell him what the effect was going to be on their business if they didn't reach an agreement.

So, there was tremendous pressure, honestly, and it all came down to one night. I remember there was one huge incident with Mickey Kantor, who was USTR, right, and the head of the Japanese – well, the famous MITI Trade Organization, and actually it was the head of the Foreign Ministry who was doing the negotiating. He was a very brilliant politician, named Hashimoto. There was one – To give you an example of small diplomatic incidents, there was one day when he came over to negotiate the auto agreements with Kantor, and the pressure was a lot; it was always in the press.

We decided, as a nice gesture, that the USTR representative would give the minister a katana, a Japanese sword. You know, as a nice gift to him. So, they gave him this sword in front of the national press. They presented it to him with a big press announcement, as well as announcements on the agreements and the negotiations. And then Hashimoto took the sword and said, "Let me show you how to use it." He put it in Kantor's hands, and Kantor grabbed it – You hold it like this. And Hashimoto got on the other end… So, the picture on all of the front pages was a picture of the USTR holding a katana sword to the throat of the minister. It was exactly what they wanted. They wanted this picture of the "U.S. threatening us to death with their hardnose politics."

Q: Very clever.

CURTIS: So, this all comes to a head in – I can't remember. '93 or '94, I guess. We are within 24 hours of putting the largest tariff in the history of the world on the Japanese. I wrote about this in the *Foreign Service Journal*, at the time: While they're negotiating in Geneva, the ambassador and I are back in Tokyo. I got a call at nine o'clock at night from my counterpart at Toyota. He said, "Dr. Toyoda needs to see the ambassador."

So, I had to call the ambassador, and by the time we arranged it, it was about 11 o'clock at night. It was really just the DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission), the ambassador, Dr. Toyoda, my counterpart at Toyota, and myself at the ambassador's residence. Dr. Toyoda, the founder and CEO of Toyota Corporation said, simply and nicely, the usual about, "Mr. Ambassador, this is one of the most important relationships in the world right now."

Then he just simply said, "We can't let this happen." Which was his way of blinking. We had gotten within inches of each other, and it was really just a matter of whether we were going to go to the mat at the very end. And basically, he was saying, "We'll agree to extend the voluntary purchase agreements one more time." But they had gone hard and strong enough that they had made their point, that this could not be a permanent regime.

But that was another example of just how exciting the career is, and how much goes on not in the eye of the press. So, those were exciting times in Japan, and I enjoyed it very much. I did, actually, interestingly enough – The NUMMI plant in California manufactured an automobile by Toyota and GM (General Motors), which was introduced to the Japanese market. Dr. Toyoda and I sat down together at the opening, and I was the representative that helped cut the ribbon with Dr. Toyoda to help introduce this joint

venture automobile back into the Japanese market. As it was in the end, we never really broke into the Japanese market.

There were certain cars that were successful to a certain degree. The Jeep turned out to be a very popular vehicle, and they made a right-hand drive version of it. The industry's so locked together, Renault, which was owned by GM, had a lot of right-hand drive vehicles that were manufactured in Europe as well. So, that was Japan. What else should I tell you about Japan? We had a visit of Vice President Quayle; that was under Bush. It was over the semiconductor issues, and that I always remember because we went to the cleanest room in the world, where they were manufacturing semiconductors. Vice President Mondale arrived with a lot of his helicopters –

Q: Quayle?

CURTIS: I'm sorry, Quayle. He arrived with a lot of his helicopters, and I remember that that was another example of where you had to be on your toes, because when we were doing the advance business, we'd all pile into these helicopters and see whether there was room to land them.

Q: And the whole reason for using helicopters was because of the traffic?

CURTIS: Exactly. In Tokyo, yeah. So, there were a variety of ways we could have gone there, but that was the main reason. So, the head of the advance team was on the phone, on headsets, and said, "While we're flying over here, Keith will now point out all the sights of Tokyo."

Q: Oh, boy.

CURTIS: It was the first time, I think, that I'd ever flown in a Blackhawk helicopter, and I had barely seen anything else, but you got to be on your toes and learn to ad lib when you're a Foreign Service officer. Of course, the Secretary of Commerce was Ron Brown, and he came a couple of times, too, but we'll get to him a little bit later. I had a very successful career, promotion-wise, in Japan. I got promoted twice in Japan.

Q: Was your wife working?

CURTIS: Yes. She worked mainly teaching English. But we had two young kids, a one year old and a four-year-old. They were two and a half years apart, or whatever. So, there was a great compound, and my older one went to a Japanese-American school called Nishimachi; he didn't go to the ASIJ (The American School in Japan), which was way out in the boondocks. Both of them went to Japanese kindergartens, so they got a real total immersion experience, which was a lovely experience. Aaron was pretty fluent in Japanese at the end. They also both modeled with great gigs and my wife managed all that.

So, I mean, of course in Japan, the mother's role is always very key in the educational process, so she was required to do a lot of things with them. It was dominating her time, and it was our first tour overseas, so there was a lot to learn about being a Foreign Service officer and being a Foreign Service family, and being introduced to the Japanese culture. But she taught in schools, and wasn't required to have a work permit. She loved the experience. So, I'm not sure… Anything else I should cover about Japan, before we move on?

Q: No, it's really up to you. Unless there's another sort of compelling issue. But it sounds like you've covered pretty much all of the –

CURTIS: The only other one that I might highlight quickly is a story about the American business jet market. So, we sort of dominated that business jet market, and we promoted – The Japanese prime minister wanted to buy a jet for his personal use. The lead candidate from the United States was Gulfstream.

Q: Right.

CURTIS: So, often in this business and in my 30 years, there's always a question about, What is U.S. product? And it basically came down to where we could say that if it was 51% manufactured in the United States, then it was an American product. So, in the middle of this competition, the other main competitor was the French, with Dassault-based aircraft. One day the French walk into my office in the embassy and say, "We want to you to advocate for our airplane."

And I was just like, "And that would be why?"

And they said, "Well, the interior of the aircraft is completely outfitted in Arkansas." This was when Bill Clinton was president of the United States. So, "All of this labor goes into it, and we want to make sure that you can at least be neutral in your advocating for your product."

So, in the end we would always ask Washington: "We've had this appraisal. They can't commit to it being 51% U.S. content, because obviously a lot… But it is manufactured in Arkansas." But that was always a big issue that we would get to. We would have a very active advocacy program for the U.S. government, very effective. We see it even to this day. But the U.S. Department of Commerce is the headquarters of the Advocacy Center, and it tries to coordinate all of the major cabinet-level officials when they're going to work on business and trade issues. So, they had that up. The competition is always trying to neutralize whatever we are advocating for.

Q: This is the early '90s, and you were in Tokyo. In the embassy as a whole, was there any sort of general guidance that everybody in the embassy needed to at least be aware of and helpful in the Foreign Commercial Service work of promoting U.S. exports or at least helping the U.S. economy and jobs in Japan?

CURTIS: That's a good question. I think, as you know, earlier, around 1980, the Foreign Commercial Service was formed out of the State Department, primarily because most people felt there wasn't a priority given to it within the State Department. It's been an evolving process in the 30 years of my career, to make sure that that priority is understood, to the point at which today, I think there's no – It comes from the top down. All of the ambassadors are clearly given orders from the president that they are the U.S. business' and U.S. economy's number one representative in that country. It's one of the most important things they do.

I think, in the time I was there, it was kind of understood, but less – I think we were still having internal debates about the priorities of the economic section versus the Commercial section, and did the Commercial section report to the economic section, or did it report to the DCM and the ambassador, and who was in charge here. There was still a lot of that going on, and I think Ambassador Armacost, who was a very cerebral kind of guy, was more of the professorial type, and was interested, but I don't think he ever thought it was one of his top priorities.

Whereas Ambassador Mondale, especially because of the auto issue, really did see business and commerce as a top priority. And also, of course, because of the trade deficit, it was a top priority, and we had huge presence. So, I think generally we got a lot of support, but nevertheless, the top thing was always about political relations and military relations, of course, and trade. While we were there, of course, there were always the ongoing problems in Okinawa, and there was a real terrible incident with some Marines in Okinawa, which the ambassador had to apologize about. So, on from there, back to Washington, D.C.

Q: And you go back in '93 to Washington?

CURTIS: No, summer of '95. The assignment was deputy director for the Europe desk. Most of the effort was focused on Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, because this was after the fall of the Wall. So, Commerce had a lead responsibility to assist eastern European countries in the transition from communist economies to market-based economies. There were maybe 10 billion dollars that the government gave to this effort. They set up special organizations, like the CEBIC organization , which was the Economic Business Council's, and a similar one throughout the Soviet Union after the breakup of the Soviet Union.

So, they were just basically setting up business centers around Eastern Europe and the United States, that was a huge part of our role and our responsibility. At the same time, there was also the war going on in Bosnia. There was a great deal of tension there, because we really, as a matter of policy, thought, "This is kind of a European problem," but Europeans weren't getting a handle on solving it. It was just one of those realities of the world, which I guess we constantly face. There's the great cycle in the United States of foreign policy, between isolationism and interventionism, and we always find out in isolationism that the world needs our leadership, and that especially with having the greatest military in the world, having military technologies that are… No one has them.

Q: Let me go back one second. In the whole policy that the U.S. government now had toward the former Soviet Union and the former East Bloc, there was certainly an element of aid going on there. But what were some of the more practical goals the Commerce Department had out there? What would an average commercial officer do in those former communist countries?

CURTIS: Well, the problem was, there was this huge hangover of bureaucracy that comes with a government-run system and a government-run economy, and there was still a fair amount of corruption in that kind of system, right? Because bureaucrats are going to get their due, and it's not driven by the price of the product, it's driven by some apparatchik. So, I think a large part of our role was assisting them and helping break down those barriers to create a more true free market economy that would benefit both local companies, as well as U.S. companies that were trying to export or get into the market, or U.S. companies that were based there. And actually, there was some investment blooming at that time; companies like Chrysler or parts-manufacturing would set up in Czechoslovakia or Austria.

Q: Was there really a major indicator in the fact as to whether a McDonald's opened or not? That was kind of a running joke at the time.

CURTIS: Yeah. I would say, throughout my careers, countless numbers of times I've been approached, by everything from local businessmen to heads of government, saying to me, "Keith, would you please bring McDonald's here?" As though I were Mr. McDonald's or something. As though I just walked into the board of McDonald's and told them what they should do. Even to my last assignment in Iraq. So, yeah, it's an important symbol of consumerism, of freedom of choice, of the local consumer being able to get what he wants, when he wants it. So, yeah.

Again, when it comes to McDonald's, we really didn't get that much involved in their business directly at all, because they knew it much better than we did. I do remember that on Fourth of July in Stockholm they provided the hamburgers and things like that. But often, McDonald's, in Japan, for example, had a philosophy that they were a Japanese company. I remember there was a survey there that showed that something like 60% of the Japanese thought that McDonald's was a Japanese company. Because everything was in Japanese, and they would serve a corn soup.

Of course, it was very Japanese in terms of the efficiency; they would shuffle around and get you your order and everything was neatly packed and high quality and delivered on time. Of course, everybody thought it was Japanese; why wouldn't they? It's very Japanese. They do this "moshi-moshi" (hello) stuff, chop, chop, chop. And it was funny. The head of McDonald's, I remember, at the time in Japan thought it was his personal mission to get more Japanese to eat more meat so they could grow taller. But yeah, in eastern Europe, I don't remember that much of a push on McDonald's particularly; I think they were really interested in jobs and selling into the U.S. market.

Q: Because obviously, also at the same time, you have huge changes in their economy. Essentially privatization, as the overarching –

CURTIS: Oh, yeah. Huge privatization. But there were – I mean, licensing for manufacturing, or just to have a business, it was extremely bureaucratic. So, I think we made a lot of progress in opening that up and loosening that up. Interestingly enough, the first thing people wanted open were bars and restaurants and things like that. Those were opportunities to sell American beer or American food. Yeah, they did want Pizza Huts and Kentucky Fried Chicken. But you can't deal with that kind of consumer thing if you have tremendous overhead bureaucratic costs.

Q: And perhaps an unreliable food chain, and so on.

CURTIS: Yeah. So, the big thing that really hit me when I was doing that – I mean, that was a big part of the job, but the big thing that really hit was what happened to Ron Brown. It was kind of an exciting time in a lot of ways, because Ron Brown was a great personality, and he had been head of the Democratic National Committee and, some argue, would have been the first black president if – He was very close to the president. Since I was at the Europe desk, and we were dealing with the missions, we had a business mission to Bosnia, and it was going to be led by –

So, Secretary Brown kind of invented, on some level, these massive missions where he would get on the plane with them and go to countries and have 20 CEOs with him. He would open up the market and make connections with them. That's what the mission was all about in 1995, right? April. I, as the deputy officer for Europe, was in every countdown meeting before they went out, and I knew all of the individuals. At one time, I was manifest to go with them. I remember to this day: I signed a legal authority for my wife to be able to execute all of our finances if anything happened. And then I was at the desk when we got the first call from the State Department situation room that the secretary's plane was missing. He had 20 CEOs with him on that plane. My dear friend and colleague, Steve Kaminski –

Q: Who I knew by acquaintance as well, yeah.

CURTIS: He was a wonderful guy. He was my mentor and just a wonderful personality. We served together in Japan. He taught me how to write cables, and we went through thick and thin together, with the president and everything else. So, he was on the plane. I was the one that – Because I got the call from the situation room, I had to go into the DG's (Director General) office and tell her that the plane was missing – it was flying into Dubrovnik, of course. We had the – The Deputy Assistant Secretary for international operations was actually on the ground, but he had not gone to – He had stayed in Zagreb. In fact, there was some debate at the last minute whether it should be him or my colleague Steve Kaminski on the plane. But because Steve was the one who knew everything, the Foreign Service officer, he was the one on the plane.

As we all found out, it flew into a mountainside. I kind of became the person that looked after Steve's family. He had a daughter and a wife and two parents in Baltimore, and again, that's the hardest part, probably, of the Foreign Service, when you have to call somebody up and tell them that a loved one died. I had to tell his parents. So, I spent a lot of the next year just visiting them and helping them; we raised a scholarship for the daughter from Foreign Service officers.

So, it was a – Of course, I spoke at the funeral along with the director general. But it's just, you know, I think a lot of people don't realize how much the Foreign Service is on the front line. All the time. Some of the statistics – If you look, I mean, sure, the military fights our wars, but there's three million in the Defense Department and the military forces. We're just a few thousand, and we regularly confront injuries and death in our job. So, Secretary Kantor replaced Brown, and he did a follow-up mission to Croatia, which I went on. We went on the John F. Kennedy Air Force One. It was a 707.

We just flew in and kind of tried to continue the effort. We were greeted with the highest level from the local government. They put a monument on the mountain where the plane went down; I went up on the mountain. You could still see where parts of the plane were there. And it was so odd, because it's such a beautiful place, Dubrovnik. You have the Adriatic right there. But, again, it's wonderful to see how people come together and how much care there is in the Foreign Service. Even though we're spread out all over the world, people really cared about what happened to Steve's wife and daughter and to their family. It was a shock for all of us. So that, in some ways, sort of colored my tour there in Washington. I worked for a great guy, George Knowles, who – Did you know George Knowles?

Q: I worked as an intern under George Knowles way back when there was an International Trade Administration, and George was the head of Southern Europe in the Commerce Department.

CURTIS: I mean, there's still an International Trade Administration; that's what I'm a part of.

Q: Okay. This was back in '80, '81.

CURTIS: Okay, yeah, those were the early days. I didn't realize he was there that long. But what we were responding to, at that time, was the beginning of the EU (European Union). So, George really came up with a plan to unify our European operations as a single market, so as to try to approach Europe as a single market in response to the EU and the change in the barriers. So, we upped our operations in Brussels, and then we kind of broke up the market by sectors.

So, we'd have one person in charge of the aerospace sector. One of our SCOs (senior commercial officer) – those are our top people in a country – would be in charge of the overall coordination for the entire aerospace market in all of Europe. That meant trade shows and research and that kind of stuff. So, I don't know – It gives me pause for a

minute that I'm not sure how much of our audience will be familiar with how we do what we did, but there are products that the Commercial Service provides to U.S. businesses that we can actually charge for.

We are unique in the Foreign Service, to a certain extent, in that we can charge businesses to recover the costs of some of the things that we do. So, we do everything from bringing them to the United States for big trade shows, because, you know, for most of my career, trade shows have been about where the real business connections are made and met and where you can see everything happen. So, we had these buyer programs in the United States where we'd bring foreign buyers over there and meet with our companies. We did research on what the market is like. We hand-hold a company into a market.

Q: Now you're talking about a U.S. company in the market?

CURTIS: Right. A U.S. company – I know they can't see on the tape my hands moving in the directions that I'm trying to indicate, but yeah. U.S. companies… We also wanted them to come to market. We wanted them doing their research ahead of time, so we helped them with that research. That's what the market is for. Most of the times, the best way into a market is with an agent or a distributor, depending on your product, but you're never going to learn the market unless you were born and lived there. So, you're going to need an agent.

So, we would help companies find agents and distributors; that was one of our most popular things. We would have a Gold Key Service where they could come, and we would spend two or three days just setting up meetings for them with key players in the market – buyers, partners, government officials. But the most valuable thing we always really did was just sitting down and counseling them, just with the experience of our staff, who were all broken down by sector and were experts in that sector.

The staff would be the experts in the local market, and the officer would be the expert who understands most where the American company is coming from and what he's going to communicate with him, how he's going to have to understand this market. The Commercial Service was in great demand by the private sector, and we used to call it the best kept secret; any company that used our services was always like, "Oh, my God, why didn't I know about this before? Why didn't I use it in all of these other countries?" So, we were always developing those projects and refining them and making them more effective for U.S. businesses.

Q: Where would the money that you charged for the services go? Would it be used locally?

CURTIS: Yes. We created – The lawyers and us created – We were very careful with it, in accounting for it. We created what was called a trust fund, and it changed names every time, and it was kept in Washington, so you couldn't keep the money at the post. But a trust fund from the fees would go into Washington, and then each post would apply for

the use of those funds based on their needs and specific programs. It could be anything from hiring specialists, which in my way was really probably the most effective thing – Because here you're approving the worth of the person you're hiring and spending money on.

If they can generate enough of these funds that they actually pay for themselves, there's a great model that we believed in, and I personally believed in. People couldn't really argue with, "We need to hire this guy." "Well, how can we pay for him?" "That's easy! We pay for him out of the fees that we're collecting." Whereas the rest of the government is always kind of justifying, on some theoretical level, why this person is worth $60,000 or $40,000 or whatever it is that we paid for them. But we didn't have that justification; we had this very simple – So, our way of operation was very close to the way business operates and thinks. It was based on a kind of financial profit model.

Q: Were there restrictions on how you could use it? Here I'm thinking about, you're in Country X, and you know someone in Country X who is a lobbyist, and an effective lobbyist with the current government there for getting people and greasing the skids. You want to pay this lobbyist to help your businessperson get into the right offices at the right time and have the right argument made. Can you do that?

CURTIS: No. We wouldn't ever pay anybody like that, although just the fact that the U.S. government was asking was usually enough to get any meeting we wanted. That was the power, compared to hiring some private sector person. I mean, we knew them, but it was also the U.S. government asking. We would hold events. To this day, we have special – We call them "single-company promotions," where they would want to make a big splash, introducing a huge product, and we would let it go out at the invitation of the Commercial section of the U.S. Embassy.

So, people would come when the U.S. government invited you, and the ambassador would often speak, or the DCM, or the senior Commercial officer. So, yeah, it was a very powerful tool from that point of view, but no, we were never in that kind of situation where we would be paying anybody. We sometimes would contract with people to do translations or drive somebody around or something like that, but no. We did have a responsibility under the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act to inform all U.S. businesses, and make sure that if we were advocating for them, they had to sign legal and agreements and make sure that they understood the Act and they were not competing illegally. So, no, we were very sensitive to those issues and were responsible for enforcing and reporting them.

Of course, we would often have U.S. companies come to us and say, "Well, the French are doing this, and the Germans are doing that, and it's not fair. They're bribing this guy, and that guy. How are you going to help me? What are you going to do about it?" They were never easy, because again, it's all sort of hearsay and there's nothing in writing. But what's important about it, I think, is that the U.S. government had a certain integrity and access and seriousness that it could lend to a situation. So, our good offices could really help them sometimes solve things. People were in the shadows, and we shined the light

of the sun on it and all of a sudden things kind of cleaned up. So, that was a very important role and something that really couldn't be done by the private sector.

Q: As you think back on this job in the Department as deputy director of Europe, were there important – Did you have important successes that you can recall?

CURTIS: Yeah. I mean, we worked a lot in the aerospace business, so a lot of our sales in Europe were through Boeing Corporation or some of the business jet operations. But as a headquarters operation, we were mainly the administrative, and I think the greatest success we probably had during that period was just, from an operation point of view, standing up what we called showcase Europe. Which was, unifying the European effort to respond to the growth and the creation of the European Union. So, that was quite an effort that we put quite a lot of push on and that was very successful in markets across the board.

IT was huge. Telecommunications, ICT (information and communication technology) were a big effort at that time, and manufacturing in general. But I can't offhand think – That's more of a kind of – I can probably tell you dozens of wins in every country I served in, because really, that's where the rubber hits the road, when you're a senior Commercial officer and you bring the ambassador in. Whether it was opening up the auto market and the auto parts market and the aftersales market in Japan, or digital television in Brazil and things like that, like the cellular market, Motorola, companies like that that we worked very closely with.

Being in Europe, at that time, it was really about responding to the EU and of course the whole effort in Bosnia, which was to help bring peace through economic stability and development. So, there was some real success there. I think in the end, the United States – I hope it doesn't have to always be this way, but the United States' involvement was absolutely crucial. The Europeans couldn't do it, and it wasn't until our technology and our military and our economic development got involved that we were able to end the war.

Q: Now, the deputy director slot takes you through what year?

CURTIS: So, basically, another four years, to '98, and then I got assigned to Brazil as the deputy.

Q: It is January 17, 2018 and we are resuming our interview with Keith Curtis.

CURTIS: After six months of Portuguese at FSI (Foreign Service Institute), I went to Brazil in the summer of 1999, which was right after the Brazilians lost a very controversial World Cup final to the French in Paris. The star, Ronaldo, fell sick the day before, and the Brazilians held national congressional hearings into the whole matter to find out what had possibly happened that the Brazilians could possibly lose the World Cup. In fact, interestingly enough, I think my career there was sort of framed by the

World Cup, because when I left it was the World Cup in 2004, I guess. No, 2002. Right, '98 to '02 (my tour was actually 1999 to 2003). They won that one and became the penta-champions. Five time, nobody near, greatest soccer country in the world, with Pele the great and all of the Ronaldos and Ronaldinhos and all that.

So, it was an interesting time to come there and we met some of our best Foreign Service friends - one of the best parts of the foreign service, including especially the Greg Frost family who became my mentor in all things counselor.. Brazil was just discovering offshore oil, which interested U.S. companies a lot. They were holding auctions for developing offshore oil, so there were lots of predictions of them becoming members of OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) and global exporters. And as we know – I think I mentioned to you, right after we concluded yesterday, that Commerce had a big movement called the BEMs "Big Emerging Markets", which was sort of the precursor of what we nowadays call the BRIC Countries (Brazil, Russian, India and China), which are now sort of without the "R", right, or without the "B". I don't know. They're dropping on and off, and it just goes to show that even though we strategically try as hard as we can to predict areas of the most benefit for exports for U.S. companies… I think of whatever that famous Yogi Berra story was, you know, "I'm 100% at predicting the past," or whatever. That's about how good we were. But Brazil was definitely in one of its many cycles of up and rising.

Q: You do remember the remark de Gaulle made? Brazil, always the country of the tomorrow.

CURTIS: It was the country of the future and always will be, yeah. It's startling to discover, when you get there, the history of the richness. At the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, the only place you could find rubber in the entire world was in the Amazon.

Q: Interesting. Not even in Congo or Central Africa?

CURTIS: No, rubber trees only existed in the Amazon, and they had to actually – The British ended up stealing the rubber trees and planting them in Malaysia in rows, so that instead of hacking away through the Amazon jungle, you could just have the trees right there. There's a wonderful story, if any history buff wants to read it, about Fordlandia, which was Henry Ford's. He bought up a huge piece of the Amazon in order to create kind of his own country, as it were of, from cradle to grave, taking care of these people out there just to grow rubber. At the same time, he got to be king of this piece of the Amazon.

So, it is a fascinating country, and very wild in many ways. What's interesting about the Brazilian culture is that, yeah, it's home of the Samba and the Carnival and Capoeira… It's just a wonderfully rich country, but with a very interesting relationship between it and the United States, because Brazil kind of always saw itself as the other giant, or our counterpart, of the Western Hemisphere. It was discovered at about the same time or shortly after; America in 1492 and Brazil in 1500. But nevertheless, we developed this

tremendous economic powerhouse, and Brazil has always had sometimes, maybe, what some would describe as a little bit of a chip on their shoulder about their relationship with the United States and making sure that they're treated fairly and as equals, which didn't always work to their advantage.

An interesting example, and this is a good commercial story about Brazil, is, one of the things that happened while we were there was the Brazilians were trying to get into the space business. They had a very well-placed location called Alcantra in the north of Brazil that was on the equator. So, any place on the equator makes for a very good launch for geosynchronous signals and satellites because it's closer and the launch is easier. You have to go through less atmosphere.

So, they asked us to help develop that with them, and again, Boeing, Lockheed, and a number of big U.S. companies were very interested in participating in it. The problem was that our missile technology regime didn't really allow us to support this type of thing. So, we in the embassy made a tremendous effort working with the Brazilian government to get an exception, through Congress, from the missile technology regime. There were only two conditions that we placed on it, and one was that they wouldn't be allowed to open and inspect, because there was a very high technology regime here, and they were very afraid, the companies, that is, not so much that there would be technology stolen, but that technology might be damaged or whatever. So, basically, it had a kind of free passage to the base through the customs system, because we had lots of issues with customs in Brazil.

The other condition was just that they couldn't take money that they made off of satellite business operations and co-mingle that and use that to support military development and operations. So, both governments agreed that these were reasonable and acceptable constraints. After two years of working on the project, after we got an agreement and got it through Congress, these two conditions were reported in the press to the Brazilians, and there was suddenly a huge uproar about how this was a violation of Brazilian sovereignty, and how could some foreign country possibly tell them what to do with their own money and bypass their own system of customs. Last I heard, it had completely destroyed the agreement. So, that's just kind of an example, I think, of how even some of the best-made plans work, and how it's easily waylaid by politics and press and other .

Q: Let me ask you a quick sort of context question: Which city in Brazil were you assigned to?

CURTIS: Sure. I was actually the deputy – again, it was one of our largest operations now. We had 60 people. I was the deputy senior commercial officer, and I was in Brasilia in the embassy, so I was actually the representative for the Commercial Service to the ambassador and on the country team. Our senior commercial officer was located in São Paulo, where all of the business center was. It was a two hour flight, or a one and a half hour flight from one to the other. So, that meant I covered the whole northeast – I covered the Amazon, I covered Fortaleza, I covered the Pantanal. It was a huge territory. But also, it meant that I did all of the work with the ambassador.

Obviously, my boss would come up on a regular basis to discuss things with the ambassador, and we'd go over them, and I got to travel a lot. But we were in Brasilia, which to me was – I loved Brasilia, and a lot of people kind of find it to be a cold city. It was designed by a Socialist, and it's supposed to be a city of the future. It was built largely, originally, by the military dictatorship. It hadn't really grown up to be a lively city with lots of restaurants and bars and creativity, but if you liked *Star Trek*, which I loved, you could really love Brasilia.

The buildings made tremendous use of water and pillars and expanse and openness. The presidential palace didn't have a staircase leading up to it, just a large white concrete ramp, and it had huge, two-story-high floor to ceiling glass with Luminant pillars that were like flying pillars. And everybody's known the iconic Congress, with the open bowl and the upside down dome. The joke used to be that one was the House, which receives the will of the people, and the other was the Senate, which keeps it in. So, anyway, it was a wonderful place to serve, and I loved the architecture.

Q: And in 1999, essentially, within Brazil, were the cities or the areas very specifically related to certain sectors of Commerce, or was it evenly distributed more or less?

CURTIS: Yeah, there were some that were really well known for certain things. São Paulo had everything – it was the industrial center, the commercial center. But Rio was very much known for telecommunications and also for aerospace; we were talking a little bit offline about Santos Dumont. They had a huge airport there named Santos Dumont Airport. Also, a lot of the entertainment industry was in Rio, as you might imagine. Coca Cola had their headquarters for the country in Rio. It was a tremendously varied and rich country. Then, the mining sort of heartland of the country was in Minas Gerais, which was kind of in the center of the country.

Q: In the Amazon?

CURTIS: No, Minas Gerais wasn't in the Amazon. It was really kind of in the center. The Amazon is more in the western and northwestern part of the country. So, Minas Gerais is more in the plains of the country, and its where they mined all of the original gold. Few people know that most of the gold that financed the Industrial Revolution in the 1800s came from Minas Gerais, and went somehow right through the hands of the Portuguese to finance the British textile mills, which then developed factories and industry. The British had the ships, so they carried everything.

Then, of course, that story is also famous for the Amazon. Manaus was the third city in the world to receive street lighting. It had an opera house where famous opera singers sang, which they had shipped marble from… And the Brazilians would, to get their shirts just rightly made and cleaned, would ship them from Manaus, up the Amazon River and across the Atlantic Ocean to Portugal and then back, the saying goes. But yeah, in terms of the industrial areas, of course Manaus was known for the lumber and for the agricultural products and for fisheries and that sort of thing.

While we were there, interestingly enough, they were developing a lot of pharmaceutical research, but also flavors for cooking and drinks. Guarana and other drinks were being developed and coming out the Amazon and trying to be sold to the U.S. market. We had a very popular show, which was supported by the Department of Agriculture, which we worked with very closely – the Foreign Agricultural Service, that is. And they had a show in Miami, which is the *Food and Drink Show*, and we took a delegation of close to 200 Brazilians, I think. It was the largest in the history of the Foreign Commercial Service. Interestingly enough, we would charge them, because we handheld them and everything like that. So, it was a big moneymaker for our operations.

And there was the northeast, Fortaleza and that area, which was more known for tourism, I think. And of course, the original capital in the south. But it was definitely on the rise when we were there. It had come through some difficult periods, where their president was impeached – Collor – for corruption, and they had a new president, Fernando Henrique, who they called FHC and was very well respected. He had a very good financial team, headed by Pedro Malan, and it was well respected at the World Bank. They were still getting IMF (International Monetary Fund) loans; they had just come through a huge period of inflation, where they had hyperinflation of 1,000%.

So, the economy was almost always kind of like that, up and down and up and down. But when we arrived, it was really in a stable period, and the "reais" (real) was getting stronger, and as I mentioned, oil was being discovered in deep water. That was really off the coast of Rio, and they were selling all of these concession tracs. And they were also just going through a huge period of privatization, which ties into some U.S. companies, because they bought part of the – They were going from a Socialist to a more Capitalist-based economy, and they sold off the telecommunications carrier to MCI, and they were selling off the oil rights, and the aerospace business was being manufactured by a private, partially government-owned entity called Embraer, which was making a huge splash in the world market in regional jets. That became a big story for a number of reasons, and I'll mention it a bit just before we start talking about –

You know, it's very illustrative that when I arrived there, the number one sale of manufacture products from Brazil to the United States was Embraer airplanes. But if you looked into it rather closely, the number one sold and manufactured product from the United States to Brazil was airplane parts. So, it was kind of a parts assembly operation. We were the leader in avionics, and how if you're going to put something in the front of the car or in the cockpit of the craft, it's going to have this technology. Which, of course, is very interesting, because the great city of Brasilia was actually designed on the plan of an airplane. When it was drawn, originally, by the designer, it was like –

Basically, the government is in the cockpit of the airplane, with the Congress and the Presidential Palace, and then the ministries are all along, and then there are the wings where people live. So, it was designed just like an airplane, and then there are two man-made lakes, which were beautiful, that we lifted off of. But there are no – It was a Socialist design. There are no names. So, everything is by – Asa Sul, the West Wing,

number 24, number 13. We lived in Lago Sul, which was the southern lake, "Conjunto" (set) 13, "casa" (house) 13. So, it was just kind of coming out of that sort of hangover of the Socialist period.

Q: You've mentioned a couple of big sectors. Is there any reason to mention some of the agricultural things, like coffee or bananas or tropical fruits, that sort of thing?

CURTIS: Yeah, it was huge, and few people realize that Brazil has probably been the largest agricultural powerhouse in the world for hundreds of years. If you look at anything – oranges, cotton, sugar, coffee, beef, chicken, soy beans… And why? They not only have the largest river in the world, they have the next two largest rivers. They have the three largest rivers in the world in terms of volume, and they have sun, and they have huge tracts of land.

This was of enormous concern to the agricultural community in the United States, and to the – We had several regular visits by the Agricultural Committee of the U.S. Congress. They were – You know, how can you compete with cheap labor, and all the sun and all the water and all the soil you want? So, it was interesting times. They were doing well. Like, the Brazilians were dominating the orange market, and bought up a large part of the orange juice market in the United States. And then, of course, we had this running problem with ethanol and sugar, because we were protecting the sugar market, or whatever you want to call it, in the United States.

In fact, it is a very interesting story of work I had to do with – We had a delegation come down from Congress, just two congressmen. One was Congressman Jefferson from New Orleans, Louisiana, who grew up as a sharecropper and later became involved in a scandal, and the other was a governor from Pennsylvania, from Erie – Or, no, he was from the Hershey area of Pennsylvania. Congressman, I'm sorry. These were both congressmen. They came down together, and I was their control officer, because they wanted to talk business issues. They were on this Brazilian caucus. We had like a Congressional Brazilian Caucus, right? And they were coming down. And it was so funny to sit with them… It was kind of a challenge of our job in the Foreign Service.

Just to give you an idea of what the challenges of our job are in the Foreign Service: They would sit together, and the congressman from Pennsylvania, from Hershey, he wanted all the cheap sugar he could get, right? Because they made chocolate, and cheap chocolate and cheap sugar… They made candy bars in Hershey, Pennsylvania. He wanted nothing to do with any of our barriers to sugar or coca. Congressman Jefferson, on the other hand, from a state that produced sugar, wanted to make sure that those were kept in place. On the other hand, the congressman from Pennsylvania was still dealing with the problem of steel imports, and Brazil was becoming a steel exporter, at that time, so he wanted nothing to do with steel exports to the United States. On the other hand, New Orleans was one of the largest ports in the South, and wanted all the business they could get of heavy ships coming into their ports.

So, you can imagine the challenge of balancing these two kind of contradictory views while you went to visit members of the Congress in Brazil and members of the administration. But they were smart, too; they knew how to moderate and diplomatically balance their points of view. It was good to see that they were both on the same caucus; I think it was educational. It created a balance in the committee and the Congress to have these people travelling together with different points of view, but being able to understand their priorities.

Yeah, I ended up spending three days with the congressman from Pennsylvania in the Amazon, because he went up there. I was going to mention: You asked a little bit about EXIM (Export-Import Bank of the United States) and OPEC. One of the biggest projects that we dealt with there, was the largest EXIM loan in our history, at that point, to a project called SIVAM, which was a $1.5 billion loan to Brazil for the export of a radar and surveillance system for the Amazon. It was interesting, because it also mixed in – We used some Embraer aircraft, as well as using some U.S. aircraft. But it used U.S. systems, and then U.S. ground-based satellite systems.

So, there was something like 33 stations involved, and we had congressmen coming in all the time to take a look at that. It was a good excuse to get out to the Amazon. So, EXIM was in charge of financing it. The day they turned it on after, I think, I don't know how long but maybe three years after I got there, they found some 50 or so airports in the Amazon that they didn't know existed. They were just ad hoc airports for all sorts of things, from just illegal farming to drug runners. So, that was a huge project, and of course EXIM and OPEC were one of the very strong tools we used in our panoply of promoting U.S. products.

It's sad to see today that even as we're speaking, both organizations, but especially EXIM, have been hobbled by political issues and not bringing the board up to full amount, so they can't finance projects greater than 10 million. One of the big things I did when I was there was work on advocacy issues, since I was located in Brasilia and that meant we worked with the government. There were a number of huge advocacy issues. One was, of all things at that time, digital television. Digital television was used to – We wanted to make the sale of U.S. systems in digital television, as well as in cell phones. That was just the beginning of the takeoff of the cell market, believe it or not, in 1999. It's still – Even if the United States it was just developing, and it was still first or second generation. I remember that they sold off the rights for cellular transmission.

The guy who was the minister of telecommunications ran for president on the platform that he had been able to fool these Western governments and companies into buying the air. A lot of the Brazilians thought it was brilliant that they'd been able to sell the air for billions of dollars. One very interesting story there, and I'll leave out the name, that I think is illustrative of how sometimes the politics in the United States makes it difficult for us to get our job done overseas… We did not have an ambassador for almost two years in Brazil, before and after I arrived.

When I arrived, Jerry Gallucci was the chargé, and one of our companies, who actually bought the PTT, the international carrier, ran into some trouble because the Brazilians… Tax was a huge issue in Brazil. So, the Brazilians who had owned the PTT entity had neglected to pay its back taxes to its own government. So, the government had to pay the government for almost four years. And after the deal was all done, the Receita Federal, the IRS (Internal Revenue Service) of Brazil, went to the U.S. company and said, "By the way, you owe us millions of dollars in back taxes."

So, this didn't seem very reasonable at the time, especially considering that there had been all these books, and they had actually produced a letter that showed that they believed that they were free of these obligations. So, we went in, as we did, to see the minister of finance. It was myself and the chargé, and we went in to see the minister of finance, who was the previously mentioned Pedro Malan, who was a very cerebral guy, pro-American, very well and widely known and accepted in the international finance community.

So, I went to see him, and we laid out this whole problem.. Now, he liked to smoke a pipe. He listened very carefully while he was smoking his pipe, while I was describing this problem to him. Then, when we were finished, he stopped, did this little pause and took the pipe out of his mouth, and he said, "So, when are you going to get an ambassador to our country?" End of conversation, right?

As I mentioned to you at the beginning, there was a real concern about respect from – You know, as a co-equal in the hemisphere. And here we were, for two years, without so much as the courtesy of a full plenipotentiary ambassador because of personality issues, basically, in the U.S. Congress. Because of the administration with the Congress, and because of our famous senior senator from North Carolina at that time. So, anyway, we kept trying, and you have to find a creative way to work around things, but those are the kind of things you face on a regular basis in the Foreign Service.

So, as I mentioned, we were advocating for telecommunications, we were advocating for digital television. We also fought a big battle on the postal services, of all things, because they'd opened up the postal market, so FedEx and UPS (United Parcel Service) and DHL were all doing great business in Brazil at this time. The Brazilians, not unlike what we sometimes experience here in the United States today, were like, "Wait, this is big money, and we just let it go free from the mail business. We can barely afford to deliver the mail anymore, and these foreigners are making millions off of our market."

So, they wanted to re-regulate it. They basically were just going to throw it back into the Brazilian government. So, it was an interesting case, which I did many times in my career, of bringing together our efforts with our allies (EU), under DHL and FedEx and UPS, and then just going to see the appropriate congressmen and putting together a committee. It was a thing we worked on for over a year or so, a year to two years. And we were able to stop the postal law. It didn't get off the ground. But that's an example of the kind of positive work we do to save business interests overseas.

Q: That is a pretty significant accomplishment. Was it recognized as such at the time?

CURTIS: Yeah, I got my share of accomplishments. For the U.S. auto one, I forgot to mention earlier, I was part of the team that got the gold medal from the Secretary of Commerce, which was a group effort. But for the individual advocacy efforts, in Brasilia I got the silver medal from the Secretary of Commerce. So, it was recognized and well-appreciated, and companies certainly appreciated it very much. So, those were the interesting things that were going on. We did get a lot of, again, governor-led missions to Brazil. We got the governor of Pennsylvania; we got, interestingly enough, Jeb Bush, who was Governor of Florida, with a delegation of about 50.

There's an interesting story there, because I was again a control officer. He brought a delegation of 50 businesspeople. But he flew up on his own to Brasilia. I mean we, the Commercial section, when he came to Brasilia. Embraer lent him a jet, and unfortunately when it pulled up to the tarmac, where the ambassador and six other vehicles were waiting for the governor to come out, they couldn't find the right staircase to bring the governor down. It was the latest and greatest Embraer jet, and they didn't have the right, proper staircase. So, the governor had to do a very odd and slightly spellbinding maneuver in order to get down from the airplane, at which point he was whisked off immediately to see the president of the country, Fernando Henrique.

But those missions… I also remember that Governor Hunt came from North Carolina, and I really enjoyed his visit very much. He has a son or a son-in-law who was in the Foreign Service. I'll always remember the drama of the moment: When he first arrived, I met him at the plane, and he was kind of looking around. He said, "So, Keith, what happened to all of the trees?" It's natural, you know – when you think about Brazil, you think the Amazon. But actually, Brasilia is in the heartland of the country – and there's a whole story about how they developed the capital there because all of the people lived on the coast, so the interior of the country was largely neglected – and everyone thinks, "Oh, it's the middle of the country, this is where the Amazon is."

But no, it is a semi-arid desert area with high plains. There have never been any trees. The only trees that were there were flooded when they made the two lakes, because they dammed two mountain passes… Or actually, they dammed one mountain pass, which created two lakes. But I remember the moment. Again, life in the Foreign Service! The day that he came, we had a number of visits planned downtown in the government section, with the ministries. But there was a huge protest – it was supposed to be a million people – against the government. We were debating every minute: "Are we going to go ahead with this?" I remember dreaming, that night, of being in a car overturned in a riot or something like that.

So, we ended up shifting some of the meetings to the ambassador's residence, which was further out, but we still held some downtown and it wasn't anywhere near as bad as we thought it would be. Then, we did get delayed, so we were rushing off to the airport with a police escort at the last minute to get him on his plane. I remember – You know, there was a police escort car in front of us who was a little agitated by the fact that there was

some car who really wasn't paying attention to the fact that he should get the heck out of the way because this was a police escort in a hurry. The police made their point to him rather quickly by pulling up alongside the driver, reaching out with a pistol, and pointing the gun at the head of the driver, who then very quickly got off to the side of the road. So, the exciting things you get to experience in the Foreign Service.

Of course, I was in Brazil during September 11th. The tour was until 2003, and I actually was attending an aerospace conference in Seattle, and was one of the first people to get out of there and go back to Brazil after they shut down all of the airspace. They had all of these delegations that were stuck in the United States and in Seattle. It was a rough time after that. We did get a number of bomb threats. Every couple weeks, we would have to evacuate the embassy because of bomb threats. Certain people were taking advantage of that, but it got old after a while.

The relationship with the Brazilians was – There were a lot of – The government was pro-American, and the Brazilians loved to travel to the United States to go to Disneyland and buy U.S. products, especially commercial products like from RadioShack or whatever. But there was also a very strong socialist sentiment. There were big issues, like they were against the death penalty, and we were actually executing a Brazilian in California who had killed somebody. I think that actually was stayed, in the end. So, we used to have regular protests outside of the embassy.

I remember one of the country teams – Our regional security had been out, trying to find out what the protests were about, and one of them – it was young, unemployed youth – got caught in the middle of a conversation. They said, "Yeah, I'm here to protest the death penalty," and then another Brazilian next to him said, "Oh, no, I'm not here for that. I'm here to protest the trade agreement with the United States."

That was a huge issue while we were there. They were trying to develop a Western Hemisphere trade agreement. So, let's see. What else can I tell you about Brazil? It was a great tour, and I got promoted into the senior service there. My family loved it as well. I think we all learned, probably, Portuguese better than any other language. It was easy, and it was fun. My high school-aged son had to go to all of these parties all the time, and it was tough for Dad. The parties would begin at 11 o'clock at night, and they wouldn't end until three in the morning, when I'd have to set my buzzer to go get him. They did like to party. They liked to play soccer and party. It was a great culture. I loved it.

Q: In terms of larger trends, were there changes in the Foreign Commercial Service that affected you while you were in Brazil?

CURTIS: Well, I think it was a pretty good time. As I said earlier, there was kind of a shift to this recognition of certain markets as being dominant and futuristic, and Brazil was picked as one of them. I was in Brazil, so that was good for me because I was heading up this operation. In general, I think that was a period when really there was increasing influence on the importance of supporting our business operations overseas through the Foreign Service. So, we were growing and it was a good period. I think we

talked a little bit yesterday about the fact that there was a lot going on between the domestic operation and international

You know, there are basically three parts to the Commercial Service. There's our overseas Foreign Service operation, which is the only Foreign Service office operation part of FCS (Foreign Commercial Service). Then, there is a headquarters operation, of course, which is where the political and coordinating administrative functions are run. Then, there was the domestic field.

Unlike any other foreign service, we had what grown to be 100 offices in the United States, which were kind of our frontline operations with businesses. We would go see the operation, meet them at their headquarters, and see the factories they were at. Those offices were responsible for really being frontline contacts with U.S. business. They were very effective and supported by local congressmen who loved to see them there. But there was always a kind of debate about how to manage the relationship between the domestic and the foreign field. We liked each other. We got along well, and we thought it was important that the foreign field get experience on the front line in the domestic field.

But these were Foreign Service officers, and the Foreign Service has lots of restrictions for serving in the United States domestically, but especially for long periods of time. As it turned out, it's not a very promotable type of operation. So, we struggled with that a lot. There was a bit of a merger that went on when we allowed some of the domestic field to join the Foreign Commercial Service, and then we established some positions in the domestic field for Foreign Service officers – you know, management level positions to serve in.

So, that was all going on, and I'd had a little to do with it while I was in Washington, but not so much in Brazil. Once you're out in the field, you quickly forget about all of the politics of Washington and just focus on your job, which is so demanding. So, those are the trends I would describe. Obviously, after September 11th, security then became a huge concern. We had a trade center in São Paulo, which was most of a building. It was highly exposed, because it was right off a major freeway, and right across the street from a huge gas station. That became a big issue, and while we were there they started looking at it. Even the regular consulate was an issue because it was too much in the downtown area. So, we found an old, believe it or not, chemical company site, and that's where they moved the consulate to.

So during that period began… After September 11th was a period when… We had had a lot more freedom, I think, outside the embassies and the consulates, and we had a lot of our locations outside Embassies and consulates. They began trying to move most or all of our operations back into connected operations. It was very tough for us, because we had to reach out to business. To make a business… You have no idea. When we were hosting events, and you have to tell a doctor or a CEO (chief executive officer) or a CFO (chief financial officer) that you can't bring your cellphone into this event, some of them would just walk away. They would say, "I'm sorry, I'm on call. I can't do that."

So, we had to be creative. We had to develop a lot of ideas. One of them was a central phone number, so that everybody could then forward their phones to that phone. I mean, yeah, we've all been inconvenienced and more by security, and obviously it's paramount, but I think for us, in some ways it affected us as much as or more than anybody because our business was so much with the public.

Q: What about the role of FSNs (Foreign Service nationals) in promoting Commerce and so on?

CURTIS: We were really fortunate, I think around the world, to have great FSNs, because they were attracted to the freedom in the Commercial Service. We were a lot less bureaucratic than our brothers at the State Department, and we could also – We paid more, because we had to, in order to compete. These were businesspeople who could make good money in the business market. So, they liked it. They loved it.

We had, in Brazil, one of the highest ranked – I think she was an 11 or a 12 – FSNs in the world in Rio. I remember in Japan we had a famous PHD who worked with us, who published on the gem market and the jewelry market. He was widely recognized as a worldwide expert. So, yeah, we had great FSNs.

Also, because it was such a massive market, especially in São Paulo, we made a lot of use of interns. So, we'd go to the University of São Paulo, and we would have dozens of interns in São Paulo working for us. They would help us recruit. As I mentioned yesterday, the gold key operation, where we would take companies out… We would just let the intern take them out and do the translation in Portuguese. They were fine with that. They were great interns; their English was very good.

And that, of course, was back in the days when we called them FSNs, Foreign Service Nationals. We probably, in some ways, created the problem where we kind of had to look at that structure again, because we would hire PSCs (personal service contracts) a lot. As I mentioned when we talked before, in the other part of the interview, we could use the funding we got to hire a temporary contract Brazilian specialist. But that was not an FSN; that was a special category.

So, we ended up having all of these different categories of individuals from the local population that we employed, and that got to be problematic, because of course some of them were permanent and some of them weren't. The ones that weren't permanent always wanted to become permanent. We created different classes of employees all over the world with our creativity, and that was both the weakness and the strength of the Commercial Service. We had tremendous creativity, and we were always inventing products that helped the customer but that would drive Washington crazy. You know, we would invent different products, and they weren't the same, because trying to get the same kind of service around the world was difficult.

Q: And while you were in Brazil, did the nature of U.S.-Brazilian commerce change?

CURTIS: Well, you know, there are always challenges in our relationship. It's a prickly, but still positive, relationship. I mentioned the Embraer issue; there was a huge trade issue between the Brazilians and the Canadians over Embraer, because they were so successful exporting it, whereas the Bombardier and… Canada took them to the WTO for violating the rules on loans. They were doing zero interest loans for the whole jet. And there was still a strong socialist streak in Brazil that was kind of against the idea of this capitalism and always very wary of big U.S. companies that were going to take over and, whatever, take advantage.

We were constantly fighting the image and the idea that the U.S. was going to invade and take over the Amazon. It was just kind of one of these funny stories, which had some truth, because somebody found some Defense Department map that showed, strategically, what would happen. At the time, there was the growing interest in the vital diversity and strength and production of oxygen out of the Amazon, and how it was being burnt.

So, it was a very contentious and delicate relationship between the Brazilian desire to continue development, especially at a high level, and even within Brazil as much as within the international community, and the need to preserve the Amazon at the time. In fact, there was a great Smithsonian project there, run by a guy named Doctor Lovejoy. He conducted a project where he divided the Amazon into a one square mile project, burnt around it, and then a ten mile square project and burnt around it, and then 100 square miles. He compared these three different locations with the heart of the Amazon, and what species could survive for what kind of limited periods, what was the minimum size you would need for certain species to survive…

So, in the embassy we had the joy of taking our kids to the Amazon, courtesy of Doctor Lovejoy and his scientists. He would conduct regular projects for the embassy people, and we took a group up there, and I'll never forget the moment. You know, to walk through the heart of the Amazon with this Smithsonian scientist describing their work and how they did it, the diversity and how the species could survive, what this means for the future.

That's another great example of the incredible richness of the Foreign Service. You couldn't pay for a trip like that. It was great. And the beaches! You know, Rio and the northeast. It was a great tour. You had to be careful in the Amazon, though. We did have one American couple that was lost while they were out for a two hour walk. They ended up getting lost for seven days in the Amazon. We had everybody searching for them, and they were Americans, and they finally found them. They could have made a movie out of it.

So, it was an interesting time with a lot of technology development. Then, towards the end of our tour there, there was a big change in government. The guy who ran for president was a former union leader who had opposed the dictatorship in the '60s, and his name was Lula. In my mind, he was just – He has since recently run on bad times,

unfortunately, I don't think because of his own… But because people around him they shouldn't have.

But at the time, he was from dirt poverty. I remember going to his inauguration and hearing his inauguration speech in the Congress, which was another part of getting to be in the Foreign Service. He described how until he was seven years old he had never tasted bread. His father left him and his mother with six kids or whatever it was, six or seven kids, and went down to São Paulo. His mother picked up the family, chased his father down in São Paulo, and found that he was living with another woman and just moved in.

So, here's this guy who really was of the people and really knew what it was like. He did this marvelous, nice, short speech where he said, "If by the end of my time as president, most Brazilians can have one decent meal a day, I will have accomplished my goal." There was no long list of tax reforms and immigration issues or whatever, just . So, anyway, that came to an end in 2003. If you have any more questions about Brazil, let me know.

Q: Well, just an odd one. There had been, for a long time, an interesting Japanese connection to Brazil. Was it still there and did it matter?

CURTIS: Yes, it was still there. The largest population outside of Japan of the Japanese is in Brazil, and mostly in São Paulo. They owned the middle market and agricultural market, so they're the ones that brought all the agricultural products to market, usually through big markets, and you can go down to São Paulo and see them at the open air markets. They knew how to care for the product. So, you know, there was this huge – And the Portuguese were the first foreigners to come to Japan during the Tokugawa period when Japan was shut. Of course, they were great navigators.

I think that was the beginning of why the Japanese, when they travelled or eventually went overseas, started developing a community in São Paulo. It was still extremely strong and powerful while we were there. I didn't – Even though I had spent all that time in Japan, I didn't have a lot of contact with that community, or get to the embassy. In Brasilia, it was important in the agricultural sector, but we let the Foreign Agricultural Service handle that. As you mentioned earlier, there were huge issues there, and of course the U.S. Congress was scared to death or our farmers being threatened. But no, it was important, and it was there. It wasn't particularly growing stronger at that time.

After I left Japan, the bubble burst, and so the economy kind of collapsed there, so they were really… There weren't even, I would say, a lot – It was mostly about the local second, third, fourth generation. There weren't really a lot of Japanese companies that invested in Brazil. Interestingly enough, there were a lot of Europeans – Italians and French and Scandinavians, which was an interesting lead-in to my next career but had nothing to do with it. So, yeah, I got promoted to the senior service out of Brazil. It was a senior position that I was in. Then we got assigned to Stockholm, Sweden. It was very interesting, because I took advantage of the little-known whatever you call it, perks, I

guess, of the Foreign Service. When you move from a tropical country to a Nordic country, they will give you an allowance to get some clothes. Had you heard of that before?

Q: Rarely, if ever, have I met someone who could actually use it.

CURTIS: Well, for a family of four, it was a whole $700, which could buy maybe half of a good coat in Stockholm, Sweden. But actually, I ended up buying a down jacket there for about $70 that I still use to this day. So, yeah, it was an SCO (Senior Commercial Officer) position, and it was a regional senior Commercial officer. I think I mentioned to you that we did a lot – More and more, when we talk about the changes, there were more demands for our coverage.

We were doing more regional coverage, so we would have sometimes two officers in one place that would cover multiple countries, rather than one here and one there. The advantage of that would be that it made for more efficient cost savings, but also in terms of protecting your own turf, you always had somebody at the helm at the head office. So, we covered – Now, in my case we didn't actually have a second officer, but I pushed for one and we got one eventually there. I covered – I was kind of a pioneer in the regional development in that area. I covered all of the Baltics, Sweden, Iceland, and Denmark.

Q: And among the Baltics, St. Petersburg?

CURTIS: No, I just covered Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, but we worked with St. Petersburg. For a while, I covered Helsinki a little bit, but I had a colleague in Helsinki… We opened and closed that a couple of times. We also covered Norway. So, the two of us worked together; I was a senior officer, and he was a two, I think, a mid-level officer. So, I developed this idea that we should coordinate all of our operations and kind of a regional approach… Again, I mentioned before about the approach to the EU (European Union); well, we kind of developed an approach to the Nordics. A Nordic product approach.

So, whenever we had some business interests in the markets – There was great similarity in the Nordic markets, even though some people would object to that, and certainly you could easily make rash conclusions from the outside that were too simplistic concerning the differences. But they were Nordics, and they were all of the same stock, essentially, with Finland, of course, being different. So, yeah, it was a huge area, in terms of land. I liked to always point out to my bosses that if you measure the distance from Reykjavik to Stockholm, east and west, and then from the Arctic Circle down to the base of Denmark, that is more land area than all of Europe, so I should be treated with some respect. To which they would say, "Curtis, yes, but it's mostly water, ice, and forest." There weren't huge populations, but we loved it. My wife loved Sweden and learned the language (better than I did!) and worked in the Embassy.

Q: Did they train you in Swedish to go out?

CURTIS: No, not even courtesy. I probably should have tried to insist on some courtesy language, but we went directly to Sweden. You know, who wants to go back to FSI? We had no desire to do that. But the Swedes are some of the best linguists in the world, and in terms of people… You know, you meet a lot of people who can do very well in English and their local language, but being able to meet people regularly who can do, effectively, simultaneous translation, who will switch like *that* in their mind between English and Swedish, is very rare.

It was very common in Sweden; almost everybody that we dealt with was good in English, and if they were under 40, then most of them would approach bilingual abilities in the language. So, there was no real need for Swedish except for the niceties. I took language at post, so I was able to master that. They have some different letters of the alphabet, but we enjoyed it. It was a Nordic climate, and of course the big thing is to get used to the dark in the winter, and the worst part of that is November, when the snows haven't come and there's black ice all over the place ready to throw you on the ground like a Sumo wrestler and crush your bones.

There is definitely – I'm a sun person, so I did suffer from some… I got myself a Happy Light. There was some Seasonal Affective Disorder there, and we had to keep being cheery, but it was… Once the snows came, there were two things you had to do. You had to get out; you had to be a skier. If you don't cross-country ski, if you don't downhill ski, especially cross-country… We lived on a beautiful little island, and the public transportation was great, it worked.

My wife took Swedish; her Swedish probably ended up being better than mine, because she would go out and took the language locally I would say for the most part, because of my training, I got my languages generally better than hers in most places we lived, but in Sweden, the Swedes offered a public course. Anybody who comes to the country gets free language training in Swedish. She took some training courses, and ended up much better in Swedish than I ever was able to accomplish. The kids, too. They got Swedish in their schools, so all three spoke better Swedish than I did.

But you had to get out on the skis. They had lit paths, so even though… At the heart of the winter, the sun would get up at 10 o'clock and it would be down by 2:30. You would see, at high noon, the sun at about 30 degrees off of the horizon, and you would get really confused about what time of day it was and where you were. You would go to work in the dark and you would come home in the dark. So, people almost immediately think about the cold when they think about serving in the Nordics, but the cold wasn't bad at all.

The Baltics still had a taste of the Caribbean currents, and it was not freezing cold, but it was as far north as Anchorage, and it was dark. Once the snow started, it lightened things up. The Swedes knew to break the back of the winter with a trip somewhere where it was sunny, and that's why they took a lot of trips to the Spanish islands and to the Mediterranean and, actually, there was a lot of – There were daily trips – During the winter, there was a daily 747 flight from Stockholm to Bangkok, and it's funny to think

of it, but it reminds me of the tragedy they experienced when the tsunami hit Bangkok. They lost 300 Swedes, which for a population of 10 million, not 300 million, was greater in effect than all the people we lost in 9/11.

The Nordics are really – We've heard them in the news recently, here in Washington, but there is something really special about the Nordics. They do have a way of doing things right, being very conscientious as a people. We used to joke that you had to be able to telecommunicate with each other to know… It's a homogeneous society, and it's interesting how similar that was to Japan, when you think about it. I didn't see that much similarity between the Brazilian and the Japanese culture, because the Japanese culture was very homogeneous but Brazilian was wildly differentiated, from the whitest white to the blackest black and every shade in between, as well as Japanese, Chinese, Hispanic…

On the other hand, the Scandinavians were very homogeneous types, with small towns. Everybody kind of knew each other, and they knew how you were supposed to behave. And I'm sure it grew out of the age of dealing with centuries of frozen, desperate, hard living. We think of them as rich, but actually, as late as the 1880s, half of the population of Sweden left, primarily for the United States, because of famine. So, you had these divisions where half of the family was in the United States, and half… You can go see the famous… It's what they call the Stairs of Tears in the Western Port in Gothenburg, where families were just divided. One group got on and walked up the stairs and were never seen again, going off to America.

So, there was obviously a very close connection to the United States and to the Midwest. So, there was a lot of business there. Another thing that people often don't recognize about Sweden is that they are tremendous traders – well, I guess we all know about the Vikings. But there are more multi-national corporations per capita in Sweden than anywhere in the world. You got the Ericksons and the Volvos. They claim the home of the first corporation, the first publicly traded stocks. You know, you've got the mines in Sweden.

Q: And you have a bit of military, particularly aircraft, right?

CURTIS: Yeah Saab built the Gripen jet, which again, had a lot of… It had about 50%... If they put a GE (General Electric) engine on it, it would have more than 51% of U.S. contents, so they could claim it was a U.S. product because it had lots of U.S. avionics in it, and if they put a GE engine on it… It didn't matter if they put a GE or a Rolls Royce engine on it, or whatever. So, it was a very competitive aircraft because it was very highly engineered. Again, it was amazing in Sweden how many CEOs of corporations – Erickson, who's the famous vacuum? Electrolux were engineers.

The CEOs of the corporations were engineers. Name an engineer who is the CEO of a major corporation in the United States. They would all hear about sales – and that was the culture, too. It took some real adjusting to for an American, because it was not a salesman culture. They were more like the heart of the United States, more like the Swedes in Minnesota or Kansas. It was like, "Show me, don't tell me about it with your sales BS. I

don't want to hear what you have to say about it. I want to know exactly what the product does and how it works; show me that it can do that, because if you start talking up all these claims, I'm just going to know you're total BS. I'm not going to trust you."

So, it was great. The counterpart of the cold winters was a fantastic summer. Beautiful, endless summers. At the height of the summer, on the 21st of June, the sun just barely dipped below the horizon. There was always light in the sky. Endless sunsets. We had a boat – I bought myself a little boat. My dad was in the Navy, so… We would go out after work. I'd get home at 6:30 or whatever and we'd go jump on the boat and sail to an island and have dinner on an island, and then come back at 10:30 at night. The light was still in the sky and you could sail; you didn't need lights on the boat or anything. So, it was a marvelous time. It was like – Just the Stockholm archipelago is 30,000 islands. Every Swede had a little or big boat, and a house on one island here somewhere. Of course, we would take the ferry across to Helsinki. It was just a marvelous thing to dodge in and out of these islands. It was a pretty big ferry and went overnight. It was a great place to serve.

Q: Well, not to take you out of your stories, but what were the major commercial activities going on?

CURTIS: As I mentioned, there were a lot of U.S. companies based there, and a lot of U.S. technology, with IBM (International Business Machines Corporation) and 3M. Again, there's a big Scandinavian country in the Midwest. There was a very active AmCham (American Chamber of Commerce) that was promoting U.S. products. One of the more notable things I got involved with – This was kind of the heyday of Bitserving and BitTorrents.

We mentioned earlier, I think, that one of the lead responsibilities for the Department of Commerce was IPR (intellectual property) protection for U.S. products. There were a lot of rip-offs of songs and particularly of movies in the Scandinavian market, where U.S. products had had a lot of success. That was with these Bitservers. So, at the time we were there, the largest BitTorrent server in the world, Pirate Bay, was based in Stockholm, Sweden. We worked very closely with the government in Sweden, and of course they were very conscientious about the rights of the law and the rights of inventors to their product.

So, they worked very closely with us, and we worked very closely with the Motion Picture Association of America, the MPAA, and that was great too, because they would bring their stars and their movies. We had some first-run movies shown privately in the U.S. embassy and in the ambassador's residence. We encouraged that as a way of promoting, among the senior government, the idea importance of IPR. We would have a private showing, or we would have a star come and she would talk about the importance of protection in order to continue this kind of product…

It was a tough cultural issue, because young people couldn't see any reason why they shouldn't just download this movie while these guys in Hollywood are making millions

of dollars. So, we worked with them closely, and they agreed to put every CD (compact disc) and every DVD (digital video disc) that was played… They had a nice public information campaign about not stealing stuff. They had this great public information campaign where they showed a young person just walking into a regular store, stealing a product off the shelf, and walking out with it.

Q: conscience, right?

CURTIS: Yeah. They would just say, "You wouldn't do this, would you? Well, every time you download a movie, that's what you're doing." The problem was that technology was moving so fast. You could do this kind of easy, just push a button and get a movie that you didn't have to pay for. On the other hand, you couldn't – The paid services that we have today, like Netflix or Amazon or iPhones or whatever, hadn't developed.

So, you didn't have any reasonable access. Some of these movies you just couldn't get. They didn't play in Sweden, because the market wasn't big enough, or they would come out months later, after showing in the United States that it was going to be a big, blockbuster movie. So, we ended up doing – This was a computer-based – because the Swedes are great engineers, entrepreneurs, and technology-people…

They had this huge, illegal Bitserver based in their country, which was a little bit embarrassing, but on the other hand, the youth loved it, and it was kind of a sign of being cool and being on the leading edge. But the government agreed with us that this was just not good. So, that was a case where we brought MPAA and talked to them, and eventually, after meeting and talking over their concerns, the Swedish government, in the proper and correct way, took the bull by the horns and raided Pirate Bay, arrested the CEO and two of the other founders. They shut down Pirate Bay, took it offline. It went dark. They threw the guys in jail.

They faced some political backlash from among the youth, and there was even a political party created – the Pirates, I think they were called – that attracted the youth. In the end, within a week or so, it was up again in Russia. They just moved it to a backup site. But the founder went to jail, and I think the point was made. It really did help solve the problem, and probably hastened the day, as well, when more commercially available solutions came to be. So, that was one of the big issues I worked on, and one of the more notable.

Q: A small issue: Whaling in Iceland. Did that come up?

CURTIS: No, I don't remember. It came up a lot when we were in Japan, and we would go to the Tsukiji market, which was the largest fish market in the world. It was fantastic, and congressmen would always want to go there. They didn't have the whales there, but they had a lot of fishing issues. Yeah, we had a full-time expert in Japan, a NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) guy, a fisheries guy. Because at that time, there was the controversy about the nets, but there was also the controversy of

fishing with night flood lights. Japanese had these huge trawlers with these football field lights, and the fish would come for the lights.

So, they were big into fishing. It was the heart of their culture, so it was tough. We had all sorts of barriers to Japan, probably more than anyone else. Rice, skis, apples, everything. They were just not really rational about that stuff, but it had to do with agriculture, most of it, which is a very hot political issue in Japan. The representation… The way they had it, cities had less representation than the countryside, which is true in a lot of places; it's true in Brazil as well. It is also true, to some extent, in the United States.

Q: Another sector you haven't mentioned is the U.S. education sector.

CURTIS: Yeah, and that I did get very much involved with in Sweden. I invented and we beefed up the post-graduate education. The Department of Commerce has a huge lead on programs like Education USA, which was a huge revenue source for the United State for quite some time. After September 11th, of course, they was some fall-off from that and some concerns, but we continued with our promotion So, we would have U.S. educational institutions do events overseas, and we always assisted the US schools everywhere we went.

I put a special emphasis on our post-graduate education business in Sweden and Scandinavia because these guys are already pretty well educated. As it turns out, it's public education. The Swedish government pays for your education. They would actually pay at the undergraduate level and, in some cases, at the graduate level, for you to go study in the United States. The Swedish government ended up paying a U.S. institution for you, a Swede, to go study in the United States. So, I really enjoyed that, because of course we dealt with all of the top universities: Harvard was there, and Wharton, and we focused on the business schools as well. Harvard, Wharton, Darden at UVA (University of Virginia), MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) and Sloan.

Of course, there was a huge connection between the Scandinavians and Stanford, so that was a big push. But the biggest commercial thing I got involved in – I'd forgotten, and I didn't get into this earlier – was on environmental issues. It actually was one of the – I would love to write a paper on this someday, but I think it's getting a little bit stale. But I think it was a great example of how to turn around a problem diplomatic relationship. So, when we arrived in summer of 2003, President Bush had actually begun the War in Iraq.

Q: And Sweden was not happy with that.

CURTIS: Right, particularly because – Not only because they had 100 years plus of neutrality and were big proponents of peaceful solutions, but also because there was one Swede in Guantanamo. There was a Swede. I don't know his whole story, but his father was Swedish, lived in Stockholm, and he had been captured by U.S. forces on the battlefield in Iraq. He was not, as we know, being given full rights as a U.S citizen. – He had no connection to the United States, so he was considered an enemy alien.

CURTIS: So, his father would come and protest outside the U.S. embassy on a regular basis. So, we had this very tense relationship with them during the Bush administration, and I had one of the most interesting ambassadors I ever worked with. He was one of the guys I just really got connected to. His name was Michael Wood, and he was 100% businessman. He was a friend of the president, had been a friend at Yale, and at Andover, I think it was. He always tells the story of how he sold his business for some $100 million or something, and then decided to retire and was looking forward to a period of playing golf. Then he got a call one day from his old friend George Bush, who said, "I'm looking for somebody to be an ambassador to Stockholm."

He said, "Thank you very much, Mr. President, but I've been working hard for a long time and I'm looking forward to just relaxing for a while."

Then there was kind of silence at the other end of the line, and his old friend George Bush said, "Michael, the president of the United States does not make these calls lightly."

So, when Michael stepped into the U.S. embassy and told us, the first country team, that, "Until I got here last week, I not only had never had any idea what it was to be an ambassador, I had never stepped foot in a U.S. embassy my entire life." But as it turned out, he and I hit it off immediately, because he actually owned one of the biggest trade shows in the world, the World of Concrete, and then sold it. He owned the whole housing… He was in the magazine business, actually, and he owned the B2B businesses that marketed the housing market.

So, when he got there, he thought about, "What do I want to do as an ambassador?" He had done a lot of – He was a very thorough guy. I always enjoyed him as a mentor, because he taught me a lot of things, and one of them was to focus. He was a very focused guy. He would go to a trade show, and he said he'd always come away with three cards. That's all. When I came away from a trade show, I always had so many cards that I couldn't remember who the heck was this guy, and who was this guy. His approach to being an ambassador was the same way.

He said he learned that there were two main ways you could be an ambassador: You could be an ambassador like most ambassadors are, where you go out and cut hundreds of ribbons and do hundreds of projects and go all over the country, or you could be one that really focuses on one thing. He decided that that's the kind of ambassador he wanted to be; he was that way by nature. He called it the One Big Thing, from the minute he got there. The first thing is he wanted to decided what was the thing he could really move the needle on and make a change in. So, at that time, actually, a year or so before he arrived, Sweden had held the presidency to the EU (European Union), and President Bush, when he came in, had decided not to sign the Kyoto Protocol.

So, we were the bad guys on the street in environment, and we were the bad guys in Baghdad. But he decided there were three things we could do: We could work on the

issue of democracy in the region, because the Soviet Union had fallen a while ago, but there were issues in the Ukraine and there were issues in the Baltics about free democracy. The president was pushing this issues. So, we could do that, but the downside of that was, a lot of people weren't sure that they had the same view of democracy that our administration did.

Or we could work on getting – An issue for a long time was getting Sweden into NATO (North Atlantic Trade Organization), because they were obviously a powerful force with a great economy, great engineering, lots of people we could use to really support the whole effort in the region. And NATO was expanding, because of course the Baltics were joining NATO, which was a huge issue because the Soviet Union was now history. So, it would be very strategic if the Swedes would join NATO. However, we realized that that meant alienating at least half of the Swedes if we could convince the government.

They were a neutral country, and had been for more than 100 years, and that would be very divisive, even though it would be, strategically, very important for NATO. And the truth of the matter was that they helped us out a lot anyway, during World War II, and they certainly were ready to give us information on what the Russians were up to when they could without violating there neutrality. The third thing that he decided he wanted to work on was environmental issues, and working with them on the development of environmental products and solutions to global warming and other issues.

This was the time when Al Gore released *The Inconvenient Truth*, a movie, and subsequently won the Nobel Peace Prize for his work on global warming and climate change. So, it was a topical issue, but again, it was an issue where there was controversy The president had turned down the Kyoto Protocols. So, he talked to a lot of people in Washington about the issue, and then he got all of the country team together so that we could decide what we should work. He wanted to hear from us what he thought we should work on. So, we had to of course tell him before he told us, which was always a little awkward. But he held a meeting we all remember very well at this offsite, down by the water. I actually sailed my boat to this meeting, because it was on a weekend.

So, I got there under wind power, and showed up, and we had a kind of open discussion, and then he said, "Well, it's time to decide. It's time to hear final votes from you what you think it should be. Of course, I will decide what it should be in the end." I don't know why it was, but I was on his right at this big table, the first one, and he turned to me first and said, "Keith, what do you think it should be?"

I was all over the environmental issue. I made my case, and it turned out that was what he wanted anyway. There was some controversy – the political officer, I think, was more for the NATO thing. But the majority of the room was really for focusing on environmental issues, because we had a lot of leadership in that area. We had a lot of leadership in solar, and solar power was really… Even to this day, some of the largest solar operations in the world are in the United States. Wind power and the U.S. Green Building Council… Obviously the ambassador was familiar with those energy efficiency issues. So, that

became a big part of my life for the next 10 years, from that moment on, and it was a big part of our commercial focus.

We took lots of delegations to the solar power show in the United States, in San Francisco, and Los Angeles, and as it turned out, the head of the International part of Department of Energy, which had a lot of the lead on these issues… The Undersecretary for Renewable Energy, Andy Karsner, was married to a Swedish woman. So, he was happy to make visits to Sweden. It was a tremendous and beautiful effort with accommodations. The Swedes themselves were huge leaders in this area, so there were a lot of joint venture opportunities. The ambassador was very much looking for new ideas and new inventions, so I put all of our Scandinavian ambassadors together, who were mostly VC.s, and had come out of the Venture Capitalist environment.

We went to the United States and took them to a number of trade shows. They first-hand discussed the advantages of their markets. So, we had the Danish ambassador, the Swedish ambassador, the Norwegian ambassador, and the Finnish ambassador. We had a great time. I organized this entire trip to the United States for four ambassadors. Ambassador Hunt was in Finland. And they got along; they were great. They were travelers. They didn't give me any heartaches or headaches. They were business people, so they knew how to jump on an airplane.

So, yeah, we went to Colorado. We went to NREL, which is the National Renewable Energy Labs, and showed it off. We got the king of Sweden to go to NRELs; we got them involved in a Flint, Michigan waste energy project, because the Swedes had – They were smart enough to get the idea back in '73 with the first oil boycott, because they didn't have any oil until Norway discovered it offshore. But the Swedes didn't have any, so they knew that their whole industry was at risk if they didn't do things efficiently. Of course, this was from a culture that knew how to do things efficiently, because you can't live in the frozen North without knowing how to preserve and recycle things.

There are a couple of great stories that came out of that, and interestingly enough, the ambassador, who was a friend of the president, knew this, and most of us didn't: The president himself was actually an environmentalist. Even though he did not sign the Kyoto Protocol… It wasn't popular in the United States; it wouldn't have passed the U.S. Senate anyway, if he'd signed it. I think he knew the initial vote was like 90 to two in the Senate. So, it just wasn't going to work.

As it turned out, the Kyoto Protocol had lots of flaws in it, but it was a great effort for its time. But when the ambassador talked to his friend the president about it, he said, "Yeah, go for it." In fact, I think he asked the president, "Which of the three would you pick?" And the president picked the environmental one, over the political or the military one. So, we had a great show in Washington that was put on by ACORE (American Council on Renewable Energy). The president started an international pledge for contributions to go towards technological development, looking for the next technological solution. So, my Commercial section became at the center of this whole effort. That was the One Big Thing for the U.S. ambassador.

And what's fascinating about it is how they completely turned around our relationship with Sweden. Here was bad press because of the invasion of Iraq, and they weren't happy with us because we hadn't signed the Kyoto Protocol, but also the U.S. ambassador was out front, in magazine article after magazine article, suggesting these environmental solutions and here's how we're going to solve this problem. The Swedes were saying, "Why can't our government be like the U.S. ambassador?"

Q: But did it generate trade?

CURTIS: Yeah. A lot of it was focused on the technology development, but still, it promoted solar – I remember we worked on a number of – We ended up selling – and don't let me forget to touch on the SME (small and medium-sized enterprises) issue, because I have a good example in Sweden… But one of the examples was, there was a small company that had developed vertical wind, which is windmills that would be – Not as big as this… What's the height of this ceiling?

The wind is on panels that stand vertically. As opposed to – You think of the huge windmills that go like this, the classic ones, but the vertical winds are like this. They can be used for – They're very great for putting on rooftops, for putting on balconies. Not so much rooftops, maybe, but balconies. The U.S. embassy led the way. We helped with an internal program for – 3M, for example, was a leader in the world for window film, which both protected against –

Q: Ultraviolet light?

CURTIS: Yeah, against ultraviolet. We had U.S. companies that had intelligent shades that would come down; a lot of it was in the building area. That was great, because it fit well in… We worked very closely with the U.S. Green Building Council. We started something called the Green Embassy Program. The ambassador started it there and it became worldwide through the State Department. The State Department picked it up, and every embassy in the world started looking at how they could be more energy efficient.

We had a European group of embassies who would meet and share ideas; everybody chimed in. People really cared about everything from recycling in the embassy to renewing the physical plants in one way or another. We put in geothermal in the U.S. embassy in Stockholm. So, yeah, there was a lot of effort; my bosses would asked the question, "Well, how much product have you sold through this great effort?" And it wasn't always easy.

We had the Chevy Volt. Denmark started charging 100% in taxes for a car, so if you had a regular… But if you had an electric vehicle, you paid zero taxes, so it was suddenly half the cost of a gasoline-powered car. So, yeah, we had some of the first Teslas in Sweden. We were showing off the Tesla, we were showing off the Volt. Of course, the problem was that they wanted it and then they couldn't get it. You could get the Volt, but you couldn't get the Tesla, because back then it was just the $100,000 version.

Lightbulbs, though – Cree was one of the leaders in the world for LEDs (light emitting diodes), so that was a no-brainer. I always remember the argument I had with the maintenance guys at the U.S. embassy. I'd say, "We have to get LEDs down into all of our – Not only the plant here, but in all of our housing."

They said, "The problem with LEDs, you realize, is that they don't generate any heat."

"Yeah, that would be because we're not burning carbon filaments and putting them into the air."

They said, "Yeah, but it's cold here, and we like our heat."

And I was like, "Oh my God." Those are the kinds of things you had to deal with. There was some logic to it, but, you know… That was a huge effort.

There's two stories I want to tell in Sweden. One is not so Commercially-oriented, but highlights the Foreign Service and the career. When Ambassador Wood arrived, I happened to be the senior officer, in terms of rank and longevity, in the embassy at that time. I hit it off quickly with him. It was actually, believe it or not… In 2003, we didn't have BlackBerrys widespread in the State Department or in the embassy, but I had one. I had an operational Blackberry that I'd gotten from Commerce, and the ambassador had a Blackberry.

So, I would communicate with him regularly via Blackberry, which of course was against protocol and the DCM (deputy chief of mission) hated it. Up until then, it was all about… Anytime you wanted the ambassador to do something, you had to write a two page memo, and you had to go through Econ, Political, the DCM, and so on. I could just say, "Hey, I ran into the CEO of Electrolux, and he would love to talk to you about this. How does that sound?"

"Yeah, sure, get him on the schedule right away."

So, I even remember when he first came, he had actually broken his collarbone or something biking with the president, trying to keep up with him. But anyway, he invited the three top officials, which was the Econ minister, myself, and the DCM, to go with him to meet the king of Sweden to present his credentials after he arrived. In classic Swedish style – there's a very conservative part of Sweden – we had to do it in horse-drawn carriages.

So, we dressed up in our tuxedos, and we went in horse-drawn carriages – there were three separate carriages – to the palace where the famous Swedish grenadiers were lined along the way, up the great big staircase, down the royal hallway, and in to meet the head of protocol and then the king of Sweden. Of course, we didn't go in to meet the king of Sweden. The king of Sweden would have a private audience, one on one, with the U.S.

ambassador. So, the U.S. ambassador went in and the doors were closed, so we waited outside.

There was only one problem to this protocol, this function, which of course Sweden had worked out, which is that the king doesn't open doors for himself. Everybody opens doors for the king. It wouldn't be proper for the king to have to open a door for himself, for some reason. These immensely practical people who still have these… Anyway. So, the only way to know when to open – Of course, the guests couldn't really do it and the guests wouldn't really know when to do it. The only way for the door to actually be opened again to let the ambassador out was for the two grenadiers to be listeners who would put their ears against the door, waiting for the right signal from the king, whatever that was, so that they could open the doors.

But it was a wonderful experience, just a highlight of the career, to be able to partake in that kind of beautiful ceremony. The king of Sweden was a great guy who did appear at a lot of things. Unlike most of the Swedes, he was kind of on the shorter side. He loved to travel to the United States and once got pulled over for speeding there. That was a dramatic moment. The other thing that I was going to mention, maybe more to the heart of issues, was that, helping SMEs, we had developed a regional product. We would, as I mentioned earlier, try to introduce it. And there was one company based in Ohio, that I remember was one of my greatest SME success stories. They manufactured something called the Midge Master, which was a machine that killed mosquitoes, and it was very popular in the Michigan area and in north Michigan. So, they were interested in whether or not their product would sell.

We developed – I was kind of called the platinum key king, which was the approach to solutions where, instead of just trying to sell one-off products, we would get to know a company, sit down with them, and help them strategically plan, almost like a consultant. We worked with them very closely in the whole Scandinavian market, and they did – they were a small company – over $10 million worth of business selling this mosquito killer in the north of Sweden where, in the summers, when it warmed up, you know, there was lots of them

So, there was a lot of focus on small and medium-sized products like that. That's just an example of one great success story we had. We developed a huge program under the One Big Thing for environmental products. I can go on for a long time about it. But I think the greatest successes were in energy efficiency products and the development of the Green Embassy Program, which lived on for many years after that. I also – We had some very important high-level visits. One was Governor Granholm from Michigan – I mentioned Michigan – who came selling Michigan products, many of which were environmental. And it turned out that she was Swedish. Well, it didn't turn out; she knew she was Swedish.

But the foreign minister, at that time, was also a woman who, it turned out, was related to the governor of Michigan, Granholm. They were distantly related, but they found some close relatives they had in common to come meet the governor when she came. We

worked very closely with something called the Swedish-American Chamber of Commerce, SACC, and they had an annual event, so she came to speak at that event in Sweden. Then, of course, she met with the foreign minister and met with her relatives, whom she had discovered in Sweden.

A couple of others that are sort of flooding back to me: As I mentioned, the Nobel Peace Prize, and the Peace Prize is actually based in Oslo. Gore came to address the parliament in Sweden, at the invitation of the government, and we attended that event. He also presented the movie, *An Inconvenient Truth,* with the king in attendance. We came to that, and I had the great pleasure of going to participate and meet the vice president. My son Jason, also came and met Gore and talked to him. There is nothing quite like growing up in the Foreign Service!

He had a marvelous speech called "The Tale of Two Cities," in which he likened Mars and Earth, using the, "It was the best of times, and the worst of times," from Dickens. He said that they are really very similar planets, but one thing that is different is that one is heavily laden with a carbon atmosphere, which doesn't permit life as we know it, and the other is lush and beautiful, with a delicate balance of oxygen in the environment. So, that was another great highlight of the career and of our time in Sweden.

We had some other visitors; now it's kind of slipped my mind. Let me see if there's anything else I left off of that. It's been a long story, I know. There was a lot of work with international institutions. Oh, I was going to mention about the COP15, which was the big UN (United Nations) event on environmentalism. It took place in Denmark, and this was the biggest, most attended for global warming until the COP21 (Conference of Parties) came along, which we just recently had. We kind of started an effort to get the Department of Commerce to become the lead – the State Department was doing this as well – with the State Department on demonstrating technologies that could be a solution to climate Change challenges.

So, all of these leaders of the world came from all over, and all of these businessmen came from all over, and they know there's this problem, and they commit to solving this problem. But then they look around and say, "How are we going to do this? Because we know that it could alter the world as we know it, in a way that would be extremely hostile to the environment and to human beings. But how are we going to do it?" So, we jumped in, creating trade shows and joining the trade shows. We had a U.S. pavilion and a U.S. lead show at the COP15, which Senator Obama came to, Secretary Clinton, Arnold Schwarzenegger.

That's just the tip of the iceberg of a huge demonstration from all over the world of leaders and U.S. leaders. which included the Secretary of Interior, State, Energy and the Secretary of Commerce, who I was responsible for. I had the lead responsibility for him and the trade show. We brought a delegation of our people from all over Europe; our SCOs (senior commanding officers) to come in, and our environmental specialists, too. Secretary Locke came; he was very interested in this issue. I toured him around the U.S. pavilion, and we had participation from Microsoft and some of the great – Johnson

Controls and Honeywell and these companies who were leaders in the buildings field and in environmental heating and cooling, which were key issues to the whole solution to the environmental issue of releasing carbon into the atmosphere and doing this more and more efficiently.

The U.S. was really a leader in it, and still is to this day. On that business side, at least; it's too bad that our current government has given up a lot of leadership from an administrative point of view. But cities and countries and states were still involved heavily from the beginning; we worked with them very closely as we did a lot of our commercial development. I led all of that at the COP15 for the U.S., and that got me into it in a way that I still care passionately about it today. I worked on it for the next 10 years; even after I left Sweden it became one of my signature things. And it was a great event; it was a great moment. The COP15 was famous for the President of Tuvalu's tears over… Pleading with the international delegation to please not let his nation die.

So, it was… All of the NGOs (non-governmental organizations) were there, which were heavily represented to the United States: the Sierra Club, the National Wildlife Foundation. I think we had four or five cabinet-level members. We had the secretary of Commerce, the president of the United States, the secretary of Energy – the Department of Energy obviously had lead responsibility – and the secretary of State, the secretary of the Interior. All of these were hosted at the U.S. pavilion, which was run by the State Department, but we worked very closely with them to bring the captains of industry. I can't even remember… There was everybody, from Bill Gates to everybody that was anybody in the technology field or the energy field. So, it was a grand event.

It was a great thing that led, six years later, to the Paris Accords. But I think that's probably a pretty expansive overview of those four years. My brilliant boys stayed in Sweden through high school; they loved it. They were, I think, very gifted kids, exposed to all the great opportunities of being in Europe and being in Sweden with a lot of other smart people. The Swedes have a very unassuming brilliance, so I think my kids learned both a lot about character and about the world and intelligence.

I always liked what David McCollough said in his book about Adams when he quoted Abigail Adams, who was once asked about John Quincy and how it affected his character, to be traveling with his father all over the world. One time he was even sent off to Moscow to represent the United States when he was 17 years old, I think, or younger, as the ambassador to Moscow. So, they asked her, "What do you think? How do you think this has affected his education, in terms of him getting to travel all over?"

She said, "Well, you know, if he grows up stupid, it's his own damn fault. I showed him the world. I showed him the best I could give him." And as it turns out, he grew up to be president of the United States, so I don't expect for my two boys to be president of the United States, but they are brilliant. They are both men of character and intelligence.

Q: That's a good place to stop.

CURTIS: And I give my wife the credit for that! Even though it was a great career, she showed it to them, and she made sure they really knew.

Q: Today is January 19th, and we are resuming our interview with Keith Curtis.

CURTIS: So, now comes one of the most dramatic points of the story. Family is so extremely important in the Foreign Service, because that's really the core of everything you have when you're moving around constantly. You have to really take care of each other. My wife was a wonderful Foreign Service career wife; she loved the career. As I mentioned earlier, she had worked teaching English in Japan and raising the children when they were young. She didn't believe in latchkey kids. Once we had gotten to Brazil and to Sweden, she started working in the consular section, and really became quite an expert in American Citizen Services. They gave her the consular course at one point, I think before going out to Sweden, which is fascinating work.

As a Foreign Service officer, you do on occasion have to serve as the duty officer, and a lot of people dreaded that, but I always enjoyed it, because some of the most interesting moments you're going to have in the career are when you get that call at midnight that there's an American that needs to be taken of, or there's an American that's been arrested, or there's an American – In one case, there was a drunk sailor who they wouldn't let into the hospital.

Q: That's the traditional American Citizen Services, sure.

CURTIS: Yeah. The most traditional, of course, is when the passport doesn't show up. I remember once some guy in a rock band called from Norway and said, "I can't find my passport and I've got to come there tomorrow morning. Can you send us a passport or something?" Of course, something completely unreasonable.

I said, "You know, they usually show up, so if you just keep looking around…"

While I'm on the phone with him, he goes, "Hey man, what do you know, it's over here under the couch." So, anyway, you really get to know people. My wife became quite an expert at that. As you may know, you have to visit an American that's in jail within 24 hours normally and usually as much as possible, so she did the regular jail visits. Most of the Americans in jail in Sweden were happy to be there. It was such a nice place compared to the alternatives in the United States.

So, she had a great regular job, and that helped her very much when we finally came back to the United States and she was looking for a regular job so that she was still not working for the State Department. The real trial came as we were wrapping up our almost five years in Sweden. I had a very serious accident. My son, who went to Cambridge, was head of the Cambridge Caving Club, and he invited me to come see his expedition in the Austrian Alps. I had taught him caving and rappelling and everything else to begin with, so it sounded like a wonderful opportunity.

We hiked up into the mountains of the Alps, near – I have to have my cup of coffee before I remember all the names. It's called the Garnish in Austria near Bad Ischl. As we were doing a rappel the second day, the rappel gear broke loose on the descent that I was taking, which was a 25 meter drop. My gear came loose, and I dropped, and I free-fell almost 80 feet, which for most people should kill you or cripple you or whatever. I landed on rock – people think, oh, maybe you landed on snow or something, but no. I landed on a rock, and my son came down.

Fortunately, he wasn't there below; he was above. He gave me first aid, and then went up and called the mountain rescue. It took nine hours to get me out of the cave, and they flew me by helicopter to the ER (emergency room) in Austria, where they put me back together again. Fortunately, God was with me during the whole thing. He helped me through it. Even though I said some stupid prayers along the way, like "Please end this," He brought me along to… None of the people hearing this will be able to see how… You wouldn't get that this man, who still plays tennis and swims and had a great game of volleyball last night, once fell 80 feet in a cave and spent a month in the hospital in Austria.

The great thing is that embassy people were there to help take care of me. They paid immediately for the helicopter. My colleague in the Austrian embassy came to visit me in the hospital. So, in many ways – I tell people this and they kind of shake their heads and say, "That's strange," but in many ways, it was a good experience, learning a lot of things. It was time that I needed, getting more in touch with the Lord and with my spiritual side, and trusting in Him. When they laid me back in the hospital bed and said, "You're going to be here for a while because you're not running around. Is there anything you want?" I said –

Q: What were the extent of your injuries?

CURTIS: So, I had an open-book fracture of my pelvis, which meant that the cartilage that held it together in the front was completely busted, and it was fractured in the back. I also fractured my L-one vertebrae. So, they put two big pieces of metal in me; one in the front, to pull my pelvis back together again, and one to fuse the bones in the back. Those are still in me today.

Q: Getting stopped in airports?

CURTIS: Oh, yeah. Fortunately, they make them out of enough strong, lightweight metal that it doesn't really set off the alarms. So, yeah. My son was there, and my wife had to take care of everything. We were actually a month short of leaving Sweden, so she had to handle the entire pack-out herself, and think of getting everything back to the States, because my assignment in Washington was going to be an MC (Minister Counselor) position as the head of our management office in the Foreign Commercial Service.

So, I would have been, basically, for the Commercial Service, running all of our management operations: personnel, budget, and management policy. However, the

accident kind of changed that. It was – You know, I was in a hospital bed for over a month, looking over the Austrian Alps, and when they laid me back in the hospital bed and said, "Is there anything you want?"

I said, "How about a Bible?" I opened it randomly to Psalm 40, which says, "I cried out to the Lord and He answered my call, and he lifted me out of the dangerous pit and put my feet on solid ground." So, yeah, that story has got as much in it as an entire Foreign Service career. When I did get back home, it took me a month in a hospital bed at home before I could resume my duties, but I was able to go back into work. I think everybody agreed that I probably wasn't in shape to do the top management job that I had been selected for. So, I ended up taking an adviser role to the OIO desk.

Q: OIO?

CURTIS: Oh, I'm sorry. Thank you for reminding me. The Office of International Operations. So, basically, we had a smaller service, but it would be the equivalent, probably, of the deputy of Political. So, in that position, I was able to continue my work, which we talked about earlier, on climate change and energy issues, as well as alternative energy and energy efficiency.

Q: Now, what year is this?

CURTIS: We're talking 2008.

Q: So, you returned from Stockholm in 2008?

CURTIS: Yeah. I spent almost a full five years there. Both of my sons finished high school. So, back in Washington in 2008, continuing my work on the COP process, where the UN process… I went to Cancun for COP17, and it was the heyday. We were working hard on the issues, trying to put together an international agreement. My role, really, was to provide the solutions, as we discussed earlier, at these trade shows that were connected to the UN, and promote the – There was a lot of interest in and a lot of activity around alternative energy.

But at the same time, I also, given that I had a little more free time than I expected. Because of my interest, there was a need for a slot as the Vice President of the American Foreign Service Association, AFSA, which opened up. I put my name in there. Actually, I guess it opened up because the VP (vice president) left for an overseas assignment, and that gave me an opportunity to take it without the election process for a year. Then I got elected after that.

Q: Now, I do want to go into the AFSA work, but before we quite get there, let's just go back a second to you work with COP. As part of the overall policy, you were assisting U.S. companies that were engineering or making renewable or solar or, in other words, kinds of equipment or kinds of manufacturers or systems. In other words, talk a little bit about the actual things that you were working with.

CURTIS: Yeah. It was fascinating. I loved working in the field, and I still do to this day, because there are so many technologies. It's all leading edge. We were doing everything. A lot of these companies were companies that were working with the Department of Energy and wanted Department of Energy grants. They were all sort of leading-edge technologies. There was a lot of solar, and there was a lot of wind development in the United States. There was a lot of integration for solar. But we were working more with the kind of small and medium-sized or second-stage capital companies that really had some very interesting things to offer.

So, there was one that did biofuels, one that was developing energy from algae as a solution. They had won several awards from the Department of Energy. Then there was a lot of what I specialized in, which was energy efficiency products. So, as we had mentioned before, the whole U.S. Green Building Council and a lot of the products that went along with that, anything from… They were developing some fascinating ideas for cooling and heating, which the embassies used a lot. There was one company called ICE , which basically was becoming very popular in the South, where they would use the… I'm trying to remember exactly how the technology would work, but they would use the energy during the night to create coolant ice, which would then be able to cool the buildings during the day. If I thought about it for a moment, I'd be able to tell you 100 really fascinating technologies that we got to deal with. One of them that we dealt with later on was, the Harris Corporation was using lidar technology to measure carbon pollution locally.

Q: What is lidar?

CURTIS: It's laser technology that – Rather than long distance, they were using the laser technology to measure the carbon in the atmosphere. They could do it for a limited-range area, whereas we had satellites we were putting up that might be able to take a picture of the entire Earth or the United States or regions. But this was on the ground, where they could take a picture of a city like Paris or whatever and be able to tell you real time, every minute, how much carbon was being emitted into the atmosphere.

You'd see spikes, like when all of the VIPs (very important person) arrived with their airplanes and their limousines… All of a sudden there would be a big spike in the city of Cancun or Paris or wherever they were using their technology. But yeah, it was fascinating technology. We would have U.S. booths and a U.S. pavilion, and we would have debates and discussions about… And I put that all together. I would put together a panel at the U.S. pavilion that would discuss leading-edge cooling and heating energy-efficient technologies.

Q: Just one last question about this. There are plenty of innovations and plenty of innovative approaches. I know that the Gates Foundation, and possibly other foundations, also take an interest in some of this, to the aspects that might be quickly used or put up in developing countries, where they don't have the wherewithal themselves to put together very simple housing that is energy efficient. Was that part of it?

CURTIS: Yes. I would say even more when I talk about the rest, but my last tour at the World Bank, there was a huge effort on that. But in the COP, a subset of the whole underlying debate at the COP was, well, the industrial nations have dumped all of this carbon, in their development, willy-nilly into the atmosphere. Now, you're telling us that that's got to all end within the African countries and Latin American countries that are trying to develop. So, there was a pretty wide agreement at the COPs that there needed to be a special fund created for the development of these technologies for the less developed regions of the world.

At the COP15, they committed to a $100 billion fund, but that never got there. But it was a nice idea. But I think the main – Hopefully, I remember to talk a little bit about this later, but maybe I can touch on it briefly now: The main effort in the developing world, especially in Africa, was for energy development, power development, and lighting, as well as power for small, rural areas. So, there were a lot of them. We did work with a lot of everything, from NGO-type organizations that were taking solar into villages, which allowed them to have lighting at night for studies and also allowed them to have radio and television and in some cases some pumping facilities so that they didn't have to carry the water for miles and miles…

But the U.S. government also had a very active program called Power Africa, which to this day is very strong in Africa. It was led by President Obama, who put it together to generate I think it was 600 megawatts of power based on alternative energy throughout all of Africa. So, that led to development. There was a lot of hydropower, solar, geothermal solutions. In Asia, for example, with solar, one of the biggest advances was the development of solar power in Bangladesh, where they found that because of all the flooding, the power grid was completely unreliable.

So, by using micro-financing combinations to put solar on your roof, you could then have reliable power and a lot of small businesses could develop solutions that they didn't… I think today, there are more solar power rooftop units in Dhaka than there are in any city in the world. That's just as a result of those development programs. So, yeah, you're absolutely right. There were… And I don't know. Bill Gates, of course… He kind of pushed, when we were in Africa, the idea of funding for new ideas, which was kind of what we were talking about for the One Big Thing: breakthrough technologies. But of course, his main effort has always been in disease control in Africa, with AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) and malaria and other issues. Nothing matters too much if you're dying of AIDS or malaria. So, that was a great part of my job. I loved it. But at the same time, there was a need for somebody to represent the organization at the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA); I know you suggested I should explain, perhaps, what that is for the listeners.

Q: Yes, please.

CURTIS: It's not a classic union by any means. It does have union bargaining powers, but they're limited, and a lot depends on the cooperation of the management. But it is,

more importantly, an association that represent the Foreign Service officers around the world on many different levels. Working with the outside world, helping Foreign Service officers who may need anything from insurance with USAA (United States Automobile Association) or…

For example, once we got there we had an issue with United Airlines, who decided it was too difficult to handle our pets anymore. Nobody can appreciate – Animal lovers listening to this will appreciate how the U.S. government might not officially think that's very important, and therefore wouldn't deal with it, but AFSA represents the well-being and reasonable life… It's a very difficult life, the Foreign Service. You're moving all the time. You can be lonely a lot, especially if you're single, but even if not, you have to be separated from your family a lot. So, issues that others might not think are important, are very important.

So, we were able to negotiate with United Airlines and show that we really needed their help, so they continued with that service. But we do have union bargaining powers, so that when… Again, what a lot of people who don't know the Foreign Service don't appreciate is that it's an up or out system. You have to be promoted on a regular basis, or you're out the door. That's not like the rest of government. The rest of the government, you can stay in a job forever, but in the Foreign Service, when you're 65, you have to retire. It's mandatory retirement. That's not true in the rest of the GS government system. You can work until you drop, if you want to.

So, that's something that… Until you've lived it, it's very hard to understand that you've always got to keep your mind on what's next in terms of your career and your promotion potential. At the same time, you're balancing your family; it's a career which intimately involves your family all the time. So, these are issues… And it's your life around the clock. You never leave the job, when you're in the Foreign Service. You're there in Paris or Sweden or Dhaka or whatever, and anytime anything happens, it's going to be reflected in your job. You may or may not get involved in issues with the law, which will affect tremendously your career. You can lose your entire job very easily if you get in the wrong circumstances. But also, what you do with your life, your whole well-being, is very much determined by the environment you're in. So, it's a full-time job. 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Q: People sometimes think that when you're not at work, when you're not at the embassy, when you're in off hours, you're on your own time and you can do whatever you want. That is completely untrue. You are always a U.S. diplomat when you're overseas, and anything you do is interpreted as something official.

CURTIS: It's going to reflect on the U.S. government, and you're still under the authority, night and day, of the U.S. ambassador. So, that's why AFSA is so important. AFSA helps support all of those issues and those relationships, both with management when they're making decisions… And the best time for AFSA, of course, is when we have a partnership relationship; we had a special partnership agreement with the Obama administration, which he started with all of the unions. Just as we learned in Sweden, the

most efficient companies are companies that really know what it's like at the working level, and what the best solutions are to problems, not just from a simple point of view.

So, AFSA has relationships at the management level, relationships with Foreign Service officers. And again, a lot of them will have grievances where we need to support them, so we dealt both with negotiation issues with the management on the large level and individual issues for officers who have run into some kind of problem. Then we represent the Foreign Service as a whole to the world, to our fellow Americans as well as throughout the world. That representation to our fellow Americans not only involved the press and stories, but very much involved keeping the relationship with the Hill, with Congress. So, a big part of our role was helping and supporting the administration in terms of a budget for the Foreign Service and a budget for Foreign Service agencies.

So, that's a lot of what I did. I think I was able to get an increase of about $15 million for our small agency. We were running about $250 million at that time; actually, less just for the Commercial Service. So, it was very important to keep that relationship and keep that strength in the Hill. We were able to do that kind of thing as an AFSA representative in a way that members of the administration within the building could not. We were a lobbying organization, in addition to an association, in addition to a union. We had a pact associated with it. I think people often underestimate how powerful and important that can be.

Q: And it is a membership organization, in that the Foreign Service is not a union shop. You choose whether you are going to become a member and pay dues.

CURTIS: Right, exactly. And the representatives are elected from the dues-paying members every two years. There's a vice president for each of the Foreign Service organizations, and then representatives, and then a president overall.

Q: So, does AFSA know one way or another if the majority of officers are members? Is there any way to know?

CURTIS: If the majority of – Oh, sure. We know the size of our membership. I was the FCS (Foreign Commercial Service) member, so I couldn't tell you exactly what it is for State and AID (Agency for International Development). I know that in our case, most of our small contingent of 200 or so officers were AFSA members. But it was our job to talk to every A-100 class and recruit them and sell the value of being a member. For example, one of the things that we worked on that was extremely important, while I was there, was the locality pay.

Q: And when you say locality pay, now you're talking about pay in Washington, D.C.?

CURTIS: Yeah. There's the pay in Washington, D.C., and then there's the issue of equivalent pay overseas, especially as retirement. So, we worked on those issues and got them passed by the Hill. It was a constant battle, every year, to work on those issues. We were always working on the issues of representation overseas. There was always a

tension with the administration of political appointees and political ambassador appointees and career ambassadors. So, that was always an issue. The professionalization of the Foreign Service, selling both to the public and to the Hill - I testified on the Hill on the importance of the Commercial Service -, to the administration, the fact that we were trained as diplomats, that we studied as diplomats, that not just anybody could walk in and do that job…

Whether it was language, or whether it was understanding international economics, or whether it was understanding international trade, or whether it was understanding international politics and how they worked differently in different environments and cultures around the world, these were things you learned, you were trained in, and you were an expert in, just like a chemist might be an expert in chemistry. Unfortunately, people didn't tend to see it the same way that you would see somebody who was an engineer or a doctor or whatever.

So, that was a constant battle, … I had more access at my vice president level to the secretary of Commerce than most people in the building and most of my other Foreign Service colleagues. We went in to see him several times, and he was happy to be able to talk to somebody who represented the morale of the organization and the guts of what they were thinking and what they cared about. And we had to do that many times, both to protect our people and to project the importance of the organization. While I was there, I managed to grow the number of officers and grow the numbers of posts and grow the budget. So, it was a good period.

Q: Okay.

CURTIS: We had a very active period while I was there. I was elected twice, so I served four years as the AFSA representative, during which there were a couple of threatened shutdowns, which are normal in government. AFSA always takes a lead role in trying to communicate to the public how important it is to keep the government open. Few people realize that if you're a family of four, a young family, and there's only one breadwinner who depends on the U.S. government, if you take that job away, that's a serious hardship.

So, we realized there were a lot of young officers in that position and I think we were able to communicate that. The other thing that was going on while I was the AFSA rep was that there was a major reorganization within the International Trade Administration. The Foreign Commercial Service was part of the International Trade Administration, the Department of Commerce. We had a section that was run by the civil service called the Compliance Center. They would very much track international trade negotiations and deals, and then work with companies overseas and with our officers overseas to make sure that our companies were treated fairly, according to the agreements that we had signed and according to the WTO (World Trade Organization) and any bilateral free trade agreements we had.

So, that was a huge part of what we did, and we worked very closely with that group. We had desk officers, as well. While we were there, there was an effort to reorganize that

part, and to integrate it more closely with the Foreign Commercial Service. So, as a result, we ended up with a more meshed environment with the civil service. That was a long and difficult negotiation, and I think, again, what a lot of people don't – What's hard to appreciate about the Foreign Service from the outside is, because promotion is so important, a term we call the "flow-throughs" is so important. You have a certain amount of officers, and you obviously don't get promoted until positions open up. Your ability to be promoted really depends on how many officer positions you have, and at what level.

When you're meshing that with a whole other organization, where they're moving into these different levels, it becomes very complicated and also, to some extent, threatening to the Foreign Service officers and their careers. So, as a civil servant it's not that critical, because you're not going to lose your job, but if you can't get promoted and there isn't a flow-through and there's an incapability to move up the ladder in the Foreign Service, just like there is in the U.S. military, then you're going to be forced to retire. So, those are very difficult negotiations, and ones in which I played the lead role. I kept a group of advisers, of my Foreign Service colleagues, and always got their advice and that of the most senior of our officers, as well.

It's a very tricky line between what's management and what's union in the Foreign Service, because we're all managers, at one level or another; we all manage FSNs, and we all have management responsibilities overseas. But on another level, really, the top management and the organization of the Department of Commerce and the politicals are not Foreign Service officers. So, our management relationship with them is more of working to a manager. They were successful, in the end; it was a long, hard-fought agreement, but I think one in which we did struggle very much to understand each other's viewpoints and reach the same conclusions.

Q: In terms of outcomes, what would you say would be the most important thing that the newly integrated force could do that it was not doing as well before?

CURTIS: Well, I think the really important thing was that… The undersecretary liked to say, "The world has changed and we haven't." Well, that's a pretty common line in Washington, and it's an easy line, but there's a certain amount of truth to it. The most radical thing that really had changed, in the last 10 years before this, was the Internet. That was radically changing business, as well. So, we needed to be very closely integrated into the digital world, and even then, things were…

We were, I remember, at the time… Even Facebook was barely getting started in 2008, 2009, 2010, if you think about it. We were spending a lot of effort on outreach and reaching out through our constituents through websites or digitally, with those kind of email stories, you know. Everything was going from reporting on the ground to creating products where people could easily inform themselves about the international markets and the barriers to market. I think a big responsibility that we had was the lead of barriers to the markets.

So, integrating these really, I think, put more priority on the issue of barriers to market and moving those barriers to market. So, there was always a certain amount of tension with the dual role of how much emphasis we put on just the transaction of helping somebody sell a widget or get counseling about how a market works, and the big picture issue of, how do we open up the trade on a larger level and remove barriers to the marketplace. So, I think this allowed us to address the issue of barriers to the marketplace on a stronger level, more united and congruent level.

Q: Okay.

CURTIS: So, maybe we'll move on to my last overseas assignment. Well, until I got into Africa things after I retired. So, that was Baghdad. It was an interesting story, because I had worked as the union rep, and I was actually interested in going to Baghdad because, unlike our State Department or AID colleagues who are always serving in difficult places, we have the nice aspect of generally serving where there is an economy that exists and is worth business. So, I had a yearning for challenges and learning what the industry in dramatic areas was like. It also allowed my wife, who had started her career in the Department of State as a civil servant… She had an HR (human resources) background, with a masters HR, so she was able to work in the DG's office on HR policy. So, that was a great job, and I didn't want to break that up again.

So, I decided to serve in Baghdad for a year. But it was kind of interesting, because management was like, "This doesn't look all that great. Here he was, the AFSA rep, and now we're sending him off to Baghdad, like we're using our power to punish him." I remember that even the undersecretary called out the director of assignments and said, "You can't do this! You can't send Keith to Baghdad! That doesn't look good."

And they responded, "Well, it was his number one choice." So, off I went to Baghdad. Pay was great.

Q: But it's unaccompanied.

CURTIS: It's unaccompanied, but it's only a year, and you've got three R&Rs (rest and recuperation), which seemed extravagant, almost. But I also… You know, as an international relations person you're always looking at the world and watching the trends and seeing what happens. It did seem not only that now there was a turn, and that Baghdad was getting free of all of its internal strife and civil war, so now was the time for the economy to really start to develop again and take off. Saddam Hussein was long dead and they had pretty much settled things.

At least, there was a quiet period between the Shia and the Sunni. The Kurds were developing very rapidly on their own, pretty much, but it didn't look to be the problem it later became. So, the government had been set up after Saddam Hussein; it was up and running. There was a parliament, there was a prime minister. The oil was flowing, the fires were out. So, I felt it would be a great time to go there and help. There was also… I

was doing it for conscientious reasons, as well. I felt that we owed a debt to this country in many ways, having been the cause of so much disruption and, frankly, death.

Whatever you feel about the causes and how justified they were, the impact of the Gulf War and the Iraq War was horrific on the country. And it was going to be interesting. You enter the Foreign Service to see the world and see what mankind is about, so I was actually quite excited about going to Baghdad and interested and glad to be able to have the opportunity. I was the Senior Commercial officer. I ran our Commercial operations there, of course, for the whole country, which were not that extensive. They were developing.

There was a big economic section; AID was very active there and I was working very closely with AID on a number of development projects they had. So, we opened up a business group. I developed a business group in Baghdad. I'm sure your listeners can read the story or get it from lots of sources. We were basically a shell within a shell. We were living on a compound in the Green Zone. There was a region where the government was run that was a highly protected region, called the Green Zone, where the top officials of the government lived and were protected. Most of the foreign embassies were there, the United Nations was there, the World Bank was there. The Italian embassy was there, the British, the Australians were there.

We had a 120-acre compound that was huge and included all of our housing, protection, water, food, the processing of energy and oil that we would need at the embassy. There were also workout gyms and swimming pools and things to keep us healthy. And there was a cafeteria, obviously. So, in many ways, it was an idyllic place to work, because you had a gym You could get up in the morning, walk across the street to the gym to work out, go home and take a shower, and then walk up the street to your office. But it was one of those environments where it was 50 minutes of calm and boredom, punctuated by 10 minutes of terror. Rockets coming in, bombs going off. We would be reading the papers about what might blow up next.

But there were tremendous business opportunities; the Iraqis had over $100 billion in oil produced and sold annually. That ran the government and bought most of their supplies. It was still a parastatal economy, so there were tremendous opportunities. They were interested in developing more free market opportunities. There was tension between, well, how much can we bring in American companies and how safe is it? I developed and led a franchise mission, believe it or not, to Iraq in that time. We had RadioShack and Pizza Hut and a number of exercise gyms like Gold's Gym. Of course everybody wanted me to bring McDonald's in; we talked about that earlier. But no, McDonald's wasn't going to open up; they weren't ready.

But we had a great franchise mission, especially up north in Kurdistan, which was very stable and safe. There was a lot of development going on there, and a lot of U.S. franchises were opening up there. I would travel up to Kurdistan, to Kirkuk, and we would get out regularly to meet with the foreign ministry. We always had to go out in three armored vehicles with 12 guys with machine guns. You had to get your flak jacket

on, your helmet on, and go out into the traffic and get stuck in traffic at a circle. It was just one of those kinds of… It was a huge issue, how to manage…

Q: Now, you mentioned you were going to the foreign ministry. But what about the other ministries that related more directly to commerce and trade?

CURTIS: Yeah. It was always very interesting, because the ministries were very political. Like any parliamentary system, the ministries tend to be divided up by not necessarily the same party. But there were some that were actively hostile to the United States, and others that were… One that we managed to turn around while we were there was the minister of Health. That was a really delicate situation, because they tended to be sort of anti-American.

On the other hand, everybody knew… Hats off to the Germans and our other European and Japanese rivals, but there's nothing like the United States for health products. There's nobody that leads the world in pharmaceutical products and health technology like the United States does. We haven't talked too much about that, but that was a primary theme during my entire career, assisting U.S. medical products. That was big there. Iraq used to be the number one place for medicine in all of the Middle East. Before Saddam Hussein, they had more doctors, they had more female doctors and nurses…

They were just the leading edge in a lot of ways. They knew that, remembered it, and were constantly trying to build up and redevelop their medical capabilities. They were always interested in U.S. product and U.S. technology. We worked with them a lot. We obviously worked with the ministry of oil. Again, U.S. products. Basically, Iraq was broken down into three main areas, with Baghdad being in the middle of them, making it the grey area that was responsible for everything.

In the south, in Basra, where we had an active consulate, that was where the oil was. There was a lot of U.S. business down there, and a lot of U.S. companies like Exxon Mobile and oil technology companies, Exxon-Mobile while we were there, developed a huge relationship up in the north with the Kurds. It was really the Sunni area that we didn't really get out to enough, unfortunately. That was part of the political problem. They weren't getting their share of the development, so it was always a potential hotspot. It became a critical hotspot while I was there, and that's a big part of the story of my service there. But before we get into that, I do think that…

I found that working with AID there was extremely effective. I had some great colleagues there like Jeff Levine. They had some great programs that they had developed in different parts of the Middle East that were very effective. One was working with the prime minister's office and the parliament to pass laws that led to efficient private sector development. We worked on a program for the development of point of sale transactions and bank-to-bank, interbank transfers. That all developed…

Obviously, all of the Microsoft products and Cisco products… We had a Microsoft office and I'll never forget the guy… An Iranian guy… No, sorry, an Iraqi. He ran the

Microsoft office out in the Red Zone. I just thought the guy had tremendous courage among those people they had to put up with. Even the FSNs that worked for us had to come in everyday through incredible security, just to get to work every day. There might be one bridge that was bombed out, or another bridge that was bombed out. They would have to basically lie about where they were, because it wasn't safe to them. It was not safe if it was known that they worked for the U.S. embassy.

There was a lot of purchasing going on by that government. There were business opportunities. The tension was between the bureaucracy that was there and the stability questions and the security questions. So, it was starting to come along, and we had two things that, in the end, even though it wasn't promising, made it very difficult. One was our own U.S. government. They managed to shut down the U.S. government in 2013. We talked about AFSA and how they worked on that as an issue, but they had one of the longer periods of shutdown – I think it was about two weeks – that came right in the middle of our major tradeshow.

One of the things we worked on every year was a trade show where they had a quarter of a million people at this trade show. We had a U.S. pavilion. The ambassador would go there. It was a great opportunity to show off all of the American products and companies that were in there. And by the way, we also had a lot of development in the agricultural sector in Iraq, which was very important and always is. You have to feed people. So, companies like John Deere and Caterpillar were there, both for construction and agricultural development. And what's the other one that's based in Pennsylvania.

Q: Caterpillar? Or –

CURTIS: No. Caterpillar, John Deere, and there's one… I don't know; I'll think of it later. Actually, this company that's in Pennsylvania had the number one selling tractor in all of Iraq; Case New Holland.. They bought more from them than anybody else.

Q: Now, you had talked about, obviously, the redevelopment of the petroleum sector, with petrol and so on. What about the renewable energy, given the sunlight and the other kinds of things available to you?

CURTIS: Well, they were developing… In the redevelopment process, they were putting up new power plants. GE was primarily funding all the turbines for those plants. They made them switch so they could run on biofuels as well. There was an emphasis on biofuels, and it was kind of a question of how we can develop this, which… So, there was an emphasis on that. There wasn't – Even if the U.S. embassy, we were working to bring in solar. There's a lot of sun. It was a good place for solar. But of course, if you don't have security or stability in the grid, solar… They do become targets. So, unfortunately, there wasn't really a lot of development of alternative energy. The oil was there, it was cheap.

You would think solar – I mean, you did see some solar, especially up in the north. Just from the point of view of, "Well, if you have your own solar power, then you don't have

to worry about the grid being blown up." So, there was some attraction to that. But it didn't get the push that it needed from the government, which is always… Since it was an oil economy, it was always an issue of what the government policy is and what the government is, based on oil. A lot of other Middle Eastern countries, like Saudi Arabia, for example, or others, they just produce solar and save the oil to sell to us…

I remember my undersecretary telling me once a story on how they met with the Saudi prince. They said, "It's great that you're developing all of this solar power in Saudi Arabia, but isn't it a little odd, given that you have more reserves of oil than anyone on the planet?"

They said, "No, no, we want to keep that to sell to you. We need that for our income. We don't want that to run our own power. We can do that with cheap solar. We got sun, so why should we be spending valuable oil for our exports?" Interestingly enough, that does lead to the point that most geologists, especially in the north, would say that under the ground in Iraq, there are more potential reserves than anywhere on the face of the planet. Even in Saudi Arabia. The geologists who looked at the Kurdistan area, their mouths would start to water.

But the problem is, how do you develop it? And that's one reason that Exxon Mobil, even against the advice of U.S. government policy, made a deal with the Kurds while we were there to develop oil. So, the whole oil issue was a huge political pitfall between Kurdistan and Baghdad, and it is to this day. So, that was part of the economic issues. But really, that was mostly run by the economic section; I concentrated on commercial development. There was a good retail. They were developing malls, especially in the north in Kurdistan.

As I said, we had this big trade show, which unfortunately we had to shut down. Actually, we worked on it for a full year and then our government shut down on the exact weeks of the trade show. That meant that we were able to attend and do some work there, because we were considered essential personnel, but it was limited, and we could not do the main event, the reception at the U.S. embassy and the ambassador's residence, which everybody saw as the key opportunity to network. U.S. companies flew in at their own expense from all over the country or from the region. I don't think the general public – Even listening to the radio today, it's still… They don't ...

People ask, "Does that end up saving us money if we shut down the U.S. government?" No, it doesn't save you money. It costs you money. It is a complete waste of the taxpayer's dollar, at least in the short term. Not only did our programs, which we had been working on for years, become… I mean, we all got paid eventually. Everybody gets paid. So, it doesn't save you a dime. But you're getting paid for essentially doing nothing, because you're not allowed to work. But you're going to get paid. So, not only is it a complete waste of taxpayers' dollars from that point of view, but more importantly, the programs which we worked on for more than a year, which required continuity…

How are you ever going to restore… What's it in Shakespeare… "Who steals my purse, steals trash. Who steals my reputation, steals my most valuable thing." How are you ever going to rebuild a relationship with a company who spent big money to get out there, and then the doors are shut in their face. So, yeah, it is a tragic way to run a government. It's a bit above my paygrade, obviously; I'm not a congressman or a senator or in the White House, but it's just a pathetic way. That was a tragedy, to have that shut down for two weeks in the middle of our difficult operations. As it turns out, in the long run, commercial development came to a halt because of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant).

Q: Of course.

CURTIS: That was… We had a lot of great work and a lot of great programs, but ISIS actually took back Fallujah in early 2014. So, I was there in 2013. I came as follow-through team, and then I was there when they shut down the government in 2013. I got my special training courses for counter-terrorism and a little bit of Arabic. Then, in the beginning of 2014, ISIS reared its ugly head and took Fallujah, which was up the street. Then, we were developing a lot of military and strategic plans, but it wasn't… The economy was still going ahead at that point.

It wasn't until they took Mosul, which was in… you could say June of 2014, and everyone realized that… That had a huge impact on everybody, because we'd thought we'd contained them, and everything was going to be under control. That was a huge success for ISIS, from their point of view. They declared the caliphate at that time, and of course, as you remember, in the initial phases they went after genocide, they went after the Yazidi and were threatening to massacre them all.

And the Kurds… Thank God, the Kurds stepped in and defended the north. So, it was a dramatic period for us, and there was a lot of discussion about what we should do in the embassy. Everything from basically shutting down operations completely to a substantial drawdown. It was a very large embassy and had already been drawn down by about half, but it was still a big operation. We had a lot of security around, and there was a lot of debate going on within the government, actually, between the military and the State Department and the White House about what we could do. There is probably a story or two there that I could tell, but I don't know how much of it is for public consumption.

But in the end, I think the White House decided that we needed to draw down, basically, to bare minimum staff, and we needed to do it immediately. We only had six helicopters waiting to get people out of there, at that point; we just did not have… If we had to do a serious evacuation… What had happened is, when ISIS took Mosul, large parts of the Iraqi army basically went home and gave up the material to the bad guys. So, we were naked in Baghdad, to some extent.

We had great security within the embassy, but that can't protect you against any kind of serious attack from the outside, especially any kind of armored, serious attack. They protected you against the kind of thing that happened in Iran in '79, assuming you don't

voluntarily open the gates to the crowds, which is what happened there. So, anyway, we decided to basically draw down and send the embassy employees in three different directions and to temporarily have them hold in these locations nearby so that if the ISIS attack blew over within a reasonable short period, we could evaluate how serious and how long term it was going to be.

But the main thing was to get people out of there, because otherwise they were at serious risk. The only way, really, to get people out of that embassy… It's the largest embassy in the history of the world. To get everybody out would have required a convoy, probably, over open territory to the south, or huge military operations. And we did beef up substantially with U.S. marines. Thank God for marines. They're the ones that… If the audience doesn't know, they have special contingents of marines that guard U.S. embassies and they are the real line of defense for us when it comes to periods of danger, which are constant in our career. Even in the places I've served, which were well-developed.

So, we sent most of the large contingent of Foreign Service officers to Amman, Jordan. We sent third-country nationals, which were used a lot to run our security and our staff and our management operations, up to the north in Kirkuk. Then, we also sent a large number of the essential officers and employees down to Basra in the south. Then we kept a kind of skeleton operation in the embassy until we could evaluate what was going to happen. That was June, July of 2014.

So, we were given, basically, 24 hours' notice to get out of there. We had to pack everything. Well, we didn't pack everything; you just took what you called your "go bag". It was 70 pounds. You had one bag and one backpack. I think I had a 700 pound shipment. I had 700 pounds of stuff there. Even to this day, I don't know what I lost and what I didn't lose. Eventually, that was all put together. They just said, "Pile it all into the center of the room."

Q: That's the way it works.

CURTIS: Basically, you don't want anything left in a corner somewhere when they come to pack, because you may never be back to pack it up. You would probably never be back. We didn't know if we were going to be back in a week or two weeks or never. One of the saddest things is we really had very little chance at all to say goodbye to each other, especially my staff that I worked with, because it was on a weekend. It was less than 24 hours. They told us in the morning: "You're leaving on a seven o'clock helicopter flight from your rooms…"

They parked the helicopter practically at your front door. We packed everything up and made sure we had our shots. When you think about it, in retrospect, it was tremendously well done, that you can move that many people in a short period. It wasn't just moving people; you were moving them and their stuff, and you were making sure they had the right documentation with them, that everybody had their yellow fever shot. If you didn't have your yellow fever, they weren't even going to let you back into the United States.

So, it was traumatic. Nobody really knew what was going to happen in the embassy. We were flown out to Amman. I was put up in a Marriott Hotel there, and I was there for about a week or two before I realized that they were getting everybody out and we were in regular conversation. They were pretty quick to figure out that this was not blowing over anytime soon. In fact, it might even get worse. Of course, at that time, Mosul was the site of the Mosul Dam, the major dam which controlled the Tigris River. If it was blown up, by most calculations, the U.S. embassy, downriver, would have been under 10 feet of water. So, it was a challenging time.

And your listeners will know that there's a certain amount of risk, but this is commonplace in the Foreign Service. One out of every three posts get evacuated or downsized one level. It's what we do in our job. We live with the constant threat of risk. We're trained for, and we signed up for it, but I don't think the public appreciates that, on a per capita basis, in many ways we take as much of a risk or more than the U.S. military does.

Q: Speaking of which, when you were in AFSA, did AFSA as a whole begin to address the whole question of resiliency and how you manage a professional staff in these kinds of circumstances?

CURTIS: Yeah, and I think the State Department was very sensitive to that. The same thing happened in the case of our evacuation from Baghdad. They would stand up emergency committees, and those emergency committees always included the FLO office, which was the Family Liaison Office, and AFSA representation. I remember even in Amman, they turned to me because of my AFSA experience. I was making sure there was an AFSA link going on so that everybody could make sure that they were able to properly and fairly consider all of the family locations, which are enormous.

But State Department… This is one of the things they do. They take care of families in the Foreign Service and. They're always considering what's best in the end for the children and the spouse. In fact, they even developed a little awards for the children. You know, you get an award because your father served and was evacuated from the situation. So, there is a tremendous amount of thought and care that goes into those situations, and my heart goes out to those people who spend the time, night and day.

When they stand up an emergency committee, it's not… Working to Washington is, to some extent, a nine to five job when compared to anywhere else, but when it comes to these situations, it's not. People are dedicated to working to solve these problems and keep people safe. So, that was the dramatic end of my service. And as I said, I was only there for a week or so before I realized… I was one of the first to come to the conclusion that, especially for Commercial services, it's not worth the taxpayer dollars.

In my career, I would say I'm always sensitive, first of all, to… I was one of the ones – I mean, there are a lot of them, but, I was always thinking about the taxpayers' money. If I wouldn't spend it on myself, I would ask myself, "Well, why would I spend the

taxpayer's dollar if I wouldn't do this myself?" If I'm sitting in a hotel for a week, for whatever it was, $100 a night or $180 a night or whatever, getting my breakfast served to me and everything else, what was the point?

So, I called Washington and I said, "You might as well just bring me home, because I can just as easily manage these things from there. We're not going to have serious commercial operations in the foreseeable future in Baghdad. Certainly not in the next six months to a year. When the time comes, we can fly somebody back in, even if it's me, and determine when to shut down operations or whatever it is we do." So, I wasn't there too long before I flew back to Washington and managed – I actually finished out my one year tour the last couple months of summer, July and August, in Washington basically managing the shutdown. We had staff there, in 2014.

But it was a very interesting… I'm really glad I did it. It's sort of perverse. My heart goes out, as I mentioned, to the Iraqi people. They're tremendously passionate, caring, intelligent people with an incredible history. I don't think, to this day, that we could ever know… As much as we tried to do the right thing, we were way over our heads. In a place like Baghdad, with 7,000 years' worth of history… It's where commercial history began. It's where trade and money and law and everything else began. The hubris of being able to think we can go on to a place like that, that's thousands of years older than we are and in many ways more sophisticated… We think we're more sophisticated, but we're not.

Q: A lot of those old cuneiform tablets are lists of goods bought and sold, and keep track of who owned what and where it went. They were receipts, in essence.

CURTIS: Yeah, property leases and property development. It was… And, you know, I loved spending time there, talking to the Iraqis. I remember to this day, the people I met for all the development, One Iraqi colleague could recite Rumi at length, and he and I would sit and talk poetry he Rumi, meet Robert Frost. It was also a tremendous spiritual period for me. It was another great period of spiritual development. There were regular services in the compound. I got to know this just saint, literally. I wouldn't be surprised if one day… Well, he'd never get that well-known, but his name was Andrew White, and he had a church in the Red Zone, in Baghdad. He had a free dental clinic there. It was the only place. People could walk into the church and get free dental service.

And at Passover, he had a Passover service with the last six Jews in Baghdad. At the turn of the century, in 1900, there were more than 100,000 Jews in Baghdad, most of them – To be honest, some of them were chased out, and most of them went back because of the development of Israel. They would much rather be in a Jewish state than in a hostile Muslim state. But they were on the front lines of Christianity. He would baptize people in his church who would be murdered by the end of the week as Muslim apostates. He would try to keep the baptism silent and try to do it with care.

I had the pleasure of… He would come into the embassy every Sunday and do services for us, and I would be an acolyte for him and help him with the services. This is real life.

This is where the rubber hits the road. He was suffering himself from MS (multiple sclerosis). He had to get blood transfusions, and he's written like 30 books about his peace efforts in the Middle East. He was kidnapped once. They threw him in a room with cut-off finger pieces. He was honored here; he was given an award in Washington. I can't remember the name, but it was a peace award.

So, anyway, I remember actually conducting… I led an ecumenical sunrise service at the swimming pool at the embassy in Baghdad. I mean, when you see death around you, it's around you. You've got to pay attention to what existence is all about. So, these are real problems. I think I was able to do some good. I had some good conversations with people. It was sad that we had to leave under the conditions we had to leave under, without even saying goodbye to people like Andrew, and our staff.

But at the same time, it's just part of the incredibly rich experience. I had staff talk to me about… For the most part, there was this very ambiguous feeling about what had happened, because everybody knew that Saddam Hussein was a terrible man. He and his sons were terrible for the country. I talked to a woman who had been tortured by his regime, but they suffered, in many ways, so much more by the war that followed and the occupation and the terror and the bombing. In many ways, they exchanged one large Saddam Hussein for forty little Saddam Husseins.

But they were courageous, and I don't want to underestimate the government that we did work with and what they put up with. They did great work, and I think the government… I met the current prime minister. He had come to the embassy many times, and I had worked with him, and I think they really struggled courageously and mightily and hard to put things back together and to protect the people and to run a fair and reasonable government. Thank God, as we speak, Mosul is free and ISIS is pretty much history, at least for the time being. So, that's my Rocky story. I'm sure there are many who have even more horrendous stories. After I got back, and after I finished wrapping things up, I was assigned a tour in… I already knew I was going to be going on to the World Bank. That was my last position in the Foreign Service.

Q: Huh. Now that's interesting. You are going to the World Bank on detail, I imagine, or is there a special – ?

CURTIS: Yeah. The office I went to was the U.S. office.

Q: Oh, okay.

CURTIS: So, there are essentially two or three major pieces of the World Bank, and one is the country representation, who were basically the owners of the Bank. The U.S. owned 18% of the Bank; they were the major contributor by far. There was nobody who was near that. So, we were the big guy on the block. So, those owners were the countries, and then there was the management of the Bank, which was the president of the Bank, who was picked by the owners, and all of the staff who run the programs.

Then there are the recipient countries, and that's really what the Bank is all about, doing work in those countries. So, we were in the USEDs, the U.S. Executive Director's Office. In that office, there were representatives from Commerce, State, Treasury… Most of it was run by Treasury, but there were also representatives from AID, Commerce, and State, as well. The Treasury guys actually had to resign their commission with the U.S. Treasury and go to work for the World Bank. So, they were employees of the Bank, which was an interesting deal and actually worked out very nicely for them, financially. They don't have to pay U.S. taxes, if I remember that right, and they get a pension from the Bank.

We were – The representatives from the U.S. agencies were liaison positions. So, I was a liaison position there. My job was, basically, to help U.S. companies be involved and get pieces of the projects that the Bank… And there were two sides to that. The Bank itself had two main project lines. I think their internal operations alone was about $1 billion and a half, and while we were there they were trying to cut that down to $800 million, so it was radical. President Kim was making big changes while we were there. But then, of course, there were hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of projects overseas that the Bank was funding or a part of.

Q: So then, the Bank does open tenders for projects?

CURTIS: Yeah. I mean, the projects overseas were actually run by the governments of the recipient companies under World Bank rules. So, the World Bank was kind of the overseer or the accountant. I don't know what the best way to describe it would be. They would work in conjunction, first of all in deciding what projects were good and what the limits should be, and then in the very rigorous process of determining the "no harm" done on these projects. That was everything from indigenous peoples to environmental issues.

And actually, you know, a lot of American companies, small, medium-sized, and even larger ones, in the consulting business were involved in that process of helping the Bank determine and do the impact studies. They did both the development of what was the best kind of solution to this problem, and how we could guarantee that the solution doesn't create harm in the environment in anyway. They were called safeguards. There were something like 14 different major categories for safeguards.

So, again, it's a wonderful career, and the World Bank was a wonderful place to work, because you had some of the smartest people in the world. All of the people working there at the upper levels were PhDs and from their countries, multi-lingual. They were very smart people, but caring people at the same time. They were people who really had a passion for trying to solve the world's problems at the lowest levels: the problems of the poor, the problem of disease, the problem of development. These huge, and in many way intractable, problems.

The Bank had one, very clear and overwhelming priority of eliminating poverty. They defined that as precisely as they could as not actually eliminating poverty, but eliminating extreme poverty, which is all those people making less than $1.75 or $2.50 a day. We had

to bring all those people above that level. So, it was a focused and an ambitious goal, but never as simple as it sounds at first, because of course it involved everything: education and energy and health and power development and women's rights. It was a massive project that people gave a lot of thought to.

Of course, at the heart of it all was the world economy. You can do all the work in the world, but if the world economy is going in the pits, then your work can be undone. But trade was an extremely important part of it, and the World Bank worked very closely with the IMF. So, we really had more lead on the world economy issues. That wasn't a really big issue, but it was part of what we did. There were different categories of recipient countries. There were the poor, and there were the medium countries – medium-poor, I guess you'd call them – and there was the whole issue of their development. And of course, they did also take a huge lead on the climate change issue.

My experience there fit right in. I conducted a couple of major seminars on energy efficiency and also alternative energy. I worked very closely with the Canadians, and we did a mission where we brought in countries from all over the world to see what kind of solutions we'd have to the carbon pollution problems. That was at the heyday, when we were leading into the Paris Accords. So, actually, the last thing I did on my job at the World Bank was to go to Paris for the COP21. It was a nice way to end the career in a lot of ways, because I had worked for about 10 years at that point, doing what I could to help bring real technical and practical solutions to the issue of global warming and climate change. Paris was beautiful. I'm not talking about –

Of course, the city is great. But I'm talking about how, for the first time in probably the history of the world, 200 and some countries were coming together to solve a problem that's not about war, it's not about defeating somebody. It's about taking care of the earth. And we had the Montreal Protocols, Kyoto, but this was the biggest thing. There was nothing like it, ever. So, it was beautiful to be there.

Again, my major role was working with the trade shows and the solutions, but I also worked a lot with NGOs, and at that point, the relationships I'd developed with the USGBC (U.S. Green Building Council) and with other organizations like the BCSE, which was the Business Council for Sustainable Energy, and a whole host of others. There was Al Gore's association, Climate Reality. Those were crucial in bringing everything together for both presentations, as well as making connections with the businessmen and with the political entities or the countries where they could offer solutions.

In some ways, all of the expertise I'd developed over the years came to a great peak there, to be able to help with that critical project of saving the world. I don't think it was single-handed. I think there were some 10,000 people there. But it was just beautiful. There was a business section at the COP, there was an NGO section, and in between was the government negotiations section. We were all just there, fluidly moving between one and the other. The French did a wonderful job of managing the whole thing, which is a

monster, because you have VIPs, heads of state from all over the world coming in, and at the same time you've got every talent in the area that wants to be a part of it.

You've got businessmen, and Bill Gates was there. A lot of them put together a group of business leaders – to put together a fund for what we talked about earlier, for developing ideas and technological solutions. So, it was an exciting time and it was wonderfully successful. I mean, it was criticized for having not done enough. To me, the whole criticism around the idea of making it a mandatory treaty was a little bit ridiculous, because how are you going to force somebody to do the right thing? They have to be committed to the idea and do their best to do it, and if they don't meet their goals, what are you going to do? Shoot them?

So, that was kind of a waste of energy. But people did want to make it as hard and fast as they could, which I guess in retrospect, with what has happened, is a legitimate concern. But the fact that they brought it all together and they put that treaty together and they reached goals and they heard and listened to people… Even at the last minute, they listened to the island nations who were saying, "If you've agreed to keeping temperature rise to two degrees, that at best leaves our countries dead in this, because in two degrees we'll be underwater."

So, at the last minute they put in language and efforts to try to decrease it even more, to the 1.5 degree goal. So, it was a beautiful place to be, and it was a wonderful way to end a great career. I don't know where we go from here. The post-career has been wonderful with my Africa work and keeping involved with climate change issues as much as I can on a local level. I've been working with some companies, too, for a while, that are working on climate change products. So, I think what I learned in my career has proved to be valuable and rewarding.

Q: So, what year did you retire?

CURTIS: I retired in January 2016.

Q: Afterwards, you obviously have built up a reputation. People know you in the Foreign Commercial Service, and you have colleagues in the State Department and so on. How did it happen that you were tapped by the Africa Bureau to work with them? Because you hadn't served in Africa.

CURTIS: No. I lived in Africa when I was a kid, but no, it was the one region of the world I hadn't really spent any time in. But it's where the needs were greatest. You may know, the Foreign Service has a great program, the JSP (Job Search Program), because we serve overseas so much and then we retire… We're forced to retire. I actually was forced to retire. I probably would have stayed in the career longer, but as a senior… I spent almost 10 years in the senior service, so that was my time. So, we come back home, and getting readjusted to what the market is here and how you approach the market and how you market yourself…

So, at the Job Search Program they brought out a lot of the bureaus, and the bureaus met with people. It was the Africa Bureau that unhesitatingly said, "We want somebody with commercial experience." Yeah, there's plenty of… In some ways, it's less needed in other parts of the world, where there is lots of development already. I suppose I probably could have had some… In Asia, I'm sure there are plenty of places they could have used my skills, but still. It's nothing like Africa, in terms of an entire continent. Almost at every turn, there's some real important commercial development issues.

Whereas, at AID, there's great work there. Most of their priority, of course, is health issues, but in most places I've served, you might have 10 AID officers, or three or four, and only one of them is working on commercial. The rest of them are working on health issues or other security issues or whatever. So, the need was greatest. Not only was the need greatest for somebody with senior level… They knew I was senior level. There was some tremendous experience that I had. Power was a huge issue. I mentioned earlier about Power Africa.

The Bank also had a huge Lighting Africa program. The whole issue was, had you allowed development to continue, we would see dramatically increasing carbon pollution in the environment. So, I was an expert in all that. They had tremendous need for that skill alone, but they also just need bodies, because Africa is a hard place to keep people, because of the security and health issues. I think my first couple of tours… I would serve in the WAE (While Actually Employed) program four to six months at a time in a place, and you can only work up to half a year and still keep your pension. So, that was ideal for me.

Q: Yeah. Just a very quick note: As much as we, the Foreign Service, immunize people, give them the vaccines they need to go to Africa, give them the malarial suppressants, nevertheless, many Foreign Service officers have to come back from Africa because of all kinds of illnesses. Not even, necessarily, simple ones.

CURTIS: Yeah. and all sorts of… Who knows. It may kill me!

Q: Well, I don't mean it that way –

CURTIS: Yeah. I feel like I've got enough floating around my insides that any disease that tries to enter gets immediately killed off by all of the diseases that are already there. But yeah, no. I mean, the post I just served in, in Botswana, I was replacing two officers who got pregnant and, for various reasons, weren't going to have their babies in Botswana. As developed as it is, it's not rated by our health unit as safe enough to risk having a pregnancy where there might be any complications. In South Africa, on the other hands, you could do it, but if you're going to go set up in South Africa for a couple of months while you have your baby, you might as well come home. So, I was serving there, developing commercial issues as well as replacing two officers who had gone because of pregnancies.

Q: I mean, I just interviewed someone who had to come home because they got a virus, and the virus ended up attacking their immune system. So, they have lifetime issues. They got over the virus, and they got over most of the subsequent problems, but it left their immune system, in some places, really unable to handle certain kinds of opportunistic infections. So, literally, you can come back with some very strange things from that.

CURTIS: Yeah. On the other hand, I guess I just – It's been a fantastic career, really. I enjoyed everywhere I worked. Africa, in its own way, is just very fascinating.

Q: Oh, it's nothing –

CURTIS: It's rich in cultures.

Q: Exactly.

CURTIS: What I've sort of discovered is, Botswana is a wonderfully right and rational country in a way that, even coming back to my own country, with what's going on here today… They're way ahead of us in terms of being able to rationally approach things like gun control or peace. They've had 52 years of fair and freely elected democratic governments. They treat their environment with – They have more green park space than any other country on the planet. Their flag advertises how well they treat and respect equality of all the races, blacks and whites and Indians. They all get along with perfect equality there. The president of the country married a white woman from the UK. It's a beautiful place. In many ways, there's so much more maturity about what life is really about, about individuals, about caring for each other, than there is here. You can learn a lot from places like Botswana, where they're struggling with real problems.

Q: In the experience that you had, even the relatively short experiences you had in Africa, what are the main areas now for commercial growth?

CURTIS: I mean, there's still the huge issue of power development. There's still huge infrastructure issues. It's a huge challenge because of the environment. So, the basic things like that… They've done pretty well with the development of phones and communications. Cellphones have been a wonderful boon for the entire world, ours included, but also especially leapfrogging in developing areas. Health issues are always important, and there's a tremendous effort there. I think the United States is…

President Bush's PEPFAR (President's Emergency Plan for AIDs Relief) program is one of the great examples of a real humanitarian effort. It's had a tremendous in saving the lives of children and the lives of others. I think, in terms of commercial development, one of the more problematic areas where there's both a lot of potential and a lot of challenge is just in consumer products. There's always room for franchises, like we were talking about before. It's just a matter of picking the right place, where they can afford it and where it's safe and where it won't…

But in the long term, these products are going to have great potential. Africa's over a billion people now. It's 54 countries. So, it's like the world. There's everything from very developed markets in South Africa and Egypt and others, to places that are still extremely poor. There's a lot of oil being developed, and there's a lot of natural gas. So, there's a lot of potential there as well. It all depends on the price of… That's a very tricky market, judging the price of oil and where the demand is. But the future is hard to predict in a place like Africa. But I actually have a lot of respect for the Africans' ability to try to manage the problem in the long term. We're an impatient people, but Africans know that it takes time.

The African Union has had a very methodical approach to, first of all, systematically… One of the tours I did was at the African Union, in Addis which tries to systematically address the problems in a certain order over time. We're talking 30, 50, 60 years that it's going to take to solve these problems. But it's hard to talk to a businessman about 50 years and 60 years from now, unless you're a big company like GM (General Motors) or GE or something like that. But, you know, they've largely eliminated coup d'états in the countries. They do have a lot of free or semi-free elections, and they are really addressing development issues and health issues. There are still lots of problems with violence. There's a problem with corruption. There's a problem with those freely-elected governments that then never want to leave, because it's a little risky if you leave.

Power is the source of everything, for them. Their prestige, their meaning of life, their safety. To go from that to probably being indicted for some corruption, or jailed or killed or assassinated, when they lose their position… Those are problems that are challenging and are hard to work with, but I think with the example of Mugabe, who basically… The military said, "Enough is enough, and we're going to keep this as free and democratic as we can. We're not going to assassinate him or anything like that." I think they are, in their intelligent ways and in their own ways…

You know, colonialism screwed up the continent pretty badly, and for years, the "white man's burden" solution was that we have all the answers, and we need to go fix things for these guys. We finally realized that, no, it doesn't work that way. That does more harm than good. The Africans have to – We have to help and support African solutions for African problems. Even though we say that, sometimes it's so hard for our kind of can do, take charge attitude of American policy to just say, "No, you're just as likely to screw it up as you are to do any good. Besides, it has to be something that they can appreciate and understand and take over themselves." I'm not saying… I know it almost sounds patronizing, but it's not. I have a tremendous respect for the fact that Africans, in so many of the important emotional and spiritual ways, are more developed than Western society.

Q: That's interesting. Let me end with a question: Since you've been to several world regions and international organizations, if you were giving advice to the Foreign Commercial Service about the direction it should take in the future or how best to train our Commercial Service officers, what advice would you give?

CURTIS: Well, it's kind of like… There's always a sort of saying about how when you first come to a country, like when I first came to Japan, I first thought, "Wow, what a fascinating culture. I'm going to write a book about this. There are so many cool things I could write. I could do this whole book. It would be great, it would be beautiful. It would be about the great Japanese culture and how the homogeneous is so different from the U.S."

Then you're there for a couple of months, and you think, "Well, I've thought about this more, and it's just so complicated. I'm going to try to focus on one thing. I'm probably going to write an article about the development of solar power or something. I know enough about that. I'm in the know. I'm getting into that. I could write an article about that."

And then you're there a year and you think, "I don't understand this place at all. I'm never going to figure this place out." When you ask me to predict the future, my dear friend… I've done so much predicting of the future. If we listen to my full tapes, you know that my first interest was Soviet studies. I thought they were going to rule the world, but nothing. And everybody thought Japan was the bad guy, and they were going to rule the world. Every time I've tried to pick a stock or something like that, I'm never right. So, you're asking the wrong person. But not only are you asking the wrong person, you're asking a person who doesn't believe anybody can do that. Life is not where we get to in the end, it's the journey along the way. It's really trusting the process, and understanding on a small level the important human things.

If I were… You asked me, and you knew perfectly well I'm going to have an opinion about it, but I wanted to preface it with the idea that don't anybody take this to the bank. But one of the things throughout the career that's been a bit of a source of constant confusion is the division between the economic section in the State Department and the Commercial section. I don't think you can divide those, and I don't think it should be divided. I think it should be one organization. But it's easier said than done. The fact that a businessman has to know whether… You know, if they're going to some countries in Africa, they're going to deal with the Department of Commerce, but if they're going to other countries in Africa, they're going to deal with the Department of State. Why should… We've done as much as we can to make that transparent to them anyway, but underneath they'll soon discover it and we should work our organizational differences out.

But it does lead to great inefficiencies, and frankly, I think what has changed – and again, my State Department colleagues who listen to this will probably want to shoot me – is that there are some changes that the State Department hasn't made that… Again, I think it should be under one roof. It should probably be under the roof of the State Department. But having said that, on the one hand, I would think that the problem is that the State Department is still doing a lot of things that are a waste of time and money. One of those is writing cables. The whole cable system…

You cannot talk to a State Department officer who isn't going to defend that system to the death, and yet it's a system from the 1800s. It doesn't even really exist anymore, from the point of view that people really communicate with emails. But writing their cable and getting that thought down and getting it out into the… It's the closest thing to being a published officer, writing a cable. But every cable I ever wrote that had to be copied to the White House and the Department of Defense, and had to be reviewed by five or six people and approved by the ambassador or whatever… Meanwhile, the president of the United States is making policy in 40 characters. The time has come to pull the plug on that system, just completely. Just pull the plug and go home and say, "We are not writing cables anymore."

People say, "Oh, well, you need to make sure you write to the Africa desk," or whatever. But I say, "Look, if you don't know the name of the guy at the Africa desk and can't send him an email, include him on an email, then he ain't gonna read it, and it ain't important." If you can't deal with people on a more connected level, then you're wasting your time and you're wasting the taxpayer's dollar. To have five or six or seven people review or contribute to one piece of communication? Well, the way to do that is to send an email.

"Oh, but if you send an email, you might say something wrong in the email." So what? I can tell you the way it works in business: You send an email, and your boss didn't agree with that email? You copied him, so he chimes in and says, "Well, yeah, with what Keith said, I agree with him on this, but we're not going to do this or we're not going to do that. This wasn't really quite right. What he didn't know was that…"

That's fine. So what? Excuse my French, but just stop being so anal. I mean, you've got to move fast. You have to go with the markets. You didn't really ask about what the future's going to be, but those are changes I would make. I would put them under one roof, and I would pull the plug on the cable system tomorrow. But in terms of where the world's going to go? Who knows. Nobody could predict it if it comes down to the oil or the power market or the cellular market or the social media market. I've seen enough to be smart enough to not try to predict what's the next big thing. Everybody says AI (artificial intelligence).

Well, I think there's a lot of BS in the whole AI. What I like to think of, is that it's more going to be about how you manage your individual lives. The Bill Gates and the Elon Musks of the world… I do think space has a future. I think aerospace has a real future. I have two boys, and their whole… Not only their professional lives, but their real interest and their real love… You know, they watch all the sci-fi in the world, and these guys want to go back to the moon. They want to go to Mars. They want that in their future, and they work on it. They dream about it and they work on it, and if there were anything they wanted, it would be to reach out and get started. Let's go. So, I do think there's going to be… And that'll be interesting, to see how that develops. Everybody's getting into the space race. But it could be a good thing.

I do think we have to learn how to care about each other more, especially in this country. We have to learn how to manage our social media. As I was saying, the Bill Gates and the Elon Musks and the Stephen Hawkings are all into this, "We're so afraid of AI! It's going to take over!" Well, there was fiction written about this in the 1800s, about robots taking over the world. Go back and read R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots). But we, in a normal world, this world, we don't have to worry about AI.

We have to worry about what I call the artificial stupidity. Here we are with… I didn't bring my recorder, it's over here, I've got to learn how to operate this recorder. In the meantime, my phone is ringing, while you're trying to do this. It's the stupid things that all this technology brings to us that is really dominant. That's what we care about emotionally, especially at home. I mean, with me, I get so irritated… I hope there weren't any cuss words on this, because when it goes off, there'll be some, because my phone will have done something. Like, the power will have run off and I've got to find some place to plug it in. How many people sit in the airport looking for a place to plug it in?

This is what dominates our lives, emotionally and physically and mentally. I'm like, please come, robots, and take all of that worry away from me. You know? It ain't gonna happen. We don't – The world's gotten so complicated. We have no idea how these systems really interact with each other. It's the same with pharmaceuticals. We take all of these pills, but we have no idea how these pills really interact with each other in an individual human body, every human body that's different, over 30 or 40 years, taking a variety of different pills. Don't let anybody tell you they know what the impact of that is. We have to come to a new understanding of what life is about, and that's why you need places like Africa. They have a better understanding than we do.

Q: Well, then, this looks like a good place to end, unless you have any other parting thoughts, it sounds like.

CURTIS: No, I appreciate the effort you guys make. I've said it a couple of times and I'll say it again: it was a wonderful career. I could have had a career in business and yeah, sure, maybe in acting, maybe in politics… But the richness of this career is just incredible. I'm glad to have been a part of it..

Q: Well, thank you.

End of interview