

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign
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LOUIS G. DAVIS

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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is January 28, 2020, we're at the residence of Louis G. Davis, who retired from the Foreign Agricultural Service as Deputy Administrator for Management. I am Allan Mustard collecting this interview for the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. Lou, if you could start, please, by telling us where you came from, where you were educated, where you grew up, and how you started your career.

DAVIS: I had an interesting beginning. Two major things happened early in my lifetime. I was born in Birmingham, Alabama in 1935. My birth was not in the very heart of the Great Depression but close to it. So since this was a very lean economic time I learned the meaning of doing without very, very young, not only from my own family, but from the people we associated with daily. The other life's lesson for me was that World War II came in 1941. As part of the War effort my father took a job in Macon, Georgia, the first of many moves I would experience early in my life. We moved to a number of places before I was ten years old. We were in Macon for a couple of years and then we moved to Gulfport, Mississippi, which is where I think of myself as having grown up through age 15. I met my closest boyhood friends in Gulfport. I think my main values came from my association with the friends I had in Gulfport; friends who were from families that were better off financially than my family; families that had an aspiration level that I caught on to very, very early in life. The happening that changed my life, too, is that my family moved to Seattle, Washington, after I finished my freshman year in high school. That changed my life because of the difference in my life in Gulfport, Mississippi, and my life as I found it in Seattle. I never adjusted to life in Seattle. So I joined the Navy when I just became 17. I was in the Navy from age 17 to 21. After basic training I was assigned to a heavy cruiser based in Boston. The group I reported to aboard the ship, about 10 of us, met with a senior Petty Officer from the ship's personnel office. He asked: "How many of you can type?" I had a course on typing in high school, so I raised my hand. This incident changed my life because I went to work in the Ship's personnel office. That was my first introduction to personnel management. So I spent my four year Navy career in personnel management, including going to basic training programs in personnel management. When I was almost through my career in the Navy I also spent some time in the military legal business. I found over the years that having a personnel and legal background helped me in my professional career. For personal development during my time in the Navy I was able to take correspondence courses from the Armed Forces Institute in Milwaukee. All of this training and education prepared me to take the entrance examination to enter the University of Minnesota. I was admitted to the College of Science, Literature and the Arts at the University of Minnesota as a prelaw student. I graduated with my bachelor's degree in three years (with honors). I was then admitted to the graduate school of public administration (The Humphrey Institute).

To begin my career in the Federal Government, I was recruited for a job in the Navy Department in July 1960. But because of the Eisenhower freeze of 1960 the Navy Department could not hire me. But they asked me to come to Washington and they arranged for me to be interviewed at a number of agencies. One was at the IRS which had just been reorganized in 1959. I was hired into their National Office Personnel Division. About six months later I was selected to go into the IRS Administrative Intern Program. I spent six years at IRS, most of it was either as an Administrative Intern where I worked in a lot of different places. For example, I worked in the Office of the Secretary where I learned what the Office of the Secretary actually did in a large agency like the Treasury Department. After my time as an Administrative Intern I spent a lot of time in the National Office Personnel Division. I had one major achievement. I became part of the team that designed the pilot central tax return processing system in the IRS, located near Atlanta, Georgia.

Q: So that when the IRS went to computers you were there?

DAVIS: I was there. I was there not before they went to computers but before they were organizationally modernized. Again, I was on the small team that set up the Pilot Service Center in Georgia. Now everything in tax returns processing and even tax returns audit is in the Service Centers around the country. In addition in another assignment I was able to travel with some very senior people for several months doing a study of the Intelligence function of IRS; traveling from region to region and so forth, with senior executive level people. So I learned a lot about the management of a big organization. I spent six years at IRS. I was then recruited to come to the Office of Personnel Management, (at the time it was the Civil Service Commission) to work on building an executive manpower program for the Federal Government; a program that was the predecessor of the Senior Executive Service. We built most of the basic elements of the Senior Executive Service but our main effort was to get people to move at the senior levels from one agency to another. At that time only about five percent of the federal workforce moved from one agency to another. So we worked on visiting with top executives who had executive jobs to fill to try to get them to select high caliber people from other agencies. That effort became very unsuccessful. People would not be selected from our pool of excellent executive talent.

Q: It's still unsuccessful?

DAVIS: Yes, but we tried, for example, to get a top-notch person from the Office of the Secretary of Defense to move to Agriculture. It just wasn't possible. I stayed at the Civil Service Commission only 14 months. I was recruited to go to Office of the Secretary of the Department of Transportation to work for the Assistant Secretary for international affairs and Special Programs. That was my first real touch with international programs. I was there three years. An interesting part of that assignment is that I did get the "international" word on my background. So when FAS did a search to fill the Deputy Assistant Administrator Management job. My name turned up in the "hotshot file." At the time Ray Ioanes was the Administrator at FAS. Interestingly enough the way I was located was a search of what we called the hotshot file at the Civil Service Commission.

Q: Hotshot file? Talk to me about the hotshot file.

DAVIS: After we did all of the staff work to create the elements of the executive personnel system we went through all of the resumes which people at the GS-15 and above were required to submit. We then culled out the most outstanding people. We referred to that as our "hotshot file." So if someone at the FAS was coming forward to fill what at the time for me would have been the Deputy

Assistant Administrator Ken McDaniel queried the CSC database and I popped up. I had international background of course. As I've discussed here I was essentially a professional administrative management person to begin with so I was selected and moved in December 1969 to FAS. I worked with Ken McDaniel at that time but it became very clear that there were a lot of things that I needed to do as the Deputy. One is that I had to get very acquainted with FAS and the whole business of the foreign trade programs, the operations in the field and so forth. I did a great deal of traveling. I was overall getting educated about FAS. In addition, almost immediately after I got to FAS I decided that since I had been in the government for 10 years I needed some retreading so I started going to night school to get a master's degree in Public Administration at George Washington University, which I did complete in 1973. Even with Ken McDaniel, and then when Dick Smith became the Assistant Administrator, I did a lot of the outside things. One is that I became the person attending the State Department Board of the Foreign Service. Several Board Chairman asked me to head task forces on very difficult subjects. One subject was to develop a plan to implement a Congressional decree that there would be taxation of the overseas housing allowance, either in kind or the allowances. So those provided housing would have to pay taxes on that benefit. We went out to the field with what we were proposing, which was 25% of base pay. My task group included people from DoD, the CIA, and Commerce. Our proposal was really a hot potato so I learned a lot about dealing with the Foreign Service. We received loads of cables stating mostly that they would have to resign if they had to pay the 25% tax. So the Director General of the foreign service and the top administrative officer at CIA and the one from Defense and I went over to the Treasury Department to meet with the Assistant Secretary who was pushing the tax proposal. We all got to the Treasury Department but the Assistant Secretary didn't show up even though we went to his office. Later on the Assistant Secretary went down to South Carolina to give a speech and dropped dead giving the speech. His departure was the end of the subject on taxation of the overseas housing allowance.

Q: Sounds more like a CIA action to me!

DAVIS: I headed another task group to review the overall cost of the entire overseas operation of the Government. We did much of that task by modeling. Luckily I had a person on the group from CIA who had a detailed background in modeling data information so we were able to take that approach. We came with numbers that were so outrageous that we just had to bury the whole thing. But in the process of running those task groups I learned a lot about the overseas operation of the Federal government; knowledge and contacts that were very valuable for my future career.

Q: What was the biggest surprise about that? Thinking back to that time of everything you learned about the overseas operations of the US government what was the biggest surprise or maybe the second biggest surprise?

DAVIS: I was able to see in great detail the overseas functions of the Government on a post by post basis and this included not only the American staff in those posts but also the foreign staff as well. So it was very impressive, learning about the total presence of the US government in all of those places throughout the world and in learning about the ballpark cost of running the entire operation. So I learned a great deal about the overall functions and locations and cost of operations of the entire Federal workforce overseas. My main point here is that I spent a lot of time on outside assignments. In addition to substantive information I became acquainted with some very high-level people at the State Department, like Director Generals. In the future when we had FAS problems with State I was able to make appointments with top officials at State to get our problems resolved.

Q: Coming back to your FAS career you did a detail at the US Trade Representative's office and why was that and what led to that?

DAVIS: We Dave Hume was the Administrator and after Ken McDaniel left the assumption was that I was going to become the Assistant Administrator. Dave had other ideas about the type of person he wanted in the job. This was my view of the substance of Dave's decision.

Q: You can say whatever you want.

DAVIS: I think that Dave was afraid of me. He told me his decision was to have Dick Smith come in because he wanted somebody who had International, a foreign field, and a program background in FAS. I think that the real reason though was that when he was head of the commodities area of FAS he had a lot of trouble with the guy who at the time was the Assistant Administrator. His name was Art Minor who had an administrative background like my own. So Dave just decided that Dick should be the Assistant Administrator and I stayed there as the deputy. Dick and I worked really well together. We were certainly close colleagues and close friends in many ways. We were the same age, we had children at the same level in school and so forth.

Q: Now at that time Dick Smith was in charge of both management and attachés as I recall.

DAVIS: No, at least not for very long. When Dick was the Assistant Administrator I was successful because of the person he was. He valued my background. He appreciated my educating him on what the responsibilities of the administrative function. He learned a lot and that was why I always had deputies with program backgrounds myself once I was the Deputy Administrator. Dick and those who were my deputies all said it was the most valuable experience that they had in their careers.

Yes, Dick did have a temper. He could lose his temper but I'm a cool person. So he could get riled up at times but as time went on I think he matured as a person. I think part of learning is that a lot of the things that you have to deal with in Management you have to keep your cool about them and Dick learned that I'm sure over a period of time. So he became a more skilled at being better balanced in dealing with the problems of the people who come to see you. They typically are not people who are feeling real good about things. They are people who are mad about something. For example, you had to do a good job of keeping your relationships and balance with the other Assistant Administrators and the division people and so forth so I think his behavior was changed when he became the Administrator. In any case, after Dick got there as the Assistant Administrator we had a lot of good people covering Management. I was prepared to take it over but that wasn't going to happen. Coincidentally about a year after Dick became the Assistant Administrator for Management the Deputy Secretary was contacted by the US Trade Representative who was looking for someone who would come to STR to be the Executive Officer there. I was recommended for that job. It was time for me to do something different so I went over to STR to serve for two years as the Executive Officer. At STR it was the time of the Tokyo Round of trade negotiations. A lot of things were going on in Geneva. I essentially took over there when there was a lot of trouble in the management of STR. I took the whole thing over but two years there was about the right time for me to leave. The trade negotiations had ended and the trade negotiations with Mexico and Canada also ended. Not too long after I returned to FAS Dick became the Administrator. It was then that I moved up to become the Assistant Administrator. (Later all Assistant Administrator jobs were titled "Deputy Administrator.")

Q: You came back from USTR in 79 and Tom Hughes was the Administrator at that point. Looking

back at the results of the Williamsburg conference Tom Hughes began a push for moving FAS back into the Foreign Service. The attachés had been in the Foreign Service during World War II up until 1954, then they came back to agriculture and were civil servants again.

DAVIS: I think the attachés were in the Foreign Service back into the 1930s.

Q: No, they were not Foreign Service at that time, they were still civil servants until 1939 and in 1939 when the foreign services were all merged together then they became part of Foreign Service. But then in 1954 they went back to being civil servants and so now we are at 1979, Tom Hughes is Administrator, Dick Smith is running Management, and why with a big push to get us into the Foreign Service?

DAVIS: I think that Tom was approached by a number of people to have FAS become part of the Foreign Service. A lot of people in FAS felt that FAS for a long time had been at a disadvantage from the standpoint particularly in the area of allowances and benefits. Mainly, the retirement benefit of being in the Foreign Service. At the time my reservation was (which did get discussed) that by going into the Foreign Service we might lose control over our personnel system; at least the parts of it abroad. I felt particularly that given that the contacts that we had on Capitol Hill (we had very close contacts with Jamie Whitten and the real powers on the Capitol Hill) we could even get most of the benefits of being in the Foreign Service without giving up all of our control over the personnel system. But by the time that we got to the conference in Williamsburg, I felt the decision had already been made for FAS to become part of the Foreign Service. I'm sure Dick Smith and most, and perhaps all the senior people, supported going into the Foreign Service. So there was not a lot of discussion about that issue. Tom Hughes was a political appointee and I'm sure he sensed the vibes for the best political choices that were there. I think too that a lot of people, not only in FAS, but those in the Cooperator world and so forth, weighed in to the argument for FAS to go to the Foreign Service. I do think, too, that the State Department supported that because they were interested in getting Agriculture and also the Commerce Department into the Foreign Service so that pretty much was a foregone conclusion.

Q: When Leo Connolly and Charlie Soisson briefed a bunch of us junior professionals on the Foreign Service and this would've been, I came on board in April 1982, so this would have been probably summer or fall of 1982, Leo said at the time that there were two reasons that FAS wanted to join the Foreign Service. Number one was for the benefits that you mentioned, but number two he said was the rotational authority, the fact that under the law they were operating under Title 7 of the US code, we could only bring someone back at grade for three years and then if they were in a lower graded position they had to be downgraded and this created frustration across the agency, that managers couldn't put the right person in the right job because the grade wasn't right and people didn't want to take downgrades. So that those for the two reasons that he gave for FAS and on State. He said State wanted both Commerce and Agriculture in because State had a vision for a domestic constituency that would stand up for the foreign affairs community and could you talk about those two aspects as well?

DAVIS: I'm not familiar with any of that. It wouldn't be unusual given the way that Dick and I divided up what we were doing. Conversations including that kind of detail would have Dick the most involved. It wouldn't be essential that I be involved. I might be, I was at the Williamsburg conference, but in terms of decision-making I don't think that I was going to have a big input into what the decisions were going to be.

Q: So those decisions were basically made while you were not there.

DAVIS: Yes, because I was gone, as the whole thing got to the decision level in terms of details I was already away at STR at that point.

Q: So when the transition got underway, what were the challenges that you and Pat Madison and others faced to bring FAS into the Foreign Service?

DAVIS: Well, to me as the Deputy Administrator I had to look at myself from the overall standpoint of the total staff of people in the Foreign Agricultural Service. As we began to operate both systems I felt that the civil service side had to understand the relationship of the Civil Service and the Foreign Service to the overall personnel system of FAS. I was, because of the earlier things we talked about, my connection with the Director General of the Foreign Service and so on, and I did spend quite a bit of time working with Bill Bacchus, a key assistant to the Director General, on the Foreign Service Act of 1980. I was very sensitive to the problems that the State Department had in operating two side-by-side personnel systems in the State Department. There was a lot of conflict between the Civil Service people and the Foreign Service people in the State Department in Washington. So one of the things I tried to do early on in FAS was get everybody acquainted with what the two systems were. I gave some presentations on that subject. Everyone was invited to come to my presentations aimed to head off conflict. I'm not sure as it turned out that we were successful totally in doing that. When we went to the basic operation of the Foreign Service it appeared to people that the grade structure of the Foreign Service when compared to the grade structure for Civil Service was very high in favor of the Foreign Service. The Foreign Service promotion opportunities and the actions became very visible and people got the feeling that they were not getting a fair shake when it came to things like promotion opportunities. Those feelings led us into a lot of trouble with the staff overall. Of course eventually it became an EEO kind of thing. It was unfortunate because we had the highest grade structure in the Department of Agriculture, but nobody once we had to routinely publish the promotion actions in the Foreign Service, that is after we adopted the boards and so forth, a lot of people felt they were disadvantaged. And it was not helpful to say "well, why don't you go to the Foreign Service", which a lot of them could have. So I think making the decision to go to the Foreign Service changed the personnel culture of the Foreign Agricultural Service. A lot of very creative work over the years was done by FAS to make the Foreign Service system very successful.

Q: Well, to some degree we did it with the Agricultural Trade Act which allowed FAS to hire people who were not part of the career Foreign Service or part of the FAS career staff. We would bring in outsiders with specific commodity expertise and send them out as Agriculture Trade Officers. Could you offer a perspective on that? Why that legislation came up, and why it basically never ended up being implemented the way it was intended?

DAVIS: I don't recall any knowledge of that subject.

Q: It was 1978 or nine?

DAVIS: That's about the time that I was at STR. I went to STR and I was there from 1976 to 1979 so a lot of these things were happening when I was away.

Q: So you spent a little over seven years as Deputy Administrator implementing the Foreign Service Act. We were deploying agricultural trade offices overseas, which created its own management

headaches. What besides that were the big challenges, the big changes in FAS, while you were Deputy Administrator?

DAVIS: I'll have to give a lot of thought to that question. One major thing that happened was we all went to the SES system. That meant that we had to implement the SES system and operate parallel with the Foreign Service system. There were some pluses to that because then the Commodity Division Directors and others were able to move up to the senior executive level and many of them did that very rapidly.

Q: Could you talk about that because I was told that the Commodity Division Directors were made SES positions specifically so that there would be high-ranking positions for officers to come back to Washington to.

DAVIS: Well, that would have made a difference. I would consider that mostly a plus, too. We could operate a rank-in-the-man system like they do at the State Department, but the problem that produced even at State was a situation like the "Hall Corps". This is a problem to this day. People come back from abroad and there are no jobs at their level, so making it clear that, for example, that the Grain Division director was an SES level position, I think just psychologically made a lot of difference in the assignment process placing people returning from abroad at senior levels. But with the SES we had a lot more control over things like bonuses and even promotions because we reclassified a lot of those positions immediately when we went to the SES. That brought some balance to the rewards and benefits of the two personnel systems.

Q: There was a so-called general quota for GS 16s, 17s and 18s administered by OPM and before that the Civil Service Commission, and so essentially when we went to the SES there was no longer a general quota, is that it?

DAVIS: There was some agreement on what positions could be in the SES. Remember that the SES is a gradeless corps of executives. There was, after we converted to the SES, no longer any discussions about the grade levels of positions. All positions that we agreed initially would be in the SES was the way we operated. Remember again that SES positions are for positions with "executive responsibility" and not just positions at the GS 16, 17, or 18 levels

Q: Why was it difficult?

DAVIS: We did have to manage the SES system; which meant that people selected for those positions were supposed to function as "executives." In practice many people placed in those jobs continued to function as technicians, such as commodity experts at a high level. Some were poor supervisors of people, which caused us a lot of trouble.

Q: Could you talk a bit about management of the overseas staff; the local employees, the FSNs. When we shifted to the Foreign Service I really didn't understand at the time what an impact this had on the FSNs but around 1983 or thereabouts I made a trip to the Middle East and one of the stops was in Cairo. The senior FSN in our office in the Cairo come to me complaining about how he had been humiliated by this change in status and I didn't really understand what he was talking about.

DAVIS: I don't know what that means either because you know that the staff of local employees we had worldwide were some of the best people that we had.

Q: What was the impact of the Foreign Service Act on FSN management?

DAVIS: I'm sorry, I don't remember anything about the Foreign Service Act that affected the foreign staff. You are talking about both professionals and secretaries. I just don't remember anything that were basic problems in my time there. Ross Cook may be able to answer those questions.

Q: I guess it was not clear to me so I was hoping you would shed some light on it.

DAVIS: We had total control, within some limitations, managing our embassy staff; what the grade levels were, and so forth and the benefits that were going to go to the Foreign Service staff. I never dealt with any problems in my time that concerned disadvantaging to our foreign service staff; professionals or clerical staff.

Q: Now were you there for the class-action suit against FAS?

DAVIS: Yes, I was there. It happened during Tom Kay's time.

Q: Could you talk about that because that had a very profound impact on FAS both in terms of personnel management and culturally. Could you talk about that please?

DAVIS: While we had an excellent EEO employment record, we had some problems with specific people who were minorities. The backdrop of that, as I see the world, is what I mentioned earlier about the conflict between the two systems. I think that particularly for the minority employees many of which felt that they were particularly disadvantaged by the Foreign Service system whose members received an unfair number of promotions. They vocally mentioned that "we want to get promoted."

Q: So you are saying that to some degree the class action suit was precipitated by the conversion to the Foreign Service?

DAVIS: I'm saying that now and as I look back on it that was what I felt because when we got to the Congressional hearing a large contingent of our black employees were there. One of the major things they had to say was the disadvantage they felt in promotions. We had the highest grade structure before going to the Foreign Service; thus we had the highest grade structure in the Department of Agriculture. So we had no problems with promoting people when we objectively thought should be promoted in the system that we had. And from the standpoint of EEO we had a very good record of numbers. As chairman of the Department's Management Council I was in contact with all of the other Assistant Administrators and Deputy Administrators for Management, throughout the Department, and I was very close to the people who ran the EEO program. In fact one of the things I did as Chairman of the Management Council, I arranged to have the entire group go on a trip to the Midwest to visit private sector companies to look at how they were managing their EEO programs. We went to places like General Mills, 3M and so forth to take a look at what they were doing and how we might do better. From the standpoint of the class action appeal I think that we won the war but lost the battle; feeling that we were doing very well in the EEO area from the standpoint of promotion opportunity and overall career advancement. Besides we had some minority employees who moved to very high levels in FAS. One who didn't move up at the time was given an unsatisfactory performance rating. That led us into a court battle. We were not charged with anything by the court. In terms of the record of FAS on EEO I think that we had an excellent record. We could have done a better job dealing with the grievances of some black employees.

Q: FAS actually won the class-action suit as I recall.

DAVIS: We were not required to do anything by the court. We did have to endure some very bad publicity; so it was not a total win in many ways.

Q: The only real outcome that I perceived was when we hired an EEO director. That was when Mae Massey Johnson was hired as the EEO director as a direct outcome of that. Even though FAS won the case, it was fairly clear that there was a problem, and that we needed to deal with the problem. so the EEO office was created in FAS.

DAVIS: That would have been after my time there. It was one of those things when you do everything that you can. It might have been a department-wide structural change that they wanted in the Department. They were able to get that in FAS implemented. When I was Chairman of the Management Council we did a lot of EEO things. Once with the EEO staff we had Clarence Thomas come to speak at one of our meetings. At the time he was head of the EEOC and so I felt, and the EEO staff in the department felt, that we had a very good record and effort in the EEO area. In addition I was able to do a number of things that had an impact Departmentwide. One of the things that we looked at when we visited 3M was that they had a system for evaluating the impact of their programs in each area of work by actually determining what they were accomplishing against management criteria for running their business, including in the EEO area. So with that knowledge I was able to have the 3M people come to Washington to make presentations mainly to people in the Management area, but also a lot of program people came to those meetings. I also got the Secretary involved in program evaluation in all program areas, including once again, EEO programs.

Q: You just touched on automation and when I was hired in 82 one of the reasons I was hired I was told is because I knew what to do with the computer keyboard and there were a bunch of us brought in about that time to start moving FAS away from typewriters to using computers to generate statistical publications. Could you talk about that and about the relationship with the Commodity Credit Corporation and how getting money from CCC to fund all of that worked?

DAVIS: Well Dick Smith was the Administrator when we launched into greater automation of our programs. This all became a separate program area with Dick Cannon running it. That was, in my time in FAS, one of the great accomplishments; going to the automation of the information processing system from going away from statistical clerks to a modern system of information management.

Q: It was a hard sell?

DAVIS: Yes, well of course it affected the entire information processing system from the field to Washington and to the analytical work that was done with that information once it got to Washington. On both ends of that it involved people's careers. The people in the field would then have to begin working differently including the Attachés who went out as well as the local professionals in the field. It totally changed the character of the people in the Commodity Divisions who were processing the information as it as it came in with shuttle cards.

So those jobs essentially became obsolete with modernization of the system.

Q: Well, I can remember coming into Grain and Feed division and a bunch of us were hired the same year. Seven of us junior professionals were hired in one 12-month period and we began overhauling the way dairy livestock and poultry generated circular tables and in the wake of that. Then Oilseeds and Products of course were on board, Tobacco, Cotton, and Seeds was on board but Dairy Livestock and Poultry kind of lagged behind. So there was a kidnapping carried out and I was kidnapped and moved up to Dairy, Livestock and Poultry. Then we kidnapped Robert Curtis and he came up and the two of us more or less brought Dairy Livestock and Poultry into the 20th century. And the last one left was Horticulture and Tropical products. It was the last holdout to continue to type circular tables on typewriters. Finally Ed Missian was told to change and he hired Kathy Tang and Ralph Gifford and they came in and overhauled the way H and TP did it. So it was interesting to see that there were pockets of resistance within the agency and could you maybe talk about what was it like trying to get people to move away from the way they had been doing it since the 1920s and move to computers?

DAVIS: Once we got organized on that we had Dick Cannon and Jimmy Murphy and so forth and a whole separate division headed by Eldon Hildebrandt. I basically didn't have a lot to do with it at that point. We had a great staff of people working on that, so the only thing that I had to do with that was our becoming more and more management conscience. So I pushed awfully hard to get particularly the commodity division level people and so forth better educated in the job of running a more modern agency. Many of them, even the outstanding people who came from a background of you know "doing it the other way" and so forth. I think a lot of the change came hard for them because they had all been trained by Ray Ioanes who was a mastermind of running the system so it took some time to get people acclimated to the job of the manager and to go as everyone has done since to run organizations with the computerization particularly of data systems. So I don't really have any knowledge of how that worked out over time. What I got when we took a look at what was being done with the information we sent to the public, essentially to do something with it that helps make them make good business decisions, the information was not being used for that purpose.

Q: I can say absolutely it was because the feedback that came back of course was factored into our next estimates so if we were doing grain estimates every month the feedback that came back was the baseline for the next month's estimate. We had to work from the official numbers and this led to conflict often times between an attaché in the field who felt very strongly that his numbers were correct and then he would get the feedback from Washington saying no we like our numbers better and one of my, well, my last FAS post was New Delhi and we had a real fight with Washington over the cotton numbers and so even as late as 2014 we were still fighting with Washington over that feedback system because we didn't always like Washington's numbers.

DAVIS: With what you did produce, did you ever look down into the system, to the Cooperators and others you were dealing with to see how the information was actually being used?

Q: Yes, the Cooperators used our numbers, but more important the private trade did too, and so talking to Cargill, talking to Bunge, talking to Louis Dreyfus, and then to smaller operators they all follow our numbers.

DAVIS: I thought that was one of the outstanding things that was done in FAS at least in my time there. After that I think there were a lot of great management improvements made in managing the system. I say, I guess we must have done something right there because I was selected for Presidential Rank in the Senior Executive Service for our management achievements in the Department and in FAS

Q: You worked for Ray Ioanes for a while?

DAVIS: Yes, I worked for Ray. The greatest disadvantage for me in coming into FAS. I was basically hired by Ray Ioanes. Ray saw me with my background coming into FAS and replacing Ken McDaniel. I had more modern management ideas than you could accommodate in a reasonable period of time in FAS, and some of them in my work with the Department. When I became Chairman of the Management Council, I was able to work on some of those things including trying to educate people in the Department who were at the senior executive level or who wanted to move up to that level, that they needed to understand what their job was and what they were expected to do. And when we got to the SES board members like myself, we began to emphasize what the true job of the manager was and what the executive job was: the manager supervising supervisors and the executive supervising managers like in the FAS commodity divisions. The next level down from the head of the division. It was one of the great things I got in IRS, a heavily managerial oriented agency. If you wanted to move up in that agency, you're going to have to demonstrate that you had the potential to do the job you are going to move up to, that you could be evaluated for doing it in the job you are in. That's the way IRS worked. Everybody understood what the job of the manager and the executive was in that agency and so the whole organization was totally managerial oriented. In fact, the Deputy Commissioner of IRS when I was there came out of the same graduate program that I did at Minnesota so we had a common understanding. The agency was reorganized in 1959 by legislation. I got there just in time to get in on what was going on to modernize the system. One thing they did, only the Deputy Commissioner was Civil Service. After 1959 all of the top positions in IRS became Civil Service.

Q: So career civil service?

DAVIS: That's right and most of those jobs were SES jobs with the next job down being a grade 15. The only political person in the agency was the Commissioner. Again the Deputy Commissioner was Civil Service and then everybody in the field was Civil Service. My point here is that in FAS we tried to get people to become management oriented, to behave as managers. And for the Commodity Division Directors we would consider them to be executives at the executive level supervising and directing managers at the next level down. So Dick Smith and I got along very well on the subject of executive management. We had a lot of conversations about the need for having people who are managerial oriented particularly in the higher level positions. And then when our SES managers had to be evaluated by the Boards (that included FAS) then it got their attention since what came out of the Boards (the bonuses) were determined by the Boards. So in time the message got out that your job is not just crunching grains numbers. That was very important but you had a job being very good supervisors and managers and I feel that got us all out of a lot of EEO trouble. They became more aware of their managerial role affecting all of kinds of things because one of the criteria evaluated that went to the Board was a rating of EEO performance. It was reviewed when I was on the Forest Service Board. We specifically evaluated even the number two person at the Forest Service on his performance dealing with the equal opportunity program in the Forest Service; with him chairing the Board by the way we just gave him an average performance rating on that rating factor.

Q: You gave him a passing grade?

DAVIS: Yes. It was a touchy meeting. I hope that that aspect of the top level jobs reached even the top level people in the field.

Q: Well, in some cases I think it has sunk in but it remains a work in progress. We'll put it that way.

DAVIS: I'm sure you are correct. But in my family the role of the manager and the executive got a lot of discussion when my children moved into positions at those levels.

Q: Well we're coming up on an hour and a half. Is there anything you'd like to wrap up with here, Lou, in terms of reflecting back on FAS: reflecting back on the international side of your career?

DAVIS: Well, I do think I became very acquainted with top level executives who are political people. I worked directly for an Assistant Secretary who was my boss, I reported directly to him. Then I worked directly for Bob Strauss for two years. As the US Trade Representative he was a Cabinet Officer.

Q: That was when you were at USTR?

DAVIS: Yes.

Q: Well, do talk about it!

DAVIS: When I was at USTR Bob Strass was the STR and traditionally the STR had always been a political position so I understood that and typically with Bob Strauss. You knew that at 30 years old he was considered "Mr. Democrat." He ran the DNC (the Democratic National Committee) at age 30. So this was a highly politically charged STR; a highly political place to work. So working for two top level political appointees taught me a lot about the job of the political executive. I still feel as I look back on it that I may have worked with a couple of the people who were not good examples of people coming into the job of Administrator of FAS. I feel to this day that the job of FAS Administrator should be held by people who are on the career side of the managerial system. My reason for that is that as I look back on my understanding of the political operations of the Federal Government one of its great shortcomings is that people come into lower political level jobs but they don't stay often more than 18 months and then they're gone. I feel that an agency like FAS should have a career executive as its head. Of course I am very biased by working for Ray Ioanes. There are pluses and minuses there too, but for a top manager like Ray Ioanes running FAS was the way it should be done. And the whole shift to going down with political appointees to operating agencies where you're depending on the people coming in at the top to be the best of the executive talent they may or they may not be. They may or may not know anything about the business of FAS. In any case they will likely soon depart. I worked best with Tom Hughes. He always carried a bag when he left his office.

Q: What was that about, carrying a bag out of his office?

DAVIS: He was just a very private person. Everything was very secretive with him and I never broke that. The sad story is that he was a very difficult person to deal with. He had emotional problems. While he was Administrator it became clear as we look back on it that he had early-stage Alzheimer's disease and so I have to cross him off of what he could have done if he had been healthy. Then Tom Kay came. Tom Kay was also a highly political person. I felt he just role played rather than accomplishing much of anything.

Q: After Tom Hughes is when Dick Smith came and then Tom Kay came after Dick Smith.

DAVIS: That's correct. Both Ray and Dick would have been more capable dealing with major management problems, like our EEO problems. They both had an excellent understanding of FAS its programs and its people.

Q: Why is that?

DAVIS: Well, I think they had better contact with the people at the top of the Department, as I did to a certain extent. Dick Smith had an excellent relationship with Secretary Dick Lyng and I think Dick would have been better able to get Dick Lyng involved; getting us out of our EEO problems a lot more quickly than we did. So in any case I do not think that having Administrators stay in the job for as long a time as Ray did was necessary but that people who came in as career people understood the programs that we had and understood the job of the manager and executive we'd have been better off. And I think we would have brought on more people like we did even sooner. We did bring on Mattie Sharpless and then I recruited Frank Lee. I went to New Orleans to recruit him myself. We should have more like him. That became a kind of a difficult thing to do to. I spent a lot of time on the Frank Lee recruitment including bringing his family to Washington. Everything to get them introduced to not only the job that Frank was going to do, the opportunities and so forth, but that he knew what life was going to be like living in Washington. We lived in the same neighborhood as it turned out when they came to Washington so I was able to counsel him. His kids went to the same high school as mine. Again Dick Smith was an excellent Administrator. He was involved as a career person, but he was able to deal with every aspect of the nonpolitical side of FAS; the Cooperators and with the top political people in the department. I got involved in that again when I was running the programs with the FAS Retiree luncheon group. We tried to get a couple of the political people who became Administrators to come visit our luncheon. I must say that I thought two of them were quite capable people but they didn't stay long. We will ask the present political Administrator who came from DuPont. I understand, to attend our luncheon. Is he still there?

Q: Yes, Ken is still there.

DAVIS: He is still there and I don't know much about him but DuPont is a big organization. As I learned about his background it seemed to me that he didn't have too much that would have been directly applicable to the FAS Administrator's job except he was at a fairly high level at DuPont. Of course I'm career service oriented but I believe there are places where political people will be the best choice. When I was in the office of the Secretary at DOT I worked very closely with high-level political people coming into Government. Once I worked with a person who had been mayor of Seattle. He arrived to get the Amtrak system off the ground; working mostly with our top people who actually were career people occupying political jobs as deputy assistant secretaries. They all worked as a team to get the Amtrak system off the ground all the way from the legislation to all the details of launching a big organization.

Q: Any final thoughts then, Lou?

DAVIS: I think that for my business, I think that it's better for people in my area, that is Administrative Management, to have a variety of experiences with that field of expertise. I'm high on people coming out of Public Administration programs to come into the government and I'm high on people working, (which was my ambition and what I did) at different levels of management and the Government, starting in a big agency that was very managerial. I went to an executive office

organization, the Civil Service Commission, and then went to a departmental level organization. I got a total view of the management of a new department of government, the Transportation Department, just coming into being when I got there, and in the three years that I was there, so I got a real education in that major department coming off the ground. And then I came to FAS, an operating agency. In my FAS job I brought a lot of perspective on what my job was. Others there even Dick did not have my perspective. Dick and I spent a lot of time getting him and the Deputies I worked with oriented in the total function of administrative management. I think all of them look back to this experience as one of the great experiences that they had from the standpoint of development in FAS. So that would be a major feeling that I have in terms of my own development. The one thing that I missed: at IRS I was nominated for a congressional internship and I competed for it. I went before a board, the American Political Science Association was making the decisions, and I was selected to be a Congressional Fellow. But a major problem came along. The whole decision made in the Congress and then to be implemented by the IRS was to launch the centralized returns processing system. I got pulled off of spending my year in the Senate and in the House and I never was able to look back for that experience ever again. That would have given me a really well-rounded career if that had happened. So I had in my life tremendous opportunities including the relationship with the family and friends that I grew up with, all the way through my career given the opportunities that I had to serve, just a magical experience.

In the 30 years that I've been retired I can't remember all that happened when I was there, but I do have a great favorable impression of FAS as I look back on it. I do hate to see young people leave. Those are some of the people I would see coming along to be the managers and executives at the age they've left, age 50. So that's just the way it is. I would not have voted for the Foreign Service retirement system. It's a great opportunity for them but all these outstanding people could be there in managerial and executive jobs. A lot of good people gone.

Q: And they bolt.

DAVIS: Yes, they're all gone.

End of interview