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LEON STEPHEN "SKIP" WASKIN, JR.

Interviewed by: Carol Peasley
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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is October 4, 2023 and this is Carol Peasley and interview number one with Leon "Skip" Waskin. And I'll be calling you Skip unless you tell me you want to be called Leon.

WASKIN: No, Skip is fine, Carol, thank you. And it's a pleasure to see you again. Yes, my legal name is Leon Stephen Waskin, Jr. My father's name was Leon. Two Leons in the house was too much so my mother chose to call me Skippy, which over time became Skip. And everybody knows me as Skip.

Q: Do any family members still call you Skippy?

WASKIN: Not while I'm listening. (Both laugh) Maybe my older cousins.

Q: Okay. So, where were you born and tell us a bit about your family and your childhood.

Childhood, Family, Education, and Early Background

WASKIN: I was born in Lansing, Michigan, in 1958. My parents were both educators. My father was a senior administrator in the Department of Public Instruction for the state of Michigan. And my mother was a professor of education at Michigan State University. And so, that really leads into how I got involved in international affairs. I always had a great deal of interest in that subject. My father's parents had fled Czarist oppression in Poland and came to the United States around 1905, and he was born in Portland, Maine just before the first World War. After that war, Poland became independent again and his father, my grandfather, decided to take the whole family back to Poland and started a flour mill in a place called Denko, Poland. But once there, they got into a huge fight with the local mayor because he perceived them as being rich Americans exploiting the poor. This was complicated by the fact that the local mayor was my grandfather's father. And so, my great-grandfather the mayor organized a riot to burn out my grandfather, his son, the miller. One of my father's earliest memories was that of fleeing for his life from a burning mill. And they came back to the United States basically with nothing. So, my father arrived in the U.S. about 1922 or '23, nine or ten years old and not speaking a word of English. And by the time he was twenty-six he was a Ph.D graduate from the University of Michigan.

Q: Wow.

WASKIN: So, he had a certain drive to him, I should say. But he always sort of had that feeling that he was a bit of an immigrant. He and my grandfather spoke together in Polish. I remember that. And one of the things I regret – and I loved my father dearly, he passed away when I was only thirteen – but I regret that he never taught me and my brother Polish. I really regret that because I could have grown up bilingual. He told me another story about the implications of being Polish in early 20th Century America. When he and his brothers were born, their family name was "Waskiewicz". That is the name on his Ph.D. And yet, even as an honors Ph.D graduate from the University of Michigan, he couldn't get a job in the 1930s. So, he and his two younger brothers decided to change their name to "Waskin". And guess what? He got a teaching job almost immediately.

Q: Isn't the W in Polish pronounced as a V, so it should be Vaskin, right?

WASKIN: Yes. And in places like Mongolia and Russia they call me Vaskin. So, that's how I got the name and that's how I got an early sense that we were part of a larger international community. My grandfather and great-grandfather never reconciled, by the way, and that's terribly unfortunate, but that's a colorful aspect of the family history.

More directly in terms of my interest in international relations, my mother was on the faculty at Michigan State and there was a very dynamic guy there called Ralph Smuckler. Dr. Smuckler was the dean of international education. You may have heard of Ralph Smuckler, as after he retired from Michigan State he became a deputy assistant administrator in USAID's Bureau for Science and Technology. At Michigan State, Dr. Smuckler was very intent on building that university into an international institution. And in that effort he very much had the support of the university's president, John Hannah,

who, of course, later became the Administrator of USAID. Dr. Smuckler recruited young faculty members who were interested in helping him do that, and one of the individuals he recruited was my mother. So, in January 1968, my mother was assigned to do a TDY for Michigan State at the Colegio Americano in Guatemala City. And she took us all, my father and younger brother included, with her to Guatemala. I had my tenth birthday in Guatemala City. Now this trip only lasted two weeks, but it was a tremendous eye-opening experience for me. I saw things that a young boy growing up in a small city in the upper Midwest would not have been used to seeing. I remember that in the mornings, as we waited on a corner near our hotel downtown for a school bus to take us to the Colegio Americano, we were guarded by soldiers with machine guns. I remember very vividly eating in a restaurant and coming out after dinner to find children younger than me on the street begging for food. I just was, you know—

Q; Stunned.

WASKIN: Stunned. And incredibly moved by that. And so, I thought, I've got to do something about this. And something else happened while I was there. Even though we were only there for two weeks, my mother being my mother insisted that we attend classes every day at the Colegio Americano. She was not one to let her children miss school. And while I was there, I made friends with a kid at school, a guy named Eric Mein. Eric was my age, and he happened to be the son of the U.S. ambassador, John Gordon Mein. And so, Eric invited me to come over to their house and play soccer, which I did. Now we were staying at a hotel downtown, the Maya Excelsior, which is still there, actually. And I got picked up there in the Ambassador's big limousine, with the American flags flying on its front fenders. And as the car was waiting for me a crowd gathered to see what dignitary was going to come and get in this limousine. I'm sure they were disappointed when a ten-year-old boy hopped out of the hotel and jumped in the car. Anyway, I played soccer with Eric at the Ambassador's residence and was introduced to Ambassador Mein there. But you know the coda that's coming to this story, which is that in that same limousine eight months later Ambassador Mein was assassinated, becoming the first U.S. ambassador to be killed in the line of duty. And I remember, we were at our family's cottage in Grand Haven, Michigan, near the lake, my mother's childhood home, and we were watching the Democratic National Convention from Chicago, which of course, was a crazy event, and suddenly the coverage of the convention and all the rioting going on around it was interrupted by a news flash that Ambassador Mein had been killed. And I was, well, stunned again.

So of course, I wrote Eric and expressed my sympathy and got a nice note from him in return. But all of that is what piqued my interest in international relations in general and in particular international development. And a few years after that I remember being at a dinner party that my parents were hosting and one of their guests asked me "What are you going to do when you grow up?" And I remember telling them, "I'm going to go to Georgetown University and become a diplomat," which basically is exactly what happened, albeit with a lot of twists and turns in-between.

So, I think from that early age, based on that experience in Guatemala, I was always keen to do exactly what I told that guest at the dinner party that I was going to do. And by the way, I should note that one of the most satisfying experiences of my Foreign Service career was that, when I was serving in Honduras, I was able to take my mother and her husband, my stepfather, to Guatemala and go back and retrace, you know, some of the things we had done twenty-six years earlier.

Q: Oh, nice.

Did you ever have any further relationship with Ambassador Mein's son, with Eric? I'm just curious what Eric ended up doing.

WASKIN: I don't know. No, I didn't. We lost contact. Another son, as you may know, David, worked for USAID.

Q: Oh, I didn't know David Mein was his son.

WASKIN: Yes, he was Eric's brother, probably five or six years older. Sadly, I never got to know him.

Q: Just before we leave, you said that you had a cottage on the lake that was your mother's home, so she was a longtime Michiganite or Michiganer or?

WASKIN: Michigander; that's what we call ourselves, Michiganders.

Q: Michiganders, okay.

WASKIN: So, yes, she was. She was born in Grand Haven and got a degree in Education from Western Michigan University. And my father, after serving with the Army Air Corps in the Pacific in World War II, was a teacher in the Detroit area and they met at a conference in Northern Michigan in 1947 or so and got married in1948 and settled in Lansing.

Q: But looking at your background, you grew up in East Lansing.

WASKIN: Yes.

Q: But, you didn't go to Michigan State.

WASKIN: No, I didn't go to Michigan State. I mean, look. I love Michigan State, you know. As my son used to say, "I was born in El Salvador, and my dad is from Michigan State." And that's absolutely true. Cut me and I will bleed green and white. But having gone to high school in East Lansing, and having a parent on the faculty at MSU, I didn't think that going there would be the right thing to do. A little too close to home. So, I went to a little school called Kalamazoo College. I chose Kalamazoo College for a couple of reasons. For one, they gave me a partial scholarship. But the reason I was interested in

the first place was that they had a foreign study program. And it was not optional. You had to do it. You couldn't graduate from Kalamazoo College unless you went overseas or got all sorts of special permissions not to do it. So, almost everybody at "K" does it, usually in their junior year. I really wanted to study abroad, and I recognized that Kalamazoo College would offer me the opportunity to do so.

Now, my foreign study program was a little unusual, because by the time my junior year rolled around in 1977-78, I had fallen a little behind my class academically. The reason for this is that, in 1976, I had gotten deeply involved in political campaigns. When I was in high school I worked as an intern in the state senate and through various connections I came to know a guy named Brian Hampton, who was the campaign manager for our local Democratic congressional candidate, who won, in Lansing in 1974, Bob Carr. And Brian himself then wanted to run for Congress in 1976. He was originally from the Kalamazoo area, and he hired me to work on his campaign. Effectively, I dropped out of school for a while and worked full-time on Brian's campaign. Sadly for Brian, we were running in the Democratic primary against a very popular state legislator named Howard Wolpe, whom you remember. (Peasley laughs) And we were beaten decisively. And so, that was my introduction to electoral politics.

As a result of my involvement in that campaign I was behind my class at Kalamazoo College. And if I wanted to graduate on time with my class, which I was determined to do, I couldn't go on the normal six-month foreign study program in the fall and winter semesters. The only way for me to catch up would be to participate in a special three-month program in the spring that basically existed for athletes who could not be out of the U.S. in the fall and winter. Well, that was fine with me – three months is better than nothing. So I told the administrators of the foreign study program "Great. I'll go to France in the spring." And to my surprise, I was told that I could not go to France for the spring program, because I already spoke French too well to benefit from that program. So they gave me a choice for how to spend the spring of 1978: go to Germany or go to Spain. "Well, I don't speak German or Spanish," I told them. "You can learn," they replied. So, I thought well, okay, what's going to be more useful for me in an international career? German or Spanish?" It took me about 30 seconds to decide that Spanish would be the better choice. So, I learned Spanish in six months. And I went to Madrid and spent three months there as an exchange student. That was a wonderful experience.

Q: It's interesting that they didn't want to send you to a place where you spoke the language.

WASKIN: That was one of my first encounters with the unbending rules of a bureaucracy. If I wanted to graduate on time, I had to learn Spanish and do the three-month program in Madrid. So that's what I did.

Q: Yes, very good. So, were you studying primarily language when you were in Madrid or were you doing other subjects as well?

WASKIN: No, I was studying art. I studied art history, and it was fabulous. We got special tours of the Prado Museum, for example. It really piqued my interest in art history, which I've largely forgotten about now but at the time was very much into. One day, I was visiting the Prado on my own, and there was a torrential rainstorm. So I decided just to stay inside the museum. I did, but almost everybody else left. And I was sitting cross-legged in the center of the floor in the main hall of the Prado and I'm the only person there. I'm thinking, I guess this is somewhat unusual. (Peasley laughs) This is really somewhat unusual. I'm looking at paintings by Goya, and El Greco, and Velazquez, and I'm literally the only person there. And I'm thinking to myself, wow. I am very, very privileged to be here. But yeah, in Spain we studied mostly culture and history. Obviously, language was a part of it, but it wasn't exclusively language.

Q: Were you living in a dormitory or with a family? What was the situation?

WASKIN: I lived with a family in an apartment at 47 Calle Dulcinea. Dulcinea is a character from *Don Quixote*. And Calle Dulcinea happened to be about half a mile from the Santiago Bernabéu, the Real Madrid stadium. So, I became very quickly an aficionado of Real Madrid, an allegiance I retain to this day because as far as I'm concerned they're my neighborhood team. (Peasley laughs). And I was warned very quickly that when Barcelona comes to town, "Stay off the streets. Don't be there."

Q: (Laughs) Okay. Indeed. You said that at Kalamazoo there was a mandatory international aspect to the program, that everyone studied overseas for some period of time as part of the curriculum.

WASKIN: Yes.

Q: But what was your major?

WASKIN: Political science.

Another thing that was unique about Kalamazoo College was that they have this thing called the K Plan, where in addition to three or six months of foreign study everybody does different things at various times off-campus. And in the senior year of the K Plan, one thing you needed to do was to write what they call a Senior Independent Project, or SIP. And what I decided to do was to go to California. At the time, I was fascinated by the then-governor of California, Jerry Brown, and the kinds of things he was trying to do. He had been an insurgent candidate for president in '76, and was advocating what he called the "Small is Beautiful" approach to governing. (That was the title of a popular book of the day.) And so, I wanted to go out there and see what was happening for myself. And since I had worked in the state senate in Michigan, I asked the senator I used to work for, State Senator Jack Faxon, "Can you help me get out to California?" And Senator Faxon said, "Yeah, I've got plenty of friends out there." And through him I got a job working as a researcher in the state senate in California for a guy named Alan Sieroty, who was the senator from West L.A., Beverly Hills, Rodeo Drive, that whole area was his district. Alan was terrific, and under the guidance of his staff I wrote a study on the

economic impact of the arts in California. And I turned that in as my SIP. And that was a lot of fun to do and was a real learning experience. Before I left for Sacramento I got some really good advice from the head of the political science department at Kalamazoo College, Don Flesche. Dr. Flesche told me, "Don't hesitate to put pen to paper. Start writing. Don't wait until the last minute." And I did. I wrote a paper of over 100 pages for which I received an award at Kalamazoo, the Clarence Leslie Miller Prize. This was a real confidence builder for me, as it showed me that I actually could produce, on my own, a reasonably high quality quasi-academic product that was more than just a term paper.

Q: Does Kalamazoo College still have the requirement that everyone study overseas and do these independent studies?

WASKIN: Yes, they do. In fact, I just got their alumni magazine and coincidentally, the cover story this quarter is about three women from Kalamazoo College who all went on Foreign Study and all became Foreign Service officers. The Kalamazoo foreign study program helped pave the way for them to have careers with the State Department.

Q: Okay. Interesting. Did you take any classes in development economics or other development-related courses while you were there? I'm just curious.

WASKIN: Not really. My interests were political science and history. But I took basic economics from a really brilliant professor named Phil Thomas. Free Market Phil, we called him. He helped me understand the concepts of supply and demand and opportunity cost and things like that that came in very handy in my later career.

Q: So, when you were ten or twelve years old you decided you were going to go to Georgetown University. So, you were planning that while you were at Kalamazoo?

WASKIN: I was plotting it, yeah. Approaching graduation, I was coming to a sort of a crossroads at which either I would go to law school or I would pursue a master's degree in the field of international relations. I was accepted at a couple of law schools.

Q: And the law school interest, was that coming out of your experience working on political campaigns and working at the state legislature? Is that what attracted you to law school?

WASKIN: Exactly. First of all, my mother thought it was a great idea. And beyond that, a lot of people in politics are lawyers so having a law degree is sort of a ticket to other things in the future. But it really wasn't where my heart was. And I was also simultaneously applying to places like SAIS (School of Advanced International Studies) at Johns Hopkins and Princeton and Georgetown and I got accepted to all those places. And so, I said to myself, "Well, I think I'm just going to do Georgetown. I mean, Georgetown's got the brand, so to speak, and I'll go there." And that's what I did. I chose to go to Georgetown, which in the long term turned out to be a very good decision.

Q: Right. So, you go to the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown, and that's a two-year program?

WASKIN: Yeah, the MSFS program is a two-year master's degree program, yes.

Q: All right. So, you got there in 1979, which was late in the Carter Administration?

WASKIN: Exactly.

Q: The 1980 election brought the transition to Ronald Reagan. So, you were in Washington at Georgetown during an interesting political time as well.

WASKIN: Indeed, it was. I was in a ringside seat for a lot of that. I remember bumping into the Director of the MSFS program on a street corner on election day in 1980. His name is Alan Goodman, and Dr. Goodman said to me, "It's going to be interesting, isn't it? It's going to be close." It wasn't close at all. (Peasley laughs) It was a landslide for Reagan and we were all surprised. We all knew it was possible and practically a likelihood that President Carter would lose but I don't think anybody quite expected that he would lose so crushingly as he did. But yes, I was there for that and for the transition.

Q: So, within that program at Georgetown, is there a specialization or is it a generalized program?

WASKIN: There are both. It is a generalized program, but students can specialize in various things. At the time, one of the major specializations available was international business diplomacy, which I foolishly didn't pursue but would have been very useful for me. I was much more interested in pursuing the great power track, focusing on questions of Cold War diplomacy because of course, this was still the height of the Cold War and of the Soviet threat. So that's where I gravitated. One of the great things about Georgetown was that you had access to some very prestigious and capable people on the faculty there. And one of my professors was Dr. Chester Crocker. He was teaching an introductory course in great power politics and I was one of his students. And then, after that first semester went by he needed a teaching assistant for his undergraduate course in introduction to international relations, literally International Relations 101. And he asked me to do it. And so, I became his teaching assistant, which meant I was in some cases giving lectures at Georgetown and I thought, "Wow, this is pretty cool." (Peasley laughs)

Q: Did he move to the State Department while you were at Georgetown?

WASKIN: That happened during my second year at Georgetown. I worked for him in the winter and spring of 1980. I was hoping to do so again in the winter/spring of 1981, but after the election in November of 1980, Dr. Crocker was named assistant secretary of state for African affairs in early 1981. While I did not have the chance to be his TA again, I maintained contact with him for several years.

Q: That's interesting. I can see your early interest in Africa as well.

WASKIN: Yeah.

Q: Did you do any international development courses while you were there?

WASKIN: At Georgetown? No. But I want to tell you one other thing. You asked what piqued my interest and what drove me in the direction that I went. When I was at Kalamazoo College one of the best classes that I took was from a professor named Bill Pruitt. Dr. Pruitt taught a course in African history. And one of the interesting things Dr. Pruitt did on the first day of class was to announce that we were going to have a test on the second day. And this test, which would be worth ten percent of our overall grade for the class, would be to identify on the map of Africa all the countries and their capitals. Now we all thought this was ridiculous, but we had to do it. And so, I memorized the location of all the countries and the names of all their capitals, and to this day I know where every country in Africa is and what their capital is. Very helpful. (Peasley laughs) More importantly, Dr. Pruitt described himself to us as a white African. Of course, we wanted to understand what he meant by that. Well, he was born in the Congo as a child of missionaries so he considered himself to be an African even though he was not ethnically an African. And he got me very interested in a country called Zaire – the once and future Congo. So, when I was getting ready to leave Georgetown and the opportunity came to apply for a program to do a three-month internship in an American embassy in Africa, I applied for that opportunity. And in the required essay, I wrote about United States policy toward Zaire under the Mobutu regime. And perhaps not surprisingly, when they selected me for the internship they looked at the essay and said, "Ah ha. This guy's going to Kinshasa." (Peasley laughs) So, that's exactly what I did. You asked what was the interim between Georgetown and Kinshasa. There was no interim. I graduated from Georgetown on the twenty-fourth of May and on the twenty-fifth of May I got on a plane for Kinshasa.

Q: And so, you were at the embassy in one of the State Department internship programs?

WASKIN: Exactly. It was in the economic section of the embassy. And this proved, again, another great opportunity to learn from really some fabulous people, including Ambassador Robert Oakley, who was an extraordinary man. Very tough but he took an interest in me and gave me more assignments than you might think an intern would get. In particular, he had a message to deliver at one point to the minister of agriculture, a guy named Cléophas Kamitatu. Ambassador Oakley called me into his office and said, "I want you to go see Minister Kamitatu. Tell him this and tell him that." It was bad news for the Minster. I have no memory of what the news was but it was bad. Ambassador Oakley said, "Kamitatu is out at the international fair. Go and find him and don't stop until you do."

So, I went to the international fair, which as part of my regular duties in the economic/commercial section I had been helping to organize. When I got there, I found that Minister Kamitatu was making a speech and his handlers were waiting outside the hall for him. Now, this was a large event; there were perhaps 1,000 people in attendance.

And I asked his staff, "Please get word to the Minister that I am here with a message from Ambassador Oakley. I don't want to interrupt his speech, but please tell him that I would like to see him after he is finished." Well, of course, they interrupted his speech. And he came out, and I delivered the message, and he ripped me up one side and down the other. He must have screamed at me for at least five minutes straight. I thought he was going to have a stroke; his eyes were bulging out of his head. "Do you know who I am? Do you know you interrupted and embarrassed me while I was giving a speech in front of thousands of people?" And I was, to coin a phrase, diplomatic. I said, "Yes, sir, of course. Terribly sorry to have interrupted you. Ambassador Oakley thought this was important and I will be sure to tell him you got the message." So, I got back in the embassy car and thought to myself, oh, my God, I've got to go tell the ambassador about this right away. There's going to be a war. I've single handedly destroyed the relationship between the United States and Zaire." And I raced back to the embassy, ran up into the ambassador's office and told him what had happened. And he said, "Was Kamitatu really angry?" And I said, "Yes, sir. He was really angry." And he smiled slightly and said, "Good." And he went back to writing whatever he was writing.

Q: Do you remember what the message was? Is this something you can share?

WASKIN: I really don't remember. Whatever it was, it was not a message the minister was happy to hear. But it was certainly something Ambassador Oakley wanted to convey and I was his chosen conveyor. I learned a lot from that experience.

Q: That's very interesting, to send the intern to give the message. (Laughs)

WASKIN: Yeah. I wish I could remember what the message was, but I don't.

Q: Since you were in the econ section, I suspect you had some contact with the USAID mission as well during that time?

WASKIN: I did. I met people from USAID. Shortly after I arrived, the head of the Econ Section, Joe Williams, took me to Country Team and introduced me. This was not unusual; it was a relatively small Embassy, and basically everyone knew everyone else, so it was not abnormal to introduce even a very junior new American employee to the Country Team. And there were some people from USAID at Country Team. The mission director was Norm Sweet, and he had brought along his general development officer, Derek Singer. So I met the two of them. A few weeks later I spoke with Mr. Singer; I believe I ran into him at a social event. And I must have mentioned to him that my three-month internship was going to be up soon, and that I was really enjoying myself and learning a lot and so wanted to find a way to stay in country. And Mr. Singer told me, "Your predecessor in this internship last year joined USAID after his internship ended and stayed on for several months. Maybe you'd want to consider doing something similar." And he suggested that I go talk to this guy at USAID named Lee Braddock.

So, I did. I called Mr. Braddock and he said, "Come over here on Saturday morning. Saturday's just a normal working day here at USAID." So, I went to the USAID offices,

which were not in the embassy but in a nearby twenty-five-story structure called the SOZACOM building, or as many people referred to it, the Copper Palace. I met Mr. Braddock there at 8:30 on a Saturday morning and we talked until 12:00. And during the course of that interview Mr. Braddock drank twenty cups of coffee—I counted—and smoked thirty-six cigarettes. They were small cups but still they were cups. He was, I learned, a very intense man. I tried to keep up. I think I smoked about nine cigarettes and drank maybe eight cups of coffee, and I don't think I slept for the next three days. (Peasley laughs) But at the end of this three-and-a-half-hour interview, Mr. Braddock said, "Well, you're obviously not qualified for this position but what the heck, I'm desperate. You can start next week." So, on that note I began my USAID career.

USAID/Zaire, Contractor in Design and Evaluation Office, 1981 - 1983

So, I showed up the next Monday—

Q: This was to be based in Lee's office in Kinshasa?

WASKIN: Yes, it was. He was the head of what they called DEO, the Design and Evaluation Office, which was effectively the Project Development Office. At that time, the Project Development Officer, or Backstop 94 role in USAID was still separate from the Program Officer, or Backstop 02 role. So USAID/Zaire had a de facto Project Development Office separate from its Program Office. And there was great rivalry between those two offices, as you might imagine. But USAID/Zaire was a great place. It was an amazing mission; there were all sorts of incredibly talented people there, and all sorts of incredible characters there. I could spend hours just talking about them, but for purposes of this interview I'll stick to my own narrative.

I started on a Monday. I arrived at Mr. Braddock's office and stood in his doorway, and he didn't pay any attention to me; he kept working on whatever he was working on. And I (clears throat), you know, went like that and he looked up and then went back to his work and then (clears throat again) and I said, "Excuse me, sir." And he looked up and said, "Yes?" And I said, "I'm here to work." He said, "I can see that." I said, "Well, where do you want me to sit?" And at that he threw down his papers and pounded his desk and he said, "Sit? I'm not paying you to sit! I need you to go out and—." The point was he wanted me to go out and organize a trip to leave the next day, a road trip to go and write something called a Project Paper for a $4.5 million project we were designing called Agricultural Marketing Development II, or, as everyone referred to it, "028". (Within USAID, all our projects in Zaire were universally known by their numbers rather than their names. For example, Project North Shaba was "059"; Central Shaba Agricultural Development was "102". The project I was designing was "028"). 028 was to work with Zaire's Office des Routes to rehabilitate the 131-kilometer stretch of National Highway Number 1 – really just a dirt road – that ran east from a town called Kikwit, the capital of the Kwilu sub-region of the Bandundu Province, to a crossroads town called Idiofa. And so, I said, "Okay." And before you knew it, I found myself on the way to Kikwit the next day.

Now, I knew nothing about roadbuilding. I'm not an engineer. But Lee had told me that he needed a pusher, he needed someone to make things happen. That was my job, go out there and make things happen. And so, that's exactly what I did. And I found myself in charge of planning this $4.5 million road project. Now this was a great thing for me because, my gosh, it was a lot of responsibility, and I was twenty-three years old at the time and I'd been given management responsibility for what by my standards was a huge effort. I got thrown into it, so to speak, sink or swim. And happily, with a few missteps, I largely managed to swim.

When I got to Kikwit, I of course talked to the local authorities, and in particular to the people running the local branch of the Office des Routes. And remember, everything in Zaire at that time was basically run by expatriates. There was a façade of Zairians who were nominally in government positions but really the decisions were made by international expert "advisors" who were there financed through various donor programs. Most of these people were Belgians; most of those who were not Belgian were French.

Q: But they were in government positions—

WASKIN: They were supposedly "advisors" to those in government positions. But in reality they made the decisions.

When I began meeting with some of these guys out there, I explained to them that I was there to write a Project Paper for a new USAID project to work with them to rehabilitate the main road from Kikwit to Idiofa. I thought they would be delighted. They were not. Instead, they said, "You Americans are all fouled up. You're screwing everything up." When I asked why, they replied, "You're building the wrong road."

Here was the problem. Two years earlier, in 1979, USAID had sent another team to Kikwit, and they had designed and authorized another infrastructure project, Agriculture Marketing Development I, or "026". 026 was to work with the Office des Routes to rehabilitate about 500 kilometers of secondary and tertiary rural roads and rehabilitate three port facilities along the Kwilu River, a major tributary of what we now call the Congo River. But in the intervening two years, nothing had happened: no equipment or technical assistance had arrived, and no roads or ports had been rehabilitated. Worse, from the perspective of the guys I was talking to in 1981, we were barking up the wrong tree with 026. They told me "We don't want you to build the feeder roads, we want you to build the main road first." 028, of course, was eventually supposed to build the main road, but it was only in the design stage at that point and we all knew work on it would not begin for some time. So the Office des Routes guys in Kikwit wanted USAID to shift the objective of 026, which at least was already approved and had equipment and technical assistance in the pipeline, from the secondary feeder roads to the main road.

With all these arguments in mind I spent two weeks out there. I drove the road from Kikwit to Idiofa in the company of a rather colorful and profane American engineer from Boston named Lloyd Crowther, who had joined me in Kikwit a few days after my arrival, and then continued a further 200 kilometers or so to the railhead at Ilebo. And these

travels convinced me that the Belgian and French engineers I had spoken to were correct: we had to start repairing the main road first before we started worrying about the feeder roads. In other words, we had to switch the sequence of 026 and 028. And remember at this time, I couldn't phone in or email. There was no such thing as email, there were no landlines in places like Kikwit, and since these were the days before cell phones, I had no way of communicating what I had learned to USAID/Kinshasa. I couldn't even tell them where I was or when I might be back. This was typical of trips to the interior in those days: when you were gone, you were gone. Maybe you'd come back, maybe you wouldn't. You showed up when you showed up, if you showed up at all. It was impossible to predict how long any trip might last.

Anyway, I got back to USAID and went to Lee's office and said, "We're building the wrong roads. Everybody out there says stop fooling around with these feeder roads, start with the main road instead. Move everything, all the equipment we're procuring for the feeder roads under 026 and put it to work on the main road." Which we decided to do. So, I learned how not only to write a Project Paper but also a Project Paper Amendment. And we made the shift and changed the focus of 026 to the main road.

What I didn't understand at the time was the nature and length of the USAID procurement process. I soon found out. I took my trip in the fall of 1981 and some of the equipment had been ordered and some of it hadn't. But no equipment actually got on-site to Kikwit until early 1983. Now I understand that's probably the timeline you have to plan for. But at the time I couldn't understand why it was taking us so long to obtain our equipment and mobilize our technical assistance team.

Again, all lessons that proved very useful to me later in my career.

Q: And the mission supported you when you came back and said the smart thing to do is to do the main road first?

WASKIN: They supported me; most importantly, Lee supported me. I reported that people on the ground were unanimous in their view that we should build the main road first before starting work on the feeder roads. And to me that made a certain amount of prima facie sense. So, we did that. And that main road, by the way, was in terrible shape, particularly in the rainy season. I returned there in January 1983 and drove that road from Kikwit to Idiofa again. This was the height of the rainy season, and it took us thirteen hours to go 130 kilometers. That was just crazy. (Laughs) We got stuck at one point only ten kilometers outside Kikwit, the provincial capital. We got completely stuck in the mud and a Jeep comes by and it's the Chinese from a nearby Chinese agricultural project. They didn't speak any English. They only spoke a very small amount of French. But they pulled us out. (Peasley laughs)

Q: Good. Sino-American friendship.

WASKIN: Sino-American friendship, absolutely. That's where it's at, right.

Q: No, that's good. And you, in this position you were hired as a U.S. personal services contractor?

WASKIN: Not exactly. There were a number of things that USAID/Zaire was doing that seem funny now. I mean, none of these things could happen today. But if you know Lee you'll understand that he was not one to be deterred by bureaucratic obstacles. The Mission was having trouble staffing its U.S. Direct Hire positions, and for reasons beyond my pay grade did not wish to hire a lot of Personal Services Contractors. But they were very willing and eager to tap into a pool of talented young Americans about my age who were already in Zaire and who, like me, wanted to stay. These were the Peace Corps volunteers. And Lee in particular had an eye for talent and liked to hire people. So the Mission developed a mechanism whereby the American Employees Recreation and Welfare Association (AERWA) would hire these people and second them, myself included, to USAID. That's how I started: I was an AERWA contractor, not a Personal Services Contractor. I was actually working for AERWA.

Q: Okay. So, it wasn't a USPSC (U.S. Personal Services Contractor). I'd forgotten that they had that interesting mechanism.

WASKIN: Yeah, a very interesting mechanism. But I later did become a USPSC because we got a new Executive Officer who apparently was suspicious of this AERWA mechanism and decided to convert all of us employed via that mechanism to Personal Services Contracts. So, I became a USPSC in early 1983.

Q: At that time in—this was 1983, at that time do you recall how big the mission was? You said that the mission director was—

WASKIN: Yeah, first Norm Sweet, then he left in the summer of 1982 and Dick Podol replaced him.

Q: Were there very many people in that office that Lee was heading up that you were part of?

WASKIN: He was the only direct hire until David Leong got there as an IDI (International Development Intern) in 1982. But Lee grew a large staff around him. When I came on board he had already hired Anne Williams, the daughter of a Methodist missionary who had spent much of her childhood in Zaire and spoke perfect French and passable Lingala. Today Anne Williams is the USAID Mission Director in Madagascar. So, it was Anne Williams, myself, and soon we added a Zairian engineer, Mulamba wa Kabasele, an American woman named Jenny Cox, and an American couple named Tim and Julie Born – Tim later became Mission Director in Burundi. And the office grew from there. It became the biggest office in the mission, not just a Project Development Office but an office with significant implementation responsibilities – including responsibility for implementing 026 and 028. This lasted throughout Mr. Podol's tenure until Dennis Chandler arrived as Mission Director in 1986. But the mission as a whole

had I would say probably twenty, twenty-five direct hires, maybe more, maybe close to thirty. That sounds like a lot now, but at the time we were perceived to be understaffed.

Q: Right. But then, it was a very entrepreneurial mission.

WASKIN: Definitely. It had to be. And it took on the characteristics of the country in which it was located, as missions often do. It took on the characteristics of what is now the DRC. Meaning not that it was corrupt, but rather that it was highly entrepreneurial. There is a saying in the DRC, "*Il y a toujours une solution*" – "There is always a solution." USAID/Zaire, under the leadership of people like Dick Podol and Lee Braddock, was very good at finding solutions.

Q: Was most of the program at that point in time ESF, Economic Support Fund money?

WASKIN: That's a good question and I don't know the answer to that. The program was highly focused on agricultural development. When I looked at the list of all our projects, I noticed that almost every project had agriculture in its name. 026 and 028 were both "Agriculture Marketing Development" projects. Everything revolved around the ag sector. That was the lodestar of what we were trying to do at the time.

Q: Okay. So, even the infrastructure activities were done in the context of increasing agricultural production.

WASKIN: Precisely. The whole point was agricultural marketing. That was the idea.

Q: Okay. And Mobutu was still in power at this time?

WASKIN: Yes, he was very much in power with no indication that he would ever leave. Mobutu turned fifty-one years old a month after I arrived and had been in power for 16 years. He would remain in power for another 16. But in 1983, there was no indication of any cracks in his authority. I remember late in 1983 the International Monetary Fund had come to town, and as a result of Zaire's agreement with them there were major hikes in fuel prices, which had been heavily subsidized. And so, there was rioting. It was happening right outside our building. We watched it from our windows. But the riots were put down quickly, and there was no real sense that this would ever lead to a regime change at any time in the near future. So yes, Mobutu was very much in charge.

Q: When people want to criticize AID and they talk about money going down ratholes, especially in the context of the Cold War, they often name Zaire as the prototypical example of that kind of issue. I'm wondering if you think that was fair or do you think that even though it was a foreign policy priority and you probably had more money than you should have had, given some of the governance and human rights issues, how do you assess what was actually done on the ground? Do you think some good work was done? Or if you agree with those who thought it really was kind of a rathole, feel free to say that.

WASKIN: Your question raises two broad issues. First, successive U.S. Administrations, both Democratic and Republican, were fighting the Cold War. And, rightly or wrongly, they had decided – at the highest levels of our government – that Zaire was a bastion in that struggle and that accordingly we were going to provide it with significant economic assistance, regardless of questions about human rights or governance or corruption. Given that decision, what then is the role of USAID? Well, in my opinion, our role was to do everything we could to ensure that that money was spent as effectively as possible and for the purposes for which it was intended. And that's what we tried to do; that's what I tried to do. Our job was certainly not to go back to Washington and say "We don't think these funds should be made available to Zaire", because you know what? The Administration had requested funds for Zaire and the Congress had appropriated those funds. Our job was to make sure they were spent well.

The second issue your question raises is that of sustainability. In every project design I ever participated in during my almost four decades with USAID, at some point in the process, usually very early on, we always asked ourselves "Is what we are planning to do sustainable?" Meaning is there a reasonable chance that the governments or organizations we are working with will be able to continue those activities beyond the end of USAID assistance? The problem with asking that question in the context of Zaire is that Zaire itself was not sustainable as a country. Wasn't then, probably isn't now. So, almost by definition, it was going to be extraordinarily difficult to sustain anything we were doing beyond the end of donor assistance.

Nonetheless, we tried. And we were very much aware of the issue. Let me give you one example. USAID/Zaire's flagship project in the early 1980s was Project North Shaba – PNS, or 059. PNS was a ten-year, $40 million project aimed at increasing maize production in that area. This was important because north Shaba was the breadbasket, if you will, for the entire Shaba Province, which in turn was, through its mining industry, the economic engine for the entire country. PNS sought to expand maize production by introducing new varieties of maize and new techniques for how to grow it, and to facilitate the marketing of that maize by improving the network of farm-to-market roads in that part of the province. Now, in the spring of 1982, the Mission commissioned an independent, third-party evaluation of PNS, and that evaluation recommended strongly that the entire project be cancelled. Why? Because it wasn't sustainable. Obviously, this was quite a blow for the Mission and for its new Director, Dick Podol. So, what did Mr. Podol do? Well, instead of cancelling the project, he sent a three-person team – myself, David Soroko, and Woody Navin – out to the PNS base in the town of Kongolo to redesign the project in a way that would make it more sustainable. We spent three weeks there, and we came up with a plan to turn the road improvement component of PNS over to a construction firm called Swanepoel, which was based in the provincial capital, Lubumbashi, and had extensive experience in the province. We developed a similar plan for privatizing the extension components.

So yes, the Mission did take the issue of sustainability very seriously and did what it could to promote it. But yes, there's no question that some of the money was wasted. For example, on a micro level, when I was working down in Lubumbashi later during my

time in Zaire, there was a report in an American newspaper about the road building project I was managing, Shaba Refugee Roads (or "115", in our vernacular). The reporter had gone to the project site near the Angolan border and determined that 5 to 10 percent of the fuel for the road building equipment, which of course USAID was paying for, was being stolen. And they published this. I don't know if it was *New York Times* or the *Post*, but it was a significant publication with a national audience in the U.S. And I remember reading that and thinking, "Only 5 or 10 percent? That's pretty good!" (Both laugh) So, yes, there was this type of "*petit corruption*". On a broader level, though, the question is whether we could reasonably expect that the government of Zaire would maintain those roads after we rehabilitated them? Clearly not, as it turned out. But again, this gets back to the fact that the country itself was not sustainable. Some twenty years later, when I was working as an Office Director in the PPC Bureau in Washington, a colleague of mine went to Kikwit on TDY. And when she came back, knowing that I had served in Zaire, she wanted to tell me about it. And I asked her, "So, how's the road from Kikwit to Idiofa?" And she said, "There is no road from Kikwit to Idiofa." It was just like Barbara Kingsolver's novel about Zaire, *The Poisonwood Bible*, where she writes about the fact the roads and many other things she remembered as a missionary child are simply gone. In that novel, when she returns as an adult to the village where her family lived, the village is gone, the road is gone, it's all gone. That novel is fiction, but it tracks very closely with reality. We built some beautiful roads, but none of that made any difference to the overall trajectory of the country. In fact, the Kikwit to Idiofa road that we rehabilitated was later identified as being part of the so-called AIDS highway, the existence of which contributed to fanning the flames of the HIV-AIDS pandemic because it made transportation from the city to the countryside and vice versa easier.

That said, there were things that we did, I think, that have proven helpful in the long-term. Of course, you can't look at the DRC now and say that it's any kind of a success. All of the structural problems that plagued that country long before I got there continue to plague it today. But through PEPFAR (United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief) we saved hundreds of thousands of lives. That's not nothing. And we trained a lot of people who are still in that country and who retain the skills we helped give them. So, it's not completely hopeless. But yes, on the whole, from the perspective of three decades later, it's clear that many aspects of the U.S. development cooperation program in Zaire in the 1980s were not huge long-term successes.

Q: Speaking of this period, 1983, this was the very beginning of recognizing HIV. Were there discussions on HIV in Zaire during the period when you were there in the middle eighties?

WASKIN: Absolutely.

Q: And I think CDC (Centers for Disease Control) had a long presence in the country working with them. If you could talk a little bit about what you might remember from that period.

WASKIN: They did. I remember clearly the first time I heard the term "AIDS" was when someone clipped out and posted on the bulletin board in Kinshasa an article about AIDS in *Time* magazine. That was in 1982, and it was the first time I ever heard of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. And very quickly we learned that this was a major public health issue, and a potential health hazard for those of us living in that part of the world. So, yes, I was aware that AIDS was around, and I knew of the existence of the CDC program. But I didn't have much, really, to do with those folks.

Q: Yes. So, you arrived in Kinshasa at the embassy in 1981, right after graduating from Georgetown.

WASKIN: Right.

Q: Did the four-month internship with the State Department then went over to AID initially in a creative contractual mechanism that ultimately morphed—

WASKIN: Right. What was to have been a four-month stint morphed into a personal services contract that lasted until December of 1983. By then it was weighing on me that I had basically left various parts of my life – my car, my pets, my clothes, my LP records – with friends and family scattered from Washington DC to Kalamazoo, Michigan. I had intended to return to the U.S. in four months and I hadn't done so. In an era before the internet or mobile phones or satellite communications, from the time I arrived in Zaire until Christmas 1981 I didn't talk to my mother for seven months. In those days, when you were gone, you were gone. The only way you could make an international call was to go down to the central post office, stand in line and wait. Which I did, because I wanted to tell my mother I was fine and wish her a Merry Christmas. When I finally got to the counter, I said, "I want to make a call to the United States," and the people behind the counter replied "*Ah, monsieur. les États-Unis sont en panne*." "The United States is broken." I said, "Oh, really? Well, here's ten bucks. Maybe you could fix it." "Oh, oui, no problem." (Peasley laughs) "Just go over to booth number three." So, I had a five-minute call with my mother. It cost me about a hundred dollars just to shout to her on a crackly line, "Mom, I'm staying. I'm working here. I'm fine. Don't worry." (Peasley laughs)

Return to Michigan – Law School and Working in the State Senate, 1984

So, as the end of 1983 approached, I decided it was time for me to leave Zaire and say goodbye to USAID. I had only intended to be in Zaire for a few months; by the fall of 1983 I'd been there for over two years. And I had never intended to make USAID a career. Instead, I decided to do what my mother wanted me to do: I went back to my hometown of Lansing, Michigan, enrolled in law school, and got a job in the state legislature, working for the same State Senator I'd done an internship for when I was in high school. I left Zaire and I left USAID with no intention of returning.

Q: At Michigan—were you going to law school at Michigan State?

WASKIN: It was the Thomas M. Cooley Law School, which has since been acquired by Michigan State. At the time it was independent and was located in the old Masonic lodge building kitty-corner across the street from the state capitol. So, this was very convenient for me: I took classes at the law school in the morning then walked across the street and worked in the State Senate in the afternoon.

Returning to Lansing, however, proved strange. At age 26, after having spent two years living on my own and managing major infrastructure work on what was effectively a strange alien planet, suddenly I found myself back in Lansing, shopping at the same Kroger store that my mother used to take me to when I was three. And when, as happened from time to time, I ran into old friends from high school and they asked me "What have you been doing?", I would start to tell them, with great excitement, all the stories I've been telling you and and pffft –they had no interest at all. It was beyond their experience and thus beyond their comprehension. My two oldest and best friends did understand – one of them, in fact, had been a Peace Corps volunteer in Sierra Leone – but apart from them Lansing proved to be a very lonely place for me.

So I began to ask myself, "What the heck am I doing back in Lansing, Michigan?" And as for my legal studies, I was getting passing grades, but I didn't find it very interesting. I asked myself, "Do I want to do this for the next three years? More to the point, do I want to spend the rest of my life as a lawyer?" And I realized I didn't. So I modeled my behavior after the movie *The Paper Chase*. I resolved that if I made the dean's list after the first semester, I would quit because then nobody could say that I dropped out of law school because I couldn't hack it. (Peasley laughs) I made the dean's list. And I quit.

Having left law school, I began working full time in the State Senate. But something else was going on that I had not expected: I began to realize that I missed Zaire, and I missed USAID. So shortly after withdrawing from Cooley, I contacted Lee Braddock and asked whether I could have my old job back. His response was succinct: "When can you get here?" Well, I was tempted to leave the next day, but I had made a commitment to Senator Faxon to continue working for him for at least a year. He had really moved some things around to get that job for me and I didn't want to leave him in the lurch. So, I continued in the State Senate through the end of December 1984, but by the first week of January 1985 I had returned to Kinshasa to take up my old duties.

USAID/Zaire, Contractor, DEO Office and Head of Shaba Development Office, 1985 - 1987

When I got back, I was pleased to see that a lot of progress had been made on the 026 and 028 roads. The TA team and the equipment were on site, and rehabilitation work was underway. But there was, of course, still a lot of work to be done, and I was happy as could be to be back in Zaire, back with USAID, and back running the same projects. My life was actually very simple; my job was to build the road. There are infinite details associated with the task but the actual work, the objective from a developmental point of view was not complex.

Q: You returned, you were in Kinshasa?

WASKIN: I was in Kinshasa for about seven months.

Q: Okay.

WASKIN: What happened was the following. By the spring of 1985, USAID/Zaire had decided to establish a provincial office in Lubumbashi, the capital of the Shaba Province. Shaba was Zaire's largest province and the center of its copper industry, the country's principal source of foreign exchange. Why did we need an office in Lubumbashi? Well, at this time the Angolan civil war was raging, and as a result the western part of Shaba province, which borders Angola, was experiencing an influx of some 30,000 Angolan refugees. And in 1984, our Mission Director, Dick Podol, who as you may recall was a master at finding money, found some money that was earmarked to support projects related to refugees. So while I was away, the Mission had designed and initiated three refugee-related projects along the Angolan border: Shaba Refugee Health, implemented by the United Methodist Church (and run by Anne Williams' father); Shaba Refugee Roads, another road rehabilitation project with the Office des Routes; and Shaba Refugee Water, implemented by a Belgian NGO (Non-Governmental Organization). Having launched these projects, USAID decided it needed to open an office in Lubumbashi that would oversee these particular projects as well as serve as our liaison with the U.S. Consulate General there and be our eyes and ears in the capital of the province that was the economic engine of the country. The guy who was supposed to go and get that job was a good friend of mine, a wonderful man, who also later became a Mission Director. Unfortunately, he and the consul general, Dennis Sandberg, did not get along. And Consul General Sandberg let it be known that he didn't want this man to take that job, and so the Mission had to find a replacement and I was asked if I would do it. Now, this was a dilemma for me because I was being asked to replace my good friend. On the other hand, this was a tremendous opportunity for professional advancement because, at age 27, I would be heading an office with thirty-five people working for me and responsibility for USAID activities in an area the size of France. Moreover, I would be a long way from Kinshasa in every sense of the word and thus would have a great deal of autonomy. Again, remember, this was a day when there were no phones, no internet, and no road connection with Kinshasa. The only way to get from Kinshasa to Lubumbashi at that time was to take a two-and-a-half-hour flight on Air Zaire. So I would effectively be on my own out there. So I agreed to do it. And I did talk to my friend and his wife about it and I felt very badly for them because I think they were treated extremely unfairly. But that's the way the Consul General wanted it, and USAID had to follow suit.

There was one more step I had to take. We had a new Ambassador, and I had to go see him because he had become aware of these tensions between USAID and the Consulate in Lubumbashi. So, I had to pass muster with him. When we met, he had only one question for me. "Where did you go to school?" I had two possible answers. One was Kalamazoo College and the other was Georgetown. I said, "I went to Georgetown, sir." Perfect. I got the job. (Laughs) That was literally all he wanted to know. (Peasley laughs)

So, in August 1985, I left Kinshasa, moved to Lubumbashi, and became the head of what was called the SHADO, the Shaba Area Development Office. And that was the greatest training I ever could have had because, again, I was on my own, basically functioning as a quasi-Mission Director. I even had a Consulate headed by a quasi-Ambassador (the Consul General) about a mile or so down the road. And I had a great deal of responsibility for the three refugee-related projects – 114, 115, and 116 in our vernacular – which were not intended to provide assistance to refugees directly (that was a job for UNHCR), but rather to improve infrastructure in the areas affected by the influx of refugees. This kind of work tracked well with my managerial strengths and my experience. Again, it was a great training opportunity for me. Suddenly I was in an executive leadership position at the top of a not inconsiderable organization without anybody looking over my shoulder very closely.

Q: Who did you report to? Did you report to Lee still?

WASKIN: I still reported to Lee which apparently was a source of some friction within the Mission in Kinshasa. I reported to Lee because those three refugee-related projects were within his bailiwick. And of course, I flew up to Kinshasa at least once a month. I wanted to make sure that I did not become perceived as something other than part of the USAID Zaire team. I also made a point of maintaining really good relations with the Consulate and established a great friendship with the Econ Officer there, Dan Geisler, who later became the President of AFSA (American Foreign Service Association). And fortunately I managed to smooth things over with Consul General Sandberg, who was eager to help us push these programs forward.

Q: Right. And the man you replaced I think he then basically took your job in Kinshasa and stayed in Kinshasa, is that correct?

WASKIN: Exactly. We effectively switched jobs, that's right.

Q: How often did Dick Podol or how often did people come out to see you? You said you would go into Kinshasa about once a month and I'm curious how often people would come out to see you.

WASKIN: I would say people came out on a relatively infrequent basis. In the two years that I headed that office Lee was probably out there three or four times. Art Lezin, who was the Deputy Mission Director, came out at least once. And Mr. Podol came out once. Put it this way – I was in Kinshasa much more often than anyone from Kinshasa was in Lubumbashi.

In addition to managing the three refugee-related projects, our office's other major responsibility was to support and participate in the design of what was to be the new Central Shaba Agricultural Development Project – 105. Let me set the stage for you. As I've mentioned, the largest project USAID had in Zaire was Project North Shaba, which was located in the very northern part of Shaba hundreds of miles from Lubumbashi. The

implementing partner was DAI, Development Alternatives, Inc. Now Project North Shaba, or 059 –

Q: It's amazing that you still remember all those numbers.

WASKIN: (Laughs) Yes, I remember them all. Or almost all. Project North Shaba, or 059 or PNS, was managed by and reported to USAID/Zaire's Agricultural Office in Kinshasa. And the folks in that office were very clear that Skip Waskin and his little operation down in Lubumbashi were not to be responsible for Project North Shaba, even though it was taking place in the province where I was USAID's representative. Fair enough; I had no problem with that. I had enough work to do with my own portfolio that I had no inclination or desire to get involved in the behemoth that was PNS.

That said, I had to collaborate with PNS to a certain extent, because by mid-1985 the Mission was launching the design of the Central Shaba Project, which was to be the successor to PNS. And Lee Braddock's Design and Evaluation Office, of which I was still a part, was to play a central role in that design – and therefore so was I. Our design challenge was to craft a project that would pick up on the successes of Project North Shaba and try to expand these to a much broader area of the province. One problem, however, was that while USAID was very familiar with the PNS project area around the town of Kongolo in the very northern part of the province, and very familiar with the area around Lubumbashi where I was operating in the very southern part of the province, we knew very little about this vast area – roughly the size of the state of Ohio - of central Shaba in the middle. So, to help us correct that, I spent a great deal of time driving over lousy roads to reconnoiter the entire planned project area. And these were significant trips; I would be gone for at least a week at a time on each of them. My colleagues and I would meet with local officials, traditional tribal leaders, farmers, merchants, traders – I talked to a wide variety of people about what their needs were and how USAID might best address those, particularly in terms of how they grew and marketed maize. So again, what a great education for me. I was learning about real life development problems in the field and being asked to help develop solutions to them.

The design and approval of the Central Shaba Project took over a year from start to finish. To begin the process, in the fall of 1985 we submitted and won USAID/Washington approval of what USAID used to call a "Project Identification Document" or PID. You remember the Project Identification Documents, right?

Q: Mm-hm.

WASKIN: Well, the process we followed for this particular PID was very unusual, because the Ambassador was deeply interested in the USAID program, and so he himself chose to lead the internal review of the PID document before we submitted it to Washington. This was unprecedented in my experience; I'd never seen it before, and I've never seen it since. The Ambassador convened a meeting in the Embassy, with Mr. Podol, and Mr. Lezin, and Lee, and myself, and the Consul General – basically all the key players within the USG from both Embassy Kinshasa and ConGen Lubumbashi. It was

extraordinary. Happily, the Ambassador approved the PID, and we went forward and submitted it to Washington, where it was also approved.

But the PID, as you will also recall, was only the first step in USAID's project design process in those days. To complete the design and get the project approved and authorized, we had to prepare a massive tome, well over 100 pages long in this case, called a Project Paper. And to help us do this, in early 1986 we brought out a team of experts – economists, agricultural economists, an engineer. This team consisted of nine or ten people, all but two of whom were American and all but one of whom were men. And these guys were a problem for me.

The issue was this: we had lodged several of them, four men, in one wing of our office building. That seemed to make sense; we thought it would save time and be more convenient for everyone. But these four guys proved to be, believe me, a handful on the personal behavior front. Several of them, it turns out, were bringing, shall we say, unauthorized late-night guests to their rooms – that is to say, to our office. So I had to sit down with the head of that team – a retired USAID Mission Director who, let me clear, was not himself involved in any of these shenanigans – and basically read him the riot act. I told him "You have to get your act together, because your team is making me look bad, and if the Consulate finds out about this we will all be in trouble." "They're not bringing women into this office," I said, "They can do what they want on their own time, they can go to the Hotel Karavia, that's not my business, but not in my office, that's not happening."

Q: Yeah. (Laughs)

WASKIN: So, again, a great learning experience for me. How does someone at what was then my level tell a guy who was a mission director to get his act together? But he did and he cracked down on it.

A more substantive challenge during the Project Paper design process arose when Lois Richards came out. You remember Lois, right?

Q: Lois Richards was the DAA (Deputy Assistant Administrator).

WASKIN: Yes. Given the size of the planned Central Shaba Project – and as we imagined it, it was to be a 15-year project valued at $100 million – the Project Paper would have to be approved in Washington, and it would have to be approved by DAA Lois Richards. And prior to approving it, she – to her credit – wanted to come out and see Central Shaba for herself. So we prepared for weeks for her visit because we had heard all sorts of horrible stories about her. She was legendarily tough and demanding. But we were ready for this. Our plan was to show her the best and the worst things Shaba had to offer. One of the features of her visit was a field trip to an unimproved stretch of road that was to be part of the Central Shaba Project. So, the day before her visit, my team and I went to that site, and, with Lee Braddock's knowledge and encouragement, we set up this arrangement whereby I told the man who was going to be driving Lois, "Now, we need to

impress upon her how difficult this is, so at this point in the road you're going to drive into this mudhole and get stuck." He was amazed: "You want me to get stuck?" I said, "Yes." And that's exactly what happened: we got Lois Richards stuck in that mud hole, and then we heroically had her pulled out.

Q: Oh, that's the ultimate Potemkin's village field trip.

WASKIN: It was a Potemkin Village, that's right, exactly. If it hadn't been raining, we would have watered the road, believe me. I would have gotten her stuck one way or the other. Happily, we also achieved our larger objective: she was impressed with our operation, and she concluded that the new Central Shaba Project we were designing had reasonable prospects for success. So, when we submitted the Project Paper to Washington in the summer of 1986, she and her colleagues approved it.

Q: Obviously, a lot of this is different today because of communication. In those days the communication was not the same.

WASKIN: Right. In the absence of even reliable telephone connectivity, our only regular means of communication with Kinshasa was what we call the "phonie" - a radio telex. This device allowed for voice communication, but the reception was pretty crackly. So basically, rather than trying to talk, we would send telexes to each other. I had one guy, a Zairois, whose entire job was to spend all day sending messages to and receiving messages from USAID/Kinshasa. And we followed the State Department cable numbering system – we numbered every message we received from Kinshasa sequentially, for example, Kinshasa 0158, Kinshasa 0159, etc. And we did the same for our outgoing messages – Lubumbashi 001, Lubumbashi 002, and so on. This allowed us to maintain a complete record of our correspondence with Kinshasa. That's how we got our instructions, that's largely how we reported our information. Obviously, we sent regular written reports to Kinshasa, too, but the phonie allowed us to communicate with them on a real time basis.

Interestingly, the consulate got word of this and tried to put a stop to it. Their initial position was that because they were the Consulate General of the United States in Lubumbashi, all official communication had to pass through them via official front channel cables.

Well, I knew this wasn't going to work, but there was a new Consul General in town and I did not want to begin my relationship with him by asking him to overrule his staff on what was basically a turf fight about communications. So I decided to solve it operationally. I asked my team to give me a typical example of a message we would send to USAID/Kinshasa. And I took that message over to the Consulate communications guy and said "You've got to send this up to Kinshasa right away, it's urgent." Now, this was the complete list of spare parts we needed for the road building project, which ran about forty pages. (Both laugh) And the next day I sent him a similar list, which ran about sixty pages. And so on. And after two days of this the guy said, "I can't take it anymore. We've got to stop this." So, we got our radio telex privileges back with the understanding that

any message we might want to send that had any sort of policy implications, we would only send that through the consulate. And that was fine with me. My stance was hey, I'm only the AID guy, right? I don't deal with policy.

Q: It sounds like the perfect training for someone to learn how to operate.

WASKIN: Exactly, in the interagency context, yes.

Q: (Laughs) By the way, you had mentioned earlier about Chester Crocker when you were at Georgetown, did you have any contact with him after you were in this position? I suspect that Zaire was probably big on this agenda.

WASKIN: I did correspond with him a couple of times early in his tenure as Assistant Secretary but given his position – particularly relative to mine – I wanted to be careful not to overstep. Now, he did come out to Kinshasa, probably in 1982, and when I heard that he was coming I mentioned to the person in the Political Section of the Embassy who'd been chosen to be his control officer that I had been Dr. Crocker's teaching assistant at Georgetown, and I asked them to put me on the guest list for the reception for him. They said they would, and I just assumed they would do it. And then, the day came and there was going to be a reception for him, but I'd never gotten an invitation. So I never saw him. Somebody crossed my name off the list. But this was very early in my time within the government, and I wasn't savvy enough to work the channels I should have worked. I just assumed that if I asked to be put on the list and explained why I wanted to be there they'd put me on it. They didn't. So, I didn't see him then. But a few years later, it must have been 1987, when I was in Washington, I reached out directly to him and asked to see him. And I spent some time in his office. He remembered me, and we talked a lot about Zaire. And at the time, things were changing somewhat. The country had taken some steps to liberalize its economy and was actually making important progress, at least by its standards. Hyperinflation had been tamed, and you no longer needed to carry bricks of cash into a restaurant to pay your bill. So, at that time I was somewhat optimistic about the future of Zaire. And I told Dr. Crocker that. My optimism seems incredibly naïve in retrospect but, as I like to say, "If you're going to work in development you've got to be optimistic. If you're not optimistic by nature, you're in the wrong business."

Dr. Crocker was kind enough to spend about an hour with me. This was late in President Reagan's second term, and so I presumed to ask him, "You've been in this job for nearly eight years now. Why have you stayed so long?" He said, "I need to be in this seat because I'm afraid of who else might fill it."

Q: (Laughs)

WASKIN: Perhaps he was joking with me – he had a dry sense of humor. But in fact he stayed in that job until early 1989, early in the George H.W. Bush Administration. And after that, we went our separate ways. I didn't see him again for over 20 years. I ran into

him years later, around 2010, when I was working on the QDDR, but I really haven't maintained contact with him, which I regret. He's a good man.

Q: Interesting. So, you were the head of this office in Lubumbashi for two years and this was on a contractual basis, again.

WASKIN: I was an international hire PSC when I headed the SHADO in Lubumbashi. And I was very happy in that status. I had a beautiful house, and a lovely working situation. And living in Lubumbashi was absolutely terrific. In those days Lubumbashi itself was like a paradise. It's in the Southern Hemisphere so the seasons are reversed. In fact, unlike Kinshasa, there actually are four seasons and, because the city is at altitude, it gets very cold in June, July and August, the austral winter. And our office was on the eastern shore of a lake, with the luxurious Hotel Karavia off in the distance to the south and the nice green fairways of the local golf course sloping down to the western shore on the opposite side of the lake. It was a lovely experience in so very many ways. I really enjoyed it and I'm very grateful I got the chance to do that job.

But, once the Central Shaba Project was authorized in August 1986, things began to change for me in Lubumbashi. For one thing, it became very clear that we needed more resources on the ground in Lubumbashi. We weren't just managing three small refugee-related projects, now we had this huge $100 million, fifteen-year behemoth to get off the ground. And Central Shaba was not going to be managed by Lee's shop; rather, it would belong to the Mission's Agriculture Office in Kinshasa. And they decided they were going to install a representative down in my shop in Lubumbashi who would not report to me but rather to them. Happily, the guy they picked was Bruce Spake, another U.S. PSC who had been the Mission's Project Officer for Project North Shaba and who happened to be one of my best friends in the world. So, I said, "Come on down, Bruce, we're going to make this work. We're going to ignore the direct hires and their territorial disputes in Kinshasa and just make it work." And we did, and Bruce and I had – and have to this day – a superb working relationship. But that was the beginning of the change in how the office was managed. We no longer reported exclusively to Lee in the Design and Evaluation Office in Kinshasa. And then, when Dennis Chandler arrived to become Mission Director in early 1987, he took, as you know, a very different view than did Mr. Podol of how Lee Braddock operated and of how things ought to be managed in that mission. So, suddenly, I had multiple bosses in Kinshasa and I was not dealing as frequently with Lee as I once did.

All these changes accelerated, or catalyzed, a decision that I had been slowly coming to anyway, which was that, as the ripe old age of 30 approached, I could not remain a U.S. Personal Services Contractor forever. To continue to grow and advance in USAID, I needed to become a Direct Hire employee. Now, I had been down that road before. Years before, in 1983 while I was still a local hire personal services contractor in Kinshasa, I had decided to apply to become a direct hire. And I went through the interview process in Washington and I was selected. I was very excited. I was going to become an IDI, an International Development Intern. And then, the Reagan Administration imposed a hiring freeze. And so, all of that got wiped out. Once the freeze was lifted several months or

maybe a year later, I contacted the HR Office in USAID/Washington, and I was told "Sorry. It's as if it never happened. You have to start again." Which I would have done except that at the time the Agency was no longer recruiting for Project Development or Program Officers. So, that was part of the reason that I decided to walk away from USAID and instead go back to Lansing and do law school.

But, as I've described, that didn't really work out, and by 1986 I wanted to apply to become a direct hire again. And I did apply, I was selected for an interview, and I left Lubumbashi and came to Washington for that interview. And as you may recall, I was interviewed by a very tough panel, two members of which I remember. One was Ron Venezia and the other was yourself. So, again, I can't help but reflect on this: you were part of the panel that interviewed me. I think that was the first time I'd ever met you, though I'd certainly heard your name. And now, here you are, interviewing me for the oral history program. So, there's a certain symmetry to that. (Peasley laughs) But you guys were brutal; it was a very, very tough interview. I remember Ron at one point said, "Mr. Waskin is giving us a lesson in how the Nazis used to think and behave." (Both laugh) I felt about this big, Carol. I walked out of that room thinking, "This is the end. I am done. They are never going to hire me; my career in USAID is finished." It was an absolute disaster as far as I was concerned. I thought I had sounded like a blithering idiot. I didn't know how I could have screwed things up so badly to the point that a member of the panel told me I was behaving like a Nazi. And I went back to Lubumbashi just figuring this was never going to happen. And a few months later I was invited to become an IDI.

Q: Well, you should know, after that interview, I will tell you that one of the other people, and I don't remember her name, but it was someone from the Human Resources Office, to make you feel a little bit better, when the interview ended she said, "That young man is going to be AID administrator someday." She was so impressed. (Waskin laughs) So, Ron might have said something tough to you but… (laughs).

WASKIN: He did. Those were his exact words. But it's nice to hear what that woman said. I'm sorry I disappointed her. I didn't get to be Administrator but I did okay.

Q: I think she was satisfied. But she picked you out as a winner, so.

WASKIN: Well, I hope you all feel that way in retrospect.

Q: Yes, indeed. And I'm sure even Ron does.

WASKIN: Ron tried to hire me when I was an IDI so I knew that he was willing to overlook whatever I'd said that annoyed him during the interview.

Q: Yes, right. In fact, you did end up going to Latin America. That was a bit of irony.

WASKIN: Yes, I went to REDSO first, but I did go to Latin America later.

Q: But you returned to Lubumbashi and then came back in as an IDI in 1987 as—

WASKIN: As an IDI.

USAID – Hired as International Development Intern, 1987

Yes, I left Zaire for the last time in August of 1987 and became an IDI, working for Barry Burnett in the Africa Bureau. But once again, there was a hiccup. You may recall some of this. I had pulled up stakes in Lubumbashi and moved back to the States with my then wife. We were staying in her parents' house in Kalamazoo, Michigan, and I was scheduled to come to Washington, be sworn in as a direct hire employee, and join the New Entry Training class that was scheduled to begin in late August. The problem was that that class got cancelled, and there would not be another New Entry Training class for me to join until late September. And meanwhile, there were credible rumors that there was going to be another hiring freeze. And I thought, oh, my God, I am going to get caught in the same situation I found myself in back in 1983. Only now it would have been worse: in 1983, I had a job with USAID/Zaire to go back to; in 1987, I was unemployed and living in my in-laws' guest room in Michigan. In short, I would have been really screwed. Happily, there was a senior official in the Africa bureau, an office director named Carol Peasley, who took an interest in my situation, thanks to David Leong, I think, who brought it to your attention. And you said, "All right, I have a solution. Tell that guy to come to work for the Africa Bureau. He can start working for Barry Burnett now, and that will get him into the system. And then, whenever they get around to having another New Entry Training class, he can join it." And that's exactly what happened. I joined in late August and went to work in the Africa Bureau in Barry's office and then joined the New Entry Training when it actually started in late September. So, not for the first time, I hope, but please allow me to thank you, because it was because of you that happened. (Peasley laughs) Otherwise, I was definitely at risk there. So, thank you.

Q: I think a number of people had been affected and so, we were trying to be as creative as we could.

WASKIN: You did it.

Q: What was it like doing new entry training after the amount of experience that you had had?

WASKIN: I was not a good student, because my attention was distracted. I did not always set a good example. I often went to the class first thing in the morning, signed the log to record my attendance, and then at break time, I would disappear. It wasn't that I didn't try to take the training seriously, but I already had a job in the Africa Bureau and I had serious work to do right across the street. At that time, USAID was headquartered in the main State Department building in Foggy Bottom, as you will remember, and the training was taking place in an annex about a block away on the other side of the Pan American Health Organization building. So I often found myself under pressure – probably

self-imposed, but pressure nonetheless, to get back to the things I was doing in the Bureau.

But some of the training was quite good. We had some extraordinary speakers. I recall in particular John Van Dusen Lewis, whom you will remember, who later became a friend and who gave a truly inspirational talk about why the United States needed to provide food aid in a world that was, as he characterized it, awash in grain yet somehow unable to get that grain to people who were hungry and needed it. He was terrific. There was also a fellow named Moses Thompson, who spoke eloquently about the importance of strategic planning and project design. He, by the way, was a graduate of Kalamazoo College. So, some aspects of it were really good. I was less interested in some other aspects, like how a USAID mission functions and what's a Project Implementation Order, etc., because I had already been working inside the Agency for six years by then and so was very familiar with that kind of stuff.

One of the oddest episodes of that training took place on its very first day. I remember very distinctly that at the start of that first day they swore us in, which is a very emotional moment, and meant a lot to me. We had the ceremony, we all sat down, and they said, "Okay, now, let's talk about retirement." (Peasley laughs) I mean, most of the people in that room had been a direct-hire for all of about thirty-five seconds and now we're talking about retirement! I understand it's important, but goodness. (Laughs)

Q: That's probably because that was about the time that the system was changing, I think.

WASKIN: It was changing, that was exactly the point. We had to go into the new system, not the old system.

Q: Yes, right, yes.

WASKIN: So, I guess that's why they wanted to get it in front of us right away. Actually, in retrospect, I wish I'd paid more attention to their talk about retirement. (Peasley laughs).

Q: Was there a class of about how many people? Did it provide a good networking opportunity for you?

WASKIN: Absolutely. There were about 30 of us in that class, and I made some lasting friendships there. Gregg Wiitala was in that class, Aleksandra Braginski, Bill Martin, Charles North, Carl Derrick, Penny Hong, all became, and remain, great friends. Years later Charles North helped me adopt my son in El Salvador, for example. And Margaret Alexander, who later died tragically in a helicopter crash in Nepal where she was deputy mission director, was in that class. These were some really, really great people, and some lifelong friendships were forged in that class.

Q: How quickly did you know what your first overseas assignment would be? Was it when you first came in or did it take a while to sort that out?

WASKIN: This became rather complicated. Very early on, possibly before I even joined the New Entry class, I was told I was going to go to Liberia to work in the Project Development Office in Monrovia. But they already had four Direct Hires in that office, and I was going to be the fifth. And that didn't sound very exciting to me. After all, I thought, I had already been heading my own office. I was pretty arrogant in retrospect.

And I must have made it known, quietly I hope but clearly, that I was not thrilled about the prospect of going to Liberia. I say that I must have made it known because at some point your deputy, Jim Graham, presented me with the opportunity to be assigned instead to REDSO/West in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. One of the reasons I wanted to go to REDSO/West was that you all had given me a fantastic opportunity when I was working in the Africa Bureau to go to Cape Verde. So, I will tell you about Cape Verde and then I'll return to my story of where I ended up.

As part of the work I was doing in Barry Burnett's office, I was assigned to backstop the USAID program in Cape Verde. And we had a very serious problem there, the Sal Island Desalination Project, which was a $10 million-dollar, ten-year project to build a desalination plant on Sal Island, the site of Cape Verde's international airport. And in nine and a half years it had spent $9.4 million – and the plant didn't work. It was not functioning. And remember, at that time, no USAID project could be authorized for more than ten years without the express authorization of the Administrator of USAID. And so, we had an emergency meeting that the U.S. ambassador to Cape Verde, a fellow named Vern Penner, attended. There must have been about eight of us in that meeting, and we spent the better part of an hour talking about why the plant didn't work, whose fault it was, how delicate the saltwater desalination membranes were and how poorly the project was designed for an African environment, etc. And I finally said, "Excuse me." (Again, I was pretty full of myself in those days.) "I don't think any of us knows what we're talking about," I said. "We can't solve these problems. We don't know anything about the technical aspects of operating this plant. We can't solve this here. What we as a group need to do is put together a plan for acquiring the necessary technical expertise to make the plant work." And of course, the room fell dead. I mean, it was like somebody had broken wind. And the conversation went on to other things. But the next day I was told, again by Jim Graham, "You're going to Cape Verde, son. Ambassador Penner was very impressed with you." (Peasley laughs)

So, I got sent out to Cape Verde. This was early November of 1987. When I got there, the AID Representative, Tom Luche, very graciously met me at the airport. He said, "I am really glad to see you." I said, "Well, yeah, we've got to fix this desalination plant. I'm glad to be here too." And he replied, "Yeah, there's that, but more immediately I have to go on vacation next week so you're going to be in charge." (Both laugh) "What?" "Yeah, you're going to be the acting AID Rep." So once again, fortune had smiled on me: I had been a Direct Hire employee for less than three months, and now I was going to have my own Mission to run.

Q: Three months.

WASKIN: Again, this was another great management training experience. And of course it was a lot of fun. The ambassador liked me, we got along famously, and I was on a tropical island in the Atlantic Ocean and having a great time fishing, sailing and swimming. But more seriously, we did put together a plan to fix the plant. I think there were thirty-six gas permeable membranes that had to become operational for this plant to be fully functional. That was not going to happen given the limited funds and limited time remaining. So I suggested that we go back and take a look at what the Project Paper said. The Project Paper included a Logical Framework, and that Logical Framework included a Project Purpose. And that Project Purpose was for the plant to increase the supply of potable water and electricity for the people of Sal Island. That, we calculated, we could achieve if we could make twelve of the gas permeable desalination membranes operational. And we did have enough time, and enough money, to accomplish that. So, I argued, successfully, that we shouldn't worry about making all the membranes operational; rather, we should focus on the output from the plant in terms of electricity generated and potable water provided. If we can produce enough water and electricity with twelve membranes, then we could say that this project was at least a partial success." And that's basically exactly what we did.

Why didn't we just ask for more money and more time? Well, Alan Woods had just become the Administrator, and the bureau did not want the first major issue they presented to Administrator Woods to be the Sal Island Desal Project. They did not want to say to him "We want you to extend this ten-year project. It's been a complete failure." Instead, they wanted us to fix it. And in fact we fixed part of it and declared victory. That was my signature accomplishment at that point. And that was, again, another great learning experience that I'm very happy you all provided me.

So, what does all this have to do with my assignment? Well, I returned to Washington in December 1987, just before Christmas, and my assignment was still up in the air. And I thought the idea of going to REDSO/West was a great one, because REDSO/West covered Cape Verde, and so I expected that if I went there I could continue to go out to Cape Verde, keep my hand in and make sure that the desal plant kept running. Additionally, I figured that an assignment to West Africa would allow me to continue to use my French. So there were, from my perspective, a lot of advantages to that plan. And I was in fact scheduled to move to Abidjan in September or October of 1988 after finishing my IDI rotations in Washington.

But then, very late in the game, probably in April or May of 1988, Jim Graham came to me again and said, "We don't want you to go to REDSO/West, you need to go to REDSO/East in Nairobi, Kenya." You will remember that the Mission Director in REDSO/East, Bob Bell, had died suddenly in I believe the spring of 1988, right?

Q: Right.

WASKIN: As a consequence of his passing, everything at that Mission was in a flux. Everybody had basically moved up a notch, so the Deputy Mission Director, Satish Shah,

had become the Mission Director, and the head of the Project Development Office, Monica Sinding, had become the Deputy Mission Director, etc. So this left a hole at the bottom of the pyramid in the Project Development Office, and they needed someone like me to fill that gap. My first reaction to this news was to protest that in East Africa, I would not have a chance to speak French. "Don't worry", I was told. "You can support programs in Rwanda and Burundi, they speak French there." So, I ended up going to REDSO/East, which was, again, a great experience that I'll get to in a moment.

But before I delve into REDSO/East, I want to tell you about one more thing I did when I was still working as an IDI in the Africa bureau. It's an amusing story. At that time, IDIs needed to develop a plan for rotating among offices and bureaus in AID/Washington. And one of the offices that I wanted to rotate through was what was then called LEG. Now it's LPA, the Office of Legislative and Public Affairs, which is responsible for liaison with the Congress. I submitted that as part of my plan and it was approved. And then, shortly after I returned from Cape Verde, it must have been January 1988, I got a call from Kelly Kammerer, the head of that office, and he said, "We have this program where we send people up to the Hill to do a detail for several months. We'd like to know if you'd be interested in being a detailee with the House Appropriations Committee's Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, which is chaired by Congressman David Obey from Wisconsin." And I replied, "Mr. Kammerer, I'm deeply flattered by the offer, but I'm scheduled to go to Somalia next week to do an evaluation. Beyond that, I was involved in electoral politics in Michigan, and I decided not to pursue that line of work because frankly, I didn't enjoy it. You meet a better class of people in USAID. So I think I'm going to decline your kind offer." And he said, "Well, thanks very much. I understand." That was the end of the conversation. That was a Friday.

Monday morning Jim Graham pounces into my office and asks, "What the hell's the matter with you?" I said, "What?" He said, "I just got a call from Carol Peasley, because she just got a call from Chuck Gladson (the head of the Africa Bureau), because he just got a call from the Administrator, and they want to know who this guy Waskin is who doesn't want to take this detail to Capitol Hill." He said, "Your ass better be on Capitol Hill at 8:00 tomorrow morning." So, that's where I was at 8:00 the next morning, on Capitol Hill to start a detail there. And that was an extraordinary program. You told me at the time, "Well, you're going to find out, Skip, about the political side of USAID." And you were right, I found out a lot about the political side of USAID. I worked for the committee for six months. And everyone basically treated me just like any other staff member. That subcommittee – formally known as the Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs – was staffed by some really talented people. The three permanent staffers were Terry Peele, Bill Schuerch, and Mark Murray. These guys were legends at the time, and I got to see that the congressional staff, contrary to the mythology about them that circulated among we junior officers, were really serious. They knew a lot about development. They knew a lot more about development than I did, as a matter of fact, a lot more about AID than I did and they didn't have pitchforks and horns and tails. They were really committed, dedicated development professionals and truly had the best interests of USAID at heart. That didn't necessarily mean that their priorities were the same as USAID's. For example, I

remember standing right next to Terry Peele when he was talking with Chuck Gladson, the head of the Africa Bureau. And Mr. Gladson was asking Terry about OE (Operating Expenses). He asked, "Why can't you guys help us out on the OE front?" And Terry replied, "I'm interested in orphans and vulnerable children. Why can't you help me?" So, OK, the deal was done in that moment. USAID got its OE, and more money was appropriated for orphans and vulnerable children. That's how the sausage is made, right? That's how things really happen. That's how decisions are really made.

My principal responsibility as a detailee to the Committee was to edit the transcripts of its public hearings. I learned quickly that even the most eloquent witnesses and members of Congress often sound foolish when words spoken orally are transcribed verbatim. But I was also given substantive work. For example, I got to organize a hearing on HIV- AIDS, which was another great learning experience and allowed me to meet and interact with a lot of people in that sector.

In addition, I had a ringside seat to some incredible personalities. Bill Richardson was a congressman from New Mexico at the time, and the subcommittee secretary, Lori Maes, was also from New Mexico. So Congressman Richardson would come by frequently and flirt with Lori shamelessly and drop all kinds of gossip. One day he mentioned that he was planning to add to the USAID budget an earmark for adobe brick construction. So as soon as he left, I found a quiet phone and called LEG and said, "You guys need to be aware of this. They're going to earmark money for adobe brick construction." (Peasley laughs) One time, there was a hearing going on, there were dozens of people in our small office, things were crazy, and a gentleman tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Excuse me. I wonder if I might sit at your desk and borrow your phone?" And I looked up and it was Al Gore. And of course I said, "Senator, please, have a seat. Take my desk as long as you want it." He was very nice. I became a lifelong admirer of his at that point. So, that was great, seeing things like that and participating in the process. Sadly, I believe USAID cancelled that detailee program some years later and I think that was very unfortunate. They may have resumed it in some fashion. I hope so because it was a real help for me later in my career. It enabled me to deal with legislators and helped me to understand the sort of things that were important to them and to their staff. It also helped me realize that they're not the enemy. We at USAID don't have to be hostile to them, we can work with them professionally. And having friends in LPA was very helpful later in my career because, given my experience on the Hill, they were very open to – indeed, encouraging of - the idea of me speaking to Congressional staff.

Q: Yes, right.

WASKIN: Because I had friends in LPA, they facilitated my contacts with these people.

So, the detail to the Hill was really a terrific experience and I'm so grateful that I had it. But the downside to this was that I didn't spend much time, or as much time as I should have, learning about how AID Washington works. You know, as an IDI, I went out to Cape Verde as the acting AID Representative and I went up to Capitol Hill and spent six months there, and then I immediately went to Nairobi. And with the arrogance of youth, I

thought, Ah, who cares? I'll learn later how AID/Washington functions. But when I became a senior official in the field, particularly when I became acting Mission Director in Madagascar, I realized that I could handle a lot of the aspects of that job. They were within my experience. I could handle managing the mission, no problem. I'd done that before. I could handle managing the embassy, no problem, I'd done that before. I could handle relationships with the host government, no problem. I'd done that before. What I didn't understand was how AID Washington worked. That was a real blind spot for me. And that is why, when I did get an opportunity in 2000 to leave Madagascar somewhat prematurely and come back to serve as an Office Director in what was then the PPC Bureau (Bureau for Policy and Program Coordination) I took it. I took it because it was a Senior Management Group job, but also because I felt like this was going to help me correct an obvious deficiency in my background. I wouldn't trade the experiences I had in Cape Verde or working on the Hill for anything but there was an opportunity cost to that. And the opportunity cost was not learning how the sausage is made in AID Washington.

Q: Yeah, that's an important point. So, you strongly support the idea of new employees spending at least a year in Washington learning the ropes instead of going out immediately?

WASKIN: Absolutely. I know there's enormous pressure to get them out in the field and put them to work immediately, but they need to have some grounding. In the short-term it's a bit of a sacrifice, but it will pay big dividends in the long term.

Q; That's good – and a good place to stop for the day.

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Q: Okay. Today is October 12, 2023, and this is interview number two with Skip Waskin.

Skip, when we left last time you'd come onboard as an international development intern, an IDI, and you had some interesting work in Washington; then you were assigned to REDSO, the Regional Economic Development Support Office, REDSO in Nairobi. And this was as a project development officer IDI. Is that correct?

REDSO/East and Southern Africa, Project Development Officer, 1988 - 1990

WASKIN: That's exactly right. I was assigned there as an IDI and it was a terrific experience for a number of reasons. Before I went out there I asked a lot of people, "Hey, is this something I should do? Does it make sense?" In particular I talked to a guy who'd been a senior PDO for many, many years, not somebody I'd worked with. But he had worked in REDSO and he said, "Skip, you'll learn so much out there. It's as if you're running your own consulting shop. And it's terrific because you can really have an impact on the design of a lot of the activities. And you'll learn a lot of skills because you'll have to." And I definitely found that to be true. REDSO in the two years I was there gave me a whole series of challenging and interesting assignments from which I learned a great deal.

Q: Who was heading up the Project Development Office at that point? Do you recall?

WASKIN: I do. I do because among other things he was the best man at my wedding, Gene Morris.

I just communicated with him the day before yesterday, as a matter of fact, so. Gene was the head of that office. It was a very difficult time for that Mission because about six months before I arrived, their mission director, Bob Bell, had passed away very suddenly at the age of forty-eight. This was understandably traumatic for everyone there at the time.

Q: Right.

WASKIN: Gene Morris arrived at approximately the same time I did to head the Project Development office in REDSO East. John Wall was his deputy. And we had Debbie Prindle, who was a brilliant officer in terms of her knowledge of development and her knowledge of USAID. And there was another guy there who'd been in my New Entry class, Greg Wiitala. So, the five of us in that office were a great team. But the nature of the business, of course, is that in REDSO you're farmed out and you do a series of TDYs (Temporary Duties). You don't spend much time together in Nairobi. I arrived there just before the annual scheduling conference. I don't know if they still hold those sorts of things but you probably remember them. A lot of work gets done in three or four days. Everybody in East and Southern Africa, all the mission directors or their deputies or program officers, senior people from each mission came to Nairobi to schedule the deployment of REDSO resources for the year. And we were in demand. There were requirements that needed to be filled at each mission. If they had a particular evaluation that needed to be conducted or a redesign that needed to be done or a new design, they'd get somebody from the REDSO Project Development Office to come out and help.

My first assignment was to go to a little country called Malawi to do a redesign of the Rural Enterprise and Agribusiness Development Institutions Project, or "READI" Project. You were the Mission Director, and I worked with the brilliant team that you had down there, including Project Development Officer Steve Norton and Program Officer Dick Day, who helped show me the ropes, so to speak. The mission had recently completed an evaluation of the project and I was tasked with writing a paper to implement the recommendations of that evaluation. So, it was an easy job, and it was a great deal of fun. But it's illustrative because every place I went for REDSO, when I got to that particular mission, to any one of the bilateral missions that wanted our services, I, like my colleagues, enjoyed the full attention of the mission at the time. Whatever we were doing was very important for the mission. So, when I was in Lilongwe I was able to interact directly with you. When I went to Harare I interacted directly with Allison Herrick, the mission director there as we were designing a new natural resources conservation program called Campfire. When I was in Lusaka doing an evaluation of a participant training project I interacted directly with Cap Dean. And when I went to Madagascar to design another environmental program, I worked directly with Phyllis

Dichter Forbes. And at that time I was just an FS-4. Normally, I wouldn't be doing such things. But all these experiences were great for a young officer because I learned a great deal from these senior people about how business is conducted and what their priorities are and why those are their priorities. So for me, not only was I happy because I was doing some useful work for the agency, but it was a great training experience. And of course, I had to learn about a wide variety of things very quickly. In Malawi, I learned about READI, which was a private sector engagement program. In Madagascar and Zimbabwe I learned about natural resource management programs. In Rwanda and Burundi, I did evaluations of agricultural research programs and so learned about that sector. Thanks to REDSO, I was able to broaden my horizons quickly. I learned a lot substantively about development and I also learned a lot about how USAID does development.

In my job in Zaire, things were done a certain way and there was a great deal of rigor, but they were done the way that Lee Braddock wanted them done. And the notion that there was such a thing as a Handbook One that you had to follow, that didn't carry a lot of weight in discussions within USAID/Zaire. But at REDSO, I had to become very conversant in USAID policies and procedures very quickly, so that I could carry out my job and be useful and be effective. So, that was a great experience.

One of the downsides of it, however, was that I barely spent any time at home. I once calculated that during the first year I was there, which effectively was from October 1, 1988 to September 30, 1989 – i.e., Fiscal Year 1989 - I actually slept in my house in Nairobi only 20 percent of the time, because I was always on the road. Because I was the youngest guy on the team, both chronologically and in terms of experience, and I was single, with no dependents and no family, if something unexpected, or unexpectedly difficult came up, it was easy for the Mission's default response to be "Give it to Waskin, he'll do anything." And I would, and I did. I spent the largest portion of my time in Burundi, where we were designing an interesting private sector engagement project that we named BEST, or Burundi Enterprise Support and Training Program. And we paired this project mechanism, BEST, with a non-project, or program assistance mechanism called BEPP, or Burundi Enterprise Promotion Program, which was a policy-based cash transfer designed to facilitate legal and regulatory reforms by the government of Burundi to encourage private sector growth. And that was a very interesting experience as well, and very intense.

Q: So, you were the main design officer on that program in Burundi?

WASKIN: Yeah, I was the main design officer, that's right, yes.

Q: Did you get to see implementation of it at all while you were in REDSO?

WASKIN: No. The nature of working as a Project Development Officer at a USAID REDSO in those days was that you would typically engage on one thing very intensely for a very short period. A normal TDY to a Mission would last two to three weeks – you'd do that TDY, produce whatever document (an evaluation, a PID, a Project Paper)

might be required, and then you'd be gone. And you might never interact on that project, or with that Mission, again. You might never learn what happened. You might never learn "the rest of the story". My experience with USAID/Burundi was different, partly because they didn't have a Project Development Officer there until David Leong arrived in early 1990. So I effectively became their Project Development Officer, and as such I did a series of 3-4 week TDYs to Bujumbura supporting the design of BEST and BEPP and actually ended up spending more time there than I did in Nairobi. But that was very much the exception rather than the rule.

While at REDSO, however, I was involved in one major design effort where circumstance did give me the chance to learn the rest of the story. In the spring and summer of 1989, I worked with USAID Madagascar to design a major new natural resource management project, Sustainable Approaches to Viable Environmental Management, or, cleverly enough, SAVEM. And when we began this design and started talking to the government of Madagascar about it, I remember officials there being puzzled about our interest in the subject. They wondered why we would care about Madagascar's natural resources, why should they care. One guy said, "Pourquoi les Américains pleurent-ils quand les lémuriens meurent?" "Why do Americans cry when lemurs die?" It was a new concept. This wasn't something that was at the forefront of public consciousness, or on the minds of public policymakers, in Madagascar in 1990. And I don't recall that there were any other donors pushing these concepts, either.

Fast forward eight years later, January 1998. I arrive in Madagascar as Assistant Mission Director and I am astonished to find that the ideas we were promoting back in 1990 are now all over the place. Everybody's doing natural resource management, or conservation programs. You can't walk down the street in Antananarivo without seeing a billboard touting the importance of protecting lemurs, or protecting the forest. And I realized that wow, there had been a huge attitudinal shift. I don't know that USAID was solely responsible for that but I'm certain that the attention USAID paid to natural resource management had a role in that shift. So, because I went back, eight years later, to a country that I had supported while in REDSO, I was able to see the changes we had helped bring about. But that is the nature of our business: that the timelines for the kinds of long-term changes USAID typically tries to bring about are such that you certainly don't see them in three or four months, and you may not even see them over the course of a three or four – year tour. But if you are fortunate enough, as I was, to come back after eight years, well then maybe you'll have the chance to see some of the real results of our programs.

Q: Yes, that's good. Did you help design other policy-based programs while you were at REDSO? Because I know AID was doing a lot of them during that period.

WASKIN: It was doing a lot of them. I was working on one for Somalia, as a matter of fact, and was scheduled to go to Somalia when I was pulled off that assignment and sent up to Capitol Hill instead. (Peasley laughs).

Q: I can't imagine Somalia being a place for a policy-based program.

WASKIN: I never made it to Mogadishu. But I do know that the guys I worked with on the Foreign Operations Subcommittee were very critical of USAID's policy-based cash transfers, and critical in particular about the Somalia program. But the one we were doing in Burundi was the one that I spent the most time on. That was my deepest involvement in policy-based assistance.

Q: Did you feel sometimes that, because of your prior experience, you had almost too much responsibility put on your shoulders at times, to go out and help missions design programs or did you feel that you were treated fairly?

WASKIN: No, I thought I was treated fairly. I had a great deal of self-confidence, to put it politely. And so, I felt that I knew what I was doing. I understand the point you're making, and in retrospect I realize that the assignments I got at REDSO were often not the sort that would be assigned to a typical new hire. But at the time, my view was that I wasn't a typical new hire because I had already worked for USAID for six years. At the time, I was eager to take on as much responsibility as REDSO and the Missions were willing to give me.

And that makes me think of an important point. A REDSO job by its nature requires a certain degree of expertise and ability to work independently. So such jobs are typically not appropriate, I don't think, for new entry officers. In my case, my time at REDSO was my de facto second or third tour, if you count Zaire as having constituted two different jobs. So, I was coming to it from a bigger experiential base than most people who had only been direct hires for less than a year. But, again, I was full of self-confidence. Designing projects and programs was not new to me and I didn't feel overwhelmed. And to be clear, at most Missions I had a great deal of help from some very brilliant counterparts. Steve Norton and Dick Day in Malawi were prime examples of that. So was Patty Buckles in Zimbabwe. So was Alan Van Egmond in Rwanda. And within REDSO, Gene Morris was a tremendous mentor and leader.

These are people from whom I was able to learn. And in most cases – Burundi being a notable exception – I wasn't going to these places because they didn't have a Project Development officer. Often, they did. But I was going because they had too much work for one person and they needed support.

Q: So, you weren't just put on your own. Okay.

WASKIN: No, almost never. And of course, and when things got really tough, I could call Gene. So I felt very supported.

Q: REDSO had technical expertise as well. Would you sometimes travel with the technical officers as well?

WASKIN: Very frequently. REDSO had an all-star cast of technical officers. For example, Art Danart from the health office, Pat Fleuret from the agricultural office, our

Chief Economist, Bob Burke, and our brilliant Regional Legal Advisor, Steve Spielman. We also had people with particular specialties that individual missions didn't need to have on staff on a full-time basis, such as our very dynamic Commodity Management Officer, Bruce Stader. When missions did need that skill set they turned to REDSO. And, yes, sometimes we'd go en masse; three or four of us would arrive at a bilateral mission at the same time. For example, when I was working on Burundi, I almost always traveled and worked with agricultural economist Dick Edwards and economist Ben Severn. I learned an enormous amount from both of them. So, while I had a great deal of independence, I also had a great deal of very skilled and very experienced support. I was never left out on the high wire by myself.

Q: I was going to ask if you had any sort of relationship or connection with the USAID Kenya mission, but it sounds like you were in Nairobi so little you might not have had a relationship with them. (Laughs)

WASKIN: Yeah, we really didn't. We had social connections, of course. Charles North, who'd been in my new entry class, was there and he and I formed a lifelong friendship. Carla Barbiero was in the bilateral mission and was married to Victor Barbiero, who was the health officer in REDSO. I became friends and spent time with them whenever I was in Nairobi. But I wasn't there that much.

Q: Right. Were there any programs that you had to work on the design of that might have been political in nature where you'd have had any contact with the embassies in any of the countries? Or were your contacts just within the USAID missions?

WASKIN: No, my contacts were within the USAID missions. I rarely if ever dealt with the embassies in those places.

Q: Since you later went on to head up a regional support mission in Bangkok later in your career, do you have any thoughts about the value of regional support missions?

WASKIN: I think they can be extremely valuable. It's very important, though, that they not get in the way of the bilateral programs, but rather that they seek to support and complement the bilateral missions. I think we did that well in REDSO/East, and it's the approach that I advocated when I became acting Director of the RDM/A (Regional Development Mission for Asia) in Bangkok in 2003. Within the first few months of my arrival in Bangkok, I made a point of visiting all of the bilateral missions in our remit. And the point I made to them was that "We're not here to compete with you. We're here to support you. We're here to run programs that are regional in nature because the issues they're dealing with cross boundaries, but everything we do needs to be closely coordinated with you." I stressed that we would be very careful not to supplant the bilateral missions in any way. And of course, in terms of relationships with the embassy and the host government, the principal voice of U.S. development assistance in the country needs to be the USAID Mission Director, not the regional mission.

I think it's also important to distinguish between the relationship a regional mission has, or should have, with large bilateral missions versus those it should have with smaller missions. You will recall that, at the time I was in REDSO, there were Schedule A and Schedule B missions in the Africa Bureau. At a Schedule A mission, like the one you headed in Malawi, the Mission Director's authority was delegated directly to her from the Assistant Administrator. At a Schedule B mission, like the one I was working with in Burundi, the authority of the Mission Director or AID Representative was delegated through the REDSO Director. So, anything that the mission in Burundi wanted to do needed to be reviewed and approved by REDSO. I thought that was a very useful structure, but I expect that some of the directors in the smaller missions chafed at it. But in my opinion, it worked well. And I had seen it from the other side of the table when I was in Cape Verde, which was a Schedule B Mission. The programs we were working on there had to be vetted through REDSO/West in Abidjan, which I think worked fine.

Q: Yeah. Did you design any regional programs while you were there?

WASKIN: I did not.

Q: So, you were not involved in any regional programs directly?

WASKIN: Not really. The Campfire program in Zimbabwe was a cross-border program so in that sense it was regional.

Q: But it wasn't a REDSO regional program?

WASKIN: Correct. It was not a REDSO regional program. It was a joint program shared by the Botswana and Zimbabwe missions. This required coordination between them but it was not a REDSO program.

Q: The Campfire program and the program in Madagascar, the SAVEM program, were they based on the same principles of community involvement and community management?

WASKIN: Yes, that's exactly right. Campfire in particular was somewhat revolutionary because it was not a technical program, per se. I remember that when I was briefing people in Nairobi about what I had done while I was down in Zimbabwe and Botswana, the agricultural officers were flummoxed. They asked, "What's the technical package that we're extending here?" My answer was, "It's not a technical package. It's an organizational package. It's a way of incentivizing and empowering local communities to manage and derive revenue from the conservation of the natural resources around them - for example, wild animals - that tourists are flocking to see."

Now, in Madagascar, SAVEM was a little bit different because we did have a technical package that we were extending. One key aspect of it was the planting of vetiver grass as a means of controlling erosion. And so, in contrast to Campfire, a lot of the SAVEM Project involved extension of that technology. But in both cases the core principle was to

engage with local communities and help empower them to control and manage their natural resources. In fact, when I arrived in Madagascar as the Assistant Mission Director, one of the first things I was involved in was service on the technical panel that was selecting the prime contractor for the follow-on to SAVEM. The contractor we picked was Chemonics. And one of the things I was most impressed with about their proposal was that, while they offered us a menu of possible technical approaches, they caveated that by saying, "The very first thing we're going to do is to go to the communities and find out what they perceive the problems to be and which of these technical solutions they think would be most appropriate." And I said, "Bingo. That's it. That's the way to go." That's what distinguished them from their competitors.

Q: That's interesting. That sounds like some very good experience.

So, you ended up staying two years in REDSO as a project development officer and traveling 80 percent of the time. (Laughs)

WASKIN: Traveling 80 percent of the time. That's right.

Q: I think this is above and beyond cruelty but, nonetheless.

WASKIN: You know, I loved it. I was in a position to be able to do it, so why not?

Q: So, you went there in 1988 and left in 1990. When you were looking for an onward assignment, I'm surprised the Africa bureau let you go.

WASKIN: Well, they were surprised too. What happened was this. I was literally walking down the street in Bujumbura, and I saw a newspaper headline that said, "Chamorro Defeats Ortega in Nicaragua." I couldn't believe it. I was stunned that the Sandinistas had allowed themselves to be voted out. And this was of interest to me because in addition to the trip that my mother had taken us on to Guatemala when I was a child, she also took us to Nicaragua in June 1971, about a year and a half before the great earthquake there. And so, at age 13, I'd spent a little time in Nicaragua, travelled around and seen various parts of that country, and it made quite an impression on me. I kept a journal of that trip that I still have on my shelf. And the last words of that journal were, "This is a wonderful country and I'm going to come back here someday." And suddenly, on that day in Bujumbura, I saw my opportunity.

I was interested in returning to Nicaragua for several reasons. It was a country that I had personal reasons for wanting to go back to, and unlike, say, Burundi, it was at the forefront of U.S. foreign policy concerns. You will recall that in the 1980s we were involved in the Contra war in Nicaragua and there were tremendous resources being expended in Central America. And I spoke Spanish, thanks to Kalamazoo College. And so, the next time I was in Washington, which was only a few weeks later, I approached the Latin America Bureau and told them that I was really interested in Nicaragua, had some background there, and that I spoke a little Spanish. And they were receptive. They wanted me to go to Nicaragua. And that's exactly what happened: having raised my hand

and expressed my interest in going to Nicaragua, I was immediately destined for Nicaragua. As I later learned, at that time, in the bureaucratic wrangling within the Agency, if you wanted to go to a high foreign policy priority country in Central America like Nicaragua and you were identified by the Latin America Bureau as a candidate they wanted, they got you.

This trip to Washington probably happened in April of 1990. But I wasn't going to go to Nicaragua immediately. Rather, I had to go back to Nairobi and inform Satish Shah and Monica Sinding that I was going to leave at the end of August. And that was painful. Satish was a dear man. I really liked him, and I liked Monica too. I liked everybody there. They had been very good to me, and I didn't want to hurt their feelings. And to their credit, while I don't think they were happy about it, they were at least understanding. But Satish told me something that I've never forgotten. He said, "Skip, I understand what you're doing. I understand what you did. But there's a right way and a wrong way to do it and you did it the wrong way." So, lesson learned. Again, one of those things that you learn early in your career and that is helpful later on.

The bottom line, though, is that I think Satish was absolutely correct. Moving to Nicaragua was the right thing for me. I think professionally I'd gotten what I could have gotten out of REDSO. I would have enjoyed staying there another two years. But Nicaragua was a great opportunity and an area of real foreign policy importance. I do wish though that I had done it the right way and spoken to Satish and Monica before I left and said, "I intend to do this," rather than blindsiding them.

Q: (Laughs) Right, okay. Good lesson learned.

WASKIN: Good lesson learned, yes.

Q: So, you go off to Nicaragua. Is Janet Ballantyne the mission director then?

USAID/Nicaragua, Project Development Officer, 1990 - 1993

WASKIN: Janet Ballantyne was the mission director. And she had assembled an all-star cast of people to work with her. Nicaragua was a searing experience in many ways because it was such a difficult environment to work in. But we had such strong people working in that environment. Let me go down for a moment the list of all the future mission directors who were working there. (Peasley laughs) Obviously Janet Ballantyne, the Mission Director, was an incredible force of nature and an amazing leader. Ken Schofield, an incredibly talented guy who later ran the USAID Mission in the Philippines, was the deputy. And then, we had Liliana Ayalde, who was the head of the health office, who was not only a future mission director but a future ambassador. And we had Todd Amani, Joe Williams, Azza el-Abd, Kevin Armstrong, John Cloutier, myself – the list is long. And add to that people like Jimm Corley, Sally Everett, Brian Rudert, Dick Owens, Richard Layton, Frank Valva, Mila Brooks – the place crackled with talent. Which was perhaps not surprising. A leader like Janet and a situation like the one we found in Nicaragua attracts talent. When it's a foreign policy priority, and there's

a lot of money on the table, and the Mission Director is a legend, a lot of good people start arriving.

Q: So, Chamorro was elected, Sandinistas were defeated.

WASKIN: Right.

Q: I assume that our program increased massively?

WASKIN: Massively. I was told at the time that the United States mission to Nicaragua – meaning the whole U.S. Embassy - went from a total of eight people under Chief of Mission authority to 58 in a matter of weeks. At least 17 of those new positions were USAID USDH employees. And of course, this caused some very significant logistical problems. Among other things, finding adequate housing for all those people was a huge challenge, because the Sandinistas had, when they were on their way out the door, so to speak, basically trashed everything. The neighborhood in which most expatriates would have lived was called Las Colinas. I had visited it in 1971 and remembered it was a beautiful place that looked like East Lansing, Michigan. And they smashed it. The houses there were severely damaged, even to the point where the toilets were smashed. So, for the first several months after we re-established a USAID office in Managua, there literally weren't any places where people could live. So, we were all in a series of temporary accommodations. Most people were in what was called the Casa Grande, which was the former U.S. Ambassador's residence atop a big hill on the western side of Managua. For the first several months, there were at least ten American families living in the Casa Grande. And this created a considerable amount of friction. I avoided all that because I was in sort of a fleabag motel about two miles up the road. Several of us were there. My neighbors at that place were Russians, which was very strange since the Cold War had not yet ended and the Soviet Union, which had supported the Sandinistas, still existed. And during those first several months, none of us were able to get our cars, our household effects, or even our unaccompanied baggage, because none of us had a house to go to. These issues created real morale problems that a weaker mission director than Janet might have been overwhelmed by. But Janet was conspicuous by her dedication to duty. It's not that she was unsympathetic to people but she set an example. Her attitude was yeah, it's terrible. We have lousy housing, nobody has a car, nobody has their household effects. So what? Get on with it. And because she did, so did we.

All this was taking place in an atmosphere of an enormous political upheaval and demonstrations, almost daily demonstrations and burning of tires in the streets. Sometimes it wasn't safe to go from our temporary housing to the USAID Mission. The USAID mission, by the way, was no palace. We were in the embassy. The embassy was a series of temporary buildings that had been built in the aftermath of the earthquake. The earthquake happened in December 1972, so those buildings would have been constructed in early 1973 with an expected life of about five years. 18 years later we were still in the same buildings.

Q: Wow.

WASKIN: It was to the point where, if you weren't careful, you could literally push a hole in the wall in your office to the outside. Those structures were crumbling. And the spaces were small. USAID staff were three, four, five people to an office. So, we were all working very closely together, and most people were living very closely together, and we were doing so in a highly turbulent and insecure political environment. And that created some real tensions. But again, Janet Ballantyne led by example. I remember one morning we were told to stay home because it wasn't safe to drive to work. And Janet said, "They tell us we can't drive to work. So I'm going to walk." Which she did. (Both laugh) Now, you've got your Mission Director doing that, someone who says, "I'm just going to walk through all these Sandinista demonstrators because I'm not afraid of them," well, that's inspirational. And it's very difficult to complain and start feeling sorry for yourself when you have a leader who is that dedicated and that personally courageous – and who by the way has the complete confidence of the ambassador and knows everybody in the country. She overcame, and helped us overcome, our problems by the force of the example she set. And that was wonderful.

Q: Was that John Maisto? Was he the ambassador?

WASKIN: Harry Shlaudeman was the ambassador at that time.

Q: Oh, Harry Shlaudeman, okay.

WASKIN: Yes. He was a bit of a personality himself. I understand that he'd been retired and was called back by President Bush to be the ambassador to Nicaragua. My impression was that he really didn't want to be there. But I don't know. I never actually spoke to him. I gathered from the stories I heard that he was a tough character but Janet knew how to handle him.

Q: How long was the living situation like that?

WASKIN: It seemed like it lasted forever but it was really only a couple of months. Things started easing up, and people started to cheer up, when we started to get our POVs, our cars. I got mine after about six weeks, and that was a big deal. And if I remember correctly, I moved into my house in January 1991, which means that I was in that motel for something like four months. And I was one of the last people to move. So in retrospect our Executive Officer, Ed Aker, and his team really did a magnificent job getting so many properties ready simultaneously. And as people started getting their cars and moving into their houses and getting their household effects, and particularly once we moved out of the ramshackle Embassy and into a relatively new, modern office building, which happened in early 1991, our life in Nicaragua began to seem like a more normal situation.

So, in one sense, all was well that ended well. But I think the Agency should draw some important lessons from that experience. I remember that while we were still in this difficult transition phase, Art Danart, with whom I had served in Nairobi (he too had left

REDSO and moved to the Latin America Bureau but in Washington) came down to Nicaragua on TDY. And he asked me what I thought of the way things were going. And I replied, "I don't understand why dependents are here. This doesn't make any sense to me. This is premature. We assumed that since the Sandinistas had been voted out, and Doña Violeta was in power, Nicaragua had become a normal country and everything was fine. But it's not a normal country and everything is not fine, and there's no way on God's green earth we should have dependents here."

Q: Right.

WASKIN: In those kinds of transitional situations, people have enough stress on their plates without having to worry about their children and their spouses and their living situation. I didn't have those kinds of personal concerns at the time, but others did and there were some very unhappy spouses and very unhappy parents concerned about their kids. So, one lesson I would draw from Nicaragua is that we probably should be a little more careful about putting entire families into those kinds of situations.

Q: But families stayed even though there was a high amount of political instability and demonstrations and stuff throughout that period? They never evacuated?

WASKIN: Families stayed, right. No, there was never an order or a voluntary departure. I remember that after he heard my views, Art said to me "Well, Skip, if you voice that opinion then you're going to be saying there's something fundamentally wrong about U.S. policy on Nicaragua so maybe you shouldn't voice that opinion. Our official policy is that everything's fine, therefore, everything's fine."

Q: Right, that's probably happened many times in many countries.

WASKIN: Right. And gradually it did get better. But bringing in families so early after the change of government was I think premature, and it made things there more difficult than they needed to be.

Q: And so, you went as project development officer and presumably were designing programs. What kinds of programs?

WASKIN: I worked on the design or implementation of several programs. One was an immediate cash for work program, which basically involved a lot of road reconstruction. We were working with the new government to build cobblestone roads in secondary cities and towns. This wasn't classic development assistance, but we weren't terribly concerned. The idea was to get cash into the Nicaraguan economy very quickly. We were also doing a major procurement program on behalf of the government. We were buying them vehicles. We were buying them radios. We didn't have cell phones at the time or we would have been buying them cell phones. We were buying them office supplies. We were buying all the things that they didn't have because in addition to trashing the houses on their way out the door the Sandinistas had trashed government offices too. So we were procuring very basic commodities in an effort to gin up the ability of the government to

function, and through the road building program we were trying to push money out to the economy as fast as possible. So, initially, at least, it was not development programming, it was what we now call transition assistance. We didn't use that word at the time, but our initial program in Nicaragua was akin to what OTI (Office of Transition Initiatives) would do in present day USAID. It was stabilization programming as distinct from development programming.

Later on, meaning within a few months, the first development assistance program that I was involved in designing was a family planning program, working with a local organization called Pro Familia. They were strong and they had very clear ideas as to what they wanted to do. But we had to be a little careful in terms of how we framed this in a highly Catholic country like Nicaragua. The Catholic Church was very influential, and so family planning was perforce a controversial topic. And so Janet - and I think Liliana Ayalde went with her – went to meet with Archbishop, later Cardinal, Miguel Obando y Bravo. They briefed the Archbishop on the Pro Familia program. And according to Janet - I don't know whether this story is apocryphal or not - but according to Janet, the cardinal said, "Look, I know you have to do what you have to do. The Church has its position; you have yours." But he added, "I just want you to know, I've seen some of these Pro Familia commercials on TV and they've got these dancing condoms. Please, no more dancing condoms, all right?" (Both laugh) And Janet of course replied, "Your excellency, we can assure you, no more dancing condoms." (Both laugh)

After the Pro Familia project was approved, I worked very heavily on the design of the new Decentralized Health Services Project, which was to be our flagship effort in the health sector. I worked very closely on that with Liliana and with Kevin Armstrong, who'd arrived to be her deputy. That was the last Project Paper that I ever wrote in USAID and I thought it was a great paper. It was exactly the way a Project Paper ought to be written. I thought it would become a model for the future. But shortly after that the agency started the reengineering process, and as a consequence of that there was no further requirement for Project Papers.

Which, as I'll get into later when we talk about Afghanistan, I think helped USAID greatly. It might have been a shame from my parochial little position as a Project Development Officer, but on the whole it was good for USAID. You'll remember that the design process was very slow, very sclerotic. From flash to bang, from idea to approval it could easily take two years, or even three. By the time you got a Project Identification Document, a PID, written in the field and approved in Washington, and then a Project Paper written and approved in the field, and then launch a competitive procurement, two or three years could easily pass. And our experience in Nicaragua, where we didn't have that kind of time, helped crystallize the fact that we didn't have to do things that way. Even before re-engineering, we had begun to, for lack of a better word, cut corners. I remember that even before I got to Managua, as I was passing through the Latin America bureau for orientation, I met Elena Brineman, who was the head of LAC-TS (Latin America and the Caribbean-Technical Support). And she told me, "I just approved a PID for nineteen projects in Nicaragua." I said, "Nineteen projects. Oh, my God. How many PIDs?" And she showed me the document. It was a two-page document. It basically said,

"Here. This is an emergency. This is the PID. We're going to do this, this, this, this, this, this and this. Now, get to it." And I thought, "Ah-ha." The lightbulb went off. I realized that we could sidestep or modify the Handbook rules when circumstances required it.

Q; Yes, right.

WASKIN: You know, the rules are there for a reason and they can be helpful and you should aspire to follow them, but sometimes circumstances require that you move forward more quickly. And that was a useful lesson for me. Sometimes in emergency situations we have to move quickly. And we did.

Q: I've heard stories about Janet and Doña Violeta. Did you ever meet Mrs. Chamorro?

WASKIN: I never met Doña Violeta, no. I met her son-in-law, Antonio Lacayo, who was supposedly the power behind the throne. But I never met Doña Violeta. Several officers in the mission did meet her and Janet was said to be personally close to her. But I don't know that for a fact. I was told that she and Janet talked often on the phone. And I think that's another attribute of Janet's, that she inspired that kind of confidence at the highest levels of the host country's government. It was a rare skill. She was a unique officer, to have those kinds of relationships. But I wasn't part of that.

Q: I had also heard Janet talk about Bob Gersony and the work he did in the eastern coastal area. Did you have any personal involvement with that or contact?

WASKIN: Yes, I did. And Bob too became a lifelong friend. Bob, as you know, before working in Nicaragua had worked in Mozambique and had done really incredibly brave work going out in areas that were controlled by RENAMO. He went everywhere in that country and came back with highly credible, on the ground, first-person reporting of the sort that became the hallmark of his career. When I was on Capitol Hill on detail to the Appropriations Committee, we brought Bob up to brief us, not to testify but just to brief the committee staff. And he spent, I think, six hours with us, talking about what he found on the ground in Mozambique. It was fascinating. When Gersony gives a presentation it is absolutely spellbinding. So, I knew him. Then one day, late in the afternoon in I think December of 1990, I bumped into Janet walking around the hallway with a piece of paper and a puzzled look on her face. So I asked her whether there was anything I could help her with. She said, "Well, I'm doing this thing called a PIO/T. I need to fill it out. Do you know how to do it?" I said, "Ma'am, why don't you give that to me? I'll take care of it." (Peasley laughs) "Now, who's it for?" And she said, "It's for this guy named Bob Gersony." I said, "Oh, I know Bob Gersony." She said, "Really?" And I said, "Yeah, sure." And I told her the story of how I knew him from my time on detail with the Appropriations Committee a year and a half before. So, I wrote the PIO/T that we used to bring Bob on board. But that was the end of my direct involvement in Bob's work. Shortly after that, my boss, the head of the Project Development Office, John Cloutier, took it on as a personal responsibility to help get Bob's program off the ground. And John did so very effectively.

Again, here's another example of the kind of talent that we had in USAID/Nicaragua: in addition to all the superstars I've mentioned already we had Bob Gersony. And Bob, later joined by his long-time colleague, Tony Jackson, went out to Puerto Cabezas, and from their base there started employment generation programs – building, with local labor only, roads and bridges, planting trees, and providing seeds and other agricultural inputs. This was an extraordinary accomplishment, particularly inasmuch as this was a very difficult part of Nicaragua to get to. You couldn't really get there by road, you had to fly. And it was socially and indeed politically disconnected from the rest of Nicaragua. For one thing, at least half of the people out there didn't speak Spanish. They spoke English or Creole. So, it was a very different culture out on the Atlantic coast. Gersony and Jackson were real pioneers to go out there and start development programs because nobody else was working in that area. Nobody. In Robert Kaplan's book about Gersony, "*The Good American*", he writes that Violeta Chamorro basically subcontracted the eastern half of her country to Janet Ballantyne, and Janet in turn subcontracted it to Bob Gersony. And I think there is a lot of truth in that. In any case, I know that Janet, and all of us, really, regarded the Atlantic Coast program as a real feather in the cap of the mission.

Q: Yes.

WASKIN: Bob and Tony would come back to Managua about once a month, but they spent most of their time out in the field. In his book, Kaplan points out that the work on the Atlantic Coast represented one of the few times in Gersony's career that he stayed in a job for more than six or nine months. He was on the Atlantic Coast for four years, from 1991 to 1995. That says a lot about the dedication that he had to the program, and to Janet.

Q: So, you were there for three years and obviously, from the beginning it was a massive buildup of the mission and of the program. Yet, the political situation was still iffy throughout that period. Is that correct? Were there demonstrations and other things happening?

WASKIN: Yes, there were.

Q: Didn't the Sandinistas come back in the next election?

WASKIN: They didn't come to power in the next election. The next election was held in 1996 and was won by Arnoldo Alemán, who was the mayor of Managua and a well-known figure on the right of the political spectrum. He won a landslide victory over Ortega and became the president. Alemán served a five-year term and was succeeded by Enrique Bolaños, who won a similarly large victory over Ortega in 2001. Reading from afar about these back-to-back landslides, I assumed the Sandinistas were finished as a political force. I was wrong. Even though he received only 38 percent of the vote, a smaller percentage than he had in 2001, Ortega was re-elected in 2006. The problem was that the anti-Sandinista forces had splintered and divided their vote among two candidates. Those two candidates together received well over 50 percent of the vote, but

Ortega was first past the post. The electoral system did not allow for a run-off. In my opinion, that was a terrible tragedy for Nicaragua. It never should have happened. Ortega snuck back into power through an electoral quirk, and he is still there today.

Q: Oh, okay.

WASKIN: So, there was about a sixteen-year period in which there were three anti-Sandinista presidents until Daniel Ortega returned in 2006. But throughout that period – and certainly during the three years I was there – there was always a great deal of turmoil. The Sandinistas had no intention of going away quietly, and for years they exploited the fact that there was a profound lack of any kind of political consensus. Both sides were vehemently opposed to the other, and one side, the anti-Sandinista side, was riven by factional disputes. I'm no expert on Nicaragua, but to me, as a foreign observer, it seemed that everyone's default stance was, "The position that I am taking on these issues is the only reasonable position that anyone could possibly take and anyone who does not take this set of positions is either an idiot or a criminal or both." That is not a great starting point from which to find common ground and compromise. There was not, in my view, any sort of desire on either the right wing or the left wing to find that dialogue, to find that kind of compromise. And as for the Sandinistas, their preferred way of conducting a political dialogue was through mobilization of, as Janet called it, the "heavier element" on the streets, the gangs of what they called *turbas*, basically violent thugs whom they could mobilize on short notice to take to the streets with their burning tires and slingshots and megaphones. So, even in the immediate aftermath of Chamorro's election, it was never a comfortable place. It seemed that something was always about to happen. It was the first time in my career that I kept a go-bag packed because it seemed to me that at any moment the situation could light up. And while it never actually did "light up" while I was there, it also never really calmed down. Things were always kind of on ready.

Q: How possible was it for the programs to be implemented successfully in that kind of an environment?

WASKIN: Well, we had some very dedicated and talented counterparts both inside and outside the government. For example, Profamilia had been working since 1971, first under the Somoza dictatorship, which was probably no picnic, and then in the aftermath of the civil war, which ended in 1979. By the time we arrived and granted funds to them they had already been operating successfully, under 20 years of dictatorship, first of the right and then of the left, so political controversy, violence, fighting was all par for the course for them. And we worked with some really extraordinarily dedicated Nicaraguans who were, like Janet, very personally courageous.

I mentioned that we were designing the Decentralized Health Service Project. As part of that we went to meet with the Deputy Minister of Health in her office downtown late one afternoon. I believe that our group consisted of Mark Silverman, who had replaced Ken Schofield as the Deputy Mission Director in mid-1992, Kevin Armstrong, and myself. We realized as we were leaving the embassy and heading over to her office, which was

about a three- or four-mile drive, that there were mobs forming in the streets. So we were a little nervous as to whether this meeting should continue or not. But we continued, and the meeting began as scheduled in her office on the second or third floor of the ministry. And as we were sitting in the meeting, we could hear a mob chanting around the building, and what sounded like gunshots. Then, suddenly boom, boom, mortars were being fired in the direction of the building. I looked around at my colleagues, thinking maybe we ought not to be there. And the Deputy Minister, an extraordinary woman named Marta Palacios who later became the Minister, was just sipping her water. Actually, the only sign of nervousness she betrayed was that at one point she reached over and began sipping my water. The idea of stopping the meeting just because of a little mortar fire never occurred to her. Or maybe it did but she wasn't going to do it.

My point is that these programs, if they were to be implemented successfully, required the engagement of some extraordinarily dedicated people. And happily there were and are such people in Nicaragua, both then and now. I give them all kinds of credit.

Q; Yeah. Now, you mentioned the family planning program being done with Pro Familia, which I assume is a Nicaraguan organization.

WASKIN: Nicaraguan organization, yes.

Q: Since AID has been focusing so much on localization recently, how did your experience with Pro Familia influence how you think about working directly with local organizations?

WASKIN: Well, I wasn't there long enough to see it in the long-term so I can't comment on what the long-term success of Pro Familia was. I know that USAID continued to work with them well into the 21st Century. And it was certainly our opinion at the time that they were very much a viable partner. This was an example of a project that was not designed by us. It wasn't Liliana as the technical officer putting forward her ideas, or of me as the project development officer assembling them and then imposing them on the local organization to sign. This was really the local organization saying, "Look, here's our program. Now, how much of this can you support?" They were the ones leading it. And this was really the first time in my experience that I'd had that sort of interaction with a local organization, and frankly, I was a little uncomfortable with it because I wasn't used to doing business that way. It was not the way I had worked in Zaire or elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa. But working with Pro Familia made clear to me that I was in a different place, in every sense of the word. And one of the characteristics of this new place was the existence of very strong local organizations like Pro Familia that not only had their own views but had the skill to put them forward in a way that a donor like USAID could accept them.

Now, did they have everything you'd want an organization to have? Did they have the right accounting systems and internal controls and procurement mechanisms and all that? I don't know. I became much more sensitive to those sorts of things later in my career, but at that point I wasn't examining them through that lens. What I can say is that this

was one example of a real partnership with a local organization. Similarly, when we went to see the Deputy Minister of Health, it was not a courtesy call. We went there to actually work with the ministry to share our plans with them and to find out what kind of programs they wanted.

Q: No, that's good. You'd mentioned Ambassador Shlaudeman earlier. Was he there the entire time you were there?

WASKIN: He was there, yes.

Q: How were relationships with the embassy generally and did you have much contact with them?

WASKIN: I really didn't. Of course, we were all working in the same building so I had a lot of social contact with these folks. But Janet handled that sort of thing herself. The ambassador was her account, so to speak, and she handled it extremely well.

Q: Okay. Did you have to go back to Washington at all during this period to defend programs or explain programs?

WASKIN: I did not. I was too junior in the hierarchy to do that. That changed somewhat in mid-1992, when John Cloutier left to become AID Representative in Lithuania, and I became the acting office director for several months. This was at a time when, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, USAID's attention turned very rapidly from Central America to Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

Q: (Laughs) Right.

WASKIN: So, suddenly, that dynamic that I mentioned about how talent follows political priorities took root, and money began to flow away from Central America and toward Eastern Europe. John's departure was part of that. Being the acting office director was great for me, because that was the first time I really got to interact directly with Janet. And then, a delightful man named Doc Odle arrived in late 1992 and headed the office for about the last nine months I was there. So, not being an office director I was—

Q: Right.

WASKIN: —not in a position to interact directly with AID/Washington or to go there to defend our programs. I started interacting with Washington in my next assignment in Honduras, but not when I was in Nicaragua.

Q: Was Washington coming down frequently to provide support?

WASKIN: Oh, all the time, yes, all the time. (Peasley laughs) They were providing support and asking questions.

Q: Being helpful?

WASKIN: They were generally helpful, yes. They certainly intended to be helpful. We had a lot of people coming down to Nicaragua. That included a lot of people from USAID Washington but also a lot of higher profile types. You might walk down the hallway in the mission and suddenly find a United States Senator walking toward you. That happened to me once; I literally bumped into Senator Paul Coverdell.

Q: Right. In fact, yeah, I assume that there was a lot of congressional interest in what was going on and—

WASKIN: Great deal, yes.

Q: So, did you have any exposure to any of the CODELs or STAFFDELs?

WASKIN: Not to CODELs or STAFFDELs, but I had a lot of exposure to the auditors. There was a concurrent audit of all our programs going on of all our work throughout the time I was there. A "concurrent audit" meant that the auditors were watching everything we were doing as we were doing it, to the point where they'd literally be looking over your shoulder and wanting to read what you were typing on your computer. It never happened to me, but I understand that in some cases they actually asked people to pull up a draft of what they were writing and print it. And of course, we asked Janet, "Are we supposed to be doing this? I mean, this is just a draft. It doesn't represent anything but one officer's own work product." And Janet's guidance was that we should give the auditors what they ask for. "Don't give them any more, don't give them what they don't ask for, but give them what they ask for. And if they have an issue with that then they can take it up with me." So, there was that sort of pressure.

The member of Congress who was most interested in our programs was Senator Jesse Helms, an archconservative Republican from North Carolina who was extremely concerned—and not incorrectly so - about the property of American citizens, particularly American citizens who were his constituents, that had been confiscated by the Sandinistas. He wanted to know how they were going to get that property back, and what we were doing to facilitate that outcome. And he often threatened to put a hold on, and at some points did put a hold on, all assistance to Nicaragua, over the property issue. And so our program became very controversial.

Q: Ah. So—but he was supportive of the Chamorro government?

WASKIN: He was supportive of the Chamorro government, but my guess is that he was also suspicious of it because he viewed the Chamorro government as having been highly penetrated by Sandinista elements. Obviously, I think they were happy that the Sandinistas were out of power but for Senator Helms and his staff the restoration of property rights of American citizens was of paramount importance and they thought the Chamorro government was dragging its feet, not moving fast enough.

Q: Well, that sounds like a very interesting assignment. (Laughs)

WASKIN: It was. And there's one more aspect of that assignment that I would be remiss in not including in this oral history. I only found out about it, as we all did, many years later. One of our most talented officers was our Regional Legal Advisor, Marta Velázquez, who was a dear friend of Liliana's and a friend, certainly, of mine. I hosted her at my home several times, and I worked with literally every day. She was a U.S. Direct Hire employee holding a top-secret security clearance. And an intimate part of the leadership of the mission. Very sadly, it was later revealed that Marta was, during all her time in Nicaragua and in her subsequent assignments, one of which was Moscow, a spy for the Cuban government. This was shocking and I think heartbreaking to all of us. We all felt an incredible sense of betrayal and disappointment. It's hard to overstate how stunned we all were. I couldn't be more surprised if I were to learn that you, Carol, were in fact a spy. At first I couldn't believe it, and as I looked back on my interactions with Marta I could not recall any evidence of it. But then Joe Williams reminded me that Marta used to leave the office every night with huge bags of paper for her to work on at home. But despite this, she was a bottleneck in the clearance process. I recall that her desk always had stacks and stacks of papers on it waiting for her review. I recall going to her a couple of times and saying, "Marta, you've got to clear these documents. We've got to move forward." And her reply was "I'm getting to it, I'm getting to it, but I'm overwhelmed." And she was a real stickler about the rules. She would not allow us to accept any kind of social invitation from our contractors, or even frequent flyer points. We had to give frequent flyer points back to the airlines because in her view, these were earned by the U.S. Government, not by us, and thus it was unethical for us to accept those points in our personal accounts. She was very, very strict in her interpretation of the rules. And then, as I reflected on it, I realized that well, yeah, Marta was in my house, but did I ever dine at her house? No. I don't even know where Marta lived. I was never in her house. (Peasley laughs) And what was she doing at night with all those documents that she never seemed to read? Well, now I realize that she was probably photographing them. So, in retrospect it makes sense, but it was not at all clear, or even suspicious, at the time.

Q: When did that all come to light?

WASKIN: I think it came to light publicly when she was formally indicted in 2013. That's when I found out about it.

Q: Okay, so quite a long time—

WASKIN: I understand that the authorities got on her trail around 2001, shortly after another agent that she had recruited was arrested, and that she resigned from the Foreign Service and moved to Sweden – she had married a Swedish diplomat – in 2002, apparently one step ahead of the law. And Sweden, conveniently for her, does not have an extradition treaty with the United States. But it's my understanding that if she ever tries to cross an international border or leave Sweden she will be arrested immediately. It's a very sad situation.

Q: That's very interesting.

And so, after three years, then I assume, knowing how the Latin America bureau used to work, they were talking to you about what other positions there might be available in Latin America for you?

WASKIN: Yes, that's exactly right. They were talking about what other positions could be available for me. As it turned out, there was a job right up the road as the head of the Office of Development Finance in USAID/Honduras. The Mission Director there was Buster Brown, Marshall D. Brown, another legendary figure in the history of USAID. I believe Buster was the Assistant Administrator for the LAC Bureau in the early 1980s, and he had been in various senior positions since then, including Mission Director of USAID/Egypt, which at the time was the largest USAID Mission in the world. And then he came to Honduras. Buster was another force of nature and another tremendous role model for me. I don't know whether he talked to Janet, but somehow he heard about me and invited me to come to Tegucigalpa and see whether I had the stuff to take on the role of office director there. And this seemed to me like a dream assignment, a great job in what was then a very tranquil and inviting country. When I was in Nicaragua we often went to Honduras just for the weekend.

Q; Yeah.

WASKIN: We would drive across the border and go to Danli, the closest town on the Honduran side, just to get the heck out of Nicaragua and have some calmness and normality, as at the time Honduras seemed calm and normal and relatively safe. And so for me the prospect of going to Honduras and working for Buster was very attractive. So after three years in Nicaragua I was assigned to Honduras, where I found a very different environment and very different set of challenges, and a very different kind of mission. And I stayed there for a long time.

USAID/Honduras, Director, Office of Development Finance, 1993 - 1997

Q: What was the program like at that point in time in the mid-nineties?

WASKIN: The Honduras program was in an interesting phase when I arrived. In a certain sense, it wasn't a great time to be there because whereas at the height of the Contra war, we were pumping a lot of money into Honduras, by the time I arrived that number had declined precipitously. In FY 1985, total U.S. assistance to Honduras was almost $686 million; by FY 1993, that had declined to $88 million, and by FY 1996 it would slip to $36 million. So this was very different from Nicaragua. In Nicaragua, at least for the first two years of my time there, money was no object. We were a high foreign policy priority. We were going to spend as much as we needed to and we were going to design new programs. That's a great situation to be in when you're a Project Development Officer. In Honduras, we faced the challenge of lowering expectations, for we didn't have nearly as much money as we had had just a couple of years earlier. That was, I think, a bit of a

difficult role for us to play. It was certainly hard for me; it's a lot more fun to be Santa Claus than it is to be Scrooge.

You asked what the mission was involved in. The mission was involved in everything. It was your standard full-service USAID mission. When I say everything, I mean to say we had agricultural programs, we had environmental programs, we had health programs, we had democracy programs, we had education programs. Every sector in which USAID operates on a worldwide basis was replicated in miniature in Honduras in some fashion. And, unlike Nicaragua, this was not a transition program; it was a development program. We were not throwing money quickly at problems. From 1980 until about 1991, Honduras had been a foreign policy priority. By the time I got there in 1993 it was a backwater in terms of policy priorities. But it was a serious development program staffed by a very competent team.

I found two things there that really contributed to my professional growth. One was that Buster, having been a Project Development Officer himself, had very much looked to my predecessor, Rich Whelden, as his de facto Chief-of-Staff. And he really counted on the Office of Development Finance, which was the Mission's de facto project development office, to keep the trains running on time. Buster was quite serious about that. He expected that nothing would reach him unless it was first cleared by Rich, or, after he left and I arrived, by me. And if there was a problem with a document that reached him, Buster didn't hold the drafter accountable; he held me accountable. This was a very new experience for me. In REDSO, I flashed in and out, did these often very quick designs, and then left. In Nicaragua, I had an important role to play, but I wasn't formally a leader of that mission. But when I got to Honduras and attended my first substantive meeting, and the discussion reached a point where a decision had to be made, I realized that everyone in the room had turned to look at me. And I thought to myself, "What in the world? Why are they all looking at me?" And then I realized that, oh, I'm the one that has to make this decision. So I'd better make it. And I did. I don't remember what the issue was, but whatever it was, I made the decision. That was an important milestone for me.

The other thing that I discovered quickly was that in the years that we'd had a large assistance program in Honduras, we had had a lot of policy-based assistance and a significant food aid program there, both of which generated local currency. I had a very talented Honduran professional, Marcela Moya, who was responsible for our relationship with the Honduran Ministry of Finance and for monitoring this local currency counterpart account. And of course I asked her how much money was in that account. She gave me the number in lempiras, and after I did a quick calculation I asked her "Am I doing this calculation correctly, Marcela? I'm coming out with $50 million U.S." She said, "Yeah, that's what it is, it's the equivalent of $50 million U.S dollars." I said, "You mean this pot of money over there in the ministry is larger than the entire annual budget of the mission?" "That's correct." "And we control this pot of money here in our little Office of Development Finance?" "That's correct." "Oh, okay." (Peasley laughs) Well now, that made everything in Honduras seem more attractive. And so, a major focus of my time in Tegucigalpa became that of working with the Ministry of Finance to decide what we were going to do with this money, because it was an all but invisible but nonetheless

significant part of the U.S. assistance program to Honduras. The agreement was that we would program it jointly with the government. So, every year we would work with the MOF to develop a budget for using a portion of those funds. And sometimes they wanted to use it for some crazy things. One year they wanted to buy new uniforms for the presidential band, for instance. We insisted, and ultimately they agreed, that the money would be used for development purposes, and that we would not spend all of it at once but rather that we would save some for a rainy day. I left Honduras in 1997, but when Hurricane Mitch hit in 1998 they still had a lot of that money and a lot of it was used for emergency response to that disaster. And I was proud of that. I was glad we didn't buy the uniforms for the band.

Q: How were decisions made on local currency—how did you judiciously use it? Was it to support the overall mission strategy?

WASKIN: It did, in part.

Q: Were you working with the ministry?

WASKIN: We were. The agreement didn't say that the funds had to be in support of the USAID strategy. It just said that we would jointly program these funds with the Ministry of Finance. But I took the stance that the best way to proceed would be to identify where the priorities of our CDCS (Country Development Cooperation Strategy) overlapped with the priorities of the Honduran government and then program the money for those shared priorities. And they were fine with that. We had a very productive working relationship. And again, this was an example of real empowerment of the host government. I didn't walk over there and dictate priorities to my Honduran counterparts, who were extraordinarily professional people. I worked with them to find common ground."

Q: Yes, that's interesting. When we discussed Nicaragua, you referred to your last project paper. So, did you do any project design work in Honduras?

WASKIN: Yeah, we did. But when I arrived in Honduras in mid-1993, there was a new administration in the United States. The Clinton-Gore Administration had taken office and Vice President Gore was given a mandate to reinvent government.

Q: That's right.

WASKIN: Well, that mandate flowed down to USAID and was really taken quite seriously by a gentleman who became the Assistant Administrator for Management, whom you will recall, Mr. Larry Byrne. So, a lot of my time in Honduras was spent on dealing with the ramifications of the process that Mr. Byrne launched, which was called reengineering.

Mr. Byrne sought to make, and to a large extent succeeded in making, very fundamental and long-lasting changes in how the agency does business. Some of those changes have proven very positive, I think, in the long-term and some of them have had and continue to

have very negative consequences. One of those changes was that Mr. Byrne very quickly made it known that in his mind USAID was a funding mechanism, not a design mechanism. So, therefore, we weren't going to design projects any longer. In fact, we weren't even going to have projects. "Project" became a word that he wanted banned from the vernacular. And so, we had to use another term, and for a time Washington told us to use the ungainly term "Results Packages". I don't know who came up with that one. I think my buddy, David McCloud, came up with that (Peasley laughs; unintelligible). I still tell David, "That's your word, wasn't it?" Or maybe it was Tony Pryor. I don't know who came up with it. But I never liked it because it makes no sense. Particularly in Spanish: "*Paquete de Resultados*". Makes you sound like a babbling idiot, you know. I used that once with my Honduran counterparts and they replied "What are you talking about? You mean a "*Proyecto*"? "Yes, I mean a *Proyecto*, exactly." (Peasley laughs) More fundamentally, though, from Mr. Byrne's perspective, the agency was crippled by bureaucracy and needed to strip away these layers of requirements, strip away many of the things that I had made my living by doing for much of the previous 13 years. Things that I'd become quite expert at doing - writing Project Identification Documents, writing Project Papers, designing assistance programs, Mr. Byrne decided we weren't going to do anymore. In his mind we were a contracting agency or a grant-making agency and that's all we should do. Our planning should be limited to the strategic level, and then we should leave it to industry or to implementers, whether they be U.S. or a host country, to actually design the projects and then do the work. That was Mr. Byrne's mindset.

Now, all this was to be implemented through the installation of a visionary technology called the New Management System, the NMS. The NMS was to be a worldwide, real-time IT platform that would integrate the activities we were supporting, the objectives that they were supposed to achieve, and the funding we were providing. All this was to be immediately available to everyone in the Agency, worldwide, at the touch of a button or the flick of a keystroke. It was a great concept, but it was way ahead of its time. In fact, it's a concept that the Agency is only now getting around to fully implementing with the rollout of the Development Information Solution, or DIS, which is in many ways the heir of the NMS. But it was far, far too ahead of its time because the information technology infrastructure of 1995, with the internet in its infancy, could not support it. It literally did not have the bandwidth to support what Mr. Byrne wanted to accomplish. Through the NMS, he intended to abolish all paper copies of "Project Implementation Orders", or PIOs. Instead, all procurement requests were to be initiated via the NMS. And I was designated as the point person in USAID Honduras for implementing the NMS. And lo and behold, Mr. Byrne decided to go out to the field to see how the NMS was working there, and the mission that he picked to visit was Honduras. So, I got to be real up close and personal with Larry Byrne. He was a very intense guy. But I agreed in some respects with the direction that he wanted to take the agency. I agreed that we had to dispense with administrative processes that added no value. I didn't reach the same conclusions that he did in terms of which processes were of no value; I thought for example, that the idea we would no longer be involved in project design was very dangerous and would really hurt the agency in the long-term. Mark Silverman once referred to it as "contracting out our brains", and I think he was right. But

some of the changes Byrne pushed through helped the Agency in the long-term. I'll talk more about that when we discuss my time in Afghanistan.

But in the short-term, the mandate that we use the NMS and only the NMS paralyzed us at one point. For a time, we were directed not to start any procurement actions unless we first entered them in the NMS. But the NMS didn't work. The auditors, of course, were hugely interested in the NMS and all the money that was being spent on it, and they, too, wanted to see what was going on. And I remember I had to sit at my desk with an auditor standing behind me saying, "All right, enter a procurement action into the New Management System and let's see how long it takes in real time." And I duly typed in the relevant information and hit the enter button and nothing happened. Nothing. The system kept showing the little blue circle of death spinning and spinning on the screen. And they actually called Larry Byrne to say that, "We are in Tegucigalpa and we're watching this thing in real time, your system is not working." And Larry replied, "Well, it must be user error. That's a poorly trained employee." Suffice it to say that I was not a poorly trained employee. I'd been trained in Washington on how to enter data into the NMS. This was not a user error; this was a systemic problem.

Q: Because you were a pilot mission for re-engineering and the NMS?

WASKIN: We were a pilot mission, yes. Ultimately, reality prevailed, and the Agency acknowledged that the procurement component of the NMS was not working and so stopped requiring that we use it to initiate procurement requests. But rather than admitting failure and just returning to the old system of PIOs, they came up with something called a Modified Acquisition and Assistance Request Document, a MAARD, which we could prepare in hard copy. It was called "modified" because it was supposed to be used only temporarily until the NMS got up and running. I think the Agency used it for another fifteen years. MAARDs were just a PIO by another name. But the NMS misadventure cost the Agency far more than just the use of a silly name for a document. I understand that we spent more than $100 million of scarce OE money on it. And as a direct consequence of that, in 1996, we were forced to endure a "RIF", a Reduction in Force. And we had to "RIF" – in other words fire –200 employees, including some of our very best and brightest.

Q: Including two that you've talked about that—

WASKIN: I've talked about earlier, right, yes.

Q: —you enjoyed working with, yes.

WASKIN: Two of the best officers I ever worked with, Steve Norton and Dick Day, whom I indeed enjoyed working with and from whom learned a great deal. Due to the foolish mechanics of the RIF process, which was supposed to be performance-based but was not, we lost some very talented people. Let me just cite one case by way of illustration. Every mission had to come up with a candidate to be RIF'd. In Honduras, we had gone through our annual employee evaluation process, which by that time was no

longer just between the rating officer and the employee but rather involved a panel of people in each individual evaluation. Since I was a senior office director, I chaired several of these panels and it was our unanimous consensus that the finest officer in the mission, the most deserving of promotion, was the deputy head of our education office, Ned Van Steenwyk, who was first-rate. Yet when the time came, only a few months later, that we had to put someone on the list to be RIF'd, because of the way the RIF rules functioned - they were looking for people who hadn't been promoted in more than two years and were at a certain grade level - we had to put forward Ned Van Steenwyk's name. This was the guy we had all identified as our best performer, and yet we had no choice but to recommend that he be fired. Such was the absurdity of that RIF exercise. It had some very pernicious effects.

By contrast, one area where I think reengineering had some very good effects was that it helped break down stovepipes within the mission, as it encouraged us to organize our work by strategic objective rather than by office. I was very much in favor of that and, with the full support of Elena Brineman, who became the Mission Director when Buster retired in the summer of 1995, worked very hard to make that vision a reality. She and I encouraged people to work in cross-office teams organized not by technical backstop, or by project, but by Strategic Objective. As we conceived it, to be successful, each team needed to be a sort of mini mission, with access to all the resources of the mission. So, each team would have a technical officer, would have a program officer responsible for finances, would have a controller responsible for tracking the money, and would have a contracting officer responsible for procurement. Each team even had somebody from the executive office. And all these team members would be equally responsible for achieving the team's objectives. This would be in stark contrast to – and I don't mean to be harsh, but I have to be candid - the classic USAID approach where certain people called technical officers were responsible for trying to achieve things and other people called program officers and contracting officers and controllers were responsible for making sure they didn't do anything stupid. We wanted to break through that long standing dichotomy and put everybody on teams where they were collectively responsible for achieving results. In Honduras, we took this very seriously. We established team charters and rosters of team membership. For some people, who had been around a long time and were used to the old way of doing business, it was a painful process, but we were making it work. This approach vested, of course, a lot of responsibility in the team leaders, who were the directors of technical offices, and probably a little bit less responsibility in the directors of support offices like myself, but I think that was the right way to go. I remember at one point, late in my tenure in Honduras, probably in the spring of 1997, looking around my office for my staff. And I had some really outstanding people working for me in Tegucigalpa. In the early days, in addition to Marcela Moya, I had Thomas Johnson and Liza Valenzuela, and then later in my tour Richard Loudis. Roberta Cavitt, and Sara Walter, who later became a Mission Director herself, joined our office. But on this afternoon, I couldn't find any of them. Nobody was in the office. Where were they? Well, I was told, they're all meeting with their teams. Dick is down here and Sara is over there (Peasley laughs). "Good," I thought to myself. "That's what they're supposed to be doing." (Peasley laughs)

Q: Since you mentioned FSNs, I assume that many FSNs in Honduras had been there for many years. Did the Strategic Objective teams help to empower them and give them greater responsibility? Or how did they fit into the scheme of change?

WASKIN: We had many FSNs who had been there for many years, and I think the team structure fitted them very well. Honduras was a mission with extraordinarily talented FSNs who had been there for years, many of whom went on to very distinguished careers outside USAID. Marcela Moya, who was the master of all local currency budgeting, ended up going to CABEI (the Central American Bank for Economic Integration) and in fact just retired this year from a nearly thirty-year career with them. Guillermo Alvarado-Downing from our agriculture office later became Minister of Agriculture and was a candidate for the vice presidency of Honduras. So, Honduras was already a mission that relied very heavily on the talents and institutional knowledge of its Foreign Service Nationals even under the non-reengineered, old structure. And I think that as responsibility was decentralized to the SO Teams this made their roles, which were already important, even more important. And again, I think that was one of the positive consequences of reengineering. And to give credit where credit is due, there were a lot of talented people working very hard in Washington to steer the reengineering process toward positive outcomes. People like Phyllis Dichter Forbes, the former Mission Director in Madagascar who was very much involved in the reengineering effort. People like Carlos Pascual, whom I first met at a REDSO scheduling conference in 1989 when he was a junior PDO in Mozambique and who ended up being Ambassador first to Ukraine and later to Mexico. He was very instrumental in this reengineering effort, as was David McCloud, who had been a colleague of mine at the bilateral mission in Kenya when I was in REDSO. So, a lot of skilled, highly experienced, highly well-intentioned people sought to reform the agency and make it more effective. And while they broke a lot of china, as it were, along the way, they also did some very good things that benefit the agency to this day. And the notion of working in teams, which when I became a mission director I tried to promote, was one of those good things. Elena Brineman took that very seriously and wanted her mission modeled that way, and one of my major goals there was to help her do that.

Q: It sounds like a lot of time was spent internally on management and how to reform how USAID operated. While you were in Honduras, did you have much contact with the embassy or were there issues of a more political nature that you were also having to deal with at this time?

WASKIN: Except when I was Acting Mission Director, at that point in my career I didn't spend a lot of time interacting with the Embassy. The embassy was physically literally just across the street from us, but I personally didn't have a lot to do with them. That's something that changed greatly in the latter part of my career. But in the mid-1990s, at least for a guy in my position, it hadn't changed yet.

That said, there were some significant interagency issues that revolved around the question of how USAID employees were treated as opposed to how employees of other agencies – for example, the State Department – were treated. And one of those issues

involved me, so let me start with that. On the day before Christmas in 1995, I had an automobile accident. Somebody ran into me when I was traveling with my family in a rural area in northern Honduras about an hour west of San Pedro Sula. And whereas the USAID mission was extremely supportive and helped me out – in fact sent a car up to San Pedro Sula on Christmas Day to bring us home – when, as often happens to foreigners in such situations, I was indicted, charged with a crime, and ordered to appear in court, the Regional Security Officer declared that the Embassy would refuse to defend me. He said, "You're not on the diplomatic list. So, we're not going to defend you, we're not going to claim diplomatic immunity. You have to go to court on your own." And so I did. I hired a local lawyer and went back up to San Pedro Sula and appeared in court several weeks later. Happily, my lawyer was really smart, and she convinced the judge that the accident could not possibly have happened the way the police described it. But instead of dismissing the case, the judge ordered a new trial, which meant I would have had to take more time off from work and drive up to San Pedro Sula again. I couldn't keep wasting that kind of time. So I solved the problem by paying the guy that hit me, whose name was Jose Stalin Fajardo – yes, his middle name was Stalin – about $700 to fix his pickup truck. Case dismissed.

I mention all this not because of myself. I resolved the situation with relatively minimal financial damage. But this created a real issue among all the U.S. direct hires in the USAID Mission because they suddenly realized that none of them were on the diplomatic list, either. Heck, who even knew there was such a thing as a diplomatic list? They realized that therefore we were all in that country without diplomatic or legal protection. And the State Department's position was, basically, "Not our problem,"

Q: But you—at that point, everyone had a diplomatic passport, correct?

WASKIN: I pointed that out. I was carrying a black diplomatic passport, and their answer was, "But you're not on the diplomatic list."

Q: Yes, okay.

WASKIN: They did say, "If you're incarcerated, we will get you out." Thank you. At least that was a relief. Fortunately, I was not incarcerated, so I never had to put that promise to the test. And I knew that what they really meant was that if I was incarcerated, they would get me out of jail – and then send me back to the U.S. and curtail my assignment to Honduras.

The other episode that I want to describe is something that happened much earlier, back in 1993 when I first got there. At that time, we, USAID, were predicting that there was going to be a major rainfall shortage and therefore that Honduras, which depends on hydro for its energy, was going to experience severe energy shortages and probably rolling blackouts beginning in the summer of 1994. And that is precisely what happened. The USAID Mission, having predicted this, prepared for it by purchasing generators for every expatriate family. The State Department did not. And so, when the blackouts began and ran for twelve hours a day, USAID staff could have had generators, but State

Department families would not have had them. And so the Country Team, "in the interest of post morale", decided that USAID could not deploy its generators – which had already been purchased and were sitting in a warehouse – until the State Department got generators for everybody on its staff. So, six months went by and we endured, every day, lengthy and highly unpredictable power cuts. I actually had to work at night by candlelight. At one point, I had a paper, a USAID document, in my hand that caught fire as I was reviewing it. I had to take it into the office the next day, and I said to the drafter of the paper "This is not a criticism of your work. I swear, it caught fire by accident." Eventually, the generators for the State Department folks arrived, and as they installed theirs we were allowed to install ours. But whereas our generators were basically lawnmower engines, which had to be started manually, made a tremendous racket, and gave off a very strong scent of gasoline, State had ordered state-of-the-art generators which started automatically and made almost no noise except for a faint whirring sound. And of course, there was no acknowledgement that perhaps this disparity might have had an impact on post morale, too. But by the point we at USAID were happy just finally to be able to run our little lawnmower engines. I bring this episode up not by way of complaining, but just to illustrate that there was an obvious disparity in how people were treated depending on the agency by which they were employed,

Q: Okay, that's a very interesting and important addition. Perhaps you should have said that the generators that AID had were for people who were not on the diplomatic list. (Both laugh)

WASKIN: Good point. I wish I'd said that. Good advice. (Laughs)

Q: Okay. So, again, those are really valuable further insights on Honduras.

Was it relatively stable in Honduras at this period? Were you able to travel around the country, or was the program focused in only certain areas of the country?

WASKIN: It was stable and safe and we were able to travel all over the country, except for those areas in the far northeast that were simply too remote to get to. And we did. We visited the very hot lowlands in the south and the mountains and forests in the central part of the country and up to the Atlantic coast in the north, which was in many ways similar to the Atlantic coast in Nicaragua, a bit of a backwater, but not nearly as isolated and therefore much more developed economically. Honduras' Atlantic coast actually had a vibrant tourist industry focused on the offshore islands there. So, yes, at that time Honduras was a place we could move around freely. Crime was relatively low. After Nicaragua it was a real breath of fresh air just to be able to get in my car and drive anywhere I wanted to go. But obviously, things have changed since then and many of the societal ills that plague other countries in Central America have since spread to Honduras. But at the time that was not a consideration, and we were encouraged to travel. And I got to travel a lot and was able to see a lot of the development projects that we were implementing. And for me that was terrific. I find that I don't absorb information very well through PowerPoint briefings or reading briefing books. The way I absorb information is to go out to the field and meet with people there, on their own territory,

and suddenly, I get it. It's like a switch goes off in my brain. In Honduras I was able to do a lot of that. I went to see our forestry project, for example, and spent two days at their base camp and learned how they identify the trees to harvest, how they cut up the wood, where they ship the wood to, and how they replenish the forest. Hours and hours of briefings couldn't give me the level of understanding that that one trip to the field did. I've always been that way.

Q: In some ways it seems that one of the benefits of Honduras was also that because it wasn't a massive growing program you had to spend much more time on implementation and seeing how programs actually operated and that probably was really an important learning experience as well.

WASKIN: Yeah, it absolutely was, no question. I did benefit from the fact that I didn't have to design massive new programs but was able to take the time to learn about our existing portfolio. That was a tremendously important learning experience. And of course I benefited from being around extraordinary people. Buster Brown and Elena Brineman, of course, but also the head of our Municipal Development Office, Mario Pita and his deputy Ron Glass. And the head of our Agriculture Office, Mike Wise. Our Controllers, Bob Bonnaffon, Larry Grizzard, and Frank Caropreso. Rick Rhoda, the head of our Program Office. Mary Ann Anderson, the head of our Health Office. And of course our Contracting Officer, Tim Beans, who later became a Mission Director and an Agency legend himself. That stuff rubs off on you. I've been very fortunate in my career to have worked with and been mentored by some really outstanding people, and Honduras was no exception to that rule.

Q: In Central America was there much collaboration among the missions, either talking about regional questions or supporting one another at all?

WASKIN: In Nicaragua we brought in people from other missions because we needed surge support, similar to the way that I had provided surge support in REDSO. We brought in people from USAID Guatemala or USAID Costa Rica. Because Central America is geographically small, and each country is dealing with some of the same issues, it was relatively easy to forge those kinds of connections.

When I was still assigned to Nicaragua, I recall going to a conference in Costa Rica sponsored by my old buddy Ron Venezia from our new entry interview. He was the Mission Director there. And he remembered me, by the way. At that conference, basically all the program and project development officers were around the table to discuss a new way of procuring technical assistance called "Design and Perform", or DAP. And DAP would have been a great mechanism. But shortly after that the Clinton Administration took office, and reengineering became the vogue, and any ideas, no matter how good, that had been floated before January 20, 1993 were by definition suspect and not to be considered or discussed. So, so much for DAP. But my point is that I saw we had gathered together all the PDOs and Program Officers in the region to discuss an issue of general concern, procurement. And that gave me the notion that maybe we should try to gather together on a regular basis the program and project development officers from all

over Central America or maybe even all over Latin America, if not annually, maybe semi-annually, to talk about such issues. So, once I got to Honduras, I worked to establish a network of PDOs and Program Officers among all the missions in Latin America. And it took a while, because money was short, but with the enthusiastic support of the late, great Eric Zallman in the LAC Bureau in Washington, we actually ended up having a conference in Guatemala City in 1997 of all Central American Program Officers. I say Program Officers because by that point the two backstops had been merged, so one of the things we discussed in Guatemala was, naturally, how the functions of the program officers and PDOs would change since we were no longer separate disciplines.

Q: Okay. No, that's good. And I know there were some regional Central American programs, were there any in Honduras? Did you have any involvement with any regional programs?

WASKIN: Amazingly enough, there were and we didn't know much about them. And if you're going to ask me what they were my answer would be, I'm sad to say, that after all these years I don't remember. But I'll tell you how we found out about them. We had to educate ourselves about the regional programs taking place in Honduras for two reasons. First, we had a reporter from the *New York Times* who came down and wanted to do a piece about the history of U.S. foreign assistance in Honduras. So, we got all the briefing materials ready for her, everything we were doing in the mid-1990s, and proudly told her, "This is everything that's going on today." And to our surprise, she replied, "No, I don't want to hear about that. I want to hear what's been done since the program started in 1961." Well, how do we know? You know how USAID is. Whatever happened two years ago is ancient history. In my experience, at least, we were always thinking about what's going to happen tomorrow or three years from now. but not what happened two years ago, much less what happened twenty years ago. Who knows? So, we had to launch a massive effort to excavate the files and find out everything we could about what USAID had done in Honduras since the founding of the agency in 1961. And we found some amazing things that had been funded in the late sixties and seventies – including regional programs that, if we had ever known about them, we had forgotten. And the funny thing was that in the course of doing all this digging, we read some of the things our predecessors had written in, say, 1971. They wrote things like "Honduras is coming out of a period of instability and crisis but is very much on the cusp of achieving a real democratic transformation." (Peasley laughs; unintelligible). I could have written that last week. In fact, I did write that last week. (Peasley laughs) So it became very clear to us that there really is nothing new under the sun. It's all been done and said before.

The second factor that pushed us to delve deeply into regional programming was that, in 1996 or so, Honduras had gotten in trouble with the International Monetary Fund and was supposedly about to default. Now, we all knew Honduras wasn't going to default. We knew this wasn't going to happen. We knew they were going to pay at the last minute. But we had to prepare as if this was going to happen, because one of the consequences of them defaulting would have been we would have been forced to shut down all non-emergency assistance programming, which would effectively have been everything we were doing because at that time we weren't dealing with any emergencies. So my

office had to do an inventory of every U.S. government-funded activity in Honduras. Well, come to find out, in this process we discovered a lot of regionally-funded USAID activities that we didn't know anything about. We didn't even know they were operating in our country. But they were. I recall that there was a health program and an agricultural research program – it was a surprisingly long list. So I went to Elena with this long list of regional programs, and she was as surprised as I was. She said, "What the heck? I don't know anything about this." (Peasley laughs) And I replied, "Well, if you're Mission Director and you don't know anything about these programs, and I'm the head of the Office of Development Finance and I don't know anything about them, then who does?" The answer was nobody. In the end, Honduras paid the IMF, just as we knew they would, and we didn't have to shut anything down. But this phony debt crisis actually proved useful, because it forced us to educate ourselves about those regional programs. And that was a great learning experience for me and prepared me later for senior management roles when as the head of a bilateral mission I had to interact with regional programming.

Q: Right, make sure you knew what all is going on.

WASKIN: Make sure I knew what was going on, that's right, yes, exactly.

Q: When I think of Central America during this period, I believe the issue arose in either Guatemala or El Salvador when 60 Minutes went in and they were looking at the private sector programs and they talked about exporting U.S. jobs. It ended up influencing USAID policy on private sector development. Were you doing any programs like that in Honduras and how did you all manage through that issue?

WASKIN: Well, it all happened a little bit before I got there. The *60 Minutes* report came out about two weeks before the U.S. presidential election in 1992. I was still in Nicaragua at that point, but I watched this report with great interest because one, I was hoping to be assigned to Honduras; and two, we were designing activities in Nicaragua that were to be very similar to the ones being criticized in Honduras. So, I watched *60 Minutes* standing outside the USAID building in Tegucigalpa, and I thought to myself, "It's a bad day when Ed Bradley is standing on the street in front of your building taping a show. That's a really bad day." (Peasley laughs) And I watched Jim Michel, who I believe was the acting assistant administrator for LAC then, being interviewed and explaining that these programs were well-intentioned and that USAID was not trying to export jobs from the U.S. Sadly, that is not the message that came across to the typical viewer of that program, nor to members of Congress who might have been watching. And as a consequence of that report, my former colleagues in the appropriations committee put a clause in the appropriations bill every year, initially called Section 599, which required us to certify that the work we were doing would not displace American jobs. And this clause created a real challenge for us at the time in Nicaragua. I remember Mark Silverman, the Deputy Mission Director, saying, "You know that private sector support project you're designing? You're not designing it. It stops right now. That's it. Until this sorts out and we understand what the legal ramifications are, we cannot assist the private sector in any way." That was, from a developmental point of view, really very unfortunate. The fact that American capital is attracted to unskilled labor in parts of the world like Central

America is not a consequence of the U.S. government assistance program. It is rather a feature of the world economy. What the mission in Honduras had been trying to do, and what we aspired to do in Nicaragua, was to recognize the reality that the so-called "*maquila*" industries in Central America were growing and to try to make sure that working conditions in those industries were reasonably tolerable. But the press coverage, the *60 Minutes* report and others that followed, distorted the story completely. They showed video of fifteen, sixteen, seventeen-year-old girls working in these factories, sewing baseballs or making garments, and then asserted that working and living conditions in these *maquiladoras* were harsh and that the U.S. government, through USAID, was somehow subsidizing the exploitation of these young women. Well this was ridiculous, of course. It's not like their alternative was to go and be cheerleaders at a pristine local high school. There were not many forms of licit employment that were viable for them. And the reason they were flocking to the *maquiladoras* was that those factories offered them a better life than what might have been in store for them elsewhere. This was a choice that they made. But there was no question this really hamstrung our programming and made it difficult for a long time for us to work with the private sector because we had to be very careful that we did not displace, or appear to be displacing, U.S. jobs. That became less of a consideration in other countries where I served later in my career, for example, when I went back to Africa. But in Central America it was a very salient issue, because U.S. jobs do move there and it becomes quite difficult to prove that USAID assistance does not somehow contribute to that process. But again, that is a feature of the world economy, not a consequence of U.S. assistance. That was, of course, the argument we tried to make. But it was not a popular argument. And Section 599 was a constraint for many years. For years, when new projects would cross my desk and I had to either clear on them as a staff person or authorize them as a mission director I had to ask, "What about Section 599? Can we in fact certify that we are not displacing any U.S. jobs with this assistance?"

I want to mention one legend that I heard about that *60 Minutes* episode. I say legend because I didn't know this personally, but I think it bears repeating nonetheless. The officer who was identified in the *60 Minutes* report as having been basically the chief bad guy was one of our brightest, most talented young employees. He was a little younger than I am, and Honduras was maybe his second assignment in the agency. So he wasn't the evil genius behind all these things; he was just the young officer who was assigned to manage that project and told to make it work. After I got to Honduras I was told that *60 Minutes* approached Honduran staff at the USAID mission to try to get a picture of this man so they could put it on television. And they offered a considerable amount of money for such a photo. Nobody gave them a picture. (Peasley laughs) People had pictures of this guy, of course, but weren't going to do that. A lot of people had pictures of him, and they could have made a few hundred bucks by sharing those pictures. But nobody did. Which I think is terrific. Whatever happened with this project wasn't his fault. He was just doing what he had been told to do to the best of his ability, but suddenly his work became a political controversy and a minor issue in the U.S. presidential campaign.

Q: Yes, interesting; that's good.

Anything else that we should cover on Honduras right now?

WASKIN: I just want to add that, while I was in Honduras, there were some personal tragedies that happened to our staff, illnesses and deaths in the family. I don't want to detail those events here because they are private matters. But those things took away our Mission Director and our Deputy Mission Director for long periods of time and had a tremendous emotional impact on all of us. And I think it's a tremendous credit to everyone who was there at the time that we were able to keep operating during a period of real loss and grief. One of the consequences of all these horrible events was that I was thrust into the role of acting Mission Director. I take no pleasure in recounting that because the circumstances that caused it were so painful. But that was real on the job training for me. And it was when I was wearing that hat that I started dealing directly with the embassy, which at that time was a new experience for me.

Q; And did that all work smoothly?

WASKIN: Yes. By then the issue with the generators had long since been put to rest, and apart from the aftermath of the automobile accident that I mentioned earlier, at this point we had a reasonably good relationship with the embassy. Certainly they were very understanding of the personal circumstances that led USAID to send an FS-3 like me to represent the Agency at country team.

Q: Good. Well, it sounds like it was a very different experience. Your first three assignments, REDSO, Nicaragua and Honduras, were all quite different from one another, but also great building blocks for a career.

WASKIN: Absolutely. That's exactly right. Couldn't have planned it better.

Q: Yes. So, 1997 comes and you did two tours in Honduras and so you're going to be going off.

WASKIN: Yeah, sort of. Technically I only did one and a half tours because I arrived on a mid-tour transfer. So by the summer of 1997 I'd been in the country for four and a half years but I'd only completed one tour, officially. Of all the direct hires, nobody had been in the mission longer than I had, but nonetheless, technically I'd only completed one tour. And I, of course, being the ambitious fellow that I was, wanted to move into senior management – or at least do something different. In early 1996, when the head of our Municipal Development Office, Mario Pita, another legend of the agency, a great man and a dear friend of mine, was preparing to retire, I had approached Elena and said that I would like to be considered for Mario's job. The Municipal Development Office was our de facto Democracy and Governance Office, and my rationale for being interested in joining it was that, while it was great being a PDO, as a PDO I was always one level removed from real implementation. I hadn't done real implementation since I was in Zaire nearly ten years before. I wanted to get that implementation experience, and I wanted to broaden my technical knowledge. Elena considered it seriously, but in the end she said, "I don't think so. I've got another candidate in mind and I need you where you

are." I was a little bit disappointed, but I understood. So I stayed where I was, but during that last year in Honduras I felt like I'd been there, done that, and wasn't growing professionally anymore. And as I said, having helped move the mission to a teams-based approach, I'd basically reengineered myself out of existence.

Q: You watched everyone else having fun.

WASKIN: Right. Exactly. I wasn't having as much fun as I used to. Living in Honduras was pleasant now that we had reliable electricity, but I was looking for the next challenge. I wanted to do something more. And then I got an email from the Africa Bureau. "Madagascar Calling" was the title of the email, and it was from Buff McKenzie, who was the Mission Director in Madagascar. He wrote, in effect, "You don't know me and I don't know you, but I've heard about you and I understand you were out here and how would you like to come back here as the assistant mission director? I'm leaving, Karen Poe, my deputy, is going to become the Mission Director, and I think this would be a great opportunity for you." Well, I thought it would be a great opportunity for me, too. But this time, I was smart enough not to make any commitments before talking to my current boss. I went to Elena and said, "I've been approached by Madagascar with this opportunity and I'd very much like to take it. This is a logical next step for me and it's a fascinating country that I've worked in before." Well, Elena didn't think that was such a great idea, and she pointed out I'd only been in Honduras for one tour. And I of course replied, "Elena, I've been here for almost four and a half years. That's longer than you have!" (Peasley laughs) In the end, we reached an agreement. She decided that, in fact, this was probably the right thing for me to do. So, Madagascar was to be my next stop. I went back to Africa.

Q: I was going to suggest that we stop now and when we reconvene, we start off with Madagascar.

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Q: Okay, today is October 31, 2023, and this is interview number three with Skip Waskin.

And Skip, when we finished up last time you were in Honduras and we'd like to start today with any sort of remaining thoughts you have about your time in Honduras before we move on to Madagascar.

WASKIN: Great. Thank you, Carol. Yes, as we discussed, much of my work in Honduras was associated with the reengineering effort. I was trying to operationalize re-engineering at a field mission. And as I look back at that experience now from the perspective of more than a quarter of a century later, I think reengineering changed in many fundamental ways the way that USAID does business, as it was intended to do. There are many good things, I think, that reengineering achieved, and I will highlight some of those things later in this narrative. But at this point I want to note that one of the pernicious things that reengineering did was that it sounded the death knell for the independent discipline of what we called the USAID Project Development Officer, or Backstop 94.

That was the job title under which I had been employed for, until that point, all of my time as a U.S. Direct Hire officer and really all of the time I'd spent in the Agency.

At about this time, 1995 or 1996, USAID chose to combine the PDO and Program backstops into what was called a new Program/Project Development Officer, or, in the Agency's jargon, Backstop 02/94. I have no personal knowledge of this, but I was told at the time, from people who should know that this was done with the full support of the then-Assistant Administrator for Management, Larry Byrne, because it was his belief that USAID should be an agency that merely procured goods and services. In his view, we were just a contracting agency and thus there was no need for project design, and therefore no need for Project Development Officers. Again, I did not hear this from Mr. Byrne, and I certainly did not discuss this with him when he came to Tegucigalpa on TDY, so don't know for a certainty that those were his views. But this explanation is consistent with what I personally observed in the field and of course, with the action that was taken. I said at the time that, whatever the motivation for this change, it was singularly ill advised. In fact, I wrote an article on this subject in 1996 for an internal USAID publication about reengineering called "Fast Track." I wrote in that article that this would mean the end of the PDO function and more importantly, really the end of USAID as an agency that planned, designed and carried out its own programs. Why did I believe that? Well, as I said in that article, overworked USAID field missions—and all of them are overworked, they were then, they are now—will always, by necessity, prioritize doing the essential. They will do what is mandatory rather than what is simply good practice. And the most essential thing that a USAID mission absolutely must do is get its budget. You've got to get your money; that's Job 1. If you don't do that, nothing else can happen. And to get that money, missions have to develop an annual budget and write a justification for that budget. Developing such budgets and writing such justifications is the essence of the Program Officer's work. That is one of the most important if not *the* most important thing they do. So, that particular skill set, Backstop 02, will always be in demand. By contrast, designing projects carefully may be good development practice, but it's not essential, particularly when the agency is one, denuding itself of the skill set necessary to design projects and two, senior leadership doesn't believe it's important. So, not surprisingly, in my experience, at that point many missions largely stopped designing their own projects and really began to farm out the design function. And that was, from my perspective, a very unfortunate development from which it has taken USAID decades to recover.

Q: So, you go off to Madagascar as the assistant director. And as I recall, it was a combined program/project development officer position that was the number two in the mission.

USAID/Madagascar, Assistant Director, 1998 - 2000

WASKIN: That's exactly right. I went out there in January of 1998. I left Honduras in October 1997 and then was on home leave, but my arrival at post was delayed because I had adopted my oldest son in El Salvador and prior to going out to Madagascar he needed to be naturalized and become a U.S. citizen. And this proved a very difficult, very trying

experience. I was staying in Grand Haven, my mother's home town on the eastern shore of Lake Michigan. Early in my stay there, I had driven 190 miles one way to the closest office of what was then called the INS, Immigration and Naturalization Service, which was in Detroit, to drop off my son's naturalization petition. And then I spent weeks calling them to try to get them to understand that they needed to move my son's case forward so that I could go to Madagascar on behalf of the same federal government they worked for. No luck; no one answered my emails, and I was never able to even get a human being on the phone. I wrote everybody – I wrote my Congressman, I wrote my Senators, I even wrote Vice President Gore to try to get the INS to schedule a review of my son's case. Nothing was working; we were stuck in Michigan. Finally, in desperation I called the USAID Mission Director in Russia, one Janet Ballantyne, and explained the situation to her. She said, "I'll take care of it," and hung up the phone. Well, as it turned out, Janet Ballantyne's next-door neighbor in Washington was the head of the INS. And then one night, at about 7:00 pm, I was having dinner, and the phone rings, and I was amazed to discover that it was the Immigration and Naturalization Service calling me! (Peasley laughs) And they said, "Can you be in our Detroit office tomorrow?" I replied, "I certainly can but your office is closed tomorrow." "Oh, no, sir, we'll open for you." (Both laugh) They asked me to be there by 9:00 the next morning. So, about 5:30 in the morning I drove off in the midst of a blizzard, and showed up in Detroit just before 9:00 to find the INS office all but empty and deserted. Someone let me in, and I saw one folder sitting on a table in the center of the room. And this folder contained all of my son's papers with red stickers attached to them labeled "Urgent", "Urgent", "Urgent". (Both laugh) And I was out of there in five minutes with my son's signed, notarized, and sealed naturalization application under my arm. So, thank you to Janet Ballantyne, God rest her soul. I will never forget her having done that.

Q: Yes. It just reenforces again how important relationships can be, including relationships with neighbors.

WASKIN: I guess that's correct. So, it took a few more weeks and a few more wintery drives to places like Chicago and Port Huron, but my son finally got his passport and we arrived in Madagascar in mid-January. One of the reasons I was really eager to go to Madagascar was that I really wanted to get back to what my old boss and mentor, Lee Braddock, would have called a line job. I'd been doing staff jobs ever since leaving Zaire ten years earlier, and I wanted to get back to a job where I would actually be managing development programs. Not designing them or developing budgets for them or monitoring and evaluating them, which was the nature of my work in REDSO, in Nicaragua, and in Honduras, but actually directly managing development programs. And so, in this role as the de facto deputy mission director – technically I was just the "assistant" mission director, but locally everyone called me the deputy and treated me as if I were the deputy - I thought I'd be able to do that. Things didn't quite work out that way for a number of reasons, but it was still a great experience. And again, I'd worked in Madagascar when I was in REDSO, I'd helped design their flagship environmental program, SAVEM, Sustainable Approaches to Viable Environmental Management, and I was fascinated by the country and eager to return there and get back to working on that portfolio.

Q: Who was the mission director when you arrived?

WASKIN: The Mission Director was Karen Poe. Buff McKenzie, the man who had actually recruited me for the position, had left to go head REDSO East and Karen, who had been his deputy, become the director. And Karen Poe was a great mission director and an even better human being. She was – is - one of the most generous, kindhearted people I know. But Karen had a personal situation that was very difficult. She was taking care of her elderly mother, who was suffering from Alzheimer's. And because of that, very shortly after I arrived at post, Karen had to leave. Her mother had a medical emergency and the two of them departed very suddenly. I got a call on a Saturday afternoon from our EXO, Paul Guild, who told me "You've got to get over to the mission director's house. Karen is leaving the country." "What? She's leaving?" I was shocked. Karen lived only about three or four blocks from me, so I don't remember whether I ran over there or jumped in my car, but I got there just as she was literally pulling out of the driveway. And I called to her, "What do you want me to do?" And she leaned out the window of her car and shouted "Be the director. Bye." (Both laugh) So, that was the extent of my guidance. Again, another growth experience for me brought on by someone else's misfortune. But that quickly changed my role.

Another factor - and I don't think Karen would object to me saying this - was that the fact that Karen and the newly arrived U.S. Ambassador, Shirley E. Barnes, didn't see eye to eye on a lot of things. As I observed things, there were two episodes, or incidents, that poisoned the relationship between Karen and Ambassador Barnes. The first was that, shortly after her arrival. Ambassador Barnes had some sort of an event at her home that was associated with a Christian religious group to which she belonged. Karen believed that this was an inappropriate use of a U.S. government facility, meaning the ambassador's residence, and she told the ambassador that. Needless to say, the ambassador did not agree. That didn't help their relationship. That was issue number one.

Issue number two was caused by the fact that Ambassador Barnes was a very active and imaginative ambassador. And when she arrived in Antananarivo she noticed, not surprisingly, that the city was awfully dirty. There was a lot of garbage around. And at the time, you will recall, USAID's Africa Bureau had a mechanism called the Ambassador's Self-Help Fund. Often, this was a great thing. It was USAID money and so USAID had to sign off on the programming and monitor and account for the use of the funds, but it allowed ambassadors to do a lot of good things that in their view needed doing. One of the things that Ambassador Barnes wanted to do with her portion of the fund was clean up the garbage in Antananarivo. And that needed to be done, no question about it. So, she directed us to develop a project to do exactly that. Karen's response was, "We can do that, but it's going to take six to twelve months." "Why?" "Well, we need to do an Initial Environmental Examination to make sure we are not harming the environment." And the ambassador was outraged. She said, "I'm cleaning up the environment. What are you talking about?" And Karen pointed out, not incorrectly, that "Well, yes, but the problem is that once you remove the garbage, you have to put it someplace. And so there has to be an assessment of what happens when the garbage is dumped at that location." Well, this

did not sit well with Ambassador Barnes at all. So, the two of them were like two scorpions in a bottle. They just didn't get along. And it quickly became known in Washington that they were not getting along. And so Keith Brown, who I believe was the Senior Deputy Assistant Administrator at the time, came out to Madagascar and stayed at my home. I think Karen was out of the country at the time. And Keith told me, "Your job is to keep a lid on this. I do not want this to blow up." He said, "It's bad. I've seen worse but this is really bad and I don't want it to get worse. You need to manage this relationship." So, I was tasked with being the friendly face of USAID vis-à-vis the ambassador. And I attempted to follow Keith's instructions to keep the lid on. Because of her mother's health, Karen was frequently absent for lengthy periods, leaving me as the acting Mission Director. And I think as far as Ambassador Barnes was concerned that was just fine. And again, I say that only with great reluctance because I have the greatest respect for Karen Poe and I think this situation was unfortunate. I just hope I was successful in not allowing it to get any worse.

Q: Well, that's often an important role to be played by someone. Did the garbage get cleaned up? (Laughs)

WASKIN: The garbage did not get cleaned up. No, unfortunately there's still plenty of garbage in Antananarivo and I think the ambassador just decided that it wasn't worth the bureaucratic trouble to go forward with that idea.

Q: I think for the record I would also say that the ambassador's self-help fund was meant to be doing small grants with more community-based groups, not major projects. (Laughs)

WASKIN: Exactly, right, And with the wisdom of hindsight, I think there are a number of ways that we could have finessed that. But, we didn't, and that's very unfortunate.

As I look back on Madagascar, the salient points of my experience, and the reasons that I was not really able to get back into the day-to-day management of projects, were number one, I was frequently called upon to serve as the acting Mission Director; and number two, there was a series of natural disasters to which USAID had to respond and which proved a bit of a trial by fire for me. The first was that in the summer of 1999 the country was confronted with an infestation of locusts. Locusts are endemic to southern Madagascar but for various reasons the government had not implemented successfully its control program, and as locusts tend to do periodically, they got out of control and were beginning to circulate into the central and northern parts of the island and doing real damage to the agricultural base of the country. And the United States, through USAID, was part of a multi-donor group that tried to address this crisis. As part of this multi-donor effort, I went on an inspection trip down to southern Madagascar with the head of the World Bank, the director of the Cooperation Francaise, the local head of the FAO, and several others. We flew down – it was the first time I'd ever flown in a helicopter -, and then we drove back, and on the way back, near a place called Antsirabe, one of the major cities in the south, we got swarmed. And I mean, a swarm of locusts really darkens the sky. —

Q: In a helicopter.

WASKIN: No, we were driving at this point. But these locusts created darkness at noon, or 3:00 in the afternoon, as the case may be. And it was extraordinary; I had never seen anything like it. And it's a little overwhelming; I think some people would be freaked out by it. Happily, locusts are harmless to human beings. They're not going to attack you but they are an extraordinary natural phenomenon.

We as the USAID Mission viewed this locust plague as a natural disaster. And we were enormously concerned about the fact that the French were leading the charge, so to speak, in terms of providing assistance to the government in locust control. But what they were using was a French manufactured chemical called Fipronil, which is the same chemical compound contained in the flea or tick shampoo you might buy for your dog. It's very effective at killing insects. And it would have been a good treatment for locusts if applied on the ground before they hatched. But the French were advocating that it be used in aerial spraying of the locusts. The problem with that, as our agricultural officer, a very savvy woman named Helen Gunther argued persuasively, was that this not only kills the locusts, but also kills any insects that happen to be exposed to it, including the bees that pollinate agricultural production. So, if you're going to destroy not only the beekeeping industry in Madagascar but also risk destroying the agricultural base, you are in fact making the problem worse than it would be if you simply let the infestation go untreated. So, this was a major issue for us. We attempted to interest OFDA (Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance) in dealing with this. We were not entirely successful. OFDA's position was that this was not what they would characterize as a disaster. They acknowledged that it had indeed had disastrous impacts, but in their eyes it was a predictable disaster with a slow-moving impact, whereas OFDA deals with sudden onset disasters, either complex emergencies caused by human behavior or natural disasters. OFDA also needs to have to get in and get out in a relatively short period of time, which clearly was not going to be the case. So, OFDA wasn't interested in dealing with this. We also attempted to interest the U.S. military. We met, in fact, with the three-star Admiral who was the head of the U.S. Pacific Command, or PACOM. Madagascar falls, or at least at the time fell within the remit of the PACOM out of Honolulu, and we attempted to interest them in providing logistical and financial support. But they weren't terribly interested in dealing with the problem either. And because of our stance on Fipronil, we also found ourselves in a diplomatic spat with the French. Someone from USAID– it was not me, and it wasn't Karen, it might have been Helen – had been interviewed by a local newspaper and had cited a scientific article published in a journal that was critical of the use of fipronil for locust control and pointed out all the types of problems that could result from that. And the French were furious. I remember someone from the French Embassy told Karen they were going to sue us. She said, "For quoting publicly available information? Go ahead and sue us." Well, they didn't actually sue us but they did something worse. They stopped inviting us to their parties. (Both laugh) Everyone from the diplomatic community in Antananarivo was always invited to their Bastille Day celebration, but nobody from USAID got invited to Bastille Day in 1998.

Q: Let me interrupt for one second on this. Since it did create an issue with the French, did the ambassador get involved? Did you have support from the embassy on this with the French?

WASKIN: She basically delegated it to me and said "You take care of this and make sure that things don't get worse." And in the event, the locusts simply went away. And that is apparently typical of locust infestations: at some point the weather changes and suddenly they're gone as quickly as they arrived. That basically is what happened in this case. But this huge infestation did significant damage to the agricultural base. But yes, I had support from the ambassador as long as I made sure that the situation didn't get out of control. And happily, not due to any effort of mine but rather more to good fortune, it didn't.

Q: You mentioned that you had gone to OFDA. Did you have consultations with AID Washington more generally? I vaguely recall a serious locust outbreak in Senegal earlier in the nineties in which I know AID got heavily involved. I'm just wondering if anyone had passed on any information on those earlier efforts to you all or is it reinventing the wheel each time?

WASKIN: I don't recall hearing about those earlier efforts at the time. OFDA Washington took our concerns seriously and sent out Mike Zeleke to look into the situation. But at the end of the day they concluded that this wasn't something that they could do, that as an ongoing, slow-moving disaster it was outside their mandate. And they weren't wrong. If you're working in a country like Madagascar where locusts, as in many places in sub-Saharan Africa, are endemic, you need to have a plan to deal with them.

Q: You build it into your strategy. Okay.

WASKIN: Right. And that is one of the things, by the way, that our strategy in Madagascar did feature. In that strategy, the Mission had written that "This is a disaster-prone country. Our working assumption is that over this five-year period there are going to be five different disasters." So, because that was explicit in the strategy, we had somewhat more flexibility to move resources around. I think it was wise that we did that because in fact, as I'll get to in a minute, we did have disasters.

Before I leave the subject of locusts, let me recount another I hope amusing anecdote about that period. As I mentioned, I was part of a delegation of donors that flew to southern Madagascar to investigate this outbreak for ourselves. And the local press got wind of the fact that we were making this tour. Now, one of the French language newspapers in Madagascar featured a cartoon on the front page every day. And shortly after returning from this tour to the south, I was horrified one morning to pick up the paper and see that the front page featured a cartoon of the five diplomats flying around the country looking for locusts and pointing at each other to assign blame. And in the very center of this cartoon was a guy with the words "États-Unis" (United States) on the front of his shirt who happened to be a bald fellow with a goatee and a long nose. In other words, me. So there I was, caricatured on the front page of the newspaper. It was very

funny. I still have a copy of that cartoon at home. But Ambassador Barnes was furious. She was furious. (Peasley laughs) If anybody was going to be ridiculed in the press it was going to be her, not me. (Both laugh) I suddenly was the public face of the United States locust response. And she did not like that one bit.

Q: That's a good one.

WASKIN: Beyond the locusts, the central focus of my attention and time in Madagascar were the two cyclones that hit that country over a period of two weeks in early 2000, first in northern Madagascar and then in the central part of the country. "Cyclones" are, as you know, what we would call a hurricane in the Western Hemisphere. In the Eastern Hemisphere they're called cyclones. Cyclones are a regular phenomenon to which Madagascar is very prone. And in January 2000, we had been alerted that Cyclone Leon-Eline was approaching. The background to this is that there had been a cyclone a few months before that had hit Mozambique. And Graça Machel, the wife of Nelson Mandela but also the former First Lady of Mozambique, was very publicly critical of what she characterized as the slow United States response to that storm. And so, as Eline was approaching, moving down the channel between Mozambique and Madagascar, it was not clear which country it was going to hit. And Susan Rice, who at the time was the Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, took a personal interest in this, presumably because she did not want a repeat of the criticism from Ms. Machel in the event the cyclone struck Mozambique. So State's Africa Bureau organized a series of conference calls chaired by Assistant Secretary Rice on the subject of cyclone preparation, and Karen and I were invited to participate. This was an early form of Zoom calls but conducted over landlines. There was no video, of course; only audio. The calls took place late at night Madagascar time and lasted about an hour each. And it was obvious that the central focus was Mozambique. Madagascar, if it was mentioned at all, consumed only about five minutes at the end of each call. These calls were not terribly helpful to us in terms of preparing our response to the cyclone, but I guess they helped reassure people in Washington that Embassy Maputo was well prepared for whatever might happen in Mozambique. The group was not the least interested in what might befall Madagascar.

As it happened, Cyclone Leon-Eline struck both countries, but it did its worst damage in northern Madagascar. And this began a long period of very intense activity not just for me but for our whole mission. We had in place a network of people – implementing partners, local NGOs, Peace Corps volunteers – on whom we would rely to give us information on the ground from wherever the cyclone might hit. And on that first night, initially we knew the cyclone had struck, but we did not know exactly where nor how much damage had been done. And as I learned, a disaster is a little bit like a war. You don't actually know what's happening. Information is conflicting. And on that first night, I was being pushed by the Ambassador to provide an update. And the first update I got was from one of our partners in the north. They were located in a small town on the northeast coast that the cyclone had largely missed and where there was very little damage. I duly reported this to Ambassador Barnes. Then later in the night and the next morning, we learned that in fact there was horrific damage elsewhere. And again, the ambassador was furious with me because she had reported to Washington there had been

no damage. Well, what could I say? I had told her this was a limited sample size. All I reported was that in this one district our source said they had experienced no damage and they hadn't. That was accurately reported. That didn't mean, and should not have been taken to mean, that twenty miles up the coast there might not have been a much more serious situation. So that was the first of many lessons I would learn during our cyclone response: always caveat your reporting, and make sure that the person to whom you are reporting understands those caveats.

Cyclone Eline was bad enough –it killed about 60 people. But just a few weeks later, Tropical Storm Gloria hit Madagascar, meandering over the country for four days and causing landslides and extensive flooding. Together these two storms killed over 200 people, destroyed about half Madagascar's rice harvest, and left 10,000 people homeless. So we had a real mess on our hands. Fortunately, this time, unlike with the locusts, OFDA was extraordinarily responsive. And, although I had no experience working with OFDA except for our conversations about locusts the previous year, I was made the point person within the Country Team for coordinating with them. One of the first lessons I learned in that role was that, when a natural disaster occurs, Washington's demand for information becomes extraordinary. I was sending emails, I remember, on certainly an hourly if not a half-hourly basis, updating AID/Washington. I was amazed by the fact that, whereas in normal times few people in Washington cared about what was going on in Madagascar, now that a disaster had struck the demand for information had become voracious. Everybody, it seemed, wanted information immediately. So I was busily firing off emails using all the sources I was able to acquire. Then I went to a meeting at the Embassy, and the Political Officer, Rick Bell – Derek Singer's son-in-law, as it happened - pulled me aside and said "You guys have got to get off the dime and start reporting." (Peasley laughs) And I said, "Rick, I'm reporting all the time and I'm copying you." He said, "Those are only emails. They don't count. You've got to start sending cables." (Peasley laughs) And so I learned: at that time at least, in the eyes of the State Department, things had to be in the form of a front channel cable.

So, I start writing daily or initially twice-daily "Situation Reports" to be sent out by cable from the Embassy. The problem with that was that, since I was so busy writing these "SitReps", I found it very difficult to make time to work on actually responding to the disaster. Fortunately – and without me asking – after a few days OFDA threw me a lifeline. They offered to send out a communications specialist to take charge of all the reporting. It was an offer I happily accepted, and when she arrived I was never so glad to see anyone in my life. So this was one of the principal lessons I took away from this experience, and one that I always recount any time I'm asked to speak to an incoming USAID Mission Director: if you are faced with a disaster situation, the very first person you need to get is a communications specialist, because somebody has to be there on the ground to write those situation reports. The demand for information is absolutely voracious and if you're the one doing it, that is all you will be doing.

As I look back on the cyclone response experience, I'm amazed at the extent to which the challenges we faced revolved around things other than the actual mobilization and delivery of assistance; that is, things other than the provision of food, water, and shelter

to those affected by the cyclones. Rather, it became a public relations problem, one involving not just USAID/Washington but also the State Department and even the DOD (Department of Defense), which, having been completely uninterested in helping us with the locust issue, now wanted to come out and provide assistance. For a while, we were at serious risk of something I saw many years later in my career in Haiti, i.e., that of having too many cooks in the broth and ending up with too many actors to be effective.

Another lesson I take away from this experience – and it's related to the question of public relations – is that no matter how fast you move, no matter how quickly you are responding, it is, understandably, never going to be fast enough. In this case, if my memory is correct, with OFDA support USAID had actually started providing real assistance – food, water, shelter – to affected communities in northern Madagascar within 72 hours of the cyclone. To me, that was impressive. But when you're out there and your village has been destroyed and you don't have any food, you don't have any water, waiting seventy-two hours or more is excruciating. And then, as happened in this case, the international press gets out there, goes to a community you might not have reached yet, and reports, "There's no response." That's what happened in this case, and it caused another issue with Ambassador Barnes. Ambassador Barnes, quite naturally, watched the coverage of the cyclone and the international response to it on CNN. And on CNN, one of the weather reporters was a woman named Femi Oke. And Femi Oke actually said, "The country of Madagascar has been destroyed and there's no government response. And the international donor community is doing nothing." And of course, when the Ambassador heard this she was furious – not with Femi Oke and CNN, but with me. So she called me to complain about this. And I remember saying, and this is very sexist of me, so forgive me, but I said, "Ambassador, she's the weather girl. What does she know?" (Peasley laughs) But she was broadcasting this nonsense internationally, so we had to take it seriously. Again, this illustrates how in a situation like this the public relations issues become extraordinary.

Another lesson I learned from this experience is that in the aftermath of a disaster, there is a very powerful incentive for some of the actors on the ground – particularly, I'm sorry to say, the international NGOs who typically help lead the USG's disaster response – to exaggerate the extent of the crisis. In this case, the second storm, Tropical Storm Gloria, had passed directly over Antananarivo. And that was quite a night, and it did in fact do some damage. When I woke up in the morning after the storm had passed, I discovered that some houses (including mine) had lost a few shingles, some power lines were down, some trees were down; in fact, some of our staff couldn't get into work that morning because downed trees were blocking some of the roads. But by the time Gloria passed over Antananarivo, it was just a tropical depression, and so yes, while it did some damage, it was hardly a catastrophe. But then later that day or possibly the next day, we started seeing reports in the international press to the effect that "hundreds of thousands of homes have been destroyed in Antananarivo." And of course the Ambassador read these same accounts, and this led to yet another angry phone call from her. By this point I was starting to lose patience, and I wanted to ask her "Ambassador, if hundreds of thousands of homes had been destroyed right here in the city where we all live, do you think we wouldn't have noticed?" But I don't think I said that; I think I simply assured

her these reports were highly exaggerated and that I would track down their provenance. And I did. It turned out that this bogus data was coming from one of our implementing partners, an international NGO, and that within that organization the source was a person who until very recently had worked as a PSC within the USAID Mission. She was not only a former colleague, but in fact my next door neighbor and someone I considered a friend. I confronted her about this, and asked why she was disseminating obviously false information to the press. Well, she was very defensive about it; "This is what our data shows", she replied. "Well," I said, "that's highly tendentious data, and you know it."

The bottom line is that the cyclone response was an enormous effort on everyone's part. You will recall that I came to Madagascar partly because I wanted to be more operational. Well, be careful what you wish for; I had become very, very operational.

Q: (Laughs) Very operational.

WASKIN: I wasn't doing much long-term development but I was very operational in terms of coordinating the U.S. government response to these episodes.

Q: Okay. So, you were primarily responding to the crisis, yeah.

WASKIN: Right. This is one of the challenges of working in a place like Madagascar: everything you do is subject to one of the many types of ongoing or sudden onset disasters that characterize the country, whether it's cyclones or rainfall or drought or locusts. As the saying goes, it's always something.

Fortunately, the damage to our ongoing development programs was minimal. We had three Strategic Objectives, which is to say we were involved in three sectors – economic growth, health and family planning, and natural resources – plus a significant Title II food aid program. Most of these were not significantly disrupted by the cyclones, and of course the food aid and the improved varieties of rice we were disseminating as part of the natural resources portfolio under the SAVEM Project were particularly welcome in the aftermath of the storms.

There was, however, one sub-project that was very heavily affected. Part of our work under SAVEM had been to rehabilitate the Fianarantsoa-Côte Est (FCE) railway, which ran about 100 miles from the central highlands city of Fianarantsoa, Madagascar's third largest, to the east coast port of city Manakara. The French had built this railroad in the 1930s, and it ran straight through the national park that contained some of the most threatened habitat in the world. Now, normally, you wouldn't want a commercial railroad running through that kind of habitat. But in this case, the presence of the railroad actually encouraged the people who lived in that park to grow forest-based crops because they could export them via the railroad. If the railroad were to cease operations, these farmers would have had no choice but to stop growing those crops and to turn instead to slash and burn agriculture, which of course would have had disastrous consequences for the flora and fauna of the park. So we were very much interested in keeping the railroad running; whence our support to it thought SAVEM. The storms, however, particularly Gloria, had

had a catastrophic impact on the railroad; they had caused something like 200 landslides along the route which had forced the FCE to cease operations. So we launched a massive repair effort under SAVEM – a great example of a USAID project and a project-funded contractor, in this case Chemonics, pivoting on a dime to address changed circumstances – and by the late spring of 2000 the railroad was ready to resume operations.

At this point, Karen came up with a great idea for an event to mark the reopening of the railroad. She conceived of a plan whereby we would fill each car of the train – and there were about four or five cars, I think – with visual representations – posters, photos – from each of our projects. There would be representatives of each of those projects, the Chief of Party or his/her equivalent, there to answer questions, and we would invite the local press and dignitaries from each of the communities to ride along. And, of course, we would invite Ambassador Barnes. And this is exactly what we did. We started on the east coast at Manakara, and we took the Ambassador, the press, the local officials, and representatives from each of our projects on the long railroad ride up to Fianarantsoa through this beautiful, forested area. And it was a huge success.

Now, I want to tell you about this railroad. The railroad was built by the French in the 1930s using war reparations that the Germans had provided after World War I. (Peasley laughs) They used material that the Germans had ripped up from their own railroads and sent to the French, which the French then shipped off to Madagascar. So, by 2000 that railroad was already over 60 years old. But remember, the Germans, when they were ripping up their railroads, they didn't choose the newest stuff to send to the French, right? No, they ripped up tracks from the 1860s and 1870s. (Peasley laughs) And I remember looking at some of these tracks and reading the inscription on them that said, in German, that those particular rails had been forged in, oh, 1858.

Q: Wow.

WASKIN: It was pretty old stuff, right? Now, Manakara, the starting point of our trip, is at sea level, whereas Fianarantsoa, our destination, is at about 3600 feet. So we had quite a climb to make in 100 miles. And the only way to get this train up the hills over these ancient tracks was to pour sand on the rails through tubes at the front of the locomotive that were connected to big, big boxes of sand on each side of the engine. That gave the train enough traction to be able to get up the hills. And so, at one point Ambassador Barnes, being the curious sort, wanted to see this operation. She wanted to get a good view of how the sand fell on the rails. So, just like Kate Winslet in the movie Titanic, she went up to the very front of the locomotive, and leaned far over the rail, and my job was to hold on to the Ambassador and make sure she didn't fall off.

Q: (Laughs) Make sure you don't lose her.

WASKIN: Right. Happily, Ambassador Barnes was a very petite woman. And so, she's leaning far over the railing, I'm holding onto her for dear life, and I was thinking, boy, I don't want to be remembered as the AID guy who dropped his own ambassador in front

of a moving train. So I held onto her very tightly. But that train ride was a wonderful experience and I'm glad we were able to pull that off.

Q: Good. And you all returned safely?

WASKIN: We all returned safely. Nobody fell off the train. The Ambassador had the opportunity to see the sand falling on the rails. And we were able to demonstrate, if not a whole of government approach, certainly a whole of USAID approach. We showed how our projects worked across organizational boundaries. That was the impression we wanted to give, and we were able to do that.

Q: I do have one question and you may not have anything to say about it and if so, we'll just edit that out. But I looked quickly online because I know nothing about Madagascar and I believe that there was a new constitution in 1998, so I think while you were there was a period when there was a newly elected government and it was a very positive relationship with Madagascar. Is that correct? I know that the relationship has been up and down over the years.

WASKIN: Well, at the time I was there, the relationship was good. Some of the most acute of the tensions to which you refer came a little later. But I think you need to view the relationship in the context of the fact that Madagascar had been in a period of chronic political turmoil since at least 1990. To give you a flavor of that, let me back up to my first REDSO TDY to Madagascar, which happened in May of 1990. At that time, Didier Ratsiraka, the longtime, well, dictator, who had been President since 1975, was still in power with no apparent indication that would change anytime soon. But in fact, it was about to change, and I was about to be a witness to the beginning of that change.

When I arrived at the Antananarivo airport early that morning, the first time I'd ever been in Madagascar, there was clearly a lot going on. There were crowds around the airport, and soldiers everywhere. The expeditor from the Embassy who met me said, "There's a little bit of a problem. There's a coup going on." Well, this was startling and disturbing news. But the airport was continuing to function, and I managed to get through passport control, get my bags, and get into the waiting embassy vehicle, and the driver managed to find a safe path to the Hilton hotel. The hotel, however, was surrounded by troops facing a huge crowd of angry protesters. As it happens, this hotel was located directly across the street from the national radio station, which the crowds were moving towards in an apparent attempt to take it over. I decided that the best thing to do was simply to go to my room, but a few minutes after arriving there I got a call from the duty officer at the embassy asking, "Can you tell us what's going on?" (Peasley laughs) "Because you're in the perfect vantage spot to see that." So I went down to a sort of reception or banquet area on the second floor which had big plate glass windows overlooking the front of the hotel and thus overlooking a complete panorama of the action. And I began reporting to the duty office in real time what was happening. I reported that the troops were charging the protesters, and the protesters were fighting back by throwing rocks and stones and whatever they could get their hands on. And then I realized that the troops had started firing tear gas canisters toward the hotel – that is to say, toward me - because the

protestors had somehow gotten between them and the hotel. And I decided that it probably was not a good idea for me to be standing there in front of a plate glass window with these projectiles being fired in my direction. So, I told the duty officer "You've gotten enough reporting from me. I'm going back to my room." (Peasley laughs) The fighting continued throughout the day, but by the end of the day the military was able to restore order. That brief uprising, however, was the start of a process that led to democratic elections in 1992, elections in which the dictator Ratsiraka was defeated and following which he left office. But then, the President who defeated and replaced him, Albert Zafy, was impeached in 1996, and Ratsiraka made a comeback and was voted back into the Presidency in 1997. So, when I got back to Madagascar in 1998, Ratsiraka was in power again, only this time as a democratically elected President.

By 1999, maneuvering was already underway for the next Presidential election, which was scheduled to happen in 2001. Now, we had a partner for our Food for Peace program, a man named Marc Ravalomanana, the head of a large agro-industrial conglomerate called "TIKO Madagascar", which I understand means "I love Madagascar". And our team told me that there were important decisions about the program to be made with TIKO, but that they could not reach him. So I decided, well, let me give it a try. So I called him, and to my surprise he agreed to see me, and I went over to his office to meet with him. And he was charming. Very practical, very direct, very willing to engage on the issues that we needed to discuss with him. And during a brief tour he gave us of TIKO's facilities, I noticed that his name or his photo, I can't recall which, was on all the packets of Title II flour that were being shipped all over the country. And I joked with him; I said, "You know, I think there may be a career in politics for you." Well, as it happened, there was. Obviously, he had thought of this before – he didn't decide to do this based on my suggestion – but shortly thereafter he got himself elected mayor of Antananarivo. And from that perch, he ran for and won the Presidency in a highly disputed election in 2001-2002. I say "disputed" because the loser, incumbent President Ratsiraka, refused at first to recognize the results of the election and tried to cling to office. So for several months in 2002 there were actually two competing governments, and the country teetered on the brink of civil war. I believe the United States actually froze assistance to Madagascar during this period and evacuated Americans due to all the chaos and uncertainty. Ultimately, under great international pressure, Ratsiraka stood down, left the country, and our Food for Peace counterpart, Marc, took office and served as President of Madagascar until 2009, when he himself was ousted for corruption. But all this happened long after I departed.

Q: Okay. Anything else on Madagascar?

WASKIN: Well, I was extremely happy there. I loved the work, loved the people I was working with, loved the house I was living in, and loved that beautiful, fascinating country. But I fell victim to the dangers of getting on elevators in the Ronald Reagan Building. (Peasley laughs) I was on TDY in Washington, I don't remember why, but I got on an elevator in the Reagan Building and bumped into a graduate school classmate of mine, Olivier Carduner, whom you will remember. And Olivier said, "Skip, great to see you. I've been trying to get in touch with you." He said, "I've got this job in PPC (Bureau

for Policy and Program Coordination) and I've got to leave and I think you would be great to replace me." Of course I asked, "What kind of a job?" And we talked a little bit. It turned out that this was a senior management job as the Director of the Office of Development Coordination in PPC. And I was attracted to that. I had unsuccessfully sought SMG jobs in the past, and my job in Madagascar was not an SMG position. And so, this seemed to me to be an opportunity to formally join the ranks of senior management. So, I agreed to do it. Just like that. And so, I had to go back to Madagascar and tell Karen that after only two and half years, it was time for me to go. And I'm sure I disappointed people in Madagascar and I'm sure I disappointed Karen, but at that time I was willing to live with the consequences of that. I loved Madagascar and would have happily stayed there a long time. But ambition got the better of me.

But as I was preparing to leave, I was notified that the government of Madagascar was going to present me with an award as a Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur – a Knight of the Legion of Honor. That is a very prestigious award that's usually reserved for departing ambassadors. And it can only be arranged by the FSNs (Foreign Service Nationals) from the Mission, because they are the ones who have the necessary political connections within the government of Madagascar to make it happen. And they made it happen for me. So, I was knighted by the Republic of Madagascar. And that makes me an honorary citizen of Madagascar, which I am told makes me eligible to own property in Madagascar should I ever return there. Now, this was duly reported up the chain to USAID Administrator Brady Anderson, and when I got to PPC, Administrator Anderson asked somebody, "Do we have to call him Sir Skip?" (Peasley laughs) And my response was, "No, Sir Leon would be fine. I think that's probably more appropriate." And it turns out there are a lot of cool things about being a knight. For instance, I remember I went to a grocery store with my son, who was four then, and there was a little day care area in that store where you could drop off your children while you shopped and they'd be cared for. And when I came back to pick him up the woman there said, "Your son's been telling us the strangest story." I said, "What did he say?" "He says that you're a Jedi knight." (Both laugh)

Q: Oh, that's nice.

WASKIN: Kind of cool, right, kind of cool.

Q: You got a knighthood and a cartoon in the newspaper. I mean, really, what more could one want?

WASKIN: Exactly. What more could you ask for? But Madagascar really was a wonderful experience for me and really helped my career growth in terms of dealing with some very challenging personalities and challenging situations. And there were a lot of bright spots. Working with Karen Poe, of course, was one of them. And the DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission), was a wonderful officer who later became an ambassador herself, June Carter Perry. As it happened, her husband was a former USAID official named Fred Perry. And because we needed help in the program office, my office, we hired Fred. And while I think this raised a few eyebrows, Fred was terrific. But this led to

another interesting personnel challenge that happened while Karen was away. We had a problem employee in that office, a Malagasy woman named Lalao. She was difficult for a number of reasons, most of which I don't remember, and had been put on a performance improvement plan. Well, she got into an argument with Fred Perry, who was the nicest person you can imagine and is a very big guy, about six foot two and very strong. And Lalao punched him in the face. So it was brought to my attention as the acting mission director that one of my employees had punched the DCM's husband in the face in the office. Well, of course I said, "That's it. No more performance improvement plans, no more anything. She's out. Now. Gone. Finished. I want her badge pulled immediately. I want her gone." And her badge was pulled and she was gone that day.

Q: Yes, right.

WASKIN: I didn't feel that I could report to the DCM that it's okay for USAID employees to punch her spouse in the face in the office. That's not going to happen.

Q: Yeah, just since you mentioned FSNs, obviously that was a problematic FSN, but I assume that in general the FSNs there were very strong and many had probably been there for many years.

WASKIN: They were extremely strong, yes.

Q: And had wonderful contacts in the government?

WASKIN: Absolutely. They were truly extraordinary. Many of them had worked for the mission for many years, and so knew the USAID bureaucracy, knew the substance of what we were trying to accomplish in development, and had wonderful contacts within the government.

We also had some very, very strong personal services contractors. One woman, Lisa Gaylord, who managed the SAVEM project, had been there for many years, and was married to a former Malagasy Olympian, who was himself very politically well connected. So, Lisa could help us accomplish really anything we needed to do. Any message we needed to pass to the government she would know how to do it. And so, one of the lessons I took from my time in Madagascar is that you need all kind channels. When you come into a country as I did, kind of a babe in the woods, a newly minted assistant mission director, you need to take advantage of the expertise that's in front of you. It doesn't matter whether they are U.S. Direct Hires or PSCs or FSNs, you need to take full advantage of the talent that is on your team. And happily, in Madagascar we had an extraordinarily strong team, one that thanks to Karen was a very high performing, high morale team. It was really a joy to work with all those people and I took advantage of it. And they reciprocated by granting me that recognition at the end, which I very much appreciated.

Q: Just one last question related to that. You had mentioned the reengineering work in Honduras. I know in many missions the reengineering process and the creation of

strategic objective teams helped to enhance the roles of many of the FSNs and give them, in many cases, a stronger leadership role. Was that the case in Madagascar as well?

WASKIN: One of the interesting things I found was that, perhaps because Madagascar was such a small mission compared to Honduras, reengineering was not nearly as salient or disruptive an issue there as it had been in Tegucigalpa. In Honduras, my whole professional life had revolved around reengineering, promoting working in teams, changing the way that we designed activities, etc. And so when I got to Madagascar I began asking questions about those subjects. They couldn't have cared less. They didn't know anything about reengineering. They already worked instinctively as a team. FSNs already had, for the reasons that you surmised, strong leadership roles within all of these teams. And so reengineering wasn't a big deal for them. Yeah, perhaps they were going to write shorter Project Papers, or maybe not write any Project Papers at all, but they already were miles ahead of much of the Agency, largely, I guess, because of enlightened leadership from people like Buff McKenzie and Karen Poe and partly just because the nature of a small mission is such that those sort of barriers that spring up in a larger mission simply didn't exist there.

Q: Yes, that's a good point, a smaller mission, I'm sure makes a big difference. Okay, so, you did decide to go back to Washington, a job which got you back involved with some of these process issues.

AID/Washington/Policy Bureau, Director, Office of Program Coordination, 2000 - 2002

WASKIN: Very much so. I became deeply involved in process issues again. In August of 2000, I replaced Olivier as the head of the Office of Planning and Program Coordination in the Bureau for Policy and Program Coordination, or PPC. And I was a little worried about it because, while from a field perspective, I obviously knew there was a Bureau called PPC, I didn't know what they did, and their work didn't seem to have a lot of relevance to my day-to-day work. So, this was a bit of an experiment. But I knew Olivier from graduate school and had kept in touch with him over the years. And I had another good friend who worked in that office, Tony Pryor. I knew Tony from Madagascar, in fact, I had met him on that first TDY in 1990 when he was on the team that was designing the SAVEM Project. So, I was willing to give it a shot. And once again I found that I had landed in a situation where I was surrounded by an all-star cast. We had a five-person team in that office, all of whom excelled in their work: Jon O'Rourke, Tony Pryor, Tom Rishoi, Parrie Henderson, Larry Laird, a really great group of people. Elena Prince was the OMS (Office Management Specialist), and she was excellent. We all had a lot of fun working together.

When I arrived in PPC, the first thing I was charged with doing, and the task that was at the center of my attention during the two years I was there, was that of picking up the thread of rewriting the ADS 200 Series. As you will recall, the Handbooks that had been our lodestars for many years, Handbook 1A or 1B, Handbook 3, which were really our manuals for how to do things, had been thrown out in 1995 or so and replaced by this

online thing called the ADS, or Automated Directives System, which of course still exists today. This allowed the Assistant Administrator for Management, Larry Byrne, to claim a major victory as he posed for pictures comparing huge stacks of hard copies of old Handbooks with a few CDs containing the ADS that he held in his hand. The problem was that this new ADS was terribly disorganized and really hard to work with. Now, I don't fault the people that wrote the ADS in 1994-95 because they were under enormous pressure from Mr. Byrne and others to move quickly, but the result of this was a guide that was not well understood and not clearly written. So, before I got to PPC, under Olivier's direction my team had started rewriting the ADS 200 series. This was very important, because the ADS 200 Series governed how USAID did strategic planning, how it did activity planning (formerly known as project design), how it implemented those activities, and how it monitored and evaluated their success. When I arrived, I said, "All right, we're going to keep going on this but we need to make this relevant to the field." I made a comment at one point that "Guidance comes out of PPC, and PPC makes the assumption that suddenly, because it has published that guidance, therefore everyone in the agency is following it." But this is not true. Most people in the agency, particularly those in the field, a) aren't aware the guidance has been issued; b) don't understand what it means; c) don't understand what's relevant to them; and d), frankly, don't give a damn. So, in my view, we as PPC needed to reach out —in the first instance to regional and central bureaus in Washington but also to the field, and to do that we had to go on the road. I don't know whether it was my idea or Tony Pryor's idea, but we put forward a plan to launch a major, hands-on training program to take the new, re-written ADS 200 Series to field missions around the world and train them in these new procedures. So, that was our plan. And we carried it out. We rewrote all the chapters of the ADS 200 Series, got them approved by the bureaucracy in AID/W, and launched a training program to socialize, if you will, these changes throughout the Agency,

I got to PPC in August of 2000, by which time most of the work of rewriting had been done. I can't take credit for that. My contribution was that I pushed very hard for all the requirements we were outlining to include what I call trap doors. My position was that, if a Mission Director in the field finds that any of these requirements – except, of course, those mandated by federal law or regulation - are inimical to what he or she is trying to accomplish, all of them should be waivable by that Director, or at least waivable upon consultation with the cognizant deputy assistant administrator or assistant administrator. It was my view that the documents we had written had too many musts and shalls in them. These requirements probably made sense in most circumstances. But in other circumstances – possibly circumstances that we in Washington could not imagine or foresee – they might not make any sense at all. So I urged that each chapter begin with language clearly delegating waiver authority to the cognizant principal officer at each operating unit. And I managed to get that language approved. Sadly, when I became a Mission Director myself a few years later, I was surprised and disappointed to discover that the agency had deleted all those waiver authorities from subsequent iterations of the 200 Series. I continue to believe that was a mistake.

Our first opportunity to roll out this new training program came at one of my favorite USAID events, the annual REDSO/ESA scheduling conference in Nairobi in the first

week of November 2000. Several of us from PPC, including myself and Tony Pryor and a team of contractors from PricewaterhouseCoopers (including Chris LaFargue, who is now the USAID Representative in Libya), had been trained by professional trainers, and had developed what we thought was quite a lively curriculum of which we were very proud. The scheduling conference gave us the chance to debut this curriculum before an audience of Mission Directors, Deputy Directors, and Program Officers. We delivered two days of training, and it was a big hit. People really loved the training. They thought it was operationally useful, and they enjoyed it because we made it fun. We had interactive games, stupid things, really, but icebreakers like drawing contests and guessing games. We really put our heart into it and created a training program that explained why the changes that we had proposed weren't just more rules from Washington, but were things that could really facilitate and streamline the work of field missions. And people loved it.

The reason that I remember the date so specifically is that the U.S. presidential election was going on. Now, I had watched the presidential election with you in Malawi in 1988 (Peasley laughs) and while a Bush won that one too, as a matter of fact, it wasn't quite as dramatic as this one. This one—

Q: Was very dramatic.

WASKIN: —was a cliffhanger, right? This was the 2000 election, and as we were conducting our training at around 10:00 am Nairobi time it was around 2:00 am back here in Washington. And of course, everyone – the participants in the class and we the trainers – wanted to know what was going on. But I didn't want to stop the training, as we had limited time and needed to get through two full days of material. And of course no one had a smartphone or an iPad to connect to the internet to find out what was happening; those things did not yet exist. So, because Tony Pryor had finished his portion of the presentation and wasn't scheduled to go back on until the afternoon session, we asked him to go out to the lobby, watch TV, come back, and tell us who won. Tony does that, and he comes back in a few minutes and reports "Bush won. Gore's going to concede." Few of us were thrilled with that news, but at least we knew. Then Tony went out again, to get a coffee or something, and in about half an hour he comes back and says, "No, no, no, wait. Gore's not conceding. It looks like Gore won!" (Peasley laughs) So we send him out again to go watch more TV and find out what the heck is going on. And then in another half hour or so he comes back again and says, "Wait, it looks like Bush won after all." And by this point we are asking him, "Tony, are you drunk or what? Are you out of your mind? What in the world is going on?" It was pandemonium. But Tony was, of course, only reflecting the reality of what was happening at the time in the United States.

But, electoral shenanigans aside, this training was well received. And we then proceeded down to Malawi and delivered it there and then went to South Africa and gave it there. And again – rave reviews. We were delighted and I think a little bit surprised. So, with the very important support and encouragement of my then boss, Deputy Assistant Administrator Ken Schofield, who had been Deputy Mission Director when I was in Nicaragua, we farmed out teams of trainers from PPC all over the world and we gave this training in probably twenty missions. I personally was part of the team of facilitators in

Peru, Bolivia, Jamaica, El Salvador, and others that I'm no doubt forgetting. The most memorable training session, however, was one on which history yet again intruded. On the evening of September 10, 2001, Nedra Huggins-Williams and I and a young woman from Price Waterhouse (PWC) took off from Dulles Airport en route to Bamako, Mali to deliver the training there. So on the morning of September 11, we were in the air flying from Paris to Bamako, and I wondered why in the middle of the flight all the stewardesses disappeared and all services just stopped, without any announcement having been made. I thought well, that's just Air France, so whatever. When we got on the ground, we were immediately met by a USAID Executive Officer from the Mission, who it's not too strong to say was nearly hysterical.

And he told us about all the things that had happened in New York, and in Washington, and in Pennsylvania. And I remember saying to him, "Look. You have to calm down because what you're telling us can't be true. Whatever you're hearing, it can't be true." Then we got into the waiting Embassy vehicle to drive to the hotel, and on the way we listened to the local radio which was carrying a live broadcast of French President Jaques Chirac speaking. And I began to realize that oh, my God, it is true.

And so, we got to the hotel, and Nedra and I looked at each other and asked "What the hell are we going to do?" For one thing, it was obvious that we were stuck and stuck in a Muslim country that none of us had ever visited. And the young woman from PWC in particular was clearly terrified. And yet we had gathered in Bamako some 20 or 25 people from USAID missions all over West Africa, including several mission directors and a couple of future stars, John Groarke and Pam White, who at that time was the Deputy Mission Director in Mali. And for a while, to be honest, we were sort of paralyzed; we just sat in our rooms and watched TV. But soon we realized that we couldn't just sit there for hours on end watching CNN showing the twin towers falling over and over and over. So we called Paul Tuebner, who was the Mission Director, and we met with a group of the trainee people, including Pam, and the consensus was we would go forward with the training because what else were we going to do? And we conducted the training, which by then had become a three-day course. Talk about a bonding experience. And frankly doing the training was therapeutic for all of us. I remember saying at the start of the first training session that "What has happened is awful, but the best way that any of us can honor the memory of these people and respect what has happened is continue the work that we're doing." And that's what we did. And the Mali Mission was great; they made sure we were taken care of. Paul Tuebner even had us over to his house for dinner. But that training was exhausting, not so much because of the training but rather I think because of the emotions around it. To illustrate: after the last session, Nedra and I had a meeting with Pam White in her office at the Mission to talk about, I don't know, PPC kinds of things. And I actually fell asleep in Pam's office right in the middle of that meeting. Which is a difficult thing to hide when you're in a meeting with only three people. And I think Pam reacted in her characteristic fashion; she said to Nedra later something like "Well, I had to stay awake through three days of his bullcrap (that's not the word she used), he should be able to stay awake through 30 minutes of mine!" (Peasley laughs)

Now the plan was that I was going to fly back to Washington after finishing the Mali training, and Roberta Cavitt, who by then had left Honduras and joined our team in PPC, was going to fly out from Washington and join Nedra in Dakar, Senegal to give the training there. But we were both stuck: Roberta could not get out of Washington, and I could not get back there, because all flights to and from the U.S. were grounded. There was no way for me to get back to the States. I could have gotten to France, but then I would have been sitting at Charles de Gaulle Airport watching all the flights being canceled. So, I said, "All right, we'll just go to Senegal. We'll do the training there." And that, too, turned out to be a very emotional experience. This was partly due to the fact that the USAID Mission there was located directly over a gas station, which in retrospect was probably not such a great idea. More importantly, though, as I was walking around exploring Dakar by myself, I was approached several times by Senegalese men, one of whom even hugged me, and who said something along the lines of "Look, you are obviously an American, and we want you to know how sorry we are about what happened. We are Muslims, and that is not what Islam is about." That was very moving.

Our ADS 200 training program continued throughout the two years I was in PPC, and I think it was very successful. I recall there were people in PPC who were not supportive of this. But the leadership of the bureau was. There had been an election, of course—

Q: Right, and so it changed.

WASKIN: Right, it changed. Assistant Administrator Tom Fox left, and Ken Schofield announced he was going to retire, but Patrick Cronin came in as the new AA as a political appointee of the Bush Administration, and he got what we were trying to do and he supported it. He wanted us to be expeditionary. So, I felt that the senior leadership of the bureau had my back. That said, there were a few people who were long-term employees of PPC who wondered, loudly, what the hell we were spending all this money for. Tony Pryor and I were not entirely popular with everybody in the bureau because we were traveling around the world and spending money and as far as they were concerned we were just having a lot of fun. And yes, we were having a lot of fun but we were also evangelizing PPC to the rest of the agency. I guess they didn't like it because it was counter to their vision of the way the bureau had long done business.

Q: Yeah, because it was much more operational policy work than probably PPC was usually doing? In a sense, you were reengineering the reengineering and providing a little bit more discipline to the system—because everything got torn down and you put back in place a more common sense, lighter touch approach.

WASKIN: Right.

Q: And the training was instrumental to help people understand because I think almost all self-discipline was lost for a couple of years.

WASKIN: I think that's very well put. That's right, Carol, we were trying to instill some self-discipline and create some uniform standards without reestablishing sclerotic

procedures that had to be followed no matter what the circumstance. Nobody wanted to go back to the bad old days. I remember the first project design I was ever a part of. It was in Zaire in 1981. And first the Project Identification Document had to be approved in Washington, and then the Project Paper had to go back to be approved. And as I recall, there was a long debate by cable - we only had cables in those days – as to whether we needed twelve dump trucks or ten dump trucks. Nobody needed or wanted to go back to that kind of system. In retrospect, Mr. Byrne was not wrong in looking at USAID and trying to identify what processes actually added value and which didn't and then eliminate the ones that didn't and strengthen the ones that did. But unfortunately, as you well put it, everything in the old system got blown up suddenly, but there was no clarity and no discipline about what would replace it. My time in PPC was dedicated to trying to re-establish that clarity and that discipline. And the process of re-establishing that clarity and discipline without being excessively directive and bureaucratic has been a very gradual one that frankly continues to this day.

Q: I think you guys did a good job, also building in flexibility and the ability to waive provisions which was important.
Are there any observations about being in Washington during a political transition?

WASKIN: Oh, God. Stay away if you can!

Obviously, we prepared lots of briefing materials for the new Administration and the new Administrator, Andrew Natsios. And I learned some valuable lessons during that time. I remember briefing Administrator Natsios about the Strategic Objective framework, explaining how each mission had three or four strategic objectives, and a set of intermediate results that contributed to those objectives, and that each of these objectives and intermediate results had several indicators by which we measured their progress. I was very proud of myself and thought the briefing was going swimmingly. At that point Mr. Natsios stopped me and said, "Let me get this straight. What's the average number of strategic objectives per mission?" "Well," I replied, "small missions have three and large missions have four, so let's say 3.5." "How many missions are there in the world?" Mr. Natsios asked. I think there were seventy or so at the time, so I said, "Seventy." He said, "So, that means, let's just do gross numbers here, roughly 250 strategic objectives. And each of them has how many performance indicators?" "Oh, three or four," I replied. "So, we are monitoring over 800 performance indicators?" "Yes, sir," I said. And the Administrator then bellowed "How am I supposed to tell whether we are succeeding or failing if I'm trying to measure over 800 indicators simultaneously?" Good question. And what he was driving at was that there needed to be a framework for the agency as a whole to allow us to tell a coherent story to the Congress and the public. And that is what became over time what is now known as the F Framework, which is maintained by the Bureau for Foreign Assistance, or "F", in the State Department. Many people don't understand that the F Framework is not intended to help missions monitor their own performance. The F Framework is intended to answer Andrew Natsios' question, which is how do you assess the performance of the agency as a whole when you're operating with multiple objectives simultaneously and multiple indicators attached to each of those objectives. That was what Andrew was thinking of. I don't mean to imply that my

meeting with him crystallized this idea in his mind. I'm sure he was already forming the idea. But I think our conversation helped move him along in that direction. Now I probably should not have just walked into that trap like I did, I should probably have thought more strategically about what the new USAID Administrator would want to hear. But I didn't; I was thinking as I always had, from the optic of a field mission rather than that of the agency as a whole. And similarly, when we briefed Patrick Cronin on the ADS 200 series, I made the mistake of handing him the entire series and having him read it before our meeting. And he walked into that meeting and said, "This is absolutely insane. You people are nuts. This is a bureaucratic nightmare." We should have instead softened the ground with Patrick by a) not giving him the whole ADS 200 Series to read, and b) explaining that this text apparently heavy with jargon and procedure was actually streamlining and adding clarity to the highly undisciplined and unclear system it was replacing. We should have told him "This may sound unduly bureaucratic to you, sir, but in fact, it's really an improvement of the current system." We didn't do that. So one big lesson I took from the transition to the Bush 43 Administration is that you need to contextualize for the incoming political appointees who are new to the bureaucracy and have no idea what we do or why we do it.

The final lesson I would take from that transition is that timing, as in so many things, is everything. I arrived in PPC in August of 2000 and I viewed myself as a reformer. I was somebody who was going to help change things and, as you put it, reengineer the reengineering process. And then, there's an election and the new team comes in. They all arrive in March or April of 2001 and in their eyes, everybody that's sitting in an office on the day they got there is part of the old team, and thus part of the problem.

Q: Yep.

WASKIN: Even if you got there the week before they did they tend to view you as part of the old team. So, the trick in that kind of a situation is to time your arrival so that you are perceived as being part of the reformist effort rather than part of the old guard. (Peasley laughs). After my experience with the transition to Bush 43 in 2001, I vowed that I would never allow myself to go through that again. But of course, I did, eight years later, in the transition to the Obama Administration. I'll tell you about that when we get to that part of the story.

Q: Right. It's a good lesson.

Natsios very early on bought into the Global Development Alliance which had actually been designed by career staff during the transition. Did you have any involvement with the early days of that as it was being created?

WASKIN: Yeah, absolutely. Holly Wise was heading it then. I knew Holly from Nairobi, when she was in the bilateral mission and her husband Robin Phillips was in REDSO, if I remember correctly. I thought the world of her. And yes, we were involved in helping conceptualize the idea of the Global Development Alliance and more broadly the concept of public-private partnerships. But this was one of those things where branding and

timing become very important. You'll recall that I described Karen Poe, my Mission Director in Madagascar, as being a visionary. And she was. One of Karen's innovations was to establish a partnership with Coca-Cola in Madagascar. The idea was to produce bottled water and also rehydration salts, both for our health programs and as part of disaster preparation. And so, we put in place a memorandum of understanding with Coca-Cola. It was a prototype, if you will, a proto–Global Development Alliance that we had simply done on our own there in Madagascar without anyone from Washington telling us to do it. We were mobilizing the resources of the private sector. Coca-Cola had a unique ability to put liquid in bottles and distribute those bottles anywhere in Madagascar, and we took advantage of that. I remember talking to Holly about the concept of Global Development Alliances, which I thought (and still think) was a great idea, and citing the Coca-Cola case in Madagascar as an example of where the Agency was already doing that. But of course, we couldn't label that as a GDA. Why not? Because it had happened during the previous Administration. That wasn't Holly's fault; it was just the political reality. As I first learned during the transition to the Clinton Administration, one thing you never say to the people coming in is, "We're already doing that." (Peasley laughs) Mark Silverman told me that; Mark was a wise man. So, the message to Holly was not "We're already doing it," it was to say that, "Wow, this Global Development Alliance,"—

Q: Brilliant.

WASKIN: It's a brilliant idea, right? So yes, I was involved tangentially in discussions about the GDA. But Holly Wise was the real leader on that front.

Q: Okay. No, that's good.

Well, you were in that position for two years and it sounds like it was a very busy two years.

WASKIN: It was a very busy two years. I really loved the job, but I wanted to get back in the field. One of the countries that we had visited during the ADS 200 training was Bolivia. And Liliana Ayalde was the Mission Director. She had been the head of the health office in Nicaragua so she and I had served together there. And Wayne Nilsestuen, who had been the Deputy Mission Director in Honduras under Elena Brineman, was her deputy but he was leaving. Liliana wanted me to come out and be her deputy in Bolivia and I was assigned to the job. But unfortunately, my then wife developed a serious health problem, asthma, which is not a great thing for a very high-altitude post like La Paz. And so, I had to pull out of that assignment. Which was awkward not just for that mission, but also for me, because USAID had already assigned another dear friend of mine from Zaire, the famous David Eckerson, to replace me in PPC. So I suddenly found myself without a job.

AID/W/Asia/Near-East Bureau, Director, Office of Strategic Planning, 2002 - 2003

And then, the Asia/Near East Bureau, or ANE, came to the rescue. Fortunately for me, the superb head of that Bureau's Office of Strategic Planning, Bill Jeffers, was moving on, and when ANE learned that I was available they offered me his slot. So I landed on my feet in a really good job working with a really strong staff and, as it turned out, at a very critical period. This was the summer of 2002. In the aftermath of 9/11, we had ramped up a huge program in Afghanistan and we were ramping up what was going to be a huge program in Iraq. Of course, no one could talk about it because while our plans for Iraq were an open secret, they were to be kept under wraps. I recall that for a time we were not allowed to use the word "Iraq" in any written documents; we had to refer to "USAID/Blue".

As the head of that office, for the first time in my life, I was doing program officer work. Fortunately for me, I had a great team, starting with my deputy office director Del McCluskey, our budget guru Bob Hudec, and our Bureau Controller Amanda Levenson. We also had Christine Wegman, who was focused on Burma issues and did an outstanding job keeping the issues associated with that country on everyone's radar despite everything else that was going on in the Bureau and the world at that time. As a team, we were charged with developing the budget for every country in ANE. Now, the term "Asia/Near East", you will remember, meant everything from Morocco in the extreme west all the way to Indonesia in the extreme east and everything in between, including Egypt, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, et cetera. So, it was a very, very big remit for the bureau, probably too big given everything we were trying to accomplish.

But again, for me, it was a great professional learning experience for a lot of reasons. Very frustrating, also, because a lot of the decisions about Afghanistan and Iraq were being made at a level far above my own, and our office – ANE/SPO — couldn't become meaningfully involved in them. For example, Jim Bever was the head of the office responsible for Afghanistan and Pakistan, and he was assisted by the very able Jeanne Pryor. And they were coming up with a new budget for Afghanistan every hour. I remember working with them to prepare for a meeting with Administrator Natsios. About an hour before that meeting, we all agreed that, OK, these are the numbers we're going to present to the Administrator on Afghanistan. We all agreed: this is the budget. And I brought a copy of that budget with me to the meeting. And from virtually the moment we sat down with the Administrator, I realized, wait a minute, everything's changed. And I of course didn't have the new numbers, so I looked like a fool. After the meeting, I said to Jim, "I understand that Afghanistan is a fast-moving situation and that these numbers have to evolve, but can't we at least start the new meeting with the same budget we ended the old meeting with?" I recount this story not to be critical of Jim or Jeanne, who were and are extraordinary professionals and remain good friends of mine to this day. They were right: it was a fast-moving situation, and the numbers were constantly in flux through no fault of theirs. The point I'm making is that it very quickly became clear to me that for Afghanistan, the budget was going to be worked out by Jim Bever and Gordon West, the senior DAA, and by Ambassador Wendy Chamberlin, who was the Assistant Administrator. And anything to do with USAID Blue, meaning Iraq, was all going to be worked out at a similar level – the Administrator, the Assistant Administrator,

and the office director. So we as the budget office in the Asia/Near East Bureau were not involved in developing the budget for the two largest programs in that bureau.

In response to that, I finally went to Gordon West, who as senior DAA was my supervisor. And I said to Gordon, "I'm finding this job really dissatisfying. It's not nearly as fun as my old job in the PPC Bureau." He was incredulous. He said, "Wait a minute. That's a terrible condemnation. You'd rather work in the PPC Bureau than here? Are you kidding me?" So I explained to him my frustration at not being involved in developing the new programs for Afghanistan and Iraq. And I'll never forget what Gordon told me. He said, "Look. First of all, if you get involved in Afghanistan or Iraq then you won't get involved in anything else. They will suck you in like the Death Star and you'll never see the light of day again. That's all you will do." Secondly, and more importantly, he explained "This is a huge bureau. I'm up to my neck in Afghanistan. Wendy's up to her neck in Iraq. That leaves everything else, including Egypt. So, who's going to look after everything else? Well, that would be you, right?" "Oh, right," I said. "I guess I see your point." (Peasley laughs). So, from that moment on, I understood that my job was to deal with everything else in the bureau. And "everything else" quickly came to focus on Egypt.

Now, Egypt was a very interesting case because there was a very dynamic and aggressive Deputy Assistant Secretary of State who was interested in the program there. And that was Liz Cheney, the daughter of the Vice President of the United States. And she was on a mission to find out why the USAID program in Egypt, which had provided hundreds of millions if not billions of dollars over the years in policy-based cash transfer assistance to the Egyptian government, had not succeeded in getting that government to actually make any real policy reforms. The Egyptian government was still dysfunctional and corrupt. The fault for this, DAS Cheney was convinced, must lie with the USAID program. So she assembled around herself a staff of some ten junior State Department Foreign Service Officers to help her look into why the USAID program in Egypt was, in her eyes, failing. I remember vividly the first meeting I went to with DAS Cheney and her team. The meeting took place in a conference room in Main State; Kay Freeman, the Egypt Desk Officer, came with me. We were the only two representatives from USAID. We walked into that room to find ten young people on the State side, each of whom had in front of them very large and nearly identical stacks of papers. It turned out that these were copies of every contract USAID had in Egypt; they had each been instructed to read every one of those contracts, and in their minds this was how they were going to figure out what the secret sauce was, that is to say, why USAID was failing in Egypt. I was very impressed – indeed, overwhelmed – by the sheer number of people DAS Cheney had assembled to work on this issue, but at the same time, Kay and I could barely contain our laughter at the, for lack of a better word, foolishness of this approach. The very idea that you could diagnose the problems in any USAID program, much less one as complex and politically charged as Egypt, by reading that program's contracts struck us as self-evidently preposterous. But they didn't know any better.

Deputy Assistant Secretary Cheney was very frustrated that the information she wanted on USAID's programs in Egypt was not readily available in Washington. I remember

explaining to her, “This is because USAID is a decentralized agency. We have that information, but it’s located in Cairo. So, we’ve got to get it from the mission in Cairo.” She said, “Well, I don’t trust the mission in Cairo.” Well, that’s a different question, isn’t it? I mean, it’s one thing to say “They don’t have the information I need”, or “I don’t think the information they are sending me is accurate.” It’s quite another to say that you don’t believe or don’t trust what they’re telling you. Nonetheless, she was determined to get to the bottom of, as she would have put it, what was wrong with USAID assistance in Egypt. I always wondered why her nominal boss, the Assistant Secretary, whom I didn’t know at the time, stayed way out of her way. (Peasley laughs) Not knowing him, I assumed he was a nonentity. Well, I could not have been more wrong, for that Assistant Secretary was named Bill Burns. (Peasley laughs) Who, as I and the world later learned, is a very smart man – smart enough to let his deputy have the Egypt account.

So my job was to play defense with Liz Cheney. I met with her face to face a couple of times, and the message from her was always, “I want more information, I want to know what’s wrong.” And of course, the answer, - and of course I couldn’t say this to her – was that it was not a question of the USAID program having failed to engage policy makers in Egypt, or having failed to put forward a viable list of policy reforms for Egypt. We had developed and analyzed policies in Egypt. We had provided technical assistance to the government. We knew a tremendous amount about what needed to be done and what kind of reforms would have been helpful in Egypt. The issue was that there was never the political will in the United States to insist that the Egyptians make those reforms. They were not going to reform, and they knew we were not going to cut off assistance. They were fully aware that we were going to keep assisting Israel, and they knew that probably as long ago as the Camp David summit during the Carter Administration we had followed a policy that assistance to Egypt and Israel would be roughly parallel, if not entirely equivalent. So they knew they were going to get the money anyway, no matter whether they made the agreed-on policy reforms or not. So why should they reform? That was the fundamental political dynamic. It was not a function of something being wrong with the USAID program; rather, it was a consequence of lack of political will on our side. So DAS Cheney’s fundamental hypothesis was basically flawed. And ultimately, because she was so dissatisfied with USAID, what resulted from her engagement on Egypt was that she led the creation of MEPI, the Middle East Partnership Initiative, which I believe still exists to this day as a sort of, if not actually a competitor to USAID, at least a complementary assistance program to that of USAID. That was the genesis of MEPI: Liz Cheney’s total frustration with USAID, but also her inability or unwillingness to acknowledge that the supposed failure she was attempting to remedy was not a failure on USAID’s part but rather a political failure on the American side. So she ended up creating her own assistance program outside USAID – but the fundamental political problem remained.

There was one funny moment in all this. DAS Cheney was in my office in the ANE Bureau. We were having a one-on-one conversation, with the door closed, and I don’t remember what we were discussing, but then we got a call that Ambassador Chamberlin wanted to see her. So, I took her down to the Assistant Administrator’s office, they closed the door and discussed whatever they discussed, and I went back to my office. About five

minutes later there's a knock on my door. It was a Secret Service agent with panic in his eyes. And he said, "I can't find Secretary Cheney. Do you know where she is?" (Both laugh) I'm sure this agent saw his whole career just disappearing in front of him. He's lost the Vice President's daughter! I assured him that everything was fine, and that DAS Cheney was safely with Ambassador Chamberlin. And I took him to that office. He was very grateful.

Q: I know that Liz Cheney made a number of trips out to Egypt because I've talked to people who were in the AID mission that she was having similar meetings with. Were you ever in Egypt while she was there on one of these trips?

WASKIN: No, I never went, and I regret that. I know she traveled there, and I know that there were people in the Egypt Mission who were quite resentful of what she was doing. Some of them were, it's not too strong to say, outraged by the requests for information from DAS Cheney's office. But I think that, frankly, that was part of the problem, and I should have been more proactive in attempting to bridge the gap of suspicion that had grown between the Mission and DAS Cheney. But, for reasons I'm not sure I recall, possibly because there just wasn't enough time or possibly because I had other priorities – for example, briefing Capitol Hill staff about our program in Burma - I didn't. And probably that was a mistake. I probably should have taken this particular bull by the horns and gone to Cairo. I should have made sure that USAID as an agency was speaking with one voice and that there was not a USAID Egypt perspective on these issues versus an ANE Bureau perspective on these issues. In one sense, it was fortuitous: I had a good relationship with Secretary Cheney and her staff, and if they had to choose between working with me and my team versus working with the Mission, they preferred working with us. But in the long term, that's not helpful. I should have tried to bridge this gap and made sure that we were speaking with one voice.

Q: Yes; that's important.

You mentioned some other things that you were working on—including doing briefings up on the Hill. Did you spend much time up on the Hill and any thoughts about how to work effectively with the Hill?

WASKIN: I think it would really help the Agency if more of its staff spent more time with Congressional staff, whether in briefing them about ongoing or planned programs or participating in the kind of program that I did in 1988, being detailed to Capitol Hill and working with the Appropriations Committee or really any committee jurisdiction over foreign assistance, be they appropriators or authorizers. In my case, I did go up to Capitol Hill a few times, and I think my experience as a detailee helped me gain the confidence I needed to do so effectively. When I was in PPL, I briefed staff on the reforms we were trying to make to the agency's administrative procedures. And later, I briefed Paul Grove and Tim Rieser about what we were trying to accomplish in Burma.

Q: Did the Hill—just to go back to the Egypt stuff—did the Hill ever get involved in any of that?

WASKIN: It must have. I'm sure they did but I was not involved in that.

As rewarding and challenging as my job in the ANE Bureau was, I only spent one year in it, because I very much wanted to go back overseas. Clearly, I was enjoying working in the ANE Bureau, Gordon West having refocused me on the broader role that he wanted me to play. But I needed to go back overseas, and an opportunity presented itself to do so as we were starting or about to start a new regional mission in Bangkok. And this might be a good time for us to pause.

Q: Okay.

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Q: Today is December 1, 2023, and this is interview number four with Skip Waskin.

Skip, when we finished up last time you were leaving the Asia bureau in AID Washington and going off to the regional development mission for Asia in Bangkok. If you could tell us a bit about that—about the mission and how it was established and what you all were doing.

Regional Development Mission for Asia, Bangkok, Acting Mission Director, 2003 - 2004

WASKIN: Thank you, Carol, I'd be happy to. My involvement with what we eventually christened the RDM/A (Regional Development Mission/Asia) stems directly from the job I was doing heading the ANE Office of Strategic Planning and Operations, or ANE/SPO. Today, a lot of people claim to be the founder, as it were, of the RDM/A, and I was in fact the first Mission Director there, but I can't claim to be the progenitor of the idea. The real people behind the idea, the real founders of the RDM/A, were my boss, ANE Deputy Assistant Administrator Gordon West, and my deputy, Del McCluskey. Gordon and Del had the creation of the RDM/A well in train long before I got to the Asia Near East Bureau.

The problem they perceived was this. USAID had closed its bilateral mission in Bangkok in 1995 and then it closed the regional mission there in 1996. The problem was that it didn't close the regional program. The regional program continued, with pieces of it managed in various places. Some of it was managed by our office, ANE/SPO, in Washington, some of it was managed in Manila, some of it was managed in Phnom Penh, and our program in Vietnam was being managed by a non-presence office (meaning an office with no U.S. Direct Hire employees) that we had in Hanoi. So, responsibility for the Asia regional program was all over the place. There was a USPSC (U.S. Personal Services Contractor) in Thailand overseeing a vestigial operation there, but he was not responsible for the regional program as a whole. No one was; it was incoherent and no one had the whole picture. It was a little bit like the fable about blind people touching an elephant. Somebody had the trunk, somebody else had the tail, somebody else had a leg.

No one had everything. So, Del and Gordon really felt, correctly I think, that if we were going to continue to have a regional program, which we fully intended to, that program needed a central locus of responsibility, and that locus needed to be physically present in the region. Even then, in 2002-2003, everyone understood that the locus of U.S. foreign policy was slowly going to be shifting in the direction of Asia, given what already was the obvious growth of China as a world power.

So, with Gordon and Del's leadership, the ANE Bureau felt strongly that USAID needed to establish, or reestablish, a regional mission in Asia, and Bangkok seemed to be the logical location for a number of reasons: a lot of other U.S. Government agencies had regional offices there; many international organizations and other donors had regional offices there, and the air connections from Bangkok to the rest of Asia and to the U.S. were very easy. And, obviously, people find Bangkok an attractive place to live. We didn't think we would have trouble recruiting staff to go there. So, there were a lot of reasons to go back to Bangkok. But there was a tremendous amount of opposition to it, both within AID Washington and at Embassy Bangkok. Let's start with AID Washington.

One of the first meetings I attended as the head of ANE SPO was with Administrator Natsios in the Point Four Conference Room where Gordon and Del briefed him on our plans to establish this new office, which didn't even have a name yet. I was new to the bureau, so I was just there to listen and learn. But that was a very painful meeting, because Andrew was extraordinarily dismissive. To say he was skeptical of the idea is to understate things completely. He was not only dismissive, but I would say downright hostile. He said, "You want to open a mission in Bangkok? Yeah, I'd like to go out and be the mission director in Thailand." (Peasley laughs) But to be fair to Andrew, you have to understand the context of the time. This was 2002. We had people in Kabul. We had people in Islamabad. We were ramping up to send people to Baghdad. And then the three of us stroll into Andrew's conference room and say, "We've got a great idea, Mr. Administrator. We all want to go to Bangkok." He didn't have much patience for us, I have to say. But I give Gordon and Del great credit because they stuck to their guns. They knew they were right; they knew that this mission needed to be established. And eventually, not at that meeting but later, they did manage to convince the Administrator to approve, with great reluctance, I'm sure, the establishment of this office, which we named the RDM/A, Regional Development Mission/Asia.

Q: Just to interrupt for one second because the real purpose was for regional programs and perhaps also for overseeing non-presence programs—

WASKIN: Precisely.

Q: —but not a support mission in the way that REDSOs were.

WASKIN: Exactly. As you and I will recognize from our experience in the Africa Bureau this was not a REDSO. For one thing, at that initial stage of its existence, the RDM/A didn't have the resources or the staff to take on that kind of regional support role. The REDSOs were major operations with 35 or 40 U.S. direct hires or PSCs who collectively

possessed every skill set in the Agency. Whereas at the time in Bangkok, we had one USPSC and a small staff of Thai professionals. So, initially its purpose was exactly as you have described it: to manage regional programs and to oversee the non-presence programs, of which there were five. The first regional program took place in Thailand itself, because any foreign assistance that takes place in Thailand can't be bilateral assistance because the Royal Thai government doesn't accept foreign assistance. Rather, they are a provider of foreign assistance. So any programs that happen in Thailand, and we had a few, had to be defined not as bilateral but as regional. We also had non-presence programs in Burma and in Vietnam. In Vietnam we had an office headed by an extraordinary U.S. Personal Services Contractor named Jean Gilson, who is now the Senior Vice President of DAI. In Burma, we didn't have any USAID personnel posted there full time but we had support from a liaison officer within the U.S. Embassy in Rangoon. And there were none-presence programs in Laos as well as in the People's Republic of China. The latter was not, of course, aimed at assisting the PRC per se but were rather focused on HIV-AIDS programming, on legal education, and on assisting Tibetan populations in regions adjacent to Tibet. So, this was the original mandate of the RDM/A and these were the reasons that I surmise actually persuaded Administrator Natsios to approve establishment of a mission to carry out these purposes.

So how did I get involved in the mix? Everyone understood at the time that Gordon West intended to go out to Bangkok to be the RDM/A Director. The RDM/A was, after all, in large part his brainchild. But, temporarily at least, Gordon couldn't go out for personal reasons. Meanwhile, I was looking for an overseas assignment. I'd been in Washington for three years. I wanted to go back overseas. So it did not take long for the idea to occur to us that hey, maybe Skip could go out to Bangkok immediately as the Program Officer and get the operation up and running until such time as Gordon became available. And of course, wow, what an exciting challenge for me, to go out to Bangkok to launch a brand new USAID Mission. There was a slight bureaucratic issue in that the job I held in the ANE Bureau was a Senior Management Group, or SMG, position, whereas the FS-01 Program Officer job in Bangkok was not. So, bureaucratically, this was a step down for me, but in reality it was going to give me the opportunity to run a mission on a stage far bigger than I had experienced in Madagascar. So, that's what I decided to do: I bid on the Program Officer job, went out to Bangkok, and became the acting Mission Director there, which was really, you know, again, a great experience for me and a great opportunity to write on a tabula rasa.

So, Del having already secured office space in Bangkok, we gradually set about assembling a team, which initially consisted of Tom Elam, the USPSC already in place, plus two OFDA Personal Services Contractors, Tom and Mariza Rogers, who actually were the first new people (new in addition to Tom) to get there. I believe they arrived in April of 2003. I arrived in June of 2003 at about the same time as did Carey Gordon, our contracting officer, Lois Bradshaw, who was head of our health programming, and Peter Hubbard, who was our executive officer. Shortly afterwards, we were joined by Dennis Zvinakis, who moved from Manila to continue his work as head of the U.S. Asia Environmental Program, USAEP. So, this was our small initial team – eight Americans, including myself, and approximately the same number of Thai professionals. But as I

said, in addition to the challenges we had successfully overcome within AID/Washington, there was also substantial resistance within the U.S. embassy in Bangkok to our presence. As it was explained to me by people involved at the time, what had happened was that USAID had told the embassy in 1995 that it was going to close the bilateral mission but not close the regional mission. And that was fine with the embassy. And nine months later, in 1996, USAID closed the regional mission. So, this really angered the country team in Bangkok, and even seven years later that resentment was still there, particularly since a lot of the FSNs that worked for the regional mission or for the bilateral mission had by then found employment in the embassy. And you'd better believe they remembered. So, USAID already had kind of a bad reputation with Embassy Bangkok. And this wasn't helped by a couple of administrative missteps that we made. As I mentioned, two OFDA PSCs got to Bangkok in April 2003 before any USDH employees arrived to staff the RDM/A. I wasn't there, and more importantly there was no EXO (Executive Officer) there. And they, quite innocently and with the best of intentions, thought, gosh, it would be really dumb to buy all this very expensive Ethan Allen furniture that we're supposed to get from the embassy, we'll just have cheaper and better furniture made for ourselves in Bangkok and have USAID buy that. Which is exactly what they did. Well, this incensed the Deputy Chief of Mission, a guy named Ravic Huso, because USAID had promised him that as a condition of the Embassy allowing us to open the RDM/A, we would be full participants in the post's ICASS (International Cooperative Administrative Support Services) system. ICASS is, as our audience will know, the interagency service agreement through which USAID and other agencies pay to receive support services at an embassy overseas – including the purchase of furniture. DCM Huso made his views quite clear in a meeting with Del McCluskey, who had come out on TDY from Washington to see how things were going, and Lisa Childs, who was the Mission Director in Cambodia and was acting as the head of the RDM/A until we could get a director out there. They met with Mr. Huso in April or May of 2003, and according to them, he said, "You're going to be full participants in ICASS, or as far as I'm concerned you can establish your f-ing mission in Kabul." That was the DCM's position. So, we assured him by cable and email that we would be, in fact, full participants in ICASS. But this had gotten things off to a bit of a sour start. And more seriously, I think, any time you have a regional mission, you have to establish that you are providing some value to the Embassy that is hosting you. This was particularly important in Bangkok, where there were thirty-some agencies at post. And the paramount question in the minds of the ambassador and the DCM when it came to allowing any new agency to set up shop in Bangkok was what does this do for our bilateral relationship with the Thais? And our answer at the time seemed to be "Not very much." So, their initial view of USAID's RDM/A was that it would be a burden on the embassy administratively and not really help what they were trying to accomplish with Thailand. So why, they must have been asking themselves, do we need these guys?

So when I arrived in Bangkok in June of 2003, there were a variety of interagency tensions and issues I had to jump into. But let me talk a little bit about what we were trying to accomplish substantively with the RDM/A and how I tried to approach the leadership of this new organization. I'll begin by way of an anecdote from about a year and half later. This must have been in September or October of 2004, after I had moved

on to become AID Representative in Mongolia, and Tim Beans had become director of the RDM/A. Tim and I are good friends, and he called me and said, "I've got to share something." He said, "I just can't believe it. I thought you were a solid officer but let me tell you what's happened here." He said, "We just had our first Project Implementation Reviews, and I discovered that more than half the staff here in Bangkok have never even visited their project sites. How could you, as the director of the RDM/A, have allowed that to happen?" I said, "Well, that's very interesting, Tim. They really should get out and visit those sites. But I want to tell you something. About a year ago, maybe in September of 2003, I too convened Project Implementation Reviews for the RDM/A. And I found that more than half my staff didn't even know or hadn't even heard of the projects that I thought they were managing. So, frankly, I think we've made a lot of progress in the last year." (Both laugh) But that was the situation we faced when we opened the RDM/A in the summer of 2003. We had a regional portfolio, but there was great confusion over who was managing what. It was a tremendous challenge just to sit down and try to define what was the portfolio of the RDM/A, who was managing what projects, and what we were trying to accomplish. These are all very basic questions that at any well-established USAID field mission you take as a given. But very little of that was defined at the birth of the RDM/A.

Q: Is that in part because many of the programs had been managed elsewhere and then they were just transferred to the RDM/A?

WASKIN: Exactly right. Somebody somewhere in the agency knew something about each of these programs, but to put them all together in one spot, with one locus of management responsibility, was a huge challenge. But that's what we were supposed to do. And so, knowing there was confusion about the mandate of the RDM/A, I set off on a kind of goodwill tour. I visited almost every mission in the RDM/A's remit. I went west to Bangladesh and India, and I went east to the Philippines and Cambodia and Indonesia, and my message in all these places was, "Look. I've been in a regional mission. I understand. We're not here to compete with you. We're here to implement regional programs that support your objectives. As long as I'm the director here we're going to be fully transparent, we're never going to surprise you, you're going to know what we're doing to the extent that we know, and we're going to manage these non-presence programs but we're not going to get in the way of your bilateral programs. We're not going to try to compete with you. And I explained to them that our regional programs were not new programs competing for new resources. I assured them that these were existing programs that were already authorized and funded. I explained that we were simply setting up a mechanism in Bangkok to manage them all in one central location in the field rather than having them dispersed throughout other places in the field and in Washington. And that message was mostly well-received. But I have to tell you a funny anecdote about my first trip to Jakarta.

Every place I went I was received with great courtesy except Jakarta. In Jakarta the director was Bill Frej. I think you know him. When my team and I got to Jakarta they said, "All right, we're going to give you TDYers from Bangkok some space in this building." At the time the USAID Mission in Jakarta was spread out around the grounds

of the Embassy, not in the chancery but in various outbuildings. So they put us in a small space in one of those outbuildings which was fine except for two things. One was that, even though we all had U.S. diplomatic passports and IDs from Embassy Bangkok, they only gave us red badges, which meant we had to be escorted any time we wanted to leave the building. I could have lived with that but there was one other complication. The building Bill put us in didn't have any bathrooms. (Both laugh) So, any time I wanted to use the bathroom I needed to get someone to escort me. So I endured that particular indignity for two days, at the end of which I was supposed to spend half an hour with Bill in his office debriefing him about our work. I ended up spending about two and a half hours with him and making great friends with him. And ultimately I think he appreciated our diplomatic initiative. But as I told him, I had to admire his bureaucratic touch. I praised him for it. I thought it was very well played. Very nice.

So, visiting all the "presence" countries in the RDM/A's remit was important to accomplish. It was also important that I visit all the "non-presence" programs: Burma, Laos, Vietnam, and China. Let me take them in the chronological order in which I made those visits.

The first such program I visited was Burma. And Burma was very difficult to get into at the time. Del McCluskey had been to Burma and in fact had met with Aung San Suu Kyi, ASSK, who at the time was the leader of the opposition and was very supportive of the possibility of expanded U.S. assistance to Burma, of course not assistance to the government but rather assistance largely designed to promote democratic openings. And so I intended to go to Burma to follow up on Del's visit and meet with ASSK myself. Unfortunately, shortly after I arrived in Bangkok or perhaps slightly before, she was put under house arrest, one of the long periods of such confinement she endured, and so she was no longer available to meet. But I went to Burma anyway. I waited several weeks for a visa and finally received one the night before I was scheduled to depart. The U.S. Embassy in Rangoon supported our team's visit, received us very warmly, and was extremely positive about the idea of a USAID regional mission and having a larger assistance program in Burma. Though at the time we had no ongoing USAID presence in the country, I was able to spend three days in Rangoon and to meet with some 25 different international NGOs, some of which we'd already been working with, some of which we aspired to work with or who aspired to work with us. It was very clear to me that this was fertile ground in the sense that there were many potential partners with whom we could implement a program. It was also clear to me that we needed a larger on the ground presence; trying to operate a USAID program in Burma from Bangkok really wasn't going to work. That was my big takeaway from the visit, and something I strongly recommended to the Asia/Near East Bureau: that we needed to establish a real mission in Burma, whether a constituent mission reporting to the RDM/A or an independent mission, as it later became. To me that really wasn't the key issue. The key issue was that we needed to have a presence in Burma. And, ultimately we did.

Q: Was the primary work we were doing to support the groups that were trying to promote democracy?

WASKIN: Yes. Apparently there were late night, off the books meetings happening with local pro-democracy groups. Everything was being done sort of on the QT, underground, very low-profile, and of course with no USAID branding. But yes, we were supporting pro-democracy groups and international NGOs that wanted to work to support democracy.

Now, I argued that we should have a broader development presence in Burma because I felt that this would be among the most significant contributions we could make to the promotion of democracy there. For example, if you take a community health center or a school in a community and you help them establish a mechanism whereby there's community governance of that health center or that school that, I argued, that is a form of local democracy. That is how democracy takes root. But not everybody believed that. In particular Paul Grove, who was (and still is) on the staff of the Senate Appropriations Committee, was very skeptical about this view of what constituted "democracy" programming. I met with Paul - I don't recall whether it was in Washington or in Bangkok – and I explained to him my opinion that we should take a broader view of assistance to Burma. We should have development assistance but with a hidden agenda, as it were, and use that assistance as a wedge to promote democracy. Paul took a different view. In his opinion, programs labelled as "Democracy Promotion" should work with and support pro-democracy organizations. Period. That was his view and of course, his view prevailed, at least at that time.

Q: So, who were the partners we worked with on the ground? Was it IRI (International Republican Institute) and NDI (National Democratic Institute)_ or—?

WASKIN: Yes, as I recall, IRI and NDI were both engaged there, but also Save The Children U.S., Save The Children UK, and many other large, international, democracy-focused NGOs. It was astonishing to me. I really had no idea of the extent to which there was an international NGO presence in Burma. Obviously, they didn't advertise it but they were there.

Q: Were we also doing any kind of emergency relief there or was that taking place through OFDA ?

WASKIN: Not at the time. The tsunami came about eighteen months later and I think there was international relief at that point.

The second non-presence program we oversaw and that I visited was Laos. Laos was an interesting place to go, very similar to northeastern Thailand, culturally, linguistically, and gastronomically. The capital, Vientiane, was kind of a sleepy place. It was amazing to think that this area had been a focus of geopolitical conflict in the 1960s and 70s. It looks as peaceful as you can imagine. But USAID was funding interesting work there – again, without the presence of an on-site U.S. Direct Hire employee. The two projects I remember most were the work to eradicate unexploded ordnance in the Plain of Jars and a silkworm project. Visiting the Plain of Jars was a searing experience. The villagers there decorate the modest front porches of their small houses with old wartime missiles.

They use them as pillars to prop up their roofs. And almost 30 years after the war ended the markings were still very clear - you could still see our insignias and the words United States. I imagine you still can today. This was surreal enough. But then I was taken to a hospital and they said, "We want to introduce you to this farmer. He just had both his arms blown off yesterday by unexploded ordnance." Again, this was 2003, we're talking about stuff that's been lying around for at least 30 years. What do you say to a man like that? I'm talking to him as he was lying in this hospital bed, both his arms all bandaged up at the stumps. What could I possibly say? Sorry you got your arms blown off by bombs that my country left behind? That was tough. That was a very hard experience. Far more for him, of course, than for me. But it was painful.

The silkworm project was hard for another reason. That project sought to raise, literally, silkworms to produce silk and use that as a mechanism for raising farmers' incomes. But this was, I believe, an example of what can happen when you don't have experienced, on-site, ongoing oversight of USAID-funded activities. In the absence of a regional mission, I don't think people were looking very closely at this project. I was briefed on it and learned that it had been going on for several years, had spent $1.5 million, and had raised farmers' incomes by a cumulative total of some $100,000. And I said, "Let me get the math straight here. You spent a total of $1.5 million and you've increased farmers' incomes by $100,000? That's great. Doesn't that sound a little counterintuitive to you?" So I was very skeptical about this project, and even though it had some powerful political allies I recommended that we not continue to fund it.

As had been the case in Rangoon, the U.S. Embassy in Vientiane could not have been nicer to us. They had an economics officer who oversaw, to the extent that he could, the U.S. assistance program. The ambassador was very gracious and had us to dinner in his home.

Q: And there was no USPSC or anyone?

WASKIN: No, there was not.

Q: Okay, absolutely no presence, so.

WASKIN: No presence, no. No USAID presence. But I said to the Ambassador that we ought to establish a USPSC position because this poor guy at the embassy was doing his best, but he already had his hands full with his day job. And while he loved overseeing the USAID work, he really needed help. And as I recall the Ambassador was very supportive. He said he would approve the necessary NSDD-38 (National Security Decision Directive) determination and allow the position to be established if USAID is willing to fund it. I think we eventually did that. Again, it happened after my time but that was one of the recommendations that I made.

The third non-presence program I want to mention is Vietnam. This was a very different situation than that of Burma or Laos, because while Vietnam was a "non-presence" program in the sense that there were no USDH employees there, we had an office in

Hanoi headed by Jean Gilson, an extraordinarily competent USPSC, and a staff of ten Vietnamese professionals. And, as I had found in Burma and Laos, the U.S. Embassy in Hanoi was extremely supportive of the USAID program and would have welcomed an increased USAID presence. They would not have objected to having a U.S. Direct Hire. And so I strongly recommended that we establish a USDH position there and make it an independent mission. It just seemed to me that it was a little silly to have the so-called Mission Director for Vietnam – i.e., me - sitting in Thailand when the issues there were so complex and the local staff we already had on the ground was so obviously competent. I felt we needed an expanded presence there, the Embassy would have welcomed an expanded presence there, and we already had the local talent necessary to staff a stand-alone mission.

As a child of the sixties and seventies, for me to go to Vietnam was, obviously, quite an emotional experience. And to be welcomed in the way that I was, both at the central government level but also out in villages while meeting farmers and teachers – it was very moving. They said to me, "We love Americans, we're so glad you're here." This is North Vietnam, for God's sakes. (Peasley laughs) And I remember thinking at the time, I've never been in a country that was more like us than this country. These guys are amazingly hard workers. They're all capitalists at heart. Yeah, ideologically this is a communist country but boy, they're all entrepreneurs. And I thought, what were we fighting them about? What was going on? In retrospect, it appears to have been a kind of collective madness. I reflect today on our views of, for example, Hamas or Hezbollah or other organizations or individuals or countries that we perceive as being mortal enemies of the United States and I think, we thought the same thing about the Vietnamese sixty years ago. And our views on them, and our relationship with them, have shifted as profoundly as anything can shift. And I wonder whether 60 years from now our views on some of those we now consider to be, and who consider themselves to be, our enemies might have shifted, too. I hope so. But again, I found that our presence in Vietnam was welcomed. I visited Vietnam a couple of times. On my second visit, I represented the U.S. at an international donors conference on HIV-AIDS, and the delegates there elected me – not because of anything I did or said but because I represented the United States - to brief the prime minister of Vietnam on the results of the conference. That was quite an honor. Ultimately, of course, this receptivity to a U.S. presence, and our own desire to establish such a presence, eventually resulted in the establishment of a USAID mission there, which I believe was a great decision.

The last non-presence program I'll mention and that I visited on a couple of occasions was China. And the China program was fascinating. It had certain parallels to what you were doing in Russia at the time and to the program there that I ended up working on several years later, in that much of our work in China focused on an issue that was of great interest to them, HIV-AIDS. In my opinion, just as in Russia, it was our work on that issue that gave us the space to carry out other programs – for example, our work with Tibetan populations living on the borders of Tibet – that the Government of the PRC might not otherwise have allowed us to do. In addition, we were funding another program the Chinese highly valued, a Masters of Law program at Tsinghua University in Beijing implemented by Temple University. And again, the Chinese really could not have been

more receptive. I accompanied the Temple team to a dinner hosted by a Deputy Minister —I can't remember if it was the deputy minister of finance or deputy minister of foreign affairs, but a deputy minister who hosted us in his office complex. And he gave us a twenty-one-course meal. It was fabulous. They couldn't have been more courteous to us.

Later in that same trip, I believe, I went to the graduation ceremony for the law school, after which they had another lovely dinner for us. And then, after the dinner was already underway, our hosts told me, "We're making another seat at the table here. We're going to have a special guest sit next to you. She's on her way now." Well, the special guest that they brought and who sat next to me was Deng Ling, the sister of Deng Xiaoping. And I thought to myself, I bet they don't bring her out for just anything. I may not be very savvy about China, but even I can pick up the importance of this signal. If they're bringing Deng Ling to the dinner and having her sit next to me, that is a very deliberate gesture on their part that they expect me to understand. They were telling me that they valued this program, they valued our presence, and in fact, they were grateful for it. Now Deng Ling was quite elderly, of course, and didn't speak English, but I was able, through an interpreter, to converse with her and tell her how much I admired her brother. So this was another very pleasant evening in China, but more importantly it was a revelatory experience that I took with me later to Moscow. It impressed on me that our relationships with our geopolitical rivals don't have to be all about geopolitics, or about competition. There are issues on which we can agree and on which we can collaborate and that are important to both the governments and the people of our countries. And we were doing that successfully in China.

Q; Just a quick question. At this dinner was anyone from the embassy there as well, just out of curiosity?

WASKIN: Yes, at both dinners. In fact, the Embassy in Beijing couldn't have been more supportive. The deputy chief of mission at the time was a guy named Michael Marine, who was, in fact, a former marine who later became ambassador to Vietnam. And Mr. Marine was a very forceful personality. People told me, "Be careful, he's tough, he's really tough." Well, I met with him in his office, and he said, "I want to show you something." And he pulled out a set of blueprints and said "Here are all the plans for the new embassy." He said, "Look at all this office space here. You see these ten offices right there? Those are your offices." (Peasley laughs) "Those are for USAID." And I said, "Well, that's great, Mr. Marine. I'm glad you're thinking of us but we actually have no plans to put anyone—." "Ah, no, no, once we build these offices you'll send people up here to fill them. We've got to have an AID presence here." Now, I don't think that ever happened, but he was very much a supporter of it. He was of the "if you build it, they will come," school. (Peasley laughs) He had space for us, and he wanted us. So, yeah, we were very welcomed by the embassy and by the government.

Now, the part of our program that we were doing that might have annoyed the Chinese government was the work on the borders of Tibet. But I had no visibility, really, on what was going on there. We tried very hard to get permission to visit that program but it took months to get a visa and to make the necessary arrangements. Ultimately, we finally did

get permission from the government of the PRC to visit the U.S. Consulate in Chengdu then go from there to see the work we were funding. It's important to point out that we weren't actually working in Tibet. That was not permitted. Rather, we were working with Tibetan populations living in the areas adjacent to Tibet.

Q: So, on the eastern Tibetan plateau?

WASKIN: Precisely.

But by the time we finally got this permission, I was already preparing to leave Bangkok, and so it seemed to me that it would be stupid for me to take up a precious seat on this trip just two weeks before I was to leave post, because we were only going to be allowed to send four people. I thought it would be far better to send somebody who would have an ongoing role in it. So, conveniently enough, a gentleman named Skip Kissinger (Peasley laughs) had arrived in Bangkok to be the head of our economic growth office, so I thought, what the heck? One Skip or the other Skip, nobody will know the difference. So I sent Skip Kissinger to take my place on that trip, which is why I never gained any personal knowledge of our Tibetan program. I kind of regret that, but I think it was the right thing to do. After all, it was going to be his program to manage, not mine.

The biggest takeaway from all this is, again, that the lessons I learned and the experiences I had in China were very much in my mind when I got to Moscow five years later.

Q: And I think a very important lesson is that sometimes you get a little more room to do the things that we are interested in if you engage very fulsomely in the things that they are most interested in.

WASKIN: Precisely. I think that was working for us in Russia for a while until it didn't. But it definitely was working for us at the time in China.

I understand that the Tibet program is still active. I was in Bangkok last month, and I called on Steve Olive who is the RDM/A Mission Director now; he told me that it's still going on. The work with the law school is now managed by the State Department but Temple continues to be the partner for it. I didn't have a chance to ask Steve about the status of HIV-AIDS programming or anything else we're doing in China now but there is still USAID activity within China. I think the American public would probably be surprised to know that, but the point is that we are working on global issues that are of concern to both countries and very much in the interest of the United States to engage in.

Q: Good. No, that's important. That's a wonderful overview of the program so thank you, Skip. You were there just about a year and then you—

WASKIN: Just about a year, yes. Here's what happened. Gordon West, for personal reasons, was unable to make a firm commitment to come to Bangkok to assume the Mission Directorship of the RDM/A. And ultimately, after I had been there around nine months, he let us know that he was not going to be able to come —which was unfortunate

because Gordon would have been a great director there and would have done a wonderful job. And so the job became open and I bid on it and I was selected for it. Oddly enough, I was only given a two-year assignment, possibly because the assignment panel figured I'd already been there a year and did not want to lock me into that job for five years. But I thought, well, two years is forever in USAID; if I do the job well we can work on that issue two years from now.

Q: Right.

WASKIN: One evening three or four days later, I was in a grocery store and my phone rang, and it was Gordon. He said, "I've got some bad news for you. Andrew Natsios wants to name Tim Beans to be the mission director in Bangkok." I of course expressed my surprise and disappointment, but Gordon explained that that's the way the Administrator wanted it so that's the way it was going to be. At one level, I was pleased, because Andrew's views on the importance of having a regional mission in Asia had evolved, which I felt good about. But the abrupt change in direction was disruptive both for me and for the mission. Of course, Tim and I spoke about the situation; Tim was and is a dear friend, and he was very apologetic. And I said, "Look, you don't have to be apologetic. I don't own this job. Andrew Natsios owns this job, and he'll decide who's going to hold it. If he wants to send you, he's going to send you. That's all there is to it." And Tim was kind enough to offer me the deputy director position, but I declined. Having run the RDM/A for almost a year I really felt I was ready to take on my own mission on a permanent basis.

So, this changed my life in many ways. Most immediately, I needed an assignment, and this was now late in the SMG cycle. I told Gordon that I was really interested in staying in the ANE Bureau and asked him what other Directorships might be available. And he said, "The only thing we've got is Mongolia." And while Mongolia was only a small $10 million program, I really didn't want to create any drama. So I told Gordon that my answer was yes, I would go to Mongolia. Part of the reason I was interested in Mongolia was that I knew it would be a well-managed, strong program because the incumbent AID Representative was Jonathan Addleton, who's an outstanding officer. In fact, Jonathan later became the U.S. Ambassador to Mongolia. So, I knew I was going to inherit a program that was in good shape. Now all this was taking place in probably February or March of 2004. And having been named or at least knowing that I was about to be named AID Rep in Mongolia, I naturally reached out to Jonathan. But as it turned out he was not at the mission at that moment. He was on vacation - in Siberia! (Both laugh) And I thought to myself, my God, what kind of a place must Mongolia be if people want to go to Siberia in the winter to get away from it? I wondered what I was getting myself into. But when I did finally speak with him, he was very reassuring about the quality of life in Mongolia, and several months later he and I did get together in person – in Phnom Penh, of all places, where he had just arrived as the new Mission Director there. And he briefed me about the program in Mongolia, the kind of life I would have there, and the nature of the work. And I actually became quite enthusiastic about it. And so, I decamped to Mongolia. And this was a big change.

USAID/Mongolia, AID Representative, 2004 - 2006

Q: But in the summertime, the summer of 2004?

WASKIN: In the summertime, right.

I got to Mongolia in late June 2004. I left Bangkok earlier that month, went to Washington for orientation and then to be sworn in as AID Representative, and then arrived in Ulaanbaatar to find that it was hotter there that day than it was in Bangkok. I think it was 97 degrees in Ulaanbaatar (UB) that day. So I asked, "Where's the air conditioning?" And my staff said, "We don't have any air conditioning." "Are you insane?", I replied. "What do you mean, we don't have any air conditioning here?" I of course was used to Bangkok, where everything was air conditioned. So they gave me a little fan, and I made due. And of course I soon discovered that those few weeks in late June and early July were the only two weeks when you would ever even think of needing air conditioning in Ulaanbaatar.

The USAID office in UB was co-located with the Embassy. And the Embassy itself was hardly luxurious. It had been built in the late 1980s, and was intended to be, I think, the embassy of both Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria. Thus, it was two buildings sort of put together as if they were one building. Of course, when Mongolia became a democracy in 1990, the Czechs and the Bulgarians diminished their diplomatic presence and the U.S. took over this facility. And USAID inherited a part of it. And it's still there. It's nothing beautiful, but it's functional.

For me, the challenge in Mongolia was how to continue an effective and relevant program with a very limited budget. I should stress that it was already quite an effective and relevant program. Under Jonathan's leadership they had produced an outstanding strategy – one that I had reviewed and cleared and been impressed by when I was in ANE/SPO. We also had a superb staff – both a small group of Mongolian professionals (all women, as it happened) and an outstanding de facto deputy, Jeff Goodson, who was there on a Personal Services Contract as, I think, officially a General Development Officer. I had known Jeff since I met him in Lubumbashi in 1986, when he was an Environmental Officer out of REDSO/West in Abidjan and came to Zaire to help us with the design of the Central Shaba Project. I had enjoyed working with him then and had stayed in touch with him over the years; I was very much looking forward to having the opportunity to work with him again. My path in Mongolia was further smoothed by the fact that we had a wonderful U.S. Ambassador, Pam Slutz, whom I had also known in Zaire some twenty years earlier when she was a junior officer in Kinshasa. So I was walking into a great situation.

As a small mission, the USAID program in Mongolia was focused on just two Strategic Objectives: promoting private sector-led economic growth and helping Mongolia consolidate its democratic transition. It was pursuing these objectives through five

projects, which I'll try to describe briefly. To my and USAID's great good fortune, every one of these projects was headed by a thoroughly outstanding Chief of Party. The first was a project implemented by what was then known as CHF, now called Global Communities, run by an extraordinary Country Director named Margaret Herro, which was called the Ger Initiative. Ger is a term in the Mongolian language that means house. A "ger" is what we would probably describe as a yurt, a circular wooden structure lined with felt with a stove in the middle. And Mongolians have for centuries lived and still live in gers on the steppe all around Mongolia. You have to understand, Mongolia is physically a huge country; it is slightly larger than Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah combined. Yet in 2004 there were only about 2.7 million people in the entire country. And almost half of those, 1.3 million, lived in the capital Ulaanbaatar.

Q: Wow.

What had happened was that when the socialist government fell, people were allowed to migrate to the city. In socialist times that was more difficult to do, people were effectively told where to live. So beginning in the 1990s, with the freedom to live anywhere, there was an enormous influx of people to the capital city. Additionally, in the early 2000s, there had been a series of exceptionally harsh winters, which they call dzuds, and the consequence of those two factors was that the population of Ulaanbaatar had exploded. Hundreds of thousands of people had moved to the outskirts of the city with their gers. Thus, these became known as the ger areas. And our project with CHF, the Ger Initiative, was designed to provide business development support and employment matching opportunities for these effectively internally displaced people who had migrated to the outskirts of the city.

Q: But it was then to upgrade the areas in which they were living, but they remained in the gers?

WASKIN: Initially, yes, when they first arrived – and sometimes for many years thereafter. But of course, over time, they began to build their own more permanent structures, and what continued to be called the ger areas were becoming more like shanty towns. The presence of these internal migrants put a huge strain on social services – health, education, water, garbage, sewage. It also created environmental issues. One of the challenges that UB, Ulaanbaatar, faces is that the city sits in a bit of a bowl. And within that bowl, almost everyone lives on the north side of the Tuul River, which runs through the city from east to west. Almost no one can live south of the river. Why? Well, the south side is considered near sacred. Chinggis Khan, Genghis Khan as we say in English but the correct Mongolian pronunciation is Chinggis Khan, decreed some 800 years ago, "This area is off limits." So, that area is still off limits. It is effectively a very beautiful national park, or protected area – another of the many concepts that Chinggis introduced that have endured into modernity. The only people that live there are the president, the prime minister, the speaker of the house, and a few associated staff.

Q: Now, did Genghis Khan live on the south side?

WASKIN: I don't know but I imagine he did.

Q: Okay. So, it was to be restricted to the most important?

WASKIN: Right, yes. And that's still the case.

The other complication is that the central power plant for the city sits almost smack dab in the center of the town, maybe a little bit toward the western side. And this being a coal-burning plant, it naturally spews out a lot of smoke. So, you've got this, plus the air pollution caused by the traffic, of which there is a great deal, and the fact that the people living in the ger areas are cooking and heating their homes largely by burning cheap coal, lignite, in their hundreds of thousands of stoves. All this creates a real air pollution problem, so through the Ger Initiative we were working on developing and promoting various green technologies that would reduce that aspect of the problem and the associated health costs caused by air pollution.

The Ger Initiative – which by the way also stood for "Growing Entrepreneurship Rapidly" – aimed to address the consequences of migration from the rural areas to the city. Another project, the Gobi Initiative, which was run by Mercy Corps and had a wonderful Country Director named Steve Zimmerman, was working with the populations, largely herders, who had remained in rural areas. Mongolians are extremely skillful herders, primarily of goats and sheep, and through the Gobi Initiative we were working with them on ways of improving animal husbandry, on finding forage, and particularly on questions of access to water, which is absolutely crucial given that much of Mongolia is desert. It's not the kind of desert that you and I would think of because it's covered with grass but it's a desert. So water is a very scarce resource, and we were using satellite technology to help herders find it and find forage. With our funding, Mercy Corps also published a physical newspaper, "Rural Business News", that gave the farmers up to date information about what real prices for their livestock and commodities should be so that they didn't get ripped off.

The third project I want to mention was called the Economic Policy Reform and Competitiveness Project, or EPRC, which was implemented by Chemonics. It had a staff of five international experts who advised the Mongolian government, and who had tremendous access to the highest levels of that government. The Chief of Party was a gentleman named Fernando Bertolli, who was superb. When I got there, I asked Fernando, "What's your policy agenda? What policy reforms are we promoting?" "We don't have a policy agenda," he told me. Well, I was nonplussed by this; in my experience until then, USAID-funded "policy" projects typically were associated with a set of reforms that we were trying to get the host government to adopt. But Fernando explained that EPRC was intended to advise the government on how best to implement the policy reforms it wanted to implement. And that's exactly what they were doing. In addition, under the competitiveness component, they were looking at various industries where Mongolia could be competitive in international markets. One of those industries, obviously, was tourism, for which Mongolia is a spectacular destination. So EPRC was advising both the government and the private sector on how to promote the tourist

industry as well as on how to improve the infrastructure and other aspects of the tourist experience. They were also looking at other industries such as the production of pet food. Mongolia produces a lot of meat, more than is needed for domestic consumption, and not all of it can meet the phytosanitary standards that are required for export for human consumption. So, we were helping them meet the phytosanitary standards necessary for exporting meat as pet food to places like China and Japan and Korea. The phytosanitary standards for pet food are not as strict as those for human consumption but they're not negligible either. So, we sought to help Mongolia build that industry.

The other two projects were in the democracy sector. The International Republican Institute, IRI, headed by a young man from Texas named John Poepsel, was working with Mongolian political parties to strengthen their ability to do things like run issue-based campaigns and carry out election observation. And the fifth project was known as the Judicial Reform Program, implemented by the National Center for State Courts and led by another outstanding professional, Robert Lamont. And this was a very interesting case. Typically, when you are in USAID and working in a place like, say, India or Pakistan, one challenge is always that of how are we going to scale up this assistance? We can do these little pilot projects in a particular area – say, production of improved varieties of dates in northern Sindh Province in Pakistan. But how can you expand that technology and scale it up to have a national impact? In Mongolia, in the judicial sector, we didn't have that problem. At the time, there were 89 court districts in Mongolia and 400-some judges. And under the Judicial Reform Project, we trained every judge and we rehabilitated every court. (Peasley laughs) We got them all. And most of the judges were women. All of them had been trained, and all the courts had been rehabilitated, which was great for me because it gave me a reason to visit every province in Mongolia, which I did. Because every province had a courtroom and every courtroom had been rehabilitated by USAID, so I saw them all, or nearly all. That was a great part of the experience there.

But there was another aspect of work in Mongolia that I got involved in very early, in fact, even before I went to the country. 2004 was the first year of the Millennium Challenge Corporation and the Millennium Challenge account. And using its entirely empirical and objective formula, the MCC had selected three countries in Asia as being at the forefront of U.S. interests in that part of the world: Sri Lanka, Vanuatu, and. Mongolia. Accordingly, in July of that year, after I had left Bangkok but before departing for UB, Administrator Natsios and I were invited to accompany Ambassador Slutz to meet with the President of Mongolia, Natsagiin Bagabandi, and the first head of the Millennium Challenge Corporation, Paul Applegarth. This was a very interesting meeting, I have to say.

Q: And this was in Washington?

WASKIN: This was in Washington. President Bagabandi had been invited by President Bush to visit the White House; I don't recall whether we met him before or after his meeting with President Bush. In any case, Mr. Applegarth briefed the president on the nature of the MCC, stressing that the Mongolians themselves had to develop their own proposal for an MCC compact, and that whatever proposal they came up with had to be,

number one, their proposal, host country owned; two, it had to be analytically rigorous; and, three, it had to be developed quickly. President Bagabandi listened politely, and then leaned toward Mr. Applegarth and asked "So, what do you want us to propose?" (Peasley laughs) And Mr. Applegarth said, "Well, this is your proposal." And he then repeated all the things he had said earlier about country ownership and analytical rigor, etc. And again, President Bagabandi listened politely, and then said, in effect, "Yeah, yeah. I get all that. What do you really want us to propose?" It was that kind of dialogue, and I could see that there was going to be an interesting dynamic between Mongolia and the MCC. It seemed to me President Bagabandi was a realist; he was willing to buy into the rhetoric of the Millennium Challenge Corporation to a point, but perhaps he felt the reality would be a little different.

So, when I got to Ulaanbaatar it appeared that USAID was going to be supplanted as the principal U.S. foreign assistance agency there, and that Mongolia's attention was going to be on the Millennium Challenge Corporation. This was not surprising, since we as USAID had a $10 million annual budget, whereas I think the MCC was proposing a compact valued in the area of $70 - $100 million, which isn't much money in a lot of countries but is an awful lot of money in Mongolia. And so, the attention of the Mongolian government was very much focused on the MCC. And the government had established a Millennium Challenge Account secretariat—

Q: Was this a secretariat to help define what it is they wanted to do?

WASKIN: Right, a secretariat within the prime minister's office. Now, the very day before I got to Mongolia they had had an election And to the great surprise of many, the long-ruling MPRP, the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party, the former Communists, had not won. They eventually were forced into a coalition with the opposition Democratic Party, which was led by a guy named Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj, who had been a young rabble rouser in the 1990s and who in the summer of 2004 became the prime minister. And so, Prime Minister Elbegdorj was now very interested in what Mongolia's proposal to the Millennium Challenge Corporation should be, as the responsibility for that fell squarely on his shoulders. The problem was that his secretariat lacked the technical expertise required to develop a sound proposal. And so, they were looking for sources of expertise. And it quickly came to their attention that they had a bunch of international economists sitting in an office building a block and a half away from the prime minister's office working on this USAID-funded thing called the EPRC Project. So it was suggested that perhaps EPRC could help Mongolia's MCA Secretariat develop a proposal. This was a logical solution from Mongolia's perspective, but it was a very sensitive issue within the U.S. government. There was as you may recall a lot of institutional tension between USAID and the MCC, and the guidance I was getting from Washington was that we were not to do anything for the MCC, but rather just let them figure it out. And I was told by my MCC counterpart, a very talented gentleman named Darius Nassiry, that, similarly, the MCC's position was that they could figure this out on their own and didn't need any assistance from USAID. However, the reality was that Mongolia's MCA Secretariat desperately needed assistance, and a great potential source of it was sitting right there.

So, Darius, who was not resident in UB but who came frequently, and I sat down and agreed that we had both a problem and a ready solution to it. He needed technical assistance. I had technical assistance. Officially, we were not allowed to work with each other. We were not really even supposed to be talking to each other. But the U.S. Ambassador and the Prime Minister both wanted this compact to happen, and it was very much in the interest of both Mongolia and the United States that it happen. So Darius and I agreed that we would figure out a way to make this happen without anybody in Washington on either the USAID or MCC sides being the wiser. So, I deployed one of our EPRC experts, an excellent economist from Poland named Janusz Szyrmer, to work quietly with the MCA Secretariat to help them develop a proposal. As I told Fernando and Janusz, "Have I got a deal for you. You're going to spend the next three months working with the Mongolian MCA Secretariat and you're not going to be able to tell anybody what you're doing and you're not going to get any credit for it. How does that sound?" (Peasley laughs) Not great, I'm sure, but this is exactly what we did. And Prime Minister Elbegdorj was very grateful for this.

Q: Yeah.

WASKIN: With EPRC assistance, we were able to quietly help Mongolia develop its own proposal for an MCC compact. And it was their proposal; we provided analytical support, but they made the decisions. There were a lot of ideas floating around, and it took a while for them to gestate. One was to improve the rail system. The problem with that was that the rail system was 50 percent owned by the Russian Federation, so the MCC decided that perhaps they ought not to be working with the rail system. The compact that was eventually signed was multi-faceted; it supported work on property rights, road transportation, energy, air pollution, non-communicable diseases, and vocational education.

Q: Looking at speed, by the way, I looked up Mongolia on the MCC website and I think the compact didn't start until 2007. So, I just mention that in the context of Mr. Applegarth's comments about how quickly they would work.

WASKIN: Well, that is interesting, isn't it? I left UB in 2006, and I thought the compact was near completion. It illustrates, I think, one of the things I believe about the Millennium Challenge Corporation and its way of doing business. As Mr. Applegarth suggested in his comments to President Bagabandi, their view is that an MCA compact should be host-country owned, analytically rigorous, and developed quickly. My view is that you can do any two of those things – but not all three simultaneously. In Mongolia, the first MCA Compact was definitely host-country owned and was definitely analytically rigorous – but it didn't get done quickly.

In 2005, I had the opportunity to make this point, indirectly at least, to the highest levels of the U.S. government. Let me tell you how that happened. As you may know, senior-level U.S. officials like to come to Mongolia. And in that year, my second year there, we had an unusually robust series of such VIP visitors. We had the Speaker of the U.S. States

House of Representatives, Dennis Hastert; we had the Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld - we gave him a horse - (Peasley laughs) and we had the President of the United States.

Q: Really?

WASKIN: Along with the Secretary of State and the First Lady, yes. So, this was a highlight of my time in Mongolia. I was designated to be the control officer for Mrs. Bush.

As our small Embassy – which consisted of a total of only 15 U.S. employees - prepared for the visit, we naturally reviewed the list of all American citizens living in Mongolia to determine whom we should invite to various events associated with the visit. We couldn't invite everybody – there were probably a couple hundred Americans living in Mongolia at the time. And one of the people we excluded was a journalism fellow from Gannett News who was there helping to train Mongolian journalists as part of a program run by the public affairs section of the Embassy. His name was Jimmy Walker, and of course in our small expatriate community we all knew him. Well, about three weeks before President Bush was scheduled to arrive my deputy, Jeff Goodson, saw the list and saw that Jimmy was not on it. And he asked me, "Skip, do you know Jimmy Walker?" And I said, "Yeah, I've met him at a couple of parties." Then Jeff asked, "Do you know why his last name is Walker?" I replied, "I assume that's because that was his parents' name." And Jeff explained, "Well, it's Walker as in George Walker Bush."

Q: Oh. (Laughs)

WASKIN: Jimmy Walker, it turns out, is George W. Bush's first cousin. He looks just like him, as a matter of fact. So, we obviously got him on the schedule. The reason I mention this now is that, a few days before the visit, Jimmy Walker and I happened to be at the same dinner, and he and I talked about the Millennium Challenge Corporation. And he asked me, "Skip, if you had a chance to tell George W. Bush about the Millennium Challenge Corporation, what would you say?" And I said, "Are you asking me this because perhaps you might have a chance to say some of these things to President Bush?" He smiled a bit and said, "Well, that might happen." So, I harkened back to Applegarth's typology that a compact has to be fast, be host country owned, and be intellectually rigorous, and I made the point that you can do any two of those three things, but not all three simultaneously. That was the fundamental flaw in the Millennium Challenge Corporation's business model. And I hope that Jimmy had the chance to mention that to his cousin.

Q: No, that's a good point. So, you think that one of the factors that might have prompted the president to want to come to Mongolia was the fact he had probably heard some stories about Mongolia from—

WASKIN: He probably heard some stories. And Mongolia was an MCC country, of course, and he was interested in the MCC. But perhaps more importantly, Mongolia was

a part of the coalition of the willing in both Iraq and Afghanistan. There were Mongolian troops in both countries.

Q: And I believe that James Baker was really close to Mongolia over the years?

WASKIN: He was. And since you mention Secretary Baker, let me tell you about my experience with him before we get to President Bush's visit.

In the summer of 2005, just before all our VIP visits and before we even knew that President Bush was planning to come to Mongolia, Ambassador Slutz took a trip out to the Gobi and was going to be gone for two weeks. Now, technically, since she wasn't leaving the country she didn't need to name a Chargé d'Affaires but somebody had to be the officer in charge in UB while she was gone. And, since the DCM was also away from post, she asked me to be that person. And even without having the formal title of Chargé d'Affaires, this was a big responsibility, because since she was going to the Gobi, where there was no cellphone coverage, it was going to be very hard to reach her. We would have had more direct communication with her had she simply gone to Washington, but being that she was in the Gobi she was all but out of the picture."

But for me, this was great. The ambassador leaves, and I got to sit in DCM's office, and I thought, boy, this is terrific. I'm running my own embassy now. I've really made it. (Peasley laughs) I'm in charge. And then the phone rings. It's the Political Officer calling to say, "We've got a problem, Skip." Naturally, I asked "What's the problem?" "We just got word from Ivanhoe Mines that their special counsel, one James Baker, is arriving in Mongolia tomorrow (Peasley laughs) and wants to see the president." Oh, great. "What should I do?", he asked. So I said, "Well, let's call the President and ask if he has time to see Secretary Baker tomorrow." What else could we do? And I added "And get word somehow to the ambassador that Secretary Baker is on his way because she needs to know this, and she better get back into town." Meanwhile, I directed our GSO to change all the pictures hanging in the embassy. I knew that we had dozens of pictures in storage from Baker's 1991 visit, so I had GSO take down whatever we had hanging on the walls at that time and put up the Baker photos from 1991 instead.

Secretary Baker arrived in UB and he could not have been more gracious. He could not have been a nicer guy. He said, "I don't really want any help from the embassy. I don't want to interfere." But he came to the embassy, met with the country team, and then he and I went to see the president, Nambaryn Enkhbayar, who had just replaced President Bagabandi a few months earlier. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss Ivanhoe Mines, for which Secretary Baker was of counsel. Ivanhoe was in the process of establishing what has become the largest copper mine in the world in a place called Oyu Tolgoi, about fifty kilometers north of the Chinese border in southern Mongolia. And they were having trouble getting what they call a Stabilization Agreement, a framework agreement whereby the mining company receives certain privileges and guarantees that are granted to them immutably by the Government of Mongolia, which they needed to be able to justify to their stockholders the enormous capital investment they were making in

establishing a mine like this. So, Secretary Baker wanted to speak to the president about progress on the stability agreement.

Secretary Baker and I went to see President Enkhbayar and had a conversation about this, which I duly took notes on and like a good State Department officer reported by cable to Washington. But what I remember most is at the end of the meeting we walked out, and Secretary Baker turned to me and asked, "How do you think it went?" I remember thinking, that's like Michelangelo asking me, "What do you think about this Sistine Chapel thing? What do you think about those fingers almost touching, does that look alright to you?" (Peasley laughs) "Well, sir," I said, "I think it went pretty well." And, either that night or the next night, Ambassador Slutz had hotfooted it back from the Gobi, and she hosted a dinner for him, which was delightful. And she was very gracious in expressing her thanks to me for handling this unexpected situation. As I told her, all I did was make a phone call and take a few notes. But I was happy that she was happy. That was a memorable experience.

Shortly after Secretary Baker departed, and as we were dealing with first the Hastert and then the Rumsfeld visits, we got word that President and Mrs. Bush would be arriving in Ulaanbaatar on November 25. I'm sure you've been involved in presidential visits, but possibly not at an embassy that has only fifteen Americans. This was a very big deal for us – and another great learning opportunity for me. I was on the team as the Control Officer for the First Lady. We started preparing in earnest about a month before the President was scheduled to arrive. In late October, the first people started coming in from Washington to prepare for the visit. They had rented a big conference room on the third floor of a new hotel in the city, the best hotel in the city, which had seats for about 200 people. We met every day at 4:00 in the afternoon, and when we started there were maybe ten or twelve of us occupying these 200 seats. But the crowd got bigger every day, and by the day before the visit, all 200 seats were full.

One of the things I learned is that most of the people who come to advance these kinds of visits are not, or at least in this case they were not, federal employees. Of course, the Secret Service was represented. But most of the people from Washington were volunteers from the Republican National Committee who were doing this on their own time. And they were extraordinarily competent, I must say, at what they had to do. Every meeting started out the same: we ran through minute-by-minute all the steps of the President's expected itinerary. "It's 10:52 a.m. The president's plane touches down. The president comes down the steps and greets the President of Mongolia…" Etc. etc. We went through the whole visit step by step, meeting by meeting, all incredibly choreographed and scripted. There is no room for error in these things. Everything has to happen in a prescribed sequence, and it's all planned weeks in advance.

A big part of my job was to come up with a program for the First Lady. We looked at several places that we could have taken her to. We visited, for example, some museums and women's centers. But we concluded that logistically, getting her from the Government House in the center of the city to another one of these locations and ensuring security along the route and at the site would be just too difficult to handle. So, we

arranged for people from Mongolian civil society, particularly women's groups, to come to Government House to meet with Mrs. Bush. My role was to oversee this process. First, I had to make sure the right people were invited and got into Government House for the meeting. Then I had to physically get the First Lady from one part of Government House where that meeting was to take place to another part of the building where she could rendezvous with the President just prior to his speech to the Mongolian parliament. Meanwhile, another part of our group was handling President Bush's simultaneous series of meetings with Mongolian officials, and all of us had to converge at the same point at the same time.

As it happened, the timing was such that the First Lady was going to arrive at that point a little bit ahead of the President. And so we actually had to put her in a side room, effectively in a closet, for about three minutes while we waited for President Bush to arrive. They both had to walk into the Parliament together, and yet we couldn't have the First Lady standing in a hallway waiting for the President. Happily, Mrs. Bush accepted this arrangement without protest. And one of the Secret Service agents told me, "You know," he said, "I'm really glad this is happening with Mrs. Bush. If we had had to put some other first ladies in that closet they might not have been so happy about it." And I said, "You've been a Secret Service agent for how long?" He said, "Eight years." I said, "So how many other first ladies have you dealt with?" (Both laugh) He said, "Okay, I guess the previous First Lady probably wouldn't have been happy about being in a closet." But Mrs. Bush couldn't have been more gracious. And happily, she and President Bush entered the parliament, the State Great Huraal, at the same time, all smiles.

I discovered that during a visit like this things become almost surreal. At one point, my job was to stand behind a pillar, wave my arm and get Secretary Rice's attention, and discreetly point her in the direction she needed to go. All of this has to happen while we're invisible. We're not supposed to be seen. That's why I was hiding behind a pillar.

Q: Right.

WASKIN: We can't be seen because the principals have to be seen as doing this on their own, without assistance. But somehow we managed to pull this off relatively flawlessly.

Another thing we were warned was that under no circumstances should we allow our cellphones to ring while in the presence of the President of the United States. He does not like that. So, turn your frickin' cellphones off and make sure that doesn't happen. Happily it didn't. Certainly, mine didn't ring and to my knowledge nobody else's rang.

But there was a diplomatic complication. Everything I've described so far was taking place at Government House in the center of the city, and everything I've recounted I observed with my own eyes. But I can't resist adding an anecdote that I did not personally witness but that is simply too good to leave out of this story. After the speech, President Bush and President Enkhbayar were to motorcade together through the city to a meeting site south of the river in Chinggis Khan's sacred area where we had set up three gers. One ger was for an artistic performance. One ger was for a musical performance.

And a third ger was where President Bush was to meet with President Enkhbayar. But the question arose, who else was he going to meet with? The Speaker of the Mongolian Parliament was slated to be there, as he, like President Enkhbayar, was from the former communist ruling party. Prime Minister Elbegdorj, however, was from what had been the opposition. And so, the government's proposal was that just President Enkhbayar and the speaker would meet with President Bush. In effect, they were saying, "The Prime Minister is really only the third wheel in our government. He doesn't need to meet with the President of the United States." Well, the Prime Minister didn't see it that way so he simply showed up for the meeting. And I'm sure our people at the meeting site scrambled to find a third seat for the Prime Minister.

This complication notwithstanding, the event was to be entirely scripted. The limousine was to pull up, stop, President Bush was to step out, turn to his left, and observe what we had created for him. What had we created? Well, the control officer for that site was my deputy, Jeff Goodson. And Jeff Goodson's from Texas. So he had said, "The President's from Texas. What the President needs are animals. He needs to see livestock." (Peasley laughs) So, we imported around 200 goats and 200 sheep and 100 yaks and we had them all in a field there adjacent to the three gers. It was a bit of a Potemkin village, right? All of these animals had to go through metal detectors, by the way, so you can imagine how that went. But somehow they got all these animals through the metal detectors, and the two Presidents arrived as scheduled. And, following the script, President Bush got out of his limousines and looked to his left.

That's when things went off script. President Bush was supposed to take one look at all the animals and then continue to go see the art ger and the musical performance and then go to the meeting. But being from Texas he looks out, says, "Look at all those longhorns. I've got to go see them." And he walks into the herd of animals. (Peasley laughs) Now, Mongolian yaks have long horns but they're not gentle animals. And I'm sure that everyone at the site, Jeff included, was thinking "Oh my God, we're going to get the President of the United States gored by a yak!" Everyone's hearts must have been in their mouths. Happily, that didn't happen, and the next day there were wonderful pictures in the papers in the United States of President Bush smiling a big smile with a long-horned yak at his side and the skyline of Ulaanbaatar behind him. He was clearly pleased to be there and see all these animals. So, Jeff's plan worked out. But as I told him later, "You were this close to going down in history as the man who got the president of the United States gored by a yak." Fortunately that didn't happen – and instead we got a great photo opp out of it.

As I said, I missed seeing all this, as I was on my way from Government House to the airport, where I and other Embassy staff and families were to wait in a receiving line to shake hands with and say goodbye to the President and First Lady as they departed. But after I'd waited a while, and the time of their departure was growing close, someone tapped me on the shoulder and said, "You need to come back into this little receiving area because the First Lady wants to thank you." I said, "Well, that's really nice. Okay, sure, I'll be right there." And I duly waited backstage. And a few minutes later the First Lady came in to thank me. And she brought her husband.

Q: Oh, nice.

WASKIN: Oh, that was a lovely moment.

Q: Yes, that's a nice gesture.

WASKIN: That was a really, really nice gesture. The President and Mrs. Bush were very gracious and were very kind in sharing their appreciation for the work we had done to make their visit a success. So, that was fun, put it that way.

Q: Yes, those visits are taxing and there is no detail that is too small.

WASKIN: No detail is too small, that's right.

So, that was Mongolia. We had a lot of visitors. But we had a good little development program.

Q: And a government that was really very committed to reform. It sounds like it was a very good government to work with.

WASKIN: Yeah, that's an excellent point. That was one of the things I was most impressed by. There were capable people in the government who were committed to reform and who were serious about development. That said, there's a lot of corruption in Mongolia. All you had to do was walk through the parking lot at the parliament to see all the late model vehicles and wonder, hmm, how are they able to afford all these beautiful brand-new SUVs on their meager legislative salary? But I believe Prime Minister Elbegdorj himself was a very serious guy and that he was committed to good governance. He later became President of Mongolia and was very committed to working with the United States. Mongolia has long pursued what they call their "third neighbor" policy. Their view is that they're surrounded by two giants. They've got the Russian Federation to their north and the People's Republic of China to their south. Therefore, they need a third neighbor to balance the weight of their two physical neighbors, and that third neighbor is the United States. And so, we were, and I think still are, very well-regarded. And there were quite competent people working at least at the top levels of the bureaucracy there, and therefore we were able to work with a government that was supportive and capable of getting things done. So, whereas when I first went to Mongolia I wasn't terribly enthusiastic about being there, it turned out to be a really positive experience and one I'm very glad that I had.

Q: No, that's great – a very special place and a very unique place.

WASKIN: Yeah, absolutely, absolutely.

Q: And I assume security was such that you could go anywhere in the country?

WASKIN: Security was great. In terms of logistics, one of the first things I did, being a good bureaucrat, upon arriving in Mongolia was that I said, "I want to see our OE (Operating Expenses) budget." And when I saw it, I asked "What's all this money here for camping equipment? "Well, that's for our travels in the country." "Camping equipment? What do you mean?" Well, I learned that's what you do in Mongolia. You don't want to stay in hotels in the interior of the country. On my first trip I made the mistake of staying in the hotels and I decided no, that's probably not a good idea. I think I'm going to go camping from now on. (Peasley laughs) We camped every place we went, and as I said, I went all over, I visited every part of the country. I didn't have to worry about security. It's very secure, at least it was then, and still is, I understand. And Mongolia is a place where you can literally stand in the main square in the capital city, Ulaanbaatar, in front of the national parliament, in the middle of a quite cosmopolitan city of 1.3 million people, and you can then drive for an hour or maybe less than an hour and get out of your car and be in a spot where you can scan the horizon for 360 degrees and see no sign of human habitation at all. Not even a road because you'd just get off the road at some point and just drive overland. And you camp wherever you want. Everything's empty. And so, that's what we did and that was a great experience. I'm very happy that I had the opportunity to do that.

Q: That sounds wonderful.

And you mentioned that your next assignment was Afghanistan. How did that come about? Did you raise your hand or were you approached? How did that assignment happen?

WASKIN: I did raise my hand. I felt frankly guilty that, while my colleagues were going to places like Baghdad and Islamabad and Kabul, I had been assigned to Bangkok. So, I was eager not only to do something important—as much as I loved the work in Mongolia it was only a very small piece of American foreign policy. And so, I wanted to do something important and I wanted to make it clear to everybody in the agency that I was willing to take on tough assignments. And so, when the bidding cycle came out my first choice was to become Mission Director in Kabul. My second choice was Mission Director in Islamabad, and my third, I think, was Mission Director in Iraq. And David Eckerson, who is another dear friend, who at the time was USAID's head of HR, got me on the phone and said, "What's the matter with you? You know, you're the only guy in the agency applying for all three of these jobs. Are you nuts?" (Peasley laughs) But however eager I might have been, I had some concern as to whether I would get any of these high-profile jobs in large missions given that I was then in a relatively low-profile job in one of the smallest missions in the world. And I understand that Administrator Natsios was–understandably–a little bit skeptical about assigning me to Afghanistan. He knew me, but not well. But someone back in Washington went to bat for me. I don't know whether it was Walter North or David Eckerson or maybe both of them, but someone went to bat for me and said, "The guy's in Mongolia now but that's a bit of a circumstantial oddity." And they, or someone, convinced the Administrator that I was up to the job.

I learned of my assignment to Afghanistan while I was on one of my forays to the Mongolian countryside, this time to western Mongolia with Jeff Goodson visiting various courthouses that we had rehabilitated and judges that we had trained under our Rule of Law program. This would have been in late July or early August 2005. Now, on trips like this, at every stop, in every town you go to there is a banquet and they have a real Mongolian barbecue. It's not a Mongolian barbecue that you and I know from, say, food courts in America. (Peasley laughs) Rather, Mongolians get some kind of animal, perhaps a marmot or more likely a goat or a sheep, and they cut it open, take out the parts that they don't want, stuff it full of rocks, and then throw the whole thing into the fire. Then, once all the hair has been burned off and it's been in there for about an hour, it's ready to go. That's your real Mongolian barbecue. Or they put it in a milk can with all sorts of vegetables and they throw that in the fire and then that becomes your stew. But whatever the main course, all of this is accompanied throughout by copious amounts of vodka beginning probably about around 11:00 in the morning, which as the senior member of the delegation I had to participate in. This is a problem because I don't really drink. (Peasley laughs) So, I needed to learn how to join in those festivities – to do what was culturally expected of me to do - in a way that didn't impair me for the rest of the day. That became somewhat challenging.

So, it's about noon, and I'm probably on my third or fourth shot of vodka. I was however compensating as much as I could by eating robustly so that the alcohol would be absorbed. And I was also drinking as much water as I could. So I wasn't completely inebriated. But at that point my mobile phone rang and it's Walter North and he said, "I want to inform you we've selected you to be the next Mission Director in Afghanistan." And so, I replied, "Well, that's great, Walter. I gotta get back to the party but thanks a lot. (Both laugh) I think we should talk in more detail about this later. I'm not really in a position to discuss this in depth right now."

Q: (Laughs) I gotta sober up first.

WASKIN: Right, I gotta sober up first. But I was sober enough to know that my answer was unequivocally yes. And I turned to Jeff Goodson, he said, "What was that?" And I explained to him I'd just been named director in Afghanistan, and he laughed, rather loudly. He too had been having a lot of vodka, and perhaps the influence of that beverage made him find it very, very funny that I was going to Afghanistan. I said, "You may be laughing now but you're coming with me, buddy." And eventually that's exactly what happened. But I'll get to that in the next chapter of this story.

So, yes, I knew nearly a year in advance that I was going to go to Afghanistan to replace Alonzo Fulgham. And I like to say that some of the most important things I accomplished as Mission Director in Afghanistan I accomplished before I ever set foot in Kabul, because the most important thing was to get the right people. As I'm sure you know, if you have the right people there's no limit to what you can accomplish in USAID and if you don't have the right people you're in trouble. So, it was very important to me to fill certain key positions as soon as possible. And so, from Mongolia, I reached out to certain people whom I really wanted on my team and arranged for them either to come to Kabul

or to stay there. One was the Program Officer, who was already there, Thomas Johnson, who had worked for me in Honduras and worked with me in what was then the PPC Bureau. I called Thomas in Kabul and said, "I'm coming out there. I'm going to be the next director. I need you to stay for another year." And happily for me, and for USAID/Afghanistan, Thomas agreed to stay for a second year.

For my Executive Officer, or EXO, I needed Peter Hubbard, who'd been my EXO in Thailand. And I got Peter to agree to come out so I had someone whom I knew was extremely competent. And I got James Ahn from Cambodia to be my Controller. It was crucial to get exceptionally talented people in place for these key positions, and happily I was able to do that.

Q: It's interesting because this assignment was done in the normal way so that you had a year. I suspect that was rarely the case with Afghanistan because they were always trying to find the right person and often done at the last minute. I think it's an important point to note the value of identifying positions for these key posts as early as possible so you can help to mobilize the team you think you need.

WASKIN: Exactly. Yes, it certainly helped me. And you're right, subsequently that changed. I don't know why, for I had moved on to other things and was not part of the Afghanistan program, so I don't understand what happened or why the Agency was making decisions with a shorter timeframe. My successor Robin Phillips was in Yerevan as Mission Director for Armenia, and I think he probably had about six months advance notice of his assignment to Kabul.

But I also know that lead time grew shorter over the years. Several years later, in 2010, I was sitting with Jim Bever and Earl Gast at an Agency senior staff meeting in the Point Four Conference Room and Jim said to Earl, "Stick around for a second after the meeting. I need to talk to you." And what Jim wanted to tell Earl, "I'm sending you to Kabul." And that was, I think, on just a couple of months' notice.

But I was very fortunate to have had that kind of significant lead time. I also had the good fortune to be able to go to Kabul on TDY in February 2006 while Alonzo was still there and begin to get a feel for the place. Jonathan Addleton also came from Cambodia because he was the Mission Director-designate for Pakistan. The three of us were there, Alonzo, myself and Jonathan, to talk about cross-border issues between Afghanistan and Pakistan. And it helped me enormously to go there and get a feel for the place before I was actually deployed.

Q: I'm going to recommend that we discuss Afghanistan our next session, but presumably you came on home leave, you were in Washington. I'm wondering what kind of preparation in Washington before you went to Afghanistan you went through, how much time did you spend, what kinds of meetings did you have, what sorts of things did you need to do before going?

WASKIN: That's a very good question because as I reflect on my Afghanistan experience, I realize that was one thing I really didn't get a lot of. I did go to Washington but by that point things were very rushed. Alonzo had to leave, he'd been there a year, and there were other things the agency had for him to do. For me, this was really a mistake and perhaps I should have insisted on leaving Mongolia earlier to have more time to prepare for Afghanistan. I didn't have nearly enough time in Washington. I did meet with a lot of people, including meetings with military officers and civilian DOD officials. I met with the Agency's office of civil military affairs. I met with staff on Capitol Hill. But I didn't get anything close to the kind of preparation that staff, say, ten years later were getting prior to going to Afghanistan. In terms of security, for instance, you know, basically it was, "Don't do anything stupid. Don't get yourself shot." That was basically it. So, I wish I'd had more time and more preparation.

One of the problems with Afghanistan is that at that time the Agency treated it as a normal situation. So, I got the kind of preparation that I would have gotten for going to, say, Jamaica. I mean, I met with the State Department desk officer, got to know the people on the USAID desk, and went to Capitol Hill to talk with Congressional staff. But a week of consultations in Washington prior to departing for Afghanistan wasn't sufficient. Moreover, the management structure we had out there in Kabul, the normal USAID mission management structure with one mission director and one deputy mission director, was not adequate to meet the magnitude of the challenges we were facing.

Now, Alonzo had introduced, to his great credit, the concept of a Chief-of-Staff, and he filled that role by bringing in Phil Gary, who was himself a former Mission Director. I had a conversation with Phil in February of 2006 when I was in Afghanistan on TDY. And I concluded that Alonzo was extremely wise to have created this position. It was extremely helpful. So I asked Phil if he would be willing to stay. And what Phil said in his own oral history interview is exactly as I recall the conversation. He said, "Look, Skip. The Chief-of-Staff role is a key role and I'm Alonzo's guy. You've got to get your own guy." And I said, "All right. I will try to do that." Now, my guy was going to be Jeff Goodson, who was my trusted deputy in Mongolia. And one of the reasons I wanted Goodson was that I wanted the Chief-of-Staff to be our principal liaison with the military. I knew that I would have enough to do, I knew that my deputy was going to be Carl Abdou Rahmaan, who was terrific, and I knew Carl would be very good at the traditional deputy role of managing the operations of the mission. I knew that I was going to be very busy working with the Ambassador and the DCM and Washington, not to mention the Afghanistan government, up to and including President Karzai. So I needed somebody to work with the American military and indeed all the entire ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) military, not just the Americans, and I viewed that as the right role for the Chief-of-Staff and I knew Jeff would be very good at that. So I asked him to come - and he declined. He said, "I can't do it. It's not my thing. I don't want to do it." And so I probably approached nineteen other people about the Chief-of-Staff position. I asked colleagues from all phases of my career, people I'd worked with before, and people I hadn't worked with. But for various reasons none of them would take the job. And finally I told Goodson this at one point, while we were both still in Ulaanbaatar. I said, "You know, I've talked to nineteen different people, yourself included, and nobody wants it."

He said, “Well, that really troubles me.” Now, we all lived together on a compound in Ulaanbaatar, and Jeff lived just a few houses down from me. And that night, there was a knock, knock, knock on my door, and it was Goodson. He said, “I’ve thought about it and I want to do it.” I said, “All right, I’ll tell you what. You think about it some more and you come back to me in the morning and we’ll talk. And if you say then that you really want to do it then you’re going to come out with me to Afghanistan.” And of course, the next morning he confirmed that he would. But we needed to get the ambassador’s clearance. The ambassador was a superb career Foreign Service Officer named Ron Neumann, and we got Ambassador Neumann’s blessing for Jeff to come out as Chief-of-Staff, which he ultimately did. And that proved to be a life changing decision for Jeff, as he ended up spending a lot of time in Afghanistan, returning there to work for the military long after I’d departed. But during the year we spent together in Kabul he really was an invaluable addition to the team.

I recognize that recruiting friends and former colleagues, as I did, can be a double-edged sword. Sometimes that works, sometimes it doesn’t. People that are very successful in one set of circumstances and work very well with you in one situation may not work so well in an entirely different set of circumstances. Happily, for me, all the people I’ve mentioned, Jeff Goodson, James Ahn, Peter Hubbard, Thomas Johnson, all were successful in Afghanistan. In addition, Alonzo had assembled an outstanding staff and I was the beneficiary of that. There were some extraordinary people working in that Mission when I arrived. The junior officer in our general development office, for example, was Beth Dunford, who rose to become a Mission Director and later an Assistant Administrator. Nancy Eslick was a junior officer in the program office, and she, too, became a Mission Director. David Billings was also a junior Program Officer; he is now Mission Director in Honduras. That was the kind of talent Alonzo bequeathed me. And on the Washington side, Sepideh Keyvanshad, who is now the Mission Director in Nepal, was our desk officer. We had really talented people at all levels supporting that program. But I was pleased to be able to bring in someone that I knew I would work well with and that I could trust to be my Chief-of-Staff. And I was lucky that a guy like Carl Abdou Rahmaan had agreed to become my Deputy.

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Q: Today is December 28, 2023, and this is interview number four with Skip Waskin.

Skip, when we finished up last time you were just about to depart for Afghanistan. We talked a little bit about the TDY you had done there earlier and we talked a bit about your time in Washington. But if you could give us an idea of what Afghanistan and the AID program was like when you arrived there in the summer, July of 2006.

USAID/Afghanistan, Mission Director, 2006 - 2007

WASKIN: That’s correct, July 2006. Thank you, Carol. Well, I think the first point to make is that I was very fortunate for several reasons. First of all, I inherited an

extraordinarily strong mission, as you might expect given that I was coming in on the back of a series of outstanding mission directors, Jim Kunder, Craig Buck, Jim Bever, Patrick Fine and my immediate predecessor Alonzo Fulgham. If you were ever to develop an all-star list of USAID luminaries all these people would be on it. So you can imagine that things were in good shape when I arrived. Secondly, I had an ambassador, Ron Neumann, who was himself a very capable individual. He knew Afghanistan extremely well. In fact, his father had been the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan from 1967 to 1973. And depending on how you count, that is I understand either only the second or third time that's ever happened in the history of American diplomacy. (Three generations of the Adams family served as Ministers to what is now the United Kingdom.)

Q: Right.

WASKIN: Ambassador Neumann was a college student when his father was the ambassador in Kabul, and he visited the country several times and traveled extensively within it. He also is a Vietnam veteran and thus was extremely conversant with the military and understood the military situation, which was very important given that there was a war going on. And finally, and most importantly from my perspective, he was very knowledgeable about and supportive of the USAID program. He was the ideal ambassador to have because he recognized the importance of USAID, valued it, but didn't want to manage it on a day-to-day basis. He counted on his USAID Mission Director to do that. And basically I reported directly to him. There was no Embassy-wide assistance coordinator at that time. We had an excellent Deputy Chief of Mission who later served as an ambassador several times himself, Dick Norland. I got along great with Dick as well, but he understood that Ambassador Neumann wanted to work directly with me, and that was fine with him.

So, it was extremely fortunate that the necessary building blocks were in place before I got to Kabul. I already talked in our last interview about the recruiting that I'd done, and about the Chief-of-Staff position that Alonzo had created and that I staffed with my de facto deputy from Mongolia, Jeff Goodson. That was extremely important. So, I had a very favorable interagency environment at post, and a very strong team, some of whom I inherited and some of whom I recruited, so that was a blessing.

Q; That sounds as if it was a period that was relatively calm? Was the security situation such that people felt confident to be able to go out in the field and things?

WASKIN: Things were deteriorating. Ambassador Neumann wrote a wonderful book about his experience in Kabul called *The Other War*. And one of the points he made is that it was an uphill battle for him to convince Washington, both within the legislative and the executive branches, within the State Department and within the White House even, that in fact there was still a war going on in Afghanistan and that indeed we were in danger of losing it.

This viewpoint was certainly consistent with my own personal anecdotal experience. For example, the USAID Mission Director had a lovely car that I inherited, a black Mercedes Benz, four-wheel drive, a beautiful SUV—

Q: Probably well-secured as well.

WASKIN: It was well-armored, yes. And in that vehicle, I was able to go anywhere in Kabul throughout my tenure, accompanied only by my driver. I didn't have to ask the RSO's (Regional Security Officer) permission. I just had to tell the RSO where I was going and if there was a reason for me not to go they would tell me. But basically, I could go anyplace I wanted within the city. But my driver, Atiqullah Alim, pointed out that, "Hey, when I was here with Mr. Bever we would drive all over the country in this vehicle," but we couldn't do that any longer. I believe that Jim Bever left Afghanistan in 2004. So, in the two years between his departure and my arrival in 2006, the situation had shifted to the point where that type of liberty, the liberty to move around the country, was now limited to only liberty to move around the city. And then, of course, during the years after I left in the summer of 2007, things deteriorated further to the point where not only could people not move around the city but even to get to the airport they had to take a helicopter. To get to the airport when I was there, we had to take an armored vehicle with a convoy of security personnel accompanying us, armed shooters, and sirens blaring. But at least we could drive. Five or so years later U.S. Embassy staff couldn't even do that. Even so by the time I arrived in 2006, it was obvious that yes, things had definitely changed, and not for the better. And again, the salient point is that, despite this, at that time attention in Washington was focused largely on Iraq. I didn't get a lot of senior level attention because, as the saying goes, Washington only has the ability to focus on one problem at a time—the collective Washington, obviously, not individuals within Washington—and the problem at the time was Iraq, not Afghanistan. And so, Ambassador Neumann was trying to make people in Washington aware that the war was still going on and was in no sense resolved. And that was definitely an uphill battle.

Q: Right. Can you mention what the program was doing at that point in time? What were the priorities? What kind of work were you up to?

WASKIN: This is an interesting question because the program I inherited had virtually every aspect that a USAID program can have. We were working in virtually every sector in which USAID as an agency has the expertise and resources to work: agriculture, health, education, democracy, women's rights, energy, infrastructure, etc. We had it all. And one of the decisions that I made early on was that I wasn't going to try to redesign the program. I didn't want to do a soup to nuts review of this strategy. Rather, I wanted to focus on pushing forward implementation of the ambitious program I had inherited. Now as it happened, when I arrived many of our contracts for key programs were approaching their expiration date. My predecessor, Alonzo Fulgham had anticipated this and had launched procurement of successor contracts, but due to the nature of the USAID procurement process many of those very large procurements were still underway when I got to Kabul. Ambassador Neumann was extremely concerned about this, about what he perceived as the slowness of the USAID procurement process. He was also extremely

concerned about what he viewed as USAID's propensity for planning rather than acting. So, I made a decision - with his full support - that I would accept the shape of the program as it was and focus on driving it forward – among other things by completing those procurements - rather than on rethinking things and replanning. Given my own background as a project development officer that choice may sound a bit odd, but that's how I felt.

Q: Well, that probably should be done in countries where people have one-year tours because—

WASKIN: Well, that's exactly right. My Deputy Mission Director, Carl Abdou Rahmaan, and I arrived in Kabul at almost exactly the same time; I think he got there one week before I did in July 2006. And when I arrived I told him, "You know, Carl, we basically have until Christmas. Anything we're going to do we better accomplish by Christmas because after that we're going to be lame ducks." And that proved absolutely correct. Given the shortness of our tours I felt like we should not constantly be reviewing and rethinking at the expense of implementing. (This is a theme, by the way, that would recur during the Pakistan portion of my career.) I very much felt that we needed to focus on getting done the things we needed to do and responding with alacrity to the changing situation on the ground rather than engaging in long-term strategic planning. For one thing, even had I wanted to engage in a strategic planning effort I'm pretty sure I would not have gotten the Ambassador's support, and I'm not sure I would have gotten Mark Ward's support. Mark at the time was the head of what was then the Afghanistan/Pakistan Task Force, which later became OAPA, and as such he was my immediate supervisor in Washington. I don't think either he or Ambassador Neumann would have been very thrilled with that idea. I think they supported my decision to focus on implementation rather than on strategizing.

Now, in retrospect, given what we know about what happened in Afghanistan from the perspective of 2023, I look back and think that maybe we should have done some re-thinking. Maybe if I'd questioned assumptions and asked more questions, perhaps we would have identified earlier than the United States eventually did the need to do things like building local governance capacity, which was a real gap in our assistance program that became evident as time went on. Or perhaps we should have radically scaled back the program. You asked what the program was like when I arrived. Well, it was working on everything. The largest component was a very significant infrastructure portfolio. We were finishing building the Ring Road. We were working on the Kajaki Dam, which became one of my biggest priorities. We were working with the Government of Afghanistan to rehabilitate, or to make plans to rehabilitate, the country's entire electrical distribution system, both the northern electrical power grid and the southern grid, of which Kajaki was the key piece. So, roads and power was not only the name of our Embassy band, it was also a major theme of our program.

But we weren't limiting ourselves to infrastructure. That alone would have been a big challenge. But we were also doing everything else that a typical USAID mission does. We were doing agriculture, which in the Afghan context of the time meant alternative

livelihoods, trying to get people to grow something other than poppies from which they could make a living. We were doing democracy programming. We were doing health programming. We were doing education programming. We were doing what was then called Women in Development programming. All of these were great things to do, but as I somewhat harshly have said when people have asked me this question before, "One of the flaws in our strategy, not just USAID's strategy but more broadly the United States' strategy in Afghanistan was we were trying to make the whole place look like Connecticut." And that was just not possible.

I recall George W. Bush saying in the first debate with Al Gore during the 2000 U.S. Presidential election that "We're not going to engage in nation building." And then, the very first opportunity that came along—boom, (Peasley laughs) we decided to try to do nation building in the most inhospitable possible terrain in the world. Which we then attempted to do for more than a decade with a notable lack of success. So, again, with the benefit of hindsight, it's arguable that my choice was wrong, and that perhaps we as a mission should have spent more time reflecting on and reconsidering our priorities. But I don't know that our voice as a mission, had we conducted a review of these priorities, would have made a lot of difference. These decisions were going to be made in Washington. My point is that rather than strategizing endlessly, I think the principal role of the USAID Mission in that circumstance was to take the strategy we had and go forward and try to implement it.

When I first got to Kabul, I mentioned something to Ambassador Neumann about the USAID planning process. That was the wrong thing to say to him because it really set him off. And I found his reaction striking. He said, "You guys are always operating on an eighteen-to-twenty-four-month timeline. But things here in Afghanistan change every two weeks. You need to respond to what we need to do this week or next week, not next year or the year after that." I took that lesson to heart. And so the word I always used with my team in Afghanistan was, "Everything we do needs to be done with *alacrity*." That became my favorite word. And I tried to imbue the whole mission with that. And really, that became the theme of my time in Kabul: I tried to make sure that the USAID program fit with and fully supported the priorities of the broader U.S. government strategy in Afghanistan, particularly the counterinsurgency effort to defeat the Taliban. It wasn't a traditional development program; rather, we were part of the war effort. And that's a very different way of looking at the world.

Q: Right. Had the PRTs (Provincial Reconstruction Teams) been established at that time?

WASKIN: Yes.

Q: And were you involved with helping to staff them and get them operational with USAID staff?

WASKIN: That was a big part of what I was doing. Improving the effectiveness of the PRTs was one of my major priorities. At that time, we basically had one USAID PRT officer in every one of the provincial commands. There were thirty-some provinces at the

time in Afghanistan, and we had twenty-four PRT officers. So we had someone in nearly every province.

Q: Were some of those authorities manned by NATO or were these all just U.S.?

WASKIN: No, they were NATO. Many of them were U.S. but they were manned by troops from various ISAF member nations of the International Security Assistance Force, or "ISAF". There were British-led PRTs, there was at least one Australian-led PRT, and one Canadian-led PRT, and one Spanish-led PRT, etc. Effectively, almost every country participating in ISAF had at least one designated province, and in almost every province there was a PRT officer. One problem, though, was that those PRT officers didn't have any money. They had a lot of ideas but they didn't have a budget. So, one of the things that I tried to do was to get each of the PRT officers a budget.

A second issue that they faced was a lack of "lift" capability, that is, the ability to get anywhere outside the wire, outside the military compound in which they were based. They had to depend on military resources to take them outside. But the military had other priorities – they had to go out and fight. They had combat operations to carry out. And, having understandably prioritized that, they often had no time to take a development officer with them. So a lot of the PRT officers would come back to Kabul and tell me that their work was not being prioritized by the military commands to which they were assigned. Yes, the PRTs were reconstruction teams, and they had a development mission. But they carried guns and when they found the enemy they engaged the enemy or the enemy engaged them. Not the USAID officers but the military. Of course USAID officers were not supposed to be carrying guns. But getting them outside the wire was a challenge. I attempted to deal with that - again, with the support of Ambassador Neumann - at the highest levels of ISAF. ISAF was commanded by a wonderful man, General David Richards, a British four-star general, now Baron Richards of Herstmonceux. And happily, I had an excellent relationship with him and could raise these kinds of issues at the top levels of the command, which I attempted to do. I could control the budgeting process – that is to say, I could find money for each PRT and give them each a budget. But I needed ISAF's help to deal with the lift issue.

We also had a bit of a disconnect at the PRT leadership level. The chain of command was not right. We had a PRT representative up at Bagram Air Base, and she was supposed to be our chief of contact with and liaison with the military. Implementation of the policy decisions I was advocating was to be channeled through her. But in my view, she was not an effective officer. She viewed herself as reporting to the military not to me. And so, we changed that fairly quickly. I replaced her with one of my really outstanding young officers in Kabul, Patrick Brady. Patrick was in our Program Office, and I took him away from Thomas Johnson. I wanted Patrick in part because he was a former military officer, and I sent him to Bagram to improve the relationship with the command there and to continue to work with the military to stress the importance of the civilian aspect of the counterinsurgency effort and thereby to try to get the individual PRT commanders to prioritize that work and make it possible for our people to actually travel out to the areas in which they were supposed to be working. So, yes, PRTs were a huge priority.

Q: And were you able to get them some resources, some budget to work with?

WASKIN: That was the plan. Everything was in train when I left but we're talking about a one-year Directorship. That's the frustrating thing. All these things were started but it takes a while to move through the process. So, yes, policy agreement had been reached within USAID and budgets were supposed to be made available to each of our PRT officers. Each of them was to be given a budget of between half a million and a million dollars, and each of them was to submit their ideas for projects to USAID/Kabul, whereupon we would get them cleared with both the civilian and military sides. But whether that system actually worked after I departed, I don't know. As for the lift issue, I was not able to solve that. General Richards was sympathetic, and he attached great importance to our development work, which he viewed as crucial to the war effort. But the demands of a kinetic situation often trumped everything.

Q: Okay. Well, you had said you had four priorities, and I interrupted you. So, I will try to let you go ahead with your priorities and then I will ask some other questions. (Laughs)

WASKIN: Sure, sure. I appreciate that.

The central theme, as I said, of my Directorship was to make sure that we were contributing in meaningful ways to the broader U.S. government strategy, particularly to the war effort and to the defeat of the Taliban. And that had several aspects. One of them was the PRTs, which we've already discussed. Another was responding to immediate military priorities as dictated to me by the senior U.S. commander in the theater, Lieutenant General Karl Eikenberry, who later became U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan. General Eikenberry was a very forceful personality. I was fortunate in that he happened to be good friends with Ambassador Pam Slutz, who was my ambassador in Mongolia. And Ambassador Slutz was kind enough to communicate to him that I was a good guy and that he should get to know me, and he did. He invited me to meet with him at his headquarters during the first few weeks that I was in the country. And that was truly an extraordinary meeting because he, like General Richards, very much valued the civilian assistance program. At that meeting he said to me, "Look, we've got to build these so-called "conflict roads" in Zabul Province and we've got to start building them today." His famous line, which he repeated to me but it surely wasn't the first time he'd said it, was that "Where the roads end the Taliban begin." Now, I think that's a little bit simplistic but it's a useful organizing principle. And he added, "You, Skip, have to find a way to build these roads now or American soldiers are going to die." That's a very powerful statement to make to a USAID Mission Director. So what did I say? Well, what could I say? I said, "Yes, sir. We'll find a way, now." I promised him we would build those roads.

Now, the estimate was that it would cost around $30 million to rehabilitate this particular set of roads. So, I immediately went back to the USAID Mission at the Embassy and met with Thomas Johnson, the head of our Program Office, and told him what I'd done. And

Thomas' face went ashen. He said, "We don't have the money. You've just made an unauthorized commitment." I said, "I'm not the program officer anymore, buddy. You're the program officer. That's your problem. Find the money because I told General Eikenberry we were going to do it." And of course, Thomas being the resourceful fellow he is, he found the money. There were two sets of roads that needed to be built – the plan was to start at opposite ends and meet in the middle. So, we gave half the money to UNOPS (United Nations Office for Project Services) and the other half to the U.S. National Guard. We chose them because both these organizations could start work all but immediately, since making an award to them did not require a competitive procurement process. The National Guard is part of the U.S. Government, so all we needed was an interagency agreement. UNOPS is a Public International Organization, and as such is exempt from the requirement for competition. So, we found the money and we started the work.

Q: Just a quick question. The army couldn't ask the national guard to build the road?

WASKIN: Somebody needed to pay them.

Q: I always thought they had a lot of money but maybe (laughs).

WASKIN: Well, they had money for other purposes. And General Eikenberry wasn't the kind of person you argued those kinds of details with. I just said to him, "General, you tell me American boys are going to die, and I'm not going to have that on my conscience. I'm going to build the roads, damn it." And so we did.

Q: Understood. Okay.

WASKIN: But I see your point, yes.

So, that was one example. A further example was that it became clear very quickly that our priorities and our planning processes didn't sync well with those of the military. They had a much different timeline. They were there on six-month rotations, or maybe a year. As you well know, in USAID, we typically operate on the basis of a five-year strategy. We do things over a long period of time because we're engaged in long-term development. But they're engaged in immediate operational military requirements. They've got to do X, Y and Z now. Beyond that they also had a very specific geographic focus. I was asked on several occasions, "What are your priorities for, say, Kapisa Province? What's your strategy for Zabul Province?" Well, I didn't know what my priorities for Kapisa or Zabul were, and I didn't have a strategy for Kapisa or Zabul. I had a nationwide strategy in which some of those things we were doing, some of our health work and our education work and our agricultural work would no doubt take place in Kapisa or Zabul, but those programs were nationwide in scope and not focused specifically on those provinces or any other province. Well, this to them was stunning. "How", they asked me, "could you not have a geographic-specific set of priorities? You must. You have to." So, to respond to that I put Jeff Goodson to work on developing what we called a "playbook" of everything we're doing everywhere so that we could tell the

military, if they ever wanted to know what is going on in any particular village, what USAID programs are in any given area. And production of that "playbook" was, of course, a very long process given the magnitude of our program. But that was very successful and the military appreciated the fact that we attempted to do that.

We also tried to ramp up operational collaboration with the military. I remember at one point I took the entire USAID senior staff with me up to Bagram and we spent the day there meeting with various units and talking about exactly this issue, what is USAID doing, where are we doing it, why are we doing it. I came away from that particular trip with a really profound appreciation that I'd never had before for the competence and the intelligence of the U.S. military. I mean, these guys could pick out a village in Helmand Province, for example, and say "Here are the five families that are most important in that village. These are the economic activities. This is who owns what. This is who's doing what. We think these people are Taliban sympathizers. We think these people are loyal to the central government." USAID had nothing like that. Of course, while we had several hundred people in the country, the U.S. military had, at the time, 20,000 troops. So the imbalance in resources was extraordinary. But for somebody like me who grew up in the Vietnam era, there is (or was) a myth that the American military is ignorant of the nuances of the local situations in which it is fighting. That was absolutely not true in Afghanistan. Perhaps their understanding was not perfect but it was considerably more granular and nuanced than ours. And so, we had an awful lot to learn from them.

Q: Usually we think of AID in a post-conflict situation. This was not a post-conflict, this was still a conflict situation. And in that circumstance, it would seem to me that geographic concentration would be a very important strategic element. I would have thought from the outset, when there was fighting still going on that there would have been a lot of interagency discussion about what parts of the country we need to focus our efforts on. But it sounds like that wasn't necessarily the case.

WASKIN: There was a lot of discussion on the military side. General Richards had a philosophy which he called the Ink Spot Theory which is very similar to what you just described. His view was that you pick a certain area, you concentrate your resources in that area, you grow the ink spot from there and it begins to merge with other ink spots and gradually your ink, as it were, begins to cover larger and larger areas of the country. Civilian assistance comes in at the tail end of that process, but General Richards and others in ISAF wanted the U.S. civilian assistance program to be part of that process of identifying where we should work. The typology was "clear, hold, build". So, while the clearing was going on, which is a euphemism for while the shooting is going on, I said, "We don't work. We're not working where the bullets are still flying," Although in fact we did work where the bullets were still flying. But as a general organizing principle that's not fertile terrain for USAID or for development assistance more broadly. But holding and then building, particularly the building after the immediate kinetic activities, that's where we need to come in. And so that is exactly the process that I wanted us to be part of, which is why the relationship we had with General Richards was so important because he too valued the civilian assistance program and he wanted us to be a part of what he was doing.

Q: Okay. So, in some ways the strategic geographic priority would in essence have to be defined by the military?

WASKIN: Yes, exactly.

Q: But that's often hard for AID to accept, so.

WASKIN: (Laughs) Yeah, I guess. But given the situation – i.e., the fact that we were involved in supporting a war effort – that didn't bother me.

So, I've talked about PRTs, I've talked about the conflict roads in Zabul, I've talked about the playbook more broadly. But the centerpiece sort of the whole thing, so to speak, the centerpiece of all our work was the Kajaki Dam, which was the main source of power for the southern electrical grid, which covered the strategically important provinces of Kandahar and Helmand. It is located in northern Helmand Province.

USAID/Afghanistan was involved with the Kajaki Dam long before I got there, and continued to be involved with it long after I left. But I happened to be there at a particularly crucial time because we needed to decide whether we were going to fish or cut bait on Kajaki and, if the former, how we were going to help rehabilitate this dam. The dam had been constructed with U.S. government funding in the 1950s. It had been rehabilitated by the Soviets in the 1980s. But as dams tend to do it was silting up, and the major turbine that is turned by water and thereby generates the power was broken. And this turbine was a physically huge thing – you could not fly in a replacement turbine; rather, you'd have to move one in by road. And so the issue was how are we going to get it to the dam and how were we going to install it while there was fighting all around the dam. was a very, very difficult challenge, one complicated further by the fact that the ISAF forces did not control the portion of Helmand Province in which the dam was located or the territory leading to it from the south and east. They controlled only a very small perimeter around the dam.

So, Ambassador Neumann led a group of us to Kajaki in August of 2006 to reconnoiter the situation and make a decision. This led to the scariest moment that I had in Afghanistan. We had spent the night before at a military base in Tarin Kowt, which was staffed by Australian and Dutch forces. We took off from there in the morning for Kajaki. And for some reason, as we were basically running across the tarmac at Tarin Kowt to board our helicopters, the ground crew sent the ambassador to one helicopter, and they sent me to another. In that situation, when you're on the airfield and the people in charge are shouting at you to "Get on this helicopter, go here, go there," well, that is not the time to argue that you should be with the ambassador. You go where they tell you to go. You just buckle up your seat belt and hope you don't fall out.

So, Ambassador Neumann was flying in a different helicopter than I was, and his helicopter landed where it was supposed to, which was on the south side of the river where the British command structure was located. Remember – they controlled only the

dam and a very small perimeter around it. My helicopter landed on the north side of the river, which was not under British control and where the Taliban were said to be active. On that helicopter, I was with several officers from the Embassy as well as four security people. And we all got off and the security people were extremely, you might say, nervous. They formed a diamond pattern around us, with we unarmed civilians in the middle and themselves on the outside and instructed us to begin walking toward the dam itself, which we would have to cross to get to where we were supposed to be on the other side of the river. And at that point, from behind rocks about twenty guys in black uniforms or pajamas, all carrying AK-47s and wearing black turbans, stood up. And I remember my only thought was "This is going to be interesting." Honestly, people have asked me, "Were you afraid?" I didn't have time to be afraid. It never occurred to me to be afraid. I was only thinking, "This is going to be interesting. What are we going to do now?" Happily, as it turned out, this particular group that had emerged from the rocks was part of a militia that at that point was allied with the ISAF forces. But they said, "You've got to get out of here. You guys have no business being where you are right now." So, we said, "Okay, all right." What we had to do was frog march as fast as we could across the dam to get on the south side of it. And once we did get to the south side, we were instructed to hide in a hut and wait for a "technical", a jeep with a mounted submachine gun, to arrive to carry us to where we were supposed to be. After probably about five or ten minutes – a short interval in retrospect but one that at the time seemed much longer – the jeep arrived, we emerged from our hut, and we finally got to the compound and the meetings that were already going on with the provincial governor and the British military. And of course, once I finally arrived, the ambassador asks, "Where the hell have you been?" (Peasley laughs) "You don't want to know," I said. "I'm here now."

Q: I'll bet that pilot got scolded. (Laughs)

WASKIN: Who knows, right? Yeah, I suppose so. So, that was quite an experience. And on the way out of Kajaki we got shelled, too. As we were walking to the helicopters to fly out, a mortar landed near us – when I say "near" I mean it landed maybe within a couple hundred yards of us. So we all took cover in a sort of trench. And I, being the curious sort, decided to look over the edge of the trench to see what was happening. I remember Ambassador Neumann shouting at me "Get your head down, you goddam fool." He was exactly right.

Q: So, this was a reconnoitering trip. What did you find?

WASKIN: Well, we met with the British military, the American military, the provincial governor, and with the Afghan engineers who were actually operating the power station. All the key players were there. And during that meeting we confirmed that the dam was key to the generation of power for the whole southern electrical grid; that it was reparable; and that the British military was confident in its ability to continue to defend it. And at some point during these conversations, Ambassador Neumann asked for a break in the meeting, and he and I went out and had a smoke. And as we were smoking our pipes, he asked me, "Should we do this? Is this going to work?" And I said, "I'll tell you

what, sir. I can't guarantee you. I'm not certain that this is going to work. What I am certain of is that if we don't try it, it won't work." And he said, "Yeah, you're right. All right. We're going to give it a try."

That decision set off a series of events that consumed a great deal of effort on USAID's part over the next several months in coordinating the planning for all of this with the military. The plan was that somehow we would have to transport the turbine, which was being held in Pakistan at that time near the border town of Spin Boldak, by road first to Kandahar then north to the site of the dam. And then, of course, install it. Now, there was a highway from Spin Boldak to Kandahar passing through territory largely controlled by the government. So while the turbine had to be guarded on that leg of the trip, that was the relatively easy portion. But after you got past Kandahar it had to be basically dragged through enemy territory and then taken to Kajaki. And that of course would require significant coordination with and effort by ISAF: they had to provide the troops and equipment necessary to guard this thing and get it to the site. And so, Jeff Goodson worked very closely with the ISAF command to develop a plan for doing this. And then, he and I went back down to Lashkar Gah and briefed the military there on the plan.

That was quite an experience for me to be sitting in that briefing tent. I remember there was a horseshoe-type table at ground level at which all the generals were sitting. Then there was a second horseshoe where all the colonels and other officers were sitting. And then a British brigadier, Dickie Davis, universally known as Brigadier Dickie, introduced me and said, "Now Mr. Waskin is going to explain the plan." And I'm thinking to myself, "What am I doing here? I'm in another world here; what am I going to do?" Well, what could I do? I explained the plan. And they said, "All right, it might actually work." So, the plan, of course, took a long time to implement and I don't think it actually happened until 2009, but eventually, USAID and ISAF coordinated to drag the turbine overland all the way from Spin Boldak to Kajaki, where it was eventually installed. Now, I've been told that in subsequent iterations of the U.S. government, USAID leadership didn't believe Kajaki was an important use of U.S. resources, and the USAID mission was directed to deprioritize support to the dam. But my understanding is that eventually the turbine was installed, and the electrical generating capacity of the dam was significantly improved. It took many years after I left for that to actually happen, but we had succeeded in laying the groundwork for that. So, I was, in retrospect, very proud of that accomplishment.

Q: No, that's good. Nothing easy in that kind of an environment.

WASKIN: No, it was really an extraordinary circumstance. On that first visit the Ambassador and I went to see the British troops who were holding the area around the dam, which again, was a very small area. It probably wasn't more than a couple of miles in circumference at most. The British troops were on top of a hill overlooking the dam and they'd been there for a month when we visited them. They were living in lean-tos. There were about thirty or forty of them up there and their task was that every time somebody from the Taliban would pop out and shoot something or fire off a rocket, they

would then fire back immediately. Really, really tough work for them and one in which they took casualties. Those British troops at Kajaki were real heroes.

Given the small size of the ISAF garrison at Kajaki, it is possible that the Taliban could have disrupted the whole operation. But in the end, they confined themselves simply to harassing us. Occasionally. they would knock down the powerlines leading from the dam, thus obliging us to repair them. But ultimately, they let us rehabilitate this thing. They did not overrun us militarily. And one might speculate that their thinking was that "We're not going to prevent the Americans and the British from rehabilitating the dam because you know what? We're going to win the war and we'd like to have that power when we do." But that is speculation. I have no insights into the thoughts of the Taliban commanders. What is factually indisputable is that they let us do the work.

So that was a major theme of my time in Afghanistan: contributing to this broader counterinsurgency effort, which was unlike anything I had ever experienced before or really ever experienced since in USAID. To be really a key part not so much of kinetic operations per se but a key part of the war effort was extraordinary.

Q: Okay. You said you had four priorities. Have you covered them?

WASKIN: I said the PRTs, the conflict roads, the playbook more broadly and then Kajaki.

Q: And then—okay. Good.

Can I ask a question about the Alternative Livelihoods Program. What was your assessment of it? Do you know if they drew on experience from South America in designing what they were doing?

And then, a third point related to it because I'd heard through the grapevine that there was a lot of interagency controversy about it in Washington. Did you see that?

WASKIN: I did. I had the opportunity to visit that program both in the West and in the East and be briefed on what they were trying to accomplish. In the East, I went to Jalalabad, and we were accompanied by one Dan Rather, who had just left CBS. Mr. Rather was in his seventies at that point but was still very vigorous and traveled with us because he wanted to take a look at the program as well. And by the way, he couldn't have been nicer. He was a tremendous gentleman throughout the entire trip, anything but a diva.

My assessment of that program is that what we were trying to accomplish was very, very hard. We were asking people – farmers – to give up growing an illicit but very lucrative crop – poppies – and to try to replace that income by growing licit but far less lucrative crops. From a purely economic perspective, that would not be rational behavior on their part. And yet many of them were willing to do it. When we went to Jalalabad, we met with farmers, talked to participants in the program and asked them what they used to

grow and what they were growing now. And they responded, “Well, we used to grow poppies.” What are you growing now? “We're growing broccoli and cauliflower.” Afghanistan, by the way, grows the best cauliflower in the world.

Q: (Laughs) Okay.

WASKIN: They really do. I don’t even like cauliflower but it’s delicious.

And we asked them why they were doing this. They said, “Ultimately, we’re making less money but we’re going to live a longer life. We work with a nicer class of people now.” So at least some of those farmers near Jalalabad, the ones we spoke with, told us that they were willing to make a choice based on other than purely economic factors. But on a broader, nationwide level, this was a very hard thing to ask people to do. We were telling people that they should grow cauliflower instead of poppies and telling them that while they would make a lot less money but maybe have a nicer life. That may be a persuasive argument for some people but not for a lot of people. So the broader question, and one major topic of the interagency debate you mentioned, was whether the U.S. should be taking a more aggressive role in eradicating, whether by air or on the ground, the poppy fields. Now, it is arguable that, since it was obvious that cultivation of poppies was in fact a major source of funding for the Taliban and thus a key part of their war effort, the American military should have included in their mission statement efforts to cut off that supply of financing, whether by eradication or interdiction. That might have been a key way of incapacitating the Taliban war effort. But the U.S. military didn’t see it that way. That was not a military objective for them. It was a civilian development objective. And so, the question then became how are we the civilians going to do it? Are we simply going to do it by incentives, i.e., encouraging people to grow carrots or cauliflower or something else, or are we going to take more aggressive measures?

It’s interesting you cite South America because Ambassador Neumann left in April of 2007 and his replacement, Bill Wood, arrived shortly thereafter. Ambassador Wood’s previous assignment had been as ambassador in Colombia so he was very familiar with the drug eradication program there, which had involved aerial spraying. And the question on Ambassador Wood’s mind, one he was very pointed in asking was, “Why aren’t we doing that here? Why aren’t we spraying in Afghanistan? Why aren’t we digging this stuff up? Why aren’t we burning these crops?” Well, there were a lot of answers to those questions. Most importantly, eradication (aerial or otherwise) would have been very politically controversial and could have been counterproductive. Eradication alone would deprive people of livelihoods without giving them alternatives, which is what we were trying to do. And in fact, if you eradicate you may end up driving them into the arms of the Taliban by virtue of the fact that you have just destroyed their incomes. This was not a debate that was resolved while I was there; when I left in July of 2007 these conversations were still going on.

I should comment that it was often almost surreal to be dealing with Afghanistan officials and talking about the issue of eliminating poppy production. At one time Ambassador Neumann and I were together in Lashkar Gah, and we were meeting with the governor of

Helmand Province, who was probably briefing us on his drug eradication efforts. And as the governor was speaking to us, I noticed that there was a window to his right, and as I gazed through that window over his shoulder I could see a large poppy field, with its beautiful blue and purple flowers swaying gently in the breeze. Come on - drug eradication efforts? What about that field right over there? (Peasley laughs) As I said, it was nearly surreal.

What this illustrates, I think, is that there was a real absence of consensus in Afghanistan that this was something that needed to be done. And there was an expectation or a hope that the Taliban could be defeated without doing that. So at that point, at least, people avoided making the hard choices. And it was a hard choice. Eradication sounds conceptually simple and appealing, but there are downstream consequences of that type of approach. But I don't know how the debate turned out.

Q: Right. Another question, in the next administration it became a priority and certainly Ambassador Holbrooke was pushing on more direct work with the Afghan government. In general, what was your experience working with the Afghan government and what part did you work with?

WASKIN: There were significant variances in capability among the ministries we worked with in Afghanistan. The ones that we, or at least I, had the most confidence in were the Ministry of Health; the Ministry of Agriculture, where we had people, including Roger Carlson, a former USAID mission director, embedded and working there on a day-to-day basis; and the Ministry of Education, which was headed by Hanif Atmar, who was probably one of the smartest human beings I've ever met, and certainly one of the most capable administrators in Afghanistan. We had confidence in those ministries, relatively speaking, and I personally felt that by collaborating with them we could begin the process of doing what Ambassador Holbrooke later mandated that we do, both in Afghanistan and Pakistan, i.e., work on a government-to-government (G2G) basis, effectively providing them the money and trusting them to implement the programs. My philosophy on that is colored now, of course, by the experience I later had in Pakistan where the G2G programming was, shall we say, less than a complete success. In Afghanistan at the time, my view was that trying to achieve an arbitrary number – say, trying to hit a target of programming 25 percent or 40 percent or 50 percent of our assistance through the local government – was an artificial target without real operational meaning and in fact, one that could have very dangerous consequences. My view on this was, and what I articulated was, why don't we take the ministries that we trust—or in which we have relatively high confidence – meaning Agriculture, Health, and Education, which are run by, at least at the most senior levels, competent technocrats. And give them $10 million, see how they do. And if they do well in the first year, let's give them $20 million the next year. But don't upset the whole apple cart; don't try to turn your whole portfolio into a G2G program overnight. Again, it goes back to the theme I mentioned earlier when I said that the Bush Administration had picked the least hospitable terrain in the world to practice nation building. If your hypothesis is that the best way to achieve sustainable development is to make sure that it is locally led and locally controlled, I'm not sure that Afghanistan and Pakistan are the best places to start testing that hypothesis. Particularly

in the middle of a war. Levels of corruption in both countries are staggering, and in Afghanistan the fact that there was ongoing armed conflict would have made it extraordinarily difficult to operate and monitor a G2G program effectively. It was extremely difficult just to monitor what we were actually doing ourselves through direct USAID programming because we couldn't go out and visit most of the places where we were working. And at the time, we didn't have drones, we didn't have Google Earth, we had limited ways of conducting third party monitoring to see what was actually happening, what was being done with our resources. To do this in Afghanistan seemed to me to be extraordinarily risky and not likely to lead to a great level of success.

But there was a very strong lobby, led by people like Barnett Rubin, a very distinguished American political scientist and expert on Afghanistan. I listened to him make a speech in Kabul in which, as I recall, he argued that we were completely wrong; his view was that our assistance portfolio should not be implemented by the United States, but rather by Afghanistan. I didn't agree. Dick Norland, our DCM, had another perspective. His view was that we should just provide them with cash. Just divide whatever our budget was at the time, a billion dollars, say, by the population of the country and give everybody that amount; that will solve their problems. And my answer to Dick was, "Yeah, this week." (Both laugh) Everyone would have gotten about $28. It's not a long-term solution, unless you want to keep doing it forever. What our development programs try to do is to create a situation where we don't have to do that. Now I recognize that there are echoes of this view today, and that the subject of direct cash assistance has become a serious topic in development circles. So, maybe I was a bit too glib in my response to Dick. I think there are some circumstances in which there may be arguments for giving people direct cash assistance. But I did not subscribe to Dick's theory, or to the theory that to be successful our program had to be implemented primarily by the Afghan government because I was very skeptical of the efficacy and the honesty of the Afghan bureaucracy.

Q/ There was a special office, the inspector general's office. Was that in place while you were there?

WASKIN: SIGAR (Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction).

Q: Yes. Was that in place while you were there; did you have interactions with them?

WASKIN: No. SIGAR was founded in 2008, which was after my time. What we did have was a group called the ARG, the Afghanistan Reconstruction Group. As I mentioned, while I was in Kabul the U.S. Embassy did not have an Assistance Coordinator per se. There was a guy in the embassy, Mac McLaughlin – actually a NASA employee, I believe - who was Director of the Interagency Resources Cell. Mac very effectively tracked everything that all agencies at post were doing, and in that context worked very closely with Thomas Johnson. But Mac did not exercise or attempt to exercise programmatic authority over the USAID Mission. But we did have the ARG, which was a group of some half a dozen or so American businesspeople who were there and had been put in place by the Bush Administration. The intent was for them to lend a private sector viewpoint, as it were, to our assistance program. Before I arrived in Kabul, I was

told that "These people are going to be a problem for you. They're really going to be difficult." But that's not what happened. I was able to establish a very friendly working relationship with the ARG, particularly with their Chief of Staff, Ed Smith, and they proved very supportive of our work and of what we were trying to accomplish. So, I was fortunate. I didn't have second guessing from the interagency at post; rather, I got a lot of support.

Q: Were they resident in town?

WASKIN: They were resident, yes.

Q: Okay. So, they were advisors to the Afghan government or the U.S.?

WASKIN: They were advisors to the U.S. government.

Q: Presumably they were put in place by Khalilzad, right?

WASKIN: I imagine that was the case, but I don't have any personal knowledge of how or why the ARG was established. What I do know is that Ambassador Neumann respected them and valued their advice, particularly on a strategic level. But he looked to his USAID Mission Director to provide operational, day-to-day direction of the USAID program.

Q: Not to businessmen.

WASKIN: No, not to businessmen. My philosophy was to tell the ARG everything we're doing, invite them to meetings, keep them informed, make them partners. And that seemed to work.

Q: Right. That's often a good strategy.

WASKIN: Yeah.

Q: To what extent were these advisors Afghan diaspora from the United States?

WASKIN: Very few of them, as I recall. I've seen that elsewhere, particularly in Haiti, where we spent a considerable effort bringing in Haitian Americans who were part of the Haitian diaspora. I did not see that in Afghanistan although obviously, Ambassador Khalilzad was himself a representative of the Afghan diaspora. It's an interesting question, but I don't remember there being a lot of Afghan Americans there at the time, at least not interacting with me.

Q: Were there other donors working there and how did you all coordinate among yourselves or was the coordination done by the military?

WASKIN: When I look at pain points of my time in Afghanistan the multiple overlapping structures of donor coordination that were going on and the amount of staff time that was consumed in preparing for and participating in and reporting on these meetings leads the list. The effort we put into donor coordination was wildly disproportionate to the benefit that we got out of it. There were several donor coordination structures, the names of which have escaped my mind. But I probably went to at least two such meetings a week, and each of these meetings lasted some two or three hours, so the time burden imposed simply by attending them, let alone preparing for and reporting on them, was significant. Some of them were sector specific. For example, the Minister of Education, Hanif Atmar, had one for just the education sector and he expected the heads of agencies to attend. I couldn't just send Jim Sarn, the head of our education office. Jim came with me, but I had to be there. And several of these bodies required that the ambassador attend, so naturally, since the ambassador was there, I had to be there. These sessions were, to my mind, largely just talk shops. Generally speaking, they were not terribly helpful. But there were two forums that were helpful because they had decision-making or operational responsibilities. One was the AFRTF, the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, which USAID had set up with the World Bank.

Q: Right. There was a trust fund and other donors were putting money into them?

WASKIN: Right. We were putting up major portions of the money but other donors were contributing as well. And this proved an effective way to mobilize resources from small donors like the Denmarks and Norways of the world that didn't have the financial ability to maintain a large on-site presence in Afghanistan but wanted to contribute to the effort, and indeed were expected to contribute to the effort because they're NATO members but needed a vehicle through which to do so. I was skeptical at first of the benefits of this Fund but over time I came to appreciate that this did end up mobilizing a lot of resources and that it was a mechanism through which we could program funds and have some assurance that they would, in fact, be used for the purposes for which they were intended. So, that was one donor coordination mechanism that I thought was extremely valuable.

The other mechanism that I think was very valuable was an informal one in which I personally didn't participate, but it was where the real donor coordination happened. It was called the Tea Group. On a regular basis – I think semi-weekly or monthly - the ambassadors of the major donor countries, including I believe the United States, the Canadians, the British, the French, Japanese, Germans, South Koreans, and others, would get together. In my opinion, that was the real coordination mechanism through which decisions were made.

Q: Okay. I assume the trust fund, that most of those resources went into government ministries. Is that correct?

WASKIN: That's how I recall it, yes.

Q: Okay. And for major infrastructure and that kind of thing?

WASKIN: Right.

Q: Okay. You've said several times that the interagency work at post went very smoothly. I wonder if you could talk a bit about how things worked with Washington and were you on frequent calls with Washington, were there interagency calls with Washington? How did things work with the multiple parties in Washington? State, NSC, AID, etc. And then, similarly with congressional oversight and whether you had to go up to the Hill at all yourself on any TDYs you made back to Washington? Were there CODELs and STAFFDELs?

WASKIN: On the first point, yes, there were a lot of "Secure Video Teleconferences", or "SVTCs", as they were called. These were meetings that generally took place, probably once or twice per month, usually around 6:00 or 7:00 in the evening Kabul time. They were held in the secure conference room of the embassy. That conference room had tiny little screens on the wall that were probably no bigger than the screen I'm looking at now on my iPad. Through those little screens, we had a view into several other rooms in Washington and elsewhere that included a total of some twenty or thirty participants – which meant that all we saw were twenty or thirty dots. The video component of those meetings, given the rudimentary technology available, was pretty useless. But these things took place on a regular basis, and they were a mechanism through which we had consultations with the interagency in Washington, i.e., with State, with USAID/Washington, with the NSC as the representative of the White House, and with several other agencies that had a stake in what was happening in Afghanistan. During these SVTCs, we reviewed progress and where we were with respect to the various targets for the performance of our program and discussed policy issues such as the counternarcotics strategy. So, while I was physically present and listening actively to the conversations, it was a very strange way to be involved in the interagency policy dialogue. Strange both physically (it felt like I was looking at the meeting through the wrong end of a telescope) and procedurally, because during these meetings, as tends to happen, the folks in Washington would begin to argue among themselves and we at post would just sit there and watch. Occasionally we'd be asked to chime in with a viewpoint. But effectively, we weren't the major participants in the meeting, we were merely an audience watching the interagency debates that were happening. And of course, during these meetings the ambassador was the principal spokesman for the Country Team. I rarely spoke at those meetings, only if I was asked to provide factual input. But basically, I was an observer which was fine with me because I had plenty of work to do just running the program in country. And USAID's point of view in these discussions was capably represented by, among others, Mark Ward, who was the head of the Agency's AF/PAK Task force at the time. So, yes, I was involved in the broadest possible sense in those various dialogues but not really in any meaningful, substantive way.

When I went to Washington, I did not meet people on Capitol Hill and that was really Mark Ward's choice. Mark was an extraordinarily effective spokesperson on the Hill and within the interagency for what we were doing and he didn't want there to be a second voice. As we've discussed earlier in these interviews, I had worked on the Hill, I had had many interactions with Congressional staff during prior assignments, and I was to have

many further such interactions during subsequent assignments. But, while memories cloud over the years, I don't believe I ever briefed anybody on Capitol Hill while I was Mission Director in Afghanistan.

There was another part to your question I may have forgotten.

Q: Well, the relationship with AID/Washington and the amount of communication? Did you get the right amount of support and guidance from Washington, or did you sometimes get more than you might have liked?

WASKIN: For most of my tour I did not have a lot of communication with AID/Washington. And this surprised me. As I was getting ready to go to Kabul, Alonzo told me, "You've got to be prepared. You are going to get calls in the middle of the night from the Secretary of State and you've got to be ready." Well, Condoleezza Rice never called me. We had one senior visitor the whole time I was there and that was Jim Kunder, who I believe was the Acting Deputy Administrator at the time. Why was that? Because Washington was focused on Iraq.

Q: Ah, right.

WASKIN: I had a billion-dollar budget and not a lot of oversight. I tell this to people who succeeded me as Mission Director in Afghanistan and they simply can't believe it. They think I'm looking at the past with rose-colored glasses. But I'm not. It's just that I was there in this weird historical period where we had enormous resources but we weren't a foreign policy priority. The priority was Iraq.

Q: Right. Because they were doing the surge in Iraq at that time, yes, right.

WASKIN: They were doing the surge in Iraq, exactly. And to answer your question, I guess I did get the right amount of support. Frankly, it was fine with me that I did not get a lot of visits from Washington, and that I did not have a lot of people looking over my shoulder. Under these circumstances, I had the keys to this amazing machine that I could operate largely without a lot of second guessing. My principal constituency was always Ambassador Neumann. If he was happy with me then everybody was happy with me. And Mark Ward was very supportive and extraordinarily capable. To be clear, Mark actually came out to post when I was first there. He met me in Kabul on my first day on the job. We didn't fly together but we arrived at virtually the same time because he wanted to make sure that I got off on the right foot. But that was his only visit. He was there the first couple of days of my mission directorship and that was that. But of course, I saw him again in Washington. And I want to emphasize that even though people may not have been visiting me or calling me, we had really, really capable people on the desk back in Washington and I think I got exceptionally good support from them. Our desk officer was Sepideh Keyvanshad, who later went on to work for Holbrooke and who's now the Mission Director in Nepal. So in terms of Washington support, it was exactly what I needed.

Q: Okay. That's good.

Can I ask you a couple management-related questions? I know that early on there was a real effort to bring in Third-Country Nationals from other AID missions to work in Afghanistan and then obviously, there was recruitment of Afghan staff as well. And I'm wondering if you have any thoughts on both the Afghan FSN staff and then the third country national staff who were at post and the roles that they played?

WASKIN: Before I went out I was briefed by a team from PricewaterhouseCoopers led by Perry Pockros, whom I'd worked very closely with on redesigning the ADS 200 series and then conducting a worldwide training program on that series. Perry and I traveled all over the world together. He was and still is a dear friend. He and his colleagues from PWC had just been in Kabul. In fact, they were giving the ADS 200 training there. And when they came back they asked to see me. They said, "The number one thing you've got to do is you've got to get rid of all these Third-Country Nationals. You need to replace them with Afghans. It's essential." Okay. I respected their judgment and promised to take their views seriously. But I intended to make my own judgments once I got to Kabul.

And my own judgment, once I got there and saw how things were operating and who was doing what, who was crucial and who was not, was that we could not operate the mission without the Third-Country Nationals. I had great respect for our Afghan staff, particularly our female Afghan staff, simply for coming to work every day because they were taking their lives in their hands merely by doing that. So, I don't mean to deprecate in any way the contributions that they made. But we had a system in place at the time where people became eligible for SIVs, Special Immigrant Visas, after I think just one year of U.S. Government service. That was later changed. But what that meant was that at that time, very few Afghan employees in the Mission had been there for more than a year. So, that was a challenge, and I quickly realized that getting rid of our TCN staff just wasn't going to work. I talked to my team and I said, "What if I get rid of, say, T.D. Naiwal in the Executive Office, or what if I get rid of Grace Agana, the Mission Director's secretary? And their unanimous advice to me was "Don't do that. Whatever you do, you can't get rid of them."

And so, it became clear to me that these Third-Country Nationals were extremely valuable. I certainly saw that in the front office where the Mission Director's secretary was a woman named Grace Agana from the Philippines. Grace was the best OMS that I've ever seen in the Foreign Service. She was invaluable to me. When she was gone on leave, I replaced her with an Afghan who was very nice and tried very hard but there were a series of problems that I wouldn't have wanted to deal with on an ongoing basis. So, I decided I was not going to get rid of the Third-Country Nationals. I recognize that may not be good development practice, but these were extraordinary circumstances. We were, after all, effectively part of a war effort, which made it extraordinarily important that the USAID program function without interruption. And I couldn't guarantee that would happen if I didn't have these people. So, I didn't make that change.

Q: Yes; I think that's an important point particularly if they were offering SIVs after only one year, I mean, that's very counterproductive for trying to build a staff. So, that's interesting.

Also on the management front, the length of tours, the one-year assignments, what are your thoughts about that and how do you manage around it?

WASKIN: I went to Kabul convinced that we should move to two-year assignments. And I told Mark Ward this. And Mark, as I recall (Mark may have a different memory so I don't want to put words in his mouth) said, "No, no, no, don't do that. Don't even make that suggestion." He said, "Encourage people to stay for two years but don't make it mandatory. If we make it mandatory that would significantly disrupt our efforts to recruit good people for these posts." His view was that, with only a one-year assignment on the table, we were able to get the pick of the litter, so to speak. Even people who have families could say to their family, as did I, "I'm only going to be gone for one year but I'll be back twice or three times during the year so I'll only be gone for three or four months at a time." That is very difficult and challenging but it's not insurmountable. But if you tell them it's going to be two years, that's a completely different kettle of fish and then you're only going to get people who are either very young, unmarried, with no children, or people who are much older whose children are grown. And so you would really risk vitiating the Agency's ability to recruit among that vast cohort in the middle, which is, of course, the bulk of the agency's staff. So, I think Mark was right. I came to the view that we should encourage people to stay for two years if they wanted to and if they performed well but that we should not push them or make it mandatory.

I had people who wanted to stay in Kabul for three years. Dan Miller was one of them. He was part of our agriculture office, a very valuable officer. And when he came to me to request that I advocate for a third year in Kabul for him, I told him, "Look. You've been here for thirteen months, and now you're telling me you want to stay for three years. That may not sound like much now, but that road gets awfully long down at the end." And so I did not let him sign up for a third year. I thought that was too much. Maybe I was right, maybe I was wrong. Dan is a very resilient guy and probably could have handled a third year. We had some people like Loren Stoddard who, once he got there to head our agriculture program, we couldn't get him out. I think Loren over a twelve-year period served something like nine or ten years in Afghanistan. He kept coming back to Kabul. So, I guess my answer to that question is yes, two-year tours should be encouraged. People should stay for two years if they can and if they want to. But making two-year tours mandatory would have seriously harmed recruitment.

Now, in my case, of course, I was there for a year. About six or eight months in, Ambassador Neumann and I discussed the possibility of my staying for a second year. The problem with that was that I had gotten married and my wife had become pregnant. She was dealing with that pregnancy all by herself, and I didn't think it would have been fair for me to ask her to also handle the first year of our daughter's life by herself. As much as I enjoyed and was committed to the work we were doing, the idea of me staying a second year in Afghanistan was a non-starter for family reasons.

On the subject of management issues, one of my management objectives in Kabul was that I wanted to limit the number of non-essential personnel at post. We had close to 100 U.S. direct hires at post. It was a huge mission. And I would say that more than half of our people never set foot outside the compound. Yet it was costing us $400,000 a year per person in ICASS charges alone to have people in Kabul. So, the question for me was, what are they doing here? They're not interacting with Afghans. I mean, even I as the Mission Director had trouble getting out and interacting with enough Afghans. Most people didn't have the opportunity. So I asked "Why do they need to be in Kabul to do their jobs?" When I characterize them as "non-essential" I don't mean that their work was not essential. I mean it was not essential that they be at post to do that work.

So, I wanted to decrease not the size of our Mission, but rather decrease the number of Mission employees permanently assigned to and resident in Kabul. When I was in Bangkok I was involved in establishing a regional Afghanistan contracting support unit at the RDM/A there. By the time I became mission director in Afghanistan three years later that unit was fully operational and fully staffed. That was a step in the right direction. But Bangkok was a problem because it was a long way away, in every sense of the word. There was a four-hour time difference between Afghanistan and Thailand, and at the time you could not fly from Kabul to Bangkok in a day. You had to overnight in Dubai. So, it took two days to get there and two days to get back. Thus, if I needed to have staff to serve on a technical panel in Bangkok, the work of which would consume five days, I had to send them away for two weeks. That was very difficult to accommodate, particularly because so many staff were away from post on R&R at any given time. You have to remember, that while I had 100 U.S. direct hires working for me in Kabul, I never had more than eighty of them on-site at any given time. Why? Because people are on R&Rs. Everybody got three R&Rs a year, which means that 20 percent of your staff is gone at any given time. And you have to manage around that. And if in addition to dealing with those scheduled staff absences I have to send significant numbers of people to Bangkok for two weeks at a time, well, that has consequences as well.

There were other reasons that relying on a support office in Bangkok was not ideal. They were on a Monday through Friday schedule. We, of course, were working Sunday through Thursday. That's a problem. We calculated that there were only twenty hours of the week when we were all in the office at the same time as were our colleagues in Bangkok. So, establishing that contracting support office in Bangkok had been a step in the right direction but it wasn't the optimal solution.

The optimal solution to me, and what I tried to implement, would have been to establish a support office somewhere in the neighborhood, somewhere closer. We tried hard to convince the State Department to allow us to put people in Dubai, for example, or in Abu Dhabi or in someplace relatively close by so that the flight distances would not be so daunting. Take, for example, Dubai. Dubai is only a couple of hours by plane from Kabul; you can get there and back in a day. I've actually done that from Pakistan. I had breakfast in Islamabad, went to Dubai for an afternoon meeting, and then was back in Islamabad that evening. It's not impossible. But there was a lot of resistance from within

the USG. I was told that the U.S. Embassies in the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain didn't want to have us. Now, you asked about support from Washington. This is the one area where I thought we did not get the kind of support from Washington that we needed. Let me be clear: USAID Washington fully supported what I was trying to do. But there was no echo of that on the State side. I would have thought that if Afghanistan was a foreign policy priority somebody at the deputy secretary level or above would say to the U.S. Ambassador in the UAE or in Bahrain, "This is a foreign policy priority. We want our people there. That's it. Stop objecting. Make it happen." They weren't willing to do that.

There was, however, one post that did want us. USAID/India was in the process of being downsized and had a lot of people for which it wanted to find employment, a lot of FSNs that it otherwise would have to lay off. And so, we were working on a deal with them whereby we would shift to New Delhi some people from our Controller's Office and some people from our Contracting Office who were still in Kabul rather than in Bangkok. And we would also move the people in Bangkok to New Delhi. That, I think, would have been a much better solution. Peter Hubbard, my EXO, was leading the charge on doing this and when I left Kabul this was a done deal. Agreement had been reached in principle, papers just needed to be signed, but everybody liked it. This would have been a great outcome, a win-win for both USAID/Afghanistan and USAID/India.

Sadly, about a month after I left Kabul I was told that the deal had fallen apart. Why did the deal fall apart? In truth, I don't know., I was told – and Let me be clear that I don't know this for a fact but am simply repeating what I was told – I was told that the deal collapsed over an issue you mentioned earlier, employment of third country nationals – or in this case, one third country national. There was a TCN employed by USAID in Bangkok at the Afghanistan Contract Support Unit, and I understand that for whatever reason USAID told USAID/India that this individual was essential, that USAID/Afghanistan had to have this person. And the mission in India said, "No. We're not going to accept any Third-Country Nationals" From their perspective the whole reason they were willing to take on responsibility for an Afghanistan support office was because it would help them find employment for their own FSNs, of which they had plenty. They didn't need any Third-Country Nationals.

Q: Right.

WASKIN: Legitimate from their perspective. Now, had I still been involved in the dialogue I would have urged USAID to say to this TCN in Bangkok, and I don't know who it was and this is in no sense a criticism of him or her, I would have said, "We'll give you any job you want but we can't give you this job you're doing right now. We'll put you someplace else, but we've got to respond to the priorities of the USAID mission in India." That is not what they chose to do.

They chose to say to India, "All right, the deal is off," and the deal was off, which I was very disappointed to hear because I really do think we had too many people in Kabul. I know Ambassador Neumann didn't necessarily agree with me on that point, and of

course, subsequently, the number of people at post in Kabul expanded exponentially beyond the number there was while I was Director. I'm not sure that was the right solution. Just referring to the PRTers, I had trouble finding lift capacity for twenty-four of them. Earl Gast had 400 PRTers to deal with five years later.

Q: Right.

WASKIN: And guess what? They didn't have lift capacity either. So, the problem had multiplied twenty-fold. And that outcome was, by the way, a reflection of Ambassador Holbrooke's preferences because when he was a young Foreign Service Officer in South Vietnam in the early 1960s he had seen USAID programs being implemented by USAID officers working in the field. That's what they did then. And he apparently wished to apply the same model to Afghanistan. Now, I never understood why a program that failed in Southeast Asia forty years before was appropriate to migrate to Afghanistan forty years later, right? (Peasley laughs) But that was Ambassador Holbrooke's view. It was not my view. My view was not necessarily that we had too many people in terms of overall numbers, but that we had too many of the wrong kind of people in country in 2007 doing the wrong kinds of things. And I think that by allowing the India gambit to fail USAID missed a golden opportunity to correct that problem.

Q: Yes, that's an interesting point and one that people should think seriously about. The immediate response is always more money, more people and sometimes it's not always the right answer.

WASKIN: Yeah, exactly.

Q: For someone who might read your transcript twenty years from now, what were the living arrangements like? Where were you living?

WASKIN: This too was another controversial issue. The new embassy Chancery had just been opened by President Bush and Secretary of State Rice in early 2006. When I got there in July 2006, the Chancery and most Embassy offices were located on the main compound on the west side of Great Massoud Road. We as USAID were in what was called the CAFE, Compound Across From the Embassy, C-A-F-E, right? (Peasley laughs) on the east side of that road. Our offices were built from a series of dozens of shipping containers that had been welded together and converted into office space. These were highly temporary facilities where everyone worked. Now, over on the west side, on the embassy side they had built two apartment buildings and some of us, myself included, were assigned to live in small apartments on that side. But most of the USAID staff were living on the CAFÉ side in what were called "hooches", small shipping containers that had been converted into tiny apartments. I stayed in one of those during my TDY in February 2006. And they were, well okay. They were heated and they were air conditioned, and they had hot running water and they had access to a wireless network and to cable television and they were—

Q: Did they have windows?

WASKIN: Yeah, they had windows.

Q: Okay. Great.

WASKIN: But they were hardly luxurious. The apartment I lived in was much nicer. It was small but it was very comfortable. I couldn't entertain any more than four people at a time in it because more than that wouldn't fit. But I had a kitchen, a living room, a bedroom, a bathroom and a balcony. What more does a person need? I was fine. But, while some of most senior USAID staff were living in apartments, most of our team members were still living in the hooches in the CAFE compound on the east side. And this created some interagency tension. As I've said, in terms of policy things were smooth on the interagency front at post. Administratively things tended to be a little rough. And particularly around that issue of housing, there was a sense, certainly among my staff, that people from other agencies got priority over USAID. Peter Hubbard, our EXO, and I tried to get from the ICASS council a headcount of who was in what apartments and whether there was interagency equity in terms of the proportion of staff who were living in apartments as opposed to hooches. We were never able to get that information. So, while I had anecdotal accounts provided by some unhappy USAID people that housing was not allocated fairly among agencies, I had no data to support that.

Q: Was there any difference between the status of AID people—I assume you had a mix of kinds of people. You had TCNs (Third-Country Nationals) and you had probably USPSCs and you probably had varying kinds of inter-agency agreements, like RSSAs, and you had Foreign Service officers.

WASKIN: Yeah, we had them all.

Q: So, was there any difference in how people lived by their status?

WASKIN: Their housing status was determined by rank. So the senior Foreign Service officers, FS-1s, office directors, those types of people were assigned to apartments. Everybody else – junior Foreign Service officers, Personal Services Contractors, people working with us through various interagency agreements – was in a hooch.

Q: Okay. More on Afghanistan? What else should I have been asking?

WASKIN: Well, there are two points I want to make. One is just by way of illustration of how I tried to manage the program with alacrity to respond to broader U.S. government priorities. There is a section of Ambassador Neumann's book that I reread in preparation for this conversation in which he recounts his last initiative as ambassador. He had discovered, through us, that contrary to what had been promised, the northern electric power grid that we were working on was not going to come online and provide power to Kabul before the Afghanistan presidential election looming in 2009. And he was quite concerned about what he characterized as the black eye that this would give the Karzai

government. So, he said to me, "We need to reprogram $100 million to bring power to Kabul before the next election." And his book recounts this episode in considerable detail. If anyone wants much more information about this initiative, I urge them to consult that excellent book. But the point I would make for purposes of this interview is that our USAID Mission, myself included, was very supportive of this. USAID/Washington was supportive. Mark Ward was supportive. And everybody pitched in together to make this happen. As you well know from your own experience within USAID, reprogramming $100 million of already obligated and notified funds is not an easy thing to do, particularly when you're doing this starting in late January and it has to get done by April 9, 2007, the reason being that that's the day Ambassador Neumann leaves post. So, all these funds have to be reprogrammed, and the agreements need to be signed before his departure, because he can't bind his successor Ambassador Bill Wood to informal agreements that he's reached, he can only bind the U.S. Government if a document has been signed. The Ambassador describes in his book how the USAID staff locally and USAID and State Department staff in Washington pitched in. To forestall any concerns on the congressional side or eliminate any problems that we might have had with the CNs that we would have to send forward, Ambassador Neumann himself briefed Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi on our plans. She was very much onboard. The plan was to spend $100 million on purchasing generators for Kabul. And in fact, we got everything done before Ambassador Neumann's departure, and in his book he is full of praise for the work that USAID did. He cites this as an example of how we were responsive to immediate foreign policy priorities in a way that is somewhat uncharacteristic of not only USAID as an organization but more broadly of the U.S. government as a whole. Our Agency generally can't turn on a dime like that for anything. But to do what we did in less than three months, to reprogram $100 million to support a foreign policy priority that he had identified, was extraordinary. I was very proud of that, of the work that we put in. The documents were, in fact, signed on April 9, the day that he was leaving, so (both laugh) we took it to the last minute but we got it done.

So, what happened? Were the generators installed? I don't know. In retrospect, was it worth pulling out all the stops as we did to support President Karzai knowing what we know now about how he would behave after he was re-elected? I don't know. Those are larger questions that we didn't have the benefit of foresight to be able to see. But we were able to turn our program around very quickly and respond to what was then thought to be an important U.S. Government foreign policy priority.

The other point I would make relates to re-engineering, the major effort USAID made in the early 1990s to significantly change the way we did business. This was part of Vice President Gore's effort to "reinvent government" under the Clinton Administration and was spearheaded by Larry Byrne as the Assistant Administrator for Management. It did a great deal of damage to USAID and to people of a certain generation. When I mention reengineering today, the people in USAID now generally have no idea what I'm talking about. But people you and I both served with from our generation remember it, and when you mention "reengineering" to them, well, that's a dirty word. In many ways that was a horrible episode; it cost a lot of really good people their jobs. But had we not done it we would not have been able to do what we did in Afghanistan. If I had had to tell

Ambassador Neumann, when he directed me to reprogram $100 million to provide electricity to Kabul, that we would first have to write a PID, and then write a Project Paper, and then sign a Project Agreement with the Government of Afghanistan, and then launch a competitive procurement process – had I said all that to him, he would have thrown me out on my ear. And more important than my own personal fate, our agency would have been removed from the equation and the work would have been given to other agencies that could respond or would claim that they could respond more nimbly. Another example: absent the flexibility that reengineering gave us, when General Eikenberry told me the lives of American soldiers are at stake unless I immediately program resources to build the conflict roads in Zabul, I would not have been able to respond to him as I did. Of course, there were always waivers; and as our pre-reengineering experience in Nicaragua demonstrates, we probably could have found ways to do it. But it would have been much harder bureaucratically. It was considerably less hard bureaucratically thanks to the flexibility that re-engineering gave us. So while I deplore the harm that reengineering did to so many people, I do think it's important to acknowledge that Vice President Gore, Administrator Brian Atwood, and Assistant Administrator Byrne were on to something. I think there were positive outcomes from reengineering. I was a big critic of reengineering at the time, and I remain a big critic of the damage it caused, but it really helped me and more broadly helped the United States to respond nimbly and as I like to say with alacrity in Afghanistan. That needs to be pointed out.

Q: Yes; absolutely, you are correct. You need a lot of flexibility in dealing in those kinds of countries and situations.

Were there special authorizations for Afghanistan? There was something called OCO; believe it was supplemental appropriations, that the funding never got built into the regular budget. Am I correct? If so, did that give you any special authorities or any more flexibility?

WASKIN: I'd have to go back and look. I remember we were instructed to prepare and sign a waiver pursuant to OCO authority that basically gave us extraordinary flexibility to do whatever we needed to do. And Mark Ward was clear with me: "You're going to sign the waiver and then you're never going to use it." Now, I have great faith in Mark's judgment, so I'm sure there was a good reason for him to have told me that, but I won't attempt to explain it. That was one of these things that I simply accepted on faith.

Q: But that's interesting because there have been other times where AID's been given flexibility and they've been reluctant to use it because they're afraid someone's going to come after them.

WASKIN: Well, I think this might have been one of those cases. We had been given that flexibility, and we had to document that we had acted in response by issuing a waiver pursuant to that authority. But we also had no intention of using it – possibly for the reason you cite. But, OCO waiver or not, as a practical matter I felt like I had a great deal of flexibility. The episodes I've mentioned really reflect that.

Q: Okay. Just out of curiosity, were you consulted at all as to what kind of person should come in to succeed you? I'm just curious whether that process was done—whether you were involved with it at all?

WASKIN: No, I was not. Robin Phillips was selected. I knew Robin, we had served together at REDSO in Nairobi. When he got the job, he was the mission director in Yerevan, and I called him to congratulate him. Before he arrived at post, he and I coordinated closely about personnel, logistical matters, et cetera. But no, I was not asked to weigh in on his selection.

Q: Okay. And I know where you went off to.

WASKIN: Right.

Q: Was that through the bidding process or did people approach you and say, "We'd like you to go there and please bid on it?" Or how did it—?

WASKIN: When I got the job in Afghanistan I was told, "After this, you can write your own ticket. You can have any job you want." When it came time to bid, I had been in Afghanistan for about two months. My first two choices would have been Vietnam or Burma but we didn't have missions there at the time. So, I said, "I'd really like to be mission director in Egypt." "Well, that's been promised to somebody else." So, okay, fine, that's the way it is. "All right, how about Indonesia." "No, that's been promised to someone else." So I called Jim Kunder, the Acting Deputy Administrator. I said, "Jim, come on. That's not what it said in the brochure. It didn't say you could have any job you want unless someone else wants it. It said you can have any job you want." And he said, "You're right, but Egypt and Indonesia are both off the table." So I asked, "Well, what have you got?" And he replied "You can have Bangkok. Or you can have Moscow." So I spoke with my wife, who is from Mongolia, who speaks Russian and whose parents were educated in Moscow. Moscow was very attractive to her. Going back to Bangkok would have been great because it would have corrected the error I think the Agency made when it cancelled my assignment to Bangkok. But I thought Russia would be a more important program and that it would be better for my family. So, we opted for Moscow. And that will be the subject, I'm sure, of our next conversation.

Q: Yes, right.

Should we stop for now?

WASKIN: Yeah, I think so. I think this is a natural stopping point, you know. Before the next chapter, I had some personal stuff to take care of. When I left Afghanistan in July of 2007, my daughter had just been born and so I was occupied with that. And then, I moved the whole family to Northern Virginia and went to the National Foreign Affairs Training Center to take Russian language training.

Q: Russian language training, right.

WASKIN: Yes, which still gives me post-traumatic stress (Peasley laughs). Actually, maybe I can just mention a bit about that right now. I had always had a knack for languages. I learned French when I was eleven years old. I got to an FS-4 in Spanish without taking a class. And so, I thought, you know, this Russian is going to be really, really easy. And it was hard. I mean, it was really hard. (Peasley laughs) You may have gone through a similar experience. And the other thing that was going on - and this is important to know, it's not just anecdotal about my own life – is that while I was taking courses at FSI, the State Department medical people kept badgering me to say, "You have to go see a counselor, a mental health professional." "Why do I need to see a mental health professional?", I asked. "There's nothing wrong with my mental health. I'm fine." "No, you have to do it. Anybody that's coming out of one of these special posts like Afghanistan simply has to do it." I continued to try to ignore them, but finally, they basically told me they were going to pull my badge and pull me out of the Foreign Affairs Training Center if I didn't go see this mental health professional. So, I said, "All right. I'll go." So, I went to see this guy, a man, and this would have been, I think, probably in September or October 2007. And it was a very—I don't know, what's the right word? It was painful but also a liberating experience. When I met this guy, I told him how frustrated I was that I could not seem to get this Russian into my head. And he said, "This is absolutely nothing unusual. For someone who has just been through an experience like you have, who has worked at the level of intensity you did and dealt with the big picture issues you were dealing with, it is very difficult to try to get your mind around the subtleties of Russian grammar." That is, he told me, a mental shift that is very, very hard to make. And as we were speaking I really almost broke down weeping because all this tension and frustration I was feeling was relieved just by being able to talk about it a little bit. So, the reason I bring it up and that I think it has relevance beyond my own personal case is that in certain circumstances, even if you think your mental health is fine, it does help to talk to someone. It helped me a lot. Now, that's not to say that I suddenly became fluent in Russian. But our conversation lifted a weight from me and I didn't expect that. I thought this was a complete waste of time that I was doing simply to satisfy a bureaucratic requirement. But it actually ended up helping me when I didn't even know that I needed to be helped.

Q: Was that a requirement for everyone who served in Afghanistan as part of their medical clearance for their next assignment?

WASKIN: That's what they told me, yes.

Q: Interesting. I had not heard that before. And I had meant to ask you when we were talking about the length of tours, the degree to which you thought there was enough attention to staff care. Because I know that ten years later AID invested a lot of time developing staff care strategies. Was there enough attention to it in those early days?

WASKIN: No, the simple answer is I don't think there was. I think my experience begins to illustrate that. I think there are stresses and burdens that are placed on individual

officers that are then in turn placed upon their families that are not, or at the time were not, well understood. And that had some really difficult consequences for a lot of people. I've never seen any figures but I can imagine what the rates of broken marriages must be and what kinds of family issues must have cropped up due to the lengthy absence of one parent. It was tough for everybody who was there. It was tough for my own family. And I'm glad that the agency has devoted more attention to it. I didn't have the prescience, the foresight to see that at the time. Only when I was reluctantly dragged in kicking and screaming to have my own encounter with staff care did I begin to realize how much it was needed. As I said in the case of Dan Miller, who wanted to stay a third year, I just instinctively told him "You don't know the stresses that you're under, Dan. Don't assume a third year is going to be easy." Apparently, I didn't fully appreciate the stresses I was under, either. At one level I think I understood them, but I hadn't translated that into any recommendations for specific steps that the agency might take to deal with those problems. But I'm glad they've made progress on that front since then. And I'm glad they made me go see a counselor because it helped me a lot.

Q: Okay, that's very good. Well, why don't we end on that right now and when we reconvene we will go to Moskva.

WASKIN: Moskva, that's right.

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Q: Today is January 5, 2024, and this is interview number five with Skip Waskin.

Skip, when we finished up last time you were finishing up language training and you were en route to Moscow. Tell us what you were doing there.

USAID/Russia, Mission Director, 2008 - 2009

WASKIN: Yes. My family and I arrived in Moscow in early January 2008. Not a great time to arrive in Moscow, as you know well. It's a little cold and dark there in January but we were very excited to be there. And this assignment had been in process for a very long time, unusually long at least in my experience. I had known that I was going to go to Moscow since September of 2006. But then, of course, I had to complete my assignment in Afghanistan and then take Russian language training. So it took a while.

Once I got to a one-plus level in Russian at FSI, we asked for a waiver of the requirement that I reach the FSI 2 level. We based the request on the grounds that I could have spent another three months at FSI and gotten to a two or a two-plus level, but really, was it that important? The Mission had been without a Director for around six months, they had been waiting for me for a good long time. Happily, the waiver was granted, and so after spending four months at FSI we arrived in Moscow in January of 2008.

Q: Were you replacing Terry Myers?

WASKIN: I was replacing Terry Myers. And that was the first point I was going to make about arriving in Russia, how it was similar to the experience I'd had arriving in Afghanistan. I told you the list of extraordinary predecessors that I had as Mission Director in Afghanistan. It was absolutely the same in Russia if not more so. My predecessors were Jim Norris, Janet Ballantyne, someone named Carol Peasley, and Terry Myers. Once again, I was fortunate to follow in the footsteps of an all-star cast of people since that Mission was founded in the early 1990s. I think each of you served approximately four years so that's about sixteen years' worth of outstanding leadership I inherited by the time I got there in 2008. So, I remember thinking to myself, as I did when I arrived in Kabul, just do what Terry and Carol and Janet were doing. (I didn't meet Jim until later.) Do what they were doing and don't screw it up and you'll be all right, that was my thought, and I think that was the right thought. Similarly, we had really outstanding American staff there. I don't know how many of them were veterans of your tenure. If my memory serves, you left Moscow when, 2004 or thereabouts?

Q: The fall of 2003.

WASKIN: So I got there about four and a half years after you departed, so virtually all of the U.S. Direct Hire staff had rotated out. But we still had a very strong group. Jonathan and Cheri Kamin, for example. Jonathan was our lawyer, and Cheri was the head of the health office. Erin Krasik was running our democracy programs, Donatella Russell was the contracting officer, Ron Edwards was our Controller, and Courtney Chubb was our Executive Officer. And Janina Jaruzelski was an absolutely outstanding deputy. The more junior American staff was also full of future superstars: Alison and Jesse Leggoe, for example, and Randy Flay. Great talents all. And we had an absolutely superb FSN staff, many of whom you will know, people like Denis Korepanov, Andrew Kiseliov, Nikita Afanasyev, Sasha Sarkisov, Sergei Nikolin, and Ekatarina Drozdova. I think these are people who were there when you were there, and who were still there when I arrived. So, I benefitted from having an FSN staff that knew at least as much, and were at least as skilled, as the highly talented American team I inherited. In fact, when in 2009 USAID/Russia got a couple of NEPs – that was the name of the Agency's entry-level program at the time, which I believe stood for "Newly Employed Professionals" - young Foreign Service officers on their first tour, I was clear with them that I expected them to be supervised by and learn from the Russian professionals. I told them when they got there, "I want you to understand. I don't want you to believe for a minute that simply because you're American citizens you're going to automatically supervise the Russian professionals around you. That may be what it says on the organization chart but let me tell you how it's really going to work. You're going to learn from them." And both of them, to their great credit, were quite amenable to that approach. The point I'm making is that I landed in clover, so to speak, in terms of the strength of the people around me and the strong history of the mission.

I did not land in clover in terms of the position of USAID within the country team nor more broadly and more importantly the position of USAID within the Russian Federation as a development actor. By the time I got to Russia what had been a very large program in the past—and you would be more familiar than am I with the details of that—was now

about a $70 million annual program. Which given the size of the Russian Federation and the Russian economy was fairly insignificant. Now this was quite a shock for me, because I was used to Afghanistan where money was no object. So I would say things to Theresa Tuano, my program officer, to the effect of "Well, I want to do this, I want to do that, and I want to do that—," and she'd look at me in horror and say, "Skip, there isn't any money for those kind of things." (Peasley laughs) That was not an issue in Afghanistan. Money could always be found for anything. Not in Russia.

This drop in funding also had pernicious consequences inside the Embassy. I recall that the first time I attended the country team meeting in Moscow, as we were waiting for the Ambassador to arrive and the meeting to begin, one woman said to me -innocently, I think - "Oh, you're the new AID person. I didn't know we had an AID program any longer." And less kindly the Economic Counselor, Eric Schultz, who later became ambassador to Zambia, shared with me his perspective on the USAID program. "The annual value of our assistance program is less than the cleanup bill for the damage that the tanks do to Red Square during the May Day parade." I don't know whether that's true or not but that was his analysis. So, that was what I was running into on the country team.

Fortunately, at the top levels of the Embassy I had support. When I arrived, the ambassador was Bill Burns, and I was really looking forward to working with Ambassador Burns. Unfortunately, after about two weeks I got a phone call from him. He wanted to let me know - which I thought was quite courteous of him - that he himself had just received a phone call from the Secretary of State, and that she had asked him what he characterized as something other than a multiple choice question which was, "Do you want to come to Washington and become the Undersecretary for Political Affairs?" The answer to that question, of course, was that he would and he would be there right away. So, he left post quickly. But we were fortunate that we got John Beyrle as his replacement. In addition to hailing from Muskegon, Michigan, which is the next town up the Lake Michigan shore from Grand Haven, where my mother's side of the family is from, more importantly, Ambassador Beyrle had deep familiarity with Russia. His father, as it happened, had been a prisoner of war held by the Germans during World War II, had escaped and fallen into the hands of Russian forces, who of course were our allies then, and had chosen to continue fighting alongside them. So, Ambassador Beyrle arrived with not only a great deal of familiarity with the country but a great deal of respect within the country, and he himself had a great deal of respect for the USAID program.

And then finally, our DCM was Eric Rubin, whom I had known when he was Consul General in Chiang Mai, Thailand, when I was in Bangkok. Eric was kind enough to invite me and my family to his home in Washington before we departed for Moscow, and he and I became friends. And of course, I think you know that Eric also comes by an affinity toward USAID naturally because he is married to Nicole Simmons, the niece of Emmy and Roger Simmons, both of whom had long and exceptionally distinguished careers with USAID. And Nicole was in Moscow not just as a dependent spouse; but she was also Chief of Party for our project with the University Research Corporation, URC. So, Eric attached a lot of value to the USAID program. But again, that wasn't a view that was uniformly held within the country team.

Russia was a different experience for me as a Mission Director, both within the country and within the embassy, than the situations I had enjoyed in both Mongolia and Afghanistan. Within the country, in Mongolia, I met directly with the prime minister. I had access to the highest levels of the Mongolian government. Similarly, in Afghanistan, while I never met alone with President Karzai alone, our program was so big and so important that I was able to attend meetings with him. This was far from the case in Russia. I didn't meet with Dimitri Medvedev, who was the president at the time, and I certainly didn't meet with Vladimir Putin, who at the time was the prime minister. Given the size and nature of our program we just weren't on anybody's radar at that level. Similarly, within the Embassy, I occupied a very different space than I had in Ulaanbaatar or in Kabul. At those posts, if there was any major social or diplomatic function, I was invited. No question. Again, that was not the case in Moscow. And after I missed out on a few of these things I talked to Eric Rubin about it. And while he was very nice about it – he made clear that my exclusion wasn't personal – he also made clear that the USAID program in Russia wasn't nearly as central to the work of the Embassy as had been, say, the program in Afghanistan. So, that was a bit of a change for me. In terms of my role vis-a-vis the Russian government, I had access up to the deputy minister level, and Eric and Ambassador Byerle were great about allowing me that. As long as I kept them informed and didn't surprise them, I could talk to Russian officials at a relatively high level. But it was a bit of a sea change for me.

The start of my tour in Moscow was also hampered by some really unfortunate events that happened in quick succession right after my arrival. To begin with, on January 22, exactly two weeks after we'd arrived in Moscow, my stepfather died. So, I needed to turn around and go back to the U.S., obviously, to be with my mother and comfort her. I was away from post for about a week. Then, shortly after I returned to Moscow, the man who had been my Controller in Afghanistan, James Ahn, who was enrolled at FSI studying Spanish in preparation for assignment to Guatemala, died suddenly of a heart attack. This was a particular blow, as he had called me in early February and said, "Skip, this studying language is killing me. Please call the mission in Guatemala and get me out of here because I can't take it." Those were his exact words. And so I did. I corresponded with the Mission Director in Guatemala, who was very understanding and agreed to help. But about a week later James was dead.

So, things in Moscow were getting off to a rocky start. But I had some thoughts about strategic directions in which I wanted to take the Russia mission. In particular, I wanted us to expand our use of partnerships – partnerships with the private sector and with provincial and local governments – that would help us leverage more resources and punch above our weight, so to speak, that would make USAID a larger actor on the Russian stage than our own $70 million annual budget made possible. I decided that one way to begin to socialize these thoughts, develop them more fully, and get buy in for them throughout the Mission would be to hold a retreat. We decided that we'd hold this retreat in two sessions over a three-day period. The first session was to include basically all staff. I wanted to get everyone, Americans and FSNs, together to talk about issues, concerns, and what the priorities of the Mission should be. I wanted everybody in the

room. Then we would have a one-day break to synthesize the lessons learned, and then I'd have a smaller meeting at my house with the senior staff to crystallize these lessons and develop an action plan.

So we decided to do this right. We went to a local hotel where we had rented a big conference room and had a really nice first day of the retreat. Now, I wasn't feeling great on that first day, but I kept going. And then the next morning I was feeling worse and my wife told me, "You've got to go to the doctor." "I'm too busy to go to the doctor." She said, "You have to go to the doctor." And I went to the Embassy Medical Unit, and they said, "You have to go to the American Clinic right now." "But I'm busy." "No, you're going right now." So I went to the American Clinic and they said, "You're going to London now." And again, I told them, "I can't go to London, we're having a retreat." And they said, "You're going to London now. That's it." And so, I found myself in a hospital in London at 6:00 in the morning on the day we were supposed to be having the second session of the retreat. As it turned out, I was having a very negative reaction to some medicine I was taking for latent tuberculosis that I had apparently contracted in Afghanistan. About one percent of the people in the world are allergic to this drug and it poisons their liver. Sadly, I happened to be one of those people. Sounds simple, but this put me out of action for about six weeks; I lost about 40 pounds and was unable to work full time again until early June. So I really didn't get rolling in Moscow until six months after I arrived.

Q: Right. So, that then would have been in 2008?

WASKIN: Yes. By June 2008 I was fully functioning again.

Q: Okay. So, the change of administration was January of 2009 so this was still before the change.

WASKIN: Right. This was still the tag end of the Bush Administration. And while things had of course not gotten as bad as they eventually would, there was a great deal of tension between the U.S. and Russia at the federal level.

Basically, I had three priorities, all of which I think reinforced each other. These were the kind of things we talked about at the retreat, which we resumed after I recovered my health. We had a one-day session at my house where the senior staff basically brought me up to speed on what had happened while I was away, and then held a full day synthesis at the Embassy's small dacha. And, despite having been interrupted and postponed significantly, I think the retreat proved to be a very good team-building effort, and a real positive experience for everyone involved.

I was trying to do three things. Number one, I wanted to demonstrate through the USAID program that the relationship between the United States and Russia didn't have to be exclusively about international geopolitical tensions, loose nukes, and Georgia. I wanted to show that in fact, there were things that were in the interest of both countries on which we could collaborate to the mutual benefit of both sides.

Second, I wanted to balance our program so that a significant portion of what we were doing was of interest to the Russian Federation. For example, they loved our programming on global issues like HIV-AIDS, tuberculosis, and deforestation, and they were very interested in getting our help in establishing what we characterized as RUSAID, a Russian foreign assistance agency. I believe that if, say, two-thirds of our program were focused on things that the Russians were interested in, that would give us the space to do the other parts of the program like civil society, human rights, and democracy that really got under their skin. My theory was if we were doing enough things that they liked they would tolerate the stuff they didn't like; I wanted to give us space to continue to do those things.

And then third, as I've mentioned, I wanted to find a way to punch above our weight, so to speak, so that our little $70 million program could form partnerships with other entities and through those partnerships maybe double or even triple the financial weight of our programs. I had in mind partnerships with municipal and provincial or regional governments in Russia; partnerships with the private sector; and partnerships with foundations. So, that was the plan generated out of the retreat: to try to do these three things, and thereby one, make our program an example of what the U.S.-Russia relationship could be; and two, multiply the impact of what we were doing by working in partnerships.

The first partnership that we explored in depth was with the Autonomous Republic of Buryatia. And this led to a series of very interesting, indeed one might say colorful, experiences. Very early in my time in Moscow, probably in late February or early March of 2008, I had gotten a call through Denis Korepanov. You'll remember Denis, and you'll recall that he was very well connected. Through Denis, I was asked to take a meeting with the President of Buryatia, Vyacheslav Nagovitsyn, and with one of the Senators from Buryatia, Vitaly Malkin. As you know, there were (and I think still are) some 89 "subjects" of the Russian Federation. These include provinces and oblasts and krais and a few autonomous republics. Buryatia was an autonomous republic, so it did not have a governor, it had a president. Now, of all the 89 subjects of the Russian Federation, why was Buryatia the one that approached me? Buryatia is the ancient homeland of the Buryat people. Its capital is Ulan-Ude, near Lake Baikal in East Siberia, but it actually stretches south from there down through Mongolia and into Inner Mongolia. The Buryats are a very significant ethnic group in Mongolia. And as it happens, my wife is a Buryat. So, this was not a coincidence that escaped my notice. Of all the 89 subjects, I wonder why they thought Buryatia would be of particular interest to me?

Of course, I called Ken Yamashita, who at the time was the senior Deputy Assistant Administrator in the E&E (Europe and Eurasia) Bureau and asked whether I should take this meeting. He said, "Yeah, take the meeting, see what they want." So, I took the meeting and President Nagovitsyn and Senator Malkin came to the Mission. And President Nagovitsyn basically said to me, "Look, I used to be the Prime Minister of Tomsk Oblast, and USAID was doing all these great things in Tomsk. But you're not doing any of that in Buryatia. I want you to do all of it. I want you to work on HIV-AIDS,

I want you to work on tuberculosis, I want you to work on private sector development, I want everything you are doing in other places in Russia. And we'll pay for it all." And then, turning to Senator Malkin, he added "More specifically, this guy here, Malkin, he'll pay for it all because he's the 162nd richest man in the world," or something like that, certainly in the top 200, right? Senator Malkin was, to use the proper term, an oligarch. (Peasley laughs) Well, this was an attractive offer. If Senator Malkin, through a foundation he had founded, would pay for everything, what did we have to lose by launching a program in Buryatia? I knew however that, if I was going to pursue this, I would have to be careful to keep Ken and the DCM and through him the Ambassador in the loop every step of the way because this could very quickly become problematic. But their initial reaction was the same as mine: if Buryatia or Senator Malkin were going to pay for the work, and USAID was not going to provide any financial resources to them, they didn't see an immediate reason to say no to this, and they gave me the green light to explore the idea.

There were, however, at least two potential complications. First, there was my own personal situation. What would the optics be of us launching a major new program in Buryatia, whoever was paying for it, given that I am married to a Buryat? Second, there were issues about Senator Malkin himself. I don't know how much you know about Vitaly Malkin, if he's ever crossed your radar. Malkin was the finance director for Boris Yeltsin's re-election campaign in 1996. And so, he controlled all the money that was funneled to that campaign. And somehow, not all of that money made it to the campaign. (Peasley laughs) So, this was a problem. After Yeltsin was re-elected, Malkin founded a bank, Rossiysky Kredit, but that bank went bust in 1998 or 1999 during the financial crisis. A lot of people, including Denis Korepanov, lost a lot of money. Malkin, who is Jewish, had to flee to Israel, where he lived for six or seven years, and had only returned to Russia around 2004 or 2005. So, he had an interest in trying to restore his reputation; working with USAID through his foundation might be one way of helping do that. So we knew who Malkin was, we knew where he'd gotten his money, and we were not blind to the fact that he was not operating out of pure benevolence. At the same time, we believed that a partnership with him had the potential to accomplish great things.

In June 2008, I was invited to go to Senator Malkin's home outside Moscow, which was Boris Yeltsin's former personal residence. I accepted the invitation on condition that I be allowed to bring three people with me. One was Denis. The second was my wife, who speaks Russian. The third was my lawyer, Jonathan Kamin. Whatever was discussed, I wanted to have witnesses. So, we went there and Carol, this was the wildest experience I've ever had. His compound consists of seven different structures on about 20 or 30 acres of land, all of which are connected by a series of underground tunnels so you can move easily between the buildings in winter. The compound included a huge indoor/outdoor swimming pool, an indoor basketball court, an outdoor fire pit, and a tennis court. His home itself was spectacularly decorated with gorgeous, ornate paintings on domed ceilings, and had a private movie theater. The most interesting thing he took us to was his underground firing range. To get there, we had to go through a tunnel that featured all sorts of paintings on its walls, including one of a terrorist holding a knife to Condoleezza Rice's throat. And I remember thinking when I saw that that this was really

not the right message to be sending to a group of people from the U.S. Embassy. But we continued underground, where we were given the opportunity to fire live ammunition through weapons of various types. We were actually firing AK-47s with real bullets. It was great fun, but wow. My most salient memory of that experience is that Senator Malkin walked around his own compound, his own home, with two shooters three or four paces behind him at all times carrying loaded semi-automatic weapons. After we left I said to my wife and to Jonathan, "I don't care how much money he has. I don't want that kind of money." If you've got to live like that with armed guards walking around behind you at your own home, if you're that worried about things, leave me out, thank you. So, that's one of the many colorful parts of the story of our experience with Senator Malkin.

This experience notwithstanding, we decided to proceed with forming a partnership with Senator Malkin's foundation. As we envisioned it, it was to be rather like a global development alliance, whereby USAID would provide expertise and advice and guidance but the foundation – that is to say, Senator Malkin - would put up all the money. And as we began negotiations for this partnership, I had another objective in mind: I wanted to use this as an opportunity to reinvigorate what I perceived to be USAID/Russia's somewhat atrophied project design skills. So I assembled a team of our most experienced and talented FSN employees, including of course Denis, plus Andrew Kiseliov, Sashsa Sarkisov, Valeria Biryukova, and several others, and told them, "I want to send a team out there to Ulan-Ude and I want you guys to design a program." Now, this gets back to a theme that I discussed earlier, how USAID had moved away from project design; by 2008 people weren't really used to doing this. In fact, when I told Denis this, he said, "Yeah, great. We'll bring out experts from this partner and that partner." And I said, "No, no, no, no, no. You're not hearing me. *You're* going to go out (Peasley laughs) and do the design. I want *you guys* to work with Malkin. I don't want to bring in the partners. I want *you* to do it." This was a bit of a revelation, and a challenge, for them. So, they spent three weeks in Buryatia in I believe July of 2008 and they came back to report that they had had a marvelous experience. They returned with a lot of ideas for the program. They also showed me some of the Buryat art that they had seen. They knew that I was and am a pipe smoker, so they showed me this beautiful pipe that they'd taken a picture of; it was made out of gold and ivory and inlaid jewels, and was priced at about $10,000. They also showed me a photo of a Buryat necklace, which was absolutely gorgeous, and was priced at $15,000. And I took those two photos and sent them to my wife on my personal email account, writing in jest "Wouldn't it be nice to have these two things?" We of course would never be able to afford them.

Fast forward to Christmastime 2008. We were having a dinner party at our home when the phone rang. It was the Embassy front gate calling to tell me "Senator Malkin's assistant is here. She wants to drop off your Christmas gifts." I was surprised, of course, but I said, "Okay. Send her in." My wife and I knew her; she was a Buryat woman named Yelena Baldanova. When she arrived at our door I said, "Yelena, come on in, join the party." She declined, but she dropped off two gifts. So, we finished the party, all the guests left, and we opened the gifts from Senator Malkin. And they were that pipe and that necklace. (Peasley laughs) I thought to myself, "Malkin is either a really good guesser or somebody, obviously, is reading my email." Which I, of course, should have

expected given that we were in Russia. So, I immediately called my lawyer, Jonathan Kamin, and said, "I'm coming over to your house in five minutes." He said, "It's 10:30 at night. I'm in my pajamas." I replied, "Well, get dressed, because I'm going to be there in five minutes." I did not want those things in my house overnight because who knows what could have happened? I wanted to turn them over to Jonathan right away. And we did turn them over and we ended up writing a nice note to Senator Malkin, thanking him on behalf of the United States government. And those gifts eventually ended up on display outside of USAID Administrator Raj Shah's office for several years as a gift of Senator Vitaly Malkin of the Russian Federation. (Peasley laughs)

To return to the more important part of this story, after our team returned from Ulan Ude, we began serious negotiations with the Malkin Foundation about the shape and purpose of this partnership. And then, in August, Russia invaded Georgia. And I feared, in fact expected, that this would put a stop to this partnership. Interestingly, it did not. Prior to the Georgia invasion, I had been speaking with President Nagovitsyn on a semi-regular basis, in phone calls set up and interpreted by Sasha Sarkisov of our Democracy Office, who along with Denis was really running point on this. Those calls stopped upon the invasion. But the partnership with Senator Malkin's foundation continued. We pressed on and we did, in fact, form a partnership. Senator Malkin came to Washington in November 2008 and we had a series of meetings. I remember that we went up to Capitol Hill for meetings at the Library of Congress, and we met with Doug Menarchik, the head of the E&E Bureau, to sign a formal memorandum of understanding between our two organizations that would guide our collaboration. And we did begin to collaborate; we began to try to carry out the programs that the foundation and our team had agreed upon during that team's visit to Ulan Ude.

But we quickly ran into an interesting problem. This was supposed to be a partnership, right? This was not a grant from USAID to the foundation. In fact, the foundation was putting up the money. We were just supposed to be providing technical guidance and support based upon our experience with similar activities elsewhere in Russia. At least that's the way I saw it. And I got a call from Yelena Baldanova, Malkin's assistant – the same woman who brought the "Christmas gifts" to my house. She told me, "We have a problem, Skip. Your officers are trying to tell us what to do. They're trying to provide technical direction." I explained to her that that's kind of what USAID people do. That's how they're used to operating. But in response to her concerns, I had to get our team together and explain that this was a partnership, not a grant, and that we therefore had to be collaborating rather than directing. So there were some bumps in the road; collaboration proved a hard thing for USAID officers to get their arms around. And this, combined with the political climate in the aftermath of Georgia, kept us from moving forward as rapidly as we wanted to. And then, for reasons that I'll get to, I ran out of time in Russia in the summer of 2009, so I was not able to see this partnership to its fruition.

Q: But a really good idea to have a partnership with one of the decentralized authorities.

WASKIN: Exactly. I thought there were a lot of reasons to do it. You probably found the same dynamic that I did: when I went to places like Vladivostok, or Khabarovsk, the

reception that I got from the local authorities was so warm, so welcoming. Even in St. Petersburg, which is Putin's hometown. Effectively, without putting it in so many words, the people in those places told me "Pay no attention to those guys in Moscow. We know there are problems at the federal level between the two governments. We don't care about the federal government. We love Americans. We love USAID. We want you to be here. We want to work with you."

Q: When the president of Buryatia initially contacted you, you mentioned he had been in Tomsk. And Tomsk was one of the regional investment initiatives sites that the State Department coordinator's office had initiated years earlier. There was Tomsk, there was Samara, there was the Russian Far East. We ended up later, while I was there, expanding Samara up the Volga region, so there had been a precedent for concentrated work in geographic regions, so it made good sense for the Buryatians to approach you.

WASKIN: That's what I thought. But to the extent there was controversy about it, the issue was that we were taking this money from a guy named Malkin. And it wasn't clean money.

Q: Yes.

WASKIN: The point I made to both Ken and then to Doug about this was that, if we wanted to work in partnerships in Russia, to work with people who have resources, well then we were, almost by definition, going to be working with some people who have some very problematic reputations and problematic histories. That's just the way it is. So, to pursue this and similar partnerships, we would need to have a certain tolerance for that. And I give great credit to Doug Menarchik and to Ken Yamashita, and to Ambassador Byerle, because they understood perfectly well the type of people with whom we were dealing. And yet they let me take the risk of associating with them.

I have to say, though, that dealing with Senator Malkin and his associates really brought home to me the fact that we were working in a society – or at least with a group of people within that society – with a set of cultural and ethical values very different from our own. Let me give you two examples.

At one point in the early summer of 2008 I was in the Russian Far East, I think in Khabarovsk, and I got a call on my mobile from Yelena Baldanova, Malkin's assistant. She said, "Senator Malkin would like to invite you to spend the next two weeks in Beijing as his personal guest at the Olympics." Well, as a big sports fan, there's nothing I would have liked to do more, but somehow I had a feeling this wouldn't fly with our own ethics people. So, I told her, "No thank you, I'm going to have to decline the Senator's kind invitation." That was not going to happen. Similarly, when on the night Senator Malkin arrived in Washington in November, I got a call from Denis, who was very concerned. He informed me that Senator Malkin had brought two young aides with him. (Peasley laughs) Apparently, these were two young female aides, both of whom I was given to understand might best be described as Russian supermodels. The problem was that the Senator wanted to bring these two young aides to all his meetings in Washington

the next day, including his meeting with Doug Menarchik. Well, I wasn't going to let this happen, either. So I had Denis explain to the Senator that the guest lists for these meetings were fixed, and I assigned two of our own young people to accompany these young women to various points of interest around Washington and gave them strict instructions that they were not to come within a mile of Doug Menarchik. Again, this is the kind of thing you run into when you're dealing with a Russian oligarch; it's a very different value system than our own.

The other major partnership we formed was also controversial, but for very different reasons. Remember that one of my objectives for these partnerships was to demonstrate that the United States and Russia could cooperate on issues of mutual interest in ways that didn't have to involve, indeed could transcend, geopolitical tensions. This partnership was Denis's brainchild: he wanted us to form a partnership with the Gorbachev Foundation. And so, again obviously, I was quite careful to keep both USAID/Washington and the Embassy front office in the loop. I didn't want to get ahead of them in any way. But again, both the E&E Bureau and the Embassy were supportive; their attitude was basically "Yeah, go ahead and see what you can do." Now, my stories about this partnership aren't nearly as colorful as those involving Senator Malkin. I did get to meet, or at least was introduced to, President Gorbachev, which was a neat thing. Surprisingly, at least to me, the controversy about this partnership largely came from within the USAID Mission. Several of our Russian staff came to me and said, "You can't do this. Gorbachev may be a much-revered figure internationally, but domestically he is reviled." And I took their comments seriously, of course; I discussed that point of view with the Embassy Political Counselor, future Ambassador Alice Wells, with DCM Eric Rubin, and of course with Ken Yamashita. And all of them agreed to allow me to continue to explore this partnership. Why? Because it wasn't aimed at Russian public opinion. It had a broader agenda. So we went ahead and signed an agreement with the Gorbachev Foundation in I believe the spring of 2009.

Q: What would be done through the partnership? What was its focus?

WASKIN: The Gorbachev Foundation is largely focused on the study of global issues, Russian economic and political problems, and Russia's recent history, particularly the history of Perestroika. Given that, its areas of focus overlapped well with what I wanted to emphasize; that is, the possibility of working collaboratively with Russia and Russians about global issues like the environment and health. So we signed a memorandum of understanding forming a partnership and expressing our desire to work together to design programs in these sectors. We weren't going to work on human rights or democratization or anything politically controversial. Rather, we intended to work on subjects that were not sensitive in the eyes of the Russian government.

Q: Okay. You mentioned that the Russian government had approached you to talk about their own efforts to reinstitute a Russian aid program.

WASKIN: Absolutely, yes.

Q: What ministry—was that part of the foreign ministry?

WASKIN: It was part of the foreign ministry.

Q: I'm wondering how those discussions went with the foreign ministry. Did they get very far or did the Georgia issue interfere with that as well?

WASKIN: I don't recall those conversations being interrupted by events in Georgia. And in fact, in the fall of 2008, we sent a delegation from the Russian Foreign Ministry to USAID/Washington to study how USAID operates its foreign assistance programs. I attached a great deal of importance to this visit, and in fact I called Alonzo Fulgham, who at the time was the Agency's Chief Operating Officer, to tell him what we were up to and to ask that he personally make sure that these people were treated well and got what they needed. I also met with that delegation before they left Moscow, and I remember them saying, possibly jokingly, something along the lines of "We're going to figure out how USAID operates and then we're going to duplicate that." And of course I replied, "Please don't do that." (Peasley laughs) And I added "But if you do figure out how USAID operates, please be sure to tell me because I'd very much like to know." But yes, we moved forward on this initiative unimpeded by Georgia. And frankly this seemed to have a lot of traction. The central issue for the Russians was not so much the administrative structure of the program; rather, for them the central issue was what would be the geographic focus of this new entity. Their idea was that it ought to be focused on what they termed "the Near Abroad", meaning the now independent states that used to be part of the former Soviet Union.

Q: Right.

WASKIN: I'm not sure we thought that was such a great idea. We were trying to quietly suggest that there were other parts of the world, for example Afghanistan, where what the United States and the international community were doing could be buttressed by Russian involvement. And of course, the Russian Foreign Ministry was not dealing exclusively with the United States on this issue. They were quite open that they'd been talking to the Germans about their assistance agency, and to the British. But they really seemed to like the USAID model.

Q: Okay. A question about the North Caucasus? I believe that USAID started work there when Terry Myers was Mission Director. Was that continuing while you were there?

WASKIN: Yes.

Q: And I assume that was another point of irritation with the government?

WASKIN: It was a point of irritation with the government, absolutely. Yes, we had a significant program in the North Caucasus. In fact, one of the questions I asked as I was preparing to go to Moscow was about that program. USAID/Russia no longer had an economic growth strategic objective. Yet I couldn't help but notice that everything we

were doing in the North Caucasus would have fallen in the realm of economic growth. But I was told that, no, those weren't really economic growth programs. They were managed by our Office of Regional Programming. That was the euphemism we used for what in today's vernacular we would call "stabilization" or "transition" programming. We viewed that program as very successful and wanted to expand it. We were in the process of designing an expansion of it in the summer of 2009, and I was slated to visit it as part of that effort; I had my ticket in hand to go there. I'd never been to Grozny or seen the North Caucasus and I was very eager to do it. And then, my mother passed away. I had to cancel my trip to Grozny and leave Russia very quickly and basically, I never came back for reasons that I'll get to in a minute. So I didn't get to actually see the program in the North Caucasus but it was a significant and important part of our portfolio. And yes, it was a thorn in the Russian federal government's side, no question.

Q: And also, even while I was there, we started a program to monitor human rights in the North Caucasus, and Chechnya specifically, in conjunction with NED, although it was also related to work being done by Sarah Mendelson at CSIS. Was that program still going on again during your time?

WASKIN: Yes. I don't recall the details of the program. I do recall meeting Sarah Mendelson, who happened to be friends, I believe, with Eric Rubin; I met her at Eric's house. But that program continued and it was, if my memory's correct, part of our civil society portfolio.

Q; Okay. More generally on democracy programming, I assume that the grants continued with NDI and IRI (National Democratic Institute and International Republican Institute?

WASKIN: Yes, with both.

Q: —and the Moscow School of Political Studies and a number of other Russian groups. I know that the Kremlin didn't like them, but were they beginning to face increasing difficulties to operate there or was the Kremlin just grumbling? How did it work during the period you were there?

WASKIN: It was very tense. I worked a lot with both IRI and NDI, who were both quite active during my time there. I met several times with both of them, and I recall that they were quite concerned about their operational security. At one point, I got a call late one night, probably in the fall of 2008. NDI had a team visiting from Washington, and they called me and they said, "We've been threatened. We feel like we're being followed, and we don't feel safe." And I said, "Come to my house right now. Come to the gate and I'll make sure you're met there. In fact, I'll meet you there, and you'll stay at my house tonight." And that's exactly what happened. They felt they'd been threatened and that it was not safe for them to be on the street in Moscow that night. And they were probably right. So, they spent that evening in my house and left the next day. So, the answer to your question is that they were continuing the program, but it was becoming increasingly challenging for them to do so. The Kremlin, and the security agencies, were doing a lot more than just grumbling.

Q: Are you aware of whether any of the FSN staff were being approached or had any pressure being put on them?

WASKIN: Nobody came to me with that type of concern. But we knew that the embassy was heavily penetrated by the FSB (Federal Security Service). You know, I'm sure, that at least one prominent member of the USAID FSN staff had been identified as being on the payroll of the FSB. I was made aware of that shortly after I arrived at post, and my decision was that I wanted that individual to stay on the staff because it was better to have them working effectively with me, even though I understood that their loyalties were mixed, than not to have them. And I have to assume that they weren't the only individual on the staff who had those kinds of links. Obviously, having that kind of a relationship would keep them safe. I did not hear of any instances of any of the staff who were threatened directly, at least none that I can recall. But it would not surprise me if they had those kinds of difficulties. Again, in 2008-2009, things were getting bad between the two governments, and they only got worse after I left.

Q: After the change of administration and after Obama was inaugurated and Hillary Clinton became secretary of state, they spoke about resetting the relationship. Was that visible at all at post?

WASKIN: Yes, it was certainly visible. Mrs. Clinton came out and hit the big reset button. And for a time, we thought, maybe naïvely in our optimism, that this could be the dawn of a new age, and that the difficulties that we and partners like IRI and NDI were having would dissipate and that we would have a friendlier relationship with the Russian government. That did not prove to be the case. One of the things that happened in the transition, actually even before the election, was that we were visited by a senior foreign policy advisor to the Obama campaign, one Michael McFaul, and he actually asked to meet with me, not me as an individual but he wanted to meet with the USAID Mission Director. And of course, I wanted to meet with him. I thought it would have been very useful to do so, and that I had a perspective I wanted to share and that he might find informative. We had a meeting scheduled, and then one or two days before it was to take place we were told, no, you can't have this meeting. The guidance I got was that we were not to get involved in either side of the U.S. Presidential campaign. I was very disappointed by that, because in my view this didn't involve partisan politics. Rather, it was an opportunity to talk to a person who was clearly going to occupy a significant position in the Administration if Senator Obama was elected. Little did I know that the significant position he would end up occupying, of course, was that of ambassador to Russia. So, it would have been great to have had the chance to share my perspective with him, but I never did get that opportunity.

Q: So, this was before the election?

WASKIN: This was about two weeks before the election. This would have been October 2008.

Q: Well, that is too bad. Who said you couldn't meet with him? Did the entire embassy not meet with him or was it just AID?

WASKIN: The guidance I received was that none of us were to meet with him.

Q: But no one in the embassy?

WASKIN: No one in the embassy, right. That's what I was told. I mean, obviously, I wasn't looking around to see whether other members of the Country Team were following the same guidance. I was told by the DCM that nobody was going to be allowed to meet with him, so I didn't question that instruction. I told him I thought it was an unwise instruction, and it's possible that privately he may have agreed, but that's neither here nor there.

So that was a lost, or missed, opportunity. I understand that when Ambassador McFaul arrived at post, he didn't share the same view as Ambassador Beyrle and I had about the relative proportions of the USAID program. I was told that he wanted it to be more "in your face" with the Russians; that he wanted civil society, human rights, and democracy to be the main focus of the program. In my judgment, that stance accelerated the deterioration of USAID's relationship with the Russian Federal Government to the point where in late 2012, the Russians told USAID that we were no longer welcome, and we closed the Mission. That might well have happened anyway, but there is no question in my mind that this shift in our focus accelerated that outcome, which I thought was really a tragedy and a real lost opportunity. But that was long after my departure.

Q: Right. Is there anything else on the Russia program? Oh, there is one other question I have and that's on HIV-AIDS. I know that the mission was doing a lot on that front and that was an area in which you were closely collaborating with the government. How was that work going?

WASKIN: That was a big priority for me in part because it was a big priority for the Russians. When I would talk to the Russian government about our programming, they always emphasized their appreciation for our HIV-AIDS funding. And I felt that this was something that we needed to continue, that from a technical perspective the Russians had done whatever we asked them to do and that these programs had been successful. However, the worldwide PEPFAR (United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief) Coordinator, Mark Dybul, had a very different view. In late 2008, during a trip to Washington, I tried to meet with Dr. Dybul about PEPFAR funding for Russia, which he was proposing to cut dramatically. I believe his proposal was to cut our annual PEPFAR budget from approximately $8 million per year – which was already pathetically small given the size of the HIV positive population in Russia – to $2 million per year, which I thought was obscene. And he simply refused to meet with me. The answer I got from his staff was that there was no way in hell OGAC (the Office of the Global AIDS Coordinator) was going to support maintenance of our PEPFAR budget. Rather, they planned to cut it dramatically as a way of challenging the Russians on their behavior in Georgia, their behavior on human rights, their behavior on democratic issues. And of

course, my answer was, "Guys, challenging the Russians is really not a recipe for success. In my experience, cooperating with them is. You have a much better chance of adjusting their behavior if you're working closely with them than you do if you are confronting them." Well, that was not a view shared by OGAC, and our HIV-AIDS funding was cut significantly as a consequence of that. So, that was a real disappointment for me. Our whole program was caught up in historical forces much bigger than ourselves, and as a result, a lot of good work we were doing, on HIV AIDS and tuberculosis and across the board, was either curtailed or never came to fruition.

Q: Did the coordinator's office still exist and did operate within that framework as well?

WASKIN: Yes, absolutely. And we had really good relations with EUR/ACE (the Office of the Coordinator of U.S. Assistance to Europe and Eurasia). The first coordinator I worked with was Tom Adams, and then Tom was replaced by his deputy, Dan Rosenblum. I knew them both well. Whenever I went to Washington my first stop was the E&E (Europe and Eurasia) Bureau. My second stop was the coordinator's office. And I had no problem with those guys. They knew a great deal about the program and were very supportive. I kept them in the loop on my thinking in terms of partnerships and trying to mobilize resources to multiply the impact of our funding and they were very supportive of that approach. So, I didn't feel like I was micromanaged by them in any way. It was a very supportive relationship. But it required effort. You had to reach out to these guys. It was a different way of working than I'd experienced in any USAID program I'd ever been in before, really.

Q; Right, it was just another interested party to keep informed—especially since they controlled the amount of money you had. (Laughs)

WASKIN: Well, yes, they controlled the amount of money, so indeed, they were a very interested party. They were an important constituency.

Q: One last question if you have any thoughts on the Russian organizations, think tanks and civil society organizations that the mission directly supported? Any thoughts generally or particularly in line with USAID's current focus on localization?

WASKIN: Well, I thought those were wonderful programs. In a country like Russia you have enormous human and institutional capital, and you would be very unwise not to take full advantage of that and I think we were doing that. I got in a bit of trouble with our Embassy Public Affairs Officer because I gave a press interview in Vladivostok, wherein I repeated publicly something I had said privately many times: "Russia doesn't need our money. The financial side of our program's not important. What we need to do is blend American experience and technical expertise with the substantial Russian experience and technical expertise that exists here and together those can be a very powerful combination." And again, that's why one of my objectives was to form partnerships with local organizations. I was focused on the Malkin and Gorbachev Foundations but as you correctly point out, we were already working in a grantor-grantee relationship with many

Russian institutions. And I think that was a really wise example of programming that you and your predecessors put in place. And I was very happy to continue it.

Q: Right. Well, if there's anything else on Russia that you want to mention. I know you alluded to your mother's death—

WASKIN: Yeah.

Q: —and I assume that this led to an earlier departure than you had anticipated.

WASKIN: Yes, it did. Which from a USAID perspective was very unfortunate, because by the early summer of 2009 I really felt we were just getting rolling. My wife was very happy. She'd gotten a great job as an IT Specialist at the British Embassy, which she was enjoying thoroughly. The partnerships with the Malkin and Gorbachev Foundations were in place, or were about to be in place, and I'd traveled around much of the country and learned a great deal about our portfolio. And so, everything was going great for us.

But there were two problems. One was my mother's health, which I mentioned, and the other was my daughter's health. My daughter had, and has, some serious health issues, and when we discovered these shortly after her birth there was even some question as to whether we'd be able to proceed with our plans to go to Moscow. Happily, the Regional Medical Officer at Embassy Moscow was extremely supportive of us, and facilitated our contacts with providers in Helsinki who could help meet our daughter's needs. And in fact, during our first year at post, my wife, our daughter, and I traveled by train to Helsinki several times so that she could get the care she needed there. And she was getting good care, or so we thought. And then a new Regional Medical Officer arrived at post in the early summer of 2009, and one of his first questions was, "Why is this child in my population?" So for some reason he brought in a State Department mental health care provider, the regional psychologist, I believe. She interviewed my wife and me, and at the end of that interview she told us that she would keep us in the loop about State Med's actions on our daughter's case and that "every decision would be made collaboratively" with us. And then three weeks later we got a letter saying our daughter's medical clearance had been pulled. This happened just as my mother's medical emergency occurred. So, everybody left. I left immediately to get back in time to say goodbye to my mom; my wife and our children left a couple of days later. And we never really returned. I could have gone back to Moscow – my medical clearance had not been revoked – but since our daughter was only two years old that was a practical impossibility. I did go back, briefly, to Moscow in November because we hadn't had a chance to pack out of the house. So I went back simply to pack out and say good-bye. I spent about a week there doing that and saying a proper good-bye to a lot of people. But effectively, my time as mission director stopped abruptly in mid-June 2009.

Q: A very sad situation.

WASKIN: It was very unfortunate. I felt like we were moving in a very positive direction.

Q: So, it doesn't sound to me that State handled this in the most appropriate way.

WASKIN: It was not the most sensitive way of handling it. And I was very sad to leave, because after a rough start and several interruptions, I had really gotten into the job. As you can probably tell, even at a distance of 15 years, I ended up being very engaged in and committed to the work. And I was really enjoying working with my team there, particularly with our Russian staff. Of all the missions I've served in I enjoyed working with the Russians probably more than any other group of FSNs I've ever collaborated with, with the possible exception of Pakistan.

With their support and frankly their leadership, we were doing some really fascinating things. And I think we could have taken that Mission in a different direction. After we did the Gorbachev partnership, Denis came to me and said, "Here's my idea, Skip. I want to know what you think of it." He said, "The next partnership should be with Udinaya Rossiya, with Putin's political party, United Russia. (Peasley laughs) And I said, "Are you joking?" He said, "No. I think we can make this happen. I really think we can do it." And you know, given Denis's connections I thought, maybe we can do it. Again, I talked to the DCM, and I talked to Ken Yamashita. They both said, "You've done okay so far, so see how far you can push this." But I never got a chance to explore that. Now, I'm not so pompous as to think that our little series of partnerships could have changed the whole trajectory of Russian-United States relationships. I don't think so. But gosh, I would have liked to have had a chance to try. (Peasley laughs)

Q: Oh, well, that's the spirit. That's the USAID spirit.

WASKIN: That's the USAID spirit. Let's climb that mountain. We can do it. But I didn't get a chance to try, which is unfortunate.

But from a personal level it ended up being the right decision. My daughter's medical issues were not, as it turned out, being dealt with effectively in Russia or even in Finland. She needed to go back to the U.S. to get the care she needed – which she did. As angry as I was at the time with State Med for how they handled it, it was not the wrong decision. She shouldn't have been in Moscow. She needed to be in the United States.

Q: Okay. Good.

WASKIN: And that meant I needed to be in the United States. So from that perspective it was the right thing to do.

Q: Okay. So, there's a good ending to that story.

So, you go back then and AID figured out something useful for you to do?

WASKIN: Yeah, it was a bit of a struggle. I went back and I was actually assigned to a job to replace Dirk Dijkerman in what was then called the Bureau for Foreign Assistance

Resources, or F. I was to be a senior development advisor, effectively at the deputy assistant administrator level. I was excited about that job and felt like it played to my strengths. Now, it took me a while to get to Washington because I needed to help wrap up my mother's affairs in Florida. But by late August 2009 I arrived in Washington and contacted the F Bureau to tell them that I was in town and was ready to go to work. They said, "Come on over." And they could not have been more courteous. I had a long, wide-ranging meeting with the head of F, and at the end of that meeting he walked me all the way to the old 21st Street entrance, shook my hand, and told me, "We're very sorry, but we don't need your services." (Peasley laughs) Well, I was shocked. And I was effectively unemployed. And I immediately went straight back to the Ronald Reagan Building, and straight up to the office of Alonzo Fulgham, who by then was the acting Administrator, and told him what had happened. Well, Alonzo was not pleased; I could all but see the smoke coming out of his ears. He said, "That," - and then he used an unkind expletive to describe the director of F - "He's always telling me to send him good people. So I send him one of my best guys and look what he does."

Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR), USAID Task Force Initially and then Senior Development Advisor to the QDDR Leadership Team, 2009 - 2010

But, Alonzo being the savvy professional that is, he had a backup plan. He said, "Here's what I want you to do." He said, "I want you to work on the QDDR (Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review), whereupon I said, "What's the QDDR?" So he explained to me that the QDDR was the Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review. It was the brainchild of Secretary Clinton, and its purpose was to examine, from soup to nuts, our approach to development and diplomacy, as its name would suggest. And its genesis was in the QDR, the Quadrennial Defense Review that's carried out by the Department of Defense. Mrs. Clinton aspired to do something similar for the State Department and USAID. That was the high-minded explanation. In practice most of the attention was on the second D, which is development, not on diplomacy. There was no real appetite within the State Department for examining how the State Department did business. There was however a great appetite for examining how USAID did business, in particular what parts of USAID business might be taken over by the State Department. Remember that this was happening in 2009, the first year of the Obama Administration. And as often happens every time a new administration arrives in town, some people were asking why is there a USAID and why is it independent from the State Department? The QDDR was one of the tools the Obama Administration was using to examine these questions.

Alonzo's suggestion was that I become the agency's liaison with the QDDR process. His idea was that, working at the head of a small team, I would become the Agency's chief point of contact for all things pertaining to the QDDR. My team's job would be to access all the resources of the agency to get the State Department's QDDR Leadership Team any and all input it might need from USAID, and in turn to assure that USAID had full visibility on everything the QDDR Leadership Team was doing. That sounded to me like an interesting role; I was excited about taking it on.

As a first step, Alonzo asked me to accompany him to a meeting at the State Department with the brain trust of the QDDR. That brain trust consisted of Deputy Secretary of State Jack Lew, Anne-Marie Slaughter, who was the head of policy planning, Karen Hanrahan, who was the executive director of the QDDR, and Cheryl Mills, the State Department Counselor and Chief of Staff. I have to confess that this was a little bit thrilling for me, because this meeting was to take place in the Deputy Secretary's office on the seventh floor of the State Department, where I'd never been before. But I expected that this would be a large meeting, and that I would sit inconspicuously in the back row. So I was more than a little surprised to walk into the meeting and find that it consisted of six people: the four of them, including Deputy Secretary Lew, plus Alonzo and me. Alonzo very graciously introduced me and explained that going forward I would be their point of contact within USAID for all matters related to the QDDR. And then Alonzo surprised me. He said "Mr. Waskin has some concerns about the QDDR and the way you've organized it that he's going to share with you now."

To say that I was a little shocked by this would be an understatement. Alonzo was referring to the fact that, as I had mentioned to him before the meeting, I had done some reading on the QDDR. And I had learned that the QDDR leadership – basically the four people we were meeting with – had set up five different working groups, each of which had long titles that were examples of the sort of breathless bureaucratic writing that didn't tell you what they actually meant. And Alonzo wanted me to share my opinion with the very people – the very senior people – who had written those titles. So, I took a deep breath, and thought to myself, "All right. I'm in it now. I might as well just go full-bore." And I told them, "I've read all your documents, and I don't understand what you're driving at, because all these working group titles are so obscure that nobody can tell what they mean. I think you need to shorten the titles and make them more pointed. One should be on humanitarian assistance, one should be on our economic growth programs, one should be on global health, etc." I added that "These would be meaningful titles that our audience can understand." And of course, there's dead silence in the room, and Cheryl Mills was glaring at me, as only she can. And then, after a very long pause, Cheryl said "You're my new best friend." (Peasley laughs)

Q: So, you were able to then simplify some of the—

WASKIN: No. They didn't change anything. They were going to run the QDDR the way they wanted to run it. Cheryl might have agreed with me but they didn't make any changes.

Q: Now, just a question because I interviewed Chris Milligan and he had been seconded over to State.

WASKIN: Yes, Chris was over there working for Karen Hanrahan as a senior development advisor within the QDDR Leadership Team within the Deputy Secretary of State's office. So, of course, when Alonzo outlined the role he had in mind for me, one question I had was what's my role if Chris is already over there? Well, the answer was

that Chris was the inside guy, and I was the outside guy. Chris was working within the Leadership Team; my role was to be to feed input from throughout USAID to the Leadership Team. This could have been awkward, but happily Chris and I had known each other for years. We were and are friends. So naturally one of the first conversations I had upon taking the QDDR job was with Chris. And, at his suggestion, we set up a regular weekly consultation. I remember Chris saying, "We're going to fix a time," 1:00 on Wednesdays or whatever it was, "and we're going to protect that on both our calendars," and we really did. And so, I worked very closely with Chris. Now, the QDDR Leadership Team of which Chris was a part, was made up largely but not exclusively of State Department people. There were other agencies represented. The Leadership Team was managed by Karen Hanrahan, who had the title of Executive Director. Karen reported to Anne-Marie Slaughter, the Director of Policy Planning, who in turn reported to Deputy Secretary Jack Lew, and Jack Lew, of course, reported to Secretary Clinton.

Q: And then, you were organizing the USAID participation?

WASKIN: Precisely. I was responsible for organizing that. Fortunately, Alonzo had given me a great team to work with in carrying out that responsibility. Most of them were very bright young people that he had assembled first in his role as the Agency's Chief Operating Officer and then as Acting Administrator. The one request I made of him when I agreed to take the QDDR job, however, was that I wanted Thomas Johnson on the team. I had worked with Thomas in Honduras, and he'd been my Program Officer in Afghanistan, and I knew that he would add great value to this effort. The problem was that Thomas had just been assigned to the agency's Education Office. So I had to ask Alonzo to override that assignment, which he did, and Thomas became my de facto deputy on what we started calling the QDDR Task Force.

As I've mentioned, the QDDR was organized in terms of a series of five thematic working groups, each of which had a number of questions. Many of those questions required field input and so, my role was to make sure that the questions were asked in ways comprehensible to a USAID audience, then to send those questions out to the field, to record and document the answers, to pull together a corporate position on any given issue that was being discussed, and then to transmit that position to the QDDR Leadership Team at State.

At the same time, there was another major initiative underway to examine U.S. foreign assistance. In August 2009, President Obama issued Presidential Study Directive 7, or PSD-7, which initiated a comprehensive review of U.S. global development policy. The PSD-7 process called on the Executive Branch to examine all the U.S. government foreign assistance programming, not just foreign assistance provided through USAID or State but rather assistance provided by any agency of the U.S. Government. This effort was led by the National Security Council, in particular by Gayle Smith, who of course later became the Administrator of USAID. Since I was working on the QDDR anyway, which covered similar subject matter, Alonzo asked me to be USAID's liaison to the PSD-7 effort as well. This group met once a week around a big horseshoe table in the Executive Office Building, and at the first meeting I was amazed to see that there were

some thirty different federal agencies represented. Thirty different agencies of the U.S. government that felt they had a stake in this because they operated some kind of foreign assistance program. These included the Departments of Justice and Interior and Treasury and Commerce and Labor and Agriculture, the Trade and Development Agency and the United States Trade Representative. And of course USAID.

Q: And State was there as well, right?

WASKIN: Yes.

Q: Anne-Marie and Karen were the representatives from State?

WASKIN: Yes, they were. This group met twenty-one times, twenty-one basically consecutive weeks to look at U.S. foreign assistance from all spigots. Run by the NSC, it was a parallel, but broader, effort to what Secretary Clinton was trying to do at the State Department with the QDDR.

One of the things we hoped to achieve through my involvement was to make sure that these two efforts harmonized. Clearly, they overlapped significantly; we wanted to make sure they didn't come out with a significantly different set of recommendations.

Q: What was the outcome of this presidential decision memo?

WASKIN: Well, at one level I don't know, because the group's final report was classified, and so I never got a chance to read it. I do know that, long after I had moved on to other things, the recommendations from PSD-7 contributed to what was called PPD-6, the Presidential Policy Directive on Global Development, which was issued in late 2010. This was a formal policy declaration from the President that made clear that development is a core component of U.S. national security policy, just as diplomacy and defense are. It was a formal recognition of the validity of the "three Ds" concept.

Q: Well, I ask in part because at this time, before the Obama Administration came in, a lot of constituency groups were raising concerns about the proliferation of agencies providing assistance. There were people arguing that it all needed to be consolidated into a single organization represented at the cabinet level. Was that ever discussed at those meetings?

WASKIN: All kinds of possibilities were discussed. The notion that the USAID Administrator should have a seat on the National Security Council, which of course she now does, was discussed. And indeed, one of the occasional participants in those meetings was a woman named Samantha Power. The caliber of the people in that room was impressive. And yes, those types of issues were discussed. We talked about the objectives of foreign assistance programming, and what the structure for delivery of that assistance should be— much the same issues that QDDR was examining. But as far as I can recall – and I attended every one of the official PSD-7 meetings – no one ever spoke up to say that perhaps the United States doesn't need 30 different agencies to deliver

foreign assistance. To the extent this was touched on at all, it was only in the context of who should coordinate the work of all these various agencies. State's perspective, of course, was that State should coordinate it. That was not a perspective shared necessarily by the NSC staff running the PSD-7 process. I got the impression that many of them believed that this was a role for the White House, or more specifically for the NSC. Interestingly, the real tension in the room was not between USAID and State, but rather between State and the NSC.

Q: So, you never saw a final report—

WASKIN: Never saw it.

Q: —so you don't know what was recommended. Presumably no decisions were made because nothing changed as a result of this.

WASKIN: No, apart from the hortatory pronouncement one year later in PPD-6 that development should be considered to have the same importance to the nation's security as do diplomacy and defense – which of course had no practical impact whatsoever. This was my frustration with both the QDDR and PSD-7 processes: both seemed to me to be simply talk shops from which absolutely nothing of practical importance was going to emerge.

And then, in January 2010, we finally got a USAID Administrator, Dr. Rajiv Shah. When Dr. Shah was first nominated, those of us who were working on the QDDR on the USAID side, meaning myself and my team on the USAID QDDR Task Force, all trooped over to the Department of Agriculture, where Dr. Shah was an Undersecretary, to brief him on the QDDR. We met with him in his office there. And one of his first questions was why USAID had a separate QDDR task force within the agency. In other words, why was my team not part of the QDDR Leadership Team over at the State Department? Then, on January 12, 2010, just days after he was confirmed as Administrator, and while this issue was still under consideration, I happened to be in a meeting with Dr. Shah at the Old Executive Office Building. As I recall, he was being briefed on the PSD-7 process. And in the midst of that meeting he got an urgent phone call alerting him that a massive earthquake had just struck Haiti. And so, obviously, a lot of his attention immediately had to shift to that crisis, and he began spending a great deal of time on the Haiti situation. One of the things he did was to appoint an interagency coordinator to oversee the response and recovery. That coordinator was retired Ambassador (and former USAID Mission Director) Lew Lucke. And Ambassador Lucke said that a condition for taking that job was that he should have Chris Milligan as his deputy. So, Chris immediately was pulled off the QDDR and sent to Port-au-Prince. And since this created a big vacancy within the QDDR Leadership Team, I was sent over to State. I went to work as part of that QDDR Leadership Team, working directly under Karen Hanrahan. Susan Fine, who had been playing a key role within Alonzo's senior staff, was also detailed to the QDDR Leadership Team at the same time.

Q: What were some of the main, the most difficult issues that the QDDR was dealing with?

WASKIN: The most difficult issues were all territorial. They revolved around questions of which agency, State or USAID, was best placed to lead the many similar or identical programs that both agencies operated. There were, as far as I could see, few if any logical distinctions explaining who was doing what and why. For example, both USAID and State operated, and to my knowledge still continue to operate, anti-trafficking-in-persons programming. Both of them provide assistance to court systems in an effort to strengthen the rule of law. Both of them run development assistance programs in the Middle East and North Africa. What's the logic in any of that? Now, in one sector, that of refugees and displaced persons, there is a deliberate division of labor: State operates programs for "refugees", that is to say displaced persons who cross an international border and enter another country, whereas USAID is responsible for programs that assist internally displaced people. So at least there is a rationale for who is doing what. But again, what's the logic behind that rationale? Why is there a PRM Bureau (Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration) at State doing what it does? Why doesn't that function rest with USAID? Conversely, why is USAID running programs to assist court systems when INL and other offices at State are focused on that issue? None of this made sense to me. So, I thought that through the QDDR we should be looking at these types of issues across the board and thinking about how the U.S. government can and should best organize itself.

Of course, some at State were raising similar issues. For example, why does USAID have OTI (Office of Transition Initiatives)? Why does it have OFDA (Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance)? Might those not be better placed within the State Department? As I understood it – and I don't recall ever speaking with him personally about this – Administrator Shah's guidance to us was that USAID was not to cede one inch of bureaucratic territory in the QDDR discussions, period. But I have to hand it to Dr. Shah; I think he played the bureaucratic game with State very well during this period. As the QDDR was proceeding, he was in the process of launching his own internal set of reforms, which he called USAID Forward. And it seemed to me that he was very happy to give the QDDR, and thereby Mrs. Clinton, credit for those reforms (Peasley laughs). But the price for that de facto truce that he established was that there were no real interagency reforms. No significant changes in the way the USG was organized to deliver foreign assistance. Basically, no one wanted to talk about it. At one point, I had a very nice lunch with Maria Otero, the Undersecretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights. And in our conversation, I made basically the same points I'm making today about duplication of effort between programs run by State and programs run by USAID. I mentioned PRM, I mentioned trafficking in persons, I mentioned several other programs that both agencies operate, and I said, "There seems to be no logical reason why USAID does one set of things and State does another. There is considerable overlap." And she replied, "Every single one of those programs you've just mentioned comes under my direction." And I said, "Well, yes ma'am, that's exactly why I'm talking to you about them." (Both laugh) But her position was clear: we're not going to change anything, and we're not even going to talk about changing anything. Which, to be fair, was the mirror image of USAID's position.

By this point, I was becoming very frustrated with the QDDR and with my role in it. I told people privately, "You know what's going to happen here, guys? We're having all these working groups. We're having session after session where we're talking, conducting interviews, and writing briefing papers. But two weeks before this thing is due to be completed Dr. Shah and Anne-Marie Slaughter and Jack Lew and Cheryl Mills are all going to get together in a room and they're going to figure out what the report is going to say and what the recommendations of the QDDR will be." And I think that's exactly what happened.

I wasn't around to see it happen, however. Because, once again, the phone rang. In late May of 2010 I got a call from Kiert Toh, who was working on the Haiti Task Team within USAID. He said that Chris Milligan, who had replaced Ambassador Lucke as the coordinator of the USG earthquake response in Haiti, had been in Port-au-Prince for four months and needed to depart. And he asked me whether I'd be interested in going down to Haiti and replacing Chris. Well, I replied that I would be very interested in doing that. I thought that the contribution I could make in Haiti would be far more impactful than anything I was doing on the QDDR. So I asked "When do you want me to go?" And Kiert replied, only partly jokingly, "Well, can you leave tomorrow?" And I said, "Well, that might be a little early but let me see what I can do."

After speaking with Kiert, I of course immediately alerted Karen Hanrahan of this conversation. And as it turned out, what I needed to do next was speak to Cheryl Mills. She was the Obama Administration's point person on all things related to Haiti. She would have to decide whether I was the right person for this job or not. So I was able to secure an appointment with her for the next day, or perhaps the day after, and I went up to see her in her office on the 7th Floor of the State Department. But as I was waiting outside her office a funny thing happened. The door opened and out walked the State Department's senior development advisor, Dr. Steven Radelet. And Dr. Radelet and I looked at each other and we both started laughing. So Cheryl comes to the door, says "Why are you laughing? What's so funny?" And we said, "Well, we have a history. We went to high school together." (Laughs)

Q: I'll be darned. Wow.

WASKIN: East Lansing High School, class of 1975.

Q: Had you seen him since high school?

WASKIN: I had seen him a couple of times. In around 2004, I attended an event where he spoke about the then newly-formed, or about to be formed, Millennium Challenge Corporation, and I introduced or re-introduced myself to him after that speech. Later he attended my swearing in as AID Representative to Mongolia and we'd been in touch from time to time. Working with Steve was one part of the QDDR I really did enjoy, not just because we were old classmates but more importantly because he is a brilliant, thoughtful, and creative guy. Anyway, as we were crossing paths in the doorway to

Cheryl's office, she said, "The two of you went to high school together? I didn't know that. I know everything around here. How come I didn't know that?" (Peasley laughs)

After saying goodbye to Steve, I went into Cheryl's office. Now, I had been warned about her. People who knew her had told me things along the lines of "You're not going to get out of there alive. She's a killer. She's a man-eater. You'll be lucky just to survive. She's very tough." But as I entered I noticed she had a Tickle Me Elmo doll on her desk, and I thought to myself, "Well, just how tough can she really be if she has a Tickle Me Elmo doll on her desk?" I concluded that she probably was not a killer. But one piece of advice I got about Cheryl turned out to be very useful: don't bullshit her. If you know something, say you know it. If you don't know it, don't pretend you know it, say you don't know. And I followed that advice. So, she asked me, for example, "What do you know about housing?" I said, "I don't know a thing about housing." She replied, "That's all right. You can learn it." And what was supposed to be a half an hour meeting lasted for two and a half hours, after which she introduced me to a team from Dalberg Advisors that had been contracted to help write the U.S. government strategy for Haiti. At that time I met people like Yana Watson, who was the head of the Dalberg team, and Jean-Louis Warnholz, who had been a senior advisor to the Open Society Foundations and who had been brought in to help focus on the housing issue. It was a very interesting and clearly very high-powered group. But I seemed to get along with them, and so I passed muster with Cheryl. Having done that Cheryl, I then had to go see Anne-Marie Slaughter," the Director of Policy Planning at State under whose overall guidance the QDDR was taking place. I explained the situation to Anne-Marie. I reported that I had been asked to leave the QDDR and go to Haiti. Anne-Marie had only one question: "Who's behind this? And when I replied "Cheryl Mills." Anne-Marie simply said, "Well, that's that." No further conversation. Cheryl was that strong bureaucratically.

So that was the end of my time with the QDDR. I should stress, by the way, that I liked and respected both Karen Hanrahan and Anne-Marie Slaughter very much. I found both of them to be highly intelligent, highly ethical, and highly committed to turning out a quality product that would shed real light on the issues we were considering. None of my frustration with the QDDR had to do with them. Rather, I was frustrated with the political dynamics around the QDDR process – political dynamics that made the quality of whatever report we produced effectively irrelevant.

Q: So, when you left, the QDDR report had not yet been completed? It sounds as if the staff, the people that worked on it didn't work out all the compromises and then present final recommendations to the leadership. Basically, the leadership decided what compromises there would be and then you wrote to what they decided.

WASKIN: Let me be clear. I was gone by the time that happened. I was in Haiti already by the time the final report was published. I want to be careful to avoid representing as fact things I only know secondhand. I believe that's true.

Q: Okay.

WASKIN: But I can't say that from my personal experience.

Q: Okay. Well this probably happens a lot, basically, that the report gets written to what the people at the top want it to say.

WASKIN: Yes, it probably does. To give you an idea of how effective, or ineffective, the QDDR was, remember that Secretary Clinton's vision was that it would take place quadrennially. I think she said several times the most important initial in the QDDR acronym was the Q for quadrennial. And it was done again, once, in 2014. I didn't participate in it. I was in Pakistan at the time and watched from afar. It was never done again. The Trump Administration, perhaps not surprisingly, didn't pick it up. Nor has the Biden Administration.

Q: Right.

WASKIN: So, it was done twice – and then basically forgotten.

Q: And I think the second time it was done, it was a much lighter touch.

WASKIN: That was my impression watching from afar.

Q; Just before we leave the QDDR, do you recall there ever being any discussions about PEPFAR and where the leadership for it should be?

WASKIN: That was one of the main areas of overlap that we discussed. USAID operates massive public health programs. So does the State Department – and for that matter so do the Centers for Disease Control and the Department of Defense. And the PEPFAR Coordinator resides in State. But was there any rationale – indeed, is there any rationale – other than sheer bureaucratic inertia for deciding who should take the lead on what? Not really; not that I could see. But again, no one was truly interested in considering the possibility of change. And in the case of PEPFAR, this was perceived as very successful program in its current bureaucratic configuration,

Q: Okay, so leave it alone.

WASKIN: Yes. It was not perceived as being broken, so we were not asked to fix it.

Q: Okay, we should probably discuss Haiti and the work you did there on earthquake recovery. Let's stop for today.

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Q: Today is January 12, 2024, and this is interview number six with Skip Waskin.

Skip, when we finished up last time you had passed muster with Cheryl Mills and were going to be going off as the coordinator of the response after the earthquake in Haiti. And if we could start there and I think you were replacing Chris Milligan. Is that correct?

Haiti, Director, Office of Earthquake Response Coordination, 2010

WASKIN: That's exactly right. As I mentioned, I was called by Kiert Toh from USAID's Haiti Task Team and asked if I'd like to go to Port-au-Prince to replace Chris. And for the reasons we discussed last week I was eager to do this and to move on from the QDDR. Cheryl Mills' support effectively eliminated any bureaucratic obstacles that might have stood in the way of that. I think Kiert called me on a Tuesday, and I was in Haiti by the following Monday. And I found Haiti to be an interesting but very, very difficult situation for a number of reasons.

This was a natural disaster that was—I don't want to say unique but unusual, inasmuch as it hit the capital city. The earthquake struck on January 12, 2010, fourteen years ago today. Because it struck the capital city, the U.S. embassy and the USAID mission within that embassy were not only part of the response but were also victims of the disaster. Many of the U.S. officers there had lost their homes. Many of the Foreign Service Nationals had lost their homes. One American diplomat was killed in the earthquake. So, this had created somewhat of a chaotic situation within USAID, as many of the very people who normally would have been expected to lead the disaster response had been evacuated. Even by the time I got there in June, more than five months after the event, the participation of U.S. or Haitian staff from the Mission was uncertain, because many of the U.S. staff had been evacuated and had not returned, and the Haitian staff, of course, were largely occupied dealing with their own family situations. So, in June 2010, it was a mission that was staffed largely by TDYers.

There was also a bureaucratic problem, which is that in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, USAID had in coordination with the State Department decided to set up within the embassy in Port-au-Prince an Office of Response Coordination, or ORC. This ORC was intended to bring together all the elements of the U.S. government response, not just USAID but the military, the State Department, every agency that had anything to do with responding to and recovering from the earthquake was to be part of the ORC. Now, the first head of the ORC was Ambassador Lew Lucke, who brought in Chris Milligan to be his deputy. Then when Ambassador Lucke left after a couple of months Chris became head of the ORC. And then after doing heroic work in Haiti in a very intense environment for nearly five months, Chris needed to leave, and that's why they asked me to step in to replace him. But there was a problem. As I was preparing, rather hastily, to depart for Haiti and was telling people my plans, I spoke to my very good friend Jeff Bakken and told him "I'm on my way to Haiti to be the head of the Office of Response Coordination." And he replied, "Well, that's very odd." And I said, "Why?" He said, "Well, they've asked me to go to Haiti to be the head of the Office of Response Coordination." I said, "Well, that's interesting. I think you and I are going to have to figure this out, aren't we?" Effectively, we had both been assigned to the same job. Happily, Jeff's a great guy and very easy to work with, and so we were able to come up

with a solution. I actually was to have two tasks while in Haiti. One was to head the Office of Response Coordination. The other was to liaise with, not necessarily lead but liaise with, the team that was working with Cheryl Mills, the State Department Chief of Staff and Counselor, to rewrite the USAID assistance strategy. This was a team of really outstanding experts from a company in New York called Dalberg Advisors. As I've described, during my job interview with Cheryl I met several of them in an office they were working out of on the seventh floor of the State Department. But their principal workplace was Embassy Port-au-Prince, and when I arrived in Haiti most of them were there – where to their everlasting credit they were living for weeks at a time in a sort of tent city that had been pitched on the Embassy grounds to accommodate all the personnel who had poured in after the earthquake. They understood their mandate as being to write the USAID strategy, and I think that's how Cheryl viewed their mandate. That's not quite how I viewed it, nor how USAID Mission Director Carleene Dei viewed it. So this was a bit of a delicate situation. In light of that, Jeff and I agreed that, for the month or so that he was scheduled to be in Haiti, he would focus on leading the ORC, and I would work with the Dalberg team on the strategy. I would sit in on all the ORC's daily morning stand up meetings, but he would run it. And then, after he departed, I would take over leadership of the ORC. So, that's how we decided to play it, and I think that worked out.

Q: —can I ask how two people got assigned to the same—?

WASKIN: To this day neither he nor I know the answer to that question. We've talked about it a few times, and we've concluded ah, who knows?

Q: Okay. (Laughs)

WASKIN: This was I think symptomatic of the stress and pressure under which everyone was operating. I was not in Haiti in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, of course. But I was told that part of the reason an Office of Response Coordination was needed was that the initial response was chaotic. There was a tremendous outpouring of support, both from within the U.S. government and, as often happens in disasters, from the U.S. private sector and the NGO community. In the first few weeks and months after January 12, not only USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance was active, but you also had the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the National Guard, other elements of the U.S. military, plus many different NGOs and faith-based organizations. It was a mess. So, the fact that two people got assigned simultaneously to the same job is, I think, symptomatic of that situation. Happily Jeff and I were able to sort out who would do what.

The broader question was what's the role of the ORC vis-à-vis the USAID Mission Director? The advent of the ORC had, I understand, created a bit of an issue, because nominally the USAID Mission Director was supposed to report to the ORC head. Well, as you can imagine, this created some tension. Carleene told me, so I think I can represent this as fact, that when Lew Lucke arrived in the country late January 2010, she asked him, "Why are you here to do my job?" And I probably, if I were in Carleene's shoes, would have asked the same thing. I certainly would have understood the idea of having a

response coordinator but if I were the USAID Mission Director I would have wanted that response coordinator to report to me. So, I said to Carleene, and with Jeff Bakken's full blessing, although perhaps not Raj Shah's but I didn't consult him, "Look. Whatever they think in Washington, whatever Raj thinks, you and I both know that one person and only one person needs to be heading the USAID effort here. I'm not here to take your job. I'm not here to compete with you. You know the country, I don't. You have a relationship with the ambassador, I don't. I have a relationship with Cheryl Mills and the interagency, but you have that too, so let's you and I agree to work together. And I will work for you. I want to work in ways that are helpful to you rather than competitive with you." And I think in retrospect, that was definitely the way to go. And it certainly, of course, helped my relationship with Carleene—whom I'd known only slightly after meeting her at various different events over the years. Carleene was, God rest her soul, an amazing, thoroughly talented USAID director. She needed help, obviously,—the mission, for the reasons I've described, was a wounded place, but she didn't need someone like me to oversee her work. She needed someone like me to help her do her work. So, that was how we decided to proceed. I viewed myself as part of Carleene's team rather than having Carleene as part of my team. And I think that worked fine. We didn't spend a lot of time on turf battles which was, I think, appropriate given the situation which, even five months after the earthquake, was still dire.

Q: I've interviewed several people (laughs) who've mentioned the earthquake often and I was totally confused by what was being done. I know that Phil Gary also went, although I thought he was working within the USAID mission that Carleene had brought him in. Was he there while you were?

WASKIN: As I understand it, Phil had been there and been part of the ORC but he was gone by the time I got there.

Q: Okay. I see.

WASKIN: At least, that's what I understand. I did not overlap with Phil in Port-au-Prince. But a lot of very senior people came in at one point or another. When I got there, for example, Betsy Brown was part of Chris' ORC team. The ORC itself consisted of some thirty-different people from a lot of different parts of USAID and working on the first floor of the embassy. The USAID mission was largely up on the second floor.

Q: And there was also a task force in Washington as well?

WASKIN: There was, yes. It was called the Haiti Task Team, and at the time was headed by Paul Weisenfeld. The Haiti Task Team, which I understand had just gone through a somewhat painful process of transition from reporting directly to Administrator Shah to reporting to the newly installed Assistant Administrator for LAC, Mark Fierstein, was a great help to the ORC. They were effectively our backstops – our desk, if you will – back in Washington. And we coordinated with them closely.

Another obstacle we faced was the constant change in personnel. People would come down for two or three weeks to Haiti and do what they could, and then they'd leave and somebody else would come in. The outpouring of TDY support was welcome, but it was also disruptive. For example, when I got there the acting deputy mission director was Dan Riley, who was there on TDY from the Haiti Task Team. I worked very closely and effectively with Dan, and Carleene really relied on Dan to be her point of contact with me. I had a wonderful relationship with Dan and together we made a lot of plans. And then Dan left, and the actual Deputy Mission Director, Tony Chan returned to post. And Tony looked at what we'd done and said, "What is this? I don't want to do this,". (Both laugh) So, arriving at a consensus approach to anything was very difficult. Also, just deciding what you were going to work on in any given week was a challenge. Every Monday morning we'd meet with Carleene and say, "Okay, who's here this week? We got anybody in agriculture? Nope. Do we have anybody in health? Nope. We got anybody in education? Yeah, there's someone in the education office. So, OK, we're going to work on education this week" We worked with whoever happened to be around. So things were challenging in that sense as well.

But we were bolstered by the Dalberg team, who as I've mentioned were living in the tent city on the grounds of the embassy. As I've said, they were all extraordinary professionals. Yana Watson was the head of the team. She later became the head of the company of Dalberg itself and is still associated with them on an emeritus basis, emeritus being a relative term. She's probably around fifteen years younger than I am. (Peasley laughs) They were excellent and I had a very good relationship with them. They were extraordinarily hard working, and they enjoyed Cheryl Mills' confidence.

Q: And they were doing a long-term strategy for USAID? Were they working with the USAID mission on this?

WASKIN: Well, as both they and Cheryl explained it to me, the Dalberg team believed they were working on what would become the USAID strategy for Haiti. And yes, in theory, they were collaborating with the USAID Mission to do so. The problem with that approach was where was the USAID Mission? Apart from Mission Director Carleene Dei and Deputy Mission Director Tony Chan, there were very few people there who were permanent members of the USAID mission. There was a rotating cast of temporary duty characters, myself included.

Q: Okay.

WASKIN: So, largely they were liaising with me. And what I said—

Q: Okay, and presumably Carleene was involved?

WASKIN: Carleene was involved every step of the way, absolutely. And Cheryl was very deeply involved. Cheryl was quite interested in what was happening. Indeed, she was so interested in what was going on that she wanted to be briefed regularly. And since in 2010 we didn't quite have the kind of technology that you and I are enjoying now like

Zoom and Teams and other virtual platforms, when Cheryl wanted to be briefed personally, she meant she wanted to be briefed in person. So, during the three months or so that I was in Haiti, I flew up to Washington on at least two occasions to brief Cheryl with the Dalberg team on our progress. In this process, I discovered something that I found very interesting in terms of how the Dalberg team and to an extent how Cheryl viewed the world. In all our meetings, both in Port-au-Prince and in Washington, Dalberg kept presenting the strategy in what they called a slide deck, which means a PowerPoint presentation. I asked several times, "Where's the underlying document? Where's the strategy that you guys are writing?" And it took me about a week to figure out that in fact, there was no underlying document. The PowerPoint presentation was the strategy. That was it. Equally interesting, I found that, even though Dalberg came to those presentations with a deck of some 200 slides - I'm not exaggerating, that was the length of the deck - when you actually briefed Cheryl you'd be lucky to get through the first three. So, those first three slides needed to be awfully good. Anything you wanted to say, you better make sure you had it said on those first three slides because that was far as you were going to get, even if you had an hour scheduled with her. That meant that any meeting with Cheryl was focused not on your presentation but rather on her questions – which made those meetings particularly challenging to prepare for. And of course, having been with USAID for many years, I was used to dealing with documents. But in this case, there wasn't any document. There was only the slide deck, as Dalberg called it.

More important than the issue of the format, I really felt that it was important to defend USAID's equities in this challenging situation. So after a few rounds of this, I sat down with the Dalberg team, probably with Yana Watson, and said, "I appreciate your help in drafting this. I know that Cheryl and the State Department appreciate your help as well. But if this is going to be a USAID document ultimately we're going to have to have final editorial control over it, and the document that we approve will be the document that is submitted to the interagency for review." Somewhat to my surprise, they were okay with that, and I think Cheryl was okay with it as well. At first they were a little taken aback, but when they realized that I wasn't trying to be nefarious but simply trying to observe basic, proper bureaucratic procedures, that was fine with them.

Working with Dalberg and with Carleene on the strategy was my principal focus during the first month I was in Haiti. Then Jeff Bakken departed as scheduled, and I became the full-time head of the ORC. At that point my attention was taken up with less cosmic but more immediate operational matters like the status of the various camps in which the hundreds of thousands of people who had been displaced by the earthquake were living; what type of housing should be constructed to provide more permanent homes for those people, and where should it be constructed, and how to accelerate the removal of the rubble from the earthquake, because five months after the event much of Port-au-Prince looked like a war zone in the aftermath of battle. There were vast areas of the city that had been all but completely destroyed. And so, the issue of where to put the rubble was very high on our list of priorities. And the government had only given us one site, which was just north of the city, if my memory serves, and a lot of our attention, a lot of what we asked U.S. Ambassador Ken Merten to do was to convince Haitian President Rene Preval to give us more places to which we could cart the rubble. The continued presence

of so much rubble in the city sort of became a proxy in Washington for discontent with the progress of the rehabilitation or the recovery effort. I know that this issue was very much on Dr. Shah's mind. Obviously, he was looking at the status of displaced persons as well but the mere visual of the city still being in ruins was very alarming to him. He felt it indicated that the recovery effort was not progressing fast enough. I believe that at one point someone made the mistake of saying to him "There were probably ruins in Berlin up into the 1950s. The Germans didn't get all the rubble from World War II cleared away for a very long time." That argument didn't go very far with Dr. Shah, of course.

Q: Did the government ultimately identify some additional places for rubble?

WASKIN: I think ultimately it did but not while I was still on the case. I worked on Haiti from June 2010 until I retired from USAID at the end of December 2010. And at that point there was still only one site for the rubble to be dumped. This was indicative of the massive frustration we had with the Haitian government: trying to get them to make what one would think would be the simplest of decisions took months or years, but it was apparently a politically controversial issue and President Preval was not given to making decisions quickly. So, that was a challenge.

So, my time in Haiti was very intense. The work was completely absorbing but I wasn't there long enough to have a real long-term impact. Part of the issue is that my daughter was having some serious health problems back in DC, and so my family really needed me to come home. I couldn't stay as long as I wanted to. I would have liked to have stayed longer. I found the work rewarding. I felt that I was making a difference, and I was working well with Carleene, working well with Dalberg, and working well with Cheryl, but for personal reasons I just couldn't stay there. And so as September approached, I told this to Paul Weisenfeld and explained that I could not stay much longer. I was very apologetic about it. And Paul said, "Ah, that's great news." I of course asked, "Why is it great news?" "Because," he said, "I need to go and take care of my job as Deputy Assistant Administrator for the Latin America Bureau and I need somebody to run the Haiti Task Team, so how would you like to do that?" Well, that sounded to me like a great solution. So after some three months in Port-au-Prince, in late September or early October 2010 I moved back to Washington and took over the Haiti Task Team.

AID/Washington, Latin America and the Caribbean Bureau, Coordinator, Haiti Task Team, 2010

WASKIN: Managing interagency relationships and relationships within USAID on the subject of Haiti proved no less of a challenge in Washington than it had in Port-au-Prince, particularly because the State Department – and especially Cheryl Mills – was deeply involved in our operations at a surprisingly granular level of detail. I especially remember one conference call that we had with her about the agriculture sector, during which she got very put out with me because I misidentified a particular watershed as being a source of cacao, when in fact that watershed was actually a source of fruit, and cacao came from the next watershed over. Cheryl knew that and corrected me, and she never did let me forget the fact that she knew more about those watersheds than did I. I was, and I remain,

extraordinarily impressed with her intelligence and her ability to absorb and retain information, although I could not help but wonder, privately, whether the Counselor to the Secretary of State shouldn't be spending her time worrying about matters larger than which watershed is producing what in Haiti. The truth, though, is that she was able to operate effectively at both levels. And she certainly kept us on our toes, whether we liked it or not.

Q: One of the big activities that I also hear about was an industrial estate from which exports could be done. Were you familiar with that or involved in any way? I had heard it mentioned along with Cheryl Mills – was it part of the Dahlberg strategy?

WASKIN: There certainly was such an activity. Whether it was included as part of the strategy that Dalberg was doing, I don't recall, but it was definitely part of the response effort. That park was inaugurated long after I departed, however.

The strategy, of course, was ambitious. It was heavily focused on some traditional activities in which USAID had long been involved in Haiti such as health, education, and agriculture, but also included some non-traditional interventions like housing, port rehabilitation, and trade promotion through things like the industrial park you mentioned. So, a lot of money was going to flow into Haiti; you might say that this was an early incarnation of the term Build Back Better. A big part of the approach was to recreate or create a Port-au-Prince that would not be vulnerable to this kind of earthquake. The earthquake itself was, as earthquakes go, relatively weak. It measured only 7.0 on the Richter scale. The problem is that the topography of Port-au-Prince made it particularly vulnerable to even a relatively minor earthquake. The city was built on shifting sands, effectively. And when you combine that with the fact that building codes were all but non-existent and that construction was therefore ramshackle, that's what led to the incredibly high number of casualties and the huge humanitarian disaster. Had this earthquake happened in another geographic location it would not have been nearly so impactful. Less than two months after the earthquake in Haiti, a much more powerful earthquake, one that measured 8.8 on the Richter scale, struck Santiago, the capital of Chile, and caused very little loss of life compared to what happened in Haiti. In Haiti, some 160,000 people perished; in Chile, less than 500 died. We were very much aware of the fact that buildings kill people, not earthquakes. So building back better had to be a major part of our approach.

The Haiti Task Team consisted of around 45 people seconded from various parts of the Agency and hired via various contract vehicles. Paul's deputy, and the man who thus became my deputy, was Russell Porter, a very talented officer who is still in the Latin America Bureau to this day and who became a very good friend. Russell had been with OTI for many years, and was very good at explaining to members of Congress and their staff what we were doing. So, I was very happy to have Russell deal with the Congress because I had other things to do. And he took the lead on that front. As I recall, we had approximately 10-15 U.S. direct hire employees, a mixture of Foreign and Civil Service. And then, the rest of the team, some thirty-plus individuals, came from a private company, a staffing firm called McFadden.

Q: Was OFDA part of the Task Team or were they separate?

WASKIN: OFDA had a liaison officer with us, as did OTI. It was the responsibility of the Haiti Task Team in Washington, and of the ORC in Port-au-Prince, to coordinate the work of all organizations contributing to the U.S. Government recovery and reconstruction effort, including the work of OFDA and OTI. But of course both those organizations retained their own operational capabilities and responsibilities.

I should make one point about Haiti in general and about OTI. Until that point in my career, I hadn't had any real direct exposure to OTI's work. And my views on OTI had been largely colored by words from former colleagues who had served in Haiti in the 1990s, who were quite suspicious of OTI. They had told me that what OTI had done in Haiti in the late 1990s was effectively to take what the Mission was planning to do anyway and make those ideas their own. So, when I was Mission Director in Afghanistan and I learned that OTI wanted to come out there, I resisted that. My view was that we had enough USG organizations out there; we didn't need OTI. And as long as I was Director there I did not allow that to happen. It happened after I left, but while I was there I didn't see a role for OTI in Afghanistan. But after seeing OTI on the ground in Haiti, I concluded that I might have made a mistake in not allowing them to come to Afghanistan. OTI had been in country for months by the time I got to Haiti, and when I arrived and saw (a) what they were up to and (b) that the entire non-emergency development assistance program had all but come to a standstill, I said thank God for OTI, because they were actually doing things on the ground. OFDA, of course, was running the emergency humanitarian response, and doing so very effectively. And in working on the strategy the Dalberg team and Carleene and I were thinking and talking and writing at length about what we might do one fine day. But we weren't actually delivering assistance; we were just talking about it. And what had been USAID's ongoing development assistance program was all but paralyzed, because most of the people who had been running it had left the country, and those few who remained or had returned were all but completely tied up with the earthquake response. So apart from OFDA, the only part of USAID that was actually delivering assistance was OTI. They were working, for example, to help set up a structure around the old U.S. embassy, which had become the prime minister's office. OTI had put up huge inflatable air domes there that were intended to provide space for a large team from McKinsey and Company, which the USG had contracted with to serve as the secretariat to the prime minister's office, which had been decimated by the earthquake. So, OTI was actually doing visible things on the ground, which gave the U.S. Government response effort much needed credibility. I gained a real appreciation for OTI's work as a result of that and I was very grateful they were there. It didn't hurt that my deputy Russell Porter, for whom I had and have the highest regard, was an old OTI guy. Getting to know that part of USAID and seeing the kind of work that they did, I came away quite impressed. And this would resonate with me later in Pakistan. I'm glad that we had OTI and I think they really proved their worth in Haiti.

Q: No, that's good to hear.

One other point I wanted to make on Haiti though, just before I move to the Washington part of my experience, which I think is illustrative of how the U.S. government responds to disasters. The first Saturday I was there, the first Saturday in July of 2010, I accompanied Carleene to the embassy. We walked in together at about 9:30 or 10:00 in the morning, walked into the embassy cafeteria, and she looked around and gasped. And she said, "There's no one here." And I said, "It's Saturday morning, Carleene. What did you expect?" She said, "No, no, you don't understand. This place was jammed seven days a week until about a week ago. Now it's empty." And she was right. All of a sudden, almost as if a switch had been triggered, the attention of the world and of the U.S. government had moved on. Haiti wasn't in the front of the headlines anymore. Yes, it was certainly still paramount in Cheryl Mills' mind and still occupied a great deal of Administrator Shah's attention, but the enormous, chaotic response, with all its confusion but also all its energy, had gone. Those tents on the Embassy grounds I mentioned had all been filled until about late May, early June, but that tent city was three-quarters empty by the time I got there. In the aftermath of the earthquake, and in response to the surge of Americans flooding into the Embassy, Domino's Pizza had opened what was basically a pop-up outlet in a roadside stand a block away from the embassy. But by the time I got there in late June it had closed—there weren't so many Americans clamoring for pizza anymore. So, whereas in the days and weeks in January there had been a huge – arguably too huge - outpouring of support and concern in the immediate aftermath of the disaster, six months later, that was all gone, and it was hard to get people's attention, which was troubling.

But, even if the attention of the world had moved on to other things, there was still a lot of work to do, and a lot of very dedicated and very interesting people doing it. For example, in mid-July, Dr. Shah visited, and he and I and several other folks, including his Chief of Staff, Sean Carroll, were taking a "windshield tour" of the city of Port-au-Prince to see what was happening and in particular to get a sense of the progress that had been made on rubble clearance. At one point, we were visiting a particular neighborhood where the Japanese had supported repair of some of the infrastructure there and were driving slowly up the side of a hill on a very rutted dirt road. At that moment, a small sedan passed us heading downhill in the opposite direction, and I saw in it a vaguely familiar face, sort of a seedy-looking white guy smoking a cigarette. And someone, I think it was Sean Carroll, called out and said, "Hey, that's Sean Penn." (Both laugh) Dr. Shah said, "Stop the car." I couldn't get out, because I had injured my leg in an automobile accident in the States the week before, so my mobility was somewhat restricted. But the others in our group, Dr. Shah included, jumped out, and had an impromptu meeting by the side of the road for about half an hour with Sean Penn. I think some members of the United States government, not Dr. Shah but others, viewed Sean Penn as a pain in the neck - but he was there on-site and doing work. He attended lengthy, boring interagency meetings that were anything but Hollywood glamourous, and I understand that he actually added substantively to the discussions and spent hours and hours on the minutiae of issues like where displaced people should be living, what conditions were and what supplies they needed in their camps, etc. I didn't meet him in

Haiti, but I met with him later, a couple of times, in Washington, and I came away very impressed with him.

Q: The media obviously played a huge role immediately after the earthquake, CNN in particular Dr. Sanjay Gupta and Anderson Cooper down there.

WASKIN: Yeah. Anderson Cooper was there.

Q: By the time you got there in late June, was the media still paying much attention?

WASKIN: Some of them were still there, particularly CNN. Anderson Cooper of CNN talked to some of my people. He didn't speak with me, but he talked to some of the people on the ORC. And of course, he certainly talked to Sean Penn, who was basically living in Haiti and was a source of media attention all by himself. So while international media attention had diminished, it was still present. And of course, that too became a complicating factor, because whatever they report becomes perceived as the truth, and then you have to deal with that perceived truth. You can be sure that people like Cheryl Mills are watching what Anderson Cooper is reporting.

Q: Right. And they tend to focus on the negative, is that fair to say?

WASKIN: Yes, I would say so. They tend to focus on what hasn't been done, rather than on what has been accomplished. It was analogous to what I experienced in Madagascar in the aftermath of the cyclones when Ambassador Barnes reacted to Femi Oke reporting on CNN that the country has been destroyed. Whatever those reporters say, and whether they are qualified to say it or not, they are on the air worldwide. What they report is by definition important. So, yes, even five months after the earthquake, there was still a lot of media and celebrity attention. Angelina Jolie came down, for example, asking questions and wanting to help. But the crest of the wave had certainly passed.

Our living situation was interesting. Most of the USAID Americans who were there on TDY, not all of them but as many as we could fit, lived in two houses next door to each other up in Pétion-Ville, which is a suburb of Port-au-Prince up in the hills. And, depending on the traffic, which could be really bad, those houses were about an hour drive from the Embassy. One of the two houses was for the men, and one was for the women, and at any given time there were maybe ten of us in each house. And since the houses only had five bedrooms, well, everyone shared a bedroom. My roommate for most of the time I was there was Jean Louis Warnholz. It was a bit like being back in college. Typically, in the evenings, one night the men would have the food at their house and the women would walk over to eat with us, and the next night the women would have food at their house and we'd all troop over to join them. It was not unpleasant. That living situation definitely fostered a sense of camaraderie and of shared endeavor and shared challenge. In the mornings, a couple of vans from the Embassy would pick us all up. Generally we had to leave by 6:30 am or we were going to get caught in traffic. If you wanted to get to the office at any kind of a decent hour you had to be rolling by 6:30. And if you weren't ready, well, you got left behind. At night we would take the same vans

back up the hill, slowly crawling through the traffic and taking calls from Washington from people like, oh, Cheryl Mills, for instance. So, there was a certain level of intensity and engagement; in a sense, we were all on duty twenty-four/seven. So, in that sense it was, I don't want to say enjoyable because people were suffering, but it was professionally satisfying. I felt we were making a difference.

Q: You mentioned the Japanese, but other donors were there, a lot of actors besides the U.S. Were you involved at all in trying to provide some sense of order for donor coordination?

WASKIN: I spent a lot of time on that, as a matter of fact. That was one of the ways in which I felt I could best help Carleene. I think Carleene's position was somewhat like the one I had found myself in when I was in Afghanistan; as Mission Director there, I was sucked into the vortex of the various donor coordination mechanisms. Similarly in Haiti there were various different and overlapping mechanisms, usually chaired by the UN. Taken together, there were three or four donor coordination meetings a week and it was, I think it was a blessing for Carleene that I was able to go to some of those meetings and report back to her rather than having her having to spend her time on them.

As I think you can likely tell, the result of all this was that I had a very good relationship with Carleene. As I prepared to leave Port-au-Prince and the ORC to move to Washington and head the Haiti Task Team, Carleene told me, "Come down anytime you want. We will miss you here but we're glad to have you on the Haiti Task Team. We're glad we have someone up there who knows what we're trying to accomplish here on the ground and will be supportive of us." And I did take her up on that invitation. As head of the Task Team, I went down to Haiti on a couple of occasions because I felt that I needed to be there on the ground to understand what was going on. It was a fast-changing situation there and I needed to understand exactly what was happening.

So, largely for personal family reasons, in early September 2010 I left Haiti and went back to Washington to head the Haiti Task Team. Then, after I'd been in that job for about a month, we started getting reports out of Haiti that there had been an outbreak of cholera. Yet another humanitarian emergency to plague the already very distressed people of that poor country, and the first large-scale outbreak of cholera ever experienced in Haiti. The initial rumors were that the cholera was brought into the country by United Nations peacekeepers from Nepal, which I initially tended to dismiss but which sadly ended up being true. This created a second disaster on top of the first, and it was by no means inconsequential. Estimates are that the cholera outbreak ended up killing nearly 10,000 people. This was a lot for me after my experiences in Afghanistan and Russia, dealing with high level people like Cheryl, dealing with the frustrations I'd experienced with the QDDR, et cetera, et cetera. So at one point, maybe a week after the cholera outbreak, I said to Russell Porter, "I'm beginning to understand what we mean when we talk about the impact on mental health of the work we do." I told Russell, "I really can feel it. I'm not all there. I'm burning out." I didn't want that to happen; I'd never been one to back away from a challenge. But I felt that objectively I needed to acknowledge that it was happening. As I said to Russell, "If I can't operate at 100 percent capacity then

it's really time for me to go, I think." I told Russell that I would need him to take the lead on handling cholera, because at that point I realized that I simply could not handle another emergency – particularly one that Dr. Shah was hugely interested in it given his own professional background, and that given the source of the epidemic had created a significant political controversy. I was overwhelmed and I knew it.

And so, I made the decision to retire from the agency. Another factor, frankly, was that I had received a fairly lucrative offer from a relatively new company in the private sector, a British-based company called Pax Mondial that had some fairly well-known people whom I'd met in Afghanistan who were associated with it, and I thought to myself, I think now is a good time to go. So I retired at the end of December 2010 and joined Pax Mondial as their Senior Vice President for Stabilization and Development.

Q: Okay. Before we do that, just to ask—give you the chance to at least think about and you can add during your editing if you don't have your full thoughts about it now, but any lessons learned or recommendations that you might have from the relatively brief experience that you had on working on the Haiti earthquake but it was, obviously a huge challenge and one that in some respects, I think, the U.S. responded well and in other respects probably there still are things that could have been done better.

WASKIN: I think a lot of things could have been better. I think we saved a lot of lives, prevented a lot of suffering, and I feel proud about that. I do think that the response was chaotic. One of the chief lessons I would draw was that I would not have created the ORC as a separate entity outside of the control of the USAID Mission Director. I would have put the Mission Director in charge, particularly given that we had an outstanding one like Carleene, who was herself not immobilized or victimized by the disaster. If she had been traumatized or injured, then under those circumstances it might have been appropriate to conclude that she could not take on that responsibility at that time. But Carleene was more than capable of playing that role. She was right there, she was ready to go, she was in her office every day. She was working normally. So, to my mind, there wasn't any reason she could not have headed the Office of Response Coordination.

I do think, though, that one of the things we did right was to set up the ORC. Regardless of who was at its head there needed to be one body tasked with mobilizing all the necessary resources of the US Government and coordinating the use of those resources in a rational way. One problem with the ORC, at least in the early days - and let me be clear I'm talking now about things that happened prior to my arrival – was that it should have been empowered to simply say no to some elements of the government that wanted to get involved. Somebody should have been able to say, rationally, that just throwing resources at a problem is not always the answer. And I think what you saw in Haiti, particularly in the early days, was a very well-intentioned but nonetheless chaotic outpouring of support. I understand that it became a bit of a disaster itself on the grounds of the embassy because there were so many people there and they kept arriving and arriving. Someone needs to be able to be the traffic cop and to say, "We need this kind of resource now and that kind of resource later. And unless you have the permission of the chief of mission or his or her designated representative you're not getting on a plane to Port-au-Prince.

You're not coming in." And the ORC just didn't have that. There was a mad scramble to do everything, *everything* possible, and everyone wanted to be part of the response.

By way of illustration, I'm not sure what bringing in FEMA added. I think OFDA, as they've proven many times throughout the world ,is very capable of responding to these kinds of situations. The lesson I draw is that it's the quality of the response that matters, not the quantity in terms of the number of human beings that arrive on-site or the dollar value of the resources being provided. Now of course the U.S. government can't control the NGOs that want to assist. And if properly coordinated those groups can add great value. Sean Penn, for example, did great work with his organization. Those kinds of people are going to respond, particularly in areas geographically close to the United States, as Haiti was and when the nature of the disaster is so visible and so heart rending. People are generous and they want to help. They're always going to want to do that. But within the U.S. government, certainly, I think you need to be able to exercise a certain amount of discipline. And again, I think Carleene Dei would have been well placed to do that had she been given the necessary authority.

That is not to say that the resident USAID Mission Director should always be the one vested with that responsibility; as I saw in Pakistan later in my career, there may be circumstances in which it is not appropriate to ask the USAID Director to coordinate everything. There is often resistance within the interagency to the idea of any one agency, particularly USAID, taking on that role; and certainly there are many people in the State Department who believe that State is uniquely well-positioned to do that. They are not necessarily wrong about that; I'm a former State Department Assistance Coordinator myself. But the issue is less about who leads the coordination effort than it is about the fact that there needs to be coordination. When there are so many agencies and organizations that want to help, somebody needs to take on that role. And in this particular case, Carleene could have done so and would have been an ideal choice.

Eventually, by the late summer of 2010, the State Department decided that it, too, needed a Haiti coordinator. Cheryl was the de facto coordinator until then, but in August or September they established a coordinator's office for Haiti and brought on a gentleman I knew well named Tom Adams, who had been the coordinator for assistance to Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, to head it. Happily, as I'm sure you also know well from your time as mission director in Russia, Tom is a thoroughly competent man and a wonderful person; he was very easy to work with, very knowledgeable about Haiti, and I thought had excellent instincts. But personalities and competence aside, the mere creation of this office meant there was another bureaucratic structure, another constituency that needed to be consulted.

Q: Right.

WASKIN: So, again, this kind of "everybody needs to pile on" sort of response is understandable but not always helpful. It's not the quantity of the number of individuals and organizations involved that matters, it's the quality of the response.

Q: Okay, that's a very nice statement, I think, of an important lesson learned.

So, then you—so you retired in December 2010.

Retirement from USAID (First-time) – December 2010 – Post USAID Direct Hire/FSO Work

WASKIN: My last day was December 31, 2010. And I found that working for a private company was a very different experience. I don't think it's necessary for the purposes of this oral history to go into all the details of that. But I did a lot of fun and interesting things with Pax Mondial. Of course, having been a Senior Foreign Service officer, I was precluded from representing any private entity in front of any agency of the U.S. government for one year. I had to recuse myself and thus was not able to work directly with USAID for the first year I was there. But I spent a good deal of time working on other things. We managed to get ourselves on a Framework Agreement with what was then DFID (U.K. Department for International Development), a framework agreement being DFID's equivalent of an IDIQ (Indefinite Delivery/Indefinite Quantity) for fragile and conflict affected states. And I spent a lot of time working with the European Union, both remotely and in Brussels. So I think that experience expanded my skill set, and my network of contacts.

But the reality was that I really missed USAID and I realized fairly quickly that I had probably retired too early. If I thought I was burning out, well, I recovered from the burnout rapidly. And so, I was receptive when Jeff Bakken, my old colleague from Haiti, called me in the early summer of 2012 and to tell me that he was working in what had become OAPA (the Office of Afghanistan and Pakistan Affairs), and would soon be deploying to Lahore as USAID/Pakistan's Deputy Mission Director for the province of Punjab. Jeff told me, "We need help out here in Pakistan." So, I said, "Well, what do you want me to do?" And Jeff replied, "I don't know but just get out here. We'll figure it out later." (Peasley laughs) Of course, I wasn't just going to get on a plane until I had a formal agreement with the Mission. But in response to Jeff's call I corresponded with Andy Sisson, who was then the Mission Director in Islamabad, and Andy basically told me the same thing Jeff had. He said that the Mission would define my role when I got there, and he urged me to sign a personal services contract and come as soon as I could. So, that's exactly what I did. I left Pax Mondial and went to West Virginia, where I completed the required crash and bang security course, which I'd never had. I was surprised to discover how much USAID's process of preparing staff to depart for a conflict zone had changed in the six years since I had departed for Afghanistan. (Peasley laughs) Back in 2006, as I mentioned in an earlier interview, I was basically just told to be careful not to get myself shot. By 2012, things had become much more sophisticated and detailed.

Upon completion of that training, I departed for Islamabad and arrived there at zero dark thirty early in the morning of September 11, 2011. And basically, I was mentally geared up for returning to Afghanistan. I assumed I was going back to a warzone. So when I saw the car and driver that came to meet me at the airport, I was puzzled. I wondered, where

are the shooters? Where's my body armor? Where's my helmet? Yeah, the Embassy vehicle was armored, but apart from that the only protection I had was one unarmed driver. This was quite different from what I had experienced in Kabul. Then, driving in through the city, I couldn't really see much, because it was well past midnight (although I was enormously impressed by the beauty of the Faisal Mosque at night). But things seemed a little different than Kabul, not quite as tense.

USAID/Pakistan, Personal Services Contract, Senior Program and Policy Advisor, 2012

I was taken to an Embassy guesthouse, where I was given a very nice private room. The Embassy did not allow personnel under the Chief of Mission authority, which I was, to stay in hotels, so instead they had rented several very comfortable guesthouses. These represented quite an upgrade from the lodging arrangements we'd had in Haiti. And in the morning I called my point of contact at the USAID mission, Peter Kranstover, whom I knew from my Latin America Bureau days, to confirm that I had arrived, and Peter arranged to send a vehicle to pick me up at 9:00. And so I rode in.

I don't know if you've been to Islamabad or spent much time there. Islamabad is an incredibly beautiful city in many ways, one with stunning, very modern architecture. It's this little Green Zone carved out of the center of Pakistan and it couldn't be, physically at least, more different than Kabul. Just in driving to work on that very first morning it became obvious to me that this was quite a different situation.

By the time I arrived, Andy Sisson had left as mission director and been replaced by Jock Conly. What Jock wanted me to do, and what before I left Washington, I had agreed with OAPA that I would do, was to conduct a study of what he called implementation modalities. The key issue was this. In 2009, the Congress had enacted the Kerry-Lugar-Berman Authorization. Not an appropriation, an authorization. It *authorized* massive amounts of assistance to Pakistan, and at the height of appropriations made pursuant to that authorization, Fiscal Year 2010, total U.S. assistance to Pakistan reached $2.6 billion, of which USAID received $1.3 billion. The problem was that USAID was having considerable difficulty spending this, and by 2012, the USAID portfolio had built up a two and a half billion-dollar pipeline of appropriated but unspent funds. And so, OAPA - and when I say OAPA I mean in particular their senior DAA (Deputy Assistant Administrator) David McCloud, Jeff Bakken, and Erin Krasik, who had been the head of USAID/Russia's Democracy Office when I was in Moscow and was now the head of the Pakistan desk – OAPA wanted me to look at why this situation had arisen. Why was USAID not able to spend all that money? And their theory was that the difficulty was principally caused by the State Department's insistence that a significant proportion, up to 50 percent, I believe it was, of the funding be provided through Pakistani mechanisms, principally government-to-government or what were called "G2G" mechanisms. This had been the approach required by the late Ambassador Richard Holbrooke when he was the head of SRAP (Office of the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan); though he had passed away in late 2010 his successors had continued this policy. Many in OAPA were quite firm in their view that the reason USAID was not able to spend the

money was because the government of Pakistan had sclerotic mechanisms and wasn't able to move these programs through its own bureaucracy. In their view, this accounted for the bulk of the delays.

So, I went out there with that notion in mind. But I wanted to test that hypothesis. Fortunately for me, both OAPA and USAID/Pakistan attached considerable importance to what I was doing, and so they gave me the ability to bring on a team from various parts of the agency to help me. I brought in Ronnie Edwards, who'd been my controller in Russia. He at the time was in Uganda but I asked him to come out on TDY to Pakistan. I brought in Jim Bever, who had been Mission Director in Afghanistan and had headed OAPA. I brought in Carl Abdou Rahmaan, who had been my deputy in Kabul. And I brought in two outstanding young officers whom I did not know well but who proved extremely valuable to the team, Don Niss from the Program Office in OAPA and Portia Persley, a Contracting Officer from the Office of Acquisition and Assistance. So, I had a good, solid team of people, and had the full cooperation of the USAID mission.

One other factor that our team had to take into account was the existence within Embassy Islamabad of an organization that was set up under Ambassador Holbrooke's guidance, which was known as ASSIST, the Office of the Coordinator for Economic and Development Assistance. ASSIST, like SRAP, was established in 2009 at the advent of the Obama Administration. The idea was to give the Embassy the ability to oversee and coordinate the massive amount of U.S. assistance resources flowing into Pakistan pursuant to the Kerry-Lugar-Berman authorization. ASSIST was effectively the field affiliate of SRAP. The first assistance coordinator had been Ambassador Robin Raphel; she served in that capacity from 2009 to 2011, and while she had left Islamabad, she was still onboard in a senior position in SRAP and was very influential. Her successor as assistance coordinator, who was in that role when I arrived in Islamabad, was a State Department Senior Foreign Service Officer, Richard Albright. So there was a constellation, if you will, of four different entities each riding herd in some way over assistance to Pakistan: ASSIST and the USAID Mission in Islamabad, and OAPA and SRAP back in the U.S. We called these the Four Corners. And we held weekly "four corners" calls among these constituencies.

There was however an enormous feeling of tension between the ASSIST office in Islamabad and the USAID Mission there. Very senior people in the USAID mission were feeling very frustrated and micromanaged by ASSIST - not so much Mission Director Jock Conly himself but some of his five deputy mission directors. That's right: we had five deputy mission directors. Remember I said that in Afghanistan the traditional USAID structure of one mission director and one deputy mission director wasn't adequate to the task at hand? Well, six years later, USAID has realized this and has responded by multiplying. So instead of one Mission Director and one deputy, by 2012, USAID/Pakistan had five deputies. Two of them were in Islamabad. One was Rodger Garner, a former mission director himself; the other was Cathy Moore, who arrived at about the same time I did. And then we had the three provincial directors.

Q: All deputy mission directors?

WASKIN: Right, all were ranked as deputy mission directors. So, we had Jeff Bakken, who'd just arrived in Lahore, Ed Birgells, another former mission director, in Karachi; and Fernando Cossich, who was responsible for our work in KP/FATA (the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas) along much of the Afghan border. Fernando's predecessors had all been based in Peshawar since that position was established in 2007, but by 2012 we had moved most of the personnel running our KP/FATA program, including the Deputy Mission Director heading that program, out of the consulate in Peshawar and back to Islamabad. Peshawar was a very high-threat post but a very small consulate, and there were other priorities for use of the very limited office and dormitory space there.

Q: Did the creation of these provincial offices come out of Holbrooke's thinking, or was it simply a response to the large increase in funding? Because it's quite unusual to have sub-offices.

WASKIN: Well, I of course wasn't there when these offices were established, so I can't speak with authority about the thinking of the people who established them. But, in my opinion, yes, it was partly a response to the large increase in funding. But more importantly it was a response to the diversity of Pakistan and to the decentralization of Pakistan brought about because Pakistan had, in 2008, enacted the Eighteenth Amendment to its constitution, which reduced the powers of the presidency and the federal government and delegated many functions, among them agriculture, education and health, to the provinces. So, the USAID mission responded to that. Whether this was Ambassador Holbrooke's idea, I do not know. I assume that SRAP and ASSIST endorsed the idea because nothing like this would have been done without their blessing. Ambassador Raphel would certainly have had to sign off on the idea. But I think the real impetus was that, since the provinces were now responsible for the sectors that happened to be those in which USAID was most interested in operating, the Mission needed to have representation with the provincial governments that are actually making the decisions about those sectors. Working only at the federal level wasn't going to cut it anymore, because the federal government was no longer responsible for agriculture, education, or health. In fact at one point Pakistan completely disbanded the federal ministry of health in response to the fact that health was no longer a federal matter.

Q: Does that mean that when we did a government-to-government program we did a project agreement, for example, on education or health it would have been done with the educational authority in that province?

WASKIN: Precisely. That's exactly what it meant. For example, our largest project in the education sector was the Sindh Basic Education Project, which was a $160 million, ten-year award that was signed with the Government of Sindh, not with the federal government.

Q: And presumably those ministries or authorities in the provinces had less experience than federal ministries would have had with implementing donor-funded programs.

WASKIN: Exactly. They had less experience across the board but particularly less experience with donor-funded programs. That's a very astute observation. The Eighteenth Amendment was a very well-intentioned attempt to respond to the fact that Pakistan is at least nominally a federal arrangement, analogous in some ways to our own system. But whereas the responsibilities and authorities were delegated to the provincial level the necessary human resources were not. So, the provinces didn't necessarily have the skill sets needed to implement programs in the sectors for which they were responsible. And the level of human capacity varied widely among the provinces.

This was the complicated institutional background against which the drama within the U.S. Mission to Pakistan was playing out. In the fall of 2012, there was very bad blood between USAID and ASSIST. And USAID - Rodger Garner in particular - felt that USAID was being micromanaged. And he had a point. Every award, every project design, and to an extent basically every significant implementation action had to be cleared with ASSIST, which was staffed with State Department Foreign Service Officers. And many in USAID felt that this was highly inappropriate and resented it bitterly. There was also a very interesting physical dynamic to the issue at the time. The US Embassy in Pakistan sat on what was then a beautiful, college-like campus. And the chancery, with the Ambassador's office and the ASSIST office, was up on top of a hill near the center of this campus. Now, for years, up until the fall of 2012, the USAID Mission had been scattered about in various offices around the Embassy grounds. But a couple of weeks before I arrived, they had moved into a new building called the TOB, the Temporary Office Building, which consolidated everybody in USAID into one space. But it was at the bottom of the hill, built on the old softball field. So, when you wanted to meet with the ambassador or to talk to ASSIST, you literally had to trudge up the hill. Which could be rather daunting in the summer because it's 117 degrees outside, or in the winter when it's raining and snowing. I found that quite symbolic – if you worked for USAID you had to climb up the hill to see ASSIST, because they almost never came down hill. The mere act of doing that posed a bit of a physical challenge.

Q: But you were all probably in better physical shape than they were, so.

WASKIN: Yes, at least we got our exercise that way! Obviously, once I got to Islamabad I made a point of getting to know the people in ASSIST and spending time with them. In that effort, someone you'll remember, Alan Van Egmond, was working for SRAP in Washington—working for Ambassador Raphel, actually—on detail to them from USAID. Alan, of course, was an old friend and colleague of mine from way back in USAID Africa Bureau days in the 1980s, and he was very helpful in introducing me to people in both SRAP and ASSIST and offering me insights about how they functioned and how they saw the world. Actually, I found the ASSIST team in Islamabad to be very reasonable and quite knowledgeable about what was going on in Pakistan. I think the problem was that they viewed themselves as the managers of the assistance program rather than its coordinators. For example, Richard Albright's deputy was a very bright, very personable guy named Vinay Chawla. And one day shortly after I got there, Vinay made a public speech in Islamabad. And it was reported in the papers the next day that in

that speech Vinay stated that he was managing a $1 billion assistance portfolio. Well, that got everybody's attention in USAID, of course, and many people in the Mission were upset – indeed, outraged – by the implication that Vinay, and by extension ASSIST, was *managing* the assistance portfolio. It was just a really bad situation, and a very strained relationship.

The other thing that I discovered when I got there—and remember, I intended to test the hypothesis that this program is not moving forward because there are so many obstacles on the government side… (Peasley laughs)

Q: Which government? (Laughs)

WASKIN: Yeah, exactly. Because this wasn't an issue of the behavior of just the Pakistani government.

One of the first things I did was to go to the USAID Controller's office to ask "What's the G2G funding, and how long does it take to spend that as compared to how long it takes to spend the non-G2G funding?" I wanted to get some empirical data so we would know what we were talking about. Well, as I learned, USAID was not tracking its funding like that. They were not tracking the pace of G2G versus non-G2G expenditures; they had no data. So, right off the bat I learned that there was no empirical basis for reaching the conclusion that money programmed through the Government of Pakistan moved more slowly than did money programmed outside that government. That might have been true, and in fact I think it probably was true. But there was no data to prove it was true.

Absent this data, our team decided to set up a series of case studies. Ultimately we had thirteen of them. From these case studies we would attempt to draw lessons as to what was causing the Mission to build up such a large pipeline. The case studies were diverse. They came from all sectors of the USAID program. But they didn't allow our team to conclude that the problem was only on the Government of Pakistan's side. For instance, we looked at the $160 million Sindh Basic Education Program, or SBEP, which had been authorized and signed with the government of Sindh in 2010 and asked "What are total accrued expenditures at this point, two years into the life of the project?" The answer was "Zero." The Mission hadn't been able to spend any of that money. So we looked more deeply at what was going on and what the issues might be. Well, come to find out, the story was complex. To begin with, as initially conceived, that program was to have been based in the Punjab province, with only a small part of it happening in Sindh. In 2011, however, something happened in Pakistan in a place called Abbottabad, about seventy-five miles north of Islamabad, where U.S. military forces found and killed Osama bin Laden, which really angered a lot of people in Pakistan. And it particularly angered the Chief Minister of the province of Punjab, a gentleman named Shehbaz Sharif, the younger brother of then former (but also future) Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. Shehbaz himself, of course, is the Prime Minister of Pakistan today. Then-Chief Minister Sharif responded to Abbottabad by saying to the United States, in effect, "Our province doesn't want your assistance. Get out." All happened before I got there, but the legend is that our response was, in effect, "You can't kick us out because we're leaving." So,

instead of launching the program in Punjab, we pivoted and programmed all this money for Sindh. And according to the people I interviewed in Karachi, the government of Sindh didn't want this money. They didn't want to run the school construction component of SBEP, which was about 50 percent of the program's overall budget, on a government-to-government basis. As I learned later, the government of Sindh is very practical, and they understood fully that they had limitations in terms of their own institutional ability to program, implement, monitor, and account for the use of these resources. In effect, they wanted us to just build the schools and give them the keys. However, Pakistan's *federal* government and the State Department – which is to say ASSIST and SRAP – insisted that this had to be done on a G2G basis. So, USAID signed the agreement for SBEP with the Government of Sindh in 2010, which meant that the Government of Sindh then had to go through its own bureaucratic processes to authorize expenditures. And by 2012, those processes still were not complete. So, the conclusion to reach from all of this is obvious, right? In this case, OAPA's hypothesis is correct: the money is not moving because we insisted on doing SBEP on a G2G basis. But, wait. Look at what is happening, or not happening, on the USAID side. We asked to see PIL(Project Implementation Letter) Number One, which as you know sets out the basis for implementation of any USAID-funded program. The answer we got from the people responsible for SBEP was "Well, we haven't been able to get that cleared yet." Why not? Well, we were told, the Regional Legal Advisors are reviewing it, and the Contracts Office is reviewing it, and the Program Office is reviewing it, etc. In other words, two years into supposed implementation and things weren't moving on the USAID side, either. So it was impossible for our team to point the finger exclusively at the government of Sindh or more broadly at Pakistan, and conclude that G2G programming doesn't work, because the responsibility for the delays rested just as much with the U.S. side as with the Pakistani side. We found similar examples throughout the cases we were studying.

Q: And this is in part because AID people no longer knew how to do government-to-government work and how to do implementation letters and those kinds of things?

WASKIN: I think so. Or perhaps it was more a question of them not knowing how to do things both correctly and quickly. For example, one of the things that most frustrated me while working in USAID/Pakistan, particularly once I became the head of the office in Karachi, was that it took on average six months to obtain clearance of a Project Implementation Letter earmarking incremental funding for an already approved project. That's a two-paragraph document, arguably the simplest standard document USAID can possibly issue. But in Pakistan those took six months.

Q: Why?

WASKIN: I would say it was because people were frightened, or to put it more charitably, because people were overcautious. They were frightened of the auditors. They were frightened of the various oversight mechanisms in place. They were frightened of ASSIST. And because Pakistan was a one-year, one-tour post, you frequently had new people coming in asking very basic questions that had long since been asked and

answered: “Should we really be doing an education project in Sindh?” “Do we really need to do this water project in Jacobabad?” “Why are we building this hospital?” It was maddening at times.

Q: Instead of just implementing, they are questioning the rationale for the activity?

WASKIN: Yes, that’s exactly what they were doing. They were asking whether these long since approved projects should be done at all. Once I got to Karachi, I dealt with this in part by telling my people, “All right, if you know you’re going to need to have that two-paragraph implementation letter signed six months from now, start it now. Draft it and send it up now because we’re never going to be able to accelerate the USAID clearance process. So adapt to it.” And basically that worked – at least for our programs in Sindh.

So in terms of the modalities study, basically our team’s diagnosis was that we could not pin all the blame for the buildup of the pipeline on the governments of Pakistan or the use of the G2G modality. USAID’s own administrative slowness was in our view equally responsible. And I think OAPA was disappointed in that; some people there really wanted our team to come out swinging at the G2G policy, and thus by extension at SRAP and ASSIST. But as I said to them, “We’re not saying you’re wrong. We’re not saying that your hypothesis is untrue.” What we were saying is that (a) there was no financial data to support the argument that G2G programming was inherently slower and more cumbersome; and (b) that anecdotal evidence suggests that slowness on the USAID side was at least equally responsible for the delays and the buildup of the pipeline. Now, yes, the anecdotal evidence also suggested that trying to work on a government-to-government basis or trying to work with untested local organizations was also part of the problem. There was another case where we gave money to the local affiliate of *Sesame Street*, which probably had never managed grants of more than $100,000 before. We gave them $10 million, and it was a disaster. They couldn’t spend it, they didn’t have proper systems in place to account for it, they didn’t have approved procurement mechanisms, they were alleged to have given money to friends and relatives, etc. We ended up canceling the program and this ended up, of course, in the news. The United States was caricatured attacking Big Bird. Just a really bad look, right? (Peasley laughs) It was probably not a good idea to have gotten ourselves on the wrong side of *Sesame Street*. But that was an example of where we were trying to force too much money through what we now call a localization lens. There were several examples of that, several examples that showed that working with host governments and/or local organizations was hard, and slow, and cumbersome. But my point to OAPA was that this wasn’t the only reason Pakistan had built up a pipeline. The evidence we saw did not support that hypothesis.

Q: So, your report pointed out a number of reasons why the implementation was slow?

WASKIN: It did, yes.

Q: It almost seems that the report includes a lot of lessons learned that hopefully USAID would apply when they're in the kind of situation they were in in Pakistan. Do you feel that those lessons were learned about how to structure these programs so they can be implemented more quickly?

WASKIN: I don't know whether they've been learned or not. We haven't had a parallel situation since then. Our ramp up in Ukraine after the Russian invasion is probably the closest analog to the experience the Agency had in Afghanistan and Pakistan in the early 2000s, but I don't know what USAID is doing in Ukraine right now. And by the way, there was a similar build up of pipeline in Afghanistan for similar reasons. In both cases, money was being poured into those countries in quantities that vastly exceeded the absorptive capacity of the host country.

Q: Well, that's part of it, too much money being poured in.

WASKIN: Right. But there is one recommendation in our report that I know they implemented. Jock Conly asked us to comment on ASSIST so we did. And we wrote that in our view the ASSIST Office should continue. We reasoned that there were, at the time, at least 11 different U.S. Government entities providing some type of official U.S. civilian assistance to Pakistan. In addition to USAID, there were the Department of Justice, the Department of Labor, the Department of Commerce, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of the Treasury, the Army Corps of Engineers, the Centers for Disease Control, and various bureaus of the State Department: INL (International Narcotics and Law Enforcement), DRL (Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor) and PRM (Population, Refugees, and Migration). We believed that coordinating all these groups would have vastly exceeded the ability of the USAID Mission Director, who at that time had his hands full just running the mission. There was just too much money and too many agencies at play. But we added that, yes, keep ASSIST, but number one, make it clear that it's coordinating, not managing, the assistance portfolio; and number two, consider having a retired senior USAID mission director become the assistance coordinator. I thought that was the position USAID ought to take. Now, that recommendation was implemented, which I know because—

Q: (Laughs) You became one.

WASKIN: I became the assistance coordinator three years later, right. But that's for our next interview.

So, again, I think the implementation modalities report is valuable. I've sent a copy of it to every incoming USAID Pakistan director. I just sent one a few months ago, in fact, to Kate Somvongsiri, who has taken over now. She was very kind and answered me right away to thank me for sending it.

Q: Can you send me a copy? I'd be interested in reading it.

WASKIN: I'd be happy to. It was fun to prepare, and I think it was somewhat controversial. I mean, at least it focused people's attention on some of these issues in a new or different way. But I don't know that it had any long-term transformative impact. As I've said, I intended to go out to Pakistan for four months and I ended up staying there for six years, and I can't say that the problems that we identified were ever completely solved. But at least we made people aware of the problems and offered some solutions for them to consider.

Q: The analysis that you did of the portfolio and the report, from what it sounds like, is the kind of tool that would be useful in many missions, including the methodology you used. When implementation is lagging, to step back and have someone come in and look at it critically. It's too easy when you're in the situation to say the problem is all the host country government; I suspect probably 50 percent of the corrections can be done in house as well.

Yeah. And I do know that, by the time I left Pakistan, the USAID Mission there had begun tracking G2G expenditures versus non-G2G so that they could analyze their pipeline and cash flow in ways that they were not able to do when I first arrived. So, at least some of our recommendations were implemented.

Q: Well, that's all very interesting. And I know that we need to break now.

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Q: This is January 19, 2024, and this is interview number seven with Skip Waskin.

Skip, when we finished up last time you had finished the TDY, doing an implementation study for USAID Pakistan. Could you tell us how that report was received and then what happened next?

WASKIN: I think the report received a mixed reaction. Many people appreciated the factual information in it and the clarity of the report. As I recall, the mission, however, actually wrote a rebuttal. But by that time I had moved on to other things, and so I didn't respond to the rebuttal. I don't recall what happened to it. I think they weren't entirely pleased by our report because it didn't fully support the narrative of which many in OAPA were convinced; i.e., that the large pipeline was effectively either the fault of the governments of Pakistan, or more broadly (and what they were really trying to say) that it was the fault of the State Department for pushing us into these G2G and local mechanisms. Others within USAID, particularly, I think, Mission Director Jock Conly, appreciated the report. But I can't say that our report generated a groundswell of enthusiasm in USAID/Pakistan in favor of moving more quickly. As I said, there's one major recommendation that was contained in our report that they did implement but the long history of our assistance program in Pakistan and really the long history of what was known as the Kerry-Lugar-Berman Authorization was in the end a very sad one. USAID/Pakistan never did spend down the entire pipeline. And ultimately they had to give hundreds of millions of dollars back to the agency for reprogramming elsewhere.

Q: What was the one recommendation that they implemented?

WASKIN: The assistance coordinator recommendation. Oh, and the recommendation that they track G2G versus non-G2G expenditures.

Q: Oh, okay.

WASKIN: To be brutally honest, USAID only agreed under protest to accept a former USAID Mission Director – me – as assistance coordinator. I think this was one of those issues where people understand the accuracy, the truth, if you will, of what we as a team were saying, but the problems are so structural, are so ingrained into the way the agency sees the world that they are not things that can simply be changed overnight.

Q: Thank you for sending me a copy of the report. When I looked quickly at it this morning, one of the things you commented on has come out in a number of the oral history interviews and that is the short one-year tours and the impact they have on the ability of AID missions to function very effectively. Do you have any further thoughts on this? I know it's a difficult balance because they are in difficult environments with serious security concerns.

WASKIN: I think it's clear that one-year tours can be disruptive. I've mentioned the fact that those of us who stayed in Pakistan for several years often found ourselves obliged to justify, and re-justify, even ongoing programs to a rotating cast of new arrivals. Here's another small example. The implementation modalities report our team worked on was the brainchild of and was endorsed fully by the then-mission director Jock Conly, who arrived in Pakistan in June 2012. But by June 2013, Jock was gone. He was replaced by another excellent officer, Greg Gottlieb, but Greg had other priorities. He wasn't terribly interested in a report that his predecessor had commissioned one year previously. Greg, understandably, had other fish to fry. My point is that, as a leader, when you're only there for one year it becomes difficult to generate momentum on a consistent basis for whatever you might want to accomplish because you just don't have the time. I faced that in Afghanistan where I realized anything I was going to accomplish I had to accomplish in my first six months because after that I would be a lame duck.

Q: Right.

WASKIN: For all these reasons, when I was first in Afghanistan I advocated for two-year tours. But Mark Ward, the head of the Af/Pak Task Force at the time, told me I was wrong. And on reflection I think I was wrong. I think Mark was right. If you make two-year tours mandatory in high threat posts like Afghanistan and Pakistan you will drastically shrink the size of your recruitment pool. It's a balance. I think you need to encourage people to stay for two years. But don't make it mandatory.

Q: Right, it is a difficult issue, but the short tours do make it hard to implement anything.

WASKIN: They make it hard, yes. Harder than it would be otherwise.

So, to get to the second part of your question—should we move on to what happened with me personally afterward?

Q: Yes.

WASKIN: USAID/Pakistan had three provincial offices. We don't say "regional" offices because they're not regions. Within USAID the word "region" means something broader. Each of the provinces in which USAID was working had a provincial office. There was one in Lahore for Punjab, which I visited. There was one in Peshawar for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the FATA, which I was not allowed to visit for security reasons. I met with the KP/FATA team in Islamabad but only got the opportunity to visit the Consulate in Peshawar several years later once I had become the Assistance Coordinator. And there was the provincial office in Karachi, which was responsible for Sindh and Balochistan. At the time, each of these offices was headed by a Senior Foreign Service Officer who had the title of Deputy Mission Director.

As part of the implementation modalities study, Jock recommended that I go down to Karachi to check out the program and the operation there. I didn't want to go. I thought Karachi's got a terrible reputation. It's in an awful place. But I recognized that to get a full picture of the USAID program in Pakistan, and since I had already visited the office in Lahore, I had to visit the office in Karachi. Then, a few days before I was to depart, Jock approached me and told me that Ed Birgells, who was the incumbent Deputy Mission Director in Karachi, had announced that he would be leaving at the end of the year. And Jock asked, "Would you be interested in replacing him?" Now, as it happened, I know Ed; he was another retired mission director who had come back on a limited appointment. And he had been one of my predecessors in Mongolia. So, I thought well, I have to go down to Karachi for this study anyway, let me check it out with an eye toward seeing whether this is someplace I'd like to work. And I can talk to Ed and get his take on the situation there. But I wasn't terribly optimistic because I'd heard it was a very tough place.

So I went to Karachi in October 2012 and I was absolutely fascinated by what I found. First of all, the total value of the program there was close to $300 million. And the nature of the program was right up my alley. It involved a lot of infrastructure development and a lot of community engagement work carried out by OTI that I found fascinating. And USAID was having trouble getting everything off the ground. particularly the infrastructure work. I had been told that the living conditions would be challenging, but I found that they weren't nearly as challenging as, say, Afghanistan had been. Nobody was shelling us. USAID employees lived in bright, modern, clean apartments on a 20-acre compound in the middle of a big city. The place may not have had a lot of charm - I like to tell people it's as if the U.S. government had built and was running a Fairfield Inn. But it had everything you needed.

Q: And this was co-located with the consulate, is that correct?

WASKIN: Yes. There were about 50 or 60 Americans living on the consulate compound and then walking 200 yards to go to work in the consulate building itself. And while Karachi itself has a bad reputation, in fact it is kind of like Miami. It's not bad. So, I said, "Hey, let's do this." I talked to my wife, who agreed with me that this was a great opportunity, so I agreed to do it. And I went back to Washington to be sworn in again as a new direct hire employee, this time on an FSL (Foreign Service Limited) appointment.

USAID/Pakistan – Rehired as an FSL – Deputy Mission Director for Sindh and Balochistan, 2013 – 2015

So, in early January of 2013 I moved to Karachi and became USAID/Pakistan's Deputy Mission Director/Provincial Director for Sindh and Balochistan. I was nominally responsible for both provinces, but almost all our programming was happening in Sindh. We were never allowed, while I was there, to travel to Balochistan. The Pakistani military really didn't want Americans running around in that province. We wanted to do things in Balochistan, and there was a certain push from SRAP, particularly from Robin Raphel, to do things in Balochistan. But we simply weren't allowed to. The Pakistanis were not interested in having us there. So, I'll focus my remarks on Sindh, which was a really interesting place and turned out to be a really good job for me.

Q: I don't know my geography of Pakistan at all but is Karachi itself in Sindh?

WASKIN: Yes. Karachi is the capital of Sindh. And Karachi is a city of about twenty-five million people. It's absolutely enormous. Sindh itself has around fifty million people; thus, about half of them live in Karachi. And Sindh in turn accounts for around 20 or 25 percent of the population of Pakistan. It is the ancestral home of the Bhutto family and thus, it is the center of power of the Pakistan Peoples Party.

Q: Okay. So, I was going to ask you how it related to politics nationally.

WASKIN: It's an interesting dynamic. In Pakistan, the Bhutto family from Sindh is the dominant force in the Pakistan People's Party, or PPP, while the Sharif family from Punjab is the dominant force in the Pakistan Muslim League or PMLN. Those were the two largest parties, and their bases of power rest, respectively, in those two provinces. During most of my time in Pakistan, the Sharif family was ascendant; Nawaz Sharif became the Prime Minister in Islamabad following elections in 2013 and his younger brother Shehbaz became the Chief Minister in Punjab. But the Bhutto family remained the chief power in Sindh. Asif Ali Zardari, Benazir Bhutto's widower, was the president of Pakistan and also effectively the major political power in Sindh, the godfather of Sindh, if you will. So, a really interesting place, somewhat divorced from and with quite a different vibe politically from whatever was happening in Islamabad. Karachi is the business capital of Pakistan, and has a booming private sector. It's very dynamic. I was attracted by all these things. And I thought we had a really strong team in Karachi.

Within the USAID office in Karachi, there was one American man, who interestingly had been in Pakistan on and off since the early 1990s, Randy Hatfield. He had done his PhD on education in Balochistan in the 1990s and had served in USAID's Education Office in Islamabad but had been in the consulate in Karachi running our education portfolio for at least two years before I got there. So, having been there for two years he was the longest-serving American in Karachi. He was a very smart guy and an excellent officer; he and Ed Birgells had both labored hard to try to move the Sindh Basic Education Program and the other infrastructure work we were doing forward, and the progress that had been made was due in large part to their efforts. The Consul General was a former Marine named Mike Dodman; Jock Conly had introduced me to Mike while I was still in Islamabad just to make sure that I was the right fit for the job, and he and I hit it off famously. Mike and I got along very well, so in terms of relationships with the State Department in Karachi it was a great situation.

The nature of the program was, as I said, infrastructure and OTI. There were other things going on that were being run out of Islamabad – for example, our work in the health sector - but the programs that we as the provincial office managed out of the consulate in Karachi were infrastructure and the work of OTI. On the infrastructure front, there were three major projects. Two of them were in a place called Jacobabad, a town of about 250,000 people in the northern part of Sindh, about a day's drive or a two-hour flight from Karachi. There we were building a hospital. Well, actually, we were *planning* to build a hospital; when I arrived in January 2013 construction had not begun. Similarly, we were planning to rehabilitate the water, sewerage, and solid waste systems of Jacobabad, but work on that project hadn't started yet either.

Now, this was a little embarrassing, because both these projects were what we called "Secretary of State deliverables." Secretary Clinton had visited Pakistan in 2010, and during her visit had announced that USAID would build a hospital and rehabilitate the water system in Jacobabad. But almost three years later, this work had not yet begun. Why Jacobabad? Well, there was a Pakistani Air Force base at Jacobabad that had been very useful during the Global War on Terror. I don't know the details of course, but apparently U.S. jets had flown out of that airbase on missions over Afghanistan, and when I arrived on the scene in 2013 there were still American military personnel based at that facility – which was directly across the street from what was to be the site of the new hospital. That new hospital, and the new water system, were to be "thank yous" to the city of Jacobabad for hosting us.

So, the opportunity to help get those two long-delayed projects off the ground was fascinating. And then, there was the Sindh Basic Education Program, the purpose of which was to build 108 new middle schools to replace existing schools damaged in the superfloods of 2010 and/or to further the government's policy of consolidating four or five existing smaller schools into one larger facility. Basically, these 108 schools would replace approximately some 500 existing, dilapidated schools which were scattered at different points and were sitting in areas that were, in many cases, highly vulnerable to flooding, as we had seen there in 2010, and we saw again in, sadly in 2022. The whole province is extremely vulnerable to flooding and more broadly to climate change. But

again, the schools weren't being built, construction of the water system hadn't started, and construction of the hospital hadn't started. So I said to myself, "I think this is a great job for me given my background." Not that I'm an engineer; I know nothing about engineering. But I did know how to manage infrastructure projects. So that's basically what I set about doing. With, of course, Randy Hatfield's help. Randy was terrific, he was the manager of Sindh Basic Education, but he was also very valuable in terms of getting these other projects off the ground. We had a real talented team in Karachi. My Pakistani staff there was small but very skilled and very dedicated. We had a total of ten people, including two Pakistani medical doctors and two Pakistani engineers. And we pushed these projects forward. Years later, after I retired from USAID and began to search for new employment, for the first time in decades I had to develop a CV. And when the time came to write in that CV about what I had done in Karachi, the phrase I chose was "I drove forward these programs." And that is precisely how I looked at my job there. My responsibility was to drive those projects forward.

Q: And were each of those programs government-to-government with the provincial government?

WASKIN: They were, yes, exactly. All of them were. And the government had set up, in all cases, unique project management units dedicated to working with those particular activities, which is kind of a good thing/kind of a bad thing. I became friends with a Senator from Pakistan, Sughra Imam, and she told me that setting up all these project management units was a terrible idea, because once they're set up, they never go away. And I think we sometimes see that in our bureaucracy, too: once an entity is established, it never vanishes. But on the other hand, it needed to be done because we needed to push these programs forward, and we needed dedicated personnel on the Pakistani side to make that possible. So it becomes a difficult choice. And so in my conversations with the Senator I sort of fudged the issue by saying, "Well, your point is a good one, but it was the Government of Sindh's choice to set up these units. So you really should address your concerns to that government."

Q: Was the construction done by Pakistani firms?

WASKIN: Yes, all of it. The infrastructure projects were all managed locally by the Government of Sindh and these project management units, and the actual construction was all carried out by Pakistani firms. That was one of the great things about working in a place like Pakistan, because they have significant human capital and a significant, very capable private commercial sector. We wouldn't have been able to do this, for instance, in Haiti. In Haiti, at best we would have been able to rely on firms from the Dominican Republic or elsewhere in the Caribbean, but in Pakistan, the organizations and the skills were there. They could do the work. The issue for us, of course, was always that this program was very broad and ambitious. Sindh itself is the size of the state of Illinois with a population of over 50 million people. It takes more than a day to drive from one end of it to the other. It's a vast geographic area. And just to take the school project alone, we're talking about building within that area 108 different schools at 108 different sites, each of which would cost close to a million dollars. These were not to be small facilities: they

were each to be two-story buildings designed to accommodate 500 students each. And we were planning to build 108 of them, spread out all over northern Sindh and the suburbs of Karachi, all of which are in areas that we really can't get to physically, or certainly we can't stay overnight in, due to security considerations. So, as I said to Randy, "Just think about this. We've got millions of dollars in infrastructure money floating around, being implemented by local Pakistani entities in dispersed geographic locations all over southern Pakistan that we can't visit. What could go wrong?" (Peasley laughs) Obviously, the answer is a lot could go wrong, but while there were of course some issues. Frankly, the number of problems that we ran into, at least while I was there, was surprisingly small.

The first thing I did when I got to Karachi was to say "I have to go see all of these places. I can't manage just sitting here in Karachi. I really need to go see these locations." So, Randy and I went to Jacobabad. An interesting anecdote is that for security reasons we were not allowed to stay overnight in Jacobabad. You have to stay in a nearby larger municipality called Sukkur, which is right on the Indus River. And there you stay at the guesthouse of the local Oreo factory. Very interesting. (Both laugh) So, we got a lot of samples of Oreos. (Both laugh) But we spent our days in Jacobabad, and I saw the green field that was to become the hospital, and I saw the existing water plant, which had been rehabilitated with German funding as recently as 2008, only five years earlier, but by now was completely nonfunctional. So, I said, "You know what? We're going to get all these things started," and we did. The hospital construction began shortly after our visit and was completed by 2014. The water system was much more challenging, but we got it going and Ambassador Olson presided over a groundbreaking ceremony there in 2015. The school construction program is still going on to this day, but they've built over 100 schools now and are on track to finish this year. So, we got everything rolling, and I'm very proud of that accomplishment.

The issue, as always with infrastructure projects, is not so much the construction. I mean, again, that in itself is extremely challenging. But the bigger challenge is the issue of who is going to own and maintain the infrastructure afterwards. And this was a particularly acute issue with respect to the infrastructure work in Jacobabad. The water system was to have been maintained by a special entity that the Government of Sindh had established with funding from the Asian Development Bank, or ADB. I like to tell people that this ADB project had my all-time favorite project name. It was called the Sindh Cities Improvement Project, or as everyone referred to it, the SCIP Project. (Both laugh) People kept saying, SCIP's going to do this, SCIP's going to do that. And I would think to myself, "I'm not going to do any of that." (Peasley laughs) It took me a while to realize that "Oh, they're talking about the Sindh Cities Improvement Project, not about Skip Waskin." SCIP was headquartered in Sukkur, and they were going to take over infrastructure in probably half a dozen towns of comparable size in northern Sindh. We were simply going to piggyback onto the ADB program, and SCIP would manage the water systems that we were building. But then SCIP fell apart. There were allegations of corruption and mismanagement, and so the challenge became that of doing this through the Jacobabad district government itself. This became a major preoccupation.

Again, the construction issues themselves were obviously technically challenging but were not overwhelming. We know how to fix the water plant. We knew how to build piping and drainage. That could be done. The issue was what was going to happen afterward.

Q: Right. The institutional aspects are always the challenge.

WASKIN: Absolutely. And in fact, when the new USAID Mission Director, Greg Gottlieb, arrived in the summer of 2013 and looked at this project, he – quite understandably – was concerned. I recall that we had a project implementation review meeting with Greg in the late fall or early winter of 2013, by which time I'd been in Karachi for nearly a year and we still hadn't spent any money on the water project and construction hadn't started. And Greg said, "I want to cancel this project." So I made a bet with him. I said, "Let's use this as a metric. If by March 31 – the end of the next quarter – we still haven't begun work and cumulative accrued expenditures are still zero, we'll stop it. But if I can get this thing off the ground by the end of March, get construction underway, and start spending money, then I think we should continue it." Happily, Greg took my bet. And even more happily, I won it.

But, difficult as it was to get these projects off the ground the challenge of assuring their institutional sustainability was even harder. In the case of the hospital things were a little different. It was managed by the Sindh Department of Health through a special entity they had set up, basically a special sort of quasi-public-private corporation that allowed them not only to manage the hospital but also to raise funds for it from private contributors. This was a really good idea except for two things. First, they weren't raising any money. Second, the military didn't like it. The military wanted the hospital for itself. The Pakistani Air Force in particular, which was there right across the street, wanted the hospital. And of course, our position was no, we are not providing assistance to the Pakistani military. As part of the population of Jacobabad you're welcome to use the hospital as patients, but you can't manage it and you can't own it. And the Air Force wasn't terribly happy about this. As the USAID Provincial Director for Sindh, I was actually an ex officio member of the board of directors of the hospital, so I had to go up to Jacobabad for board meetings a couple of times. And of course, Jacobabad being a relatively small town, everybody knows everything, and the Air Force certainly knew that the board meeting was starting at, say, 10:00 in the morning. And immediately, just as the board meeting was starting, the jets would start taking off right across the street and would rattle the windows of the hospital boardroom. (Peasley laughs) Maybe they just wanted to let us know that they knew we were there.

Q: Weren't always happy with you.

WASKIN: Exactly, they weren't always happy with us. Superficially at least we had friendly relations with them, but I think they resented the fact that we'd built a civilian hospital rather than a military one.

Moving paperwork through the bureaucracy in Islamabad was also a constant challenge. As I've mentioned, it routinely took six months for the Mission to issue a routine Project Implementation Letter, or PIL, to obligate, say, half a million dollars in already approved funding, to an ongoing project, which should be the simplest bureaucratic act that USAID could possibly undertake. Yet every PIL became an adventure, because various people in the clearance process would repeatedly ask basic questions like "What should we be building? Should we be building a water system in Jacobabad?" To me, this was a huge frustration. Those questions were asked and answered at the time the project was authorized; they did not need to be asked and answered again. So I got very tired of working in a bureaucracy that viewed time as a free good and that was not in any hurry to get the money spent. As I look back on what happened to the USAID program in Pakistan, and reflect on why the Kerry-Lugar-Berman money wasn't as impactful as we wanted it to be, I think USAID itself bears a big responsibility. Yes, what we were trying to do was difficult. In the first place, the amount of funding authorized far exceeded the absorptive capacity of the country. But we didn't help ourselves by making everything so terribly slow. Let me try to summarize one aspect of the problem.

When I was in what was then the PPC Bureau, we taught a class on the ADS 200 series on how to implement USAID programming. And I remember that we taught a module about firm-fixed price awards. The idea was that USAID could use firm-fixed price programming. For example, suppose a host country's government wanted to build a school. Under this model, USAID would agree that the government would build this school, USAID would verify that the school had been built, and upon that verification it would pay the government a fixed price agreed on in advance – say, one million dollars. That's it. If the government spends more than a million to build that school, that's its problem. If it spends less than a million, congratulations, it just saved the money and gets to keep the difference. As this approach was conceived, and as we taught it in the late nineties and early aughts, it would simplify infrastructure programming and accelerate implementation while providing a powerful incentive to the host government to save money. Now, when I got to Karachi in 2013, I was pleased to see that USAID was using firm-fixed price contracting for the schools to be built under the Sindh Basic Education Program. However, I also discovered that, instead of simply agreeing with the government that the price of any given school would be, again, say, a million dollars, the USAID mission, and in particular the controller's office and the lawyers, were insisting that there be an extraordinarily detailed cost estimate for each school. And when I say "detailed", I mean down to the last nail and the last rivet. And these estimates took months to prepare, and then months to argue about, down to the last cent. Well, it's even more difficult to prepare and agree on these types of estimates than it is to report on actual costs. So, this was taking a very long time. And then, at the other side of the equation, if the actual costs proved to be different than the estimate, which of course they always were, then we had to go back and reconcile the two amounts because the controllers and the lawyers – and probably the auditors - didn't want the host government to get a windfall, right? And so, we'd have to redo the entire cost estimate to make it match, to the penny, with the actual costs. And this took yet more weeks and months, and effectively, we simply ended paying the actual costs rather than a firm fixed price. It was just madness. And I talked to people about this and argued that this was completely

defeating the purpose of firm fixed price, host country-led programming, or what we now call locally-led programming. The idea was to encourage them to save money, encourage them to economize, in the design and execution of their own programs. Instead, we were micromanaging the heck out of them, we were not saving any money and we were significantly delaying implementation and delaying disbursement of the pipeline. The answer I got was always along the lines of, "Well, we have to be careful, because we'll be criticized. The auditors will look at this and say, 'The school only cost $850,000 but you gave them a million dollars.'" Well, that was exactly the idea of firm fixed price contracting; it wasn't a bug, it was a feature. And for the agency to be so consumed by this was very, very frustrating from an implementor's point of view.

Q: It's interesting. Were there ever discussions about using certain mechanisms in a high foreign policy priority country, that you can accept higher risk because it is a high priority and implementation is important? Were there ever discussions like that?

WASKIN: I wanted to have discussions like that but those were not discussions that anyone in a more senior position either within the mission or within OAPA was willing to undertake.

Q: I would think that's what the assistance coordinator's office would have been saying.

WASKIN: Well, exactly. And when I became the assistance coordinator that's what we did say. (Peasley laughs)

The problem was not that the assistance coordinator's office didn't understand the issue. They did. Certainly they were very intelligent people, and it was not intellectually challenging to grasp the nature of the problem. The issue is what's the bureaucratic lever to fix it. How do you say to a group of people – controllers, auditors, lawyers - whose job it is to make sure that no U.S. government money is wasted that they should back off and tolerate a little bit of risk, and maybe even a little bit of waste, because spending this money quickly is a foreign policy priority? Nobody wants to be the one who says that.

Q: Right, although it's not so much accepting that there'll be waste. I think as you said, if they can economize, they get a little extra budget support as an incentive.

WASKIN: Right, right.

Q: —that's not waste, that's just looking at what you're paying for slightly differently.

WASKIN: You got it.

Q: Was there a special inspector general's office for Pakistan as well?

WASKIN: SIGAR. No, we didn't have that.

Q: Okay. So, it would have been the regular USAID inspector general's office.

WASKIN: Right.

Q: Was there one located in Pakistan?

WASKIN: Yes. They had people in Islamabad.

Q: Was there a good relationship with the RIG (Regional Inspector General) or a bad relationship?

WASKIN: I think many people in USAID/Pakistan were scared of the RIG, not because of the people there at the time but rather because of the history of it and the fact that there had been issues where, Afghanistan being one example, the auditors did go after the mission and made life very difficult for them. The RIG people that I dealt with in Pakistan were quite reasonable. They didn't view it as their objective to embarrass or punish or harass the mission in any way. My problem with them was that their focus was always on the past rather than on the challenges confronting the mission at present. A classic example of this was their audit of the Jacobabad Hospital. In the spring of 2015, they decided to do a RIG audit of that project. And that could have been very useful. But their audit universe was only through the end of fiscal year 2013. So, their audit focused on the fact that it took a long time to get the hospital built, and that as of September 2013 there were questions about the long-term financial sustainability of the hospital, etc. Which, of course, we already knew.

Q: Yes, right.

WASKIN: They were concerned about whether the government of Sindh was prepared to manage the hospital. But their principal focus was on what had taken so long and why had it taken so long. All good questions. But by the time they were asking them it was 2015. The hospital had been built, it was providing services to the community, and the government of Sindh was managing it. So my view was that we should talk about more important issues; i.e., the issues that faced us in 2015 rather than the ones from 2013 that we had already addressed and resolved.

Q: Right.

WASKIN: My point is that this audit wasn't terribly useful to us. It wasn't harmful to us, but it wasn't helpful.

Q: I can think of two examples that involved high foreign policy priorities when the RIG was brought in as the programs were starting up. One was the Contra funding in Central America managed by Ted Morse; the other was the early anti-apartheid work in South Africa when Tim Bork and the USAID mission were doing small grants to community-based organizations. In both cases, they kind of brokered an agreement with the RIG as to what was acceptable, what was not acceptable. Do you know if that was done in Pakistan when the funding increased so rapidly?

WASKIN: I don't believe so. I mean, you're right. It would have been very helpful had there been an agreement with the RIG. But I don't know that there was. And frankly, it's an exceptionally good idea. In retrospect it seems fairly obvious. But I don't think the problem was the RIG. It wasn't that the RIG was running around with torches and pitchforks looking to tar and feather people from USAID. It is that USAID was anticipating problems. And therefore, managing so that no problem could possibly occur. The problem wasn't the RIG, it was our own bureaucracy, which in some ways is even more frustrating.

Q:Yes, absolutely. Does AID have any special training for these high-profile programs in messy, difficult environments? It could be helpful to know there are different ways in which you can operate in these difficult environments and be presented with an array of different kinds of instruments. People might be willing to accept more risk if they knew that these are approaches that everyone has endorsed.

WASKIN: Well, I don't know the answer to that question. I hope it's being taught somewhere and if so I'd love to participate in teaching part of it. But no one's ever asked me that question. You're the first.

Q: Okay. Well, that could be a useful recommendation coming out of the oral history program.

WASKIN: Yes it could.

Q: Yes. So, these were clearly the issues on the infrastructure side. What was the OTI side of the house doing? countering violent extremism?

WASKIN: Countering violent extremism, yes, exactly. The embassy had commissioned, in 2011, before I got there, a study of the root causes of violent extremism. And it looked at the fact that whereas a lot of the programming in Pakistan was focused on the border areas with Afghanistan, that is to say on Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and what were then known as the FATA, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, which is where much if not most of the extremist violence was occurring, the root causes of that violence and terrorism went much deeper, and in fact were probably incubated in areas outside KP/FATA. They knew that many of the fighters who were either crossing the border into Afghanistan or creating havoc domestically on the Pakistan side of the border in FATA or in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa came from other areas of the country. So, the embassy commissioned a study to ask what are the root causes of violent extremism? Obviously, these are all quite complex. They're historic, they're religious. But the conclusion of the study was that there are certain economic drivers and that in particular the absence of a government's ability to deliver basic services, like health, like education, like water, was a major driver because there's no reason for people to be loyal to that particular government if they're not getting anything out of that loyalty. It also found, if I'm recalling the study correctly, that there was a great divide, if you will, among communities or between communities within Pakistan itself and people from a given religious group or given ethnic minority

who didn't ever interact, indeed had almost no contact whatsoever with the people from another group. The study also found that there were three areas of the country that seemed to be particularly fertile recruiting grounds for violent extremists. Those were southern Punjab, northern Sindh, and the city of Karachi.

And so, while the infrastructure components of our program had been initiated in part because Mrs. Clinton wanted to give the people of Jacobabad a hospital and a water system, there was a method to what we were doing beyond merely producing a long-promised Secretary of State deliverable. Our infrastructure programs in northern Sindh and the suburbs of Karachi - the water system, the hospital, and the schools - were responding to the fact that the absence of such public services was a driver of extremism. When I would explain our Sindh program to people, I contended that we were really countering violent extremism by dealing with some of the root causes. We were providing water, we were providing health services, we were providing education. Maybe not on as comprehensive a scale as we should have. In my view we could have done more but we were doing something.

OTI's program was working to combat violent extremism in another way. Their program, the Karachi Youth Initiative, or KYI, which had just gotten off the ground when I arrived, was working in several different neighborhoods of Karachi, not to provide traditional public services, but rather to bring people together through sports and cultural and community action events. And when I say "neighborhoods", remember that each of these neighborhoods consists of from half a million to a million people, including the area surrounding the U.S. consulate, which is known as Sultanabad and has the largest Pashtun population in the country outside of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa itself because of the number of people migrating into that area of the town. The others were Lyari, which is a stronghold of the Bhutto family's party, the PPP (Pakistan People's Party), and Korangi, which at the time was a stronghold of the MQM (Muttahida Quami Movement), a Sindh-based party of little significance on the national scene but one that is enormously influential in Karachi. OTI's program, the Karachi Youth Initiative, sought to work in these areas through cultural events, sports events, neighborhood cleanup events, park rehabilitation, music festivals, even the painting of murals with messages of peace throughout the city. Now, at first, all of this seemed a little soft, if you will, to me; this was not the sort of hard edged, rigorous development work that I was used to seeing. But soon I came to realize that these kinds of community outreach efforts were probably what was needed at the time. Now, we had been warned about this approach. At the time the program was approved, some people had said, "This is never going to be a success. You're going to get people killed. This is not fertile terrain for what OTI wants to accomplish."

Beyond that, there was also a bureaucratic challenge within USAID. We had an OTI representative on the USAID staff in Karachi. But they reported not to me but to the OTI Country Director based in Islamabad. So in a formal sense, I was not in the OTI chain of command for the Karachi Youth Initiative. Well, I took a very different view of things, because the consulate and the Consul General in particular looked to me to be the voice

of USAID programming in Sindh, and they didn't distinguish between OTI and USAID; to them it was all USAID, and as such was my responsibility.

Q: Right.

WASKIN: So, I made it very clear that I was going to be very much involved in OTI's work. And happily, we had a series of OTI directors that I worked with very fruitfully and who welcomed my involvement and support, first Nick Marinacci and then Suzanne Sullivan, who became and remains to this day a great friend. They welcomed me being involved and they welcomed my support and interest. In fact, they told me, "We haven't seen this before. It's wonderful."

An interesting aspect of the Karachi Youth Initiative is that we never labeled it publicly as a U.S. government program. Publicly, it was always something that was being done by various local organizations, with no USAID branding and no public acknowledgement of our participation. We didn't hide it. It wasn't a classified piece of information. But we never highlighted it. We never said that this was a U.S. government program, not publicly. Now, everybody knew it anyway; it was kind of an open secret. In fact, I remember accompanying Consul General Dodman to a meeting with the Governor of Sindh, and with the press there, the governor kept talking about "the USAID-funded Karachi Youth Initiative", and we just twiddled our thumbs and didn't say anything. So, everybody in town knew that USAID was supporting the KYI, but as long as we didn't push it into people's faces they were, interestingly enough, okay with that.

Q: And so, you were going to their events and not waving the flag?

WASKIN: I went to their events, I just didn't wave the flag. I sat there quietly.

And the Karachi Youth Initiative, OTI's work, really had a significant impact. Staying in Karachi as I did for nearly three years I saw a lot of changes. The city got better. The murder rate went down. The violence declined; the whole vibe improved. Just before I departed, in the early summer of 2015, KYI organized a huge, city-wide music festival at the Port of Karachi. I attended, and while I was there several people, several Pakistanis who were longtime residents of Karachi, remarked to me that, "You never could have done this a couple of years ago. We wouldn't have come to it. It would have been too dangerous." And we had thousands of people out on the street celebrating. Yeah, the festival was held in a secured area. You had to go through a checkpoint to get into the grounds of the festival. But in 2012 or 2013 we would not have been able to secure that area, or, more importantly, make people feel secure enough to attend. But by 2015, we did. I can't say OTI was responsible for all the changes. Obviously, OTI was only one player within a much larger set of social dynamics. But the fact is that things did get better in Karachi. There was less violence. And I think we contributed in some not insignificant way to that. The Karachi Youth Initiative was a very important and very successful USAID program.

We sought, of course, to institutionalize it and turn it over to local actors. And in fact, several prominent Karachiites formed an NGO called I Am Karachi dedicated to continuing and expanding KYI's work. And as I was leaving Pakistan in 2018 they were continuing to operate similar events and similar programming. What they've done in the last five years, I don't know. I don't know what's happened since I left the country. But through I Am Karachi they were making a stab at continuing the work started by KYI. And I often highlighted the success of the Karachi Youth Initiative, and the formation of I Am Karachi, to senior U.S. government officials who visited Karachi. Dan Grant, who at the time was the deputy assistant administrator in OAPA, came out and we had a lovely dinner for him on the rooftop of a beautiful new office building owned by Jameel Yusuf, a very prominent local businessman who was the president of I Am Karachi, the NGO that had been formed. And I remember telling Dan, "This is probably the most inspiring single program I've ever been associated with in the thirty-plus years I've been with USAID." Because we were doing things that were risky, that could easily have failed, that could have been embarrassing. And yet, they didn't fail, they were successful and they generated a lot of very positive momentum, and prominent people from the host country realized this and took actions on their own, even formed an organization on their own to try to continue what we had helped start. I was proud to be a small part of that.

Q: That's good. I'm remembering a former colleague of ours, I don't know if you knew him or not, Warren Weinstein. Was he killed in Karachi?

WASKIN: Sure, I knew Warren. I knew him from my days in the Africa Bureau when I was working on the BEST and BEPP programs in Burundi. Warren was kidnapped and later killed in Lahore. He was still a captive, and his death was confirmed, while I was still in Pakistan.

It was easy to forget that Pakistan was dangerous, because it wasn't as visibly dangerous as Kabul, as was Afghanistan. If you drove around Afghanistan, the fact that it was dangerous was obvious: almost every building had sandbags and razor wire and machineguns around it, and guys with helmets and AK-47s and body armor standing outside it. You knew, visually, that you were in a conflict zone. When I was there you couldn't mistake that you were in a war zone. Islamabad by contrast gives you a veneer of tranquility. Things don't look nearly as threatening. And the security presence is much less visible. The town itself is brighter, cleaner, bigger, more modern. You're not visibly in a conflict zone. Even Lahore and Karachi appeared to be much more tranquil than Kabul did. But the country could still be quite dangerous.

As Warren's experience, and that of my friend Stephen Vance, who was killed in Peshawar, attest. Sometimes we would chafe at the security restrictions and laugh about them. For example, even in Islamabad, we were never allowed to walk on the street. Ever. And we often asked each other, "Why can't we walk around the corner in our own neighborhoods?" One weekend morning there was a jewelry show at an official American residence two houses down from my house, literally, two houses away. And I wanted to go. I wanted to buy some Christmas gifts for my family. And I decided that I was not going to call the motor pool to send an armored vehicle to drive me maybe 100

feet from my front door. And so I walked. But I shouldn't have. The rules were clear: no car, no jewelry show. And had the RSO found out I would have been in a heap of trouble. I should have remembered that, silly as it might sometimes have seemed, there was a real threat, and we had to be very mindful of the security environment. Quiet and normal as it seemed, Pakistan could be a dangerous place.

But it was also a place where you could get things done – particularly in Sindh. I found the government of Sindh was quite different from the federal government in Islamabad. Sindh was more analogous to what I had seen in a place like Zaire. Maybe that's why I thrived in Sindh. Many politicians there were keenly interested in the construction projects we were carrying out in northern Sindh: the Jacobabad hospital, the Jacobabad water system, the schools. And we briefed several of them on those projects. After one of those briefings in particular, our head engineer Ghufran Shafi was practically shaking. He told me, "I felt like a lamb surrounded by wolves," because you could see the dollar signs sort of rolling in these guys' eyes. We knew they were thinking that these programs were great, because they represented a tremendous opportunity for them. Kickbacks galore! And I agreed with Ghufran, I could tell that that's exactly what they were thinking. But the good news was that they allowed us to go forward with the programs. And I was confident we could do them right; I was confident we could stave off any efforts to sidetrack or divert funds from any of these projects. And we did. We built the hospital, we built the water system, we built the schools. And the Government of Sindh let us do it. They just wanted to know what was in it for them. And probably the only thing that was in it for them was that these projects allowed them to hold a press conference or a ceremony and tell their relatives and friends and constituents, "Look what I did for the town." We were never going to allow them to steal the money, and we made sure they didn't. That's the virtue of USAID's on-site approach: we knew what was happening on the ground because we were on the ground watching it happen. Again, that was similar to the environment that I operated in in Zaire. In other places in Pakistan – in KP/FATA, in Punjab, at the federal level in Islamabad – projects could be tied up for years in the Pakistani (not to mention the USAID) bureaucracy. That was less true in Sindh. In Sindh there was kind of an understanding that you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours. If we wanted to build a hospital or a water system or 108 schools, that was fine with them. They'd let us do it, and in fact they'd help us do it. Much like Zaire in the 1980s.

To be perfectly candid, there was another factor in play. Our chief ally in the Government of Sindh was the Secretary Education, Fazlullah Pechuho. Dr. Pechuho, in addition to being extraordinarily competent and highly dedicated, is married to Dr. Azra Fazal, who is not only a very prominent Pakistani physician and politician in her own right but who also happens to be the sister of Asif Ali Zardari, Benazir Bhutto's widower and former President of Pakistan and the de facto Godfather of Sindh. So nobody messed with us, because nobody messed with Zardari.

Q: Yes, interesting. So, you ended up staying a year and a half, almost two years in Karachi, right?

WASKIN: Yeah. Almost three. I got there in January 2013 and I was there for two and a half years.

While I was in Karachi, I of course dealt with the ASSIST office, and through them with SRAP. I did so largely because I wanted them to understand why it took USAID so much time to get things done. Their question about the program in Pakistan was the same as it was when I arrived: "Why is it taking so long to move the money?" Well, I wanted them to be allies, I wanted them to understand that there were people within the USAID bureaucracy, including myself, who were working very hard to push these programs forward. So, I always maintained contact with them. When they came to Karachi, of course, they met with me. They didn't come down very often, however; I think maybe once or twice during my tenure. But whenever I was in Islamabad I met with the ASSIST office and tried to make them allies rather than enemies of the USAID program.

In the midst of this Alan Van Egmond, whom you'll remember, who was working at the time in SRAP on detail from USAID, contacted me and told me that SRAP and ASSIST remembered the recommendation in the Implementation Modalities Report about having a USAID person become the assistance coordinator. And that model had worked well across the border in Afghanistan, where first Bambi Arellano became the assistance coordinator while Ken Yamashita was the mission director, and then when she left Ken himself became the assistance coordinator. It worked great, actually, or at least that was what I heard from my side of the border. So, according to Alan, SRAP was thinking about doing something similar in Pakistan. And he asked me who I thought might be good candidates for such a role. And so, I gave Alan a list of about ten names, people that I thought were at the right point in their careers, people who had either just retired or were about to retire and were senior enough and might be interested in taking on a role like this. And in a long phone conversation, Alan and I reviewed the names, many of whom he knew, but he then he asked, "So, what about you?" And I just laughed and said, "I don't think that's going to happen." And I didn't think much more of it.

Then, several months later, while I was in the States, to my great surprise, I got a call from Dan Feldman, the deputy head of SRAP. And Dan asked me to consider becoming the head of ASSIST. And then when I got back to Pakistan, I talked to Ambassador Olson, and he said, "We want you to do this." But this needed to be kept quiet for a while for a couple of reasons. The most important reason was that USAID - and when I say "USAID" I mean in particular OAPA as an institution and Larry Sampler, who was the head of OAPA and thus my boss's boss, as an individual – were very much opposed to this. Larry's view was that number one, there shouldn't be an assistance coordinator, and number two, if there is an assistance coordinator it should be the USAID Mission Director. This was USAID's institutional position; they were adamant that when Brian Aguilar, the incumbent coordinator, left in the summer of 2015 he should not be replaced.

So, more personnel and HR skullduggery. I knew that State – i.e., SRAP and the U.S. Ambassador - wanted me to replace Brian. And to be totally frank, I wanted to replace Brian. But I needed to be discreet about it. And for reasons on the State side the Ambassador needed to take his time making the decision. But ultimately, just weeks

before Brian was to depart, State formally offered the job as assistance coordinator to me. And I said, "All right, but I need to tell Larry first." And as chance would have it, at the time I happened to be in Washington anyway so I said, "I'm going to go see Larry. I want him to hear this news from me, because I don't think he's going to be happy." And so, I walked in the door and saw Larry and he said, "So, you've come to tell me you're going to take the assistance coordinator job, huh?" (Peasley laughs) Larry's not dumb and he's got his own wires throughout the bureaucracy. So, I said, "Look, you're my boss. You represent the institutional views of USAID and I work for USAID. If you tell me not to take this job, I will not take it. But let me give you my advice and let me tell you what will happen in that scenario. If I don't take this job the State Department is bound and determined that there is going to be an assistance coordinator. So, if I don't take it you will get whoever the State Department personnel system happens to throw up right now very late in the assignment cycle. You might get somebody really good. But who knows who you might get?" So my advice to Larry was don't gamble; take the devil you know. And he said, "Yeah, yeah, you're right. You gotta take the job." He wasn't happy about it and I don't think he's forgiven me for it to this day, but I did take the job.

Once it became public that I was going to go up to Islamabad, I remember telling my Pakistani friends in Karachi, "I've gotten this big promotion. I'm taking this big job. But I have to move to Islamabad." And their reaction was uniformly,"Oh, how awful. What a terrible thing." (Both laugh) The people in Karachi, they're like New Yorkers. They complain all the time. They don't like the city, it's so difficult but they can't live anywhere else. And Islamabad for them is a provincial backwater; in their eyes, who would want to go to Islamabad? Someone actually asked me, "Can we send you things?" (Both laugh) "Who did you piss off to make you have to go to Islamabad?" But, back to Islamabad I went.

U.S. Embassy Pakistan, Coordinator for Economic and Development Assistance, 2015 - 2018

Q: Who was the mission director at the time that you returned?

WASKIN: Well, I was, actually. Greg Gottlieb had to leave post in mid-July, I believe, and John Groarke, his replacement, was not scheduled to arrive until early August. So Greg asked me to fill the gap and serve as Acting Mission Director for a few weeks. I got back to Islamabad before John. I knew John slightly from interacting with him at various points over his career and mine within USAID, but I wanted to be sure to tell him personally of this new arrangement; i.e., that I would become the assistance coordinator. So I made a point of seeing him in Washington and discussing this with him face to face. And while he may have been surprised, he was fine with this arrangement, and he appreciated my alerting him of it. John is a very diplomatic and very capable guy. In fact, I just had coffee with him last week, as a matter of fact. He's now mission director in Burma and he's got some great stories to tell. When he retires, make sure he's part of this oral history program. He's terrific. But John understood the dynamics of the situation and he also, I think, appreciated the stance I took.

After serving as Acting Mission Director for a few weeks and returning to Karachi to close out things there, I got back to Islamabad in mid-August. John Groarke arrived at post at roughly the same time. By then, the physical geography of the embassy had changed. Remember that I mentioned that USAID staff used to have to walk up the hill to the chancery if they wanted to see the Ambassador or the Assistance Coordinator?

Q: Right.

WASKIN: All of that was gone. All those buildings had been knocked down and the new embassy had been opened. This was a new facility that had been under construction for nearly five years. Everyone had just moved into it as of the summer of 2015. Which meant that ASSIST was in one building, and USAID was in an identical building right next door to it. And I think that helped because we were all much closer together, physically. It sounds silly but it has an important impact. More importantly, on my first day as Assistance Coordinator, I told the ASSIST team, "I don't ever want to hear any of us saying, as one of our predecessors twice removed said when I arrived in Pakistan three years ago, that we *manage* the USAID program. ASSIST does not manage the USAID program. There are 200 people over there in a building next door and there's a guy named John Groarke whose name is on the wall. It says John Groarke, USAID Mission Director. He drives around in a big white vehicle. He manages the USAID program. We don't manage it." Our job, as I saw it, was to make sure that the program was managed well, that it was achieving what it set out to achieve, and that those achievements in turn contributed to the priorities of the Ambassador of the United States as outlined in the Embassy's Operational Program Statement. And I could see jaws dropping. But that was the stance I insisted on. I felt that if ASSIST was going to add value, we had to take a higher perspective. Obviously, these were views that were influenced by my own experience within USAID and my own prior interactions with ASSIST. But before I took the job I had also talked to Bambi Arellano and Ken Yamashita. And I asked them, "How were you successful? How did you navigate this distinction between being a coordinator versus actually managing the program?" And their view was that as a coordinator you have to look at things from a higher level. You can't let the assistance coordinator's role become a second layer of operational management. And so, I sought very hard to avoid doing that. I think their advice was exactly spot on. But it represented a real change from the way some of my predecessors at ASSIST had operated. They had become, I think unfortunately, an additional layer of senior operational management. And partly as a consequence, when I arrived in Pakistan in 2012 to head the Implementation Modalities Assessment, the level of trust was very low between the USAID Mission and the State Department as represented by SRAP and the ASSIST office. To be blunt, State didn't trust the USAID Mission to implement the USAID program.

Q: Were there other agencies implementing programs there?

WASKIN: There were. Depending on how you counted there were 10-12 different "spigots" of assistance. USAID was only one.

Q: Was part of the function to allocate resources among the agencies?

WASKIN: Absolutely. We were responsible for developing the budget every year, so all budget proposals had to go through ASSIST. We were also responsible for overseeing the work of those other agencies, the same way that we oversaw USAID's work. And these other agencies were not insubstantial. INL (International Narcotics and Law Enforcement) was small relative to USAID but they had a $100 million pipeline. So, this was a problem; this was money they were having trouble spending. And in the case of INL, by the way, while I didn't realize this when I took the job, I found out on my second or third day as assistance coordinator that I would be writing the INL director's performance report. He reported directly to me. Why was that? Well, as it turned out, the DCM three generations ago couldn't stand the ground on which the INL director at the time walked, and apparently (or so I was told) the then-DCM simply said "I won't have anything to do with that guy. The assistance coordinator will have to do it." I inherited that arrangement. So, I got very deeply involved in the work of INL.

Q: Did State itself have programs, for example, for refugees and democracy programs?

WASKIN: They had programs, yeah. The PRM (Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration) coordinator was part of my staff in ASSIST. He reported directly to my deputy. DRL (Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor) also had a representative at post. She was not part of the ASSIST staff, but rather was assigned to the Political Section, but she worked very closely with us. The Department of Justice was there. The Department of Commerce was there. The Army Corps of Engineers was there. The Centers for Disease Control were there. The Department of Agriculture was there. All of these agencies - and I'm probably forgetting some – were in some way providing assistance to Pakistan, and thus were part of the ASSIST portfolio. And of course, the Public Affairs Section operated its own programing that was considered to be part of the civilian assistance effort, such as the Fulbright program and various other scholarship mechanisms. All of that came under our remit as ASSIST. And I had a staff of, initially, ten which later shrank to seven. So, forget about whether we as a group had the skills to manage assistance programs. We simply didn't have enough human beings to try to micromanage the USAID or any of the other agencies. We simply could not do it from our perch in ASSIST. We had to trust them to do it. But again, I tried to be very clear with my ASSIST team about what we were trying to accomplish. We had an important role to play: we needed to make sure that all these programs were in fact being managed well and in accordance with the Ambassador's priorities. And both USAID Mission Directors with whom I worked, first John Groarke and later Jerry Bisson, really got it and I think appreciated the fact that we were there and that we were trying to add value to the civilian assistance effort in ways that did not involve second guessing them and their staffs at every turn. That was not our intent. And I think this approach helped a lot.

That's not to say that there weren't some very significant frictions. Those frictions often revolved around the budget process, and particularly two aspects of that. One was localization, or what we called at the time G2G or host country programming. One of my mandates as assistance coordinator, at least for the first two years I was there, was to make sure that a certain proportion of the budget, as close as possible to 25 percent, was

being implemented through host country or G2G mechanisms. And this was always a source of contention because, for good and valid reasons from their perspective, USAID didn't want to hit this target. And so, they'd submit a budget to us for review, and typically that first draft came in at around 12 percent local programming. And I would simply say to them, "That's not going to work." Remember, when I got to ASSIST, this was still the Obama Administration, and it was the policy of the United States to program foreign assistance through local partners to the greatest extent possible. And it was ASSIST's job to enforce that policy. Sara Walter was the head of the USAID Program Office; she was and remains a dear friend of mine. I actually hired Sara in her first job in USAID in Honduras in 1994. She later became Mission Director in Liberia and is currently director in Barbados, I believe. But Sara would get so frustrated with me, because I'd say, "We cannot accept this. You've got to get that local number to a much higher level." And eventually, we'd settle on around 20 percent. As I told John and Sara, they had to give me a number that I could defend. I had a constituency in Washington to which I was accountable. I couldn't defend 12 percent. I might be able to defend 20 percent.

Another source of serious tension was the issue of scholarships. Not how the USAID money was allocated but how the foreign assistance budget was divided among agencies. A series of assistance coordinators, reflecting the wishes of a series of ambassadors, had decreed that a given, fixed amount within the budget had to be for the Fulbright Scholarship program. and that this amount could never be cut even if and as the overall budget was cut. The Fulbright program, as you probably know, is a real favorite of the State Department and of ambassadors more broadly. For excellent reasons; it's a wonderful program that sends foreign students to the United States for post-secondary education. And my mandate was to defend that number at nearly all costs. In fact, at one point one of my predecessors as assistance coordinator had signed an agreement with the USAID mission and the head of the public affairs section, basically writing in blood that this number would never go down. Well, I did not feel bound by this agreement; I was willing to be somewhat malleable with the number. But I did feel bound by the priorities of Ambassador Olson and later Ambassador Hale. And their priorities were very clear. I might have to adjust the number at some point, but they wanted a robust budget for Fulbright. So, this was always a source of contention between the assistance office and USAID. And while I would try to reach an amicable agreement with USAID, ultimately at some point in the negotiations I'd have to pull out my trump card: this is what the ambassador wants and that's what he's going to get. No further discussion.

Q: Right. Was the Fulbright program used primarily for scholarships to the U.S. for universities?

WASKIN: Yes. And no one objected to Fulbright per se; no one disputed that it was an excellent program and a valid part of the civilian assistance effort. It was just that as the overall budget began to decline, it was very awkward, and arguably unfair, to have one major portion of the portfolio set at a fixed level and therefore immune to any cuts.

Q: Right. And it's a flat amount so the percentage is going to go up, keep going up.

WASKIN: Exactly. By the time I became assistance coordinator the overall civilian assistance budget for Pakistan had declined from its height of almost $2.7 billion in FY 2010 to $788 million in FY 2016, the first year for which I was responsible for developing a budget. That's still a lot of money, of course, but it was a significant reduction from the budget envelope that existed when that supposedly immutable figure for Fulbright was agreed upon. And if there was one piece in the budget that's protected, while everything else is subject to reduction, that's a problem. Happily, Ambassador Hale understood that, and supported my efforts to try to apportion the cuts equitably. He did not insist on any one number for Fulbright; only that its budget be "robust".

Q: Can I ask a coordination question about democracy and governance programming? I would think it is challenging when there are multiple agencies operating in a country, including AID and DRL and Justice doing some kind of programming relating to democracy and governance, rule of law. Were there ever discussions about the best way to divvy up that pie and roles? Or, were there no issues in Pakistan?

WASKIN: This gets back to the larger question we dealt with during the QDDR, that of how to devise a rational, and effective, division of labor among the various U.S. agencies that provide some type of foreign assistance, often with overlapping mandates and overlapping objectives. It was hard to have those conversations in Washington because no one wanted to have them. In Pakistan, no one needed to have those kinds of discussions about who's the best place to do what because the resources were so vast that everyone had plenty to do. Everyone had their lanes, and everyone was fully occupied within those lanes trying to program and spend the resources they had effectively. So, that is not a conversation that would have found fertile ground. The disagreements about Fulbright suggest one area where we might have had a very interesting discussion about the best use of foreign assistance dollars. Is it in dealing immediately with, say, basic education levels and literacy? Or is it to send people who are already literate and quite well educated to the United States to get PhDs? There are arguments in favor of both those approaches, and we could have had a conversation about what's the right balance. We never had that conversation. There was just bureaucratic fighting about protecting a number. Which I think is unfortunate. But frankly, in an environment like Pakistan and certainly Afghanistan, people at post are too busy to have those kinds of conversations.

Q: And State Department over the years has gotten more and more used to implementing programs and they like it, right?

WASKIN: I think that's true. State is definitely much more involved in actually implementing programs than, say, when I arrived in Kinshasa in 1981. But the two largest programs State was running in Pakistan, INL and PRM, didn't tread on USAID's territory in any way. PRM had a clear mandate to assist Afghan refugees in Pakistan. USAID did not have a mandate to do that and did not aspire to obtain such a mandate. Similarly, INL had a mandate to assist Pakistani law enforcement agencies; that was very much outside USAID's lane. Now one could make a case that perhaps USAID is better placed than the

State Department to work with refugee populations. Perhaps. But that is a discussion to be had in Washington, not at post.

Overseeing the PRM program, and more broadly focusing on the refugee issue, were important parts of ASSIST's work. The refugee program was run through a series of grants from PRM to UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), so it was not a huge operational burden for us. But from a policy perspective we had to be very active on the refugee front because during my time in Islamabad it became the avowed policy of the Pakistani government that all Afghan refugees had to return to Afghanistan. Our refugee coordinator was an extremely bright man named Patrick Wingate who spent a great deal of time on those kind of policy issues, liaising with the Pakistani government and with UNHCR to reinforce the U.S. position that any refugee returns had to be safe, dignified, and voluntary and carried out fully in accordance with international law. But we didn't have operational responsibilities.

DRL programs were a different matter. The DRL program operated through a series of grants to local entities. And this caused issues for us in that sometimes the ambassador wanted to know just what local entities DRL was giving these grants to and what they were doing with the money. Not only the ambassador wanted to know, I wanted to know. And sometimes the answer from DRL was, "That's none of your business. We can't tell you." That was not a good answer for Ambassador Hale, believe me. And I had to spend a good deal of time working with the DRL representative in the Political Section to convince the DRL Bureau in Washington that the U.S. Ambassador had a right to know precisely what was being done with assistance resources in the country where he was Chief of Mission. That was a bit of a hard slog, though we ultimately won that argument. But apart from that it wasn't a hard program to manage because we were not involved in day-to-day implementation of those grants.

The closest analog that State had to what USAID does was INL, International Narcotics and Law Enforcement. And as I said, I actually supervised the INL Director. When I first got to Islamabad, I found that mildly amusing, for I had no background at all in international narcotics or law enforcement. To my ultimate sorrow, I treated it largely as an honorific; I took the same stance toward the INL program as I did toward USAID, which was that they are managing the day-to-day operational details, and thus ASSIST doesn't have to, and shouldn't, get involved at that level. In fact, initially I was less involved in INL than I was with USAID, because whereas I knew I could add some value to USAID's work, I didn't think I could do the same for INL. So, while I met with the INL director on a weekly basis, those meetings were very superficial. I didn't lift up the hood to examine what was going on, and I didn't spend time liaising with his staff to get a better understanding of what was happening. I didn't think I needed to.

This was the biggest, and saddest, mistake of my Foreign Service career. In February 2016, after I'd been in the ASSIST job for maybe seven months, the INL director went on leave for about two weeks. And on the first day of his absence, there was a line of people outside my office coming to see me to complain about him. I'm speaking metaphorically but it was almost true. Most, but not all, of them were women, and most of them

complained about his personal behavior: they reported that he had created an abusive workplace, that he tolerated sexual harassment, and on and on. It was horrible. Obviously, I took these concerns seriously and kept the Deputy Chief of Mission, Jonathan Pratt, an extraordinary officer, abreast of the situation. I arranged to meet with the director first thing in the morning on his first day back in the office, because I wanted to get to the bottom of these allegations immediately. I met with him and he was horrified. Of course, I didn't give him the names of the people who had come to me, but I did tell him in general terms that these concerns had arisen and that they were going to be dealt with through the appropriate bureaucratic procedures. I stressed in the strongest possible terms that not only did he need to be aware that this was happening, but that he needed to take immediate steps to begin to correct this situation. That was the morning.

That afternoon, the director came back to my office looking horrified, and I asked, "What's happened?" I assumed it was because of what he and I had had discussed in the morning. It wasn't. He reported to me that two of his staff had been killed in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa that afternoon. Their convoy had been ambushed. They had departed from the consulate in Peshawar in a Pakistani government convoy to make a site visit. One of the victims was a Pakistani driver; the other was a Pakistani professional who'd been with INL for more than a decade. He was a really beloved guy, a real key part of their team. The issue of course, was why the hell were they out there in the first place? Why were they in a thin-skinned vehicle? Who authorized this? Well, there were no good answers to those questions. Apparently, they had decided to take this trip because they feared the INL budget was going to be cut and they felt they'd gotten criticism from one of their American supervisors for not having made a site visit in more than a year. They feared they were going to be fired. Now, the INL director hadn't approved this trip, and I certainly hadn't approved it. It turned out that the approval came from a very junior American officer much lower down in the bureaucracy.

This never should have happened. They never should have been out there. Clearly, the fact that this did happen meant that the necessary internal controls were missing within INL. But these people were in my chain of command. Their deaths were my responsibility. So when I look back at my Foreign Service career, that day, March 1, 2016, was the worst day.

So the question became, what were we going to do about this? One of the first decisions we made – and when I say we, I mean myself, the DCM and the Ambassador – was that the INL director had to go. This was not a sustainable situation. And within a few days he left post, never to return. And since a new INL director couldn't get out to Pakistan for a while, I became the Acting INL Director, charged with beginning to fix this mess. Which I immediately set about doing. And so a great deal of my attention for the next several months was focused on the INL program, looking into what had happened, preparing for the investigation, responding to the questions that were raised by the investigation. But even more importantly, I tried to put in place structures that would prevent this from ever happening again. In particular, and Ambassador Hale and DCM Pratt were very specific about this, there wasn't going to be any travel to the field by anyone from any agency unless it was first approved by senior management. And I also dealt with the allegations

of harassment and of an abusive workplace. Suffice it to say that the INL director was not the only person from that section who left post early.

In the end, we ended up getting a thoroughly outstanding INL director, Katie Stana, who is now Consul General in Barcelona. When she arrived a few months later, she really took charge and we moved that program forward. But this was a horrible situation and it was a lesson to me. You would think after nearly forty years in the government, I would not have had to learn this lesson, but I did. I learned that you need to look under the hood. Don't assume that because things are calm on the surface that the programs are being well managed. The INL program was not well managed, to say the least. And I reproach myself to this day for not having found that out earlier.

Interestingly, from a bureaucratic perspective the biggest issue we had with INL was that they had a pipeline that was approaching $100 million and most of it was in expiring funds. We were going to lose about $75 million if we didn't spend it by the end of Fiscal Year 2017. And Katie and I agreed we don't want to tell the ambassador that we'd lost seventy-five million bucks. Even by the standards of Pakistan that's a lot of money. So, what did we do? Basically, we pushed equipment out the door. We ran a highly accelerated commodity procurement program on behalf of the Pakistani government. That was a tactical decision that Katie and I made. We were determined to spend the money and not return it to the Treasury. Was it sustainable development? No, maybe not. Was it wise? I think it was wiser than just letting the money disappear. And we didn't; we spent all but a few hundred thousand dollars of it.

I want to add one thing about my time with ASSIST. I've described the tensions with USAID over the budget. Those persisted, but in 2017, of course, the world changed dramatically when the Trump Administration took office. As a result, we were dealing with a completely different set of actors in Washington who had a very different world view. And one of the things they were concerned about was why we were giving money to the government of Pakistan. They were also concerned about giving money to international organizations; they were deeply suspicious, for instance, of the United Nations. And they were deeply skeptical about the wisdom of giving money to local organizations. So, at the last budget meeting I ever had with USAID, they presented their usual proposal to program 12 percent or so of the money either on a G2G basis or through local organizations, and I remember telling them, "We can't accept this budget. This is a ridiculously high number. I don't want to see anything more than two percent."

Q: So, you had gotten instructions from State Department?

WASKIN: I had gotten instructions from the State Department, yes. We were told to forget about all these localization targets. They were not interested in that. We were told that we would have to justify why any money was to go through the government of Pakistan, or through any public international organizations such as the UN. So, our budget negotiations with USAID took on a completely different dynamic. I think we settled on six, nine, 10 percent, or thereabouts – again, a figure I thought I could defend, but this time because it was sufficiently small rather than sufficiently large. And after the

meeting, someone from USAID, I don't remember who, came up to me and said, "Do you have any principles? Do you have any moral compass? What is guiding you?" And I replied "What's guiding me is administration policy." But I was aware of the irony and amused by it.

Q: Did the budgets remain more or less the same?

WASKIN: No, it was getting cut every year. I remember talking to people in SRAP about what would be a cruising altitude, as I described it, i.e., a sustainable U.S. assistance level that would respond to Pakistan's needs and be at a level that we could afford and they could absorb. And I thought that level would be $250 to $300 million per year. By Fiscal Year 2020 the actual civilian assistance budget was under $88 million, and while it has recovered somewhat in the intervening years it's never topped $150 million since. As compared to $1.3 billion for USAID alone ten years earlier.

Q: Well, Pakistan has historically gone through dramatic changes in its AID budget.

WASKIN: Indeed it has, and it probably will again. But we can't walk away from Pakistan. We just can't. It's a significant actor and as the cliché goes, it's too big to fail. We can't allow it to fail. We tried walking away from it in the late nineties and that didn't end well for us.

Q: Just another question about the coordinator's office with respect to Washington. You mentioned an office in the State Department – was that also an Afghanistan-Pakistan office equivalent? Parallel to the USAID OAPA office?

WASKIN: Yes. They had the office of the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, or SRAP, which was established in 2009 and initially headed by Ambassador Richard Holbrooke.

Q: And you technically reported to?

WASKIN: I reported to the ambassador in Islamabad. But I was very much aware that SRAP in Washington was part of my constituency.

Q: And so, differences in policy between USAID and the State Department should have been argued out in Washington between OAPA and the SRAP office.

WASKIN: That was the idea, yes.

Q: But presumably sometimes they didn't get worked out and you guys would have to work out—

WASKIN: Right, exactly, we'd have to work out the details on the ground.

Q: Okay. So, you did this for quite some time.

WASKIN: Yeah, I did it for nearly three years. I had intended to take the job for one year, but Ambassador Hale asked me to stay for a second year. And then, as the summer of 2017 was approaching and the entire embassy staff was about to turn over, including the deputy chief of mission and the heads of every section other than Political, the ambassador asked me to stay on again. As he put it, "I need some stability." And so, with my wife's and my family's support I agreed to stay for one more year. The political counselor, Ian McCary, and I were the only members of the country team who remained through that transition.

By the early spring of 2018, however, it was obvious that I needed to come home. In 2012, my wife and I had agreed that I would go to Pakistan for four months; now, almost six years had gone by and I was still in Pakistan. So from a personal perspective I needed to leave. From a professional perspective, I would have happily stayed on but looking back on it now I think I left at the right time. Things were changing; we no longer had a massive assistance program and so the need for a strong assistance coordinator had I think abated somewhat. And this time I vowed to myself, "I really am going to retire from USAID. I've done it before and it didn't work so well, but I think I've done my time now." And I felt very proud of the work that I had done in Pakistan. It was a great culmination to my career. Had my last assignment been Haiti, and had I never come back and worked in Pakistan I would be looking at my career retrospectively through a very different lens. But I'm glad I went to Pakistan, I'm glad I did all three of the jobs I did in Pakistan. They were all tremendously rewarding. It was a great experience.

Retirement (Again) and Move to the Private Sector, 2018

Q: No, that's great. And so, then you retired and then you started work again in the private sector for a consulting firm, so you're still busy.

WASKIN: Still busy. DevTech Systems, Inc., my employer, is helping the agency rewrite its strategy on economic growth and private sector engagement. We're working on inclusive education in Morocco. We are the chief provider of technical assistance to the education sector in USAID's Latin America bureau. We're advising the government of Indonesia on how to move its capital from Jakarta to Nusantara on the island of Borneo. So, we're doing a variety of interesting things that play well to my strengths. It's good stuff. It's perhaps not as dramatic or as intense as what we did in Afghanistan and Pakistan, but it's rewarding, interesting, and challenging. It's great to be an old dog learning new tricks.

Q: Well, you certainly had a fascinating career, going to a lot of very difficult spots. You seemed to specialize in difficult countries. (Laughs) And certainly learned a lot about how to design, implement and to be strategic in those difficult circumstances. Any final wrap up thoughts about a career that was a very meaningful one?

WASKIN: Yes, it was meaningful. Sometimes I look back and say, hardly in jest, "Oh, what a record of success I've had. Look at the countries I've worked in and where they are. Congo, Haiti, Afghanistan, Pakistan, even Honduras—

Q: Don't forget Nicaragua.

WASKIN: Don't forget Nicaragua, thank you. Exactly, another major success. But I think that, if we apply that as the standard, all or almost all of us who work in this business would have to judge ourselves to be failures because these are very difficult environments, and very difficult challenges that USAID has taken on. The nature of USAID's mission is an extraordinarily hard one. In most cases success will not be achieved even within our lifetimes. The changes we are attempting to foster will take generations, decades, even centuries to bear fruit. But as President Obama used to say, the arc of history bends upward. And I think you see that even within the lifetime, or the career, of one man. When I look at places like Madagascar or Karachi, places where I stayed or to which I returned over a long period of time, there have been positive changes, and I think USAID played a role in that.

As I look back on my own career, I was reflecting on your comment that when you interviewed me in the fall of 1986, when I was applying for a direct hire position, when I left the room, someone commented, "Well, there goes a future USAID Administrator." Well, that person was wrong. I didn't make it to that level, did I? So, does that mean I failed? No, I don't think so.

Q: No, you did very well.

WASKIN: I agree. I feel that I did well and that I ended up in a series of rewarding jobs that were the right jobs for me. Other jobs might have been higher ranking, but I probably wouldn't have been as successful or as happy in them. I ended up where I needed to be. And I think that is probably the case for most people in USAID. So, I'm grateful for the experience and grateful for all the people that I've met, all the examples I had to follow, yourself prominently included. It was an extremely rewarding career. I'm very proud of it, and very grateful I had the opportunity to do it.

Q: Well, thank you, Skip. And this was great.

WASKIN: Thank you.

End of interview