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FRANCISCO ZAMORA

*Interviewed by: Mark Tauber
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INTERVIEW

Q: This interview is with Francisco Zamora as part of the AFSA 100th Anniversary series. Francisco, where were you born and raised?

ZAMORA: I was born in Mexico, right across the border from Nogales, Arizona. When I was five years old we moved to the U.S. side.

Q: Were you a US citizen in Mexico at the time or did you become naturalized?

ZAMORA: I became naturalized when I was nineteen.

Q: Your education took place in Nogales, Arizona?

ZAMORA: Yes, right up through high school. Then I went to the University of Arizona in Tucson, about sixty miles north of the border.

Q: During this early part of your education, and then on in college, did you begin to have interest in public health – your area of expertise in USAID?

ZAMORA: Even as a child, I was interested in public health when at movie theaters on the Mexican side the government had community health clips before the movie started. I remember seeing a government health officer explaining how to drain water to avoid mosquito bites. At school I enjoyed any health related topics. Well, eventually I did get my master's degree in public health at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor after completing my bachelor's degree in microbiology, in Tucson. After that, I came back home looking for a health job and the closest I found was a job at a mental health clinic in Nogales, Arizona. That's where I met my wife, Susan who had an interest in world travel and foreign cultures. She had studied Russian at Indiana University and had lived for a few months in Moscow. Susan had a friend whose father was working for USAID

[United States Agency for International Development]. One person talked to another and then Susan said, "Oh, well, you know, with your health degree you could apply to USAID" I did, I applied, and I was unfortunately rejected on my first try.

Q: What year did you first apply?

ZAMORA: About 1978, so I was very downtrodden about that, as you can imagine. I resubmitted, and I was eventually asked to come for an interview in Washington which I passed. Actually, at that time, I was chosen for the International Development Intern (IDI) program. The process took more than a year and by then, Susan and I had gotten married, had a newborn son Andres and on December 28, 1980, I was sworn as a foreign service officer candidate at USAID.

Q: A good moment, because shortly thereafter, with the advent of the Reagan administration, there was a hiring freeze.

ZAMORA: Absolutely, and that was the reason we came in at the end of the year, before January 20, 1981. So we lucked out and joined USAID.

Q: Your wife joined as well?

ZAMORA: No, I joined officially as a direct hire because I have a master's degree in public health, so that made me qualify. Susan and Andres joined as my family members.

Q: Did you join when USAID still had its early program of development internship?

ZAMORA: Yes, and that involved staying in Washington for over a year, going through rotations in a variety of offices. After that, you are assigned overseas.

Q: But you were hired in the area of expertise of public health and health management?

ZAMORA: Yes, that was the expertise, the category is known as my "backstop."

Q: Now, as you enter, and you're doing your internship, did you learn about AFSA in that period?

ZAMORA: You know what? That was very interesting. Our new IDI class had a "welcome to the foreign service" presentation from somebody at AFSA. I joined right away, because it was such a good presentation. The presenter was Tex Harris [Franklyn Allen "Tex" Harris, former American diplomat and a president of AFSA]. Later, when I

worked for and was elected USAID AFSA vice president, I did the presentations myself for about six, or seven years.

Q: Now, at that time, was AFSA already representing USAID?

ZAMORA: Yes and you know, the funny thing is, AFSA was helpful to me in a direct way as soon as I arrived in Washington after being hired. USAID gave us per diem to find living accommodations and get settled, but only for about three months. After that they reduced it to half. We checked things out and learned that the arriving State Department new hires were not getting a per diem cut. As a new union member I contacted AFSA, and explained that our class was upset that we were getting a significant cut in the middle of our internship. Entry level salaries were very low and surviving financially in the Washington area was difficult. AFSA challenged the USAID administration policy, and the rule was changed in our favor. They started giving us per diem, as long as we were in Washington at the same rate that the State Department interns were getting per diem. My membership in AFSA paid off immediately.

Q: This is your first encounter with AFSA. As your career progressed, did you serve as an AFSA representative at foreign posts, or here in Washington before becoming AFSA Vice President for USAID?

ZAMORA: I did not, but I was in contact with the AFSA representatives at every post, where there was one.

Q: During those times, did you have a reason to apply to AFSA for any other kind of representation or advocacy?

ZAMORA: Oh, absolutely. My first assignment was in Bamako, Mali. I was still, officially, an untenured intern. My first performance evaluation came due but my regular supervisor had left for home leave in the States and a replacement supervisor was given the duty of preparing my evaluation. That person worked in a different office at the mission and knew nothing about me. A short term visitor from Washington happened to be at the mission, who also did not know me or my work. Without proof, this person reported to my temporary supervisor that my Malian contacts were not cooperating with me on my health project. Based on her comments, I got a bad evaluation which ultimately affected my tenure eligibility at USAID. Of course, I contacted AFSA and said, "This makes no sense, they don't know me or my work, I've been here a year and yet a one week TDYer negatively influenced my career prospects. Guess what, AFSA went to bat for me with the grievance board and convinced them that this was not a fair way to judge an incoming employee. So the initial evaluation was thrown out, the evaluator received a

letter of reprimand and the following year I was tenured based on an outstanding performance evaluation. AFSA helped me a second time.

Q: AFSA's top representative for USAID is a vice president who sits on the board. As your career moved on, were you in contact with the USAID vice presidents or other board members?

ZAMORA: I was able to contact the AFSA representative and the USAID vice president through cables. Later, emails became the main way of communication.

Q: During this time, how would you rate AFSA's ability to communicate its goals, activities, and member requests? This communication is often called "inreach" to members.

ZAMORA: We received the *Foreign Service Journal* and other written publications. But yes, I was satisfied with the other updates, surveys, and eventually, AFSA's media brief on foreign affairs and federal actions that affected members.

Q: Were the skills and talents you picked up in your work with USAID helpful once you became a USAID vice president at AFSA?

ZAMORA: Well, just the experience of being overseas, of getting to know how a mission operated helped. Seeing some of the hardships that other people and to a certain extent we were experiencing, you really have to be out there to understand what the job and the experience is like.

Q: In the 1990s, there was a reduction in force in USAID. How did AFSA, to the extent you were able to follow it, address that?

ZAMORA: I was in Egypt at the time that happened. I think AFSA did a very good job given the situation. I understand, from just reading the documents and the communications to us, that AFSA was very involved in trying to make this inevitable process as easy as possible. They were intimately involved in the negotiations, what kinds of positions would be reduced, what levels could be maintained. They emphasized to the administration that you could not simply cut every office by a questionable if not arbitrary percentage.

So in the end, they were also very instrumental in keeping the younger interns and other employees because of all of the investment that had been put into them. They were on their way to proceed to higher levels. I thought that was a very good strategy that AFSA

used. Now, this was a terrible time for all employees. The day that the announcement was made, I remember getting into the elevator at work in Cairo as the mission employees were going to their offices, and everybody was quiet because they knew that the information was going to be waiting for them at their desks. Whether they had a job or didn't have a job, was a very sad situation and some people took it very hard.

Q: As we get to the late 90s, there are also efforts to integrate USAID entirely into the State Department. How did you and your colleagues at USAID see that?

ZAMORA: As an AFSA staff employee, the organization trusted me to be in touch with my constituency, and I was conducting employee surveys on the subject. I took account of their views in several articles that I wrote regarding that. My main point was that the U.S. foreign affairs community has three main missions: defense, diplomacy, and development which are mutually supportive but distinct in themselves. Each of these sections has its goals, they have very focused jobs to do. By trying to combine development with diplomacy, you were muddling the picture. We at USAID understood that the first two – defense and diplomacy – were essential and moved faster than we did. Their work was often short-term, dealing with emerging events and managing a rapidly changing international political, economic, and military scene. We at USAID, on the other hand, often work on development issues over the long-term. True, we also address humanitarian crises when immediate relief is needed. But thereafter we manage international relief organizations and contractors who manage the longer-term relief needs we identified. The State Department has neither the skills, staff, history or experience to carry out these complicated long term tasks. There is no need for these implementation actions from their part.

So, my constituency saw the effort to reduce and fold USAID into State as confusing and most likely complicating our distinct mission. Our experience taught us that if you mix development and diplomacy too closely, what happens is that you miss opportunities that you may never get back. In my own experience in health issues, if there is a problem in the country, and diplomacy says, "let's get out of here with all our health programs", that is shooting ourselves in the foot because diseases and other catastrophes don't respect boundaries. There are many more examples.

Q: What led you to run for AFSA vice president for USAID once you were back in Washington, DC in the early 2000s?

ZAMORA: After my fourth overseas country tour, I was assigned to the Washington human resources office in 1999 where I got to see exactly how personnel matters affect the employee. So, two years later, I decided that it would be good to join AFSA to carry

that experience and knowledge with me, in our negotiations with the agency. I had seen the belly of the beast, you might say, and I felt that I would be able to influence personnel management since I could now speak their language. I had seen how some policies can affect employees, and they knew that I knew what was going on.

Q: There is one other major contextual issue I wanted to mention before we discuss your AFSA time, and that's the arrival of Colin Powell as Secretary of State in 2001. He had relative success in restoring some of the cuts to USAID under what was termed the "Development Leadership Initiative." Is that correct? How did that affect the continued development of USAID as an organization as you started as vice president?

ZAMORA: Yes, you mentioned the mid-1990s RIF [Reduction In Force – laying off of government employees] earlier. It was done during the Clinton Administration when both the executive and legislative branches expected a "peace dividend," or reduction in cold war spending with the end of the Soviet Union. Also, the chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee was Jesse Helms who wanted to collapse the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, the U.S. Information Agency, and USAID into the State Department with a resulting rationalization and "right sizing" of these agencies.

The RIF caused terrible problems for USAID. For one, it reduced the number of our USAID foreign service officers from roughly 2,000 to about 1,000. The other thing is it took away a lot of our top leadership, which meant a loss of institutional memory and the expertise that goes with that. But that was a big miscalculation. We needed development of a different sort – helping the former Soviet republics and Eastern bloc republics to handle immediate collapse of economies and the long-term restructuring of their economies, political systems, and health and education programs. As we ramped up to do this, funding for development assistance tripled, but we had far fewer officers to lead and staff these programs. Thank God we had farsighted people like Colin Powell and more progressive senators saying, "We must increase the USAID foreign service staff to adequate levels. It was good news for us.

Unfortunately, as I said, we had been cut off at the knees because our experienced mid-level and above officers, those at the FS-02 (equivalent to U.S. military lieutenant colonel) and FS-01s (equivalent to colonel) had been forcibly retired. Filling those slots was going to become very difficult. Unfortunately, what the agency wanted to do was to hire directly from the private sector instead of promoting those in the bottom –, FS- 04s, 03s, 02s, and 01s – to fill in those slots. AFSA said, "No, that's a terrible workforce strategy" because that would have undermined the career service as it is not allowable under the U.S. Foreign Service Act requirements. It would have been like placing outsiders into military officer ranks (i.e., lieutenants, colonels, captains, majors, generals)

directly from the private sector. AFSA fought that very strongly, and we were able to prevent that from happening. The foreign service system is an up-or-out career system modeled after the US Navy that develops employees over a structured learning path. Anyway, many years later, we're still trying to catch up to the numbers that we had before the RIF. Even now I think we're barely getting there.

Q: This answer that you just gave is a great introduction to your arrival in AFSA, on the AFSA board, as USAID vice president. What I want to ask you is: what finally decided you to run for the position? Were you part of an overall slate of applicants for the position?

ZAMORA: I did not have a lot of competition for the job. USAID foreign service officers thrive more in the field than in Washington. This is easy to understand. We like to work on programs and projects and meet the people in the countries where we work. To be a member of the leadership team in AFSA, you have to be assigned to Washington because it is a full-time job. But I had been overseas for some time and at some point you do have to come back to understand where headquarters is going. I won my first election and was reelected for two additional two-year terms. As I mentioned earlier, my experience in the human resources office gave me unique credentials to be an effective representative for my USAID constituency. I also credit my master's degree in Public Health Management as helping me understand diverse interests to accomplish a common goal.

Q: As you enter AFSA leadership in 2006, there are many issues. One of them you already addressed – the hardship of fulfilling new and extensive missions in Eastern Europe as well as worldwide with a smaller workforce. What were the other issues that faced you as you arrived?

ZAMORA: I noticed right away that there were some inequities between foreign service officers between State and USAID. For example, language training for spouses of State Department officers received cost free language training. We did not. State Department officers received per diem [lodging, meal, and incidental expenses coverage] for a longer period when they were in Washington than USAID counterparts. Similarly, State Department senior foreign service officers were getting locality pay overseas counted toward their retirement calculations based on the Washington locality pay. Our people were not getting that.

Q: With locality pay, as I understand, that's about 20 percent of salaries for Washington service.

ZAMORA: It was about 21%, at that time when I was there, it might be different today. We were able to discuss those issues with USAID leadership and get them changed in our favor. The salaries for interns, by the way, were very low. It was hard to even rent an apartment and have your family in Washington while you were there. We worked on that too and got that changed. Salaries went up a substantial amount, I believe at least 20 percent or more when AFSA got involved. So we did a lot of things to make things equal between agencies, and also to provide living wages to the people who were coming into Washington to join the agency.

Q: Another aspect of workforce management that all foreign affairs agencies in the period of your tenure was filling positions in Iraq and Afghanistan. What happened with USAID when the demand for filling those positions jumped significantly?

ZAMORA: Well, that caused a lot of hardships for the staff. At one point the OIG [Office of Inspector General, United States Department of State] checked into it. They found out that the people who were working in those billets were working up to 80 hours a week – a frenetic pace. Of course, they were burning out and were not being compensated fairly. They were overworked in very dangerous, conflict areas. Their mission was nation-building from bunkers in a compound under very stressful conditions.

I looked at that report, but I also was in constant communications with our people in Iraq and Afghanistan. People were saying, "Look, we're not asking for more money. We're happy to do the work that is needed for our country. But it is just so stressful that we can't operate at this pace. It is causing friction with our families who are separated from us. We're essentially doing military work without the training and ability to move around quickly in force-protected formations. At that point, I wrote an article in the *Foreign Service Journal* called "FSOs Are Not Rambos," which got a good response because it showed that all these people were very patriotic and that they love their job, but they couldn't be treated as a military type of assignee. It's a different role and not being able to go out in the field and help people on a one-on-one basis as we're used to doing in all other USAID mission areas. Those assignments did cause a lot of stress and even post traumatic stress, at that time. It should be noted that more than 50% of the USAID Foreign Service officers that USAID had served in those countries.

Q: The other aspect in filling these positions, as I understand, was the limited appointments that USAID brought in with its budgets. These people were often inexperienced, on their first overseas job, and sometimes conducted activities parallel to or inconsistent with the USAID mission.

ZAMORA: Right, because of the staffing shortage, some counter productive things happened in the agency. USAID had a lot of program money, and as I said, development assistance was tripled, however, an insufficient number of foreign service career officers were available. Because the RIF had occurred, the agency was looking for ways to carry out the work. However, one couldn't just go up to Congress and say, "triple the number of career government Foreign Service officers, and also increase the budget for administration and management five times". That was not politically viable for legislators to do. So, management decided to approach the private sector and pay these administrative costs using program instead of operational funds. A huge number of limited non career employees called FSL (literally foreign service limited) were hired to work in those countries and of course, this distorted the personnel structure. So you have all this program money, a lot of money, but a limited number of Foreign Service career staff. Later, they brought FSLs into Washington on short term limited appointment assignments, which they kept extending beyond the mandated 5 year terms. A huge number of these FSL contractors were paid with USAID program funds since our budget for program activities increased dramatically but our normal administration budget did not. It caused quite a mess that is still not resolved, even to this point, but you know it's optics because yes, Congress can say "no we did not increase the government administrative budget or add a huge permanent federal employees component to the either". In reality, they were using program funds to substitute for administration expenses and we are not hiring a huge number of new federal employees. Another problem was that these FSL "temporary non-career" employees were constantly being extended beyond the 5 year limits. In addition, some were starting to demand overseas assignments which legislatively are only available to career employees. The FSL program was being mismanaged and weakening the career service.

Q: The first few years that you are USAID vice president, you're also establishing yourself on the board within the organization. How was that transition for you? How did it work out within the organization that you kind of carved out your place and worked with the other vice presidents and the president?

ZAMORA: As I explained earlier, being on the board was very collegial. It was so good to meet with people from the other AFSA agencies such as the State Department to understand their experiences and opinions. It brought us all more together, which is an understanding that develops only through a mechanism like AFSA. There might be a State Department person who may be thinking the wrong thing about USAID people and vice versa. When I bring survey results and the discussions from my members at USAID to the board and then publish them in the Foreign Service Journal, there's more understanding, "oh, they're not that bad". You know, these guys are also going through

some of the things that we're going through. AFSA is a good mechanism to do that. Otherwise, I think there would be misunderstandings between the agencies.

Q: What's interesting about that is you're doing what might be called in reach, talking to your members, learning what they need, and bringing it back to the board. Before we go on with your other accomplishments, as the years go by, I do want to address in general the theme of outreach. How did that begin for you in terms of working with allies, either in Congress or outside the department, to accomplish your goals? What were your outreach activities?

ZAMORA: You're probably aware of this, as government employees, we're not allowed to lobby Congress. As for AFSA, that's a different story. I was not actually lobbying but communicating what I was hearing from my members, what they felt was just, what we should do. I was able to go with the AFSA board members, meet with senators and congress people, and be very upfront with them. We would say, "we need to hire more people, or we need more support because many costs are not being covered". We were able to convince them, for example, to establish the DLI [Development Leadership Initiative] program, a followup to the IDI program. We were exempt from rules for doing that because that was our role as a union. We were able to go through Congress quite often, and meet with their staffers to explain things that they could never have known in any other way. We felt we were that communication between the field and those decision-makers.

Q: It's interesting that in your columns as USAID vice president in the Foreign Service Journal, you mentioned by name several of these senators and members of Congress who publicly supported some of the requests that you were making.

ZAMORA: Some proposals would be considered radical now that some legislators were supporting. For example, there were Senators and Congress people who were interested in working on bills to remake USAID into a federal level department so that they report to the President and not to the Secretary of State. Presently, I don't think that there's an understanding that you can have defense, diplomacy, and development as unique organizations that can work with each other but don't need to be controlled by any one of the three. In the end, decisions should have to be at the highest level possible. What was wrong with trying to merge development into diplomacy was that development would not be able to go through to the top level because it would have to go through the Secretary of State. Sometimes, for whatever reason, you need independent voices and not be told, "No, we control diplomacy, and we don't think those development programs are good". It's good if they think that, but they can tell that to somebody higher as the development people would be able to do. Then somebody higher than them could get the big picture.

Just trying to circumvent that information process is harmful to the country I believe. I have to note that even some of our State AFSA colleagues did not agree with me but that was their privilege. Just as State can't comment on the Military, they should not control what the latter does.

Q: Your first term of two years ended in 2008. At that time, the Bush Administration is leaving and the Obama Administration is taking over. How do roles and activities change at AFSA?

ZAMORA: Well, every time we get a new Secretary of State and a new USAID administrator, we have to adjust as they come in with new ideas. For example, it has nothing to do with whether one is Republican or Democrat, as to how they feel about the idea of merging USAID and the State Department. We had Democrats like Hillary Clinton, for example, who were convinced that the State Department should control USAID. Yet others were willing to say no, even Republicans. As AFSA vice president for USAID, I was the one responsible for presenting our case for an independent development agency to new secretaries of state and other high-level management officials. When Secretary Clinton came to USAID on the first day, I was chosen to welcome her before the agency employees in the Ronald Reagan auditorium and my clear message was, "We're very happy to have you here, supporting us. We work fantastically well with the State Department. We like the fact that the State Department concentrates its efforts on diplomacy and we focus on development".

I'm not sure that she appreciated that. From what I could tell, maybe I should never have said that, but it was true. The reason that I felt justified in saying that is that I consulted with and listened to my membership. I reflected on the way they felt on the issue. USAID missions overseas have always worked closely and cordially with ambassadors and their staff. They always came to us when they needed technical information about what was going on in the country. There was always good communication but we never felt controlled by the embassies.

I tell people that in many instances when I was overseas, most ministers in certain countries met with the mission director first to request development aid activities and afterwards for protocol reasons with the Ambassador. The Ambassador was usually involved in something else but many of these other ministers, ministers of health, knew that the mission directors had a budget and program that went directly to USAID Washington instead of the State Department for approval. There was nothing that the embassy and USAID were fighting each other about. We always respected the ambassadors and their roles, and that's what I was trying to communicate to Hillary Clinton at that time.

Q: Although USAID was not technically merged into the State Department, an under secretary position was created to oversee funding for a variety of programs, including much of the budget for USAID. How did you view this office, whose abbreviation FA for Foreign assistance bureau, from your position in AFSA?

ZAMORA: It was a disaster. It caused total confusion at USAID. I wrote an article in the *Foreign Service Journal* that expressed my view entitled, "Who's on First?" This is a reference to a famous comedy routine performed by Abbott and Costello in which the names of baseball players are Who, What, Where, etc. Costello is completely lost as to which player does what.

There was indeed an FA [Foreign Assistance] bureau that was set up at USAID. There was also an F bureau in the State Department and a number of employees from the USAID were moved there. Nobody from State moved to FA so our USAID bureau had no staff or office. There was a mass movement of people over to the State Department, and all the policy and budgeting went to the State Department. We were decapitated, we could not plan our budgets without their approval, we couldn't set the programs the way that we wanted to, and it was total confusion and duplication of roles. They had, for example, the traditional State Department geographical bureaus over there, Africa, East Asia, and so on. Well, they had to create five more for this type of USAID activity that they usurped. At the same time, our regional bureaus at USAID, about six of them, were still there. I guess they were supposed to communicate with each other, which made things very confusing. Nobody knew who was on first, who was in second, who was in charge, and it made everything go much slower than it would have.

Can you imagine the recipient countries? If we didn't have any idea what was going on, they had no idea who to go to either. Should we go to the ambassador or should we go straight to Washington? Should we go to the mission director, to tell them about what our needs are and how we feel about these programs? It was chaos, and I don't know where they are, since I left. Maybe they worked it out by now but it didn't work then.

Another situation where chaos reigned was when an unqualified new USAID administrator decided that the private sector model would work very well at USAID. He was the head of Eli Lilly, a drug company, and his idea was to "manage the budget". That was a term that he used and proclaimed in his office, in the State Department, where he set up office. He rarely showed up at USAID the way he should have. While using his private sector mentality, which was "managed to budget", everybody was confused. What do you mean by "managed to budget"?

First of all, we don't produce widgets, nor do we produce drugs. The idea of "manage to budget" is that you get rid of the fat. You get rid of employees you don't need, and you go out in the private sector and grab some other people, and you fire when you don't need them. Well, that's not a career in the Foreign Service. At USAID, like the military, you start at the bottom, you learn, and you pick up skills. Your success is not based on how many things you sell and the dollars you produce for your company but instead on your performance on the job promoting the goals of your nation. That was a time when there was confusion, as I said, because some of the cuts that were going on and reorganizations made no sense for a public service type of program, especially in development. The inputs in a private sector scheme give you immediate higher profits, that's what you look at, profits. At USAID, the things that you produce are usually long-term like disease prevention, control and eradication, or in agricultural development, it could be transfer of knowledge for increased production, and so on. Many things are not readily visible until you check five years or ten years later and are hard to monetize. The policy of "manage to budget" seeks quick results and monetary gains. You hire from the private sector and fire them the minute you don't need them anymore. It didn't work well during that administrator's tenure, who incidentally was forced to resign for unethical personal behavior.

Q: Also in this period, AFSA did have several member advocacy accomplishments related to pay, benefits for USAID officers to make them commensurate with those of the State Department, etc.. For example, there was the first-time homebuyer's credit and other things like that. How did you accomplish that?

ZAMORA: There were some things that the people didn't know were happening that were giving us a very disadvantaged position. As I explained above regarding discrepancies between USAID and State Department new hires, there were other problems of equity. In regards to the State Department, for example, student loan reimbursement was one big one. For a long time, people who had student loans were allowed to receive payments to pay off their student loans. Whereas at USAID, that program did not exist. The AFSA board understood this, they thought, "You're right, Francisco, this is unfair, we're all foreign service officers". They got behind us, the board worked to change that and pressure USAID to also provide this benefit to employees. This is what works well when you have a united board, State Department people, Foreign Agricultural Service Foreign Commercial Service, and so on. If you work together as a block, you can now get the negotiations in any agency to be more fruitful.

Q: As you move along in your tenure, the AFSA president changes over time. Did that also significantly change the work that you did?

ZAMORA: No, I think we've had excellent presidents. The people who join AFSA administration are doing it mostly because they want to help and do some good for both the employees and the agencies. I never felt that any of the presidents or vice presidents of AFSA had ulterior motives. They, from what I could see worked, overtime to try and improve things both for the agencies and especially for the employees.

Q: Let's turn to the other side of AFSA's work – professionalization of the workforce. That includes things like training, allowing them to dissent in appropriate ways, changing the language requirements, and so on. As you're looking back over your tenure, how did you approach those, what happened?

ZAMORA: In the same way, a lot of it has to do with getting the AFSA board involved and informed, and then sitting down with the agency leadership and explaining the differences between the agencies. It would be beneficial if there were more funds for training than we have right now. For example, in USAID, we had regional technical training that happened regularly. Well, that was one of the first things to go in cases where the budget was coming out short. We actually would approach the leadership and say, "Try to provide more money for programmatic training in agriculture, education, or health, etcetera". Most successful organizations have opportunities for periodic skills training or leadership training to get them up to date. It's easy for them to say, "Well, we don't need to spend all this money on regional training activities like that." We were always pressuring them to improve that because it was for the benefit of the agency as well.

Q: One other professional issue I think that you dealt with was the question of language training. Your constituency needed to be effective overseas. and the department began to consider cost-cutting, giving them less language training,

ZAMORA: They wanted foreign service officers out as fast as possible and a lot of these people were new hires. Since there was a shortage of people, there were many open positions overseas. They felt, "Well we need to send this person over now, instead of in six months". That was driving some of these decisions and I can understand in a way, because there was a RIF, but also a gigantic increase in the program budget. Most of the missions had substantial vacancies and were also competing for whatever staff was available. However, the Foreign Service Act guidelines were clear that foreign language competency was a requirement for tenure and AFSA held strong on that issue.

Q: When you're talking about this, and the lack of sufficient USAID officers, you also mentioned in your columns that the US military was stepping into development activities in place of USAID officers.

ZAMORA: This was so interesting because, in some places, like Central America, we were noticing that the military was bringing in all this assistance. They were bringing in doctors, nurses, equipment and medications. They had no idea how to go about it, and so the funny thing is that they came to us for help, which we were happy to give them. A lot of the times we were saying, "no, you can't build a school up there, nobody's gonna come to it". We noticed that the military was trying to build in places that nobody went to because they didn't know the country. They were putting pop-up clinics in certain places that did not have staff to fill it.

Other times they were providing surplus medications that they were getting from charities in the U.S. that had nothing to do with what was needed in the country. So the military realized, "we shouldn't be doing this but we're pressured to do this", so we were happy to help them but we knew that most of the things that they were doing were not going to work at all. That situation further justified my belief that the military, the State Department, and USAID should operate within the bounds of their expertise and purpose. Every sector has its purpose and its strengths. The military was excellent in their defense and offense role. Diplomacy was something that the State Department was in charge of and we're doing development and assistance. Mixing of roles only complicated matters.

The other thing is that because we at USAID were foreign service officers too, we ended up taking on diplomatic responsibilities that would normally go to a State Department officer. I'll readily admit that we were not trained for these tasks, but given the situation, we couldn't get the programs going without working directly with contacts who would normally be talking to the State Department reps. Of course, we always consulted our State Department colleagues when it was appropriate and did not assume their duties or roles.

Q: I want to go back for a second to one of your other accomplishments, which was to create USAID's own dissent channel. Do you recall any particularly interesting or valuable dissents?

ZAMORA: I had no qualms about putting forward people's dissents because I was protected. I could write an article from information that I had heard before. This is what the people in the field believe, that you shouldn't be doing these types of things, that this is not correct. The beauty of having AFSA, is that you're protected about a lot of these things. People's grievances go through us, and we either write about them or sit down with the administration and tell them what's going on. It's not always us fighting the administration, a lot of the people in it were happy to gather our input. They already

thought, in certain ways, a lot of the people who were in the administration were Foreign Service officers. They knew what we were talking about.

Q: Toward the end of your tenure, there was an issue regarding USAID personnel receiving adequate medical care overseas. Is it something related to equal treatment with State Department and even Defense Department officers?

ZAMORA: You know that most foreign service people and their families are in countries with very poor medical services. We're in Africa, we're in South America, we're in Central America, we're in places where you see hospitals that have trash piles in the middle of their courtyard. You can't depend on getting emergency services right away. Our emphasis was at least having a good way to evacuate people to good facilities when it's needed. We always get the very hard posts that are available, so healthcare was a big issue. We take our families with us. The first week that I was in Mali for my first assignment, my nine month old started bleeding from the nose. We didn't know if it was the nose or the mouth. It was at one in the morning, and of course, we panicked. I remember saying to my wife, "Why did we ever go overseas"? It was just a nosebleed because it was very dry in Mali. We took him to the local regional doctor at the embassy compound. He looked at my son and calmed us down. What if it had been something more serious? So we insist that, especially contractors, have something in their contract that ensures evacuation resources. The plane will come from Europe and take you back to adequate medical care, so that's huge.

Q: You mentioned Tex Harris at the very beginning, talking to him about AFSA. Other important people made huge contributions throughout the history of AFSA. Are there recollections that you have of working with other presidents and board members?

ZAMORA: I would hate to mention some but not all of them, there were so many. But I will mention that Tex was a legend. He was responsible with others for establishing AFSA as a union. He looked at all of us, no matter what agency we were in, as his kids. He was very insightful and intelligent and he knew how to negotiate with the administration and came up with some incredible ideas. He'd make you feel what being a Foreign Service Officer meant. We lost a true leader when he passed. In addition, there were many prominent board members who had distinguished foreign service careers and even hostages during the Iran crisis.

Q: USAID officers sometimes work under the most challenging circumstances. Could you recall some examples of how you had to overcome obstacles to carry out your duties?

ZAMORA: There were many obstacles, some of which were humorous. For example, while I was serving in my first post in Mali, I boarded a plane early one morning. It was a two-propeller plane belonging to Mali airlines and I was supposed to go to Segou on my way to visit a project site. I got on the plane and there were 50 passengers on it. One of the propellers was having a hard time starting and I was thinking that maybe I should get out now, but I stayed and we reached Segou.

Since I had work to do in Segou, I did not continue on to the next stop – Timbuktu. It took off and it crashed on take off the next day. All 50 people, passengers, crew, and pilots died. Word did not immediately reach me of the crash, and I'm waiting for it for the return flight to Bamako. On the radio, I became aware of the tragedy but because I was in the desert I had no way to communicate to the embassy that I was not on that plane. Meanwhile, my wife did get word about the plane crash and thought that I had been on the plane but there was no way to communicate back to Bamako that I was alive.

I decided not to wait and took a bush taxi back. The station wagon had three people in the front, one was almost sitting on the stick shift. I took all three of the second seats because I could pay for them. Behind me, there were three other men sitting with their knees up to their chins sitting on luggage. Every place we went to, it would stop, and the crowds would go around the station wagon to look in. They couldn't understand why I had three seats to myself. My wife eventually found out I was alive but only after many anguished hours of not knowing. So that's the type of thing that happens overseas in some USAID posts.

Q: We've touched on strategic workforce management. We've touched on your advocacy for equal treating for your USAID constituency. Is there something I've overlooked that you want to relate?

ZAMORA: Yes, half of the time I was there, I was counseling people. We had staff people in my office there, Doug Broome a USAID retiree was the full-time AFSA advisor. Doug knew the Foreign Service back and forth, all the rules. Whenever there was a grievance, he took that over. Some people had medical problems, and other people had issues with their supervisors, and they were being mistreated. The reason that I felt comfortable doing that work was that, as I said in the beginning, I worked in a mental health center. I was trained in mental health counseling. We helped a lot of people who risked being financially hurt because the administration or the personnel office did not understand the regulations well enough to work in their favor. Some people were going to lose thousands of dollars in salary, because they were not being correctly given credit for past work experience. Other people who are coming in from the outside, had starting salaries at a barely living wage level. We were able to intervene and say, "No, you have

many years that can be applied to your salary as work experience." Those were people who happily joined AFSA. Actually, more than 90 percent of new hires joined AFSA immediately, especially after hearing what we could do for them.

What makes AFSA special is that we had staff that listen to employees, calm them down, and help them think through some of what they were getting into in life. Most of them were great people, they wanted to do good, and they wanted to thrive in a Foreign Service life. They would have been hurt if they didn't have an advocate like us on their side. That's what I feel most happy and satisfied about, that I was able to see something change for the better for a lot of people during those years I was there.

Q: Because USAID is a relatively small organization, as you help more people, did word-of-mouth help get you elected three times as AFSA vice president for USAID?

ZAMORA: I had people who, when they arrived in Washington on a temporary duty or training or they came to me and said, "You know, I talked to somebody else who said that you could help me with this". They took the time to come and talk to us. Doug Broome was fantastic. This guy was not intimidated by anybody else in the administration or personnel, because he knew what he was talking about. He did a lot of good.

Q: As we approach the end of the interview, in thinking back over your tenure, would you like to make any recommendations or proposals to AFSA? To improve its efficiency or in terms of representation, etc.?

ZAMORA: The top issue for me in terms of the overall management of USAID was personnel. It is an issue I followed closely while AFSA vice president. At one point, I took a chance related to the human resources office. The head of USAID human resources while I was there was always a Foreign Service officer. I started to notice over the six years that I was with AFSA that nothing had changed in that office. There were no structural reviews to see how to better handle recruitment, retention, resolution of problems before they result in grievances, and so on. So, I'm asking myself, "Why is it that HR does not understand what is going on?" They don't seem to be responsive to what my constituents are complaining about as far as more careful transport of household effects so that they are not lost en-route to overseas posts, as well as just oversights in pay, awards, etc., that are not corrected without a long complaint process.

I noticed that almost every two years, they placed a foreign service officer from overseas as director of Human Resources. While it's fine to put USAID foreign service officers in Human Resources, the majority of them had no specific skills in personnel management. Most were in agricultural, program, health, and economic backstops, and often leave after

a single headquarter's tour. The HR office loses continuity and the office remains dysfunctional. Why not put skilled personnel officers in HR for a longer period of time to deal with ongoing problems even if they are civil service instead of foreign service employees? The Human Resources Office director position was a revolving door where organizational improvements were inexistent. But it turns out that these people specialize in program development, resourcing, budgeting, managing overseas activities, and auditing. These are important skills, but they are not human resource skills.

For example, a personnel manager is somebody who needs to have skills in computerized HR processes – access to and protection of sensitive personal data. You need to be able to understand and upgrade computer programs and integrate parts of them with other offices. But USAID human resources was slow in responsiveness. When I worked in that office, the overseas bidding system was performed manually until I proposed that we hire experts to computerize it.

So, I said to the USAID administration, "You know, if you can find a civil service specialist I'm describing, that will reorganize the personnel office, I'm willing to take a chance that they will do a better job than you picking a mission director who comes every two years to take over HR."

There was a little bit of backlash to that idea from the foreign service people. They were saying, "Why are we putting a civil service person to manage the Foreign Service? My idea was, you've tried this over decades, has anything improved? No, let's try something else that's different. So I said to management, " I'm not gonna fight if you decide to recruit a qualified civil service HR person". Unfortunately, I didn't think they did a good job. I still am of the opinion that what you need is somebody who's going to stay there long term, not be changed every two years and who knows how to improve personnel services for Foreign Service officers and civil service. That was a contentious issue but I was willing to be proven wrong.

As I understand it, the model they chose is to place a civil servant as head of HR but the person had to report to a political appointee instead of the USAID Administrator. The political appointee decides whether the HR person has access to the administrator. I think that's the problem. I haven't been able to follow this system closely after I left the AFSA vice presidency, so I can't give a final judgment. But this is a key aspect of improving human resource management and morale which I hope is working better than before.

Q: Before we end, after you concluded your tenure, did you have any other activities with AFSA ad hoc?

ZAMORA: Yes, to a limited extent. It's always valuable to talk with your predecessor, so, once I went overseas again, I communicated with the new vice president for USAID to provide my perspective on things. But otherwise, I remain an AFSA member and interested in general in its continued ability to fulfill its mission.

Q: If I'm not missing anything else, we've completed the interview. Are there any concluding thoughts or remarks you'd like to make before we end?

ZAMORA: One issue which I was not able to improve significantly at USAID was the poor representation in employment of minorities. The most under-represented were Hispanic Americans who never exceeded 5 percent during the three decades I worked at USAID, given that in the U.S. it is now the largest minority at over 15 percent. I participated in many job fairs all over the country and convinced HR to dedicate an office for outreach. I still believe that the situation has not changed much since I left, especially within the foreign service component. This is regrettable since foreign service officers are the image of our country we project to other societies we meet overseas.

Overall, I enjoyed my time at AFSA. I had opportunities to accomplish things for my constituency that were very gratifying. I also value the colleagues I worked with on the board as well as all the staff who ensure that AFSA thrives and evolves to address emerging needs. I think six years was just right for my tenure and that I turned over the position to capable hands. I'm glad to see that we are celebrating 100 years and wish AFSA continued success.

End of interview