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USDA 2012 Agricultural Outlook Forum

February 23

PANEL DISCUSSION BY FORMER SECRETARIES OF AGRICULTURE

(Transcript-Part 2)

SEC. TOM VILSACK: I appreciate the opportunity. So often when we have panels like this, we have one segment in there, just an awful lot of questions that people would love to hear a second go-around. So we appreciate everyone taking time to give us this chance. I'm going to pick on my good friend Senator Johanns for a question that really I think only he can best answer to start off this round.

And that is: Senator, will we have a Farm Bill in 2012?

[Laughter]

Take your time.

[Laughter]

SEC. MIKE JOHANNNS: You know, Secretary Vilsack and I of course were governors together, so we're good enough friends—he warned me that I'd be asked this question first out of the chute. Here's what I would say. On the Senate side it appears to me the Senate will lead the Farm Bill process. That's a little bit different than what we have seen in past years. Typically the Farm Bill was developed on the House side.

If you look across the membership of the Senate Ag Committee, obviously this is not the first rodeo for most of those members. There's probably more experience on the Senate Ag Committee than about any committee out there. Literally everybody there has been a ranking member or chaired it; they've been there for years and years. So I have some degree of optimism that a Farm Bill will be developed on the Senate side. I think we can get a Farm Bill out of the committee and on to the Floor. You can start to see how you put the coalitions together to make that happen, and move it through the Senate.

I think on the House side, number one I'm not familiar with what they do there, but hopefully the working relationship will be close enough with the House that they'll be ready to work with what the Senate has done. But I think it's a little more unpredictable.

The final thing I'd say though, you know at the end of the day we've got to do something. It expires this year. It expires with this year's crop season, and if we don't do something we revert to the 1949 Farm Bill if I remember correctly. So that's not doable. So at the end of the day seems to me we've got to do something. We've either got to extend, which I don't think is the best approach. Or we've got to develop a Farm Bill and get it done.

SEC. TOM VILSACK: A show of hands. How many folks in this room would like to see a Farm Bill in 2012?

[Applause]

Okay. Well, I'd say it's a vast majority there, Senator. You can take that back to your colleagues. You know, one of the issues that has been discussed and mentioned a couple of times in the first session, and a term that's often used by folks is this issue of sustainable agriculture. And I have begun asking people, what do you mean by that? So I'd be curious to hear from the former secretaries if they have, in their view, what ought to mean and what the USDA ought to be doing about creating some kind of standard understanding of "sustainable."

Who wants to take that up initially? Dan, go ahead.

SEC. DAN GLICKMAN: You know, the question reminds me, remember Justice Potter Stewart when the issue of pornography came up in an earlier Supreme Court ruling. He said, "Well, I can't define it but I know it when I see it."

[Laughter]

And that reminds me a little bit of this issue, because some people think that means "organic." Some people think it means no GMO. Some people think it means no fertilizer, no pesticide; or natural fertilizer, natural pesticides. In my judgment, it means just basically a whole farm effort to try to improve the environmental condition of your land, and it's not all or nothing. It's a sensible use of nutrients, and it's a sensible use of additives and fertilizers that can help you grow but at appropriate conservation mix that preserves the long-term nature of the land and reduces the nutrient run-off. It's not all or nothing.

I know former Deputy Secretary Jim Moseley who I think was your deputy secretary. He's got one son who's an organic farmer and one son who's a traditional farmer, and he says, Believe it or not, there's harmony in their household when they eat together." The fact of the matter is, it's not all or nothing. And we need to recognize that it's a good, sensible balance. Farmers are much better stewards of the environment today than they were 50 years ago because they have better information, better tools, better science and everything else. And it should not be an all or nothing approach, in my judgment.

SEC. CLAYTON YEUTTER: Tom, I would agree with that. But this is a term—you're indicating by your question that it's just caused a lot of confusion, not only with agriculture but everywhere. And it seems to me that, although we're never going to get total agreement among groups on what that term means because groups have their own reasons for defining it as they wish, as you're suggesting Secretary Vilsack we ought to really try to come up with something rather sensible.

And I think it applies not only to production agriculture, Dan, but really to resources of all kinds including, say, forestry. The same principles apply there. To me "sustainable" suggests that you ought to apply it to a noun—whether it's a farm or a forest or whatever.

And if you pick that noun, whatever the product or the service or the resource is, it seems to me it ought to mean that we will leave that resource if you will in as good or better shape to future generations than it is when we use it.

SEC. TOM VILSACK: Very good.

SEC. MIKE ESPY: I agree with everything that has been said on the production side. But if I could just offer some insight on the consumption side, if we are going to be providing federal dollars for the production of food and fiber, I think that our federal dollars ought to be used toward the production of those products which are healthier and we can provide more access to the American public.

What am I saying? We are on the precipice of an incredible epidemic, guys. I mean two-thirds of our country are either overweight or obese. If we look at the health consequences of that, there are negative impacts when it comes to health, diabetes and high blood pressure. When you look at the future status of our children, it's not bright. And if we provide federal dollars to produce, I think that we ought to place more of an emphasis on producing foods and offering market signals to farmers which end up on the "my plate" scenario, which you and Michelle Obama have promoted so well.

If it doesn't have anything to do with fruits and vegetables, grains and proteins and dairy, I think, I'm almost about to say that we ought to try to modify our farm support system toward encouraging more support for those four or five elements than anything else.

I'm almost willing to say, as a Mississippian, as somebody who's proud to be a Mississippian but as I look around every day I really don't like what I see. I mean, I see that on every socio-economic index that's good my state tends to be lagging and almost at the bottom. One of those indicators really relates to obesity and the increase in waistlines and body mass index. So I'm almost willing to say –

SEC. TOM VILSACK: Are you talking about Haley Barbour or –

[Laughter]

SEC. MIKE ESPY: You know, there are a lot of people I can pick on because we have a multiplicity of examples. But honestly you know, with technological changes, I really believe that in our SNAP program, Governor Vilsack, we ought to do a bit more. We can't tell people what to buy. And you know, I don't want to sit here today and try to pronounce any Big Brother behavior. But we really ought to do more to emphasize healthier food choices in our SNAP program, even at a bonus level.

You know, if you have your EBT card that gets filled twice per month, the recipient has to understand that when he or she goes to the grocery store that they should be inclined or persuaded to tend more toward healthy food choices that high caloric, low nutrition food choices because there's going to be a financial benefit for them, maybe some bonus if you stock your cart with choices that on the "my plate." And I'm almost willing to say

on the other side that there ought to be some punitive measures as well, meaning if you just have to have the Fritos or the Ho-Hos or whatever, then maybe the EBT card would not compensate those purchases to 100 percent of their value. I think food dollars being scarce, you can't tell them what to buy but they can buy that on their own discretionary dollar and not take agriculture support dollars for that.

I'm almost willing to say that here today.

SEC. TOM VILSACK: You came pretty doggone close the way I heard it. John.

SEC. JOHN BLOCK: We've had a lot of explanations of "sustainability," but to me it just kinds of means something that keeps going and continues to succeed and, you know, it keeps going. But I'd like to do something that would make sure the U.S. Department of Agriculture sustains its strength and power and influence in the halls of government and in the nation. A lot of people aren't aware that more than 70 percent of the budget is food programs, nutrition programs; that's the first thing to keep in mind. The second thing is, more employees in the Department of Agriculture work for the Forest Service, more in the Forest Service than anyplace else in the Department. And then the public thinks the Department of Agriculture is farm programs.

I think we ought to change the name of the Department of Agriculture to encompass everything called the Department of Food, Agriculture and Forestry. And the reason is, we could lose, always reorganizing things—we could lose the food programs. They've tried to take them away from us before. We could lose the Forest Service. Interior would love to have our Forest Service. We need to keep everything we've got to make sure we're strong and powerful, have a position, a cabinet level position. If we lose those, just have farm programs, we're not going to be in the cabinet anymore, okay? Just think about that.

So my advice is, let's sustain the Department of Agriculture. Just changing the name is not going to do everything, but it just might kind of hold the team together.

SEC. TOM VILSACK: Anybody on this side want to add any?

SEC. CLAYTON YEUTTER: We've got four more years for Vilsack?

SEC. TOM VILSACK: There's a lot of different ways I could respond to that but I'm not going to. But John raises an interesting point which I really want to ask all the secretaries, and that is the relationship between USDA and other federal departments. You all had experiences. We saw some of those experiences in the clip. Mike, you talked about Katrina, some of the other federal agencies, and 9/11. I mean, there were just a lot of experiences here. So I'd be curious to get your thoughts about the relationship with the departments and what we could do better to raise the profile of USDA.

Ann, go ahead.

SEC. ANN VENEMAN: Well, I think this is a very important question because oftentimes in disasters we're working with many different agencies in response to a disaster, but one thing I've found about working at USDA was how people, both within and outside the government, did not understand the immense diversity of this department. And so you really work across agencies on so many different issues.

You're working with HUD on housing issues through Rural Development. You're working with HHS on the dietary guidelines for Americans and many of the feeding programs and how they coordinate with other programs. And of course they come into play in a large extent in disasters. You saw in the video the fact that the Forest Service, through their Incident Command Teams, go out to these disasters all over the country and indeed the world.

And we have Commerce and Technology, USTR and Trade, State and foreign assistance, and Feed the Future. Your initiative with Defense and the fuel, Energy Department on research. We touched in USDA virtually every other department of government. I'll never forget walking into the Cabinet Room on these issue-specific meetings and I had the President look at me one time and said, "What does USDA have to do with this issue? You're in every meeting." And it's because of that diversity.

And so I think, I'm a big believer in collaborative efforts, and I think it is very important for the USDA to work with other agencies on this diverse portfolio that USDA has which touches the lives of so many different people, not just in rural America but in urban America through the feeding programs, through all of America through the dietary guidelines. That really has to be focused on, and I think the collaboration among the various departments of government is critical as we go forward.

SEC. MIKE JOHANNIS: One of the things that I look back at during my time as Secretary and really feel like this was such a high point for me personally was, we did Farm Bill listening sessions across the United States. Ended up doing them in all of the states, and I did about 20 myself. I'll never forget, I was at a Farm Bill listening session and somebody just came up to the microphone and started talking about farm policy. I've used this line over and over again: He said, and was such a powerful thing: "You know, Mr. Secretary, good farm policy is more than a Farm Bill," he said. "It's good tax policy, it's good energy policy, it's good trade policy, it's good economic development policy." And he just kept going down through a list of items. Well, if you think about what I just mentioned, the USDA obviously doesn't make tax policy. It doesn't make the EPA regulations or write them I should say. It works with USTR on trade policy, but USTR leads that effort.

I believe that person's premise about what is good farm policy is the right premise. It's a whole host of things, but the responsibility that puts on the Secretary and the Secretary's team and the entire USDA is that we've got to work with these other agencies to make things happen. You can't have a good energy policy for agriculture unless you're

interfacing with that, and you have an administration that is insisting that you be at the table.

So for me as I think about the future of agriculture and where we are headed, that rings so true to me what that farmer said to me, and it rings true that somehow the USDA has to break down silos and make sure that, as Ann pointed out, that, “Yep, we’re at the table, at every single meeting, because we just kind of touch everything when it comes to agriculture.”

SEC. ED SCHAFER: Just to keep this side of the stage going, yeah, I think, people ask me, “What was the most interesting thing you found out when you were at USDA?” I always go back to the surprise we had with the quality of the people that work for USDA. I mean, it was very impressive for me to see the dedication and ability and commitment of the employees there. But what it comes with in a rural agriculture-focused agency is neighborliness and a friendliness that you don’t have in other departments.

I think at USDA you can use that to interact with other people in other agencies. You have developed a strong relationship with your counterpart at the EPA. It’s very impressive; you’re trying to bring the two departments together who are often at odds. But if we can figure out a way to get the career employees interacting with each other so that EPA employees who are sitting in their offices and thinking, “We’ve got to do this,” understand that people at USDA care about the land and the water, about conservation. If you can figure out how to get that neighborliness together for common good and common goals between the departments, I think we can build better relationships.

SEC. TOM VILSACK: Dan, you have a comment?

SEC. DAN GLICKMAN: Well, practically speaking you operate within a government where there are a lot of agencies, and agriculture isn’t always at the top of the heap. When you’re working at OMB, you’re working across government, so there are a couple things here.

Number one, Congress and especially the United States Senate is the great protector of the Department of Agriculture. That relationship is critical to this department being able to forge its relationships with other agencies. And I think Mike Johanns is a great example of having that.

Two, a strong secretary of Agriculture, like you, and you have been great, and I think I was going to say you were the second best secretary of Agriculture in history but I’d say the 8th best in history.

[Laughter]

You know. But a strong secretary of Agriculture who just is there in the face of those people every day saying, “Don’t forget about us.” And we have to be engaged. That

truly is critical in these interagency things. That's the way the world works, the squeaky wheel. And I think you have done an exceptionally good job of engaging this process.

From my own experience—and again every president is different—I'll never forget when President Clinton asked me to be Secretary, and there wasn't much of a discussion. And I said, "Well, do you want to know what I want to do?" And he said something to the effect that, "Well, just remember that you and I are the key voices here when it comes to agriculture." And it does help to have a White House that's got a political sensitivity to these issues because if they do then they won't neglect us.

Look, Clinton had the rural routes and he had agriculture and Rural Development in his blood. Not every president is going to be exactly like that, and so if that's not the case then it takes other voices, the Secretary and alliances the Secretary will make.

It's also interesting, agriculture and rural issues and food issues have hardly been mentioned in this political campaign. You watch these debates, and I don't even hear hardly any discussion. I'm not sure if that's bad, or maybe it's good that they're staying out of this discussion.

[Laughter]

But I do think the answer to the question is largely a practical human leadership question, and I think you fill those shoes very well.

SEC. CLAYTON YEUTTER: Just a point to what Dan just said. To me there are two basic functions here. One is kind of a coordinating, cooperating function between and among agencies where you really want USDA to work effectively with everybody else around town where you have an issue where that's important. Tom, when I was Secretary Jack Parnell who was my deputy at the time spent an immense amount of time working with EPA and FDA because we had some major food safety problems then. And the three entities had to work very closely together, and they were able to do that.

But then there's a policy-making function that's a little bit different because as Dan indicates that's an interagency kind of function wherever it's a really major policy issue. I mean even if it's an agriculture issue, the Secretary of Agriculture isn't going to make the final decision as the White House after an interagency deliberative process. I think a lot of folks around the country don't realize that process is in place. They assume the Secretary of Agriculture makes the decisions on ag policy or that the U.S. Trade Representative makes them on trade policy.

What happens is, the White House makes sure that all the entities that have an interest in that subject are sitting around the table and that the issue gets fully deliberated, and then at the end of the process you get an interagency decision on that policy.

I think it's really important that people like you folks sitting here understand that process.

SEC. TOM VILSACK: John?

SEC. JOHN BLOCK: I think that was a very good point, Clayton, that you just made. My take on this is that a Secretary of Agriculture, especially when you come in, first of all you need to know your constituency: rural America, agriculture, food, whatever. You need to know what it is. Then you have to have in your own mind what you need to get done. And it may be a little naïve I'm sure when I came in the first cabinet meeting wasn't on the agenda; we talked about all these things on the agenda. Then President Reagan said, "Anybody else have anything else they'd like to bring up?" I just raised my hand. I thought, "We'll just get this done." I said, "Mr. President, I hope you can lift the grain embargo right away because farmers are suffering a lot." And I almost had my head taken off by two or three cabinet members -- I mean, Secretary of Defense Cap Weinberger and one or two others. So I had to go back to the drawing board and find out who my friends were in the cabinet, in the White House.

[Laughter]

And it took a couple weeks, but they came to me, and I went to them, and then we worked out a strategy because "we got to get this done, the President promised to lift the grain embargo." Well, then he got shot, and that delayed things a little while longer.

[Laughter]

But we were still working behind the scenes all the time.

[Laughter]

And so, when he got back, and it was a couple months, and all the farm press was saying, "We'll never get it done because we got to punish the Soviet Union," but Ronald Reagan called us into his office. We had a cabinet meeting, and he said, "I'm going to lift the grain embargo today." I just say, you've got to know what you want to do and then you got to fight for it. You find out who your friends are. That doesn't mean the others are your enemies; it just means that you've got to protect your turf. And --

SEC. TOM VILSACK: Good point.

SEC. JOHN BLOCK: That's my words. My thoughts.

SEC. TOM VILSACK: Mike, do you have anything else to add?

SEC. MIKE ESPY: It's really not much more I can add to what has already been said before. You realize from day one when you're Secretary that you cannot operate in a vacuum. When you go to work, you have to obviously please the President, you have to also please these senators that Dan found out just how powerful they are. With me, it was Robert Byrd. I tried to close down a county office in West Virginia.

[Laughter]

And I never will forget it. We had done a survey of all the offices in the country which had seen fewer than 10 farmers a year. We did a survey, it was precise, it was accurate, I could defend it, and just to show that I was promoting self-sacrifice I closed some in Mississippi. There was an article in the *Washington Post* about a certain office in West Virginia which had not seen one farmer all year. And so in my authority, I decided to schedule it for closure. And I got a call from the chairman of Appropriations of the Senate.

[Laughter]

And he called me up to his office, and I never will forget, there was this long, long table. And he's at one end of it, and he had a court reporter, a stenographer sitting there. And I'm wondering, why is this necessary? And so I took my seat sheepishly on the other side of the table, and he told me that he had read the *Washington Post* article and, was it true that I had indeed decided to close a certain office in West Virginia? I started going through the data, the statistics, the research we'd done at a great cost, and I tried to tell him that there are 4,600 USDA offices in the country with only 4200 counties, and that we were going to collocate, to close some and move them, create a new culture of efficiency, and so forth. And he said," Look, what you didn't know is that the director of that office is my cousin."

[Laughter]

I'm not sure that office is still open, but I imagine it is.

[Laughter]

SEC. TOM VILSACK: Mike, I'm really sorry that I asked you that question because –

[Laughter]

I got a feeling that I'm going to hear from 131 members of Congress who have cousins running offices all over the country. You know, I would say, and I want to give these secretaries an opportunity to comment on a lot of questions.

But I would say one of the positive aspects of this administration is the establishment of a Rural Council. The President by executive order has asked all his cabinet level officials who deal with rural issues to meet together. And he's asked me to chair this counsel, and to try to integrate and better coordinate our activities. And that I think helps to build the relationships and friendship and supports for the agency. But make no mistake about it, as several of the secretaries have mentioned there is always a desire to take a little bit of this or a little bit of that from USDA because we are indeed always at the table.

One question I found interesting from the audience, folks are interested to know, I guess maybe I'm really interested in knowing this too: "What do you once you stopped being the Secretary of Agriculture?"

[Laughter]

I know what Mike Johanns has done, and that's not of particular interest to me. But, Ed, what are you doing?

ED SCHAFER: My first effort when I left office was to catch up on the honey-do list at home, which I neglected after 20 years of public service. So that was the big thing. But the opportunities I think that we all have following out of USDA really give a chance to continue to interact in public policy generation, in agriculture, in land values, of how they work. We travel all over the world and speak at gatherings like this about generation of policy and food and nutrition. Those are opportunities that you get, not because I know anything about it. It's because I have a title, you know, of being a former member of USDA.

So I think it really gives us a chance to continue on with the work that I learned, the effort that was in place at USDA. And I continue to stay engaged in the effort, not in the office, but continuing on with the important issues that generate out of USDA for nutrition and production values across the world.

SEC. MIKE JOHANNS: I was sharing this story with the Secretary last night. This is what it's like when you leave. Our two children were in Washington. They both live back in Lincoln. And it was a very hot summer day here in Washington, you know like you get, and so we were out on the Mall going to this thing, and I was in shorts and a polo shirt and tennis shoes. And we were walking right by the USDA, and I said, "You guys have never seen my portrait. Why don't we go on in and I'll show you the portrait?" They were very excited, so we go to the front door. Of course there's security at the front door. And I go to the front door and I said to the security guard, "These are my two children; my portrait is on the patio, would you mind if I took them in and showed them?" And the security guy looked at me and said, "Do you have a government issued ID?"

[Laughter]

So that's kind of what you do when you leave USDA.

[Laughter]

Here's what I'll tell you. You know what I ended up doing, and I actually could not be prouder to do it. I've done a lot of different things in my life, but I have the good fortune of representing and have represented truly some of the best, most practical, decent, honorable people on the face of the earth, and that's Nebraskans. Yeah -- there are some Nebraskans up there.

[Applause]

You know, I love what I'm doing. I'm not saying that I'm one of those people that will stay forever, but I love what I'm doing, and I think this is the time where our nation needs people—we were talking about this last night—who can just kind of sit down and try to solve some problems, you know, and forget about what party stripe they have. And I hope I can be a part of that; we try to be a part of it. And so I'm very happy to be where I'm at.

And then I'll just say finally, having said that, the time I had at the USDA working with the industry and the great people at USDA I will always remember with just great fondness. It's hard to describe how good the people are at USDA. They are really good, committed; they're talented, they're smart. I think of people who could have left years ago and made so much more money if that was in their heart, but it's not. They wanted to do what they're doing, and they were just so much fun to work with. And to all of you, thank you for giving me the opportunity to work with you for awhile.

[Applause]

SEC. TOM VILSACK: That's very nice. Ann?

SEC. ANN VENEMAN: Let me just pick up on that because I too really appreciated the many years I had at USDA. You know, I had almost 11 years in total at USDA. I think Clayton and I were the two secretaries who actually have worked in the South Building. I started my career at USDA in the Foreign Agricultural Services many of you know, and had the privilege of eventually moving up, after working in the trade area for so many years, to deputy secretary, and then going to California. And I spent four years in the California Department of Food and Agriculture as Secretary before I came back.

So it's been a great experience to work in so many different positions in agriculture over the years. As most of you know, I then went to the United Nations and I spent five years running the United Nations Children's Fund which many people have asked me the question, "How does that really relate to your agriculture background?" But in so many ways my entire career really built upon that position—whether it was in Nutrition and Childhood Nutrition issues which were a considerable overlap, or poverty alleviation in the developing world where agriculture is obviously critical to livelihoods, women being 70 percent of smallholder farmers in the developing world. But more than that, having served in so many different positions in government it was so helpful because so much of what we were doing was advising governments in how to move forward, in how to have the right policies. And they really respected somebody who had come from the most powerful country in the world who'd been in the cabinet.

And so I found all of my background extremely helpful in preparing me to work basically at the international level, having worked at the national level. So it was a great privilege

to have a public service career that really spanned both state, federal, and international areas.

I'm now doing a number of things, including serving both on some for-profit and non-profit boards; serving on some commissions, two of which are with Dan Glickman. And there's plenty to do once you leave. (laughs)

SEC. TOM VILSACK: Well, Dan, you heard these folks who left the office and went into public service and into helping global food issues with children. You went to Hollywood? Is that –

[Laughter]

SEC. DAN GLICKMAN: You know, it was because of the experience in farming in rural America that Jack Valenti asked me to be head of the Motion Picture Association.

[Laughter]

And they said, “Well, how does that qualify you?” I said, “We used to grow popcorn, and now we sell it.” It was about the only thing I could think about. It was an interesting experience.

I used to tell people, it's funny how your profile – I thought being Secretary of Agriculture was the greatest job I'd ever had in my life. But you get into this movie world and your profile goes to the roof. I think people used to think that Angelina Jolie came home with me every night because they used to follow me around like crazy in this new job.

But the truth of the matter is, there was no better job I've ever had than being at USDA. And I said before a little bit about the bipartisanship that this agency has had over the years. And so when I left, and I'm now at the Aspen Institute where I run their congressional programs. I'm at the Bipartisan Policy Center where my whole life is trying to promote civility and bipartisanship in government. And can't we just all get along and get this country to work again, rather than killing each other all the time?

[Applause]

And there's no better advocate of that than the current Secretary.

And I'm also still involved with two agriculture things. I mentioned Agree, which is a multi-foundation effort to promote long-term food and agriculture solutions. Then I've worked with Catherine Bertini on something called the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, and a Global Agriculture and Hunger Initiative which has been very much involved, as Ann said, with the Feed the Future Initiative. And that effort is still being sustained.

So to have the enriched great ability to do a lot of different things.

My grandparents were immigrants from Europe, and farming was not part of my family history. My parents were in no business related to it, but I certainly think I'm a pretty good legacy of that effort to come to this country and make good.

SEC. TOM VILSACK: Mike?

SEC. MIKE ESPY: Well, right now, I'm really practicing law. I started a boutique law firm which is connected to some of the largest plaintiff's law firms in the country. So we partnered together on cases, and some we're prosecuting right now. I won't name them, but they are cases of great consequence with some tremendous upsides. So that's about 60 percent of what I'm doing, just practicing law.

Now, but the 40 percent of it is agriculture. I've done two things since my departure 16 years ago. The first is, I was the senior counsel to a very large Food Aid organization, and I won't name them, but that was a principal recipient of commodities from the World Food program. And this particular organization had a history of feeding 1 million children per day, primarily in Africa and in some other third world countries. So I started with them as senior counsel, and I made a lot of trips to Rome to discuss the food authorization situation. But I ended up being the person to go to, nations primarily in Pacific Rim countries with surpluses in their storehouses, primarily rice and other grains. And my job would be to try to persuade them to commit some of the percentages of their surpluses to some of these nutrition deficient countries that we represented.

And you really find out, Dan, that when you leave Washington and go to some of these countries, primarily in the third world, you are a big deal. These countries are so utterly dependent on agriculture for their survival of their country, they really listen to you and accept your insights and it's really a big deal for them. So I had a great opportunity for 10 years to go to these rice surplus countries and try to persuade them to remit part of their commodities to the third world countries we represented. And I really enjoyed that.

The other thing I'm doing is with Secretary Block, and he's chairman of a board on which I'm privileged to serve. We work on agriculture development in third world countries, but we select a country in need and amass resources from the United States. If it's greater seed varieties, more plentiful seeds with greater robust yields; we'll go to equipment manufacturers if that's the problem and try to recruit the equipment manufacturers to come to the countries we represent.

We have a Farmer-to-Farmer program to make sure we can train small stakeholders in countries in Africa to increase their yields with information we provide primarily in technology. And we have a lot to say about post-harvest maintenance. A lot of these countries are infrastructure-deficient; they do not have the roads and the bridges, the infrastructure. So when they have their crop yields, oftentimes these crops will rot in whatever small warehouse containers they have on the farm. So we are advocates of a system of communal warehousing where we can hopefully get the crops to some central

storage facility and provide money for that. We also have a credit component which is such an essential part of these small stakeholder operations. The last thing we do is to make sure we have a brokered deal operation, because oftentimes there is no connection when the crops are harvested and how and when they are sold at the right time to create the optimal price for their crops. So I'm proud to work with them on their board, and I think we are making remarkable progress.

SEC. CLAYTON YEUTTER: Tom, there's a lot of things we can all do after we leave this job. The question is, whether or not we can get paid for it.

[Laughter]

Fortunately, most of us I think discovered some way of getting paid. But Mike did it by running for office. The rest of us have to do it in the private sector. But I've been around here longer, I guess, than anybody at this podium. I think I first came here before you were born, Tom. But not quite – go all the way back to 1970 when as Ann indicated I started as administrator of what was then called the Consumer and Marketing Service over in the South Building. Then I had a couple of subcabinet positions under President Nixon and President Ford, went off to Chicago to be head of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange or which Dan Glickman is now one of the directors. Ann came in as back to government under President Reagan as U.S. Trade Representative and then served under President Bush as Secretary of Agriculture, and then went on to do a bunch of other things including serving a lot of corporate boards and practicing law. That's given me the privilege of staying involved in trade policy and agricultural policy ever since I left USDA.

But enough on that. The other point I wanted to make while I have the podium here, Secretary Vilsack, is that all of us have learned that we can't take ourselves too seriously when we're secretaries of Agriculture. We have to kind of downplay our own self-importance, and as our wives would tell us: Maintain a little humility in life. I want to tell you a story that reflects this, and this is just for you, Mr. Secretary.

[Laughter]

Because you need humility. This is one I've never told publicly before, but I think you will all enjoy it. While I was secretary of Agriculture we were living in McLane, and on Sunday after church one Sunday we stopped and I was buying doughnuts in a little bakery in McLane. And as I was doing that I noticed there was an attractive young lady who was watching me, and I thought that was rather interesting. I wondered what she was up to. Finally, Mr. Secretary, she got up enough nerve to come up and introduce herself to me, and she said, "Aren't you Secretary Cheney?"

[Laughter]

That's the first punch line. There's one more. So I decided I should let her down kind of easily because she had miscalculated a bit. And I said, "Well, you know Secretary

Cheney and I kind of look alike; neither of us has a lot of hair on our heads and some people do sometimes mix us up. We're both members of the cabinet." And I said, "As you know he is Secretary of Defense and I'm Clayton Yeutter and I'm secretary of Agriculture." And her chin dropped, and her eyes bugged out. And she said, "Oh, my God, you're my boss."

[Laughter]

SEC. ANN VENEMAN: That's a great story.

SEC. TOM VILSACK: Good lesson.

SEC. CLAYTON YEUTTER: She was like the third nutrition service.

SEC. TOM VILSACK: Did she still stay in your employ?

SEC. JOHN BLOCK: I can't top that. I can't even come close, and I'm not even going to try. But I wanted to just say, I came to Washington, DC, in 1981, President Ronald Reagan asked me to be his Secretary of Agriculture; always before that a farmer, still today a farmer. I was state director of Agriculture in Illinois and then I came out here and worked for President Reagan. And I will say that throughout my time at USDA there's not a finer bunch of people to work with, to have working for you. The career employees are the best in the world. I really appreciate that, and I appreciated it then and I never forget it.

After I served not quite as long as Dan Glickman did, because he brought it to my attention—he served longer than I did as secretary. But was around there for almost 6 years or something like that. And then I ran a Food Trade Association, Food Wholesalers, still with the farm in Illinois, going back to the farm as I was there last week. I go back there every month almost. I didn't go in January; it's too cold.

[Laughter]

Except this year it wasn't very cold. But that's the connection, and ran a food association. I'm over at a law firm, and I do some work and help them out at Olson, Frank and Weidiff (sp). We specialize in food and agriculture, and I think it makes a lot of sense. Anyway, I've kept my ties to agriculture and the industry and even the Department of Agriculture because that's my life and that's where my roots are. I have a radio show that I do, and we've got some farm broadcasters here, and I've been doing that for more than 20 years. Every week a radio show, three minutes, 500 stations in 30 states.

[Laughter]

And I tell them whatever I want to tell them, and I'm going to pass on a lot of this stuff you guys are saying here today.

[Laughter]

Anyway, no, it's been a great, great time, and I love the Department of Agriculture. And they pay me to do it. It's not a lot, but I get my word out, and that's worth more than anything else because I think I have at least some answers. Cut the debt. That's one of them.

SEC. TOM VILSACK: Clayton, I want to tell you that I learned that lesson of humility before I got here, and Mike Johanns can maybe appreciate this, Ed Schafer can as well. I was a two-term governor of Iowa, and I left the governorship and shortly after I was sitting in the Denver Airport for a flight back to Des Moines, and a young man came up to me, looked at me and finally said, "Aren't you somebody?"

[Laughter]

And I said, "Not really."

[Laughter]

He said, "I know I've seen you before." He said, "Are you in broadcasting?" I said, "No, sir, I'm not." He said, "I'm sorry, I'm really sorry about this." So we walked away. About two minutes later he comes back, bright big smile on his face, and he said, "I am so sorry. I apologize for this. I now know where I saw you." And of course I thought he was going to say, You're the former governor. He said, "You were on Dancing with the Stars."

[Laughter]

If you folks will go on You Tube you'll see me dancing with Michele Obama, and you will know I have never been on Dancing With the Stars.

[Laughter]

So I got that lesson very early in the process.

We just have a minute or two left, and just give everyone an opportunity for any final comments. I guess I'd frame it this way. If you were speaking to a young farmer today, what would the message be that you'd convey to that young farmer? Ed.

SEC. ED SCHAFER: First of all, thanks again for the opportunity to be here. It's just been a great time, and I for one really appreciate it. I know we all have, so that's great.

I think two things. One thing we didn't discuss here in the relationship with USDA after we leave is, I mentioned I get invited to participate in a lot of things, not because of me but because of my title. But I want to tell you, USDA is always there for me. I'm

placing calls in to people saying, What about this, that? So I still get to ride the wave of USDA even though we're gone, so I want to thank everybody for that as well.

I think the biggest message in agriculture today is opportunity. We have 400 career paths you can track that go into agriculture today because of the technology increases and the global reach that the importance of agriculture is bringing. And I just am thrilled about how many, many young people today are focusing on agriculture who didn't before, because they are finding ways to participate in the agriculture arena that weren't traditionally involved. I think as that moves we'll see a tremendous opportunity for young folks today to find their way in agriculture and the importance that brings to the **global marketplace**.

SEC. TOM VILSACK: Great. Senator?

SEC. MIKE JOHNANNS: I had a young FFA member at a Farm Bill Forum said to me, "If we can somehow bring profitability back to what we do in agriculture, young people will stay home." And I thought a lot about that. There is some profitability in agriculture; obviously prices have been strong across a lot of commodities. But if there was one piece of advice I'd give that young farmer it would be: Farming today is really about risk management. These values are remarkable. I mean, they really are. If you started farming five years ago and bought land, you're probably feeling like you're doing very well, but those of us who have been around long enough to know what goes up does come down. And I'd just be very careful about risk management.

Then in that vein and in a whole host of other areas, I'd say to that young person, Use the resources of the USDA. There is so much out there, and there are so many experts putting great information out on so many different topics that are relevant to what that young farmer is doing. I just couldn't emphasize enough: Don't try to reinvent the wheel out there; use the resources of the USDA.

SEC. TOM VILSACK: Ann.

SEC. ANN VENEMAN: As I look at all of our young people in the front row, I wonder what you would have to say about the future of agriculture. I guess if I were to give any advice I'd say to look at the diversity of opportunity within this field, be it production agriculture or research around issues of the future; or technology that helps create new and different crops, whether it's drought-resistance in a time when we're getting more and more droughts around the world; or technology to improve nutrients in different crops; or water saving technologies, be they irrigation technologies or things that help to preserve water quality; or food safety technologies-- and I think agriculture development in the developing world, the issues go on and on. So I believe as I look at you in the front row that the opportunities for you who are looking at the area of food and agriculture and sustainability and how it links to the environment, tremendous opportunities for the future, and you all are the future.

SEC. TOM VILSACK: Good message. Dan.

SEC. DAN GLICKMAN: Again, using the movie analogy, some of you remember the movie *The Graduate* when young Dustin Hoffman was given this message of the industry that he ought to go in, *Plastics*. Some of you, not all you probably saw that movie, so go back and buy the DVD. Well, I kind of think the industry of our times is agriculture. And you think about it. I'm very jealous of you. When I was Secretary we had hog prices at 15 cents a pound; and wheat got as low as below \$2. And I remember being a member of the House Agriculture Committee, the 1977 Farm Bill, and the trick was to raise the target price to \$3 a bushel. And the whole issue of that debate was the bleakness of agriculture, and we had to have the government in there supporting it; we couldn't survive. And frankly many people couldn't survive without that effort.

Those times have changed. Our programs haven't changed as fast as the times have changed. We are still largely operating in the history of the 1930s programs, they still kind of dominate our thinking. But the times are changing, and I really do believe with population growth, income growth, that we are in a very bullish time. This is an exciting time to look at agriculture as a business opportunity. And as Ann said, there are many facets of it. And it's not without its ups and downs. By and large it's up. By and large we are no longer in the era we were in the '30s, '40s, '50s and '60s. And so new people can enter this business smartly with good judgment and with education experience, but knowing that you're in a field that is likely to be hot for a very long time.

SEC. TOM VILSACK: Good deal.

SEC. MIKE ESPY: I agree with that. I speak to schools all the time, and I tell them, really except for the Defense Department for obvious reasons there really is no higher calling in government that are participated in an agency which has the primary responsibility of providing food, fuel and fiber to sustain a nation. So when you're looking for career opportunities, I mean this ranks very high on the list.

On the production side, prices right now are pretty good. There's a forecast that they will likely continue that way. We still have credit programs which will assist these young people in beginning their opportunity to provide a stake in agriculture. And there's a market, because we know the world population is increasing by leaps and bounds, and by 2050 we're going to have a 38 percent increase in global population, and they all have to eat. So you're always going to have a market to sell into.

The trick is knowing that there's a change in environment and making sure that you can have your own niche in that changing environment. You know, American consumers are more demanding now than they ever have been before. They want to know where the food comes from. They really want to know who grew it. They want to know the caloric intake and the ingredients and how much of the taxpayer dollars went into elements of growth for that particular food they're eating. So I think there's a lot we have to do, but there's an incredible future. And that's what I tell the students that I talk to.

SEC. CLAYTON YEUTTER: Three words: Risk, Education and Technology. Risk, getting back to what Sec. Johanns had to say and to add a little caution to all that euphoria you've been hearing here. I'm an eternal optimist, but I also know that the conventional wisdom is usually wrong. So remember that. In addition, as Secretary Butts years ago put it, "The antidote to high prices is high prices. The antidote to low prices is low prices." Meaning as secretary Johanns put it, What goes up, typically sometime comes down." The question is when. So have a little flexibility in your operations.

As to education and technology, you must have it to have a solid education to do anything worthwhile in agriculture in the future, and you better be able to handle sophisticated technology because agriculture is infinitely more sophisticated than it was when Jack Block and I began farming. So be prepared to handle that.

SEC. JOHN BLOCK: Clayton, that was, I'd second everything you just said. I have an enormous amount of optimism about the future of agriculture and the food industry in its broadest sense. There's great opportunity because people are going to be eating, there are more people in the world, the demand is going to be strong. Frankly, we need to and we will let the markets tell us what to do. The markets will tell us to grow corn or wheat or whatever we need. Let the markets work. We're going to have a great future.

But I'm a little bit concerned about how wild the land prices are today and how high they are. You got to be a little cautious in this industry, especially because I remember only too well how exciting, and everything was booming in the late '70s. By the time I came to town, working for Ronald Reagan, farmland prices dropped in half. And banks in Iowa were going broke, country banks. Those times were not great. We worked our way through it. Listen, we're well beyond that now. But you have to have enough sustainability because there is a great future. But you know just use your own good judgment. And then we can all take advantage of it.

SEC. TOM VILSACK: Well, I really appreciate the opportunity to visit with these great public servants, dedicated folks to agriculture, and I'd appreciate it if you all would join with me in thanking the members of this panel. It's been a great discussion.

[Applause]