

History

of the

U. S. Food and Drug Administration

Interviewee: Alexander Grant

Interviewer: Suzanne White Junod, Ph.D.
Robert A. Tucker

Date: January 15, 1997

Place: Rockville, MD

DEED OF GIFT

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Alexander Grant

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INTRODUCTION

This is a transcript of a taped oral history interview, one of a series conducted by the Food and Drug Administration's History Office. The transcript is prepared following the *Chicago Manual of Style* (references to names and terms are capitalized, or not, accordingly.)

The interviews are with persons, whose recollections may serve to augment the written record. It is hoped that these narratives of things past will serve as one source, along with written and pictorial source materials, for present and future researchers. The tapes and transcripts are a part of the collection of the National Library of Medicine.



CASSETTE NUMBER(S) 1 & 2

GENERAL TOPIC OF INTERVIEW: History of the Food & Drug Administration

DATE: January 15, 1997 PLACE: Rockville, MD LENGTH: 80 Minutes

INTERVIEWEE

INTERVIEWER

NAME: Alexander Grant NAME: Suzanne White Junod, Ph.D., and

ADDRESS: [REDACTED] ADDRESS: Robert A. Tucker

Reston, VA 22091

Rockville, MD

FDA SERVICE DATES: FROM: October, 1972 TO: January, 1997

TITLE: Associate Commissioner, Office of Consumer Affairs
(Last FDA position)

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RT: This is another in the series of interviews in the FDA oral history program. Today we are interviewing Mr. Alexander Grant, Associate Commissioner, Office of Consumer Affairs in the Office of the Commissioner, and more specifically in the Office of the Deputy Commissioner for External Affairs. The interview is taking place in Mr. Grant's office in the Parklawn Building in Rockville, Maryland. The date is January 15, 1997. Present are Mr. Charles Gaylord, Acting Deputy Associate Commissioner, and Carol Lewis, Staff Assistant. Conducting the interview are Dr. Suzanne White Junod and Robert Tucker.

Mr. Grant, we like to begin these interviews with a brief autobiography. Would you please start with your early years, where you were born, raised, educated, and significant work experiences you had prior to coming to the FDA.

AG: I was born in Newark, New Jersey. My mother moved to New York when I was an infant, and I attended high school there, with the exception of my senior year. I lettered in two sports in high school, basketball and baseball. I received a basketball scholarship to Bloomfield College, where I played basketball and baseball and majored in English. I was the sports editor of the school newspaper, and in my senior year vice president of the student association.

RT: Let's see. What was your full curriculum?

AG: I majored in English and minored in chemistry. I went to graduate school with the hopes of getting a master's in English.

SWJ: Where did you go?

AG: Montclair State College. I had every intention actually in college of eventually becoming a Presbyterian minister. However, I ended up teaching high school English.

My first teaching job was in Newark, New Jersey, in a very depressed neighborhood. It was a school for the mentally retarded and juvenile delinquents.

My first day at school, one of the veteran teachers handed me a dowel stick, and said that was the only real thing I needed there. It was that kind of school. I spent one year there, and then I interviewed and accepted a job in one of the suburban high schools; it was a very tough time for minorities.

RT: What year was it that you graduated and went into your employment?

AG: I finished graduate school in 1955, and I began teaching that same year.

RT: You mentioned that it was a difficult time for minorities. Were you involved in those affairs?

AG: The high school that hired me had decided the year before that they would begin hiring minority teachers. I was the first black to be hired. When I left some eight years later, there was a total of two black teachers.

SWJ: Where was this high school?

AG: This high school was in Union, New Jersey--Union High School.

SWJ: Was it a minority high school?

AG: No, it was a predominantly white high school. As a matter of fact, I would guess less than one percent of its students were African-American. To supplement my income, I coached freshman and took tickets for the basketball and football games. One year I actually coached the twirling team (majorettes).

CG: Unionized twirlers? (Laughter)

AG: It was a very, very progressive high school, and I had an opportunity to do some interesting projects; for instance, I started a mobile bookstore which was the first in our area. The students could buy paperbacks for special assignments and general reading at a discount rate. We formed a poetry team, and entered state competition.

SWJ: You wrote poetry at that point?

AG: Yes, but not for publication. I taught creative writing, and as a result, we published the best student poetry in a magazine every year. Through the magazine we found out that there were poetry reading contests, and we entered poetry reading contests. We did that for two years, and both times we made the finals. So I'm kind of proud of that. So . . .

RT: Was that a statewide competition?

AG: Yes, statewide. So most of my teaching career was balanced between teaching and writing and sports. I had a friend at the time who was working for *Life Magazine*, and he suggested that maybe I might get a job outside, something that paid a little more than the \$8,600 I was making at the time. He introduced me to the president of Bell

Telephone Labs, and I set up an interview with him. Bell provided a bus from New York to the Cherry Hill laboratory.

Unbeknownst to me, the president of Bell Labs was on the bus. I sat next to him and we started a conversation. He liked poetry and I liked poetry, and he said, "Do you write?" I said, "Yes, I do." He said, "I'd love to see your stuff one day." And I said, "That would be great." Then I got off the bus. He went his way, and I went off to start my interviews. Well, of course, the last interview was with the president. After some chuckling, he hired me, and we developed a close friendship over the years.

It was 1964, at the height of the civil rights movement, and I left Bell labs to work with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. I traveled throughout the South helping to raise money for the lawyers who were trying the civil rights cases.

My next job was at Harcourt, Brace, Javanovich, editing high school English literature textbooks. Actually, one of the books was the same one that I taught in high school. I was asked to edit and get a new version of that book out, and that was a quite interesting, considering the number of minority writers working at the time.

I met Molly Yardgarrett, former president of the National Organization of Women (NOW), and she arranged an interview with VISTA, Volunteers in Service to America, and I stayed with VISTA as their director of recruitment for three years.

After VISTA, I had the pleasure of working for John Gardner, a former Secretary of HEW, at the Urban Coalition. This was right after the riots in Newark and other major cities, and the coalition's major aim was to entice businessmen to invest in the communities, to rebuild the cities that were burned, and provide job opportunities for minorities in major organizations.

I had two responsibilities at the league. One was to direct the Call for Action program using volunteers to assist residents with problems using the radio to air spots on various subjects and gain relief. The second thing I was asked to do was publish a magazine called *City Magazine*, which was a publication for urban planners. Again, as

a result of the riots, there was a need to rebuild these cities, and I think this was the time when city planners really were at the height of their profession. Also, part of my job was to get advertising for the magazine.

The person who actually ran the magazine was a lady named Ellen Strauss, and although I had some experience in editing, I had no experience in publishing. Her family owned *Life Magazine* and *Time Magazine*. I was sent to New York, and I spent three months at *Life* and *Time Magazine* learning the "ins and outs" of publishing a magazine.

RT: With the *Life Magazine* staff?

AG: Yes, with the *Life Magazine* staff. They taught me the basics of circulation, advertising, and layouts.

When I returned to *City Magazine*, the first thing I did at the request of the people I had been working with, was reduce the size of the magazine. It was an eight by ten format, and we reduced it so that we actually copied *Time Magazine*, and that was all fine.

During my stay at *City Magazine*, I got a call from Frank Matthews, one of the assistant secretaries at the Department of HEW, and he asked if I would come over to FDA to discuss a possible job in Consumer Affairs. The agency was having some problems with consumers and was interested in having someone to act as a liaison at the consumer groups. I was then hired by Commissioner Edwards.

RT: Was that in 1972?

AG: That was in 1972.

SWJ: What had they seen in you that led them to think that you were the person for this job?

AG: I think it was probably my reputation from previous places I worked and recommendations. It's a very . . . I mean, this is probably one of the realities of life. I was reading Jane Henney's interview, and it's interesting how you can map . . . Her progression through life was dependent on the people she met at various points in her life who remembered her for what she had done. And the same thing happened here. So when I was presented to Commissioner Edwards and Deputy Commissioner Gardner, they just assumed that I could take this consumer mess they were having and straighten it out.

FDA was perceived as not being the most open agency. And since so much of what we do is directly dependent on consumers and has a direct effect on people, it seemed kind of foolish to consumers not to have people on the inside who could explain what we were doing. As a result, consumers were running to the newspaper. In addition, Jim Turner had just written his book, *The Chemical Feast*, so the agency was under all kinds of attack, and they asked me if I could prevent the consumers from going to the newspapers all the time, find out what it is that they were so angry about, and fix it.

SWJ: OK. Let's think a little bit about that. Do you remember any of the specific issues that were causing problems, because I'm thinking back to the end of the Goddard era . . .

AG: Correct.

SWJ: There had been the cyclamate problem that marked Ley's departure and Edwards' arrival. We had been having trouble with the drug industry . . .

AG: It was mostly drugs, but consumers felt the agency was so heavily industry oriented that all the agency's decisions were made in favor of industry. I must say that when I got here that was pretty much true. There was criticism of cyclamate at the time. Also, Depo

Provera had just broken, and consumers were afraid, and rightly so, that this was a drug that would be used in third world countries as a form of reducing population.

RT: Well, the drug problem really had endured since the George Larrick days. I think that was one of the pressures that he had felt, and he didn't retire until he was ready to, but there was certainly a lot of pressure that he be replaced. So that had been a chronic problem for several years.

AG: And on the food side there was red dye #2, the whole idea of food additives being approved without, the consumers felt, any testing. The agency wasn't really into its public relations. The agency was in a real bad state.

SWJ: Now what was your relationship with consumer consultants when you came into the agency? Under George Larrick, they had appointed some of the first consumer consultants that had started off as part-timers initially.

AG: Home economists.

SWJ: Yes, home economists and housewives. And so when you came in, what was your relationship with them, or did you have any interaction with them at all?

AG: I had a great deal of interaction with them. The person who was in charge of the field staff, Paul Hile, had a different view of my job than I had of my job. He felt that my job was to do the programming for the field staff. I know I was hired by the commissioner to solve a consumer problem and it had nothing to do with the field staff. So my relationship with Paul started off rocky, continued to be rocky throughout my entire career until he left. His view of consumer affairs is not my view of consumer affairs.

RT: Yes, I was going to ask you Alex--and you're touching on it now--the Office of Regional Operations Organization (the field), of course, had this staff of consumer affairs officers, though I think they're public affairs specialists now by name. They operated kind of like health educators do, if you will, in a state or local health department. Was there a sufficient difference in your activities that what they did complemented your office, or did you end up going down parallel lines in your consumer affairs activities?

AG: Well, I'm not quite sure how to answer that, but let me give this a shot. What the field staff did and still does is incredibly important in the mission of this agency. At the time they were, as you mentioned, housewives and home economists.

SWJ: Were they working full time by the time you got here?

AG: They were working full time, and their direction, their vision was to communicate with colleges and universities. They never, ever, ever went into the community--ever. It was . . . It was almost as if the community didn't exist. From my point of view, the most important thing was the community, because these were the people that were being affected by the rules and regulations that were made, not the colleges and universities.

RT: Well, as you observe it now, does the ORA, Office of Regional Operations, people, the ones we've referred to as relating to colleges, are they still kind of parochial in that area? Or are they now getting out into more media-types of communication?

AG: The whole picture's changed, and part of the reason it's changed is that the makeup of the field staff has changed. There are now not only home economists, but there are people out there who have degrees in chemistry, who are Hispanics and African-Americans. We have people who bring a diverse culture to the program, which we didn't

have before. The makeup of that field staff was 100 percent white, and I would guess not only white, but Protestant. So it kind of brought a . . .

SWJ: Were you one of the first blacks hired during this time?

AG: In headquarters, yes.

SWJ: In headquarters, yes.

AG: There was one other black here, Voyce Whitley. But I think I was the highest ranking black at that time here.

SWJ: And what were you hired as? Do you remember?

AG: I was hired as director of consumer programs.

SWJ: Yes, but the level. What level were you?

AG: Fifteen (GS-15).

SWJ: You were hired as a fifteen?

AG: I was hired as a fifteen.

RT: I think the unit at that time was called the Office of Professional and Consumer Programs.

AG: Well, that actually happened a few years later.

RT: Oh, did it?

AG: Yes. That was under Commissioner Schmidt. We combined the Offices of Professionals, actually Health Affairs, Consumer Affairs.

RT: Now when you came in, Alex, what kind of a staff, if any, did you have?

AG: No staff.

RT: You were just a single person.

SWJ: You were a lone gun.

AG: Just me. Just me.

SWJ: And who were you primarily reporting to?

AG: The commissioner.

SWJ: Directly to the commissioner.

AG: Yes.

SWJ: What kinds of things did he want you to tackle and what did you work out with him to tackle?

AG: The first thing he wanted me to do was to figure out what it is that the consumers wanted us to do that we weren't doing. I remember vividly my first day on the job. Jim Turner walked in my office. No appointment; just walked in the door of my office with another guy named Bill Caballero or something, and Jim demanded to know what I was going to do. And I said I didn't know, but come back in three months. I was two clicks away from punching him in the nose. I mean, he was about as rude as anybody I had ever met in my life, and I later discovered that that was the technique that most of the consumer advocates used. They were rude; they were abrasive. There was just no pleasing anybody.

RT: Not much finesse?

AG: No, no finesse at all. But I was fortunate in that a lot of the jobs I had prior to coming to FDA pretty much prepared me for that kind of welcome. The first thing I did was organize a forum where consumers could actually meet the commissioner, and I think we called them "meet-the-commissioner meetings." Later, we called them ad hoc meetings, because we never knew what the agenda was or, if in fact, they were going to have them. But the first thing we did was to get the commissioner out of this building, and we actually arranged for him to tour a selected number of district offices and actually meet consumers in these various settings.

RT: And again, let's see, that was Commissioner Edwards.

AG: Edwards, yes.

RT: So up to that time, he had not really been exposed much to the field, as far as an on-site visit is concerned. Is that right?

AG: I'm not sure about that. I would imagine he did make on-site visits. But, again, they were organized and controlled by the district office. And you have to remember something. Your boss is coming out to the district, you're going to show him the best face you can possibly put on, and that was not my job. My job was . . .

SWJ: To have him meet consumers.

AG: Have him meet consumers, be embarrassed to see the outrage that consumers were feeling for not being informed about what this agency was doing. Once Edwards saw that, he communicated that back to the senior staff. And for several years, quite honestly, I was thought of as someone that the agency could well do without, because no one really wanted that kind of unhappiness.

RT: What you observe about the agency is certainly true. My origins are in state government, and the agency was very circumspect about really sharing very much with the states, like regulatory standards and so on. They were really tight-lipped. Apparently afraid that state people would go to industry and then they'd know. Well, industry knew most of them anyway.

AG: Sure they did. Sure they did.

RT: But I've seen a turnaround in that attitude, and they cooperate much more openly now with other people.

SWJ: You had a colleague in crime, I think. I could be wrong on this, and you'll have to correct me. But Peter Hutt was chief counsel around this time, and he was trying to open up the agency with notice and comment rulemaking and insisting that people

understand regulatory background . . . He gives a wonderful example of somebody in drugs that didn't like the package a drug was in and wanted to simply disapprove it for that reason. And Peter says, "Oh, no, no. If you want to make this a rule that no one can have see-through labels, then you go through notice and rule-making procedures, and then you can refuse it, and then everyone in the field will have to change theirs. But you cannot turn down this one drug on the basis of your feelings about 'see-through labels.'" Did you sense that you had a comrade in arms there?

AG: Peter Hutt was my best friend, my best friend at the agency. He understood how important the consumers were to the mission of this agency, and working with him a great deal happened. One, the forward or preface to the *Federal Register* announcement should be in plain English so that people would understand what the hell was in that document.

SWJ: Could you discuss that with him? Is that something the two of you . . . ?

AG: Oh, yes. And the other thing that never really got off the ground, but I've got to tell you it was one of the most dynamite ideas this agency ever came up with, and that was to provide consumers with funds so that when they petitioned the agency and had to use a lawyer or an expert witness, we would provide a little of the money to be able to do it. See, the whole idea was to correct the imbalance, and anything that we could help to do to bring the consumer up equal with industry we tried to do. Peter was excellent, and the two of us got a lot done. I was sorry when he left. But it was called . . . I can't remember the name of the program, but it was basically a consumer organization. In order to qualify for funds, they would submit proof that they were nonprofit and that they didn't have enough money, and then they'd hire the lawyer. We would then pay the fee out of administrative funds.

SWJ: And you said this never really got off the ground then?

AG: Well, it didn't get off the ground for a couple of reasons, and mainly because the consumers were a little nervous about the government being that generous. You know, were they going to screen the lawyers, could they pick their own lawyer, da-da-da-da-da. They weren't happy with the paperwork that was required. It never achieved its full potential, but it was certainly visionary. I think the consumers saw at that time that this agency was serious about trying to equalize the balance from where it used to be.

SWJ: What was your continuing relationship with the *Chemical Feast*-type . . . ?

AG: Jim Turner?

SWJ: . . . Jim Turner and his group? Did you manage to turn things around with him or . . . ?

AG: Yes.

SWJ: Or come to some satisfaction with him?

AG: Yes. I think today if Jim has a question about the agency or wants something, he'll call me. We have lunch occasionally. He went through a real bad divorce. Yes, I think that's been turned around.

RT: As you reflect back on the numbers of years that have passed, are there any particular issues that we haven't raised already that really hit home in terms of consumer information needs? We've mentioned cyclamates, I think.

SWJ: Well, saccharin soon followed, and I imagine that was one of the major issues.

AG: Saccharin was major.

SWJ: At this point you had a staff though, right?

AG: No. I was still alone, and I was working with . . . He went over to the drug company. Anyway, he was in charge of public affairs, a southerner from Mississippi. Actually, he was campaign manager for one of the most outrageous racists to ever run for office in the State of Mississippi. He was there. He was the campaign manager. Walden. Jack Walden. And I really felt that it was important for consumer affairs not to be part of Public Affairs for a variety of reasons, but one very important reason stood out. Public Affairs' job was to make the commissioner to look good; our job was not to do that, and we couldn't be taken seriously by the consumer community if we were in a public relations office. So I petitioned hard, and Gardner finally in 1976 said, "OK, fine. We're going to get you the hell out of there and establish you on your own."

But getting back to the cyclamates and saccharin. If you remember this, we tried to explain saccharin away by saying you had to drink ten thousand cans of a particular thing in order to get . . . I mean, that was the most idiotic bit of trying to explain something to a consumers advocate group.

SWJ: Who came up with that? I mean, it . . .

AG: That was a product of the public relations staff, the public affairs staff, the people dealing with the newspapers.

SWJ: All we see in the newspapers when we're going back to that period is rat cartoons everywhere. We call it the era of the rat cartoons.

AG: Everywhere, and it was a poor way of dealing with the public, and it set us back God knows how long, because people didn't trust us. I mean this whole ten thousand cans of soft drinks in order to replicate laboratory results on rats.

RT: In hindsight now, Alex, if we had a similar problem of that nature today, what would be better ways of communicating with the public than happened before? Or was that really an issue that the media took out of our hands?

AG: The media certainly took it out of our hands, and, you know, as with everything else, we were tried in the newspapers over this issue. But we don't have to go back that far. We just go back to the Alar business, and how the agency handled Alar. We brought in . . . Our office brought into a senior staff meeting representatives from Consumers Union in the Scientific Department, risk management professionals. In our agency, the senior staff could not understand why the consumers were so outraged over Alar. Finally, one of the consumers said, "The reason that we're outraged is that we can understand that there is a need for pesticide in foods, on foods, if you would have just told us. But you didn't tell us."

And, again, it just goes back to if you don't inform the consumers about the potential of risk, they're going to be outraged because you didn't inform them. They can handle the risk, you know, whether they'll take a car or airplane or whatever, because they know the risks that are involved. But you have to tell the public, you have to be open and honest with the public, and let the public decide before the newspapers get it. Alar was one that just bounced right back in our face. I mean, we had mothers not giving apple

juice to their kids. It was . . . It was . . . It was risk management. It was risk management that wasn't managed.

RT: To jump ahead--and this is ahead because I'm sure there are other things that we want to talk about in the interim--but today, with the tobacco hazard. Do you think that that's being handled more effectively as far as consumer information goes?

AG: Oh, I think it is. Yes, I think so. Absolutely.

The other thing that's helping us manage in getting information to the public is I think the entire newspaper corps is far more sophisticated than they were in the days of the saccharin incident. We now have people, scientific writers, on staff. I think the whole radio and television industry is more attuned to . . . Not to say that they still don't come out and say things that are at best misleading without offering . . . Frightening is a better word. But I think they're more sophisticated now than they were.

RT: Well, I've personally gotten into a couple of rather strong opinion discussions with people I know about the tobacco issue and the agency's initiative. Some of those people, and I guess many in the agency, questioned that FDA ought to be the one dealing with this issue. But personally, I admire the commissioner for having the courage to undertake such a controversial, politically sensitive thing. But some of the people I've heard comment seem to have a fear, "Well, the government is moving into this area of choice now. They're probably going to move into other areas that we don't want them in." Well, as a 40-plus-year bureaucrat, I argue that that's over reactionary. But there is some feeling apparently that the agency is getting too big for its britches, if you will. That may be a minority view; I don't know.

AG: Well, let me see if I can put it another way, if you want me to talk about tobacco. I think there's a corps of people inside the agency who feel, who are not convinced that the agency should move or should have moved on tobacco at the expense of the day-to-day operations of some of the centers. That's not a secret. Center directors have said it enough times in open meetings so that that's not a secret. There are centers who feel that people have been pulled away from them in order to work on tobacco, and their work has suffered because of it. The public's view is that the agency should have been in this issue a long time ago.

SWJ: About tobacco . . . I guess I'll push you a little bit on the consumer issue of tobacco. I've been going back through the tobacco records, and it looks to me as if the agency had been petitioned regularly to address tobacco, and we had developed a corps of people who were assigned to try to explain why we weren't acting on tobacco in the required reports to Congress compiled by CDC's office on smoking and health. Did you have any contacts with those kinds of people before?

AG: Under Commissioner Schmidt, I think, was the first time the center looked at nicotine as a possible drug. Well, maybe that's not true. It's the first time I've heard that the agency had looked at nicotine as a possible drug. Consumer support was very heavy at that time for the agency regulating nicotine.

SWJ: In light of the surgeon general's reports?

AG: Yes. The agency was right on target. Again, it's always been a question of resources and interpretation of what the mission of this agency is, which . . . I mean, that's . . . It's hard to tell a commissioner, "Don't go out and do what you think ought to

be done." Particularly if he has the backing of the secretary and the backing of the White House, which Kessler has had.

RT: The direction of the regulations and so on were apparently pointed at protection of young people from this addictive product. It certainly seems to have merit in a lot of people's minds, I'm sure.

SWJ: Let's go back . . . You've served under a lot of different commissioners. I don't think I quite realized exactly how many you had served under. At what point did the nature of your job start changing. It sounded as if with the early commissioners, you were their sort of personal . . .

AG: Advisor. Point person.

SWJ: Point person on consumer issues. When did some of this start changing? By the time, of course, I came with the agency, you had a large staff and a well-directed program.

AG: I think we assumed some duties, which is probably one of the easiest ways to build a staff, and I was very . . . I was convinced that there was a lot more to consumer affairs than just talking to the Washington-based consumers, because they don't represent consumers nationwide.

SWJ: Let me ask you a quick question before you go on. Did you ever meet Mrs. Harvey Washington Wiley?

AG: No, I never did.

SWJ: There was a permanent housewives group apparently . . . I say housewives. These are politically, well-placed housewives, from what I can gather, that met, and that would pressure the agency periodically.

AG: Actually, that group, many of that group were members of the National Consumers League, who pressured this agency since 1908.

SWJ: And the General Women's Club?

AG: Yes.

SWJ: Right, and the General Women's Club as well.

AG: Yes, and that was . . . The General Women's Club was Ruth . . .

SWJ: Desmond.

AG: . . . Desmond.

SWJ: Did you know Ruth Desmond?

AG: Oh, very well.

SWJ: Oh, tell me something about her.

AG: Well, Ruth Desmond, she was a lot . . .

SWJ: She was supposed to be quite a character.

AG: She was a character. She had a couple of issues, one was the fact that . . . standardized foods was a big issue with her.

SWJ: She was supportive?

AG: Well, she wanted to know whether or not these guys were still putting their ingredients in standardized foods that they said they were going to put in back in the 1920s. And sure enough, after she pushed the agency hard enough, we decided to go look at some of these foods, and she was right. A lot of these standardized foods weren't standardized at all. They were substituting oils for, one type of oil for another type of oil. And it was Ruth Desmond who got that done. It took her twenty years, but she got it done.

SWJ: Well, standards is a particular interest of mine.

AG: She was quite a champion.

SWJ: What was her other issue? You said she had a couple issues.

AG: Food additives and Red Dye #2 being carcinogenic . . .

SWJ: Did you ever arrange a meeting with her and Mr. Turner?

AG: Actually, Jim was very supportive of Ruth. As a matter of fact, the entire consumer community was supportive of Ruth, because Ruth had a knack of getting in

places where they couldn't get because of her style, the way she was. I mean, she could just act like she didn't understand. "Oh, is this the Commissioner's Office? I didn't know this was the Commissioner's Office. Well, since I'm here, is he in?" You know, that type of thing.

SWJ: The little old lady syndrome? She had it down pat? And she got it done. Neat lady.

AG: The little old lady syndrome, and she was smart as a whip. She was smart as a whip, but she, you know, she came across like she didn't know. And she always had this little attorney that she carried around with her. It was . . .

SWJ: Mrs. Wiley had her own secretary she carried around with her, too.

AG: Ruth Desmond . . .

RT: Well, for about four years I was in the Office of Legislative Affairs and was in that part that wrote testimony. And Ruth would call up frequently and want to either inject some ideas that ought to be presented in testimony or perhaps try to find out what was going to be presented, which, of course, we never could give her. But she was certainly, as you say, an activist.

RT: She was an activist in the best way.

SWJ: And she put out a newsletter, as I understand, that must have been fairly influential as well.

AG: Yes, a newsletter. Yes.

SWJ: At this point, I remember that the saccharin issue attracted almost more comments and more public input, wanted or unwanted, than almost any issue at the time. Is that your remembrance as well?

AG: Yes. Yes, that's true. And I think the reason why it did was the reason the agency handled it. I mean, it was . . . It was crazy the way we handled that issue.

SWJ: And why did you . . . ? Why do you feel like you didn't have any more . . . ? I think I know the answer, but I'm baiting you in some respects. Why do you think you had less influence over how the agency handled the "spin" on that than . . . ?

AG: Well, because the spin was coming out of Jack's office, and Jack Walden was the spinmeister.

SWJ: If they created the problem with spin, what did you have to do to help clear up the issue with consumers? What was your responsibility in terms of answering to your constituency?

AG: Well, the first thing we did was we set up a series of a single-issue meetings with consumers, and we pulled the center director--I think it was the center director at the time--and we just made him available to small groups of consumers all over the country. We set up conference calls so that people could call. We were very interested in people who had newsletters or other forms of communication within the community. We went to churches.

RT: Was that Virgil Wodika at that time?

AG: Virgil Wodika. Went off to Hershey Foods, didn't he?

RT: Right. Currently, it might be of interest, how large a staff do you have? It's a reasonably significant group of people now, professionals, is it not?

AG: We have twenty-seven? Twenty-seven. We were at a high at one time of thirty-six.

SWJ: When did you start adding staff?

AG: When we started adding programs. I was, and still am, very concerned that the agency doesn't reach out far enough to people, and I was particularly concerned that non-English speaking consumers had very little knowledge of what FDA was all about.

I remember I went to Philadelphia to interview Louis Sullivan, who at the time was running a community-based organization. I can't . . . Operation something. Not Push, but Operation something. I went to interview him. I passed by a neighborhood barber shop. This was in an African-American Community. I walked in the barber shop, looked around, not one FDA bit of material was in that barber shop. Now that's certainly not a survey, certainly not scientific, but, I mean, I knew that the materials that this agency produced were not getting very far. So we tried to set up a network for distribution, and we discovered that the best way to distribute information was to get the community to distribute .

About that time, a very sympathetic commissioner agreed with some of the views I had.

SWJ: Which one?

AG: Donald Kennedy, and we got an increase in funds, we got people, and pretty soon the telephone answering inquiries unit. We took that lock, stock, and barrel from policy organization, and that's . . . I mean, the moment we had the responsibility being the first and only office in the agency that had first contact with callers, that opened up a whole other area for us. We were able to hire Hispanics, hiring (Inaudible).

SWJ: When I came with the agency, I was looking through the files, and Poison Prevention Week was always . . .

AG: It was always a big deal.

SWJ: It was always a big deal; it was always one of the few consumer-oriented things I've ever seen. And actually we had contracts with Dennis the Menace as the star of "Take a Poke on Poison," which you all have probably already seen. But Wallace Janssen actually takes great pride in having helped initiate that. Was that a model that you were inclined to follow? The reason I said that is it did have a Hispanic version, which, you know, surprised me greatly at that time. Was this something that you were able to build on? Or did you just carry on? What did you think about this sort of unusual little program?

AG: I loved it. I thought it was a marvelous program. I think that any of those week-long congressional programs, you know, kinds of programs were very good. I think the thing that bothered me a little bit was we'd gear up for Poison Prevention Week, and for one week we ran around doing poison prevention, and the next week we forgot about it till the next year. So I'm kind of leery of those, but it was a good package program. It

was effective. But our philosophy has kind of been that those weeks and those months are very good in terms of drawing attention to a program or an activity that needs attention.

The hard part is to continue to keep that attention and momentum going, and I found that internal politics by far was the most important thing that we, as a young office, a new office, had to overcome, because people at the policy board level are always looking for funds and resources, and here's this little upstart, and here's this guy running this office, who's not even . . . He didn't even come from the field. He's not even a cop. So internal politics during the early years, we were close to losing it with the advent of every new commissioner. I had to sell the program all over again, all over again.

SWJ: You had to prove yourself to every one, to each new commissioner.

AG: Yes.

SWJ: What were some of the issues that either you or your staff did a particularly good job in addressing?

AG: I think we did a good job addressing the hearing aid issue, because it was . . . It's one of those issues where the public is so at the mercy of hucksters, and getting CDRH to help us get information out to the public and to hold hearings. It was a tough issue, and the people were spending--and these are older people--spending their life savings on a hearing aid that wasn't even approved by a doctor.

SWJ: And when did you initiate this program? Because I know *60 Minutes* has repeatedly addressed it again, you know, in recent years.

AG: I guess it must have been '78. That's a guess.

RT: I noticed in reading a little brief on your career, Alex, that you have also been very active in publishing or causing the publication of a number of articles regarding consumer initiatives, public participation, health fraud, and so on. Apparently, you've gotten some of those writings into some of the trade press and so on. Are there any of those particular initiatives that you think were unusually successful, at least in writing different perhaps from the one-week campaign. I assume that these were kind of an ongoing input for consumer education, the writing of publications and so on, not just a once a year . . .

AG: No, it wasn't. We made a conscious effort to join organizations, consumer organizations, community organizations, and other organizations that networked as a way of getting our message out. We're the . . . I think one of the most successful things that this office has been able to do is to make public participation a reality for nearly every consumer in this country, and it doesn't matter if they speak English. Most of the things that we were writing about at that time had to do with public participation and how people can get involved in the agency, because our feeling was that we needed to find the consumers who were responsible for putting stop signs in their neighborhood, because those were consumer advocates, and they weren't in Washington. They were someplace out there in the boonies, and we had to find them. Once we found them, we had to let them know that we were very serious and we were honestly interested in having . . . That the agency needed to know what they thought about what we were doing. So public participation was probably the key.

SWJ: I remember talking to Pat Kuntze about the program that they initiated to try to get representation on advisory committees. What can you tell us more about that? I consider that one of the major programs that was initiated during your tenure.

AG: That's the cornerstone of public participation is the ability for consumers to serve on advisory committees directly.

SWJ: The agency was very reluctant to do that. It was . . .

AG: Oh, they were so reluctant it was crazy.

SWJ: It was, I believe, the Ob-Gyn advisory committee was the first to realize that they needed it with the backlash from the pill. And Barbara Seaman. Did you have dealings with her?

AG: Barbara Seaman, Doris Haire.

SWJ: Doris Haire?

AG: Doris Haire. They were very reluctant, and I think the thing that finally sold them was that the mechanism that we used to select the consumer representatives. What we said was, "Okay, we want consumers on the advisory committees. But we want to make sure that the consumers aren't going to turn around and say that this was a federally-operated process." So we basically turned the process back to the consumers and said, "Fine. You get together with the people. You tell us who you give a Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval to, and we'll get them on the committee, and we'll somehow figure out a way of servicing them once they're on the committee." That was the program that even today is not a program that the centers accept.

SWJ: Pat said also that you had some problems with the early consumer representatives, that they had to learn . . . That you almost had to bring them in and tutor them on how to get into their, how to get along with their colleagues . . .

AG: How to be a good advocate.

SWJ: How to be a good advocate without being a gadfly in the process.

AG: Right. And how not to be intimidated by the scientific giants that were on these advisory committees. Actually, to help do that--and I was telling Carol this the other day--we initiated a program with Georgetown Law School. The program was designed to teach community leaders how to petition this agency, and we actually went out and taught a course on how to do this in twenty-five cities. We taught the soon-to-be mayor of Santa Monica. We had Jane Fonda's girlfriend in one of our classes out there. I mean, it was wild, and I went around the country with Don Rothchild, who is a law professor, and we taught this course. One of the things that we emphasized was the fact that you guys can identify potential consumer representatives for us, and that we're serious in having these people serve on the advisory committees.

RT: I think one of the noteworthy consumer outreaches was with labeling, where they had the . . .

AG: Food labeling hearings.

RT: Yes, the hearings where people were invited to come, and . . .

AG: That was Frank Young's. Frank wanted to know how best to do this, and we had had some experience again in going around the country to different places, and we suggested that we take the food label to Arizona, and Chicago, and to Atlanta and actually have people from the Washington-based organizations get into touch with their local people. For instance, AARP (American Association of Retired Persons) in Atlanta had four elderly women testify on the need to have that label in print large enough so that they could read it, read the label. So we did eight of those.

SWJ: And that was under Frank Young?

AG: That was Frank Young.

SWJ: At that point were you testing a mandated format? Do you see what I mean about the standardized, mandated format. Was it one that looked similar to the one today?

AG: Very similar one to the one today.

SWJ: So you were testing both format and content.

AG: The big issues at that time had to do with trace ingredients and, you know, what vitamins are the ones that you want to have on this label, and I think there was at this point some new research that showed that some of the old things that everyone thought was terribly important were not nearly so critical for good health.

SWJ: The B vitamins in particular.

AG: B vitamins.

There was one other thing during the Frank Young era that I'd like to say something about for the record and for the history, and that was the agency's involvement with the AIDS groups.

SWJ: That was one of my questions.

AG: Frank Young came to be the commissioner at the time that the AIDS epidemic became a national health problem. He spoke to a gay rights group. He committed us to protecting the AIDS organizations, and told me to "do your magic--do what you do with the consumer groups." Well, of course, it presented several problems for us. One, we had to go, really had to go to them. Once we made contact with the leadership, the leaders that we met were so incapacitated that they couldn't even talk at times.

So the problems of making contact with the AIDS community, of getting people on my staff that were willing to go to Harlem, you know, and willing to go to where the AIDS people lived and worked--it was difficult, because at that time the perception of AIDS was that . . . I mean, some people actually thought you could get it from a telephone. I mean, I remember working with Commission of Consumer Affairs in New York and trying to put out information to tell people, no, you're not going to get this from the telephone, you're not going to get this from the toilet seat. So getting the staff involved was something else. There was very strong sentiment about homosexuals, so being able to convene the first AIDS meeting here was one of the things I think we're, as an office, very proud of.

SWJ: After they marched with tombstones in front of the Parklawn Building.

AG: That was before, and many people who were around at that time blame us for opening up the agency to that kind of demonstration.

SWJ: I thought it was rather entertaining.

AG: I thought it was great. I mean, I remember Peter Staley to this day standing on that roof down there with a smoke bomb, bandana across his head, and . . .

SWJ: Swaggering.

AG: Swaggering. As a result of that, the commissioner was asked to attend one of the first AIDS meetings up in Boston. Frank took the invitation to the policy board. I mean, the way it was run in those days. Nothing like today. You actually had a vote. And Frank looked around the table and wanted to know how many people here thought we should go to Boston, and eleven hands went up, and I was the only one that said, "You shouldn't go." I told him if he got to Boston what they would do to him, and they did it. They wouldn't let him speak. We were sitting on a dais, and I'll never forget Stu Nightengale positioned himself to get on the end seat, because if anything happened Stu was going out the door. He told me that. He said, "I'm sitting my brief case here. If there are problems, I'm out the door."

And they had the night before gone, took this security tour. Hotel security showed us the back way out of the hotel, so actually you could just leave the podium and go through this kitchen door and make your way downstairs, and there was actually a car waiting to take us away. They wouldn't let him speak. They came up to the front of the podium; they took his water, and they drank it. I said, "Frank, pick up the glass and drink it, because you've got to get over to them that you're not afraid. Pick up the glass and drink it." Frank wouldn't do it. Frank's a doctor. He wouldn't do it. He wouldn't pick up the glass.

So they had him. They hung them in effigy right there. They had watches, and they were, you know, saying, you know, the time is running out. You guys have to

approve these drugs and so on. It was a . . . It was a mess. What made it even worse is Frank left that day and left us behind, left our staff behind to kind of attend the rest of the meeting and see if we could get some semblance of agreement.

SWJ: Now which meeting was this? I know, but I don't think we got it on tape.

AG: It was organized by the Gay-Lesbian Coalition, and it was a meeting of all AIDS people from California, . . . There were three, four thousand people at the meeting, and Frank, bless his heart. Most commissioners would have been absolutely devastated by all this, but Frank was a deeply religious person, and I think that helped him get through a lot of difficult times. He just . . . He was able to get through that meeting. After we stayed on in Boston for four days, we invited the key--Peter Staley an acting--the key people back here to Washington, pay their way . . .

Which was another interesting thing. You think about successful programs. I think the scholarship program was one of the successful programs. The scholarship program really meant that if a consumer who was economically disadvantaged--students--could attend conferences because we would pay their way and offer them expense money, which meant that we could then open up our programs to people that otherwise we couldn't have reached, and with the AIDS community.

RT: Well, you've mentioned, Alex, that along the way, you had sort of an adversarial, sometimes uphill push, but I've also noticed that the work you've done for the agency has been recognized in a number of awards, and while you might be too humble or bashful to say what those are, I noticed in one writeup here that you received the National Public Service Award, the SOCAP Individual Achievement Award. What is that, those acronyms?

AG: SOCAP is Society of Consumer Affairs Professionals, and there was a Washington chapter, and I was fortunate to be president for one year. After that, they decided they didn't want any more feds in the program, so they wouldn't even let them run for office. Needless to say, I quit the chapter. (Laughter)

SWJ: You clearly impressed them. (Laughter)

RT: Apparently you also received from the SOCAP their Distinguished Service Award in Consumer Affairs, and you received the Award of Excellence in government . . .

(Interruption)

RT: To continue for a moment, I was just mentioning some of the awards that Mr. Grant has received. He also received the Senior Executive Service Award for Outstanding Management, the FDA Award of Merit, an Equal Opportunity Achievement Award. I think those ought to be on record.

AG: Since you're on awards. I do have to say something about one award I received, two awards I received that I think are probably the most important. I think it's one thing for the agency to recognize that, you know, you've done something that really hasn't gotten the agency in a whole bunch of trouble. A little bit of trouble, but not a whole bunch of trouble. But I think community recognition is more significant in the long run. Our constituents were the consumers, and there are two awards up there that I am really proud of, and I am proud of them. One is the Esther Peterson Award that the Marketing Institute gave me, and the other is the Philip Hart Award from the Consumer Federation of America. These are consumer organizations who recognize that this office was doing what they thought we should be doing, and I think that's really far more important in

terms of credibility than a succession of commissioners that you are able to keep out of the newspaper.

SWJ: Yes. I'm so glad you mentioned that. I had a couple of other things, and Esther Peterson was one of them. She was involved in food labeling. As I'm putting it together, it looks like the FDA first got involved in food labeling as a result of the White House Conference on Food and Nutrition, which I believe was in '69. Now you weren't working for the agency yet.

AG: No.

SWJ: But do you remember anything about that or the feedback that came as a result of that?

AG: Sure, I do. Sure.

SWJ: That was part of the food controversies that you were seeing when you came in.

AG: At that time, Esther had just gotten back from Holland, and--Esther Peterson--and came back with the news that most foreign countries were beginning to use symbols on their foods to designate foods that weren't appropriate for pregnant women, as an example.

SWJ: That weren't?

AG: Were not. Drugs, I'm sorry. Drugs that would not appropriate for pregnant women by just using the symbol, you know, with the line through it.

At that time, the agency was seriously thinking of revamping our food, our approach to food education. And we're right in the middle of it, and then twenty years later we did it all again.

SWJ: What happened? What cut it off there? Cyclamates? Saccharin? The good will was . . .

AG: Yes. Disinterested commissioner.

SWJ: I noticed that. There was a fair amount of consumer steam built up in the sixties, and then it completely dissipated in the seventies, which was supposed to be the decade of the consumer, which surprised me. Maybe it was the consumers getting organized and getting the expertise and the confidence they needed to sort of tackle some of these issues. But, then it was the agency that picked up on the initiative to really revamp the food label. They had done a lot of the work early, but . . .

AG: They had a lot of the work done. It was . . . The timing was perfect. Esther was at Giant Food and pushing the industry.

SWJ: And you knew her and . . . ?

AG: That's true, yes.

SWJ: Tell us about Esther Peterson. She's a legend.

AG: Well, I met Esther, I guess, in '73. It was maybe a year after I joined the agency, and I fell in love with her. I mean . . . The woman still was just incredible. She was working at the White House, and she was the consumer advisor to the president.

SWJ: That was Carter?

AG: Carter.

SWJ: Carter's administration. I've looked at the papers, but they don't show a lot.

AG: And Esther was interested in grabbing off our field staff. She wanted the consumer affairs officers, and I would be a good person to get them for her. She wanted them for U.S. Office of Consumer Affairs, because she had very little staff.

SWJ: And there was very little expertise anywhere else in the government in that particular area.

AG: That's right. There was nothing. I found myself in the enviable position of trying to protect the FDA's people, but also not wanting to anger the president's top consumer advisor. I mean, I was probably afraid of Esther.

SWJ: She was a powerful woman.

AG: She was a very powerful woman. I managed to avoid her taking our consumer affairs officers, and I wish I could discuss some of the techniques, but she didn't get them. (Laughter) But she formed . . .

SWJ: Give us one example of what you had to do.

AG: Well, I arranged for Esther and . . . Who was it then? I guess it was Mark Novitch, to sit down over a glass of sherry, and I just left them alone. You know, Mark was a charmer, and Esther was a charmer, and they just charmed each other. Mark convinced Esther . . . Esther convinced Mark that we really needed these people out there on the front line. The Consumer Consortium Council, I guess it was, made up of members of government who had . . . Well, actually they were cabinet people. Every cabinet organization had a representative on this consumer council. It was about this time that our office was really . . . It was our strongest period. It was a Democratic administration. Liberals were falling off the trees. Almost everything we proposed sounded like a winner, and others had an opportunity to observe our operation, and illustrated it was necessary in government to have a consumer affairs office.

She used our office as the model for an executive order being issued, and the executive order said basically that our office not only should have consumer people, but that a consumer person must report directly to the top person who runs the agency. Now that was just unheard of. I mean, totally unheard of anyplace. I mean, who would imagine anything like that? This order really got consumers and government really involved, which is why that Society of Consumer Affairs Professionals was important, because we actually had consumer people that we could reach out to that were in the government.

SWJ: That's what I was trying to understand. I knew that at some point the government itself took an interest, that we were able to tap into those organizations more than any single person or even a small staff would have been able to do. There was some formal organization.

AG: It was formal organization through that Consumer Consortium, and I'll tell you what it led to. It got us together, and we were able to exchange ideas. I got a chance to sit down with a person, my counterpart at the Department of Energy, and I realized that Energy was providing small grants to their field offices for local education programs. Whoa! Was that an idea or what? I came back here, and I said, "Guys, we can do that." So we set up what we called a fielded funded program or something. You could write in if you were a consumer affairs officer . . . You didn't even need your district director. You could write into me, and it was myself, Paul Hile, and Jack Walden, and we would approve the project, and we would make grants up to \$2,500 for small projects. And, you know, that much money goes a long way in a community, \$2,500. But had it not been for that council, I never would have met this person in Energy; I never would have had the idea. And we just stole that idea from Energy.

RT: That wasn't an outgrowth at all of the Intergovernmental Regulatory Liaison Group, IRLG or something?

AG: Oh, Lord, what a mess that was. IRLG, you're right. God, I served on that thing . . . It was an attempt to get the Consumer Product Safety Commission, our agency, USDA, and I don't know . . . But the thought was that we could reduce the regulations that we put out if everybody got together and talked about them.

SWJ: This was during the paperwork reduction under Carter.

AG: Paperwork reduction, and that was the biggest mess that I've ever been a part of. I don't want to say that. I mean, there was some good that came out of there. There was some good that came out of that.

RT: Well, it failed to achieve that.

AG: But it didn't work.

SWJ: It didn't work out in the way that had been envisioned.

RT: I don't know if this is being recycled, but before I retired, which was in '92, we were asked to . . . Well, one of my staff persons was the scribe for FDA, working with Don Heaton, and we were asked to bring out from the files what that thing had been. Apparently there was some thought, well, maybe if not that, something like it might be regenerated, but I never heard that it was.

AG: I don't know. I shouldn't be . . . There were some good things. We got to, again, interact with our colleagues at the other federal agencies, which we never would have done before.

RT: You were able to get this information from Energy just on your own initiative, without organization apparently.

AG: Well, we'd sit around . . . We'd have meetings, and we'd sit around and talk about, you know, what's hot. What's worked? What have you guys done that really works? Everyone would have to say, encouraged to say what they did that really worked, and that was . . . That energy idea I thought was good.

RT: Was there any pick up on FDA initiatives by other agencies that you're aware of?

AG: Sure. They took our idea of community, how to involve a community, which basically is the Sol Olinski . . . You know. How do you get a commission going, and we developed planning boards where we had members of the planning board, so that we went with the program. It wasn't a program that FDA wanted, a health education program, it was what the community decided that they wanted.

You know, it's crazy, but at the time, we were publishing a series of books, and the titles of these books were *What FDA Wants You to Know*. That thinking was throughout the agency. Here's what we want you to know.

SWJ: It's like when NIH tried to call their seminar series "Medicine for the Layman." It's now "Medicine for the Public," in light of government's new role in serving the customers.

AG: A lot of people picked up on our community development ideas, and I think that it was important not only to have Spanish language material sitting in the warehouse, but to actually distribute them, including the U.S. Pharmacopeia. I remember sitting in a meeting with the Pharmacopeia, and I said, "You guys have this in Spanish?" "Oh, yes, we have it in Spanish." "How many copies do you have?" "We have 100,000 copies in Spanish." "God, that's great! Who's distributing them for you?" "Nobody." "The Spanish community knows that you have this?" "No."

You know . . . And this was true. There was a time that, this agency included, felt that all you needed to do to meet whatever the pressures were, you put it in Spanish, and you didn't necessarily make it culturally specific, you just translated it. So the leap from mere translation to something that's culturally acceptable was quite a leap. Then the other leap was . . .

SWJ: Do you remember the issue where this became known?

AG: It was a Pharmacopeia issue, and it must have been . . . It was a drug issue.

SWJ: Did you deal with Barbara Seaman much?

AG: Yes.

SWJ: What was your impression of Barbara?

AG: She was on the board of Women's Health Coalition. Doris Haire, too.

SWJ: Yes, that's the other name that you mentioned to me.

AG: Doris Haire's position was that there is no such thing as prescription drugs--what is safe? "No, it's not. It's not safe and can't be made safe." And, of course, Doris was right, and we were just reluctant to define what we meant.

RT: Well, we've covered quite an area. Are there any particular other things that come to mind that we might like to include on the record here while we're here?

SWJ: OK. Let's talk a little bit about what you've witnessed in terms of minority employment in the agency. I know Sharon Holston is one of your friends. Let's talk a little bit about Blacks in Government. I'm sure you were involved. Did you work with that group when it came?

AG: Yes.

SWJ: Talk a little bit about the strides that were made--or that we're still working on, should I say?

AG: I guess we're still working on them. I think there was a fairly heavy recruitment effort in the seventies to hire African-American field staff out of school--FBI, FMI, FEI.

SWJ: FEI?

AG: Federal Executive Institute. And they produced several district directors, several regional directors. Well, that era is over. There's not one regional director from that particular era.

SWJ: John Turner?

AG: John Turner is now, but I would consider him a new guy on the block.

Right after the move to hire more African-Americans in top positions, the Hispanics got very upset, Leroy Gomez and . . .

RT: Ed Esparza.

AG: . . . Esparza and Adam Trujillo wrote a scathing memo to the commissioner demanding that opportunities open up for Hispanics. What was so unfortunate is we have a tendency to look at the pie as finite. Instead of asking for a larger share of the pie, whether it be employment or whatever, we're asking that we get a larger share of a smaller piece of pie that's only for Hispanics and blacks and women. And it's crazy, because what we should be doing is saying--and not be at odds at each other the way the Hispanic community is at odds with the African-American community at times, and where

both of those communities are at odds with women--is to open up that section of the pie, because there is certainly plenty of room to hire more Hispanics in high positions, more women, and more blacks. It's crazy the way our approach is.

It's the same approach that welfare takes, thanks to liberals who have touted welfare as a minority issue, when, in fact, it is not. What you end up is a welfare system that's being dismantled, and the people that are being hurt are those people who live in Appalachia and who are white. And I think we're doing exactly the same thing when we look at employment in the agency.

Fortunately, if you're smart and you're a scientist, this place will hire you. But it's the soft shoe generals who have a hard time getting jobs here, and they just can't have them. I think Charles may be the last of a breed of soft shoe generals coming on. They just aren't out there anymore. Can you think of anybody that's coming up in the ranks, Charles?

CG: No.

AG: Me neither.

RT: Well, I think John Taylor once said in some remarks that to be successful as an African-American chemist, you really had to work a lot harder and maybe be better than some of your peers or you just were not recognized. Rather than being equal, you had to really be better, and I'm sure he experienced that in his climb to the top.

AG: Well, that's a good example. His son is in the agency now. He's down in the office of general counsel.

RT: Oh, he is?

AG: He stands about six-four, he weighs about 230, trim, smart as a whip on tobacco . . . He was one of the best leaders we had, John Taylor.

RT: Yes. Well, as to the . . .

AG: Employment. OK. That's it. I don't know. I think we don't see anybody in ranks at the GS-13, 14 level coming up. They may be coming in from outside . . . Byrd, what he's got from USDA. Internally, people with the FDA history, they're just not there. No Hispanics past Esparza, not that I can tell. And no one's looking at it. That's what has me worried. Nobody's looking at it.

RT: Was that area primarily a responsibility of Voyce. When he was here, Voyce Whitley?

AG: No, it wasn't. Voyce was basically the EEO officer. I think the hiring questions--and this is where the field excels--came from the field. I mean, the pressures always came from the field, although often they would be prefaced by, "Get rid of all those high-paying people in the commissioner's office, and give us some of those slots in the field." But they were the ones who I think were the key. Guys like Don Healton, who I think was a pioneer. (Inaudible) I think. I'm not sure. Barkdoll did a study on attrition that indicated that, as an agency, we are really old in the senior position. We're going to be in serious trouble in the year 2000 with an influx of people retiring and leaving.

RT: I think they once mentioned in the Office of Regional Operations that in the next five years, about 45 percent of the staff would be gone through retirement or something else, which has apparently proven now pretty much the case.

SWJ: I think when I came with the agency in the early eighties, the average age was considered forty-eight, and climbing.

RT: Of course, you know, historically . . . Well, not this agency alone, but government in general back in the so-called Depression days, which I can remember. I don't know whether you can or not. I'm a little older. Maybe you don't. When people got a government job, they really cherished it, because it was a lot better than not having a job, and I think, you know, there's a lot of younger generation, including my own children, who don't look at work that way, and they have a great deal of mobility.

AG: Don't get me started on the work ethic. Present day work ethic is crazy, but I'm not going to get on that.

RT: There is a difference, you know, in perspective. Today you don't necessarily have people that tenaciously stay with an agency until they are older and senior in position. They move around.

AG: Well, I was only supposed to be here a year, so . . .

SWJ: And how many have you been?

AG: Twenty-five.

RT: Well, Alex, you're contemplating retirement at the end of February, as I recall.

AG: January.

RT: January, I'm sorry. Do you care to share any thoughts as to what you will do. Will you continue in some consumer cause or will you just enjoy your retirement?

AG: Probably all of that. I got a note from the lady who runs Call for Action wanting to know if I wanted to come back and be a volunteer. I had lunch with the lady who runs IFIC, the International Food Information Council, and she wants me to come help stuff envelopes on Friday.

CG: We will be hounding you, I assure you.

AG: Steve Brobeck wants me to come over and, you know, it's volunteer. And I probably will volunteer.

SWJ: I've been aware of a lot of interesting things that I know you've been part of. So we may have some other questions as we go along, especially your knowledge of some of these people who were so influential. The consumer movement, I think more than any other historical piece, is particularly strengthened by its characters--its outspoken people with good common sense that managed to get their point across to . . . And that's always been a strength of the consumer movement. They can get awfully good press by asking awfully simple questions of people in authority.

AG: I'll do some thinking about it if you'd like to come back with other questions on that.

SWJ: Yes. Especially people that you've talked with and issues that you were responding to in consumer work. Hopefully we've gotten you started thinking, so you might have a piece of paper around. When you're cleaning out files, and it jogs a memory, just make a note of it, and maybe we'll do a follow-up to get some more reminiscences on tape.

AG: OK.

SWJ: That's probably enough for one sitting.

AG: That would be fun. I'd love to do it.

RT: Well, Alex, we really appreciate your courtesy in affording this opportunity to put on record your experiences and your achievements, and we in particular appreciate your patience in getting started with our faulty recording equipment.

AG: Been there. Been there, done that.

SWJ: We promise, we're getting new. And we thank your staff for the use of their tape recorder.

RT: So thank you very much.

AG: OK. We'll do it again whenever you're ready to . . . And I'll think about the people of the consumers' movement.

SWJ: Think about some of your people, and I'm going to think about some organizations, too, that I want to get a little more information on.

AG: OK.