

**Robert C. Goodwin Oral History Interview – JFK#2, 5/29/1967**  
Administrative Information

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**Biographical Note**

Goodwin, (1906 - 1999), Administrator, Bureau of Employment Security, Department of Labor, discusses the effect of equal opportunity programs on staffing of the Bureau of Employment Security agencies, funding for the programs, and the Mexican farm workers bill, among other issues.

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By Robert C. Goodwin

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Robert C. Goodwin – JFK #2

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Second Oral History Interview

with

Robert Goodwin

May 29, 1967  
Washington, D.C.

By Larry J. Hackman

For the John F. Kennedy Library

HACKMAN: Mr. Goodwin, last time we had been discussing the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity. Did anyone on this committee work directly with you in connection with the problems in the employment offices, or exactly how did this work?

GOODWIN: Well, there were some people in the Department here who had the responsibility, representing the Secretary's office, for liaison with this committee, and we worked with them rather than directly with members of the committee.

HACKMAN: What was Arthur Chapin's [Arthur A. Chapin] role in relation to the Bureau of Employment Security?

GOODWIN: Well, Arthur Chapin started out with the Department of Labor, he started in the Bureau of Employment Security, and he was representing us in this whole field of civil rights, and then he was later taken over by the Secretary's office to represent the Department as a whole.

HACKMAN: Did you feel that here at the Bureau level you were given a sufficient amount of independence in solving the programs that existed in this area?

GOODWIN: Well, I think we were.... Yes, I think we were given the opportunity to do what we could and make the contributions that we could make. I think that we got a lot of help after the Civil Rights Act passed. We got help then from other places, and I think the important thing was that this changed the public acceptance and expectation of what was going to be done in this field. We never had had a lot of problems with the personnel of the Employment Security agencies themselves. They themselves were not inclined to discriminate. But many of them were inclined to follow what the community was doing. In other words, if there were practices, particularly in some of the Southern states, the personnel in our local offices, coming from those communities, frequently were not inclined to do the positive thing to change those practices although they themselves were not involved in discrimination. When the Civil Rights Act was passed, this represented a big change. It was then the law of the land, and the attitude of communities did change, and it created a better climate for us to make a bigger contribution.

HACKMAN: What about the staffs of the regional directors? I remember reading that there were some problems maybe with the staffs of certain regional offices as far as integrating. Do you recall anything about that?

GOODWIN: Well, I think our situation was fairly typical of other bureaus and programs in the Department of Labor. We had gone along, had not made positive efforts to recruit minority members. If one of them showed up on the Civil Service list, we were happy to appoint him. But frequently they did not for one reason or another, and we hadn't taken the kind of steps which start way back and get promising young Negroes interested in what we were doing and suggesting to them that they apply for Civil Service exams and get in a place where we could appoint them. This is one of the programs that was worked up Department-wide in which we participated. And that was taking the initial steps

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in getting them interested and getting them into a position where we could appoint them.

HACKMAN: Was this done early in the Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] years, or was this again speeded up as a result of the Civil Rights Act?

GOODWIN: Well, this came.... We took steps in this direction in the early Kennedy years. Most of that did not come to fruition, though, until later, and the passage of the Civil Rights Act did give a big boost to this particular program.

HACKMAN: Do you recall what your opinion was when it was allowed, when other agencies and commissions were allowed to have access to the files and records of the Employment Service? Now, I'm not sure if this is on the local level or what level it is on, but I've seen this mentioned at one time, in an effort to lessen discrimination in some of these agencies, it was done.

GOODWIN: Well, this was in terms of making this information available for the purposes of enforcing the Civil Rights Act, and this came very shortly after the Civil Rights Act was passed. The problem here revolves around the basic policy of confidentiality of records. Most government agencies that find it necessary to get large amounts of information from individuals – in our case employers and applicants for unemployment insurance, for instance, or applicants for employment in the Employment Service – most agencies that do find it necessary to get large amounts of information in that way have a policy of confidentiality. In other words, they assure the person that "If you make this information available to us, we'll treat it on a confidential basis." Now, our policy is still basically that, one of confidentiality. But it has been amended so that the information can be used by other agencies who are administering closely related programs, provided, of course, that they too treat it on a confidential basis.

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HACKMAN: What was your feeling about this at the time this developed?

GOODWIN: Well, I had no problems on this. We were in favor of this.

HACKMAN: Could you comment on the system of classification of unemployment offices, or of employment offices, that had developed in which some offices which were, in fact, segregated, were classified as divisional. In other words, there weren't separate facilities for the races, they were within the same physical facility and were actually segregated in that Negroes and whites were referred to different people to treat them, to take care of their applications.

GOODWIN: Well, I think your question probably goes to two different kinds of situations. One is where offices have been located in a particular area of a city to take care of that section of the city. We've had, as a practical result of that – we did have, as a practical result of that, what you would call a de facto segregation because the office might be located in a section of the city containing only Negroes, for instance. Now that was one kind of situation, and that kind of problem we eliminated really in the approach to local offices, the policies we adopted for the establishment of local offices. We locate most of our local offices now in downtown sections, and they're set up on the basis of specialization. We may have, for instance, a clerical and professional office, we may have an industrial office, we may have a service office. Now, we occasionally still get some criticism of de facto segregation on this kind of a breakdown. For instance, you'll find in some places that most of your service workers will be from minority groups. They may be Negro, or they may be Puerto Rican or they may be



Spanish-American. I don't know of any situation, however, where they're completely that. They may be predominantly from minority groups but not completely. If the actual breakdown is done properly, I mean if the specialization is chosen properly, you won't get this problem. I think that, by and large, we have eliminated this particular problem.

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HACKMAN: Did you ever have any problems in relationships with people in Congress over enforcement of provisions on the local or state level? Would these people on the local and state level go to their Congressman and complain about enforcement?

GOODWIN: Occasionally, not very frequently. We've had a few cases over the years that I can recall where that has been done, but it's a rare thing. Our relationships with states, generally, have been quite good, and we're always ready to negotiate and talk through problems so we rarely get this sort of thing.

HACKMAN: We talked a little bit last time about the creation of the Office of Manpower and Automation in 1961. What further effect did the passage of the Manpower Act in '62 have on the Bureau of Employment Security, this whole idea of reorganization?

GOODWIN: Well, this, in effect, set up the Manpower Administration and made the Bureau of Employment Security part of the Manpower Administration. We had been operating as one unit in the Manpower Administration. It puts an additional level in between the Bureau and the Secretary, but the whole arrangement has worked out fairly well. Along with this development have come, of course, the development of new programs. An example of that is the work program within the Manpower Administration so that one of the corollary developments has been a greater amount of coordination that's needed within the Manpower Administration.

HACKMAN: The Manpower Administration was actually set up in '63. I thought maybe you could talk a little about the problems that existed between the time the act was passed in '62 and then the Manpower Administration side was set up.

GOODWIN: Yes. Well, during that period OMAT [Office of Manpower, Automation, and Training] had principal responsibility for the development of MDTA [Manpower Development and Training Act] although the Employment Service was utilized as far as development of

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the projects in the field was concerned, and the selection, counseling, and referral of trainees. As in any new arrangement, there was some friction during this period, but not to the extent

that getting the job done was jeopardized. It went along fairly well.

HACKMAN: Who in the Department was most involved in getting this reorganization all cleared up, in defining lines of responsibility?

GOODWIN: Well, I suppose this was the Office of the Assistant Secretary Mr. Leo Werts [Leo R. Werts] primarily.

HACKMAN: Did Under Secretary Henning [John F. Henning], who later became the Manpower Administrator, have any significant role in this reorganization?

GOODWIN: I don't think he played a leading role in it. He played some, inevitably, as Under Secretary, but I don't think it was a leading role.

HACKMAN: I know it's frequently been mentioned that Secretary Wirtz [W. Willard Wirtz] had a problem for a long time of finding the exact position for Under Secretary Henning, where he could perform. Did this ever create any problems for you in relationships in the Department?

GOODWIN: No, I don't think it did.

HACKMAN: Did the departure of Assistant Secretary Holleman [Jerry R. Holleman] have any great effect on the workings of the Bureau of Employment Security?

GOODWIN: No, I don't believe so. Our relationships with Mr. Holleman were cordial, and when he left, there was a period there of uncertainty as to what was going to happen, but I can't say that there were any major problems as a result of that change.

HACKMAN: Other than in the area of discrimination, which we've discussed, what problems existed in dealing with state and local employment services

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coming into effect?

GOODWIN: What period are you talking about?

HACKMAN: Say the act was passed in June of '62, I believe, and then the new programs got going in '62 and '63.

GOODWIN: Well, there's been a continuous development, really, of new programs and the ideas that are involved in the Manpower Development and Training Act. The Act has had now three amendments, I believe, three major amendments, and each one of these has brought in new policies, new programs, new emphasis on old programs, and so on. The Employment Security system has been involved in most of them in making the application and the actual operation. I'd say, generally speaking, that there've been no major differences of opinion on these policies. There's been acceptance of them, pretty well, by the states, and they have gone ahead and put them into effect. There have been some of them that there have been some fairly sharp differences of opinion on. The only one that comes to mind at the moment really isn't a matter of change in the law. There was a change in policy shifting greater emphasis to on-the-job training as against institutional training. In the state agencies there was quite a bit of opposition to this. There's still some feeling that this was a mistake. Of course, what it resulted in was a cutting back of the institutional program, or I think it would be more accurate to say a failure to expand the institutional program in the way they thought it should be.

HACKMAN: What was your opinion of the experiment and demonstration programs under OMAT after the Manpower Act was passed?

GOODWIN: Well, there was a good deal of good that came out of that program. I think it made a contribution in developing some new areas. There

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was some experimentation that was very useful and pointed the way to changes in our program that have been profitably made. I had the feeling in a good many cases that it was used not really as experimental and demonstration, but just as a way of getting people in a training situation, and along with this point I felt that sometimes when you needed only one or two projects to demonstrate something on a particular type of program, they were developing them on a multiple basis, and you might have fifteen or twenty. So it seemed to me that there was more money that went into some of those projects than you really needed in order to demonstrate what could be done.

HACKMAN: Did you ever express this opinion within the Department?

GOODWIN: Oh, yes. And I think that the trend has been in the direction of eliminating the multiple kind of projects devoted to the same objective.

HACKMAN: What was your feeling on the use of the unemployment insurance system to provide financial assistance to workers being trained under the ARA [Area Redevelopment Administration] and the MDTA Act.

GOODWIN: I thought it was a logical step to take. The machinery was there; it has no special program connotations. The machinery was there, and that project could be done without jeopardizing unemployment insurance payments, so it seemed to me it was a desirable thing to do.

HACKMAN: Did Assistant Secretary Daniel P. Moynihan [Daniel Patrick Moynihan] have any relationship with the Bureau of Employment Security while he was in the Department?

GOODWIN: Well, his job was in the policy development area while he was here, and in that capacity he was very much interested in unemployment insurance. He did do a great deal in the development of ideas for the program that was submitted to the Congress two years ago.

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HACKMAN: Let's move on and talk about your relationship in getting funds during the period. Did you ever have any problems with getting the necessary funds for your program from the Budget Bureau?

GOODWIN: Yes, we've had problems in getting what we thought were adequate funds for the program. Sometimes the problem is with the Bureau of the Budget, and sometimes it's with the Congress. But I think in the last few years at least we've had more problems with the Bureau of the Budget than we've had with the Congress.

HACKMAN: Does that include the Kennedy period or after?

GOODWIN: I think it's principally since.

HACKMAN: Do you recall any specific programs during the Kennedy years where this would have come up?

GOODWIN: Well, I recall very clearly that right after the Kennedy Administration came into power, we asked for money to expand the Employment Service and take care of many of the new problems there. I never was sure how much our problem on this was within the Department and how much of it was the Bureau of the Budget. We felt that we needed at least fifty million dollars in order to take care of expanding needs of the Employment Service and perform some of these new functions. We finally got about twenty-nine million dollars. Then in the last few years there's been a real tightening up, most of it related to Viet Nam and the economy program that the Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] Administration has followed. So that about the only expansion that we've been able to get basically in the program in the last few years has been some of it that is tied with the poverty program really, the Employment Service functions as they relate to this event. And we have gotten a little additional there.

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HACKMAN: Did you have direct relations with the Council of Economic Advisors during the Kennedy years? What was your opinion of their ideas toward unemployment?

GOODWIN: Well, we had very little by way of direct relationship to them, and about the only way it came through was in connection with the development of specific legislation and on things like reports to the Congress and so on. Occasionally, we dealt with them directly, but mostly it was through the Secretary's office.

HACKMAN: Could you comment on the relationship of the Bureau with the Federal Advisory Council on Employment Security in the Kennedy period? Was this a great help or did it really have any serious effect on anything in the Bureau?

GOODWIN: Well, during that period the problems we had with the Federal Advisory Council resulted in its not being too productive. We had members of the Council taking pretty much an institutional position, labor's position and management's position, and there was a very strong feeling, particularly on the part of management, that we shouldn't take any votes. They were willing to have discussions and see if we could get a consensus, but they didn't want votes which might end up with the public members going along with the labor members, a two thirds-one third split. So we didn't really get too much out of the Advisory Council during that period. The result of this was that we just didn't use it very much. We went for a couple of years without calling a meeting, and then this was criticized. So we worked out a program; the last year and a half, two years it's been working fairly well. We took something of a new approach in dealing with them; we got some new members on the Council through retirement and so on; and the last year it's worked pretty well.

HACKMAN: You had mentioned briefly last time that the Bureau was involved with the program of recruitment of Mexican farm workers. How were you involved in 1961 with the bill that extended the law which allowed the recruitment of these Mexican farm laborers?

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What were your views?

GOODWIN: '61?

HACKMAN: The bill was up for – it ran out in '61 and then was extended.

GOODWIN: It was extended for one year.

HACKMAN: I believe it was in '63 it was extended for one year. In '61 it was extended for two years.

GOODWIN: Two years. Well, at that time we favored an extension. We still had a sizable number of growers that were dependent upon that. I've forgotten just how many were actually in the country in that year. But what we favored was a program to phase it out. We thought if it suddenly came to a stop then, that it would cause serious economic dislocations. So our proposal was an extension at that time and a program to phase it out. Now, one of the things that we developed as a means of an orderly phasing out of the program was this concept of adverse effect wages, which raised the wages they had to pay to Mexican workers, and these had to be offered to American workers. As you got that wage high enough, you add the incentive for the growers to do more by way of recruitment of American workers and offer higher wages. This had the effect of cutting down substantially on the number of Mexicans that were brought in and really paved the way to eliminate the program which came at a later date.

HACKMAN: Did this proposal originate in the Bureau or was it from somewhere else in the Department?

GOODWIN: The adverse effect proposal originated in the Bureau.

HACKMAN: What about the viewpoint in '61 that the program should be extended? Was that typical of the Bureau or of the Department as a whole?

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GOODWIN: I think there was general agreement on that. I think the original recommendation, as I recall, originated in the Bureau, but there was general agreement on it at that time.

HACKMAN: There was a great deal of legislation proposed in the domestic migrant area in this period especially. I believe it was handled by Senator Williams' [Harrison A. Williams, Jr.] committee from New Jersey. Did the Bureau help write most of this legislation, or did this originate...

GOODWIN: We participated on that, and the Department did, too. Some of that legislation the Bureau would not be directly involved in in terms of administration, but we were very much interested in it because we were interested in the problems of the migrant worker, and we were very much in favor of legislation dealing with his problem.

HACKMAN: Could you comment on the development of the program for rural areas in the Kennedy period? I believe there was an experimental program in Mississippi in 1961 which the next year it was proposed that this concept be extended. Do you recall that?

GOODWIN: Yes. I didn't recall the Mississippi one particularly, but this was developed during that period and has now been extended to a number of states, I believe fifteen, and we're interested in further extension of it. But it's an effort to get a more complete manpower program for rural areas and smaller towns. I think last time we talked a little bit about what our weaknesses are in this area.

HACKMAN: Right.

GOODWIN: We have, over the years, not had adequate resources to put full functioning offices in, oh, say, towns of five to ten, even up to fifteen

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thousand. The rural approach we took was to try to work out a program with the community which would put the emphasis on an analysis of what the manpower resources were; they'd try to tie it in with efforts to induce industry to come into some of those areas if that seemed to be the solution to the problem. It also is to get job information in the hands of people who might be interested in moving out of the area and going to the city and making a connection there. It's worked out pretty well on the basis of these demonstrations, and we are interested now in trying to extend it.

HACKMAN: Moving to a different area, could you compare Secretary Wirtz and Secretary Goldberg as far as their attitude and relationship with the Bureau of Employment Security? Did it differ to any appreciable degree?

GOODWIN: Well, I'm not sure of this. I probably shouldn't try to comment on this. I'd have to.... They both.... Secretary Goldberg had had a good deal to do with unemployment insurance particularly, and he was very much interested in the Employment Service. He was interested in pushing it, expanding it, and extending it. I think that Secretary Wirtz, when he came in, had had more reservations about the program, both sides of it, I think. He was concerned, for instance, about the area of so-called abuses in unemployment insurance. I think he was skeptical of the adequacy of the Employment Service approach when he came in. I think this is about all I want to say.

HACKMAN: You had said several times, I know in '61, that you felt the Employment Service system needed more national leadership in the system as a whole. How did you go about trying to accomplish this in the Kennedy period?

GOODWIN: Well, we undertook to do this by working with the states, making clear to them what these national objectives were, using the argument

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with them that if we couldn't accomplish these national objectives within the federal-state system, something was going to have to give, and it was to their advantage to join with us in trying to achieve these national objectives. We recognized that you couldn't use a federal-state system in the same way you would a purely federal system. You've got to work cooperatively with the states; you can't order them to do all of these things. But we got, really, what I think was a pretty good response from the states in their acceptances of national programs and willingness to do a good job in achieving these national objectives.

HACKMAN: Were there ever any suggestions within the Department or within the Administration that you know of of making this a completely federal program?

GOODWIN: Oh, it's been discussed a good many times. I think that there are a good many people within the federal government who think that this would be highly desirable. The only reason that they haven't made it a legislative program is because politically it isn't realistic. States have enough political strength that they could stop it.

HACKMAN: Do you think the image of the Bureau of Employment Security, or the whole employment system, changed to any great extent in the Kennedy years?

GOODWIN: I think it improved, I think it improved. I think the President made reference to unemployment insurance. In the first place, he was interested in it; he had been interested in it when he was in the Senate; he talked about it in his speeches frequently. It was clear that he knew what he was talking about; he wasn't just saying something that someone had given him to say. He knew something about the program, and he believed in the program. So the image of both unemployment insurance and the Employment Service was helped considerably while he was in the White House.

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HACKMAN: Did you attend any meetings at the White House during this period, or have any meetings with the President personally?

GOODWIN: I didn't have any meetings with the President personally. I attended one or two meetings during that period at the White House. I can't recall at the moment just exactly what they were, but I know that I was



over there on one or two meetings. Most of this, most of our programs and jobs that needed to be done were done during that period by Goldberg.

HACKMAN:           Those are all the questions I have. Do you have any overall comments or conclusions on the period?

GOODWIN:           Well, only that it was one which gave a tremendous lift to those of us who were connected with the program here. I came into the federal service in the Roosevelt [Franklin D. Roosevelt] Administration, and I always felt that Roosevelt had this appeal to a lot of people; he appealed to the best in people; he could get them to cooperate in the promotion of worthwhile programs. There was a real zeal attached to it, and I felt that we had that same kind of leadership, a little different, but I mean it inspired people to do things to help their fellow man. And I felt we got the same kind of leadership in President Kennedy. As among many other things, he made a lasting impression, I think, on this – at least the Civil Service. I felt privileged to have been a part of it.

HACKMAN:           Thank you very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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