

NOTICE

Materials in our digital Oral History collections are the products of research projects by several individuals. USF Libraries assume no responsibility for the views expressed by interviewers or interviewees. Some interviews include material that may be viewed as offensive or objectionable. Parents of minors are encouraged to supervise use of USF Libraries Oral Histories and Digital Collections. Additional oral histories may be available in Special Collections for use in the reading room. See individual collection descriptions for more information.

This oral history is provided for research and education within the bounds of U.S. Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S.C.). Copyright over Oral Histories hosted by the USF Libraries rests with the interviewee unless transferred to the interviewer in the course of the project. Interviewee views and information may also be protected by privacy and publicity laws. All patrons making use of it and other library content are individually accountable for their responsible and legal use of copyrighted material.

**Citrus Oral History Project
Globalization Research Center
University of South Florida**

Interview with: George Austin
Interviewed by: William Mansfield
Location: La Belle, Florida
Date: June 22, 2005
Transcribed by: Wm. Mansfield
Edited by: Wm. Mansfield

[Tape 1, Side A.]

Bill Mansfield: I always put a label on the disk by saying, This is Bill Mansfield from the University of South Florida's Globalization Research Center talking with Mr. George Austin in his offices in La Belle, Florida on June 22, 2005. And Mr. Austin, we always get people to start out by having them state their name and telling when they were born and where they were born. So let her go.

George Austin: Okay. My name is George Austin. My birthday is December 6, 1936. I was born in the little town of Alva, Florida, which is between Fort Myers and LaBelle.

Mansfield: Tell me about your education.

Austin: I went to high school and graduated from high school in Alva. It was a real small high school. Had about ten people in my graduating class, so you can imagine how small the school was. From there I went to the University of Florida, in Gainesville and I have a degree from the College of Architecture, a degree in building construction from the College of Architecture at the University of Florida.

[phone call interrupts interview]

Mansfield: From majoring in architecture how did you get into citrus?

Austin: I grew up in the business. My father came to the area in the 1920's with the railroad. He was a telegraph operator for the railroad. We had railroad in Alva at the time and had several citrus packing houses. He ended up being the manager at one of the packinghouses. I grew up in the business and after he passed away in 1966, [I came back over here and took over a small business that he had developed, after the packinghouse had closed]. I was working in the construction business and at that time I was in Miami and when he passed away,

Mansfield: Okay. And how would you describe your current occupation?

Austin: Well, that's a good question. [laughs] I'm not sure. People ask me all the time and I'm not sure. I can't describe it, real well. I operated this business of my own, from 1966 to 1995. At that time, for various reasons, I sold the assets of the business to Oakley Groves, Incorporated, who I currently work for, and had a two year employment agreement and here I am, basically ten years later, still working for them. I've never had a real specific job description but I do a little management. Buy a little fruit and I do just various things that they need me to do.

So, to answer your question, I don't have any specific title or necessarily any job description or responsibility, but I've done a little bit of everything for the company, for the last ten years.

Mansfield: What does Oakley Groves do?

Austin: Oakley Groves, [are, primarily] growers. They are the largest fruit hauler in the state of Florida. They also have a packinghouse. Then there's the other side of the business that has a food grade transport business, so they haul a lot of orange juice as well as other commodities. But it's a fairly large family owned business that's been in the [citrus] industry for a long, long time.

Mansfield: Okay. It sounds like they cover a lot of the aspects of the Florida citrus, growing the fruit, fresh market fruit, processed—what concentrate I guess?

Austin: We don't actually do any processing, per say, but we do have the packing house and we ship a lot of fresh product and as well as growing fruit, we buy fruit from other growers. We market a lot of four fruit through the major processors, Tropicana, Southern Gardens, you know—uh—Coke-a-Cola, people like that..

Mansfield: Okay, the main thing I'm interested in talking to you about is your activities on the Citrus Tariff Oversight Committee. So tell me how you became a member of that committee?

Austin: [chuckles] I'm not real sure. Any way, when the President—or Congress, I guess it was, gave the President trade promotional authority, primarily to negotiate the Free Trade Area of the Americas, the FTAA. It raised a lot of concern in the citrus industry because the FTAA would have covered all of the countries in the Western Hemisphere, with the exception of Cuba. I think there are probably thirty-four countries involved in that negotiation and Brazil was one of the companies—or countries, and of course they are largest citrus producer in the world, and Florida's main competition.

So it got the attention of Florida Citrus Mutual, the Florida Citrus Commission's Department of Citrus and so it was felt that the industry needed to have a separate committee to specifically address, you know, the tariff issue and what we could do about preserving the tariff. Because, it's pretty well understood in the industry that we can't compete with imported Brazilian product without the tariff. So, the initial committee was an appointed committee, by Bob Crawford, who at the time was the executive director of the Florida Department of Citrus at the time, and Andy LaVigne got together. They came up with a list of names that they thought would be good to serve on the committee. And so it was an appointed committee.

I'm not quite sure how I ended up on it. I guess one of the reasons is that I've been somewhat active, from the in industry affairs from the southwest Florida area and had served on the Florida Citrus Commission in the past. I was asked to serve on the committee, I think there was originally, thirteen or fourteen of us on the initial committee. Unfortunately I was having some minor surgery and missed the first meeting and got appointed chairman. So I was the first chairman of the CTOC. [laughs]

Mansfield: And when was it formed?

Austin: Oh! [clicks his tongue as he thinks] I guess it would have been the Spring of 2003. I'd have to go back and verify that.

Mansfield: How did they –did they tell you, you were on the committee or did they ask you?

Austin: They asked me. They asked me would I serve on the committee and I agreed to do that. I was serving on the, what was it—the—another committee for Mutual at the time and was actually chairing that committee also. I told them that I didn't feel like I could [chair] both [committees], but I thought this was an important committee to serve on.

Mansfield: How did they explain the mission of the committee?

Austin: Well, initially, I think we developed a mission statement and that sort of thing, after the committee was formed. But initially we had one focus and one goal and that was to preserve the existing tariff on imported product from Brazil. Because with the FTAA negotiations, we just felt like that was, you know, the bottom line.

Mansfield: Tell me about the other members on the committee. It was a fairly heavy weight committee as far as the people that served on it. We had people from—number one, I think the—ah—Florida Citrus Mutual and the Department of Citrus, or Florida Citrus Commission, who were originally involved with it, [they] are no longer involved with it, but initially, they were involved with forming the committee. I think they did a very good job of picking the various members of the committee. They represented all the areas of the state. Geographically, it was well presented. Also, it included most of the people that had provided leadership in the industry in the past and presented a large portion of the acreage in the state.

Mansfield: I just want to make sure I understand it. It was like they had to cover the orange growing areas, geographically and people who had experience in other committees, like with their—

Austin: Yeah, just that had been involved various leadership positions in the past, and/or represented very large—in other words when you took the total committee [the members] represented a fair percentage of the acreage in the state.

Mansfield: So it was primarily large growers?

Austin: It was primarily large growers, because it was a fairly influential committee, as far as representing the major players, so there was a number of large growers represented on the committee. I guess you would have to say it was made up primarily of larger growers

Mansfield: Tell me about your duties as chairman of the committee.

Austin: [sighs] Well, we started out with some major decisions to make. Number one—you know—how—there's a couple of things. We felt like it needed to be an independent committee, from any of the other existing organizations in the state. We'd—ah—I'm having to think back through it.

Mansfield: Take your time.

Austin: But one of the things that we initially had to determine was how it was going to be structured. We knew this effort was going to take a lot of money. And then how do we structure it? We knew it had to be some kind of a non-profit structure. We looked at a totally independent entity, a 501C3, or whatever the nonprofit category is. In the end, the final result was we ended up being an Ad Hoc committee of Florida Citrus Mutual. And independent committee, but an Ad Hoc committee just because of the need to—the final structure needs, requirements of the committee.

Then there were a lot of other issues that had to be resolved regarding primarily how to fund the effort was the major hurdle we had to work through. I think I told you [clears throat-takes a drink of water] Excuse me.

I think I told you before that Florida Citrus Mutual—the Florida Department of Citrus was initially involved, the Florida Citrus Commission. Initially we had talked about them doing part of the funding and Florida Citrus Mutual doing part of the funding and also collecting some kind of box tax from the growers to do.

We felt like—or we thought we needed approximately seven-million dollars, over a two year period of time, to accomplish at the time—I guess we all knew that it wasn't going to be over in two years. But that was the critical time frame that we needed to be concerned with as far as our budgeting and our initial efforts for preserving the tariff.

Well, as it turned out, and you've probably talked to some other people, we had some issues regarding this funding. The Florida Citrus Commission had some other focuses in place. Not the least being the advertising and promotion of Florida orange juice. And of course they are a public entity and they operate in the sunshine and there was a question about, if they funded some of this project, we're talking about, were they subject to the sunshine law?

There was concerns expressed in those areas. The citrus industry was going through some fairly tough economic times. There was a lawsuit, that you may be aware of, regarding the box tax in place. Some of the people who serve on the CTOC were part of that lawsuit, they were part of the litigates in the lawsuit. So, we had some initial difficulty in figuring out the level of involvement of the Florida Citrus Commission in relationship to Mutual's involvement. The end result, after a lot of back-and-forth, the Florida Citrus Commission agreed to reduce their box tax for the first year, by a cent and a half. [That allowed] the CTOC to go to the growers and ask them to substitute that cent and a half, that they would have paid to the Florida Citrus Commission in box tax, to fund the CTOC. Basically, after that, the Department of Citrus and the Citrus Commission was out of the picture. It became a Florida Citrus Mutual-CTOC effort.

In that initial agreement, regarding funding, I believe that Florida Citrus Mutual agreed to donate five hundred thousand dollars to the effort. [They] also agreed to loan

the CTOC a substantial amount of money, in an agreement in which they would be paid back for the loan portion of their commitment to the CTOC.

Mansfield: What kind of reaction did you get from the growers when you went to them and said, “*The tax is removed. We’d like for you to pay this tax?*”

Austin: I would say, generally, we got a good response. Canker wasn’t quite the issue that is today. So—the industry was struggling economically, it was pretty well understood, within the industry, among commercial growers, that without the tariff, it would be just a matter of time before they had to go out of business. So, we got fairly good reception. I can’t tell you exactly what the percentage of the collection rate was. It was a voluntary tax, by the way, as opposed to the mandatory tax that the commission collects. But I think we probably ended up, somewhere in the 70-75% collection range the first year. While I don’t know that we totally broke even, we did have a reasonably good collection effort.

Mansfield: Well, it seems like it would be in their best interests to support the—
[voluntary tax.]

Austin: Right. Most people—[In any business you’re in, or any industry you’re in] there’s always independent people that don’t want to be a part of a common effort. But I felt pretty good about how we were able to fund the effort the first year.

Mansfield: What kind of reactions were there in the CTOC? I mean you’ve got different people—

Austin: There were, and I don’t think there’s any question about that, because we had a number of large corporations represented in the CTOC. Several of them had other commodity interests, primarily sugar. They had a little different approach to, the politics, the political process than some of the other people on the committee, the pure citrus growers, or people that were representing only citrus did. We had the opposition to the

box tax [on the committee] which in itself has created some friction and some faction there. But—I would say, at the end of the day [everybody felt like the ultimate goal was the preservation of the tariff]. Even though we had some disagreements, or at least some concerns about how we would approach the issue (what we were trying to accomplish)—at the end of the day, and we didn't let the various factions influence our ultimate goal.

Mansfield: I don't want to put you on the spot or anything, but who were the leaders of the different factions?

Austin: Well, we had, Ben Hill Griffin III was on the board. He has pure citrus interests. And then we had people like US Sugar. (I'm trying to think if they had a pure representative or not at that time.) I know that later they had the CEO of Southern Gardens on there. But they had a little different approach to—[pauses as he chooses his words] because they did represent the sugar interests. Then we had some people from the Florida Citrus Commission that served. They had a little—they felt like that they, you know the Commission or the Department should be more involved in the process.

I guess the bottom line is that we were coming from about three different directions. Not that fact that anybody was 180 degrees opposed to anyone else. We were coming at this thing from three different directions to accomplish our goals. In addition to, let's say, we had some people involved like Consolidated Citrus, that had both citrus and sugar interests, the same as Southern Gardens or US Sugar.

And, like I said, we had at least one commissioner from the Department of Citrus on board. Actually, we ended up with a couple and one time or another. So we had some issues that they were concerned about. One of the things, they were initially committed to some funding for the effort, other than just—reducing their box tax rate. And there were some issues about how this money could be spent, would be spent and still maintain the—you know, with in their authority as to what they could spend money on and that sort of thing.

I guess it boils down to the little different approach that the sugar industry has taken in the past to their political efforts and the other thing with the Department of Citrus and the Citrus Commission, regarding funding.

Mansfield: Sounds like you all wanted to go to the same place, but couldn't agree on how to get there.

Austin: Yeah .We had a little problem in getting there initially. I'll have to say that. We did. The end result was fine. I think there was always a question of—the other thing is, when we did agree to bring our Washington law firm on board—

Well, actually when we first began talking to them they provided a lot of help and a lot of direction. [They helped us decide] what kind of approach should we take with congress, with the USTR, you know, the US Trade Representative's office. [They helped with] what kind of lobbying efforts should we take a look at. How should we approach the Florida [congressional] delegation? What kind of public relations should we be involved with? Hoe do we tell our story to the public? What should we do about trying to better understand the Brazilian end of the industry? Where were they coming form? How do you understand the negotiations?

How do you understand what's important to another country in these trade negotiations. Because under the FTAA, I mean there were a number of issues. It wasn't just agricultural commodities, there were banking laws—uh—intellectual property issues. There were a lot of other thinks beside just agricultural commodities.

Mansfield: You all had quite a task in front of you, figuring out how to take this on. But you said, once you figured out how to fund the committee you had to decide on what course to take to shape the legislation, who to talk to and how to talk to them and such. And I just want to make sure I understand you correctly. You said there were conflicting ideas about how best to do that? I'm I understanding that correctly?

Austin: To the degree that—initially the Florida Department of Citrus was involved and there was conflicting ideas, because there were some of these things that we didn't feel like should be subject to the sunshine law, certainly in our initial efforts. So there were some concerns that if the Florida Department of Citrus/Citrus Commission was going to be involved, how could they fund some of these things with out being subject to [public scrutiny], with out them violating the sunshine law.

And I guess on the other side, there was—concern about, particularly from some of the people who represented the sugar interests whether we were spending enough money or not. One of the other things we had a tough time with was trying to figure out what level of funding that we would need. So we were somewhat all over the board there. You know, whether you take—how strong approach should you take in your lobbying efforts? Whether we do some of this with a carrot or with a stick.

And I think this is where the law firm that we hired, provided some excellent leadership. They were involved on both sides of the aisle in Washington. They understood the trade process. They gave us some excellent guidance about where we should spend our money and how strong, what kind of approach should we take in any kind of lobbying efforts.

Mansfield: And what law firm did you all hire?

Austin: It was Aiken and Gump. They've got as longer name than that, if you need it. But that's what we [call them].

Mansfield: With a name like Gump—

Austin: [laughs] I know. That was my first question, "*You hired a law firm by the name of Gump?*" [laughs]

Mansfield: But they sort of helped educate the committee about how best to work through Washington?

Austin: Yes. Yes. They did an excellent job in that respect. They are well connected. We had two people from the firm that were kind of directly responsible for our efforts. One was a person by the name of Bill Paxson who was a former legislator from New York State. Even though he worked for the law firm I don't know that he was a lawyer. But he certainly understood the political process very well. [He] represented the Republican side of the aisle. And then we had a person, an attorney by the name of Joel Jankowsky, and

he represented the Democratic side of the aisle in the effort. You know, you're a little apprehensive about going out and securing some outside help and whether you're picking the right person or not, but I feel real good about [our choice of lobbyist].

I wasn't directly involved in that process Bob Crawford and Any LaVigne, they brought the firm to us, as a recommendation. But I think they did an excellent job in selecting that firm.

Mansfield: Once the firm was selected and then you all began lobbying Washington? I don't know how else to put it.

Austin: Yeah, let me back up just a minute. I know you spent some time on trying to get an understanding about where some different people in the committee were coming from. There were, and I think I alluded to it, there were some people who felt like we weren't spending enough money, but on the other side there were some people who felt like we were spending WAY too much money in our effort to preserve the tariff. They felt like that the industry, especially because Jeb Bush was governor of the state of Florida, George's brother, whatever. That we didn't have to spend as much money as we were spending. So there were a lot of things—and—I don't know—there wasn't any serious divides. But there were some things that kind of had to be reconciled.

Mansfield: Well, let's see—US Sugar, were they on the “not-enough money side”?

Austin: They were on the more aggressive side. They were [saying], “*Are we spending enough money?*” side of it. And then we had some people that—in the industry, some leadership in the industry that felt like, “*You guys don't need to be spending this kind of money. We're politically solid enough as it is.*” [phone rings]

Mansfield: And who were they?

Austin: They were—uh—Bill Becker comes to mind. He was one of them for example. One of his people was the chairman of the Florida Citrus Commission at the time.—What

was his name?—I can't think of it off hand. It might have come up in one of your other interviews.

Mansfield: It wasn't Mr. Crawford was it?

Austin: No. He was—oh I don't have a very good memory. Maybe I'll think of it. Or we can get it to you later.

Mansfield: Okay

Austin: And, you know, here again, I don't want to [give you the impression] fights about this. There weren't any hard feelings, or anything. But there were just some things regarding the spending level, and how aggressive an approach we should be taking. We had to agree on [it]. We had to go through the process, until everybody got reasonably comfortable.

Mansfield: Okay. So once you'd chosen the law firm and started working, tell me what you all did.

Austin: Well, we had some other consulting firms, in addition to the major law firm. Most of them worked under the major law firm. The law firm focused on the US Trade Representative's office and Congress, trying to educate them on what our issues were; why we were so concerned. Why we felt like our situation was so unique that there was justification for leaving us out of any negotiations regarding the reduction of the tariff on citrus.

On the local level, Mutual, Gulf Citrus, Peace River, Indian River, we all got involved on the local level. We went to chambers [of commerce meetings]. We went to various governmental entities. We tried to get endorsements, from the Chamber of Commerce, in various areas. I know, in Fort Myers, Lee County has a large economic development office. Their advisory group is called the Horizon Council. It is represented by various business and interests in the county. One of the things we did is went to them

and asked them for an endorsement, regarding our effort and to help preserve the tariff on citrus. Basically, we did a lot of trying to tell our story on the local level, as well as [in Washington]. And we made several trips top Washington and met with some of the key people. And certainly [we met with] the people from the Florida [congressional] delegation.

Put I guess, primarily we tried to do a lot of work at home. Our attorneys tried to give us a lot of help in Washington. I guess—what's Putnam's first name?

Mansfield: Andy? Andrew Putnam?

Austin: Is it Andy? [Adam]

Mansfield: Well, the representative. [Adam Putnam.]

Austin: Yeah, any way, in looking back on it, and even at the time, he was the catalyst that made al of this happen. What success we've had —[is to a large degree, due to his efforts in Washington and having the presidents ear to some degree. He was on the plane with the President during the 9/11 thing. The President certainly wants these negotiations to work. But [Putnam] has taken a very strong approach as far as the industry is concerned. There's been a lot of effort.] I think we've had a lot of success, but it ain't over and it may never be over.

Mansfield: You said, you met with the Florida Delegation in Washington and some other key people? Who were the other key people that you met with?

Austin: It'd be people like—ah—the Secretary of Agriculture, for example. We met with the Secretary of Commerce. I think Evans, was the Secretary of Commerce at the time. We certainly met with a number of people in the Trade Representative's office. [We] met with—ah—Martinez, when he was Secretary of Health and Human Services, or what ever it was.

[End Tape 1, Side A. Begin Tape 1, Side B.]

Austin: We met with him some key people, from other agricultural producing states. One of the things that we were looking for was, “*Where do we establish our coalitions?*” If it comes to a long drawn out process, who are our friends? We had discussions as to, “*What other agricultural commodities can you depend on? Is organized labor, is that a place where you can get some help?*” You look at the environmental community. Generally, citrus is perceived as environmentally friendly crop. We tried to look at a large scope of people that would have similar interests as far as the agreement might [effect them].

Mansfield: And how did you alter your story, your presentation, from group to group?

Austin: We really didn’t alter it very much. I think we stayed pretty much on line with our story. You know, I’ve never been able to sell something I didn’t believe in. And I guess, philosophically, I can appreciate our need to expand trade. If not world wide, then certainly in our own hemisphere. But by the same token, we had a unique situation and we had very compelling arguments as to why the citrus tariff should not be part of any negotiations for the reduction of the citrus tariff. So I felt real comfortable with the story we had to tell. But, even though these arguments made a lot of sense to me. I still think they are good arguments. We also realized, at the end of the day, this was going to be a political decision, and not based on an intellectual arguments. And I think most of the arguments, or most of the reasoning that we presented, didn’t require changing the focus. [cell phone rings]

Certainly, if you were talking to people who were environmentally sensitive, you talked a little bit more about the green-space, the wild life habitat that citrus provides, water retention and the water recovery areas that the citrus industry provides, and that sort of thing. But the bottom line is, we didn’t alter our argument a lot. I guess, what we felt like—our what I felt like any way, was that—I lost my train of thought, that damn phone. I should but this in my car.

Mansfield: You were talking about the way you presented your story.

Austin: I guess it's an over simplification. But I felt like this trade agreement or the [cell phone rings]—[pause]—or the elimination of the citrus tariff. And here again, I know there are other countries involved but most of the Caribbean bases countries are exempt anyway. Mexico was negotiated under NAFTA and [its tariff] is down to some thirty-third of what it was. But and the bottom line is we're talking about Brazil.

I guess one of the arguments I was comfortable with is that, you know, the reduction of the tariff on citrus didn't accomplish what it was suppose to. [cell phone rings] It wasn't going to make citrus juice any cheaper, because we're taking about the two largest juice producers in the world. Somewhere between 75% and 85% of world's orange juice is produced in Brazil [cell phone rings]. If you reduce the tariff and put Florida out of business, you'll end up with a monopoly. So I always thought that was a legitimate argument, along with the jobs and the environmental sort of thing. So I felt comfortable with our position.

Mansfield: Well, I asked that question because I was curious as to whether or not you tailored your arguments to address a particular group, like the environmentalists [cell phone rings].

Austin: To some degree, but not substantially.

Mansfield: What about other agricultural states, what would you say to them to enlist them?

Austin: My thinking is there are some states that felt like any kind of trade agreement would be a benefit to them. So I guess—I don't know how to answer the question other than the fact that you don't try to change their philosophy but you just try to make them understand that you're coming—that it effects you differently than t might affect someone else.

Mansfield: What kind of response did you get from different groups?

Austin: Actually, we got a much better response, a lot more favorable response than I ever anticipated. Just about all the chambers [of commerce] went on record [in support of us]. Here again, when we're talking about preserving the Florida citrus industry, we're talking about a way of life in the state of Florida. We're talking about, probably the number one or number two industry in the state, other than tourism. So you're almost talking about an "apple-pie" sort of think when you talk about the citrus industry in the state. Of all the agricultural commodities in the state, in my opinion, citrus has the best image.

Mansfield: [laughs] It's a darn sight better than tobacco, that's for sure.

Austin: [laughs] Right, exactly. [cell phone rings] And quite frankly it's better than sugar's image.

We're basically a non subsidized industry and that always—most people today are not really comfortable with a lot of subsidizes. So that always sells well and comes across well. You know, we don't want the government to keep us in business. All we want is the, you know, opportunity to compete on the open market, with something to offset the difference in the cost of labor. Labor is not all of it, but it's the bulk of it. The difference of the cost of labor in growing citrus and processing citrus in Brazil, compared to Florida.

Mansfield: Like, in Washington, how were you received by the different groups in Washington? Like the Agricultural Department, and those groups?

Austin: [pause] You know, you have to take anything that's said in Washington with a grain of salt. [laughs] But with the two or three trips I made, I felt real good about [it].

I know in our interview with the Secretary of Commerce, that—uh—he got pretty blunt and said, basically—you know—that, "*You all have got a real problem ahead of you with these trade agreements.*" So we had a few people that were real blunt with us.

We had some people that were probably—I can't think of the word—but were probably catered too much to our position.

Mansfield: Obsequious, would that be a word to describe it?

Austin: I don't know—

Mansfield: Well, “suck-up,” or “kiss-up,” to use laymen's terms.

Austin: [laughs] Yeah, but over all I think we were well received. Certainly, when you talk with the trade representative's office, I mean they got one thing in mind and that's the President, or Congress gives them a mission and they're not going to sit there and tell you that anything is off the table. They are not going to make any commitment to you. You try to get them to talk in terms where you might be able to interpret some kind of sympathy for your argument or position. But—you know—that's all to be expected. And I felt real good about what we were able to—[accomplish] who we were able to see. The quality of the leadership and the various departments we were able to talk with, the high level of officials we were able to get an audience with.

And, I felt okay with the response. I didn't anticipate and wouldn't have expected anything different than—we weren't going to get a commitment per se, or spelled out to us, any way.

Mansfield: You mentioned approaching organized labor for support?

Austin: It was just something that was—we tried to take a broad approach to it and not leave anything off the table. We did not, or to my knowledge we did not [**?talk to organized labor?**] But when you start thinking about who might have a common interest with you, a lot of times you have to include—you know—groups like labor, even though we would have made awful strange bedfellows.

Mansfield: Adversity does make strange bedfellows. [laughs]

Austin: [laughs] Right but certainly—[Intercom interrupts interview]

Mansfield: (I just want to make sure I got the recorder running again.) But anyhow, we were talking about how adversity makes strange bedfellows, but as the chairman of the Citrus Tariff Oversight Committee, were you the arbitrator of these [disputes]?

Austin: That's what I tried—that's what my goal was, is to try to bring any opposing interests—to reach some kind of compromise in any differences of opinion, or opposing interests. I can't say that I did a good job with that, but that was my number one objective as chairman. Certainly as the initial chairman, where we had to work through some of these start-up issues.

Mansfield: Were there any sub-committees?

Austin: We had some sub-committees. I'm trying to think, certainly we had—budget type committees, regarding the voluntary tax contributions and to establish our budget levels, etc. I think we had a committee to try and better understand [the Brazilians. What was their approach? What was their philosophy?] What were their true feelings about the citrus tariff, as opposed to what just might be [presented] by the media, or reading something. Trying to have a better understanding of the pros and cons of the reduction in the tariff as it relates [interview interrupted]

Mansfield: So anyhow you had the different [subcommittees]?

Austin: We had three or four committees, two or three committees, anyway that most of them were just two or three people.

Mansfield: And you served on the committee from the Spring of '03 until till—when did you leave the committee?

Austin: I hope I got my years right. Maybe it was the Spring of '02. Could it have been the Spring of '02? Let me see here. I stayed on it about eighteen months, I think. [Looks through documents.]

I guess it was the Spring of '02. I'm just looking at a letter here that was confirmation of the representation of Aiken and Gump as our attorney. So I would have stayed 'til the Summer of '04. [Continues looking through documents.]

You know, we were told early on that there would be big flurries of activity and then nothing would happen for days, weeks, months, whatever. And that's certainly been true. These negotiations ran into trouble, from the start. So, you know—nothing has really been cast in stone. As far as I know they haven't even selected a location for the head quarters. I mean, Miami seems to be the obvious place. It just seems like stuff goes on forever and nothing ever gets accomplished.

Mansfield: Well, that sounds like a good description of politics in general.

Austin: [laughs]

Mansfield: What is your over all feeling about the future of Florida's citrus industry?

Austin: [pause] I think I'd be a lot more positive about the future of the industry if it hadn't been for the canker finds, that seems to be over whelming us now. It's probably due to the storms we had last summer. I felt like we were optimistic in our efforts in the tariff arena, but—you know—canker seems to have taken center stage now. If we continue to destroy all of this acreage because of canker, I don't know what kind of industry we're going to have left when it's all said and done. If it ever is all said and done.

Plus the price of land is now appreciated so rapidly in the past couple of years. A lot of people have elected to get out of the citrus business, because they can sell their groves at a big profit.

And then we're never going to be the cheapest producer in the world and so I have a lot of questions about the future of the industry. I certainly feel confident telling

you it will be a lot smaller industry than we've had in the past. I just hope—you know—that we're able to have an industry of some significant size in the state. I think it is beneficial, the state and to the people of Florida.

Mansfield: Well, I've been throwing questions at you for the past hour or so, is there anything you want to comment on? Is there a question that you want to answer that I haven't asked?

Austin: I don't know. [pause] Can you think of any area that we haven't covered?

Mansfield: I'm sure that when I go back and listen to this interview there will be a dozen questions that I could have asked. But we'll let it rest for the time being.

But I will say thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me. I've really enjoyed it. And I'll remind you again that the information you've shared with me in this inter view will be deposited in the University of South Florida's Special Collections and I'll need to get you to sign a release form.

Austin: Okay.

Mansfield: Also, I've been photographing everybody I've interviewed. Do you mind if I take your picture?

Austin: I guess I don't [laughs]

Mansfield: Well, great. Let me shut this thing off.

[End of interview]