**LindaThomasGreenfield.mp3**

[00:00:00] **Speaker 1** Is my guy on? Um, yes it is. Okay.

[00:00:10] **Speaker 2** And are you ready? Thanks for watching!

[00:00:14] **Speaker 1** Okay, we are rolling. Linda Thomas-Greenfield, welcome back to Wisconsin.

[00:00:20] **Speaker 2** Thank you, I'm really happy to be back, and the weather is beautiful.

[00:00:26] **Speaker 1** So I say welcome back, of course, because you did, some decades ago, live here and you were a grad student in 1975 at UW Madison. And since then, you've worked in a number of federal government positions overseas in Switzerland, Pakistan, Nigeria, to name a few, before eventually you became the United States ambassador to United Nations during the Joe Biden presidency. Thinking back to your time here, is there something about Wisconsin that helped you or motivated you to work in foreign affairs and on the international stage.

[00:00:58] **Speaker 2** You know, I think when I look back, it was the international community here. There were people from every country around the world. And you started to get curious about what was happening in countries. I was studying Africa, but I also was curious about other places and meeting people from other places. I had a friend from Thailand and I'd never even thought of going. to Thailand. There were students here from China. I had a colleague who studied Chinese politics. So a lot of that experience and that exposure I think helped move me in the direction of diplomacy.

[00:01:44] **Speaker 1** You're here in Wisconsin to give a talk through UW's Lafauet School of Public Affairs on quote the art of negotiation. What is the art negotiation and why is it an art?

[00:01:56] **Speaker 2** You know, I think it's an art, and I love the fact that they refer to it as an art because people do it in different ways. Artists don't all paint the same picture. They don't focus on the same subject. And diplomacy is an art. Because it's how an individual carries out that process of negotiation. My art, my process, I call gumbo diplomacy. And what that means is that I like to get to know the people I'm negotiating with. I like get to get them up close and personal over a bowl of gumbo or whatever, cheese curds, since we're in Madison. But really taking a little bit of time at the beginning of any discussion to know who I'm talking to and where they come from and what's important to them. And so the art of diplomacy, the art of negotiations can be different for different people and in different places.

[00:03:04] **Speaker 1** How should people approach a situation where they think negotiation is needed?

[00:03:09] **Speaker 2** I think they need to be open minded. They need to know what they want to achieve before they go into negotiations. And they need a sense of what the other side wants as well. And you need to what your outer limits are. So you may go in with a hard position, but that position might be movable. It might be a little bit flexible. And you to know that before you go. uh... into into the room that you have some flexibility uh... and that you're looking for some flexibility so you're not going to get everything you want and the person you're negotiating with won't get everything they want you're gonna come out somewhere in the middle now my goal is not to get to the middle my goal was to stay as close to my position as possible, but I know I have to move. And I'm sure the other side is trying to stay as close to their position as possible. But if you come out of the room with a settlement, then you're in a good place.

[00:04:14] **Speaker 1** Negotiation is a very serious word, but I bet people negotiate more in everyday life than they think. Where might people find that they're negotiating?

[00:04:25] **Speaker 2** You negotiate with your children. I remember many situations with my adult children when they were younger negotiating how late they would stay out or what friends they would have over. And now I'm negotiating with a five and six-year-old. I have three grandchildren, three, five, and six. And to negotiate with a 5-year old is tough.

[00:04:56] **Speaker 1** Do you win?

[00:04:58] **Speaker 2** Sometimes, sometimes, but they win most of the time.

[00:05:02] **Speaker 1** That said, how do you gage your rate or accomplish a successful negotiation? What does that look like?

[00:05:11] **Speaker 2** I think when you walk away from the negotiation, both sides are happy. So as I said, you're not gonna get everything you want, but you're gonna get some of the things you want. And if you walk out the door knowing you have accomplished some of things you wanted, then you're happy and you want the other side to be happy as well. Because if they are not happy, then they may not adhere to the terms of the negotiation. and you start all over again from scratch. And I've seen that happen. We've seen countries at war, for example, Democratic Republic of Congo. I remember negotiating when I was Assistant Secretary, the relationship between Rwanda and DRC as it related to M23, which is a group that has been fighting inside of DRC. I thought we resolved that in 2013, and I said that to the president of Rwanda when I saw him just a couple of years ago. It wasn't resolved because when we walked out of the door, one side was not happy with what they came out with.

[00:06:28] **Speaker 1** So is negotiation a lot of this based in trust that people will do what they say they're going to do when they leave the negotiating table?

[00:06:34] **Speaker 2** It's based on trust, it's based on commitment, and it's based on common goals. So if you're negotiating about war and peace, the common goal should be peace. And if both sides walk into the room with the goal of achieving peace, then once peace is achieved, both sides should be happy. But that is not always the case.

[00:07:01] **Speaker 1** We spoke about this a little bit, but you're from Louisiana. Yes. State known for its gumbo. Professionally, you're known for diplomacy. So you've created this thing called gumbo diplomacy. Gumbo can have many different ingredients. What does your gumbo, diplomacy include? Thanks for watching!

[00:07:18] **Speaker 2** You know, it includes having everybody participate in the preparation. So you're sitting around a big kitchen table or a counter, and you're chopping onions and celery and green pepper, the holy trinity of gumbo, and you are talking. And you're not really focused on what you're talking about. You're trying to ensure that you don't cut your fingertips off. and sometimes you get to a place. where you're in agreement. Now, I don't have, you know, heads of state coming to my house to chop onions and make gumbo, but I do have them come to the house to sit down and eat gumbo. And it's a great conversation piece. It lays out a very comfortable environment to start with. And then you get to the tough stuff. And the tough is easier. you've enjoyed Vologambo on the way there.

[00:08:22] **Speaker 1** What is the best hot sauce?

[00:08:25] **Speaker 2** So my family in Louisiana will disagree with me. I like Tabasco. Tabascos you can find anywhere in the world. If I open my purse up right now, I have a little bottle of Tabascon in my purse. Cause sometimes you'll go and they'll bring something else and try to convince you that it's as good as Tabasca. People in Louisiana also like Louisiana hot sauce or Crystal or Texas Pete. I am a strict Tabasco person.

[00:08:59] **Speaker 1** I'm a Texas Pete guy, so I guess this interview's over.

[00:09:03] **Speaker 2** Let me give you a bottle of Tabasco and you'll change your mind. Okay.

[00:09:10] **Speaker 1** Excuse me speaking of food, Wisconsin farmers like those in neighboring Midwestern states play a pivotal role in Global food assistance programs dating back to food for peace in the 1950s more recently Wisconsin farmers have sold their agricultural products to programs that are part of the US Agency for International development the Trump administration is in the middle of trying to dismantle the USA ID program. I'm trying Yeah, truly have It's still caught up in the courts a bit, but two questions here. How will that affect Wisconsin farmers and, and also how will dismantling the USAID program hurt American diplomacy and the rest of the world?

[00:09:55] **Speaker 2** You know, I was here in Wisconsin last year for the big farm. for a minute. What is that? State Fair? State fair. So I was here in Wisconsin for the State Fair last year and had an opportunity to engage with farmers and to learn what a significant role, I always knew they played a role but I didn't really realize how significant they are to our food assistance programs, and they really... an important part of those programs. The other side is that those programs provide food security for people all over the world. And so this current policy of dismantling USAID and defunding the programs that USAID fund around the world will impact farmers in Wisconsin and all over The United States who are providing their products for USAID. And it's going to have a horrible impact on the people who depend on this food aid, people who might now go to bed hungry because they're not getting the food assistance that they relied on from USAID. So I'm really extraordinarily sad about what I see happening. I'm sad for American farmers, for Wisconsin farmers, and I'm said for the recipients of their products.

[00:11:36] **Speaker 1** Take a little water break.

[00:11:37] **Speaker 2** Take one, two.

[00:11:51] **Speaker 1** International conflicts like the war between Russia and Ukraine and the war between Israel and Hamas and Gaza, they can feel very, very far away from Wisconsin. Why should people here care about these international conflicts that are literally thousands of miles away from their everyday lives?

[00:12:08] **Speaker 2** You know, that is a very important question. And I used to answer that question with a simple response. It's because Americans care. We care about people. We care bout suffering around the world. And I still believe that Americans care about people who are suffering around the world, but in a broader context. wars around the world do impact us. They impact our economies, they impact the people. We have people from all over the world who are hyphenated Americans, who are Palestinian Americans, Israeli Americans, Ukrainian Americans, huge population in the United States. And those people have, they really have a vested interest in seeing that these wars end. uh... and that families are no longer suffering and i think that is important to to americans is important too many of our policy makers uh... it's important to people around the world to see america's being a leader is being uh... the country that they depend on to find solution

[00:13:25] **Speaker 1** The war in Gaza can be very confusing to folks. What should people understand about that war, particularly?

[00:13:31] **Speaker 2** Well, first and foremost, the war was started by Hamas. When Hamas attacked Israel on October 7th and took over 200 hostages and killed over 1,200 people. But that war has expanded and it has impacted tens of thousands of people in Gaza. More than 50,000 people are estimated have been killed, more than 2 million forced from their homes. So the impact of that war has had a devastating impact on people across the globe. And there are strong views on what our policies should be, and there are lots of debate on what we should be doing or what we shouldn't be doing, but ultimately we need to work to find a diplomatic solution. to what is an extraordinarily difficult problem. What I learned over the course of the past four years and I probably knew even before, diplomacy is hard. And it's not a magic wand that you bring into the room and you find a solution. You have to negotiate and you have to negotiation and you to use diplomatic means and eventually you come to a solution and it's not a solution that will satisfy everyone. and it's not a solution that comes quick enough for most people.

[00:15:05] **Speaker 1** What role should the United States play in wars like those between Russia and Ukraine or in Gaza?

[00:15:13] **Speaker 2** Well, I mean, just look at Russia and Ukraine. Russia attacked its neighbor. It broke every rule in the international book. It broke the UN Charter by invading Ukraine and attacking the people of Ukraine and taking children in Ukraine. So we made a decision during the Biden administration that we would support Ukraine and we would encourage others to support. Ukraine in this really unprovoked war that Russia started. And I think that is a position that most people in the world still continue to have.

[00:15:56] **Speaker 1** The United States and Wisconsin and universities and industries here in the state are home to many international residents. Some of them are looking to become permanent residents of the United States, but deportations are now happening. How do these deportations look and feel to those outside of America?

[00:16:16] **Speaker 2** I think they're afraid. They're afraid and they're also surprised because they don't expect to see these kinds of deportations happen in the United States. We've always had a deportation program for illegal aliens. It's not a new program, but how it is being implemented now has put the fear of God in so many people, students around the country. I just heard on the news since I arrived. that a student at the University of Minnesota has been arrested, and no one knows where the student is. We know that a students in Georgetown had a similarly-assured student at Tuft. And so I think students are afraid, particularly foreign students. Their families are afraid for them. And they're all kind of walking on eggshells now.

[00:17:14] **Speaker 1** Here in Wisconsin, like elsewhere, political division on a number of issues has really fractured our state. There are things like abortion or school choice in the voucher system or vaccines that seem to have really only two sides, either for or against. Where does negotiation fit into these kind of two-sided debates or discussions?

[00:17:35] **Speaker 2** You know, when I first started in politics, it was so bipartisan. So you would always find a path to a solution with Republicans and Democrats working together to find a solution. And I think that's what the American people want. They want their politicians to find solutions. They don't want the divisions that they're seeing. And I know that many of them will not always get what they expect. But what they don't expect is to see gridlock. They don't to expect to see their politicians disrespecting each other, screaming in profanity at each other. Screaming insults at each. This is a new kind of politics in America that I think the American people broadly don't want to see. We all have our different views about immigration, about abortions. about gender and LGBT, but to fight about those issues in the halls of our Congress and the halls in our state legislatures really don't provide solutions for ordinary citizens who want to see our government work. They want to the government work for them, and what they're seeing now is that the is not working for them. What I would say to them is they have to raise their voices to make sure that the politicians that they voted for represent their views, but also represent the interests of the country.

[00:19:19] **Speaker 1** Is there room for negotiation in these kind of two-sided debates, whether it's abortion or vaccines, where it seems you're either one side for or one side against? Is there negotiation room?

[00:19:31] **Speaker 2** There has to be room for negotiation. Otherwise, we will stay in this gridlock forever. And again, when you negotiate, you're not going to get everything you want. But you will get some of the things you want, and what we most want is to see our government function.

[00:19:56] **Speaker 1** Here in Wisconsin, like everywhere that there's internet access, citizens are having to sift through a lot of misinformation and disinformation to get to the truth of the matter. And we find it in politics and discussion about society's problems. It seems that no matter where you turn, there's some misleading individuals who are looking for attention. How does the ever-growing impact of misinformation and disinformation. affect the ability to navigate and negotiate on issues that need solutions.

[00:20:31] **Speaker 2** how people start to fight for things that may not be factual. And so we have to find a way to ensure that people get the actual facts, that they know what they're hearing is really based on truth. And sometimes I think about the good old days of Walter Conkright, where we're all in front of our TVs at 7 o'clock at night on CBS. listening to contact, give us the facts and give us the truth. And now we see politicians and reporters really fight each other with disinformation. And it's not serving the American people, it's not serving American voters. People don't know what they're voting for. They don't know where the truth lies. And I don't what the solution is to that because we're in a world now where it's instant information and someone puts out something on Twitter and suddenly it's the truth when maybe it's not the truth. I looked on the news and I heard it was snowing today in Wisconsin and I'm here today and the sun is bright and it's beautiful. You have to find a way to get to the truth, and I think so many people now don't know how to do that because we're being fed information from so many different sources, whether it's or it's Instagram or... podcasts, you're just getting news from too many different sources.

[00:22:24] **Speaker 1** Wisconsin is a very politically purple state. It's divided in terms of power. Our governor is a Democrat. The state legislature is controlled by Republicans. We have one Democratic US Senator, one Republican one. And we flip and flop between presidents when we're voting every four years. But many citizens say that our elected officials aren't working much together at all, and they're sick of that. What can Wisconsin residents do to encourage their elected officials to come back to the negotiating table and actually compromise more? That's the...

[00:23:01] **Speaker 2** million dollar question. I think part of it is to ensure that they vote. We have very low turnout in elections all over all over the United States and particularly in in statewide elections, local elections, and even in some of the congressional elections. If it's not a presidential election year, people don't turn out to vote. That's the first thing, people need to vote with commitment, regardless of what the election is. And then they need to hold their elected officials accountable for what they promise to do and what they are doing if they're not ensuring that they're making the government work for them. And, you know, I think there's also a sense that... When a representative is elected, he only represents the people who voted for him. When, in fact, he represents the entire state, he represents people in his district who may not have voted for them, or she represents the the people in her district who may have not voted. And I think we've lost that sense of, we're here to support the good of all. Thanks for watching!

[00:24:30] **Speaker 1** You're retired now, you're chasing grandkids around, kind of, except for these kind of things. What do you miss about your work?

[00:24:37] **Speaker 2** I miss the people. When you go to work every day, you're dealing with people every single day. I'm dealing with young people who are ambitious and who want to succeed in diplomacy. I'm deal with my colleagues and listening to their ideas. So I do miss that part of being engaged in foreign policy every single Thanks for watching! but I don't miss the... the, I don't know how to describe it, the turmoil that we go through every single day. I was the US representative to the United Nations and I'd go into the Security Council and have to negotiate and fight with 14 other people to come out of the room with something that was meaningful to us, but also to the rest of the world. I don' miss that part of it.

[00:25:39] **Speaker 1** These seem to be very uncertain and even scary times for some.

[00:25:42] **Speaker 2** Yes. Where do you find hope? You know, in young people, this is why I'm at the university. I want to hear from young people but I also want to encourage them. When we look at, if I just use Africa as an example, the median age is 19. So half of that population is under the age of 19. Fast forward 20 years, those young people are going to be in leadership positions. and so we have to... ensure that they are invested in the futures of their country, that young people here in the United States are invested into the future, and want to see our country work, and they're committed to seeing the country work. So that gives me so much hope, because when I talk to them, they still have hope. And we have to ensure that they continue to work in a positive way and help us make this world a better place. Linda Thomas-Greenfield, thank you so much.

[00:26:45] **Speaker 1** And did I forget anything? Is there anything else that I didn't ask that's important? We covered a lot of ground.

[00:26:54] **Speaker 2** We covered a lot of ground, there's still a lot more out there.

[00:26:59] **Speaker 1** I think that's it. Do we want a room tone? We're going to sit here awkwardly quietly so we can capture the room noise. That's so we can listen to that quiet because there's always