

GLOBAL EXPERIENCES ETHICAL LEADERSHIP IMPACTS WORLD'S ECONOMY

Spotlight on Ambassador Allen Johnson, BS '83

From a small town of only 300 in Iowa to the Ambassador and Chief Agriculture Negotiator of the United States, Allen F. Johnson (BS '83), has taken his degree and global experiences and established his own company aimed at promoting international trade and building alliances.

During the last 25 years Johnson has served in leadership roles in political and policy areas on the local, state, national and international level. Johnson served as Ambassador and Chief Agriculture Negotiator for the United States at the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) in the Executive Office of the President from 2001 until 2005.

In this role, Johnson worked closely with the economic, trade, foreign and agriculture ministers in virtually every country of interest to the United States. He was responsible for directing all U.S. agricultural negotiations including globally in the World Trade Organization (WTO), regionally in the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), and all bilateral free trade agreements with various countries.

Johnson was a key architect and core player in advancing the most active trade agenda in U.S. history. Prior to coming into office, there were free trade agreements (FTAs) with only three countries. Johnson closed FTAs with 12 countries on five continents while in office and started another eight, including several that closed after he left. **Johnson held the longest term of any agriculture ambassador the U.S. has ever had.**

One of the most significant trade agreements Johnson closed was the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). This FTA between the US and Costa Rica, Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua and later the Dominican Republic, strengthened each country's economic ties with the U.S. Johnson said, "CAFTA was not just important for trade and economics, but it provided a framework and stability for these countries even as they dealt with domestic political changes."

With the agreement in place, when shifts in government were occurring in these countries, economic development could continue uninterrupted, allowing for changing environments without creating chaos. Johnson said, "It [CAFTA] created stability in the region – it is the glue that keeps trade and investments moving. Even in the middle of turmoil, the

agreement has been honored." Most of these governments have turned to the left since these agreements were done, and yet all have respected the CAFTA, thus having a very positive impact on these countries' economic development.

When asked, Johnson said one of his proudest moments as ambassador was pursuing a biotech case against the European Union. In 2002, the EU had movements against biotechnology for crops and was inhibiting U.S. exports of these products—not accepting soybeans and corn based on non-scientific reasons. Its actions were creating confusion and impacting the view of biotech products around the world, even causing some desperate poor developing countries to stop distributing this food to their hungry people.

Along with Ambassador Robert Zoellick, then the US Trade Representative and now President of the World Bank, Johnson and his colleagues launched a World Trade Organization case against Europe for its non-science based reasoning. This case sent the message to developing countries that biotech food is safe and this technology should be utilized to feed their populations and address the serious production challenges they face. The case was won, and has helped pave the road to allow biotechnology to continue its role in finding new ways to address the food production and quality issues that have plagued mankind since the beginning of time.

"Biotechnology is an important and essential vehicle for dealing with the challenges we face in feeding a hungry world. Of all the trade initiatives we undertook, this is probably the one that makes the most difference. A lot of hungry people will be fed because of this advancement," stated Johnson.

Inspired by his active involvement in international business and trade issues, Johnson established Allen F. Johnson & Associates in 2005 to promote international trade, build alliances – locally, regionally and globally – and find solutions that create opportunities for clients in international commerce. As president and chief executive officer, he directs the firm's work on policy consulting, business consulting, provision of commercial services, and product trading.

Johnson said, "Our business was created to help countries, companies and people benefit from an ever more integrated

world. We are able to pursue that through the work we do for private sector companies, associations, governments and with multinational organizations. So in some ways it is a continuation, where the 'rubber meets the road,' of the ideals we believed in while serving in public office but with private sector entrepreneurial initiative."

When asked what advice he would give to SOM students, Johnson said, "My experience is that being open to ideas and change has been very interesting, challenging and rewarding for me. When representing your company or your country, your biggest asset is your credibility. If you lose that all your other assets won't be enough to compensate for that liability."

Johnson received a Masters in Business Administration (MBA) from Stanford University's Graduate School of Business and a Masters in Food Research from Stanford University in California. His undergraduate degree is in Business Management from George Mason University School of Management.



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