

## EP.156 – Ambassador Joey R. Hood

**Narrator:** You're listening to *BioTalk* with Rich Bendis, the only podcast focused on the BioHealth Capital Region. Each episode, we'll talk to leaders in the industry to break down the biggest topics happening today in BioHealth.

**Rich Bendis:** Hi, this is Rich Bendis, your host for *BioTalk*. We really have an unusual edition of *BioTalk* for you today. We're not just talking about the bio and the healthcare industry, we're talking about a very important area of the world for the United States to partner with. BioHealth Innovation also has been a partner working with a US Embassy project in Tunisia related to science and technology. We're privileged to have the Honorable Ambassador Joey Hood to the Republic of Tunisia who is going to be our guest on *BioTalk* today. Welcome, Ambassador Hood, to *BioTalk*.

**Joey Hood:** Thank you, Rich, for having me.

**Rich Bendis:** Thank you for joining us.

0:01:00 This is the first time we've ever done anything with an ambassador so it's a privilege to have you on our podcast today. Normally, we do introductions of the honorable people that we have on our podcast but no one can do an introduction better than the guests themselves, so I'm going to let you give the listeners a little bit about your background. You can tell us all that you would like us to know about you and you can go as far back as you want and bring us up to date as to your current post in Tunisia, Ambassador Hood.

**Joey Hood:** Thank you for the opportunity, Rich. I'm a first-generation professional from New Hampshire. I've been a professional diplomat for the past 25 years. I've focused all of my time on the Middle East and North Africa, most of that in the Middle East, especially the Gulf countries going all the way from Iraq down to Yemen. Also served in Washington. I was the acting assistant secretary and the principal deputy to that position for what we called the Near East Affairs Region, which covers for us all the Middle East and North Africa.

0:02:08 I did that for about three years. Then I was nominated and confirmed as the ambassador to Tunisia where I've been here now for about a year

and a half. I'm delighted to be working on projects in areas like scientific research, technology transfer to try to promote economic development here because I think this country has a tremendous amount of potential, certainly in the current environment.

**Rich Bendis:** Thank you for that introduction to your background, Ambassador Hood. I think one of the things the listeners are always interested in is—you probably had many opportunities to go into different fields or endeavors with your career; why did you choose public service?

**Joey Hood:** I'm not sure that I did have a lot of other opportunities. [Rich Laughs] I did some interviews here and there, and the private sector, partway through each interview, my interviewer would kind of look at their watch and I'd get the signal that the interview was done.

0:03:06 Hopefully I'll do better in this interview here today. But the circumstances really pushed me toward public service. Certainly every man in my family has had some role in public service going back generations, usually the military. Military was not an option for me for several reasons, but the State Department came calling at some point as I was getting ready for graduate school and said, "We've got a deal for you. If you agree to work for us for"—I think it was seven years, or five years—"we will then pay for your graduate school including your tuition, your books and everything else." I said, "Great, where do I sign?" So I did that. I remember when the time period passed, I looked at my wife and I said, "Hey, you know, our requirement is up, we could leave." She said, "Are you crazy?!" Because it is a great experience. It's tough. It is not for the faint of heart. It's especially tough on families.

0:04:02 Because I think the popular image is that we're serving in London and Paris and places like that—and we certainly do—but we also serve in 190 other places around the world and those are not always as easy or as nice or as easy to navigate as the Western European posts or Washington D.C. It's definitely not something you get into without taking full account of exactly everything that you're going to give up. But then everything that you're going to gain as well. Being able to represent the American people and the US government, there's really nothing like it.

**Rich Bendis:** Thank you for your service, Ambassador Hood. Another thing that’s interesting—and I’d like to know myself—is did you choose the Middle East and North Africa as an area that you’d like to specialize in or did the State Department choose that for you?

**Joey Hood:** I think it was maybe a mutual decision. I intended to focus on Sub-Saharan Africa. That is where I focused my research in my undergraduate years and in graduate school.

0:05:05 That’s where I was aiming. But when I got into my first class for the Foreign Service, they handed us a list of the posts that we could put in for and there really wasn’t anything on the list from Sub-Saharan Africa. I protested and I complained and I said, “But I’m so qualified.” They said, “Look, you’re worldwide available, which means we can send you anywhere, and so just deal with it.” [Rich Laughs] So I looked at the list and I thought: here’s Saudi Arabia, a very, very important country for Sub-Saharan Africa going back centuries, of course—with the advent of Islam, trading and cultural, architectural exchange, you name it. There’s a lot of back and forth between the Arabian Peninsula and Sub-Saharan Africa going back centuries. So I thought, we’ll put that at the top of our list. When else would we have a chance to ever discover Saudi Arabia?

0:06:02 And so we did. My time there happened to coincide with September 11th. My portfolio there was the military relationship. So imagine, here we are in Saudi Arabia having to try to figure out how to respond to these horrible attacks that were perpetrated mostly by Saudi citizens and get the support that we needed from Saudi Arabia to prosecute the war against Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, because most of our air assets for the region were located there. It was also very important for us to have some sort of Islamic imprimatur over what we were trying to accomplish and Saudi Arabia is the home of Mecca and Madinah, so their word on things really carries weight and it certainly did then. That’s how I got started in the Middle East and I discovered very quickly that, yes, the Gulf countries have what many people consider to be fairly closed cultures but that’s only the case if you don’t really show interest in their language, if you don’t show interest in their culture and in their history.

0:07:11 If you do show that interest, they’ll open the tent flap for you, and in you

go, and you learn a whole lot more and you make friendships and you find that just like people everywhere else in the world they're real people with real dreams and interests and foibles and problems and challenges. There's a lot that we can get done together on the basis of that mutual understanding. One post just led to another one until I ended up in Washington.

**Rich Bendis:**

Thank you very much. That's an interesting background and it goes to show that timing is everything really in careers, being at a spot at a certain time. Not the right spot at the right time; it's a spot you can't choose. Before we get into the real focus related to science and technology, let's just talk a little bit about the current environment in Tunisia and the Middle East region and what are the opportunities and challenges for the United States today?

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**Joey Hood:**

I think everybody who follows international affairs associates Tunisia these days with the uprising in 2010, 2011 and the advent of participatory democracy in the years after. Of course that's a difficult undertaking in any country including the United States, but here it was even more difficult because it is a middle income country. I think GDP per capita is somewhere around \$3,500 per year. There is also the fact that there were lots of financial and political crises going on around the world that Tunisia didn't have anything to do with but Tunisia was certainly affected by. These all buffeted the country, none more so than I think the crisis in Libya, which sent a million refugees across the border into Tunisia, and the Tunisian people took care of them as best they could.

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There was also the COVID pandemic of course, which really hit the country very, very hard. So you have the challenges of trying to make a democracy work while also trying to put an economy back on its feet in a regional and global context in which things are dicey and challenging for everyone. That's the situation we find ourselves in. What I talked about here are mainly challenges after challenges but there's lots of opportunities here and that's why we're talking here together today, because there's a great deal of potential in Tunisia for private-sector led development supported by the Tunisian and US governments but also the

Europeans. This is a market that's just 140 miles away from the closest European neighbor. They've got a free trade agreement with Europe, they've got long-standing historical ties, they speak common languages. So there is a lot that can be accomplished I think when you bring those factors in together, and some others that we'll talk about as we go through the rest of the episode here.

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**Rich Bendis:** Thank you. I think one of the areas that we really want to focus on today though is since *BioTalk* talks about science, technology, healthcare, life sciences—is really where does the United States and Tunisian cooperation stand today in terms of scientific research and technology transfer, which really relates to looking at basic research and how you can get that basic research transferred into the marketplace, potentially from some of the Tunisian universities?

**Joey Hood:** As you know, Rich, the US government has been a leader in sharing the fruits of science and technological research for decades. For instance, I was struck recently when I read an estimate that credited the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS relief, PEPFAR, for saving as many as 25 million lives mostly on the African continent.

0:11:03 That's just an astounding number. Here in Tunisia, we believe science and technology can be promoters of private sector-led growth. They don't need things like PEPFAR, but what they do need is cooperation between our research institutions. They need investment from US companies. They need access to markets. These are all things that we're working on together. Just to name a few, the governments of the United States and Tunisia have established over the past few years a Customs Mutual Assistance Agreement, an Implementation Agreement for the Foreign Accounts Tax Compliance Act, a Science and Technology Cooperation Agreement in 2014—which we are currently working to renew in coordination with the Tunisian government. We also established a Trade Investment Framework Agreement in 2002, a Bilateral Investment Treaty in 1990 and a Tax Convention in 1989.

0:12:02 In addition, we launched a Joint Economic Commission in 2016. I'm being

good to you Richard, because I could bring you all the way back to 1797 [Rich Laughs] with all these treaties and agreements and accords that we signed with Tunisia. You're thinking, "That wouldn't be entirely relevant." And you're right, in part—it wouldn't be—but in part it would be, because I'm always amazed when I go back to the archives and I look at things from 1803, 1805, 1830, 1860, you name it, and we're corresponding with each other on all sorts of topics, including educational exchange and science and technology transfer even way back then. So that's something that I always try to keep in mind as I'm going into work in the morning. I look at that wall of all the previous diplomatic envoys. I'm the 71st here from the United States.

**Rich Bendis:**

Wow!

**Joey Hood:**

We go back a long time here.

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And so the activities and the things that we're trying to do here—obviously you've got to deal with the fires that break out metaphorically from time to time, but in general we're trying to maintain a strategic focus so that 50, 60, 70, 100 years from now, people are looking back on what we did now and saying, "Wow, it's really great that they got that started then."

**Rich Bendis:**

That's fantastic. People don't think about having that 230-year relationship with Tunisia. We really focus on things that we are—in our lifetime are the things that we understand about the regions around the world that we've actually experienced ourselves. So, thank you for that historical perspective which I think is very important. Now that you've had an opportunity to work with the Tunisian government and the different ministries within Tunisia, how do you see them prioritizing scientific research and innovation and technology transfer and how has the United States determined that it is an area that we should support them in?

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**Joey Hood:**

I was struck last year shortly after I arrived by a report put out by the World Economic Forum that said that 40% of Tunisian college students graduate with STEM degrees—science, tech, engineering, math. That's

the second highest percentage worldwide, higher than the United States for sure. It's second only to Malaysia in the world. That emphasis on STEM education I think is a product not just of Tunisian mothers and fathers encouraging their children to go down those fields, but also what the government has invested in over the course of years since independence in 1956. That has made Tunisia a regional leader in fostering talent and technological advancement. In fact, one of the challenges that I didn't mention earlier in talking about the challenges and the opportunities, is a fair bit of brain drain that's going on here lately because there are other countries that recognize—and economies and companies within those companies that recognize—that Tunisians really are a high-quality asset.

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Someone was telling me recently—I don't know if it's entirely true—they say it's true that in France if a recruiter wants to say that they really got the best of the best they say they got a Tunisian in the IT sector. I think all this showcases the country's dedication to academic excellence but it also highlights its potential for what can be done next. Because this is a beautiful country, it's a nice place to live. And so a lot of those STEM graduates, for very little, would actually choose to stay here. Very strong family networks. You can go to the beach in the afternoon after taking off from work. I think that there isn't a huge amount that needs to be done to entice more Tunisians to stay here. So I think investors looking to capitalize on emerging markets with robust STEM talent should really consider Tunisia as a strategic destination.

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Because they can leverage this skilled workforce. By the way, it's mostly trilingual as well—French, Arabic and English—so those are three very big markets. Don't forget, French is useful not just for Western Europe but for Sub-Saharan Africa. There are more French speakers in Kinshasa than there are in Paris. Africa's got one of the fastest growing economic areas in the world. Tunisia has lots and lots of linkages to Sub-Saharan Africa. So businesses can innovate and thrive in sectors ranging from healthcare and biotech to information technology, renewable energy, automotive parts—that's another big one—agrifood. There's a lot of opportunities.

**Rich Bendis:**

In our research that we did in getting involved in this project—and we're going to talk about the CURES project that the Department of State is

funding in Tunisia.

0:17:00 What you just talked about in the brain drain is that from an IT perspective it's one of the top-end leaders in information technology experts in that region. Take a look at Europe as well. Some of the people when we were talking to them had an opportunity to go to Europe and potentially make 10 times their salary that they would make in Tunisia and they would be recruiting a lot of these talented people there. So I would think that, how do we stem the brain drain within Tunisia through some of the projects, like this CURES project, which you're going to explain to us, and the reason the United States got involved, because academically they are unbelievably strong. We found many researchers and scientists that would go toe to toe with those in the United States and in Europe. Tech transfer and commercialization isn't something that is first nature for them, though. It's really about the basic research or getting something published, not trying to get that research into the marketplace.

0:18:02 Let's talk a little bit about this State Department project called CURES in Tunisia which has been involved almost three years now to help identify and address around tech transfer, commercialization, reducing the brain drain in Tunisia, Ambassador Hood.

**Joey Hood:** CURES is a concrete outcome of our cooperation and collaboration, and more and more that's what people are looking for, is actual results. You've got so much fake news out there nowadays. The only thing people can really count on is what's landing on their dinner table every night. And if they've got a good job that has been made possible through investment and collaboration with the United States then they know that that's coming from a good place; it's coming from the American people. CURES is a five-million-dollar investment. It started in 2021 and it's supposed to go through September of this year and it has focused on advancing scientific research and training here to enhance the prevention and treatment of non-communicable diseases.

0:19:11 We've done that mainly through the establishment of a simulation center at the Sfax Medical School, which I had a chance to visit last year. Because of COVID we had put off the celebration of it—a big ribbon

cutting—but finally we were able to do that last year. The excitement was through the roof. Young and old! I had a gentleman in his nineties who was there and I noticed, so I approached him and introduced myself and he talked about just how proud he was that Tunisia was able to take this step with the United States, leading-edge universities like Johns Hopkins. That simulation center was about a million dollars to equip and stand up. It's got training equipment. It's got new technology that allows medical students, nursing students, and healthcare technicians to develop critical communication and technical skills through simulations for detection of NCDs such as cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and the like.

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Thanks to that investment, so far the center has trained almost 8,000 health professionals. That includes roughly 6,500 undergraduate students and about 285 at the graduate level, everything from emergency medicine to surgery to pediatrics to paramedicine. Also, CURES has supported the participation of 12 Tunisian students in a summer institute on chronic diseases at Johns Hopkins in the United States. We're going to send a third cohort later this month. That's all designed to make research and tech more accessible and useful for everyone. Because I mentioned it in Sfax; it's not in Tunis, in the capital.

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We are through projects like this trying very deliberately to bring our collaboration and cooperation to areas outside of the capital because if the revolution taught us nothing else, it's that the people who feel marginalized outside the centers of power are not going to sit silent forever. They are a reservoir of talent and potential but if they are not taken advantage of, if they are not given opportunities, they will find other ways to express themselves. Now we've got to try to move these technologies from the research phase to the market. We're trying to do that. We've helped four research projects so far get ready for the market by offering technical assistance. It's interesting, when I talk to people I say, "My colleagues told me they gave you technical assistance. What in the world does that mean?" Most of the time, Rich, to be honest, people will say, "It gave me confidence in myself. Here are these Americans coming from all this way, just for me. It gave me the confidence to make my pitch, to make my proposal, to finish my research, whatever it is."

0:22:10 We've helped them with things like market research, identifying potential competitors, finding potential markets both local and international. That's where having a market of 300-and-some-odd-million people really helps us. We've helped them come up with viable plans for bringing their services to market. I'll highlight just one. We helped one researcher develop an anti-bacterial paint additive through his start up called Fluoink, which participated just last week in the tenth annual Select USA Investment Summit, which is the highest-profile event every year to facilitate business investment by connecting thousands of investors, companies, economic development organizations, and industry experts to make deals happen. I certainly hope a deal comes through for Fluoink.

0:23:01 But even if it doesn't this year, I'm confident that it will in the coming years as he develops his idea. Those are just some of the ways that we're trying to help people bring their training and ideas to reality and to make money.

**Rich Bendis:** Thank you for that summary. We've had the privilege to be able to work with FHI360, who is really one of the contractors with the State Department helping create a potential Sfax technology transfer and commercialization center. The technical assistance is one of the key components of that because one of the things is there is great intellectual property coming out of the researchers in Tunisia but sometimes they don't know how to protect it. I think part of the CURES project is making them aware that there's valuable IP there that can generate returns back to the university, back to the Tunisia ecosystem, and how do you protect that. Professor Ramsey is the one with Fluoink who went to Select USA in Maryland just last week.

0:24:06 We had an opportunity to set up several meetings for him while he was there. He did extremely well in his presentation. We helped him with his pitch deck so that he would feel comfortable pitching to all the people he would encounter there. We think he's got a successful product. He's got something unique that has some proprietary advantages over some of the competitive products in the marketplace. This project, through CURES, has enabled him to progress from the lab to identifying the target markets for this technology, this antimicrobial additive for paint. What it really does is reduce bacteria in patient rooms, hospitals, nursing homes

and I think it has significant potential. That's just one example of identifying a technology with a professor from a university in Tunisia and giving them the background technical assistance and the exposure that's necessary that otherwise would not have happened if the CURES project didn't exist and wasn't supported by the Department of State.

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So you should be proud—even though they're small steps and small accomplishments, you know it takes a long time to build successful programs and it never would have been initiated if the United States government had not created the CURES program to stimulate an environment for such researchers within Tunisia.

**Joey Hood:**

Lot of times Tunisians will say to me, "Well, why don't you just build us infrastructure? We need bridges, we need roads, we need dams." First of all, because we've got this long relationship, I point back to the 1960s and 1970s. We did build the Tunis-Carthage International Airport, we did build a major dam, we did build roads and bridges here back when you needed that sort of assistance from governments like the United States. Now you've got a fully functioning government—independent, sovereign—you have the capabilities.

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What you need now are things like market access. You need connections to big markets like the United States so that you can sell your great ideas and your great projects. Maybe you need a little bit of help in business English. So these are some of the things that we're doing. We've seen great results over the past few years from relatively small investments in say the handicraft sector, the agricultural sector. Now, as a result, the United States is the biggest importer of Tunisian handicrafts in the world. This is not just people out in villages weaving baskets for charity. Not at all. This is high quality ceramics, olive wood products. Probably you've got a chopping board in your kitchen with the little black and white squares made out of olive wood; that almost certainly comes from Tunisia. You can find Tunisian olive oil now bottled on the shelf in any supermarket across the United States. And it's just the beginning. There's a lot more that we can do here.

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And again, as I said, Rich, it's from those investments and technical assistance and market access and not so much building a port. That's

something the government can do. What the government here, the Tunisian government can't do is to give ways for market access to the US market and to the European market. That's where we can really help.

**Rich Bendis:**

That has really been the priority of the CURES Project and it's really not about the brick and mortar, even though the simulation center was a component of that. The access to potential investors, collaborators and research—we're doing joint research with European and United States researchers around the potential commercialization of projects. This program, the CURES program, opened the doors for the beginnings of some of those relationships to begin, which can become long term relationships. As we look at closing on this segment of the *BioTalk* podcast that we're doing with you, do you have any ideas about other projects or priorities that the US government has for Tunisia going into the future?

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**Joey Hood:**

Just focusing on research and technology transfer, I'll just do a rapid-fire overview of what we've been doing recently and what we're hoping to do in the future. COVID is one of them, obviously. I think we all tend to want to move on from COVID as quickly as we can, but it's worth remembering that we provided more than three million doses of vaccine to the Tunisian government so that they could hit their goal of vaccinating at least half their population by the end of 2021, and that no doubt saved a lot of lives. We also provided 46 million dollars in support which helped things like 280 schools and 40 primary healthcare centers get small-scale repairs of water and sanitation infrastructure, and to get more than a thousand refrigerators throughout the country so that the cold chain could be upgraded and enlarged.

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In fact, along with other donors we ended up replacing 80 percent of the Tunisian cold chain. That's going to have a positive effect for other vaccines and other things that need that cold storage. I've talked about what we've done in non-communicable diseases through the CURES program. We're also working through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to help improve local epidemiological capacity through strengthening group surveillance systems for things like the flu. We have

also been working in healthcare infrastructure. We've worked with the Ministry of Health to deliver 14 life-saving pediatric incubators to hospitals around the country. They're helping Tunisian professionals meet the needs of the country's tiniest patients and most vulnerable as well. We also worked with the Ministry of Health on a cutting-edge pharmaceutical storage facility that's capable of storing medicine, vaccines, and COVID laboratory reagents in a climate-controlled space.

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Even though I talked earlier about how infrastructure is really not our focus, we recognize that sometimes it's essential and sometimes we've got the goods. The Tunisians can build a building just as well, if not better, than anybody. But maybe we've got state-of-the-art incubators or climate-controlled spaces for vaccines that would not be available locally and that we can provide, and so that's what we're doing. We're also working on better governance in the healthcare sector. So, through a five-million-dollar program called SAHA, we are partnering with the Ministry of Health and local service providers to try to help the Directorate of Pharmacy and Medicine develop and strengthen the digital system that helps with transparency and institutional performance. Because obviously in a country where healthcare is provided centrally by the government and drugs are provided centrally by the government, there's lots of opportunities for bad actors to get involved. We want to help the Ministry of Health to try to make it as fair as possible for the population and as transparent as possible as well so there's no chance of bad actors profiting from people in their most vulnerable moments.

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Finally, we're partnering in medical research. Last year, Harvard Medical School signed a ten-year MOU with the Tunisian Ministry of Health. Remember what I said about the smart people knowing where the smart people are here? Harvard Medical School has not missed a beat there. The MOU follows a launch last year of the Hazem Ben-Gacem Tunisia Medical Fellowship Fund, which is an initial five-million-dollar gift from this Harvard-educated, Tunisian-born financier. His gift covers the tuition and living expenses for two Tunisian medical students every year, which is going to be a great thing especially over time as you go from two to four to six to eight and onward.

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He also invested in a million-dollar initiative that enables 40 students

form Tunisia’s four big medical schools to take online courses at Harvard Medical School and they can earn a certification from HMS while studying at their own universities here. I think it’s a great combination of exchange and also online capabilities that we wouldn’t have had just a few years ago. That’s going to benefit more than 200 students. As of the fall of last year, 80 students had completed the program. We’re doing our part too. We funded a grant and provided a scholarship for English language training for medical students from the four big medical schools so they could better take advantage of the educational opportunities that they had before them. I took note of what you said earlier, Rich, about how sometimes Tunisians can sometimes find salaries ten times higher than what they can get here. That is true, and I think higher salaries are definitely a part of the solution here and certainly international companies have understood that.

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There is a very dense, rich family and social network here. I’ve mentioned the natural beauty of the country. People really like to visit here. More than 30,000 American tourists visited last year, we’re expecting many more this year. But from Europe and from elsewhere it’s in the tens of millions of visitors every year. There’s a reason why that’s the case. So I don’t think investors would have to pay ten times the local salary in order to keep Tunisians here. Maybe two or three times; I don’t know what the number is. But I think there’s a lot of other advantages here that can’t necessarily be quantified that would keep Tunisians here. They generally don’t want to leave if they can develop their ideas and their careers here. That’s what we’re trying to do with CURES and SAHA and all the other investments and programs that we’re putting together. And so far, so good.

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**Rich Bendis:**

Your quality of life example is something that we have to defend all the time with an office in Maryland and having to compete against Boston, Route 128, Silicon Valley, Research Triangle and other areas of the United States. Our cost of living is less, the salaries are less, and the quality of life is fantastic. We are sort of like a Tunisia. We have all the assets that all of the other places in the United States have but we just have to educate people and connect them to these assets and tell them that the quality is

equal or surpasses those in some of those other areas. That’s exactly what you just stated, Ambassador, is the exact example for Tunisia really. It’s not about the money all the time. It’s really about the quality of life, quality of the enjoyment that they get in the surroundings in where they live and I think—from this interview I’m sensing—you’ve enjoyed the time you’ve spent in Tunisia and probably will be sorry when this tour of duty transfers you to some other location in the world.

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**Joey Hood:**

I was talking with a previous American ambassador here and he said, “You can probably still see the marks on the floor of the living room where they dragged me out. [Rich Laughs] I tried to stay.” It is a beautiful place with a lot of opportunities. Every day we just have to choose what we are going to work on that day. When I meet those Tunisian people who are so excited and so full of ideas and so full of energy it just becomes infectious. I can’t help but believe in them and do everything that I can to help them. Because it’s in our interest, Rich. We didn’t really talk so much about that but a question somebody might ask—especially from the American side—is, “Hey, why are you sending those five million dollars there? Why don’t you put it into the hospital down the street that needs to be renovated or something?” The answer is that when countries like Tunisia are more prosperous, healthier, that’s good for the United States because it means more investment opportunities for us, it means less more expensive interventions later if things go bad. It means—probably—that we have a healthier global health system.

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Because if a terrible virus arises in one part of the world, we know now it’s going to affect everybody around the world pretty quickly. So we all need to have stronger surveillance systems, vaccination systems, management systems and good cooperation so that people are willing to come and say to us, “Look, we’ve detected something, we need your help, let’s work on it together.” We’ve seen when all of that breaks down what happens.

**Rich Bendis:**

You did a better job of asking yourself a closing question than I could have asked you, Ambassador [Joey Laughs] so thank you for asking that of yourself. Because generally when people say, “We’re from the

government and we're here to help"—what you just stated in the last 30 minutes about everything the United States has done in one small country like Tunisia, it is amazing the impact you can have on that culture.

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And just think—as you mentioned—there's 190 other countries which America provides some assistance to as well. We've had the privilege of talking to the US Ambassador to the Republic of Tunisia, Joey Hood, on our *BioTalk* podcast today. Ambassador Hood, thank you very much for being on the podcast and enlightening not just other Americans who will listen to this, but other people around the world about the good work that the Department of State is doing in Tunisia and other countries around the world.

**Joey Hood:**

It was a great opportunity, Rich. Thank you.

**Narrator:**

Thanks for listening to *BioTalk* with Rich Bendis.

**End of recording.**