

Inside Interior:
Stewart Lee Udall

Udall ushered in landmark legislation on wilderness, Alaska lands and scenic rivers under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson

Stewart Udall

photo: Deseret News

This is the first in a monthly series of interviews with former Interior secretaries, conducted by Charles Wilkinson and Patricia Limerick, co-founders of the Center of the American West in Boulder, Colo. The series is sponsored by the center and the Nature Conservancy. Boulder, Colo.; September 24, 2003

Charles Wilkinson: When the center started up, we wanted to start with a bang, and there are a number of you who were here that evening in 1988 when the center had its first public event and Wallace Stegner came to Boulder to give a major presentation. There was a crackling in the air that night. This room has seen many grand occasions, but there's a crackling in the air tonight, too, that reminds me of that evening.

Biographical information

Stewart was born in St. Johns in far eastern Arizona near the New Mexico line. He grew up as a farm boy, working the horse-drawn plow and cleaning out the irrigation ditch. He'll always have the southwestern high desert country in his blood. When you grow up in a small farming town and you raise your own food, Stewart has said, you are close to the ground, close to the animals: "I grew up in the Colorado plateau and I will love it always."

He served in the military in World War II, went out on a Mormon mission and then went to the University of Arizona, where he was an all-conference basketball player. While practicing law in Tucson, he decided to run for Congress in 1954. He came from leading Arizona families on both sides, and if he might have been a tad bit liberal for that district, his lineage counteracted that. Besides, he was "dashing." He won handily.

Shortly after the election, he received tremendously good news. He would be given a seat on the House Interior Committee, which handled all the Western issues he'd grown up with and went back to Washington to work on. At the end of his first month in office he realized the tremendously bad news: His subcommittee chairman, soon to become full committee chairman, was Wayne Aspinall, one of the old-time committee chairmen who might as well have had a banner up behind him in the hearing room saying "Junior members are to be seen and not heard."

Six years later and after a good deal of hard work and equal amount of frustration, Stewart received from President Kennedy the request to serve as Interior Secretary. There may have been some jealousy in the office of a certain committee chairman who was also a Democrat. After serving eight years -- only Harold Ickes in the FDR administration served longer -- Stewart embarked on an extraordinary journey. The kind of selfless, long-lived service that we so rarely see in our former office holders.

He has written four major books, including a revised edition of his classic "The Quiet Crisis," and collaborated on several others. He helped found organizations, including the Grand Canyon Trust to protect the Colorado Plateau and the Mineral Policy Center to carry on the pioneering work he initiated as secretary in reforming the Hard Rock Mining Law of 1872.

Although he has served on many other boards, he has kept the vow he made to himself while leaving office never to sit on the board of any mining or energy company. And for two full decades, Stewart carried on an ultimately successful but draining and heart-breaking crusade to bring a measure of justice to the widows of poisoned Navaho uranium miners.

Stewart has now spent 35 years continuing to serve the public after leaving the West's highest office. He's been out among us, taking the time to tell us what he knows and what he doesn't know in his direct, humorous and passionate, always passionate, way.

He's close with his children and his large, extended family. He loved his wife Lee so well. He told me once that he wanted to become a *viejo*, with something valuable to pass on to other people. He's

become that and as well he's become the first citizen of the American West.

Patricia Limerick: We have a virtual special guest who wanted to make special opening remarks and so we will have those. Someone whom you will recognize instantly. In that dashing Udall tradition, we're very happy to have Congressman Mark Udall available on tape.

Mark Udall: Good evening. I'm Congressman Mark Udall and I have the great privilege of representing the city of Boulder, the University of Colorado, and the Center for the American West in the U.S. House of Representatives. I want to thank the center for hosting this important series of interviews and events with the past and present secretaries of Interior, but I am most eager here tonight to welcome Stewart Udall, who also happens to be my uncle. Stewart is the brother of my father, Morris, and I grew up with two leaders and role models in my dad and my uncle Stewart.

Stewart, I just wanted to tell you that on behalf of all of us, not just in the Udall family and here in Boulder, but around the country, how proud we are to know you and how much we respect your leadership and your vision. You have in many ways put your mark on the American environmental movement with books like "The Quiet Crisis" and "The Forgotten Founders," "The Myths of August" and many other publications.

Perhaps unknown to many of the people here tonight that have come to hear you is the fact that you were in many ways the inspiration for my climbing career. Although I remember as I attempted higher and higher mountains, including Mount Everest, that you encouraged me maybe to take a pause and look for other adventures, other challenges.

I want to be here with you tonight but I'm unable to because I'm in Washington, but I want to thank you for all that you've done and tell you that many of the people here and all over the country, and frankly around the world, because of your example, are carrying your banner and carrying the torches high that you began to light in the 1960s.

We are committed, particularly in the Rocky Mountain West, to doing what your good friend Wallace Stegner suggested that we do which is build societies, build communities that would match our scenery. So enjoy, all of you in the audience, Mr. Udall's stories and his insight and his wisdom. We are lucky to have him with us. Thank you very much.

PL: Stewart Udall became John F. Kennedy's Secretary of Interior in 1961. He was the first Arizonan to ever occupy a cabinet office. During the campaign in 1960, John F. Kennedy had done little to spell out his policy for the West, public lands or for the Interior. Kennedy's silence on these matters left Secretary Udall with a lot of room to make his own choices and to set his own course.

After the assassination of John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson retained Udall as Secretary of Interior and within a few more months, what Udall has called a crescendo of legislative success was under way. This was the signing of the Wilderness Bill, and the Land and Water Conservation Fund Bill in 1964.

Secretary Udall and First Lady Lady Bird Johnson hit an instant rapport and shared many of the same enthusiasms and hopes and visions. Surely one of the most distinctive features of Secretary Udall's time in office was his extraordinary engagement with the world of ideas and letters.

His wife, Lee, and he had what was in essence a salon, an intellectual salon in Washington. Wallace Stegner was an early and influential participant in Interior's artist-in-residence program and Secretary Udall was a steady champion of Robert Frost.

While in office, Secretary Udall wrote and published widely setting forward the ideas he called the "New Conservationism." The ideas set forward in Secretary Udall's writings meshed directly and closely with his actions and undertakings in office. The list of major achievements passed during his administration includes newly created national seashores and new national parks, along with 54 wildlife refuges added during his time in office.

A concern for Indian issues and a desire to reorient Interior's Indian policy away from termination and toward self-determination also guided Secretary Udall.

Secretary Udall was ahead of his time in recognizing that cities have environmental issues, too. Interior could not be concerned exclusively with issues of the outdoors and natural resources. When Secretary Udall added water pollution to Secretary Udall's domain he showed this wider definition of the environment at work.

Holding office at a time of great international tension meant that Secretary Udall's presidents were intensely preoccupied with the Cold War. Secretary Udall himself was active in connecting U.S. conservation practices to international audiences.

When Secretary Udall took office he held a classic American enthusiasm for dam building. In the controversy over the Grand Canyon dams, he made a consequential change in attitude that would signal a big change in Western American life.

Stewart Udall is a man very much identified with the American West and yet he was also the key figure for giving the Department of Interior a national significance and national meaning persuading Americans that this was indeed a national agency.

In striking and significant ways, Stewart Udall's influence and the manifestation of his ideas and legislation continued long after 1968. Many of the bills that turned into laws 10 years, 15 years after his departure bore his stamp and influence.

Growing up in rural St. Johns, Stewart Udall says he grew up in the 19th Century without electricity, working with livestock, and doing his own planting and harvesting. From these origins, he became a person of a long view, looking toward the future and asking us to think constantly of the legacy that we will leave to the people of that future. Ladies and gentlemen, Secretary of the Interior Stewart Lee Udall.

Charles Wilkinson interviewing Stewart Lee Udall

CW: When you went back to the largest Secretary's office in Washington and sat behind your desk, what was in your mind right then at that moment and what did you want to get moving on early that was important to you?

SU: Well, Charles, it was a staggering experience. But I want to say I'm glad to see so many gray-headed people of my generation out there. I thought that career people in the federal government, a lot of them went back into the Great Depression and the New Deal, were the best public servants in the country. And the greatest tribute that I've received from older people down the years is to have people come up to me and say, "I worked in the Interior Department with you and those were the best years of my life." I really appreciate that.

President Kennedy's vision for the West

Charles, President Kennedy's program for the West was modest. He didn't carry the West, maybe that's one of the reasons I got my job, I don't know. I had helped him carry Arizona at that Los Angeles convention.

To Ted Sorenson, his friend and speechwriter, I said, "What are we supposed to do, Ted?" And he said, "Read the Billings speech." That was the one speech Kennedy had given on policy in the West and he wanted to build more dams. That's what the Democrats were saying. He talked about more — extending rural electric lines, more hydropower. He talked about wildlife and so on. It was not a blank slate but there we were. And I had not been a part of his re-election campaign. I was running for re-election in Congress. And so I kind of had an open slate to work from and that was one of the wonderful things that helped us have such a good period in the 1960s.

The other thing was, Kennedy opened the door a bit. He said, "Let's have a wilderness bill." Senator Anderson from New Mexico had introduced a bill. He said, "Let's have a couple or three national seashores, Cape Cod and so on. He opened the door; the people rushed in.

We like to think — and politicians like to think too often — that all the leadership comes from the top down. Sometimes too much of it does, by the way. But the leadership and the passing of laws like with civil rights — did the initiative come from the government? It came from the streets. It came from people. And the conservation movement, which had been frustrated and gathering strength, they

just burst in the door of my office, and boy that was a wonderful time.

The other thing was, Kennedy opened the door a bit. He said, "Let's have a wilderness bill."

CW: Patty alluded to the relationship you had with Wallace Stegner and bringing him in. Talk a bit about this, I think, very unusual step you took of having a writer in residence and even more unusual step, perhaps, of writing a major book while in office, "The Quiet Crisis."

Writing "The Quiet Crisis"

SU: Well, I didn't know Wally Stegner well. I had read and admired his work. I persuaded him to come my first year in office. I said, "Come. I've created this new position. I don't want you to write speeches for me, I want you to give me advice."

And he said, "Well, I'll give you a semester." And he came in the fall and I told him, I said, "What should I do to help communicate with the American people?"

And he said, "Write a book." I thought I was a pretty good writer, but I had never written a book. He said, "Write a book." I said, "A book about what?" And he said, "Your job." And he made an outline of "The Quiet Crisis" which is a history of conservation use and abuse, the conservation movement and so on. And we went to work on it.

Patty asked me earlier today, you know, how did you move into your job? Well, I listened. I studied. I listened to the career people in the Interior Department who were good people. And they told me. They gave me their ideas. I brought in good people with me and we talked and reflected. But writing that book gave me a grasp of American history.

And Patty, one of the wonderful things about this series ... I think nothing like this has been done to have former Secretaries of the Interior of different persuasions describe the job and describe the opportunities that are there.

And I was just there at a fortunate time. The country was ready, the American people — the conservationists all over the country. They began calling and knocking on my door and saying, "We're going to have a seashore in Cape Cod, what about one in New York or Maryland or California or Padre Island, Texas?" The whole thing took off. But it's an example of leadership coming up from the grassroots.

CW: President Nixon has a very, and justifiably so, a very strong record on Indian affairs. And yet, that was a time when in this area there was quite a smooth sense of continuation between the Kennedy-Johnson years and the Nixon years. Two of the events that were finalized in the Nixon years were his address in 1970 on the self-determination policy and the other in the same year was the return of Blue Lake, a sacred place to the Taos Pueblo that had been put into a national park.

Tell us about the formative times in Indian policy during your administration, maybe using those two issues as an example.

Indian Issues

SU: Well, Charles, I want to say something. It's kind of a confessional in my old age because I believe in giving credit where credit is due, and despite all his flaws, and I never thought he understood some of the subtleties, Richard Nixon was a pretty good president. A good president on the environmental issues. He was a good president on Native American issues and let's give him credit.

President Eisenhower, in my view, I didn't think that way when I was a congressman, probably did more to get us on the path with the Soviet Union where we didn't have a nuclear war than any other president maybe except Truman. So let's, let's look at history that way.

The Native American people -- I was in Congress for six years in the 1950s, if anybody was down and out when I took office in 1960, in 1961, it was the Native American people. President Truman had a policy like the Japanese, relocate them, and get them off these miserable reservations. Move them into cities and find them jobs. Well, these were not city people and the termination policy under

President Eisenhower was supported by a lot of Democrats who were my strong supporters and friends.

The Native American people were confronted with a very bleak future, and we were trying to reorient it a little differently, and they would shout at us, "Well the policy is termination." What was termination? The Indian reservation idea was a mistake. Cancel it out. Get rid of it gradually and so on. That was hideous to Native American people. As we know now so well, they had a tie, a personal tie, a religious tie to the land and we were going to take it away from them. So that was a challenge, but it was also a challenge because there was a policy of ending the reservations as gradually as we could for people.

And fortunately, Native leaders began to emerge. We finally gave them a reasonable education. I couldn't find a lawyer, an Indian lawyer to head the Indian department. I ended up with a career lawyer who said he was 1/16th Cherokee. He was a good man. But I could not find an Indian lawyer in 1961. I couldn't.

And look where we've come. The Native American Rights Fund, John Echo Hawk and his people who have been working here are some of the best lawyers in the country. And we gave them a chance finally; we gave them an education. The situation began to change and I felt we didn't help it change enough, fast enough. But we see where the native people are today. They're moving; they're doing things; they have leadership. They're hanging on to their land. God bless them.

CW: On Taos–Pueblo, that could have posed some conflict for you because it meant taking land out of the national forest, taking it out of public lands and transferring it to the Pueblo, transferring it back to the Pueblo. Tell us a little bit about your involvement.

SU: Charles, it didn't cause any problems with me. I testified for it every year. Sen. Clinton Anderson, one of my great supporters who had been Secretary of Agriculture, said, "You're taking land away from the Forest Service and giving it to Indians." He said, "If you start this, they'll claim the whole West."

Well, that was a fear; it was unfounded. But it finally got accomplished. You know how it got through Congress? I'm going to

tell you a little bit later about this wonderful bipartisan spirit where we didn't play politics on environmental issues and we didn't sometimes on Indian issues.

Why was the Blue Lake Bill passed? The Taos Indians had been fighting to get this sacred lake back in their hands, in their ownership for 60 years. They had been fighting this battle, they finally won. Why did they win? A combination of people. Just think: George McGovern, Fred Harris, liberals; Barry Goldwater joined with them and the bill passed. And that was justice, and Nixon used this as the occasion to announce a new policy that we weren't going to terminate Indians, we were going to let them determine their own future. And we had started it moving in that direction, so let's share the credit for it. That's what I'm for.

CW: To me, I would consider the actions you took in Alaska to be perhaps the most important actions you took in your eight years. Let me ask sort of a series of questions about that. Because you, first of all, used your authority to withdraw land, to withdraw from mining, homesteading, all of Alaska essentially. Because it was virtually all public lands and you did that to protect native claims that the state was starting to ask, and the natives said, "No. We still have an interest in it." So that's what spurred your two historic withdrawals.

And so it started in that context but it then became the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of '71, which became a great conservation act. And then your brother, Mo, who you are so close to, was chair of the Interior Committee and really put through the largest land act we've ever had: the 1980 Alaska Lands Conservation Act.

Now your original withdrawals, I'm sure you didn't have that in mind but – they were important in themselves and then they set so much in motion.

Conserving Land in Alaska

SU: Charles, they called it a land freeze. I helped write, in '57, '58, '59, the Alaska and Hawaii statehood bills, the last areas to come in as states. We decided with Alaska to be generous and, unlike the

other western states, we give you the authority to select 20 percent of the land as a dowry to help the state get started.

Well, they weren't dumb, these Alaska people. You can ask Hickel about this. What did they do? No drilling had been done but there was strong suspicion that the largest oil field in America might be Prudhoe Bay up in the Arctic. They selected Prudhoe Bay. And until this year they didn't have an income tax, they gave everybody a check because that was their oil field. We let them have it. They were getting ready to grab other lands, mineral lands and so on, that were near the villages of the natives. The Alaska natives in 1961 were so scattered. That's a huge area, twice, three times as large as Texas.

They were getting ready to select mineral lands and my solicitors came to me and said, "If we don't stop them, they are going to take some of the most valuable lands that really belong to native peoples." And I said, "Well, what can I do? Is there anything ..." And they said, "You can sign an order that prohibits the state of Alaska from selecting further lands until the land rights of the Alaska natives are defined.

And that happened. And then a dispute arose over the pipeline out of Prudhoe Bay and the oil companies got behind the Alaska natives and said, "Get this settled so we can build the pipeline." And that was, that was a wonderful thing.

But the state of Alaska ... Hickel used to take me to the woodshed – he and his attorney general -- every morning, and they were furious that I was not letting them go ahead and select lands. But that was a good moment and the Alaska natives have come out in very good shape as a result of it.

CW: Did you make a connection? Maybe you didn't so much when it ended up with your own brother putting through the act that really was made possible because of those land freezes.

SU: No. Something was put in the initial law to say that Congress reserved the right to decide. They in effect sort of zoned Alaska. You know there were a few people and they zoned potential national park areas, wonderful wildlife areas and so on, and my

brother fought this battle. He was then chairman of the committee and he went to Alaska. They hung him in effigy and so on.

CW: They used the same rope they used for you, didn't they?

SU: Well, yeah, he was finishing my work. But, he would say he was doing the work. And he was hung in effigy in Alaska and they just battered the hell out of him and he went back in the last year or two of his life to Anchorage and a reporter – I mean, the newspaper asked him the question, "Well, Congressman, is there a feeling the Alaska people have mellowed a little bit?" And he said, "Yeah, I guess so. They now wave to me with all five fingers."

CW: One of many examples. Mo Udall ran for president in '76 and then wrote a memoir called "Too Funny to be President."

Your last day in office was also very eventful and it is interesting not just because of the kind of strong recommendations you made and what happened, but it also gives us some insights into the relationship between your office and the White House. Lead up to that and tell us in some detail about those series of events because a lot of it involved the canyon country.

The Antiquities Act

SU: Well, in my opinion, now this is something – this is an issue Republicans and Democrats at least in the last 60 or 70 years have disagreed on. It wasn't true in the early period. The Antiquities Act of 1906 was written and it was scripted in a way that it looked like it was intended that Congress could – or that presidents could -- issue proclamations and protect Indian ruins. And it had some rather broad provisions, too.

But it gave the power to the president of the United States -- Congress gave the power to the president. And Teddy Roosevelt, who is one of my very favorite presidents, had a very expansive view of what his power was. There were mining claims being staked on the rim of the Grand Canyon. Somebody was going to control access. Think about how rich that person would be if that had succeeded. Of course, it later became a national park, since 1906.

And Teddy Roosevelt called his lawyers in and some of them had recommended "create - make the Grand Canyon a national monument." And he said to his lawyers, "Well, what does this law say?" And they said, "Well, it's kind of murky. Some would say that you can't do it." And he said, "Is there anything that says I can't do it?" And they said, "No." And he said, bring the paper, he'd sign it. And he signed it and that was the beginning of the Antiquities Act that Bruce Babbitt and Clinton used.

And I had proposed as a Christmas present or a going-away present to the country, when we were going out of office, to President Johnson that he create national monuments. I had two big ones: Gates of the Arctic and some of these places in Alaska. I had one, to show him I was serious, on the Arizona-New Mexico border, a million-acre national park, enlarging Organ Pipe Cactus National Park. And I proposed two wonderful ones in Utah.

And I asked for a meeting with Lady Bird there in the cabinet room and I thought I had it made. And so I said, "Mr. President, other presidents have done this." And he said, "Really?" And I said, "Yes. Herbert Hoover created eight -- 4 million acres of national monuments. This included Death Valley and I think Glacier Bay in Alaska."

And I said, "If 4 million acres is right for Herbert Hoover, 8 million acres is right for Lyndon Johnson." Boy, I thought I had it made. But he had a change of heart and it's a sad story. And we ended up at loggerheads and he did the little ones but he turned the rest of them down. And that was a sad way to end because Johnson supported me on the Wild and Scenic Rivers Bill; he supported the Land and Water Conservation Fund and my great partner was Lady Bird Johnson. Wonderful woman.

PL: What are the powers of the Secretary of Interior and what should the powers of the Secretary of the Interior be?

Secretary of Interior's Role

SU: Well, you have to approach this, Patty, on several levels. The powers are the powers given by the laws that are passed and some of them are quite explicit. There are certain things that only a Secretary of the Interior can do. In terms of policies and

administering laws, that is a question. And how much power does the president delegate?

I didn't have anybody in the White House supervising me, some assistant to the president, saying if you want to do anything call and talk to me and I'll talk to the president.

I was, I think extremely fortunate. This is because of the Cold War and my presidents, and Vietnam, and they were spending most of their time on the Cold War. I had a wonderful broad delegation of authority. I didn't have anybody in the White House supervising me, some assistant to the president, saying if you want to do anything call and talk to me and I'll talk to the president. I didn't have to do that. I was a wheeler and dealer and it was a wonderful time.

One power the Secretary of Interior has is as an educator, as a preacher. And my book, which became a best-seller and reached out to the country, was very popular. Someone said to me later, a critic, he said "Well, the reason you got on the best-seller list and you sold so many copies is that everybody in the Interior Department thought they had to buy a copy."

Well, whether that was true or not, it had an impact. And along came Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring," translated into 18 languages, a world best-seller. It was one of the most influential books of the last century and that was a challenge to us to help interpret what she had said. Her message, the wonderful message in this book, was the fountainhead of the environmental movement. The old conservation movement had its principles, so you put the environment on top of the conservation movement, and that's where it moved.

But a Secretary of Interior can develop a following in the country. I don't know how big a following that I'm bragging that I had, but when I spoke up and said things, at least it got regional press and so on. We didn't get much publicity — the space program got all the publicity in the 1960s. I didn't go on the national talk shows and so on. But the people out in the regions where we were doing — Sleeping Bear Dunes in Michigan or the Apostle Islands in Wisconsin or Point Reyes in California -- the people appreciated that and they

rallied behind. And the conservation organizations grew and doubled and trebled in membership in the 1960s, before Earth Day.

PL: As I understand it, you went from a staff of four people when you were a member of Congress, and then several days later, you had a staff of 55,000 in Interior?

SU: Yes, 55,000 employees in 18 different agencies.

PL: So how did that keep from making you seasick?

SU: Staggering.

PL: How did you make that transition?

Assuming the role of Secretary of Interior

SU: Well, I'll tell you. And this is advice for young people who may face the job of taking on responsibility: If you're suddenly confronted with something big and you don't fully understand it, listen.

The first month I was in office, I had this office that Ickes had and we had chairs, and I brought in the leaders. A different organization every evening: saltwater conversion, Indian affairs and so on. These were the traditional people and I respected the people who had worked for the Eisenhower administration at high levels. And I said, "What are the problems of this agency? What should we do?"

We talked and they argued a little bit and out of this came some kind of definition as to what we should be doing. And then we had the president's message where he said let's have a few national seashores and that opened the door. We had the president saying, he didn't campaign on that, let's have a wilderness policy, a new policy for the nation. Let's set aside areas that we're going to leave alone, and that became a very popular issue.

CW: One that was just a little different was the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. The Wilderness Act was in the pipeline when you came into the office as you explained. But tell us a little bit about the gestation of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

Wild and Scenic Rivers Act

SU: Well, the thing that was beginning to happen because in the West in particular, dam building was the big thing. Everybody was for it. I was for it. You had to be for more dams in your state. If you could get the project authorized, get the money, have a dam dedication, everybody would see you as somebody who brought home the bacon, as we used to say.

But I sensed from going around -- I went to Maine my first summer with Sen. Edward Muskie, and he wanted to stop a dam that was going to flood the Allegash River, the finest canoe river in the East and so on. And I remember there was a dispute with the National Wildlife Federation over what is now the Dworshak Dam on the Clearwater River, a tributary of the Snake, and they said this is going to block the salmon runs up the tributaries of the Clearwater River. It was too late to stop it.

And so we began to talk, maybe we need to bring balance to rivers. We built dams on some of the best dam sites. Let's select parts of streams and rivers and tributaries to leave them alone. And that developed into the Wild and Scenic Rivers bill. And Congressman Aspinall from Colorado, the powerful chairman, after I got President Johnson to put that in the State of the Union message, walked off the floor and told the Denver Post, "It's the craziest idea I've ever heard of." Well that mandate would take us three years to get it through his committee but we did it.

PL: Well, Wayne Aspinall was a Democrat, which is a premise to my next question in that we do live in rather polarized times now and the word "extremist" is used by both sides, extreme environmentalists, extreme advocates of development, and yet you seemed to have led a kind of utopian bipartisan life in office where those terms were not tossed around. Could you reminisce a little bit about this.

An era of bipartisan cooperation

SU: I never in my years referred to someone who was opposed to one of our bills, whether it was Aspinall or a Republican as an

extremist. I might have said if he was a Republican, "Hasn't he heard of Teddy Roosevelt?" I didn't call him an extremist.

A wonderful thing happened and I think we helped make it happen and I told my people in the beginning — I just sensed that if we could have a broad bipartisan coalition get behind these programs that I thought were going to be very popular out in the country, that that would give us a wonderful momentum to carry forward -- and this worked.

There is only one test: Does it meet the criteria? Is it good for the country? Is it good for the future?

I told my people in the beginning, I said the test is, if a congressman or a conservation group in St. Louis or wherever comes in with an idea, we don't ask the question, is this in a state with a Republican governor? Is this in a congressional district of a Republican congressman? There is only one test: Does it meet the criteria? Is it good for the country? Is it good for the future? And that approach developed something — a wide broad bipartisan approach.

You want proof? The vote on the Wilderness Bill in July of 1961 was, I think, 82 yes; 12 no. Only six or seven members of Congress in the West voted against the Wilderness Bill: two from Colorado, two from Arizona -- my home state -- one from Wyoming, one from Idaho, one from Utah.

And this was a sign that the country was ready for conservation. Now the message didn't get to Wayne Aspinall. He held the bill up, just he, himself. He wouldn't let his committee handle it. Can you imagine that? A man just sitting on it. And he told me once, because I had to go beg him to act, and he told me, "Well, Stewart, you may get a wilderness bill sometime, but you may not recognize it." He won a lot of concessions.

But that was a wonderful time and it carried through into the Nixon administration, into the Ford administration, into the Carter administration. It lasted for 20 years, I think. You can go back. I don't remember a big fight between the Republicans and Democrats in the Nixon administration or President Gerald Ford and so on.

There was a consensus that the country needed more conservation projects of the kind that we were proposing.

PL: I just have two questions more and then we're going to go to questions from the audience, so if you have written questions on your card could you pass them to the center aisles. So send them down there and excellent volunteers from the Nature Conservancy will be gathering those. So my last couple of questions, which you're right on the edge of: How has the mission of Interior changed over the last 50 years -- you did the 20 years or so of continuity, so it's the last 25 years, I guess I'm asking about.

What have been the causes of changes in Interior? I guess let's include your period of time, too. What were the causes of those changes? How has the mission changed? Did those changes in the mission of Interior reflect and track changes in attitudes in the American public in some pretty exact way? Did they lead those changes in attitudes?

Yielding to controversy

SU: Well this has puzzled me and dismayed me. The fact that issues that we were all agreed upon in the '60s and '70s became contentious, became friction. The Republicans on one side supporting development usually, and industry, and the creation of jobs by developing resources, cutting more timber and everything else. And the Democrats kind of supporting the protection of the environment. That's the way it seemed to split out.

This started, I'm sorry to say, under President Reagan and James Watt. He said you've been going in the wrong direction for 20 years and we're going to reverse course. Well that hit me between the eyes because that 20 years was something that I had something to do with.

Also, the attitude developed that government was bad, government was doing too much. There was an anti-government philosophy. You know all this that came out - Republicans and Democrats that came out of the Great Depression where the country was down and out, 25 percent unemployed and everybody, almost everybody, liked the New Deal programs, and in the West they were conservation programs and this developed broad support.

But then suddenly the government, the national government becomes bad. Get the government off our backs. Let people have freedom to do what they damn please. A real free market is every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost. Well, who's the hindmost? The poor and the middle class. So there you were. I hate to see what's happened and still happening, I'm afraid.

PL: My final question. If you had the power to reorganize Interior what would you do?

A new National Department of Natural Resources

SU: Well, my thinking in the '60s is a little different than today. We have got to have a rational Department of Natural Resources. We could take the name of Interior away and call it Department of Natural Resources. Bring the Forest Service and the other land agencies all together under one roof. But this has been hard to do.

Pinchot, Roosevelt's adviser who founded the wonderful National Forest Service, thought Interior was a giveaway agency and in some ways they were. He was suspicious, you know. No presidents have been able to do that.

But maybe someday when I'm long gone it'll be done, I hope. That's what I would do. Create a Department of Natural Resources.

CW: You have to say something about the dams in the Grand Canyon.

Dams in the Grand Canyon

SU: Well, there I was confronted. It became a big conservation issue. The Sierra Club very effectively said "Are you going to build dams in the Grand Canyon?" and so on. Here I was having to support this crazy Arizona water project, which we sold Congress that it was water for agriculture, and the water was so expensive most of the farmers can't use it and it's supporting this explosive growth of Phoenix and Tucson.

Phoenix is trying and succeeding in being another Los Angeles and Las Vegas is trying to be another Phoenix and I don't know what Denver is doing. You can tell me that later.

Question: Mr. Secretary, your first question from the audience: Can you describe your best day as Secretary?

SU: Oh, my goodness, I had so many. I had so many that were wonderful and pleasing. I don't like to think of this in terms of an ego trip, but I had so many occasions where I went out to Long Island, to Fire Island, out to Point Reyes. I had Lyndon Johnson, he was vice president, come with me to Padre Island and I heard all along what a wonderful island with all the wildlife. And to be there with conservationists who were seeing their dreams fulfilled. Boy, that lasted a long time.

Q: Mr. Secretary, we've heard it said that one of the major pieces of unfinished business for you was the lack of reform of the 1872 mining law. Could you talk about this a little bit?

Hard Rock Mining Law of 1872

SU: The 1872 mining law was a product of the California gold rush. It was the worst law ever passed in the United States. It just opened it up. There you go. Pay no royalties. The idea for precious minerals paying royalties. A royalty is the fifth in Spain and in England and other countries that the crown was to receive. But we decided on this approach of letting the mining companies have a free hand to go wherever, and it has resulted in a lot of damage to the country.

I tried, I have helped found organizations to repeal it. But the mining companies are very powerful and this is one thing they – Republicans -- seem to support, mining companies in keeping that old law, and some of the rest of us are on the other side.

Q: Mr. Secretary, what do you see as the most pressing issue for the Department of Interior today?

SU: I wish they would follow the law more. I wish they would stop trying to change regulations. I hate to get political. I've said some things tonight that have really expressed my views, but this

administration is more anti-conservation than the Reagan administration.

If anybody wants to come up and tell me, if there is a positive thing they have done. George Bush, the first George Bush, wanted to be and he was a pretty good environmental president. Now he stopped that dam that Denver wanted to build but it probably should have been stopped, or he appointed a man and he gave him a free rein. But I strain and try to see positive things that they are doing and I'm having trouble. Big trouble, big time.

Q: Mr. Secretary, The Indian Trust Fund seems to be a constant mess of litigation. How can this be resolved?

Indian Trust Fund

SU: No, that's the biggest mess in the government. It was a mess when I was there and everybody swept it under the rug. I was talking to a lawyer that's maybe in the audience who was working on this problem and he doesn't say it's hopeless but he says it's going to have to go a long ways. It's tragic because the people that are robbed and denied are Native Americans, and it's the proceeds, the money they should have received from their land, from the lease and the use of their lands. It's sad.

Q: Mr. Secretary: How are we going to support the national parks with all the overuse by campers and users, etc.?

Snowmobiles in Yellowstone

SU: Well, the national parks and their use has been — there are always controversies. The thing that's so symbolic to me is snowmobiles and how the Park Service let them in in the first place in Yellowstone, and so on with all their noise and pollution. Is that what we want to have in a national park? But here now we have an issue, one party wants to continue it and maybe slow it down a little bit.

I've been wondering who the hell it was that first let the snowmobiles into Yellowstone, and I'm wondering if it was one of my people.

Our national parks, the charter that Congress passed in 1960, says "leave them unimpaired, leave them unspoiled." And every administration seems to have to struggle with this problem. I'm not sure we were perfect in that, in the 1960s. I've been wondering who the hell it was that first let the snowmobiles into Yellowstone and I'm wondering if it was one of my people.

Q: Mr. Secretary, in 1997, Secretary of Interior Bruce Babbitt spoke at CU on the issue of global warming, calling it one of the greatest threats ever to humankind. How serious do you view this crisis today as to when you served as Interior Secretary?

Global warming

SU: The scientists, and some of the best were here at ENCOR, are all telling us it's a problem. So much of politics now involves clever deceptions. In Washington today, in this administration you don't hear talk about global warming. They stripped mention of it out of the report of the EPA and they use different language. There is "climate change": "We're not doing anything wrong, human beings aren't creating global warming, the damn climate's deciding to change. Isn't that awful?"

We don't talk straight talk. Barry Goldwater- , John McCain-type talk. Arizona politicians have been too straightforward, including Bruce Babbitt. And my brother used to say after his failure, he said "Well, it looks like Arizona is the one state where parents can't tell their children, 'you might be president someday.' "

Q: Mr. Secretary. Can you tell us a little bit about, some stories about Harold Ickes and Floyd Dominy? Harold Ickes and Floyd Dominy?

SU: Floyd Dominy was a small-town boy from Wyoming, little town. I always liked him and Mark Reisner in Cadillac Desert pictured Dominy as this powerful figure saying "We're going to have a dam here and there's a dam here." He was operating and functioning with senators and congressmen who would give him money and say, "Go look at this river and see if there's a good dam site." He'd come back - they'd always come back and say, "Oh, yeah. There's a couple of them."

The Bureau of Reclamation loved to build dams, their masterpiece was Hoover Dam and Glen Canyon Dam which became very controversial.

Harold Ickes had an interesting career. When I look hard at his time, of course, the war came along. He didn't do quite as much work in conservation, you know, enlarging the park system, doing other things, as I thought he might. But he had another job, he was called "Honest Harold Ickes." During the Depression they created something called the Public Works Administration. They built post offices and federal buildings and things all over the country and he supervised it and everybody wanted it to be honest and not a pork barrel. Harold was quite a character. You have to admire him.

Q: Mr. Secretary, what advice do you have for young people who see environmental preservation issues consistently defeated or downplayed, such as the Kyoto Protocol, by the administration?

SU: The interesting, the big climax at the time of Earth Day, 1970, was that the environmental movement came in over the top of the war protests as a major issue on college campuses, and high schools and grade schools called in. It was a wonderful media event of raising the consciousness of the importance of the environment and environmental protection.

One thing I found today, because we're 30 years later, is that kids in their 30s and 40s have wonderful memories and they have allegiances they've formed as a result of the environmental movement.

We used to use these phrases: 'We owe a duty to future generations' ... 'Leave a Legacy.' Do you hear those words much these days?

But the thing that I'd like to say to younger people here in the crowd tonight and we used to say — my wife used to say it. She thought the kids were the most important people. It's their world, more than ours. We're going to go out the door soon. It's their world and the challenge is there for them to make it a better world than the world we left them.

I'd like to hear more language today, both from Democrats and Republicans out of Washington. We used to use these phrases: "We owe a duty to future generations." "Leave a Legacy." Do you hear those words much these days?

Q: Mr. Secretary, what is your vision for the future of water in the West?

Water and energy policies

SU: Water in the West? We've got a big problem. The energy problem is soon going to have us by the throat. Over the Rio Grande River there's a big problem now. We're pumping, over-pumping the underground aquifer – as long as this drought continues and even if it slacks off some. You had that wonderful snowstorm in the spring up here and it saved you didn't it?

Los Angeles, watch Los Angeles. Gale Norton did a good thing. She backed Babbitt up and they're cutting back on the water they can draw out of the river. They've been cheating all of these years and they're going to have to learn to be thrifty.

The thing is if you say that we're running out of water, you're saying really that we're running out of water the way we use it. Santa Fe residents, because we have a more serious problem, use half per capita the water that Albuquerque does. Tucson cut back 50 percent when they had a water crisis. They eliminated lawns. Lawns don't belong in the high desert or the low desert.

We've got to rethink the use of water. But if you think it's going to go away, the people that think well, we're going to go back to a wet cycle, don't bet on it.

Q: Mr. Secretary, it seems almost unfathomable now that something like the Wilderness Act or the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act would get passed. Do you think there's any hope for such legislation in the future?

SU: I've wondered about it. This legislation passed without a great dispute and it passed in a bipartisan way. The most important people -- because we were a Democratic administration, Kennedy and Johnson, we controlled Congress -- is the Republicans. There

was a wonderful senator from California, Republican Sen. Tommy Kuchel. He was a deputy leader to Dirksen in the Senate. When he came out for the Wilderness Bill, most of the Republican senators rallied around and voted for it and it's those kind of people that I'm waiting to reappear.

We may have national policies. Well, we sure as hell need them where energy conservation is concerned. We don't have an energy policy in this country. Congress is thrashing around with it. I think the water issue is going to have to be solved on a regional basis. We can't look to Washington. They can't create water. Water comes from the heavens.

But energy and water are the big problems and we're going to need statesmen, mayors and others that are willing to talk to their people and say we're wasting water. We've got to cut back. We've got to be thrifty. We've got to use technology to reduce per capita use. It can be done.

One of the reasons I'm a troubled optimist is that I believe that we have the best scientific establishment in the country and I know we have the best educational establishment. We're educating people who can show us how to deal with these problems that are coming up. So don't be pessimists. Just demand action.

Q: Mr. Secretary, how do we achieve sustainable environmental development in poor, developing countries where the need for foreign-investment-driven projects is argued to be more important than environmental conservation?

SU: My brother and I started talking about the population problem before Paul Ehrlich wrote "The Population Bomb," and we got caught up in something. We were both fathers of six children and they said, "What are these guys preaching about here? Why don't they practice what they preach?" Well, it was too late for us to practice. But the problems that the developing world has are very serious and we're not doing enough, the prosperous countries.

It looked like we were throwing the United Nations away for awhile. The United Nations is going to be more important than it is (now) in the future. You know, we finally started — the AIDS epidemic in Africa, sub-Saharan Africa was just hideous. It's still hideous but

we're finally beginning to make some progress. I'm not an expert on the international picture but there's a lot of work to be done and a lot of generosity is needed.

The country is better off when the community is more important than the individual -- when people are judged by how much they contribute to the community.

PL: What do you want to say at the end here?

SU: My generation, I was a Depression kid, I was in the war. Tom Brokaw called us "The Best Generation." I think he was talking about our parents and not us kids. There's something to be said: The theme of my last book which came out a year ago is that the country is better off when the community is more important than the individual -- when people are judged by how much they contribute to the community, and to take it to the national level.

Kennedy's phrase in his inaugural speech rolls through my mind as we approach the 40th anniversary of his death in November: "Ask not what your country can do for you."

That's not the theme in Washington now with all these lobbyists. What can Congress do to give them tax benefits and so on. Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country or your community.

Good evening. Thank you. What a nice farewell.

I'm going on 84 and you don't know how long you're going to be around, but I've always loved Boulder, I've always loved Colorado, I've always loved the West.