Manuel Lujan Jr. was Interior Secretary from 1989 to 1993, under the first President Bush. He helped usher in protection for wetlands and key amendments to the Clean Air Act, and he presided over Indian water reforms and the cleanup of the Exxon Valdez.

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Introduction

Patricia Limerick: Our guest tonight, Manuel Lujan Jr., was born near Santo di Francois Pueblo in New Mexico in 1928. Here’s a quotation about the interesting and complicated heritage of the area of his origins. I quote him from his confirmation hearings:

"Growing up in a tricultural environment has given me a deep appreciation of Native Americans. To make the ideals of Native American self-government and self-determination a reality, I will work with Native American groups to promote economic development, improved educational opportunities and other measures to enhance their quality of life." Which is indeed a promise he stuck to.

Soon after his birth, he moved to Los Alamos and then to Santa Fe. His family has a many-generation history in New Mexico. Really to the 1500s. His father, Manuel Lujan, Sr., was an important political figure in New Mexico.

The three-term mayor of Santa Fe who also ran for Congress in 1944 and ran for governor in 1948.

Here’s a quotation from one of the senators from New Mexico speaking at the confirmation hearing with this memorable quote:

"I concluded that there really were three parties in New Mexico: Democrats, Republicans and Lujans. Because he, Manuel Lujan, Jr., had such a reputation that those who were related were quick to say it and those who thought they might be related, claimed it."

Secretary Lujan's father purchased an insurance business that became the family business and the business ties that came out of this left us totally astonished. Insurer to Georgia O'Keefe. Can you imagine being Georgia O'Keefe's insurance agent?

With this political heritage, Secretary Lujan was first in the House of Representatives for 20 years and in the House of Representatives he served on the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, the subcommittees on Energy and Environment, Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, the Committee on Science, Space and Technology.

His support for clean air and clean water legislation was consistent and inspirational.

An interesting feature of his time in Congress was a close friendship with Morris Udall, a friendship which some commentators say has really built an important bipartisan bridge in the House committee overseeing Interior.

However, 20 years in the House was enough by a judgment that I think many people could understand. He did not run in 1988.

It was his plan to retire from the Congress and return home to Albuquerque. Indeed, his wife had already moved back to Albuquerque when a set of phone calls came in.

"When the president asked me to be Secretary of Interior, I told him that Interior was like a sack full of cats and I would be in the middle," he said. A statement we know to be true and prophetic.
At his confirmation hearings, the importance of being Western came up over and over again. The senators were very interested in that. Secretary Lujan repeated frequently that his goal was consensus, not contention. And yet as those of us who read the confirmation hearings, the range of senatorial opinion in that room was dazzling and maybe even alarming.

Senators from Jake Garn in Utah, a real Sagebrush rebel, over to our own Tim Wirth. So consensus — as you look at those senators, you think good luck on the consensus issue. Because finding consensus between Jake Garn and Tim Wirth, I'm not sure anyone's been able to do it yet but it's a noble ambition.

Still, 100 to zero on the vote for confirmation.

Here's a summation of Secretary Lujan's program from his confirmation hearing: "The President and I agree that the conservation and wise management of our natural resources, this whole notion of stewardship, will have a high priority in his administration. We are committed to protecting and enhancing the nation's valuable resources as well as proceeding with their environmentally sound development. We can do both. We do not have to choose between them."

Indeed, to this project of building consensus, Secretary Lujan brought an unusually congenial manner. You would not want to say exceptional and unique, but it comes pretty close to that I think.

"I want to avoid lines being drawn which lead to confrontation," Secretary Lujan said at his confirmation and indeed a senator from New Mexico, Sen. Jeff Bingaman, said "Anyone who knows Manuel Lujan already knows his approach to problem-solving is to try to work with people and it is not to engage in posturing or needless confrontation."

A quotation from a Sierra Club lobbyist in Washington: "Even when he's an enemy, his approachability and congeniality make him a palatable enemy." There are many, many statements from people on all sides of an issue remarking on his extraordinary amicability and good nature.

During the Bush administration, some important acts of legislation: The North American Wetlands Conservation Act with important provisions for what were sometimes called swamps but then got upgraded into wetlands, an American conceptualization. And also some important Clean Air Act amendments which benefit us to this moment.

However, history does come upon people in unexpected ways. Secretary Lujan was only a couple of months in office when the crisis in Alaska, the Exxon Valdez grounded on Bligh Reef in the upper part of Prince William Sound. In a few days, the tanker had spilled almost 11 million gallons into Prince William Sound. Coping with that crisis was an important part of his early years in office.

The other big issue [the controversy surrounding spotted owls in the Pacific Northwest, interrupted by someone shouting from the audience] — now that's very cute — Secretary Lujan for very understandable reasons reacts to this little creature with a different sensation because this was indeed the most controversial part of his administration. The heated feelings, the tensions around this dear little thing you can forget its cuteness and its feathers when you have dealt with all the human passions that circulated around it.

Here is an important quotation from him on his concerns that if we are too moved by the cuteness of these animals, the dangers of that: "In looking at endangered species, the law says that you cannot take into consideration economic disruption. That," says Secretary Lujan, "bothers me. There ought to be some mechanism where you can take both things — both the economic and the endangered species concerns — into consideration."

A third feature of the times, the Yellowstone fires had just occurred before he took office so that was still hanging in the air. At his confirmation hearings, it was almost as if there was smoke in the air from Yellowstone. This was from Sen. Wallop from Wyoming, "This summer the federal government was an appallingly bad neighbor. It was careless of the concerns and health of the people of Wyoming, the economy of Wyoming." Much of this settled out into a fight over who should pay for the firefighting in these circumstances.

Now, a quick review of the issues circulating around at the time, along with these events: An important concern in the Lujan administration was the question of concessionaires in national parks and the terms under which they operated their businesses there; an ongoing shift, maybe consummated in some ways here from the Bureau of Reclamation as the large dam-constructing organization to a maintenance and water quality and water management organization. Ongoing controversies about the implementation of FLPMA in 1976, the new law on the management of the Bureau of Land Management; issues of multiple use, still heated and contentions; issues of grazing fees
on public lands and whether they should be raised. I think Secretary Lujan thinks that was an issue he would have liked to have gotten to but was not able to cover for various political reasons.

Concerns over the Bureau of Indian Affairs and its effectiveness in helping Indian people. This is a quotation from the somewhat ill-fated, I guess he chose his own fate — Sen. Hatfield from Oregon.

Here's an interesting quotation of Sen. Hatfield looking at Secretary Lujan's background from the confirmation hearings: "You have a unique opportunity, with your background and experience, to give a new perspective perhaps to the whole relationship of the Bureau of Indian Affairs to the Department of the Interior and to the people they are supposed to be serving."

In one particular area, in Indian education, that was a great concern for the new secretary and that obligation was one that he really took up very wholeheartedly. Also, his hope that he could persuade the other departments of government that the trust obligation to Indian people was not simply a matter for the Secretary of Interior, but of concern to all other departments of government. That's another very important commitment.

Next, the concern we have heard from our other visitors, on the importance of reducing the United States' foreign-oil dependence. Secretary Lujan is a supporter of drilling in ANWAR and was that at his time in office. He is also a person who thinks we should be considering nuclear energy and re-evaluating its possibilities as we plan our energy future.

During his time in office he established the Interior Council on Global Climate Change to further strengthen the department's role in scientific research and policy development related to the issue of global climate change and he also established a multi-bureau global climate change response program to establish the effects of global change on the natural resources for which the department has responsibility.

Now, reading some of this stuff I really came under the impression that the discussion of global climate change was calmer and more reflective and considerably less contentious and considerably less divisive and fragmented than it is today so I'm hoping that might be a topic we return to.

Now, his final issue: His concern about appointing women and minorities to an organization that had not had great representation in that territory. A quote from his (confirmation) hearings: "I will see that individual opportunities for women and minorities are available at all levels. My own appointments will reflect a diversity of ethnic backgrounds and an increase of women and minority managers."

In summation, his key commitments were to economic development with environmental sensitivity and to a sense of stewardship and heritage summed up in a statement he'd made on many occasions: "President Bush and I want to be known as the team who passes on these natural treasures to the next generation in better shape than when we found them."

Sen. Wirth was on the Interior Committee that was doing the confirmation and since is the Tim and Wren Wirth forum I found an exchange that was really striking. This is Sen. Wirth talking to the Interior candidate: "We are living in very changing times and our concerns are shifting around us."

This is Secretary Lujan's response to our senator at the time: "You are absolutely right and we have to change our way of thinking. I don't suppose that 15 years ago I would have given the same opening statement that I have today and I think that all of us are more sensitive to the environment than we used to be."

That larger context of the changing times from the 1960s to our times is another feature of our conversation tonight.

In leaving office, these are a couple of comments Secretary Lujan made: "The position of Secretary was much more enjoyable than Congress. You had some authority. You could make things happen."

"When all is said and done, I must admit that during my 24 years in Washington, my most enjoyable time was at the Department of Interior in that sackful of cats."

There is a real tribute there to a temperament and personality that can be placed in such a contentious zone and come out of it in such a wise, reflective philosophical understanding of both physical nature and human nature so, ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to present Secretary of Interior Manuel Lujan Jr.

Charles Wilkinson: December 1988 was surely a memorable month for you. Tell us a bit about maybe what went on behind the scenes during that stretch of time when President Bush decided to appoint you as Secretary of Interior.
Manuel Lujan: December of 1988. My last month in the Congress and I had gotten several calls from the headhunters for President-elect Bush. The guys that were trying to recruit people to come to different positions. I got about three calls during that month. Understand that I had retired from the Congress then. That was my last month. We were going home. My wife was already in Albuquerque and I was anxious to go.

So when the staff of the president-elect called and said, "On a what-if basis, if the president asks you to serve in the Cabinet, would you accept it?" I said, "Well, tell him not to ask me." Because I knew if he asked me, it's like your dad asking you to do something. With the President of the United States, you can't say no.

One day, President-elect Bush ran into my brother Edward in Washington at some reception or meeting and said, "What's the matter with Manuel? Is he sick?" because I had had a heart bypass, stents and all kinds of heart problems. And Edward said, "No, he's fine." "Well, why doesn't he want to serve in the Cabinet?"

Edward said, "Well, after 20 years in Washington he'd like to go. Bush said, "But I'd like for him to be Secretary of the Interior." Edward said, "Well, why don't you ask him? He's not going to turn you down." So sure enough, the phone rang. I was literally cleaning out my desk in the congressional office and the phone rang. It was president-elect Bush, who said very casually, "Want to come by the house this evening?" I said, "Yes, sir." What do you say? My wife was already in Albuquerque so I called her and I said President Bush wants me to come down and you know what that means. And she said, yes, for you to be in the Cabinet. And I said, "Well, what do you think?" And she said, "Well, I'm not going to tell you 'no.' If you want to do that, that's perfectly OK."

CW: And she didn't add, "but I'll be out in Albuquerque?"

ML: No, she came back with me, thank God. It was around Christmas time because Barbara Bush opened the door, just like in any household, and she had on this Santa Claus hat and he's sitting over there in a little office. And he goes like that, because he was on the phone. He said, "You know what you're here for?" And I said, "Yes, sir. But before you tell me that, you know I have Los Alamos and Sandia Laboratories that are all Department of Energy laboratories and there are thousands of people employed. Would you consider Secretary of Energy instead of Secretary of Interior?" He thought about it and he said, "no, no." And I said, "that's fine." And so I became Secretary of Interior.

But the story is that about three months later, I ran into Jim Watkins. Jim Watkins was an admiral who had been appointed Secretary of Energy by Bush. He was in his work clothes. We had gone to Mass on Saturday night and normally you dress up to go to Mass. But he was in his work clothes, and he and his wife were there. He said, "You know, we just got back from Barnwell and that's why I'm dressed like this." Well, coincidentally, my wife and I had just got back from Acadia National Park. A beautiful park up in Maine. We're on my home and my wife said, "What's Barnwell?"

I said, "Well, that's a nuclear storage place and they have liquid radioactive material and they have eight great big tanks and they're corroding and they're leaking and he went over there to see what he can do about it.

My wife said, "And you wanted to be Secretary of Energy instead of Secretary of Interior" with all the beautiful national parks and everything that we had to visit — so that's what went on in December.

Confirmation

CW: The next step for you would have been the confirmation hearing in front of the Senate committee. It's interesting because your nomination was well-received and you had been around the Hill for 20 years. How did you look at that period of time? Did you spend a lot of time on your statement to the committee? Did you look at it as an important statement? Was it one that that the White House reviewed or OMB reviewed? And then, in the room, in the hearing room, what was it like that day?

ML: Well, there were two hearings. One in the House of Representatives that I can cover just like that. Because Mo Udall – Congressman Udall, was the chairman of the Interior Committee and, of course, I was the senior Republican – had been there – so we were next to each other, and I walk into Interior to that hearing, on the House side, and Mo said, "Welcome to the Committee." He said, "Anybody got any questions? No. Meeting adjourned."

CW: He didn't even tell a single joke?

ML: Nothing. Which is pretty nice. And I thought, well, I don't think it will go that way in the Senate. I
think Johnson – Bennett Johnson was the chairman, and of course we'd served together on the Joint Committee for Atomic Energy so we knew each other. We'd served on several joint meetings between the House and the Senate and these guys were all my friends. People that I knew. Tim Wirth and I had been together in the House of Representatives, and so had a whole bunch of others. So I was not nervous at all. I knew that they would try to gig me a little bit but kind of in a friendly fashion.

We went in there – we were talking about that a little earlier today – some of them were making statements. Like Malcolm Wallop, who was a good friend, was saying that the Department of the Interior had not been a good friend. That quote there because of the fire in Yellowstone. But I knew he was not directing it at me, because I've been in politics long enough that you speak to your constituency really. But that was their chance, all of them, all the statements that they made to point out what their point of view was. It wasn't that they were directing any harsh criticism against me. I had no problems with the hearing.

**CW:** One thing that is very refreshing is that you're so open about how much you enjoyed the job. If you had to pick out a single thing that was most satisfying to you over that four-year period, what do you think it would be?

**ML:** Ski-mobiling in Yellowstone. As Secretary of Interior, you had all this staff and everything to bring your lunch and all of that. Seriously, that's my best memory of everything. Visiting the national parks, that is the big perk of being Secretary of Interior. Instead of all of these policies and things that you have to do. The National Park Service is the most popular of all the government agencies, on the national scale they're way up here and the IRS is way down here. So that was the most enjoyable part – I was going to say I was kidding about ski-mobiling in Yellowstone but no, I'm not kidding.

**PL:** You know, I think we should skip the order a bit and you should do that bird.

**Endangered species**

**CW:** You came in as the secretary of a department that has U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in it. Which is given a government-wide authority over the Endangered Species Act, so that most notably your department had jurisdiction over spotted owl issues in the very economically productive and magnificent old-growth forests in the Northwest — in California and up through Washington and that issue was a major one during your time.

**ML:** Yes, it was.

**CW:** When did it first come to you in the sense of really appreciating the magnitude of the problem and how did you react to it?

**ML:** Well, first of all I have to tell you that we're lucky we're in front of a big audience because I vowed when I left that I was going to kill anybody who ever mentioned the spotted owl after I left.

**CW:** Part of the program was to have you check your revolver at the door.

**ML:** Because that really probably the most difficult of all issues. There was really no way to come out of it unscathed, I guess would be the word. The Fish & Wildlife came to me with a recommendation that we put it in a threatened category, not that it was in danger of extinction. We started looking at that issue and then finally the Fish & Wildlife came to me and said we need to protect this area, so many hundreds of thousands of acres because the spotted owl, each pair needs 3,200 acres to survive.

There are so many owls times 3,200 acres and that's the amount. Others from the Department came to me and said that science is flawed. The reason for this is that the old-growth forests and that people were wanting to save the old-growth trees and that they had manipulated the mathematics of it in order to accomplish that. I was very disturbed by that.

**CW:** Let me ask you this. Did you have office meetings also with the Forest Service over in the Department of Agriculture and environmentalists over this?

**ML:** Absolutely. We met with a diverse group of people. We even went over there. I went over there with my staff over to Oregon and Washington and California because there was a big concern over shutting down all those mills also, and what the unemployment was going to be. It went into the thousands. And people were coming to me—one lady came to me, for example, and said to me, look if they shut this mill down my husband is going to lose his job, I've got cancer and I lose my health insurance. You don't want stuff like that on your conscience. But what bothered me more, was that the science, it was brought to my attention, that it had been manipulated and that the reasons were different than just the spotted owl. Well, before I had to make a final decision the court ruled that so much land had to be
set aside and all of that so it was really taken out of my hands.

There was a lot of concern about that decision and there was only one thing you could do in order to override a court decision and that was called the "God Squad." The God Squad was, and is to this day, the Secretary of Interior—

CW: Now, you actually chaired it at that time —

ML: Yes, I was the chairman of it. The Secretary of Interior, the Secretary of Agriculture, and I imagine, EPA and Commerce. That was convened to take a look —

CW: Now, the BLM petitioned for that and we're talking now about the old-growth forests on BLM lands in Oregon and were you involved in the decision to convene the God Squad?

ML: Yes, I was. As a matter of fact, I sent my representatives, Tom Sansonetti and Marianne Bach, a gal from here that had graduated from the University of Colorado here in Boulder, a Ph.D., those were the two principal ones that went over there. But we did not invoke the God Squad.

ML: Incidentally, years later, in New Mexico the silvery minnow is a little fish on the Rio Grande near Albuquerque, big controversy. The court ruled, Judge Jim Parker ruled that the priority was the silvery minnow. That they should have water that belonged to Albuquerque and that the citizens of Albuquerque — he didn't say that but by implication, the silvery minnow had priority over individuals. That was overcome — they talked about putting together the God Squad to override it — but Sen. Domenici and Sen. Bingaman, two senators from New Mexico, offered amendments and passed to exempt the silvery minnow from the Endangered Species Act and thereby overturning the court decision.

I have to tell you a funny story about that. Jim Parker is a friend of mine. The judge who made that ruling. We meet once a month, him, another judge Leroy Hanson, old has-been Republicans, all us old guys there, so we meet once a month. After his ruling, and it had nothing to do with the ruling, but he said, "We built a new house so let's have our Christmas, our December luncheon at my house and we bring the spouses."

We all did. My wife went with me, and she's not political. But she understands what's going on. She happened to be sitting next to Judge Parker and she says, "Judge, you're the one that ruled that the minnow had priority rights to the water." He said, "Yes." And I'm kicking her under the table all this time. He said, "Yes, yes I did." She said, "Why did you rule that way?"

He said, "Well, I was interpreting the Endangered Species Act and that's what the Endangered Species Act says is the priority."

She said, "In your heart, you really believe that?" And I thought, "Oh, my god, we're all going to jail here." He never did answer the question, but that's my story about the God Squad and the Endangered Species Act.

PL: Could you tell us the story about your effort early in your time in office to bring all those contentious people together for a meeting?

Conciliation Attempt

ML: You're probably thinking with all these stories that I was really having a good time, I was. But there were very serious and light moments. I decided early, maybe I'd been in office two or three months, something like that. All these environmental concerns and the business concerns and environmental organizations and the drillers and the timbering people and the mining people and they were all at each other's throats. At least they were against each other in almost every instance.

I thought I could bring them all together. Make each other see each other's point of view. So I called all the leaders of the various environmental organizations and the leaders of the organizations like the Cattlemen's Association, the Timbermen's Association, all of those. And I thought I'd bring them all into my office and I did. I thought, you know, if I can just get them talking to each other then they'll understand each other's point of view and we'll solve a lot of these problems.

I did that and my office, the Secretary of Interior's office is a big office. Probably bigger than this whole stage. It's got a nice fireplace. I brought in some donuts and made coffee. Got everybody comfortable, sit down, and we'll talk about these issues.

I decided to just leave them alone and let them talk it over amongst themselves and once they understood each other's problems, they could solve the problem by giving in a little bit here and there. Well, all of a sudden the noise level is getting higher and higher. I yelled at them, "Hey, let's lower our voices so we can hear each other talk." Out of the corner, comes
somebody yelling "Well you tell that SOB" – and he used the big word – "to lower his voice so he can hear what I'm saying." I knew right then and there that it wasn't working. I never called them back together. I did learn something from that. There are professionals in different things that that's their life's mission. And I had done that. I had brought those professionals in that's their life's mission and they couldn't afford to compromise because then they would lose face with all their members and many of them would lose their jobs if we were able to solve the problem.

That's one lesson that I learned. In getting people together later on, I would not call the heads of organizations and stuff like that. I would call people who either lived near where the problem was or somebody who had knowledge of the problem, somebody who maybe had looked at it in a different place and had come to a solution. I worked that way a lot because I felt that was the way to solve problems.

PL: I think people need a little demonstration of the skills you had acquired or probably took to service in Congress, especially around constituent service. Your story about constituent service involving the Pentagon.

Constituent Service

ML: That was a fun one. When I was in Congress, I had office hours. I would go from one little town to another. Albuquerque was the big one so it would be at the school. First of all, I would send cards telling people that I would be at a certain place at a certain hour and if you have a problem that you wished to discuss with me, come on in. A lot of people would come. We'd go to a courthouse in one of the counties, people would come and there would be 30 or 40 or 50 people, sit in the courtroom, and I'd use the judge's chamber over to one side, to visit individually because they didn't want everyone to know what their problem was. Social Security problems, somebody wanted to get into the Veterans Hospital and they were having trouble. But anyway, they were seeking the office of the congressman to help them straighten out the problem. One day I was in Albuquerque at one of the high schools, and this one guy came in and he said, "What do you know about outer space creatures?"

I said, "What do you mean? What are you talking about?"

He said, "They won't leave me alone. They have me delivering messages for them all the time. Today it took the cake. Today they had me go all the way down to Rio Bravo – which was 10 or 15 miles from where I was – and I walked down there and I get within a half a block from where I'm supposed to deliver the message, and they changed their mind. That's it. No more."

I said, "What do you think I could do about it?"

He said, "It's the Pentagon. They're the ones that are responsible for that."

I said, "Really? What do you want me to do about that?"

He said, "I want you to go to the Pentagon and tell them I don't want anything to do with that stuff any more and to leave me alone."

So I just wrote it down in my casebook of things to do. About three months later, we're running for re-election and having a rally in another high school and the guy comes up and says, "Mr. Lujan, I came by because I wanted to thank you. Since you've talked to the Pentagon they haven't bothered me at all."

I said, "That's fine, that's what we're here for. To help the constituents in whatever way we can."

But that's one of the big jobs of the congressman. It's not just going to vote. It's answering constituents' letters, it's answering the phone, returning telephone calls. It's the casework, you know, that's what it's called. It could be, "bring my son home because grandma died because he's in Iraq or Germany" so that's one of the big parts of being a congressman.

PL: First, everybody in Boulder had to hear that story. That was my first reason for asking about it. But also, there's a possibility that holding elected office for a fairly long spell is really good training for being Secretary of Interior. For what you do, not necessarily in that particular story, but the experiences you had had as a member of Congress. To be Secretary without that experience of dealing with people.

ML: No. It's valuable experience. First of all, you understand I had been on Interior Committee dealing with Interior issues for 20 years. So I knew what the problems were as far as the BLM or the Bureau of Reclamation and Bureau of Indian Affairs and all of that.

As an illustration, I'll tell you what really did serve me having been a former member of Congress. When I was in Congress, one year I had a really tough election. The next year I decided, you know, we're not going to take chances. We're going to raise a lot of
money now. In those days, a congressional race, $500,000, a half a million dollars, was a lot for a congressional race. Today, they cost a $1 million or a million and a half.

So we got serious and we raised a half a million for that particular election. And I thought, you know, you raise that much money and then you blow it. Just on an election. For a good cause, I might say, for getting re-elected. But I really kind of felt bad and you know if an organization can do that in an election year we could probably raise a half a million dollars for a good cause. So we did. For scholarships. That foundation is still going on today and it's grown. We give $500 a semester to each student who graduates from what is the first congressional district and they get a scholarship for four years so it's pretty good.

National Park Concessionaires

When I got to be Secretary of Interior – well, what we did was have concerts and wrestling matches and stuff like that, and I got to know the concessionaires at the university gym, at the state fair, and they paid about 50 percent of their gross as a fee to the university or the state fair for being able to have the concessions there.

Well, when I get to Washington find the concessionaires at the national parks are only paying 2.5 percent. I thought this isn't right. So I did study and came up with the recommendation of 22.5 percent because they are in rural areas and it's more expensive to do business in rural areas and all of that.

So I decided what we're going to do is we're going to raise these fees and we're going to raise them to 22.5. There was a reason for it. Instead of it going to a general fund, it was kept there in the park to do the repairs to roads and buildings. There's a big backlog anyway in the national park.

But anyway, I knew what was going to happen because when I was a congressman I used to do it myself. When anybody threatened to raise the fees, in would come the concessionaire from your district and say we'll I'm going to go broke. So I would go on over to the guys in Congress that ran those committees and I would say don't raise them because my constituent and so forth and they would put in the appropriations bill. And the way to stop something from the administration doing something is to say no money can be spent in order to accomplish whatever it is. In this case, no money can be spent in order to study the fee structure of the National Park Service concessionaires.

Having been in Congress and having just left there, I knew all the guys that did that. So I went to them and said look, I'm going to do this and it's needed and I explained to them and sold them on the idea. I said I know what's going to happen. The other members of Congress are going to come to you about their constituents and all of that and I would ask you, you know, your reply to them can be "Lujan was never worth a damn when he was here and he's not any better than he ever was and he's stubborn and he's not going to listen. Blame it all on me. But don't put it in the law that I can't do it." It served me well. Being friends with Sid Yates and Ralph Regula who ran that committee so I was able to accomplish what other Secretaries of Interior hadn't but only because I had been one of them. I was one of the guys in Congress so it did serve me well.

PL: How big a difference did that make in funding?

ML: The Park Service gets $100 million more from the concessionaires and no one got hurt. In my research, I found that one of the concessionaires had the previous year, their bonus was $1 million and the son had gotten $1 million and the daughter-in-law another million. So I figured I wasn't taking the food out somebody's mouth, but it did amount to $100 million annually that's still going on that's used – and we changed the law, instead of it going to the general fund – the general fund, you know, $100 million is nothing. But it stays in the park and it's for renovations and upgrading and all of that. I thought that was pretty good. That worked out to my advantage.

PL: A theme in the series has been the variability and the ups and downs in bipartisan collaboration on bipartisan issues. So I'm interested in your reflections on that. Your friendship with Morris Udall might be an interesting place to start. And then if you choose to reflect on our crabby times, you can reflect on the world we live in in 2004.

Polarized Politics

ML: I think it's changed a lot and I think everybody has noticed that. There's more animosity among the parties today than there was before. For example, in campaigning, one of the things used to be that you don't mention your opposing candidate's name. Why give him the free publicity? That was the rule in those days. Now, it is mention your opponent's name but put an SOB in front of it or whatever; what a lousy guy he is. That's gotten more and more polarized.

Frankly, it's more difficult. You see more party line
votes today. Not that we didn't have them in those days but they weren't as pronounced as it is today. I'll tell you very honestly I'm glad that I'm not in politics any more. I can take criticism, that doesn't bother me but the kind of criticism today is just terrible. It applies all the way down the line. Environmental issues or whatever.

In those days, there was the Republican club and the Democratic club. There still there. The watering holes. The Republicans would go over to the Democratic club just as often as we would the Republican club and we were all friends. But I don't see that happening any more. There's such a polarization. You see it every day and almost on every issue. Like I say, I'm glad I'm not running for office any more.

PL: Is it possible that you and Morris Udall were nicer people than the people we have today?

ML: It's the times, I guess. Maybe even the general atmosphere throughout the country. We don't get excited anymore about the things that happen. There's more confrontation. There's a lot more in-your-face stuff. I don't want to get into the particular issues now but things that organizations and people demand. They demand it and it's very much in-your-face.

PL: But they were suing quite a bit in your time if you want to reminisce a little bit about your –

ML: The Department of Interior?

PL: The Department of Interior.

ML: What I meant when you said this quote up here, when the president asked me to be Secretary of Interior and I said that's like putting me in a sackful of cats and I'm going to get scratched no matter what. You have the environmental organizations here and you have the drillers here and you have the timber people and you have the mining people, all of those different things. The Department of Interior has always been very contentious.

When I left office, and one of the bad things about it is that when you're the Secretary of Interior, they put your name on it. They don't just say they're suing the Secretary of Interior, they're suing Manuel Lujan instead of the Secretary of Interior. I had 1,600 suits pending against me when I left. Keep in mind I was only in office 1,400 days. If you take 365 days times four. Luckily, when you leave the next guy gets his name on the lawsuit. Can you imagine filling out an application of some kind? Have you ever been sued?

But that's the nature of the Department of Interior. Everybody files a suit to get their way or they felt they were maligned in some way or another.

PL: Talk about the spectrum of agencies that are within Interior and what it's like to try to orchestrate that.

ML: Well, probably the best way to explain the whole Department of Interior and why it's so contentious. The Bureau of Reclamation is a water department. There's 10 different departments under the Secretary of Interior. The story is – it's not a true story – that the Bureau of Reclamation wants to build a dam on this particular piece of property. Along comes the Bureau of Land Management and says you can't build a dam, you can't flood that out, that's good grazing land and you shouldn't do that. The Bureau of Mines comes along and says, no, no. There's gold down there so we ought to mine that. What other departments are there?

PL: Park Service –

ML: Then the Park Service says we want to make it into a national park, you can't do all of that. Then the Fish & Wildlife says, well you can't because this is a wetland, it's got to be preserved. Then the Bureau of Indian Affairs comes in and says, no, no, no. That's aboriginal land. You can't do anything with it because it's ours. So that's the contention within the Department of Interior. Just within the agencies, let alone somebody from the outside having some issue with each one of those departments. Also, the Department of Interior has the territories, Guam and the Mariana Islands, Palau, the Virgin Islands and those. That's where all those cats are, that are going to scratch you when you get in that sack.

PL: Is that productive? To have that kind of range? Or is there something smart to do in reorganizing?

ML: Over the years, different functions have been taken out of the Department of Interior. Let me say this, because this makes a difference in how you view the department. It is the Department of the Interior, of the interior operations of the federal government. The Post Office used to be part of that, the Veterans Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency was carved out of Interior. Over the years, things have been taken out. But unless you make them a separate department what are you doing to do? You have to keep them there to be administered.

I liked it because most of them are Western issues. The water, the land, the mining, Indian affairs, all of those are Western issues so I suppose it's well-placed.
Western Secretary

**PL:** The Western-ness thing. Like I said, the senators were really going on about that at your confirmation hearing and it seems important to you. Could you talk about why the Secretary of Interior should be a westerner and how you think your Western-ness was part of that? And my last question will be the three letters.

**ML:** The fact is that every Secretary of Interior, and I was beginning to feel my age when we were going through all the Secretaries who have participated and were invited, all the way to Rogers Morton, and I knew all of them. I guess that tells you how old I am or how long I've been around this thing.

But all of us are Westerners and it's traditional and probably a very desirable thing that we be Westerners because those are the issues at Interior that affect the West.

When I was in Congress, we always said Easterners who don't have the big presence of the federal government in those states really don't understand what it is to have the federal government. Like in the case of Nevada, 70 percent, in New Mexico it's almost 50 percent. I don't know what the percent is in Colorado. The governor of Nevada told me one time, you're the landlord of more land here than I am, so you have more jurisdiction over more land than I do. I think that's why that's important.

Westerners are different and it shows. We're more independent. At least that's my thinking in what I noticed. You know, if you're going to drive from here to Colorado Springs, you'd better know how to change a tire. At least that. You'd better be that independent because you don't have a filling station a mile down the road. If you're going to call AAA, it's going to cost you an arm or a leg and it's going to be an hour or two or three before they get there. There's a different thinking on the issues. I think that's why it's important the Secretary of Interior be from the West because those are western issues.

**PL:** Sen. McClure, at your confirmation hearing, said that Cecil Andrus said to him that the reason he was happy to become Secretary of Interior was that since "Idaho was two-thirds federal land when he went to being Secretary from being governor, he had more control over Idaho."

**ML:** Yes, that's correct.

**PL:** Your three letters.

**ML:** Somebody asked me if I left any advice for my successor. I told this story and it's a joke. When you leave office, I'm going to leave three letters on your desk, you tell your successor. And every time a crisis comes up, you take a letter and open it and just follow the instructions. So there's the three letters on the desk of your successor, and the first crisis comes up and he opens up the first letter and it says, "Blame the opposition party." And sure enough, that worked out real good and the crisis is over and on we go.

The second crisis comes up, opens the letter and it says, "Blame the Congress for it. They're the ones responsible for it." And sure enough, that worked out pretty good. The crisis is over.

The third crisis comes up. The guy opens the letter and it says, "Write three letters. Your advice to your successor." You get two shots at it.

**PL:** I forgot all about the Exxon-Valdez which is not easy to forget about, but I forgot to ask about that so we can have that as a question.

**Exxon Valdez**

**ML:** Maybe someone has a question and we'll incorporate it. But while we're waiting, I will tell you that had not happened before, at least in my watch and something that I was responsible for and understand that I had just become Secretary of Interior. It seemed like every Friday afternoon something would happen. I hated to see Fridays come, except that the next day was Saturday. We had the Exxon-Valdez on a Friday afternoon; the next Friday, the Delaware River right outside of Welling, Penn., there was a tanker spill there. Another one right out of Providence, R.I., we had a ship capsize and there was this spill.

I decided I had better go on up to Alaska and find out what's going on and I did. I could see people that Exxon had hired with paper towels cleaning the rocks there on the beaches where the oil was coming out. The decision was to suck up all the oil that was floating in the water, put guards all around it, a tube, to contain it. You do all of that. But the cleaning up really wasn't very effective. The people in Alaska who had been there for many years, said don't worry about it. The winter storms are going to come in and wash it off. I didn't tell Exxon that. They kept cleaning but they were producing more waste with all these oil-soaked paper towels than all of the oil on the rocks.

So sure enough, winter came and the storms and churning of the water on the beach did clean most of it. But there was still a lot of damage to the land and
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the trees and the vegetation and all of that. Interior had some lands in there; the Department of Agriculture had some lands in there. NOAA – National Oceanographic something or another, and the State of Alaska. I was the chairman of that committee, trying to determine what to do about the cleanup. We determined that Exxon, in the final analysis, was the one who had to pay for it so we had to figure what it would cost to do it.

If some of you were here when former Secretary and Governor of Alaska Hickel, Wally Hickel. He's a grand programs money. The Alaska Pipeline. He wanted to bring an iceberg down to Los Angeles and let it melt there and that would be the water supply. Big things. He always thought very big. We were all sitting there trying to make something out of this whole thing, and he said, well, let's have Exxon pay for it. They have plenty of money.

I naively said, "Well, how much do you think we ought to ask them for?"

He said, we're going to ask them for a billion dollars. A billion dollars. That sounds almost like government. I didn't quite understand how much a billion dollars is. And sure enough, we got a billion dollars off of Exxon to do all of that restoration and that was sufficient.

I wanted to put the billion dollars in trust. And that we would just work off the interest but I got voted down and the billion is gone now. I knew that if you put a billion dollars into any one of the federal agencies they'd use it up real quick. Sure enough, we don't have any of the billion dollars. It's all gone. But it's restored.

Now there are lawsuits by the native corporations and by the — because we were only doing it as far as the government land was concerned. Now the individuals and the corporations and stuff like that, the Alaska native corporations, they're now still negotiating over it. We solved that – Hickel said charge them a billion dollars and off we go.

I decided that if some of them are able to run parts of their department and some of them maybe had two or three. The more capable tribes, the bigger tribes. Why don't we just enter into a contract with them and say, OK, the government is spending $600,000 or whatever the figure may be, to your reservation to run these programs, you just run the whole thing. We entered into contracts with, I'm going to say 12, but I'm not positive of the number, that we entered into, that they would run their own reservations and that the government would only pay what was their responsibility, what they had been paying in the past.

That was a step into the self-determination of how their programs ought to be run.

CW: And it's really taken off since then.

ML: I haven't kept up with it. I know more tribes have taken the department up on it. How many I don't know. That was a good beginning. Now, it's a different situation on Indian reservations because of the gaming. Part of the law for gaming on Indian reservations says that you cannot take that money and distribute it amongst the tribal members that you have to use it for improvements within the reservation. I know, for example, right out of Albuquerque, the Sandias, they put in a wellness center, which is a clinic, it's even exercise equipment and stuff like that. They rebuilt their old church, which is from 400 years ago. Their road system has been improved, their police system is a modern system now, and that all comes from gaming. It's a different world out there now on the Indian reservations than it was 20 years ago.
Questions from the Audience

Q. What should be done to resolve the question of the Indian Trust fund.

ML: The Cobell lawsuit against it, the accounting for it has been horrendous. And is for a matter of fact. The Cobell lawsuit says it's out of kilter by billions of dollars and that the government owes all these people billions of dollars because they haven't kept the proper records and they've squandered it and this and that.

That's not quite correct. It's correct to a certain extent that those records have been mismanaged and all that. I personally don't believe that it's in the billions of dollars but I do think that it's in the millions of dollars. The only way to straighten that out is, and they're attempting to do that now, is to go back over those old records and some of them don't exist any more because they're many, many decades ago. Get as close as you can, and say you get to – I'm going to use a figure of $50 million or whatever it may be, and it will take an appropriation by Congress to square it out. I really do think that that's a solution. Maybe that's not the bookkeeping way of doing things.

I remember when we were in the insurance business and my sister kept all the books and we'd be there late at night and she'd be trying to balance and she'd be 37 cents off and she couldn't find it. I'd say here's the 37 cents and she'd say, no, we can't do that. We've got to balance the books.

I think this thing is so messed up, the accounting of it, that that's the only way that you're going to be able to figure it out.

Q. Mr. Secretary. What's your biggest disappointment, i.e., decision or policy change that you made as Secretary that didn't last or was reversed, and looking back what do you think you could have done better?

ML: I don't know. I really don't know that I had any disappointments. I can think of things that I was happy about. But maybe that's my nature. But I don't know. I can't think of any disappointments that I had. Let me think of it through the program and I'll come back to it.

PL: I think you were quoted as saying you would have liked to do something with the 1872 mining law, not that you confessed bitter disappointment but that you'd ... 

ML: There were a number of things that I would have liked to do. For example, the 1872 mining law, there are some minerals that you don't pay royalties on and I think if you're going to get them off of federal lands, you ought to pay royalties just like you do to anybody else. On the BLM, the grazing fees I thought needed to be bumped up a little bit. Not in terms of dollars or anything like that, but in terms of 10, 25 or 30 cents, something like that. There were some programs that I didn't get done but, well, maybe they were a disappointment. There, that answers your question.

Q. Mr. Secretary, what do you think is the most pressing environmental issue facing the Interior today? And perhaps you might expand upon that regarding the U.S. and the larger view.

ML: The most pressing environmental issue. Probably the Endangered Species Act. It is the most controversial. It's under fire. Some people want to completely do away with it. I think it needs some adjustment. I think you have to take into consideration some economic values, how it affects the human population. Probably the Endangered Species Act is the most critical within the Department of Interior.

Q. Mr. Secretary, do you think the Secretary of Interior position is inherently controversial and please comment.

ML: It is inherently controversial because of those things – that little story I told you about the Bureau of Reclamation wanting to build a dam and then in comes the BLM and all of those — that's one part of it, within the department itself, very controversial. But then on the outside also, there's 1,600 lawsuits filed. There's mining interests, there's the timbering interests, whether you drill in the outer continental shelf or not. You have the environmental organizations that would oppose most of these things and that's what brings the lawsuits on. It is inherently that sack of cats that I was talking about and it is the most controversial of all the departments just by what it's like.

PL: Have any of your views changed since you left office – on Interior?

ML: No, I don't think so. I'm still the same person that I was when I was in office. One of the things that I struggled very hard with, let me tell you, is not to change when I got into public office from what I had thought before about different things. And I don't think I did because what I found — someone asked me what advice I would give when I was talking with students to those that are beginning now. That is, that you keep your values, whatever they may be. I remember both when I was in Congress and when I
was Secretary of Interior, particularly when I was in Congress because you can see that more. I think my first reaction, my gut reaction, when an issue would come up, it generally turned out to be the right one for me. Then I'd go study the issue a little more and I'd get both sides, but generally I would come down on what that first impression was. Because you are who you are.

I'm a Westerner, I'm a Republican, I'm a Catholic, I'm this, I'm that, I'm the other. Those are the things that formed my way of looking at things. Those things aren't easy to change. My advice was that before you vote for someone, look at what he's been like most of his or her life, because that's what they're going to be like when they're in office. If I meet someone who is going into public office for the first time, say they're going into Congress, and I know their background, I can tell you 90 percent of the time what their vote is going to be on a particular issue and so can you. Because that's who that person is.

I don't think you change your views. Maybe if you become enamored of your job, that you quake every time you cast your vote because some constituent isn't going to like it, then maybe you will change, but for political reasons.

Another thing, and we've never talked about that, before somebody goes into politics, what my feeling is that you be pretty secure. Either you have a business or you have your education that you know if you get defeated, you have someplace to go. I always had the insurance business and thank god, I never sold it. My brother ran that and I always thought that if I got defeated I would go back to selling insurance. I think that that's very important. Just like in business; that you have an exit strategy. Then nobody can threaten you.

**Q.** Mr. Secretary. How were you able to achieve such success with Indian water rights settlements and why has this gotten more difficult.

**ML:** Because we concentrated on it. One of the things that I knew going in as Secretary of Interior was that these things had been hanging on, in some cases for a 100 years. I put a team together. I remember two guys particularly. Joe Miller, who had been with the Bureau of Reclamation, and knew the people in the dam business. Then Tim Glidden, who was my attorney, not in the Solicitor's office, but in my own office. I sent them out and said we need to get some of these settled. I think we settled 12 of them, which was pretty good because none had been settled in 100 years. I don't know how successful it's been now. How many they have now. But they still have the program going. The present Secretary of Interior has that program going. I'm assuming that they are closing some but I can't tell you that they have. But I would be very, very surprised if they haven't closed a bunch of them. I think it's probably still a successful program.

**PL:** Would you like to give us any reflections on closing here?

**ML:** I think this is wonderful. This program. I was thinking about that. I guess we all think about — I wish when my dad was alive I had taken the time or my grandfather to take some tape about what it was like then. I think this is kind of like that. Getting all of us that has been there — now that's been a period of let's see probably 40, 45 years? Almost half a century. To have people participate in it. I hope out of this thing comes a good book that will be a good history of the West. Because all of these people have been involved in one way or another in shaping the West so I think it's a good study.

I've enjoyed it. I've had an opportunity to visit with students, some faculty, with others. The questions. I had not thought of water rights settlements for — well, since I left 11 years ago. So it brings back some memories of those years. It's been very enjoyable and I thank you for inviting me to participate.