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STEWART L. UDALL ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW II

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78705

ACCESSION NUMBER 74-259

INTERVIEW II

INTERVIEWEE: STEWART UDALL

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

DATE: May 19, 1969

Tape 1 of 1

F: This is the second interview with Secretary Stewart Udall in his office in Washington on May 18, 1969. The interviewer is Joe B. Frantz.

Stu, let's talk a little bit about the differences between Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, both of whom you had ample opportunity to observe. Talk particularly, first of all about the difference in approach in Cabinet meetings.

U: There were differences. They were not too great, however. Of course, President Johnson was influenced in part by the fact that he sat in the Kennedy Cabinet, saw how Kennedy did it and was confronted immediately, obviously, with the problem of well, how differently did he want to do it. Both of them used the Cabinet in a limited way. Their main purpose seemed to be to have a discussion of common problems that ran across the board and to use the Cabinet as a means of more or less producing the kind of unity--both of information and outlook--of understanding what was on the President's mind.

F: They did not look on the Cabinet as an extension of the White House staff?

U: No. In other words it was this quite limited concept. Kennedy began it. I'd say Johnson--in trying to characterize it, I think it was the same approach. We see already Nixon has a different approach. He's using sub-Cabinet committees.

I held the view myself, particularly in the last part of the Johnson years, that it would have been a wise thing to have had a kind of sub-Cabinet committee on the cities and the city problems. I often wondered if Secretary Gardner had been given that as a very special assignment whether he might not have stayed on in government. But this was not done.

In looking back on both the Presidents I felt, although this limited use of the Cabinet that I've described I think was useful and it was necessary, but it was sort of minimal. I felt myself that if I were President, after sitting and watching the whole thing, I would have made the Cabinet a more versatile instrument. I would have broken it down into pieces.

I think I would have done one other thing. I would have systematically, every sixty to ninety days, I would have had a kind of leisurely casual meeting with each Cabinet

member to kind of get his view of what his Department was doing and what needed to be done--as well as to give him a chance, perhaps in a personal private way, to get his views across on various issues.

Now we did that, of course, but it was sort of done ad hoc and you got your licks in where you could. I always tend to think that Presidents, particularly if they surround themselves with staff intimates whose judgement they rely upon, that they never quite realize--neither the two Presidents I served with--that Cabinet officers, not simply because they were running a Cabinet Department--. But we got around the country. We saw a lot of things and a lot of people that Presidents could not see and therefore as eyes and ears for the President--.

F: And the White House staff didn't get out of the White House much either.

U: No. They're closely tied to the President, and we're exposed to a range of opinions and experiences and whatnot. It seemed to me, therefore, that the Cabinet members could have provided more help to the President in that way. They missed a bet in not, as I say, using it as a more versatile institution.

On the one hand, I think the Eisenhower use of the Cabinet was with these long meetings and having all the Cabinet members sit and discuss at great length--you know, the classic Cabinet approach--that this in terms of the modern realities is not the best use of the Cabinet either. I'm not faulting the Presidents I worked for not having the Eisenhower type Cabinet, because it seemed to me this was not efficient use of time. Yet on the other hand I don't think either of these Presidents got the full use out of the Cabinet members and that they relied too much on their staff, quite frankly because I think that narrow circle of a staff orbiting around the President, always close to him, every minute trying to anticipate and carry out his wishes and his orders, they can't be very dispassionate. At least a Cabinet member, he's sitting back in the next circle as it were but he can be a little more objective than staff people. Again, there was not too much difference. President Kennedy probably was even a little tighter, had a little tighter circle around him, was harder to break through than President Johnson.

F: Did the Presidents bring a typed agenda in with them or did you sort of play Cabinet meetings by ear?

U: No, the Presidents always had an agenda and it was always pretty predictable. It was usually briefings on the main items with comments, with the President explaining to all of us some of his decisions or feelings on major issues, giving instructions [and] directions to the Cabinet. There was rarely vigorous discussion.

F: It seldom got riotous or table-pounding?

U: No. I always thought that some of the most interesting Cabinet meetings were where there was a specific burning crucial issue and the President would go around the table. But this was not done too often with either of the Presidents that I worked for.

F: They didn't tend then to act as sort of moderator of the group?

U: No. Of course this again relates to the personality of the President, how he functions, how he wants to operate. President Kennedy, the larger the group--because of his reserve and everything--the more uneasy he got. President Johnson--again because of his strong driving personality--he usually was interested in telling about decisions that had been made and moving on down the road, rather than saying, "Well, what do you think?" On the other hand, of course, in terms of responsibility given to Cabinet members, in my Department I had a pretty free hand and with very few exceptions strong support in what I was trying to do. That's another facet of it, however, as to what authority you were given in terms of running your Department. But I thought always there was too much of a thought of Cabinet members merely as somebody who was running a Department over there, and who was trying to keep things going and carry out programs.

F: More on the operating level than on the policy level.

U: That's right.

F: Now then on the various things that came up within your administration--all the movements and the changes and so forth in the Interior--did you send those up to the White House by memo? Did you introduce these topics at Cabinet meetings? How did you get the President's ear on this?

U: Well, Joe, I probably did this differently than most anyone. And this gave me a feeling of direct communication on a constant basis particularly if I realized--and I always tried to make this clear to the President's staff people--that he recognized that he was getting a report from me personally. You know, President Kennedy instituted a weekly report which each of us turned in. Most Cabinet members had their staff prepare them and they signed them. I did my own. I dictated them myself. No one else saw them. It was highly personal. These were very terse, very tight. Of course, they're all in the record. And it was a way for me--it was the best really diary, or record I had, of what I was thinking on what I was doing. I tried to single out just major issues--one page or two--and either state what I thought or what I thought should be doing, try to identify policy questions, and not just a reporting mechanism. So this was my way of communicating on a regular basis with the White House.

Because of the playback, it was always quite clear to me that President Johnson saw most of these because he reacted occasionally. I was never sure what President Kennedy did, and this disturbed me because I felt that there ought to be a constant

communication. After all if this took three minutes of somebody's time to quickly read a memorandum, at least he had the benefit of your thoughts, what you thought was important, what was coming up. He then could react, could give direction to somebody if he wanted to look into something and so on.

F: When you sent in these weekly reports to President Johnson, were the responses pretty prompt?

U: Well, usually if they're of an action nature I'd often times get something back the same day it went over. He was very prompt. It was obvious, knowing how President Johnson operated, if he saw something he checked it, handed it to somebody, and said tell him this or give him this direction and so on. This, of course, was the thing, since it happened with regularity that I knew he was reading my memos, my reports. Of course, having this kind of communication was very important, because you can't act with the sort of confidence that you need and you can't spend your energies effectively unless you know how you're keyed in with White House thinking.

F: How much time is spent in Cabinet meetings on just what you might call pure politics?

U: Well,--

F: Everything has political over or undertones.

U: You mean real politics?

F: Yes, how are we going to handle this in a--?

U: Oh, not a great deal. Occasionally the President, you could always feel when he was letting his hair down and giving his thoughts on some major political issue, political development. President Johnson, of course, was very keenly attuned to political overtones. Occasionally he would go around the table and get a reaction from everyone with regard--.

F: Well, when you have, in a sense, a foreigner like Douglas Dillon in there from the other party, does that hamper?

U: No, that doesn't inhibit, I don't think under either President that inhibited, because both of them regarded him as completely loyal. Actually there was not too much of this. I remember President Johnson, for example, discussing at the time he was faced with a crucial decision in '66 with the war costing, you know, whether to go for a tax bill. The political consequences were fairly clear. I mean the alternatives. But he was troubled and I remember him asking for opinion and getting opinion.

But I do think it's extremely important that the Presidents have the sort of candid unvarnished advice of people. If they feel the Cabinet is too big a group, then it's very important that they get the views either privately or in smaller groups. I think, and of course this gets down to the question of how the President uses his time, which I think is one of the most fascinating studies--what his method is in handling his time, and how he uses it, and to what extent he is getting a free flow of opinion from whatever people in the Cabinet that he ought to be getting it from. That I think is the most important thing.

F: Did you notice any particular difference in the amount, let's say, of advice or interference or whatever you want to call it, in operating your own Department?

U: Well, with my Department, and you know my Department is not one of the big major Departments in terms of its programs and responsibilities like HEW has been the entire 1960's. We were initiating a lot of new programs. I think we were doing a lot of interesting things that I hope will be regarded well by history. But both Presidents seemed to have a great deal of confidence in me and therefore I had pretty much of a free hand. There was very little that was initiated at the White House in my area. Now the President had this report on natural beauty that was turned in 1965, after the '64 election, that Charles Haar of Harvard and Laurence Rockefeller and I worked on. Of course, the White House people looked at it. I looked at it.

Neither the Kennedy nor the Johnson White House--they really didn't have a counterpart to me in the White House. This was perhaps a vote of confidence or in part an indication that they didn't feel it was sufficiently important for them to have somebody who was constantly overseeing or looking in the way for example, Doug Cater, was with HEW in the last few years. I had people that I dealt with, but they were usually doing this as part of a larger job and this meant that I had a freer hand than most Cabinet officers, except when it came down to the budgetary consequences--this is where you sometimes had a crunch--that I was able to formulate, initiate and carry out the programs. But I was the only Cabinet officer out of the Congress. I thought I had the very best Congressional relations of any Cabinet member. I rarely had to ask the White House to pass my bills. I passed them myself, therefore they didn't have to worry too much about me. This gave me a kind of freedom I think that most Cabinet people didn't have.

F: Did the President spend much time with new Cabinet members in trying to educate them in this matter of Congressional relations?

U: Well, both Presidents--I'd say President Johnson even more than President Kennedy--because they were trying to get legislative programs through as activists Presidents, they were always pushing. One of the standard items on Cabinet agenda was a report on legislative programs. This was usually a summation by Larry O'Brien and the President would pin you down maybe as he went around the table. This usually was sometimes with a scoreboard there showing what the status of legislation was. Both of

these Presidents set store by that and you had to be on your toes. But it was a problem with most new Cabinet officers--. Of course I had only one period of being new--to get their Congressional ties and their relationships established, and the President and his people were harping at them and working on them and helping.

F: Now you invariably have someone on your Department who is expert in Congressional relations, maybe more than one. Do you choose that man? Is he suggested by the White House? Where does he come from?

U: Well, in my case--

F: In your case you'd know.

U: Well, in my case it's interesting the way that it evolved because when I began, when I went over to my new Department, the Eisenhower Administration had no legislative liaison person. They weren't that aggressive. They didn't have that big a legislative program. The thing just kind of droned along and things happened.

I decided rather early on since we were going to be activist and have a vigorous program--a lot of new legislation--that we needed a person who would spend full time doing legislative contact work. The first person that I had my first year sort of flunked out on me and at that point I got Bob McCone who had been on the Hill with Montoya, Fernandez, and others who knew Aspinall extremely well. He was from New Mexico and knew Senator Anderson and he had a lot of friends, very skillful. He developed this staff of five or six people and they handled all Congressional contacts, did it extremely efficiently. He was one of the few people who, in effect, had the key to my door, could barge in anytime he wanted to. I think one of the reasons we were highly effective was because he could get all the rumors and all the playbacks. Some of the Congressmen would tell him things they didn't want to tell me and he'd start every morning up there. I think ours was one of the most efficient and effective liaison operations that was run. So much so, as I say, that even on our big bills that involved considerable controversy we rarely had to ask the President's apparatus in the White House--well it was the Larry O'Brien operation for such a long time--for them to get out and for them to make calls from the White House and even have the President get on the phone and that sort of thing. I don't think I ever had to ask either President. Well, I remember asking President Johnson a time or two to call Congressman Aspinall, who's particularly difficult on some things and so on. But this was a very rare thing. We did it ourselves, and I took some pride in the fact that we were more effective than most in getting our legislation through.

F: Was Congressman Aspinall fairly close to President Johnson, or was it just the power of the White House?

U: No, no, he wasn't. Oh, for example, we appointed Congressman Aspinall's son, you

know, to be Governor of Samoa and there was a feeling that we had a right to expect that we'd get support from him for the Redwoods National Park Bill and other legislation that was very vital. Well, he was a prickly person and had his own rather straight-laced view of the relationship between Executive and Legislative. So he was always difficult, never easy to work with. But if you understood him--because he was honest and straight-forward--it made your job tough, and you had to hold his hand and court him and play straight with him. It was very important that you were honest with him. But occasionally--not more than once or twice I think--the President had some dealings with him, and once or twice I asked him to make a call at a particularly crucial point.

F: Did the Cabinet tend to break down into subgroups which you would inaccurately call cliques? Or did they reform on each issue?

U: No, I think there were a group of us--oh, Freeman, Wirtz, myself, Arthur Goldberg and others--who were, I would say, the more liberal members of the Cabinet on domestic issues. But we never did form any group. We might talk on a specific issue back and forth on the phone and decide what we should do together. Or if there were a Cabinet meeting coming up where you wanted to get some licks in, you would have a little strategy--again probably just talking back and forth on the phone. But there were not identifiable groups in the Cabinet at any given time that I was there in an organized way.

F: Is that because each man--

U: Well, the Presidents didn't want it. There didn't seem to be any necessity, other than on an ad hoc basis, where you had what you thought was a particularly important issue and that somebody ought to speak up and others ought to second the motion and so on.

F: Let's shift this now and talk a little bit about your relationship with Mrs. Johnson. You, of course, went on any number of trips with her. About how many?

U: Well, I suppose over those five years, Joe, there was something like ten or twelve. It all began in the summer of 1964 with that first trip she took to Montana, Wyoming, and Utah where she dedicated the dam, looked at the Indian people and their problems, ended up in the Grand Tetons. There was a little subtle politics mixed in this because Senator Moss of Utah and Senator McGee from Wyoming, they were up for election and this was handled very skillfully.

This was her first sort of major venture into the country and because of her modesty and, also, that very keen judgment of hers she was very careful. She wanted to do the right thing, what she felt was the right thing, make the right kind of appearance. She didn't want to involve herself in controversy. She wanted to, however, be identified in the public mind as somebody who was trying to accomplish something for the country and she was feeling her way that first trip.

I think she came back with considerable confidence. One of my main functions on that trip, because we sat side by side and talked for several hours, was to both to give her some insight as well as confidence in herself. I think she came back from that trip and went into the election a few weeks later and of course, handled herself so well on that Southern train trip. I think that gave her a lot of confidence because she was on her own. Then she decided, she talked with me and others in November, December, trying to decide, with the new term coming up, what she should do. She chose really two major projects, and she chose to carve out a role for herself. I was fortunate enough to be one of those who was closely involved with her in her trips and the speeches she gave and the leadership she provided for the country.

F: Did you make up the agenda, was it made in concert with say Liz Carpenter and Bess Abell? Just how did the itinerary get decided on? Did you consult personally with Mrs. Johnson on this? I'm sure everything had to be cleared with her.

U: It was a combination as you would expect, different initiatives coming from different sources. I would occasionally, where I thought there was some event or events that were particularly important, I might send something in. Meanwhile, Mrs. Johnson had her own people tugging at her, trying to get her to come here or there. She had her own instincts and interests. Usually it would start out in the beginning saying she wants to go to the Midwest and there's one event or two events that she's on the verge of accepting. Now, what shall we build around it? Or with that one Texas trip that you remember so well, Joe, when we went into West Texas, San Antonio and West Texas. In substantial measure this was Mrs. Johnson doing some things that she had wanted to do in her own state and of us building other events around it.

But we usually tried to work in what I'd call either conservation dedication or kickoff ceremonies. With Mrs. Johnson's personality--she liked to praise more than criticize, which I think is a good position for a woman to take. She always liked to be in a position of commending those and participating in ceremonies where you were, in effect highlighting and dramatizing the good things that were happening in the country. This was her general bent. So this is the way we tried to do it. This meant that maybe we went to the nice outdoor places in the San Antonios rather than going into the slums the way Eleanor Roosevelt did but I think everyone does the thing they feel easiest and that is right for them. I thought this was right for her and her personality and she did it extremely well.

F: Now some of the trips were mildly rugged. Did you have to take any special precautions for safety other than you would for an ordinary tourist?

U: No. We let the Secret Service handle that. There were a lot of things you had to be concerned about. It was a major project for them, like the raft ride down the Rio Grande and some of these other things. But they usually checked everything out and it was their responsibility to see that it was safe. If it wasn't they'd tell us that it couldn't be done or it

ought to be done in a certain way.

F: Were you sent into public lands, such as parks? Did your Park Service people or whatever the entity was, did those service people do a dry run on the trip beforehand?

U: Yes, there was a lot of preparation done. The Secret Service would have their people in a couple weeks before. They would run through the whole thing to be sure it was both safe and properly timed. The trips usually went off, I thought, extremely well. I think her trips were as well prepared when I think back as the ones I went on with the two Presidents almost. You didn't have quite the hurly-burly and quite the number of Secret Service agents but it usually was staged very well. I don't think we really had a sour performance where something went wrong, or where we felt afterwards--

F: Did you ever, on any occasion, run into just plain miserable weather?

U: Not very much. We were very lucky that way when I think about it. Certainly on her outdoor--

F: That's what I was thinking about, particularly, where you would expose her to a driving rain at the Snake or something.

U: There were plenty of times we took that chance and wondered what she would do if we had a little blustery weather, but we were very fortunate.

F: And never any accidents of any size?

U: No, no. Everything went extremely well.

F: Speaking of the Presidential trips, was President Kennedy as adept at fracturing timetables as President Johnson?

U: No, President Kennedy was a little more inclined towards being punctual, keeping on schedule, and that sort of thing--not quite as spur-of-the-moment inclined the way President Johnson was to depart from the schedule simply because he had some impulsive thought or wanted to meet the crowd. President Kennedy was inclined to let himself be managed, rather than to manage the way President Johnson did.

F: President Johnson always became the tour leader?

U: That's right. Particularly if he was in an expansive frame of mind, I mean, he'd add to the schedule, throw things in. Oh, heavens, I remember that one trip we made to the West Coast in September 1964 where we were into Montana and then in Seattle and Portland--this was just before the political campaign--and on to San Francisco I guess.

The President decided that he wanted to stop off that night or the next morning, I forget which it was, to see David O. McKay, President of the Mormon Church in Salt Lake. Of course, this had some political overtones since it was September '64. And this was all put together in a matter of a few hours, which really made him scramble. But he said, "I'd like to see him, let's stop." It just came to his mind and it was done.

F: Even though McKay had also been a Republican Secretary of the Interior.

U: No, no.

F: This is another McKay.

U: No, that was the Governor of Oregon. This is the President of the Mormon Church, who is a very elderly man.

F: They're kin, though?

U: No, no relation.

F: I was confused on that.

Mrs. Johnson also struck me, one, with the punctuality of her trips, things seemed to go on schedule, and also at least her public face, always showed complete equanimity in all situations. Now, did you get that with the Presidents?

U: Mrs. Johnson was a very calm person, a very tidy, well-ordered person, and she liked things to go that way. She would, you know--once Liz Carpenter and I and other people had set it up--she wanted it to go smoothly. That was part of her personal feeling and her own personality, that expressed her as it went well, went smoothly and so on. It was a very happy circumstance to work with her, travel with her.

The Presidents tend to be more impulsive and more disordered, and particularly if it's a political thing, wanting to stop the car and say hello and shake hands to a group of people. I think to me it was a much more sort of, well-ordered, pleasant thing to travel with Mrs. Johnson than the Presidents because there were fewer people tugging at her--there's always those people, you know--and much more of a feeling of orderliness than you get traveling with the President.

F: Now when you travel with either President Kennedy or Johnson, how do you keep--I don't mean to demean, how do you keep every Tom, Dick and Harry of a politician from horning in on your time? I see their point. This is their one big opportunity and yet they can just use you up?

U: Well, some of the most interesting times that you would spend--and that's the reason for the President's private cabin on the airplane, for example and for the privacy in the hotel, and he would control that in the main by who the people were that he admitted to his inner room, so to speak. Usually, if some of us from the Cabinet were along, we were there. We were in the President's cabin. If it were a governor or a senator or some friend of the President's or some leading person, he'd be there and he'd recognize his time. When he got a few minutes off to the side with the President or when there was a larger group. Depending upon the mood of the President, you get a larger discussion going and it was pretty much controlled by the President saying who he wanted to be in his immediate party.

The other people are always there trying to get attention and barge in. Politicians being what they are, they're usually kept to the side by the force of circumstances and the way things are organized. If you understand the way politics works and friendship works, why you just have to organize it so it moves along in such a way that the President sees who he wants to see.

F: When the Presidents stay overnight in some city, do they tend to stay in hotels, in private residences? Is there any pattern in this?

U: This would depend in part on personal friendship, in part on the rigors of the schedule and other things. It varied. You see both Presidents stay in some private home. Usually they'd stay in a hotel because that made the arrangements easier. It probably wasn't safer, from that standpoint. You always had that period you worried about, getting out of the car, going in and out. You know, people knew he was going to stay at that hotel. This is where your dangers very high, with violence and assassination. So it always encouraged me to see or know, particularly if it could be done, the President discreetly slip off to the side.

But President Johnson was much more gregarious himself than President Kennedy. President Kennedy, if you arrived in a city or wherever your destination was, he went to his room and you rarely saw him. He, again, was with his own immediate group.

F: President Johnson wanted to be out with the people?

U: No, no. What I'm talking about, if there were Senators along or others, President Johnson might have the Cabinet people, Senators and others in for a drink, or tend to socialize with them, whereas President Kennedy, whether it was his back, his health problem or whether it was just his own innate reserve, when I travelled with him, when you arrived that was the last you saw of him until the next morning. He closeted himself and wanted privacy.

F: Did most of the ideas for the trips originate with you? I'm back to Mrs. Johnson now.

- U: No, I would say it was something like fifty-fifty, when I look back on it. You know Liz Carpenter and I would talk sometimes months ahead. I would be saying there's this and this [that] I really think Mrs. Johnson should do. She'd put that in the back of her mind. Maybe she'd wait until something else came along. An invitation that Mrs. Johnson got that was going to take her to the same part of the country, and then we'd say, "Could a trip be put together." So I suppose if we sat down and went down through the list of things that were done, we suggested quite a few of them.
- F: You would have had a much more intimate geographical knowledge than probably Liz would.
- U: That's right, and we knew what things were right to be done. That was an important part.
- F: Did you ever try to play politics with a trip in the sense of something you wanted to bring into the Department of Interior in the way of a park, monument, historic landmark, whatever, that was kind of caught on dead center and you thought that Mrs. Johnson could be utilized to move it?
- U: Well, I would say, yes and no, in the sense I don't think we did anything very blatant, you know, trying to use her. Although the thing that you have to understand--because everyone knew that Mrs. Johnson had a great deal of influence with her husband and her association with me in my Department was a very powerful influence on how we stood with the President, how we stood with the Administration, that our programs were important, so on. There was politics there just in terms of helping us. The liaison done was extremely good because we knew the President was following what she was doing. She talked with him all the time. If she thought something was good he would most likely think this was a good thing.

So I would say that, probably, the place we got our licks in there was because I and Sharon Frances and others who worked on Mrs. Johnson's speeches, the content of them, we got in our licks there by putting things in. Of course, she read her speeches. She went over them in great detail. We would be trying to get her to praise certain things and urge certain things be done that hadn't been done. All of this is the way we worked it out. I can't think of an instance where we used her as a kind of battering ram. I did for example, with the Redwoods--when I got the President to have that first meeting in the White House--I made sure that she was there. This then became something she identified with and from time to time mentioned and pushed in speeches and so on. That was the sort of way I used her, shall we say, for the purposes of our Department.

- F: Did her visits to your outdoor areas increase attendance? Did it tend to perform an advertising function?
- U: The normal pattern has been with national parks, because of the increased travel and

increased affluence by five to seven percent a year. I always thought the thing she did do was to attract attention to the importance of the natural wonders of this country and the importance of people seeing them. Hopefully, this would tend, over the long haul, to give American people pride in the natural and scenic wonders of this country and increase their desire to see them, rather than as a lot of people do. I'm amazed still at how many easterners--the idea of a vacation is to go to the Caribbean or Western Europe. They've never been west. They've never seen many of the great places in this country that a lot of foreigners come to see.

F: Did you have any ostensible purpose tied in with keeping the dollar drain from being any worse?

U: This, as you'll remember--along about '65 or '66--became for awhile a rather paramount consideration. And we did tie ourselves in with the "See America" theme to a degree. But, you know, this wasn't a hard sell at any time. It was usually something that was done in a rather straight forward and honest way.

F: Let's shift now to more strictly legislative and Departmental matters. First of all, when you came in '61, did you more or less lay out a policy to be pursued over, hopefully, the next eight years, or did you play things ad hoc? I'm sure, of course, some policies developed because the need comes. But at the beginning did you come in with some sort of long range goals?

U: I have to say this. I think it really, to be honest, sort of evolved. You see, I was not one of President Kennedy's advisors during the campaign. I was running for Congress on my own. Therefore, when I came into the Cabinet I didn't come in with a lot of commitments that he had made because this didn't loom large in the campaign of 1960. The one major theme the President struck in the West--and again it shows how far we've evolved--was that he criticized the Eisenhower Administration for what was called in political parlance at the time a "no new starts policy." They were not for building more dams. You see dam building became controversial in a much different way in the 1960's, that we were trying to build dams in the wrong places. But this was the only really major commitment President Kennedy made. He sort of, I thought, struck this too much in his campaign. It was kind of a Johnny-one-note thing in the West, but the West turned him down.

F: I read his speeches, incidentally, in the West and I don't know how many times he reminded them that the best President that the West ever had, as far as conservation was concerned--the best two--were the two Roosevelts, both of whom had come from the East. Therefore there's an inference there that what you need is an Easterner in the West.

U: You see control of pollution, what we now call the total environment approach to conservation, enlarging the national park system, these were not themes. These were not major themes.

F: I don't think pollution was mentioned was it?

U: Hardly at all. So the main theme that Ted Sorenson and others kept telling me was, "Well, let's reverse the 'no new starts policy'." Of course this is highly controversial whether Congress--the Democratic Congress--hadn't already reversed it. You know, there was a lot of argument about whether the Eisenhower Administration really had such a policy.

So that was really the only initial impetus that I was given. It was up to me pretty much working along to develop policies. The Wilderness Bill had been before the Congress for three or four years. The question really was: Was the Administration going to get aggressively behind it and push it? It was obvious to me that we had made a great mistake in the post-War years in not vigorously moving to expand the national park system. So I began moving in this direction. It was clear, too, that we needed some special funding vehicle if we were to have the money to buy park land and we began to work on the conservation fund.

So all of this evolved and developed--and fortunately for me personally probably in a way--there was quite a crescendo, quite a climax, in the fall of 1964 just before the election. This dramatized to President Johnson what we had done, what leadership my Department was providing, what I was doing personally, because we passed the Conservation Fund Bill, we passed the Wilderness Bill, we had several new national parks bills--all of which were passed by the Congress within a period of two weeks in September of 1964. This, of course, led on to a second phase in the President's new term because that gave us a momentum. I think I have to say, that the thing sort of developed and evolved and grew and gained strength as we began to have some successes, as the country responded and as the country prodded us too--because it works both ways.

F: You hadn't been on the Interior and Insular Affairs Committee in the House, had you?

U: Oh yes, I was on that.

That gave me a great deal of insight. I was aware of the mood of the Committees--you know, what the pitfalls were, the fact that Aspinall was a brake on passing rather expansive new legislation. I knew what the essential issues had been in the 1950's. I also had my own ideas about what the art of the possible was for the future and what the new issues and the new Administration ought to evolve.

F: Without being critical of your predecessors, it has struck me that they were more interested in the managerial function of what they already had rather than developing new programs. Did this percolate down through the whole Department? Did you have a sort of turning around of morale performance that you had to carry through? Or were they just sort of waiting on tiptoes for someone to come along and prod them?

U: A Department that has a lot of different agencies, such as mine has--you see we have over fifteen separate bureaus or agencies; and if you don't have a kind of Departmental leadership that's presenting new goals, that's trying to give a Department a sense of mission, what happens is each bureau or each agency tends to function in its own little slot with its own goals and ambitions. It's just doing its job, doing its thing, as we say. This was I think pretty much the way I found the Department, with some bureaus strong, some weak. Over the three or four years I was there I was able to select my own leaders. One or two of them I was disappointed in. I made bad choices but by 1965, I had essentially my own team. We had developed, and were developing, overall goals, a feeling that the Department had a cause that the nation was interested in. I felt that my job was to orchestrate it and to get all the people feeling that they were not just doing their own little effort, but that this was related to the American environment and we had to think of it as something as a unified cause. That's the kind of stress we gave it.

That's best depicted I think in these five-year books that we turn out. These became a yearly statement of what we were trying to do and what our convictions were and so on. It gets rather exciting when you get everyone feeling they're playing on a team, you see. Also quite frequently, as we did, bring in the wildlife people, the park people and the public land people in the Bureau of Reclamation perhaps and others, and they find themselves in the same room talking about what the Department should do, what new policy should be recommended to the President, not just what they and their agency should do. This is the sort of thing I did frequently--and I did it deliberately--in order to produce a feeling of a large Department head. You have one overall mission.

F: Did you ever meet with just the across-the-board employees? I realize there's too many over here to meet at one time unless you held it in D.C. Stadium--but say break it down by bureaus, agencies?

U: Well, when I first came in to the office, I had a kind of openhouse in my office for several days. I'd do this a couple hours a day and shook hands with anyone who wanted to come in. This is the way of getting acquainted.

F: Did they come?

U: Oh yes. We had a fire in the fireplace that winter and everybody came in. Then I talked to the employees in my Department. I had several of these occasions with youth. I think, to lead a large Department, you must give them some feeling of your personality and your convictions. I think is the very essence of esprit [de corps]. They not just dealing with body upstairs who occasionally makes a decision or issues an order, but you try to understand them and you want to work with them. I think this is very vital.

F: Let's get a little more specific. How did you get moving on the recreation program?

U: Again, this sort of grew and developed. You see, what you had had in the 1950's was that a lot of Congressmen, some of the Republicans and Democrats--I guess most of them were Democrats--had proposed various far-reaching new conservation bills. President Kennedy, fortunately, sponsored the Cape Cod national seashore. There were others that were beginning to push for saving large pieces of seashore. There were various ideas for new national parks that came around. The Wilderness Bill was introduced by Vice President Humphrey as a kind of radical conservation bill in 1957.

Nothing happened you see, because the Administration--all of these things were controversial; all involved new policy--and although I think Seton was much better than McKay, there were no basic decisions made to move strongly in a particular direction.

So what I did and what you had to do after 1961 was to move from strength and push where we felt we could accomplish something and develop our ideas as we went along. The idea of having a national seashore system, for example, I don't think came into view in a serious way until we had passed the Cape Cod Bill, which was passed the first year. This was the President's bill, his home state and everything. This was the only bill we passed in 1961. Well, the next year we got two more. We got Padre Island off the Gulf Coast of Texas and Point Reyes and we then began talking about a national system of seashores as a special unit of the National Park system.

Each success led to more expansive thinking and more expansive goals. We began working, of course, on the idea of how we were going to finance these. Out of this came the idea of conservation funds. We spent a lot of time on that, developing it. We had our alarms and excursions on that. So I have to say in all honesty it did just evolve by sort of an ad hoc approach, moving where we had things lined up. One success then led to another, new demands, new enthusiasm in the country. And that's the way it really developed.

F: Now in the matter of financing this recreation program, what were the alternatives to the direction you finally took?

U: You see, Joe, we had had in the policy, going back to the Weeks Act of 1911 of purchasing lands for national forest in the eastern United States--and then FDR took all the money in the New Deal period and bought a lot of the eastern national forests. But the attitude had been very strong and very profound that we were so rich as a big continent, had so many lands still in public ownership that we didn't need to buy land. There's a marvelous letter that FDR sent Senator Carl Hayden in the 1930's in which he just said that and really was the policy up through the 1950's, that we don't have to buy land. Yet here were these great seashore areas that were on the verge of being over-developed and spoiled for all time. So it was clear that we had to have a new policy.

Now you could have passed bills and had them funded out of the general fund.

But these are the types of things that the hard-boiled people on the appropriations committees--it's like the arch, you know, they don't feel this. "This will always wait until tomorrow." They don't recognize the urgency. So we came up with the idea.

I began talking really sometime in 1961 about some kind of conservation fund. It would be like the highway trust funds, you know, where the funds would be earmarked. The Bureau of the Budget was at first very reluctant about this. They went along with me in part finally because I agreed to go along with them with this system of charging entrance fees at national park areas. We were already doing a little bit of that. This didn't work out nearly as well as everybody had hoped it would. But I had to battle that through the Bureau of the Budget, then the Congressional committees. Some of them were difficult on the subject and it took time but we just evolved this. We said, "Look, if we're going to enlarge the national parks system, we're going to have to spend thirty, forty, fifty million dollars a year in buying these lands; we're going to need a financing vehicle to do it."

F: So you came up with this cost sharing. In the parks where you charge, do you make enough off entrance fees, is it appreciable, as far as paying the cost of managing the park is concerned?

U: You see, they charge an entrance fee in the big parks, the Tetons, Yellowstone, Yosemite and these other parks--

F: Carlsbad.

U: And we made about six million dollars or something a year on that. Of course, that in itself probably covers operation and maintenance of national parks readily. But that just went into the general fund. Some calculations were made that if we set up a fee system with this annual sticker--people paying seven dollars and getting them in all the parks. Of course, Congress didn't go along with this. They sort of muddied the water and watered it down a bit and so we ended it up with day fees and other things. But our forecasts were that this fee system we put in would bring in thirty-five million dollars a year. Well, it only brought in twelve. Fortunately some of the other things we had earmarked brought in more money. So we came out quite well on it, but this was a new venture.

I still think its regrettable that we didn't have the system of national priorities, where we would simply do what had to be done out of the general fund. But there is a value--and of course a lot of states operate out of conservations funds. And we even did this in the wildlife field with the Dingle, Johnson, Pitman, Robertson legislation, of taking taxes from ammunition and arms and so on and using it for wildlife purposes. It just seemed that this was the best way to get support for it and that's what we did. It worked fairly well.

F: Does the establishment of a conservation fund make Congress more reluctant to appropriate monies for purchases? Or does it make any difference, as far as you can tell?

U: I think it had a very significant affect of encouraging. You see, we moved really because half the money went to the states under this grant program for them to initiate and carry out action programs on their own. In fact about sixty percent of the money went to them. So we moved I guess in 1965--not from zero, because there were some appropriations being made from the general fund--but we moved probably from a level of fifteen to twenty million to a hundred million just overnight! Well, that was a big jump. It helped to accelerate and stimulate action in the states. This was almost as significant as the enlargement of the national parks and national forests.

F: As far as appropriations are concerned, did you get equivalent support from both Presidents in your needs?

U: I think it was about the same under both Presidents. Fortunately, the Budget Directors we've had--Dave Bell, Kermit Gordon, Charlie Schultz--all of them and some of the subordinates were in different degrees conservation minded. They recognized our activities had a legitimate claim in the picture. Of course, as always in your budgetary decisions you're balancing overall priorities within the budgets. I would say the one really major disappointment to me was when the Viet Nam war really began to be felt. The last three years were essentially tightening down, slowing down programs and the expansion that we had experience previously was slowed down. I'd say through 1965 our budgets were growing and we were really thriving. Then it became kind of a hold-the-line operation beginning in '66.

F: A sort of buttoning up what you had already bought in effect.

U: Yes.

F: From the vantage point of a Cabinet Secretary, how much role does the Bureau of the Budget play in determining your policy? You have here, in one sense, an agency that is not answerable--certainly not to the people in the sense that Congress is--but it stands in a very vital spot to make or break a program. Is there a danger inherent here?

U: The Presidents I worked for had what I'd call strong Budget Directors, and they relied on them to a substantial degree. But, Joe, this is one of the areas where I think, myself, that there ought to be a lot more controversy and a lot of slam-bang fights within the Cabinet on priorities. You know FDR had the technique, which is rather disorderly but also useful, of encouraging certain kinds of controversy between people because, number one, he kind of liked to see people fight and stir things up. And, number two, it sometimes helped illuminate issues.

F: I judge they got into some real head-knocking affairs.

U: That's right and this does have value. I certainly would have liked to argue, any day of any month in the years I was in the Cabinet, that some of the things that I was doing were far more important in terms of national priorities than let's say keeping the space program on schedule, or ahead of schedule. It's ending up ahead of schedule. I remember two or three because I had to keep myself under such tight control, I took a little sideswipe at the space program and I got my hands slapped. People at the White House, they wanted this as the President's program. But when President Kennedy made the decision to go all out with a man on the moon program, this was never discussed. None of us ever got a crack in arguing it.

The whole issue of national goals, national priorities, it seems to me, I always in later years in the Cabinet tended to think it would have been a very good thing for the President to set aside a day or two days and just have a tough brawling session perhaps with the whole Cabinet on this whole question of national goals and priorities. I think it might have been enormously illuminating to him. Otherwise he's got to sit himself with his Budget Officer and make the decisions. Of course, if they're good, they'll spread it out, but there's no substitute for hearing the arguments of the men who are on the firing line. And if somebody thinks this is more important than that he ought to have a right to say so and the President ought to hear his argument.

That's one area where I would I think, again, say make the Cabinet more versatile an instrument, not set up anything that was institutionalized but just once a year--in fact maybe this ought to be along in November prior to the time the President usually makes his budget decisions early December when the budgets being put to bed--and really have a slugging match and let everybody be heard on what they think the national goals and priorities are that the nation needs at that particular time.

F: Did you find yourself working more intimately with these new Departments, like HEW and HUD and DOT as you yourself became more involved in bringing the park idea to the people? Or did you keep fairly separate?

U: No, because Joe, when we began increasingly in the last three or four years, not talking about conservation of the old style but to talk about the American environment, it was very clear that my Department had a lead role in this, but that Agriculture, HUD, Department of Transportation because of their impact on the environment and HEW with their responsibility for health and air pollution and things like that that we all had a piece of the action as far as environmental control was concerned. I sat down with Secretary Boyd at the time he was first announced. We had a luncheon together with Weaver the same way. Freeman and I always had a very good relationship. I deliberately went out of my way to court John Gardner when he came in and let him know that I thought our common interfaces were. With the idea really of selling them--and of course Mrs. Johnson

helped a good deal on this front, her support of what I was doing--on approaching their responsibilities in terms of this total American environment concept. I felt that if we worked together closely and if we realized that this was a large common problem that it would ensure us doing more and doing it in such a way that the country would understand what we were trying to do. And I was pleased at some of my best young people moved out into these departments--particularly HUD and Transportation, to new Departments. A few of my good second echelon people, young people were hired away from me, I said, "Well, we're making headway here."

F: When did you begin to decide maybe you could not satisfy all the automobiles that wanted to see our natural wonders and our great out-of-doors?

U: Of course the two big parks that were jammed [were] Yellowstone and Yosemite. It's funny because I think the attitude we reached in '66--the 1950's--Joe, basically was that we had to have better facilities in the parks, have more roads in the parks, and take care of more people. I think today, ten years later, we've just completely reversed that attitude in recognition that automobiles can choke parks just as they're choking cities and that the essential mission of the national park service is preserving rather than overdeveloping. I believe again this evolved and I think it moved really much more rapidly after George Hartzog took over as director. I don't think Connie Wirth while he was director ever fully grasped what the automobile was doing and could do to parks if they were not restricted.

Usually the attitude was that if an important Congressman or Senator wanted to build a road in a park to get more people in it, you went along with it. We essentially reversed that and that's the reason I think ten years ago you'd have made the decision to ram that road over the top of the Great Smokies, the trans-mountain road. In fact Hartzog himself, because he knew the Smokies, even proposed this as a compromise at one point to the north shore road along the lake which he felt would be far more destructive. We finally came out to a point where we're not going to do either. Now this could be reversed and may be. It's still a very lively subject. But the recognition that parks can be trampled to death, and that we have to be more rational and to move a lot of the camping out into national forests nearby and so on, so it was quite a profound change.

F: Did you get any political kickback on this?

U: Oh, you get some. After all, the Congressmen and Senators will take the local attitude and the local attitude usually is that there ought to be more development. They're for getting the maximum tourist dollar. But the national attitude--the national organizations of course supports this-- and you just have to balance off one vector against the other. Remain upright, as they say.

F: That's the reason for a national park system not a state park system, where I suppose the pressures would be almost irresistible in some instances.

Fairly early in your career as Secretary for Interior, you inherited this Lower Colorado river water allocation problem. You had the central Arizona dispute. You finally had the Southwest water plan devised. Do you want to, with what's left of our time, discuss a little bit of your trials, tribulations, triumphs in that?

U: Joe, I can encapsulate for you fairly briefly. Naturally as an Arizona Congressman I had had quite a deep involvement in this. In fact this was and is the number one issue in my state because California and all the other states had water projects. Arizona had an entitlement to water and yet it had no project, so this naturally was the overwhelming political issue in Arizona over the last decade. Of course, California managed to block Arizona, [and] send us into the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court decision in 1963 resolved the legal question. The question then was what kind of project should you have, and the Bureau of Reclamation, of course had their old plans dating back twenty years, for these two dams keying hydroelectric power development.

Naturally at that point, trying to be statesmanlike so they couldn't accuse me of being an Arizona Secretary, we tried to broaden this in what we called the Pacific Southwest Approach looking towards augmenting the river, bringing water in from the northwest or somewhere. Of course, this then added more controversy. We tried to get out of the controversy by broadening and this brought Senator Jackson and northwest people into the picture saying we weren't going to take any water from the Columbia River. This narrowed it down again. Of course in 1966 the Pacific Southwest plan that we had developed, the larger plan, just couldn't get through the door and past the Senate. It did pass the House.

It then became clear to me that we had to strip the bill down, strip it of controversy, that we had to find a way to get Arizona a water project without building dams in the Grand Canyon region. I took some satisfaction, although I didn't get a hell of a lot of credit out of it, the final plan that was enacted was essentially the bill that my people came up with in the fall of 1966 and that we'd proposed as an Administration plan in early 1967. This is the bill the President signed last September or October. It represented a major triumph for a kind of a regional statesmanship. We just finally got Aspinall and the California people and the others that had special axes to grind in a position where they could get something for their region--some kind of compromise that would be tolerable to them--and go ahead and enact the bill. So I was in a rather desperate situation myself after eight years of having to produce something from my own state. Yet it appeared at times you'd get engulfed in this national conservation controversy over the dam in the Grand Canyon, or on the other hand that these differences between the northwest and the southwest between Arizona and California would overwhelm you.

F: How did you propose to create this northwest intertie?

U: What we had proposed initially, Joe, we had proposed a study. Of course, Senator

Jackson and the Northwest people weren't even going to let us study the Columbia River. We proposed that we look the northern California, we look at the Columbia River, as possible sources of diversion of the water into the region. Of course, this raises a lot of larger questions for the future. I myself believe that we're going to have to be much wiser in our use of water, learn how to recycle it, use it from a conservation point of view rather than moving enormous quantities of it down as the engineers would like to do.

F: That's a question I was going to ask you. Again from your long experience in grappling with this--and I have some sympathy with it myself--in a land which produces so many people and particularly industry which used great amounts of water, obviously we cannot go on with dropping water tables, what is the solution? Do we go to Hudson Bay?

U: I think this idea that the cheapest way to get your water is to go longer and longer distances to get fresh water--why not develop the technology, the technique of cleaning up the water and reusing it. There's an enormous amount of waste in water in this country. We don't really have any kind of a conservation regimen. We're a nation of water wasters. And it's true, if we're going to double and redouble population, which I think would be a great national tragedy--I think it will be a destructive force- we may have to go long distances for water. But I think most of our problems are going to be solved by wise use of the water we have now.

F: You think some of the money that's going into more spectacular programs could be used wisely here?

U: That's right.

F: What about the Passamaquoddy-St. John controversy? Did you get involved in that?

U: I was right in the middle of that. At the time that Senator Muskie and President Kennedy gave me the responsibility to make the study, I guess, in 1962. This was one of the fascinating things we got involved in. Of course, we recommended the Passamaquoddy project be done jointly with Canada. All of us recognized all along that it was going to be extremely difficult to get a tidal project going, because you had to have complete cooperation with the Canadians. Yet from the standpoint of engineering and electric power generation it was very exciting because it was new technology and the French and the Russians were experimenting with tidal power.

I think the thing that satisfied me the most out of this, though, was that the initial plan the Corps of Engineers had for Maine at that time--and that would have been keyed in because of the transmission line grid with Passamaquoddy--was a large dam on the St. John River that would have flooded the Allagash. We were able to move that dam upstream. You know, it's been authorized but Congress won't appropriate the money. It's become very controversial. But we've moved it upstream of the mouth of the Allagash

and then we worked with Maine later. Maine, with us putting up half the money out of my special fund, we saved the Allagash River, so it was curious that we went into it primarily on a tidal project and came out with saving a wild river.

F: Good. Do you have much difficulty with the Federal Power Commission? Do your lines get confused?

U: There are points of conflict there. In fact, I was highly critical of the Federal Power Commission until about a couple of years ago because of my feeling that their attitude was that anybody who filed an application to build a hydroelectric dam it ought to be granted. They didn't recognize these very influences that I was having to live with, the argument of people that the best solution for some stretches of river is no dam at all. They seemed to be operating upon this assumption that goes back into the 1920's and '30's that the more dams in the country the better. I believe we've come to the point now in our history where we are skeptical of dam building. We want to be sure that any dam that's authorized or licensed--that it not only makes sense economically but it's sound in terms of long-range planning for the future of the country.

F: Do you think the Federal Power Commission has come to this viewpoint, too?

U: Under Lee White with Charlie Ross and these other people I think they began to show in the last couple of years a sensitivity to these other environmental values. Ross and White are now leaving the Commission--or have left--and it will be interesting to see whether these attitudes are reversed.

F: In this making of Lake Amistad down on the Rio Grande, how did you get the marketing power for that water there? That isn't normally an interior function, is it?

U: Yes, all of the hydroelectric power from the Federal Hydroelectric dams, other than the TVA, we market the power. So that therefore was standard procedure in terms of the way we would operate.

F: So this was just normal then.

U: That's right.

F: Why did the Federal Water Resources Council die?

U: No, it's functioning quite well. We established in 1965. It's still functioning.

F: It's going all right.

U: I would say generally I was satisfied with the way we began. It was, of course, a Cabinet

level group. There was a tendency that I didn't like that seemed to be growing and developing of driving everything down to the lowest common denominator.

F: Meaning what?

U: Anybody who had an objection of giving some ground and of shrinking ideas to the point where when everybody's complaints get through that you don't have much of a policy left.

F: What did you do in the Council meetings?

U: Well, I ran the Council meetings as chairman. I thought the President made the right decision in making one person the permanent chairman, putting the main responsibility there. We were supposed, and did discuss, major issues of water policy in an attempt to evolve a clearcut Administration policy on issues. But the Council will only succeed in the long run, I believe, if it's able to face up to controversies and to grapple to resolve them.

F: Just seemingly too much bent on compromising in this case?

U: If you get any kind of body, any council, commission or whatever it is, and you develop staff people, a staff approach that tends to lead to settling and compromising issues rather than fighting them out and let's say taking them to the President, then you're sure in the long run to have played rather a limited role.

F: Did President Johnson show a personal interest in the Council?

U: Well, we didn't ever have to involve the President in the work of the Council. Maybe we should have. But I think the members of the Council recognized that I had the President's confidence and we could try to work solutions out. I am really afraid that the Council, under the new Administration--you know, with the Secretary--may or may not have that kind of influence, that its effectiveness will be impaired.

F: Did the President--I'm talking about Johnson now--generally show a grasp of water problems and an interest in water problems?

U: He always had a lot of insight on water problems and this grew out of the New Deal period and the dams that were being built in his own congressional district. He had an intimacy with water projects. He knew how they functioned and this, of course, was something that President Kennedy did not have and it was something that worked to my advantage.

F: So you never really had a selling job with him on them, if you came up with some good water plan?

- U: No, that's right. He recognized the realities in terms of water policy. That's the reason I think he knew that I did too, because we were both from parched Southwest and knew what the problem was.
- F: Did you actively push the evaporative research from sea water?
- U: Water Desalting?
- F: Yes.
- U: Yes, we got substantially larger budgets.
- F: But, I mean, you yourself were the one who implemented that policy.
- U: Yes, I had support from both Presidents on that. It meant largely a matter of increasing research and development funds and projects. We didn't move as rapidly as I would have liked to have seen us move, but we had very substantial increases in our budgets. This was an area that was favored in terms of research.
- F: On a percentage basis how much have you been able to bring down the cost now?
- U: We've brought the cost down from about \$1.25 per thousand gallons to, I think sixty cents. And it'll go down further when we can get the large scale plants.
- F: You think it's a matter of size.
- U: It's a matter of size although we'll need a wider array of desalination techniques. But at the same time to get the water costs down you're going to have to go to very large units. Our major disappointment--the last big disappointment I had--was the fact that the power companies backed out on me and that the big plant off the coast of Southern California--we were going to build an artificial island--that this did not go ahead. It may be built later, but we thought we had it all put together and would be starting this year or next and the power companies surprised us by withdrawing.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview II]