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Verkler, Jerry T.; Staff director, Senate Interior and Insular Affairs Committee (1963-1974). Verkler discusses Congress' achievements during the Kennedy Administration, John F. Kennedy [JFK] as a senator, and his involvement as a staff member for Governor Anderson, among other issues.

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Jerry T. Verkler- JFK #1

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Oral History Interview

with

JERRY T . VERKLER

February 9, 1970
Washington, D. C.

By William W. Moss

For the John F. Kennedy Library

VERKLER: It's been a long time ago. In the years 1961 and 1962, the 87th Congress was the first two sessions under President Kennedy. I was a lot younger then, and so were we all. I think from my standpoint, being a staff member of a congressional committee that authorized the legislation of the Interior Department, we were caught up in the excitement of the time because for the first time in eight years we had a party in power in the administration which also was in power in the Congress. We felt that we were truly going to get the country moving again as the president had promised and indicated that he wanted to do. So it was a very exciting beginning--everything about it. Although I played a very minor role from the standpoint of being a staff assistant on the committee, I felt that we had a big task ahead of us. It was a very exciting beginning.

As far as the relations with the department, like any new administration, I think they were a little confused at the beginning. The most recent comparison, of course, is this brand new administration which just came in in 1969. The Kennedy administration, because the same party did control the executive and the Congress, was considerably smoother. The squabble over appointments, the struggle for power, so to speak, was very much in evidence. But, nonetheless, we had the feeling that we were going to accomplish great things, and I think great things were gotten under way. The president had appointed a very energetic and very good secretary of the interior who was what I like to call public interest oriented. He, too, got off to a little rocky start in the beginning with the president's birthday fundraising

affair and all of that business. But I think all of that was part of a new administration and new experiences .

During that 87th Congress, the most significant achievement as far as I was concerned in the legislative program of the Department of the Interior, was the reemphasis on meeting the nation's outdoor recreation needs. For the first time in a decade we authorized three major additions to the National Parks system, one of which, of course--and the first one--was the Cape Cod National Seashore. President Kennedy, as a senator, had introduced, I think, the first bill during his first term in 1953 . It takes a long time to get

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these major additions authorized, as we know so well in later years in our battle over redwoods, and so on. But this was the new emphasis on meeting these needs. We'd just finished a study of the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission. It completed its report and the job lay before us. We had a secretary of interior who wanted to do the job and a president, of course, who backed him up. And the job got under way.

These bills marked, I think, the first time that Congress authorized the appropriations for parks in the beginning. In the past, parks have been added from either public land or donations, etc. Or after they've been authorized, years later, we came along and authorized appropriations for them. This marked the beginning of both authorization and the authorization of appropriations to buy them. As an aside, as a matter of fact, we have before us now the Cape Cod and the Point Reyes bills. We just finished Padre Island. The same three, having to come back and re-authorize additional money because the money and the estimates were off. But we were trying something new. As I remember it, of course, the feeling was excitement and action. We were trying to do something. As I say, we were all younger then. But this was the most significant achievement to me: we were turning things around from dead center, and, if I might phrase it, concerned with the status quo or the people who were using our vast public resources from the user-oriented interest--the big ranchers, the big cattlemen who wanted the status quo--to those in the conservation organizations who felt that these were public lands, they belong to all the people and so on, and we should look at their management, administration from that standpoint. This was all part of it.

As far as our relations with the Department of Interior throughout those three years of President Kennedy's administration, I would say that they were good. They were very good. From the standpoint of a staff member, the relations as far as the White House was concerned, we are talking more about the Department of Interior, and I had personal friends in the administration of the Interior Department, so my relations and our relations were good. I never saw the inside of the White House, of course, during the three years of the Kennedy administration.

When President Johnson became president, he invited the congressional staff people down there several times, mostly, I think, Democrats, but many times Democrats and Republicans. As far as our relations with staff people with the White House during the Johnson administration, they were probably closer. At least they tried to make you feel more important towards getting the job done.

But President Kennedy in his administration--and you've got to remember that the Department of Interior was not changed a bit; President Johnson kept them--started the turnaround in the direction that we'd been following in the

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last seven years. There were many more accomplishments in the five years, I guess, of the Johnson administration. But the very things that they accomplished were begun during the Kennedy administration. The same secretary of interior was just as energetic, and the programs which we initiated in those first two and three years, some of them were brought to fruition later. But the excitement of the Kennedy era and the emphasis on action, I think, was much greater than during the last five years with actual accomplishments, probably, well, obviously, exceeded when we came along later on and passed the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Wilderness Act and all these measures which we had started in the first three years.

There was one assistant secretary and, of course, the secretary of the interior: Mr. Udall [Stewart L. Udall] as secretary and Mr. Holum [Kenneth Holum] as assistant secretary. I think they were the only two that remained full-time, from the beginning of the Kennedy administration through the end of 1968. The congressional relations office was headed by Mr. Robert McConnell during most of that time. I've known Bob. We're fellow New Mexicans and I knew him when he was a staff member up here. Frank Burnett was his assistant, and his responsibility, primarily, was to cover the Senate. Frank, of course, worked for Senator Chavez [Dennis Chavez] of New Mexico for years. He's now living in Arlington [Virginia], and he's retired. These gentlemen didn't change. They were the same. They were very helpful to the president's program.

My only real relationship with the White House during the Kennedy administration, I remember one time Secretary Udall and his group invited me down to play softball against the White House office. Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] was pitching; and our old friend Mike Manatos, who was in congressional relations used to work up here for years with Senator O'Mahoney [Joseph C. O'Mahoney] from Wyoming, he was playing; and Mike Feldman [Myer Feldman] and so on. I knew Mike when President Kennedy was senator.

But our relations, primarily, were with the Department of Interior during that time. As I say, we as staff people were never invited down to the White House for bill signings and so on, whereas in later years we were all the time. So I felt, naturally, more a part of the subsequent achievements. But the bills that we were invited down to see the signing of under President Johnson were bills that were introduced during the Kennedy administration. Many of them, of course, were initiated up here. Senator Clinton Anderson was the chairman of this committee during 1961 and 1962. Under his leadership, I think that this committee and the department went hand in hand on our accomplishments. On the other side of the Hill, Congressman Wayne Aspinall is still chairman, and he was chairman then. Of course, it takes both sides to pass a law. Many times he has been criticized, I think, perhaps, in some

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instances unjustly. The accomplishments of the last several years are there, and if he had not gotten them passed through his committee, they wouldn't have been signed and they wouldn't have been made.

MOSS: Criticism. You're thinking of the Jack Anderson type of criticizing. . .

VERKLER: Criticizing Mr. Aspinall. He has his own views, and they may not coincide with ours. But I think the record is pretty clear, and that we've accomplished great things during these past eight years. We couldn't have done it by ourselves over here.

MOSS: Now, what I have, essentially, will be going over of the same ground, but in more particular and trying to get your response to specific things. First of all, for the record, so that somebody looking at this in the future will place you, you came in as Senator Anderson's legislative assistant in 1956?

VERKLER: That's right. Right.

MOSS: And then you became the staff director of the Interior and Insular Affairs Committee in 1961?

VERKLER: That's correct. I came aboard at the same time, of course, the administration changed. Senator Anderson became chairman in 1961.

MOSS: Right. Now, a fellow named Callaghan [Richard L. Callaghan] was your predecessor.

VERKLER: Was my predecessor. As a matter of fact, Mr. Callaghan stayed on the committee, I think, until about the middle of 1962 before he went with the Kennedy administration at NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration].

When I first came here, as you point out, I was with Senator Anderson on his personal staff. Senator Murray [James E. Murray], the late Senator Murray did not run again. He was chairman of this committee, and Senator Anderson became chairman. When he became chairman, he assigned me here from his personal staff. I started out here as, I guess, technically I was the assistant chief clerk, staff director, whatever you want to say. But I was responsible to the chairman, Senator Anderson. Gradually, as I learned my way around, I took over the staff directorship and Dick [Callaghan], of course, moved into the administration. I officially or formally took over the spot when he left. There was no question, but I was responsible to the chairman and he put me down here for that purpose.

MOSS: Okay, now. In the years 1956 through 1959 what contacts did you and Senator Anderson's office have with then Senator Kennedy, if you can recall? Specifically in terms of his capabilities and activities as a senator and the indications of his going to run for the presidency.

VERKLER: Well, from my standpoint, there is an interesting twist here because when I was on the senator's personal staff--I think I was called legislative assistant, I might have given myself that title--he had his office broken down into his major committees as far as legislation is concerned. I did not watch the Interior Committee; my main responsibility was the Finance Committee. I had the real personal pleasure and satisfaction of starting, from the staff level, Senator Anderson's original activities in the health care for the aged, what finally became known as Medicare, of course, and the King-Anderson Bill, etc., referring to Representative Cecil King in the House of Representatives. But I remember the earliest start on this bill because I had a hand in it with some experts from the Library of Congress.

Well, Senator Kennedy, of course, I think everybody sort of dates the Democratic National Convention of 1956 as his drive for the presidency when he made the unsuccessful, but... Well, I would say that it wasn't unsuccessful in the long run, but he lost out, of course, to the better known and more entrenched Senator Kefauver [Estes Kefauver] in the vice-presidential race when Mr. Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] turned it into an open convention. So I think from that moment we felt that he was running, and I think the facts indicate that he was running for the presidency.

In 1960, when things really got hot and we had moved the health care bill, the medicare bill, if you will. . . . We never liked that term in the beginning. Senator Anderson never did. We always called it health care for the aged under social security, all of it, because medicare seemed to indicate what is now the case, I guess, medical payments or something to the doctors. But we were having enough opposition from the doctors at that time, and we wanted to steer clear of that terms. But it became the popular term, and that's what the thing ended up with. .

But we originally had our bill introduced, and, if you remember senator Kerr [Robert S. Kerr], the late Senator Kerr, was opposed to this social security approach. Senator Kennedy had a proposal also. Senator Anderson had met with the Kennedy people. As we got down the home stretch--I think this was, of course, after the convention; you remember the rump session of 1960--then suddenly our bill (It was the Anderson proposal, but we called it the Anderson-Kennedy; I think even switched it and called it the Kennedy-Anderson proposal.) was voted upon as an amendment to the social security bill that

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year. We lost by seven votes that first time. I remember because we didn't get one Republican senator to come over to us. Obviously politics was in the air. Senator Kennedy, of course, was taking a major lead on the floor. Jacob Javits was one of the five or six stalwarts who came over after that, of course, and joined and led me to believe that their heart really was always in the social security approach. But they sure didn't give us a vote

that time because obviously they were in the middle of a campaign too and were not about to hurt Mr. Nixon [Richard M. Nixon] and the administration by supporting this.

It would have been a real step up for President Kennedy, at that time candidate Kennedy, if our bill could have passed the Senate. We didn't think, of course, we could get it through Wilbur Mills at that time. We took four years to finally get it, I guess, three or four years. So we lost by seven votes. But I will never forget Senator Kennedy talking to Javits, and Javits--I thought it'd be interesting to look up his response in the Congressional Record: "no sir. We will not go down that toad," referring to the political events of the day. My experience then was with Mike Feldman who was handling this for Senator Kennedy. It was the Kennedy-Anderson proposal on health care for the aged under social security.

Then, of course, after the election the next year, Senator Anderson in his conversation with the president was told by the president that he wanted him to spearhead the drive for the bill again. So actually, Senator Anderson had launched his proposal and gotten it into the forefront. As a member of the Finance committee, it was his proposal which they joined together on in 1960 during our rump session, and, as I say, we lost by seven votes. So if we could have gotten four senators to switch, well, we would have been in good shape.

MOSS: Kennedy as senator is often characterized as having been in the Senate, but not of it; you know, the club business, quite physical and that kind of thing. How do you as a staff man in the Senate look at him as a senator? How would you characterize him?

VERKLER: Well, of course, I don't think that I am personally that qualified to speak. You know, we're talking about ten or eleven years ago when I was a relatively--I consider myself to be fairly young now. Although I was here, I think, like any young man, I was pretty much impressed with John Kennedy, and although he might not have been part of the club or the establishment, that might be to his credit in my opinion. He was running for the presidency for the last two years of his Senate career very hard. He wasn't here a lot. But he was here at important hearings. I remember when his brother, Robert, of course, was

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general counsel for Senator McClellan [John L. McClellan] and Dave Beck and the one that's in jail now. . .

MOSS: Hoffa [James R. Hoffa].

VERKLER: Jimmy Hoffa. They used to see him around quite a bit. He, of course, was an important national leader on his way to becoming president of the United States, and he was a United States senator. I don't think the people of Massachusetts suffered at all. Probably they gained, because of his stature and his national leadership. The Senate is a pretty clubby place, but I've worked here now for fourteen years, almost, and I don't pretend to know all there is to know about it. You may not unless you are

a member of the Senate itself, frankly, in my judgement. But, I never was too much impressed with that sort of thing. Some members of the Senate who are supposed to be in the club and they may be in the club, as far as that goes, couldn't carry the brief case of other senators. But I've always felt that he was well liked by those in and out. I mean, Smathers [George A. Smathers] was supposed to be in the club, and, you know, they were very close friends. The southerners liked him. As a matter of fact, wasn't it true that he was considered to be considerably less objectionable than Hubert Humphrey at the time, 1960? The majority leader at that time, of course, I guess had the South in his corner being from the South or Southwest.

MOSS: Did he have New Mexico and Senator Anderson in his corner? Johnson?

VERKLER: Yes. It was true.

MOSS: Very definitely? Were there any attempts by the Kennedy people to woo Anderson away?

VERKLER: Well, of course, you know, anyone that's been associated with Clinton Anderson and knew him then in his prime, I think, would be less than honest he pretended to know everything that happened, because, unlike many senators, as a member of his staff you didn't know everything that happened. I'm just as sure as I'm sitting here that they must have, but they were, as far as I know, never anything but courteous and respectful to Senator Anderson, recognizing his obvious political alliance with the majority leader, Lyndon Johnson. I don't know what efforts as such were made to woo him away. They were not successful. There was a pretty bitter battle, I think, in the senator's own state, in the convention at that time. But Senator Anderson had many, many personal contacts that the staff was never privy to, and I don't know all of them, by any means.

I do know that he supported Lyndon Johnson for the

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nomination right to the end. But as soon as it was over, he became a strong supporter of the president and the president recognized this. That's why, as I say, they never treated him with anything but respect, as far as I know. Of course, that year Senator Anderson was still a very forceful, able, and dynamic man, even with all of his personal illnesses that he's had over the years. I think, at the time, he carried New Mexico in 1960 by the largest plurality anyone had ever carried it. President Kennedy carried it by about four thousand votes if I'm not mistaken. They always felt, I believe, because Senator Anderson carried it by such a huge majority, it might have helped President Kennedy carry the vote. I think New Mexico and Nevada were the only two--or did Montana also go?

MOSS: I forget, but it can be checked out.

VERKLER: Right...were the only western states that he carried, so they were very friendly with him.

MOSS: Did you have any role in the campaign in 1960? Anything to do with Frank Smith's [Francis J. Smith] task force on resources or anything?

VERKLER: No, frankly, I did not. I was primarily engaged in the senator's campaign at that time because I had not moved into this field.

MOSS: What kind of coordination was there between the presidential campaign and the senatorial one in New Mexico? Do you recall?

VERKLER: Well, mostly, we spent a lot of time trying to make excuses and rationale for and point out the fact that it would never happen again, the fact that Senator Kennedy had voted against our Upper Colorado River Storage Project in 1956. You see, I think he was kind of a newcomer to resources conservation, in a real sense, because like other senators progressive in many ways--I can name Senator Proxmire [William Proxmire]--they apparently feel it's a misuse of public funds to spend public federal moneys to develop these water resource projects, and so forth. Senator Kennedy, of course, voted against our Upper Colorado River Storage Project. That was kind of an embarrassing thing for Senator Anderson to go around the state and face that issue because that was crucial to the upper Colorado River basin states, the four states, and, of course, that was one problem we had. I think Ted Kennedy [Edward M. Kennedy] was in charge of that area during that campaign.

MOSS: Any problems?

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VERKLER: Well, actually familiarizing them with the problems we faced generally.

MOSS: They weren't coming in and trying to run roughshod over your organization, tell you what to do, or any thing of this sort?

VERKLER: I may not be as qualified to comment on that as some others. You may want to talk to Jack Beatty. Do you know Jack Beatty?

MOSS: I've heard the name several times. From Albuquerque?

VERKLER: Right. As a matter of fact, he's here now, of course. Jack, subsequently, was appointed by President Kennedy to be a member of the Contract Re-negotiation Board. Jack was Bernalillo County party chairman when I first met him--that's Albuquerque--and then he became very close to the Kennedy organization. I think the highlight of his political career came during the convention of 1960 when candidate

Kennedy was being interviewed. I think someone asked him the question, you know, "Why are you doing this and why are you after it?" He spoke about how there was a new group of youthful Americans and so on; he mentioned three names, I believe, and Jack Beatty of New Mexico. I think that was Jack's pinnacle--I don't know if he'd want to read that or not. But I'll never forget that and I know Jack won't. So he was the Kennedy man in New Mexico. He got himself crossways with Senator Anderson who was the acknowledged leader, I think, of the Johnson forces and the state political leader because he tried real hard to get the delegation. In fact, I think they did get about a third of them, something like that. But as far as their coming in during the campaign, since I was stationed here for the senator, and my job mostly was research and feeding information out during the campaign, I can't say. But since relations went so well afterwards, I'm sure there wasn't that much of a problem during that I can remember.

MOSS: Okay, now after the election and talking about appointments to Interior, Senator Anderson was offered the secretaryship of interior, wasn't he?

VERKLER: Well, I'm not sure. There were rumors at the time that he was being considered for secretary of treasury.

MOSS: Yes.

VERKLER: You remember that? I'll never forget--I'd better look at this later too--but at that time I was still

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on his staff. Senator Anderson and I went down--I was driving him down--to the Georgetown home of the president. If you remember, he was holding court in those days during the transition between election and inauguration down on O Street or P Street, wherever it was, his home down there. Senator Anderson had his time to go down, and we went down. He was very happy. When we came back out, he had on his western hat. And the president--of course the photographers were there--and the president-elect took his hat and put it on. Senator Anderson kicked himself later and said, "Why in the hell didn't I give him that hat? I should have walked off and let him have it." But he did take it back.

I'm trying to remember in my own mind whether some of the major appointments had already been announced. Didn't he announce some of them as they were made? I don't think he saved them all. I think he announced some of them. I think McNamara, [Robert S. McNamara], for instance, had already been announced, because a lot of us were wondering who he was. We heard about a Republican from Detroit, you know.

But Senator Anderson was curious. I think the president had asked him how much he was worth or something like that. At the time, since we were very much involved in the social security business and health care and everything, there was rumor that he might be asked to be secretary of treasury. If I can remember--and again, everything that happened to the senator I can't really say--I think that he considered himself too old for a cabinet office at

that time. He had been a cabinet officer when he was much younger--1948 he got out and came in the senate. He was at the height of his energy when he was in President Truman's cabinet and remembered by all who knew him as a very vigorous secretary of agriculture. But I believe that he felt that he was too old and declined any position if it were offered to him. The treasury thing sticks in my mind. But again, I wasn't privy to the innermost thoughts or what went on.

MOSS: Do you know if the Udall nomination was cleared with Anderson before Kennedy...

VERKLER: I think that it was. I believe that it was. I'm not sure about some of the assistant secretaryships, because I know he was complaining about some of them.

MOSS: Who was he complaining about?

VERKLER: Well, I'm not sure that I should say this.

MOSS: Well, it's up to you. As I said, the thing is for the record and for some future historian, not for me. I can't publish it.

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VERKLER: Am I going to get a chance to edit it?

MOSS: Yes. You're going to get a chance to edit it, rephrase it if you like, or delete in fact, if you wish.

VERKLER: Well, I will say this. I think that he was unhappy about some of the appointments for the assistant secretaryships. But I also believe that the way they were handled was the way any president should do it. That is: clear the appointments with the senator, the powerful senator if he is powerful; find the man that he wants for the job, that he thinks is qualified for the job; make sure he's cleared with his own delegation; and then say, this is it. My experience, especially in this last administration, this administration, proved the point, because they would get somebody who seemed to be fairly well qualified. They would send him around then for everybody to knock him off and start putting forth their own. And therefore...

MOSS: By this administration, you mean...

VERKLER: Yes. I'm talking about the Nixon administration. We had to confirm them, see, and it took weeks and weeks to. The record is pretty clear on that. It took an awful long time. The Nixon administration, I think, made a fatal mistake from the standpoint of getting somebody in office. I know a couple of very well-qualified men

that they would circulate them around, put out the word that this is the guy, and then they would start sending him around to meet and "to clear him"--put that in quotes--with some of the leaders of Congress, people who had their own candidates for the job. If the fellow was not nailed down in the job, they felt they still had a chance to shoot him out of the saddle, and they proceeded to do this on numerous occasions. That's why it took them a long time. It was months before this administration was organized in Interior.

President Kennedy had his major appointments announced at the beginning of January. At least, we had hearings on them early in February.

MOSS: With one exception. The Kelly [John M. Kelly] appointment came a little late.

VERKLER: It came a little later...

MOSS: Not much.

VERKLER: Right. And there wasn't much opportunity for anybody else to shoot him down, because once it was made, it was announced. I know John Kelly has talked to you, I guess, already. He's from New Mexico. He

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told me, of course, the president talked to him and decided that he wanted him and asked him if he could get cleared with Clint and Dennis, meaning Anderson and Senator Chavez. Said yes and all right, and that was it. He didn't have to go through this business of floating around and visiting all the other senators and then having someone shoot him down.

MOSS: Okay. I was reading the hearings on the nominations of the assistant secretaries, and I know that Kelly had a little bit of a rough time on his personal holdings in the Elk [Refining] Oil Company and so on.

VERKLER: Right.

MOSS: They pinned him down pretty hard on that. And finally...

VERKLER: He eventually sold them, of course. Under Senator Jackson's [Henry M. Jackson] leadership the last seven years of this committee as chairman, we have had a better method of handling the financial examination of the nominees. At that time, frankly, I like to think that beginning with Senator Anderson and carrying on through Senator Jackson, this committee has done a lot better job of organizing itself. I may be tooting my own horn a little bit since I've been involved in it. But I think that we have set procedures, whereas before I believe that it was rather loosely organized and run out of the hip pocket of Charlie Murray [Charles A. Murray], you know, who was Senator Murray's son. I think that we've done a lot better in the last few years.

It was true that John did have these problems and he sold them. The hearings do not indicate that he sold them, but he subsequently...

MOSS: Put them in trust.

VERKLER: Yes, but he eventually disposed of them, and he wrote us. As a matter of fact, that came up in during Secretary Hickel's [Walter J. Hickel] confirmation. I think Senator Allott [Gordon Allott] referred to those hearings, about what we had done in Kelly's instance, but then we had to get a letter clarifying the situation. Kelly wrote us that he had sold them after that, but he had never told anybody but the chairman, I guess, Senator Anderson, and the rest of the people didn't really know it.

MOSS: Another rather curious thing I noticed in the nomination hearings was the Goldwater [Barry S. Goldwater] reaction to a couple of people. It differed vastly.

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VERKLER: Especially Ken Holum.

MOSS: He was very much against Ken Holum. But he seemed to give John Carver a clear bill of health, almost automatically. Why was the difference there do you think?

VERKLER: Well, of course, Senator Goldwater was not exactly a public power man at that time. Ken Holum was. John, I guess, he might have known him personally as a member of Senator Church's [Frank Church] staff. He was administrative assistant to Senator Church. I guess that might have been the reason.

Earlier, I alluded to the fact that Senator Anderson wasn't too happy with a couple of the appointments. I remember at the time, I think he was a little surprised at John Carver's appointment. Of course, John's a very able person. I think he campaigned pretty hard during that election. But I think, subsequently--of course, he's a member of the Federal Power Commission now and he's a personal friend of mine--the philosophy that he has and has had during the years seems to maybe put him more sympathetic to the user type that I referred to earlier, the user interest as opposed to the public.

MOSS: But of course so is John Kelly.

VERKLER: Well, I don't think that he expressed that kind of a philosophy in his public administration too much. At least I don't recall it.

MOSS: So Carver's user orientation gave you a little trouble?

VERKLER: Well, I don't think that it gave us too much trouble over the years, but I think that's generally the view that he has. I mean, you check his reputation. I think, generally, people feel that way. But not to take anything away from John. As I say, he's a very able and, I would say, a very scholarly man. And I think that nobody took more energy and dedication to the job than he did.

MOSS: Now, you said that Senator Anderson had some problems with the specific men who were chosen for assistant secretaries, and really there were no problems in the way these nominations were presented. Is that fair?

VERKLER: As far as I'm concerned, there was not. As I say, obviously, he might have preferred some others. But, even as chairman of the committee that had to approve their nominations, I don't think that he was given an

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opportunity to veto any of them, or else if he were, he might have.

MOSS: What was the general feeling upon the appointment of Udall?

VERKLER: Of course, going back politically, Stu Udall had gone out and taken Arizona for Kennedy, I think--didn't he--at the convention. Senator Anderson, I think, liked him personally, and I think that it was pretty well received by his colleagues in the Senate. You know, Secretary Udall was a very energetic and hard working secretary, and when you do that, when you are that kind, you're going to make a lot of enemies. I think he did make some enemies, and I think he should be pleased with the caliber of enemies that he made. That's my view. So I've always liked him, and I always liked what he was trying to achieve. Some of his methods might have been better.

MOSS: Specifically. Could you illustrate?

VERKLER: Well, you know, Stu is kind of a stubborn type. That might be a good quality sometimes, but other times it wouldn't. I can't say much more than that. He might have made mistakes, without being specific or calling specific instances. He might have made some poor judgements, but at least he was making the judgements and not letting things burn. For instance, when he held up some decisions with Bureau of Land Management, these made a lot of people mad. But I think one of the things he did when he left office, he sent up a proposal to repeal the Mining Act of 1872. Now, I wish that he would have sent that up about six years earlier, you know, when we had had a chance to work on it. That's an archaic law that needs to be revised. In the year 1970, we're operating under a law that gives away land that was needed a hundred years ago but isn't needed now. But yet, because of the entrenchment of the special interest, mining and cattling and others, it's hard to do something about it. But he tried, and, of course, in this instance, he could have tried a lot harder.

He made a lot of mistakes, but that was because he was busy doing things. I think when history is recorded, obviously, his administration of the Department of Interior is going to go down as one of the greatest in the history of that department because of the types of actions that he did take. The expansion of our national park system, the efforts to do something about our water problems. Touch any area relating to the public's resources and we made tremendous strides in the last eight years.

MOSS: Was there much congressional reaction to his establishing the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation as a

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departmental thing before he got the congressional authorization for it?

VERKLER: Well, there might have been. You may run into some. There are some people, especially on the House side, that feel that these things are a wrong exercise of secretarial power. I don't believe that it was wrong from my standpoint, but I was sympathetic. We passed the so-called organic act afterwards. But, even the organic act, you know, they were not incompatible. So I feel that it was probably a good move to get it under way. It might have facilitated passages of the act. And, of course, it helped get one of the most important achievements of the administration, in my judgement, the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act.

MOSS: Which didn't go the first time.

VERKLER: No, it didn't go.

MOSS: Partly because of the way it was presented by the department?

VERKLER: Well, I think that probably was because it was sent up in late '62.

MOSS: We're going to cut this off now. And we'll see if we can pick it up another time. All right?

VERKLER: All right. Fine.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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