

Jerry T. Verkler Oral History Interview –JFK #2, 3/4/1970
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Biographical Note

Verkler, Jerry T.; Staff director, Senate Interior and Insular Affairs Committee (1963-1974). Verkler discusses public land use and conservation issues across the United States, in Guam, and in the Virgin Islands, the 87th Congress' role in conservation and preservation operations, and issues surrounding Native Americans and their land, among other issues.

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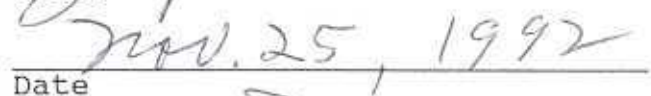
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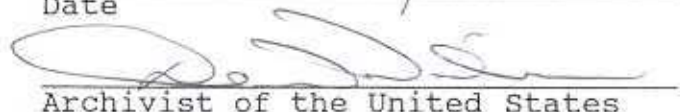
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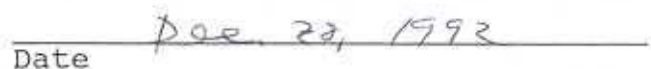
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Jerry T. Verkler- JFK #2

Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
16	Public land and resources issues
21, 23	Establishment of environmental bureaucratic operations stemming from John F. Kennedy's [JFK] presidency
26	Guam and the Virgin Islands
28	Native Americans and politics
30	Issues surrounding Philleo Nash

Second Oral History Interview

with

JERRY T. VERKLER

March 4, 1970
Washington, D.C.

By William W. Moss

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MOSS: I'd like to start in with the public land area first of all. I've tried to look through here and see what specific things you might be able to help with. I think that in the seashores and parks things, I'll take the two controversial ones, the Oregon dunes and the Indiana dunes. You recall the circumstances of those two proposals, taking Oregon dunes first? It was going very well and then Wayne Morse came up with a pretty solid objection to it. Do you recall that situation at all?

VERKLER: Well, Senator Morse's objection was that, although he favored such projects as Indiana Dunes and the Cape Cod [National] Seashore, places elsewhere around the nation where the government had to use the power of eminent domain to acquire them, he was very much opposed to using eminent domain in his own backyard. So, he fought us bitterly on the Oregon Dune-Seashore proposal. In fact, I don't even remember them really getting off the ground those first few years. Say, I ought to get my calendar to refresh myself .

[INTERRUPTION]

MOSS: Specifically, I have one question. Morse opposed it. Now, it has been my understanding that he opposed it not so much on substantive grounds, but

because it wasn't cleared through him first, because the action wasn't taken through him, that they went through Maurine Neuberger and simply ignored Morse on it.

VERKLER: Well, I hardly think that that's true. He was a senior senator and had been in the Senate since the election of '44, I guess. I'm not aware that he had ever introduced a bill on Oregon dunes, and when it started to become a popular issue throughout the conservation community, the recreation community, he was opposed to the principle of condemnation. It was as simple as that. Now, Senator Morse was greatly admired by most of those who supported him on most issues. But on this one--and he was known throughout his public career to switch positions with regularity, which he could do and did do in the greatest Dirksenian [Everett

[-16-]

McKinley Dirksen] tradition--he was opposed to condemnation of these lands for public purposes on the theory that there were so many publicly owned lands already, you didn't need these additional ones. We had heard stories relating the fact that some of his friends owned valuable properties there and just didn't want to lose them. There were all sorts of reasons that could have been the basis of his opposition, but he opposed it bitterly.

He had every opportunity to get into it, so it's hardly likely that because Senator Neuberger took the lead in it was the reason why his, so to speak, nose was out of joint. I don't believe so at all. I just think that he was bitterly opposed to it and did not take it up after she left the Senate.

MOSS: It doesn't sound right.

VERKLER: No. Not at all. Now, I'm not saying he wasn't above getting upset about such slights as that, perhaps, but usually, there was something much more fundamental when he was opposed to something.

He opposed our procedure in the redwoods later on when we were engaged in a big battle with the powerful private timber interest on the preservation of the redwoods. He came down on the other side, taking a position directly opposed to one that he took on the floor of the Senate just six months before.

Of course, I personally have felt the brunt of his battles. To give you an example, he went to the Senate floor one time and thanked me personally--you know, you remember things like this when the staff is involved--for having helped him work out a difficult problem on the very redwood bill that I'm talking about in the Land and Water Conservation Fund--it is related to it--and then six months later, he came back to the floor and singled me out as always giving him a hard time and being a villain. I always kind of felt, and so did my friends who told me that he was getting ready to do this, that he didn't want to mention my principals, senators who were my chiefs on this committee. So he decided to attack me instead of the chairman. He could have picked up the phone and talked to the chairman of the

committee, but he chose instead to go to the floor and berate a staff member who had no opportunity to defend himself.

Now, having said that, I was on his side many, many more times and on many, many more issues than I was against him. But the point is that he was very, very flexible. He'd take one position one time, and another one at another time. Even though his public image might have been guardian of his views on the floor of the Senate, and the wild rose of Oregon, you know, but some of us have a different view point.

[INTERRUPTION]

As far as the Indiana Dunes was concerned, of course, for years the only voice you heard in support of Indiana dunes was

[-17-]

a senator from Illinois.

MOSS: Yes. Now, this is the question I had. To what extent was he still beating the conservationist drum and to what extent was he protecting the port of Chicago on this?

VERKLER: Senator Douglas (Paul H. Douglas)?

MOSS: Yes.

VERKLER: There's no question in my mind that he was motivated by his deep desire to preserve this area. As far as the port of Chicago, I'm not convinced at all that--you're referring to the possible economic threat of competition in development?

MOSS: Right.

VERKLER: I don't think that that's a real economic question because, you know, you could use that argument about Washington, D.C. and suburbia and everything that's growing. Senator Douglas was representing the millions and millions of people of the Greater Chicago area, of course, in trying to preserve for them, and for all the people of the United States, a unique area. Unlike Michigan, a rapidly dwindling spot, ecologically threatened and every other way, it's going to be taken up completely if we did not save it. The point of fact is though that we did not save it until we got senators from the state of Indiana who supported it also. As long as you had the representation from Indiana feeling the way it did, we never got it out, no matter how much in front Senator Paul Douglas was in his valiant efforts. As I say, he was first and foremost.

When the bill finally passed, it was Senator Henry Jackson who was the main name on it. Frankly, that was to avoid the squabbles between Douglas and Bayh [Birch Bayh], and

even Hartke [Vance Hartke] to some extent, as to who would be the primary sponsor. But, of course, Birch Bayh deserves a lot of credit in my judgement because he faced up to this as an Indiana senator. You know how Charlie Halleck felt, the guy from the district--dead set against it: "Using our area for a playground for Chicago," and all this business.

But I never felt that Senator Douglas was motivated by any other reason than what he clearly stated, to preserve this area. Sure, it was going to be a park for the people of Illinois and the people of Indiana, and the people of the United States. But I don't think that he was concerned about any possible competition to the business interests of the port of Chicago, because, to me, that's not realistic. These ports grow and develop and spread out as the population and the requirements of industry are anyway. They were going to

[-18-]

spread around, so we were trying to preserve a small segment for public use.

I was going to mention that in the first congress under the leadership of President Kennedy and Secretary Udall [Stewart L. Udall], we made a real departure in the authorization of new units in our national parks system. In the past, and even in the Re-Organization Act of 1946, when you refer to national parks, you refer to national parks created from the public domain. There was always this idea of our vast amount of public lands, mostly in the West, almost exclusively in the West. If you found areas that were unique, why you would cut them out and reserve them as national parks. Then they started spreading the idea to the East. But they authorized a park, and then expected it to be acquired by donation or by exchange or otherwise, and then they'd come in and ask for money later, and so on.

But, beginning with Cape Cod and then, I guess Point Reyes might have passed first, but anyway, the big three as we refer to them: Point Reyes, Cape Cod, and Padre Island on the Pacific, Atlantic and Gulf Coasts, were the first time in our history that at the same time we authorized a park, we authorized specific appropriations to go out and buy the area.

Now, as it has turned out, of course, this has been a sad history associated with these three areas. Not the idea, but there were some faulty calculations on the part of either the Park Service, and of course, subsequently, then some court actions. The original estimation of the cost was unrealistically low. We have legislation pending before us now, introduced by Senator Ted Kennedy to raise tremendously the ceiling on Cape Cod.

MOSS: We just had some new appropriations for Point Reyes.

VERKLER: We've finished the hearings, and the House has passed a bill to do the same for Point Reyes. Last year, we finished with Padre Island. But, of course, there are all sorts of factors that enter into this, the rapid escalation of recreation lands and so on.

Senator Kennedy, John Kennedy, of course, one of the first bills he introduced before this committee was to establish Cape Cod back in 1953. These things take quite a bit of time. It was one of the first bills from this committee that he signed as president, you know, many years later, to authorize the establishment of the park itself for the national seashore.

But the concept of our national seashores, national parks and recreation areas made its greatest spurt forward in the history of the country during these beginning years of the Kennedy administration. They laid the groundwork--as I pointed out earlier in our other interview, the fact that some of them, most of them in fact, did not come to fruition until years later--but the groundwork and the initiative to get them

[-19-]

started, the revival of the conservation, recreation spirit which is now, of course, developed in the ecological, environmental nomenclature, began in the 1961-62 era with the 87th Congress. And we haven't stopped yet. We've run into some tremendous problems with the war and the costs we're facing. Environmental pollution, though, is now recognized by the nation as one of the greatest threats we're facing domestically, I mean as far as the problems we have to overcome in our society.

I think the real beginning was made at that time. We added, during the last eight years, more lands to our national parks, by far more than in any previous period. I'm not sure now of the percentages about how it compared with all the previous history of the system, but we've made some tremendous gains.

MOSS: Okay. Now, let me go to Padre Island for a minute. Wasn't there a fight over whether or not a road should be built on the thing? Barely enough room for it, but it was insisted that a road be built as a condition for the seashore?

VERKLER: Yes, there were some that wanted the road to go right down the parkway to provide the people getting on at one end could get off at the other and vice versa. Those down at the end where no access to the island by road was programmed, I guess, were the ones that felt like they were going to get short-changed. But we did not put a road on it. We defeated that, if I'm not mistaken. I remember, I think, Senator Halleck was the key sponsor of that. And we did not provide for a road down Padre Island.

But, of course, you're always facing the different conflicting values on how best to develop, as opposed to preserving, a national park area. If you are doing it for all of the people, then you're trying to make it available to the most people and most people are the ones that have the week or two vacations, traveling around the country with their kids. On the other side, you have the purists or the preservationists who want to preserve it just for the sake of preserving it and really dislike intrusion by man in some of these areas.

MOSS: Commercialization.

VERKLER: Yes. Well, I mean....Aside from commercialization, they don't like overuse by the public in fact. Of course, that's a sign that we need to do more to get additional areas for the public to use, like shore lands and other prime recreational areas. But this has been a constant battle, development as opposed to nondevelopment of these areas.

MOSS: Of course, now, along these lines the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation was established in April of '62. Now, this was established some months before they got the congressional authorization, the organic act for it.

VERKLER: Right.

MOSS: Was there any opposition in Congress because Udall went ahead with this on his own initiative?

VERKLER: Well, I don't think that there was a great deal of opposition, as I recall. I mean obviously we passed the organic act. In fact, I'm not sure whether the act refers to the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation or not. It's the Organic Recreation Act. We tell the secretary of interior to do certain things and so on. Now, he had established a Bureau of Outdoor Recreation by executive order, and this was what the bureau was to do, as I recall, it's not a very long act. But I don't think we go into establishing the bureau as such. We gave it the backbone, the statutory guidelines, but I don't think that we called it a Bureau of Outdoor Recreation in the act or not. Do you recall whether we did?

MOSS: No. It was to be a coordinating bureau.

VERKLER: Right. And that's what it was to do. And, of course, it's served that. There have been some misgivings about it, as it's worked out. Some people felt that they have attempted to become sort of a little bureau of the budget within the Department of the Interior, and this has caused some consternation. But with any new program, whether it's the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation or the Office of Economic Opportunity, you're going to have problems getting underway, and new machinery has to jell. We've established several new bureaucratic operations, many of them recommended by President Kennedy. For instance, our Federal Water Resources Council, the Water [Resources] Planning Act, it finally passed in 1965 but it's beginnings were those first two years. We had hearings and we even passed a bill once, before we could ever get the House to pass it. We passed the Office of Water Resources Research.

We look back and we recognize that we made mistakes. The regrettable thing about doing it is that it's so hard to go back and undo it. If you create a bureaucratic operation, then when you start to change it, if it needs changing, you've got involved in lives and jobs and people that are imbedded and have built up their own constituency. So it's a very difficult thing to undo once you get it started. They had their beginning in that period, but there wasn't a big fight if I remember correctly.

MOSS: Somewhat along the same lines, with the land and

water conservation problem, now, when this first came up, it has the provision for charging of fees for boats on navigable waters. Do you recall this? And there was a great deal of objection to it by both the pleasure boaters and by the barge people because of the possibility that it could be extended to barge traffic on all navigable waters, not just users of reservoirs and this kind of thing, for pleasure. You recall this?

VERKLER: Well, I recall that, of course, that's been their fear and why they so violently opposed any kind of user charge or entrance charge to get to water recreation areas. It slips me that we had in there an actual charge for boats and such. We had charges to use boat ramps and so on. But what they were afraid of was the fact that the American people who've have been spending billions of dollars to benefit a few people who operate barge traffic up and down these rivers and channels that we've created, they're afraid that they might have to pay some special user tax as a partial remuneration for the vast public expense.

Well, of course, they have opposed the Golden Eagle program, as it came to be known, a system of collecting certain user fees and entrance admission fees for recreation areas. It was because of their fear that they have opposed it, and still do. Of course, as you know, unless it's extended, the Golden Eagle program expires at the end of this month. We have passed a bill to continue it. Of course, the House has had hearing on it. I don't know what they're going to do. We lost it. I mean, of course, you know, here we are extending it when we could say very easily, "Why in the devil did you let it die?" Well, at the time we were more interested in getting two hundred million dollars a year into the fund from the Outer Continental Shelf receipts, so that was part of the package in 1968 when we amended the act.

Unfortunately, the Golden Eagle or the fees program, as such, never panned out to be the revenue producer that we were told it was going to be when the officials came up and included it. They estimated after two or three years it would be bringing in something like twenty-five, twenty-seven million dollars a year, whereas, in fact, I don't think it ever brought in over all the years, much more than nine million dollars total, or something like that--a very insignificant amount of money.

So that was another reason why we were willing to see it go; I mean, at the time, to get our big program. But it had proved to be frankly--not so much from the standpoint of making money because it was a bargain, a politically popular thing, especially for retired people who could buy a Golden Eagle passport and go to all of our recreation areas. So we adopted it. And the main reason we pushed it this last time, in addition to trying to slip on a few amendments to the Land and Water Conservation Fund, was because it has proved to be

[-22-]

extremely popular. So political reasons entered in their thinking this last time. Recognizing that just because they do away with the Golden Eagle, they still can charge fees at the individual areas, and may make a lot more money, we felt that this was a heck of a lot more popular. So that's the story of the Golden Eagle.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund Act, the Organic Recreation Act, which established the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, the big push in recreation in this country started up in 1961. It was right to do so, for various reasons, of course. In the last thirty years we had a great depression and then a great war. Then we had a period during the fifties of not doing anything particular except sort of bouncing along. Then near the end of the fifties, the Laurance Rockefeller group, with Senator [Clinton] Anderson and others, sponsored the outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission to make a study of the outdoor recreation needs of the country. This report gained wide acceptance and many of their recommendations were followed up with legislation. I think the fund and the bureau and all of these ideas were generated by that commission and given birth. Of course, we were able to push them to fruition during the period of the sixties.

MOSS: What kind of clout can the conservationist lobbies bring to bear? People like the Isaak Walton League, the Sierra Club, the Explorers Club, the National Wildlife Federation, this kind of thing? Is it just that they make nuisances of themselves, or do they really have something?

VERKLER: Well, I think that they can bring to bear important influence on legislators and on the administration. I'm not convinced that it's quite as grave as some of them think it is. You know, they are organizations with considerable members, and when you start turning on the heat in the constituencies and getting letters and wires from home, that counts if you're on an important vote or something of that nature. The senators and congressmen listen to that. Some of them are very reasonable men. They know. They have a pretty good perspective about how important their influence is. Sometimes they become just another lobby and they give themselves an undue hard time by pretending or believing that they have more clout than they actually have.

For instance, I'll give you an example. Back in 1951 and '52, the Senate of the United States passed the Central Arizona Project. In it there were two dams on the Colorado River. Three times they passed it. They passed it twice, back in 1951 and 1952. Then there was a long delay because of the Arizona against California water dispute which was settled in the Supreme Court. The House didn't act on those other bills because the water rights were unsettled. After that court suit was settled, we passed it again out of this

[-23-]

committee with those dams still intact. The recreationists by this time were saying, "Well, this is a terrible thing to do, to dam up the Colorado River any more, because you're going to foul up the Grand Canyon," and so forth. You know the story.

MOSS: Rainbow Arch.

VERKLER: Sure. Well, Rainbow Bridge, of course, that was a previous battle. They dammed it up, up there at Page, Arizona, on Glen Canyon. In other words, they were able to dam the Colorado River at that stage, and Rainbow Bridge

was supposed to be flooded and all that. As it turned out, I don't think that it's hurt it at all. What it's done is it's enabled many thousands of people to get in to see this beautiful area that they never got to see it before.

But aside from that, with the Colorado River, there were good and valid reasons, I think, for not building dams on the Colorado River. These people were largely correct when they started their campaign. The point is though, the Senate passed it twice. This committee reported the third time. But it wasn't until the interests of the conservationists and the preservationists of the Grand Canyon coincided with the political interests of the Pacific Northwest that were afraid of water importation, that they were able to stop the Colorado River Projects from building more dams in the Colorado River. So that's when they had to come up with alternatives to those dams. That's an example to me, that by themselves, they may not be all important. They're getting better. You know, they're getting stronger and more effective.

They're our allies. We work with them quite a bit because we believe in the same things they do. But I'm trying to be as candid and as objective as I am, because we're with them most of the time. And they're with us, I hope, most of the time. Every time we run into a tough problem, why there's a certain few of them here in town, about six or eight, that I call together. We have a council of war in the backroom and decide how we're going to go out and get the votes for certain issues. They are helpful and very effective. But the point is, I don't think they make or break important political issues necessarily, unless they're allied with other pretty strong interests.

MOSS: What about the other side of the fence? What about the mining and timbering industries, that kind of thing, who are the users of the resources?

VERKLER: Well, I think that we've seen in the last several years a definite waning of their power. I think that, again, this started--if you wanted to point to a period of time--I think Secretary Udall and the president and, of course, the administration, and the Congress, too, were able to be a little more independent of these powerful

[-24-]

interest groups, because the Wilderness Bill was a blow to the mining and timbering people. Well, you asked me why. I think that maybe it's a simplistic explanation, but the people in power were more attuned to the broad public interest involved in these public resources than the special user interest. Maybe that's cliché in a way, but I think it's a fact. I also believe that we're coming back into an era where those who are more attuned to the interests of the grazer as opposed to the sportsman and all the people having a stake and an interest in the public lands, those people are back in power. Case in point, when Stewart Udall went out of office, together with the Department of Agriculture, they spent about a couple of million dollars making a study on raising grazing fees on public domain lands to bring them more nearly to the same rate charged by private and state lands, for similar lands. Over a ten year period this was to be escalated.

Well, when he made this announcement, caused all sorts of complaints and hue and cry from the cowboys and their friends. Admittedly, it was late in the administration when he was getting ready to go out of office. But the study had just been completed and was getting ready to go into effect.

Just this year the first step went into effect for 1969, and then Secretary Hickel [Walter J. Hickel] has cancelled the step projected for 1970. Well, if you look at the facts, you'll see that those who were slated to get the increase, the poor farmer, rancher, the little guy, he wasn't even going to get an increase for another couple of years according to the formula. Three percent of the ranchers using these lands were going to get about 45 percent of the benefits from this increase that was stayed for this year. So it's very clear to me, as an observer, that those who have special interests to grind have friends in high places.

MOSS: Earlier in the Kennedy and Udall administration, John Carver had some success on a kind of jaw-boning approach to the grazers to get them to accept an increase, hadn't he?

VERKLER: Yes. He came up and testified here before us on an increase. Of course, at that time we ran into problems with some of our committee members. You know, my views represent my own thinking a lot, plus some of the senior members who can afford to be public interest oriented, as opposed to constituent first problems. We have many members, though, who think primarily of the ranchers and the miners, because, of course, they make a great contribution to the economy of their states, they're public land states and so on. That's the history of it. It's only been in the last ten or fifteen years that as these areas have grown tremendously, the people coming in and new industry, government and military and business, have created these recreation clubs that we talk about, the Isaak Walton Leagues.

[-25-]

All of these chapters have grown, and suddenly, in numbers, I think they far outnumber the old entrenched economic interest.

But, yes, John raised the fees back in those days, back in 1961 or 1962, or whenever it was. He was very courageous about that. I guess he supported it. I don't know all the intricacies that went on at that time, but he did come up as assistant secretary for public lands and argued for the increase at that time.

MOSS: Okay. Moving to a slightly different area, but still under John Carver's cognizance, on the territories, what was the general feeling on the Hill for home rule for Guam and the Virgin Islands in those days, do you recall?

VERKLER: Well, I think it was not a very favorable climate at the time. In fact, as you know, they didn't get home rule as such until just a couple of years ago, effective this year. For the first time, they'll be able to elect their own chief executive, their own governor. But it was very slow to come. It took seven years in

Guam. I guess we've had the Virgin Islands since 1918, or something of that nature, and this year will mark the first year that they've elected their own chief executive. So it has been a long time coming. I think the ground work was laid, again, to get it, because legislation was submitted to have elected delegates in Congress and their chief executive. But at that time it didn't get very far, and as I say, the representation in Congress is still far from a reality. It may come about in the next five or six years. But they do have now, or are beginning this year, to elect their own governor.

MOSS: Okay. On the Virgin Islands, the Virgin Islands Corporation is, as I understand it, something that nobody was really very happy with. It was not operating the way it should for the benefit of the people of the Virgin Islands and so on. There was a House bill, H.R. 5358 in 1961, to do away with it. It was finally turned down. What do you recall about the corporation?

VERKLER: Well, the Virgin Islands Corporation, I guess, was established first back in the thirties and then subsequently restructured to become a corporation. It was an attempt, of course, at the time to save the islands from economic disaster. I can't say and am not going to say that it was a failure. I think it served a pretty important purpose. Of course, we witnessed the transition from an agricultural sugar cane economy, in St. Croix at least, to a phasing out of sugar. The corporation, of course, was primarily engaged in producing sugar cane and processing it-- the farmers, of course, produced it and they processed it--and running certain utility functions. I know that the Virgin

[-26-]

Islands have been problems to us for forty years. I guess Herbert Hoover referred to them as America's poor houses.

We've had many, many problems in the Virgin Islands, political and otherwise. I frankly think that many of these problems have been exaggerated. I don't think that they take their politics any more or less serious than the good people of Boston or Denver or Albuquerque, or any place else. All sorts of sordid things have been said about the Virgin Islanders and the governor for eight years, Ralph Paiewonsky, but frankly, I think that we witnessed an era when the population tripled in just about eight years. The Cuban situation came along where Cuba was closed to Americans as a vacation area, so it put a tremendous pressure on development in the Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico too, of course. In that sense, Cuba's situation was a real boon to us.

So they had a lot of growth problems in the last eight years, and I think Ralph Paiewonsky proved to be a good choice. He did darn good job. He was very rough in some of his political relationships up here. He may not have been as smooth as possible, but I frankly am convinced that he did a good job under the circumstances and has had to take an awful lot of abuse, most of which I don't think was deserved.

But, of course, the corporation was just one symbol of the problems that we were facing in transition from basically an agricultural into a semi-industrial, leisure type tourist economy.

MOSS: What about the other two governors? Bill Daniel [William P. Daniel] in Guam, straight political appointment?

VERKLER: I think that everybody and his brother was a little bit chagrined that this happened. I don't know what happened originally. We all held our noses and approved it, I guess. Whether Lyndon Johnson forced it on him or. . . . Of course, the president made the appointment. Part of the stories I used to hear was because Price Daniel, his brother, was governor he had to be a governor too, and he was going to get out--he was only there a couple of years at most. But that was quite an experience. I think that it proved to be kind of a poor choice for the spot.

MOSS: Rex Lee in Samoa, on the other hand, turned out to be pretty good, didn't he?

VERKLER: Yes. Well, there was a lot of difference, because Rex was a career public servant who had vast experience working with underdeveloped peoples, I guess, if you want to refer to some of our Indian citizens. He worked in the Bureau of Indian Affairs for years, and was a very capable administrator. Some of the things that he developed in his time in Samoa, they're looking for some of

[-27-]

the records now, unwinding and so on. The current governor has his hands full unraveling what went on, not only with Rex, but with his successor. But, he was a very energetic type of man who was action oriented and was able to cut across red tape and cut through it. Sometimes it causes you problems later on. As I say, you don't know where all the records are.

MOSS: I wanted to go through the Indians, and then I was going to go on to the water and power area. But I can go through the Indian part and come back another day if you prefer.

VERKLER: All right.

MOSS: Really, I just had one basic question on the Indian thing. Well, two in a way. One is, what is politically useful about being for Indians? Why does a guy come out for Indians?

VERKLER: That's about as perplexing a subject politically and sociologically that you can get into. I mean, I'd like to be able to say that you're for Indians like you're for any other class or any other segment of American citizens who are unfortunate or less fortunate, poverty, you know. You're for the underprivileged or for those poverty-stricken Americans who need special help. Indians are a special category. Politically, for those senators who have large Indian populations, of course, the answer lies there, they get some Indian votes. For those members of Congress not from Indian areas, of course, they get

the sympathy vote, because it's been a great thing. You know, we refer to the little ladies in Boston who write letters about our Indian deeds and misdeeds, mostly in the past. I think we have as a nation a very shameful record in the treatment of our Indian citizens. Obviously, we're a melting pot as a nation. We all know that as we came to this land and took it over and made treaties backed by the solemn promise of the government of the United States, and when it became inconvenient or uncomfortable to keep those treaties, why we'd make new treaties and move the Indians around. I think it's been a pretty sordid record. I'm not so sure that it's any worse in history than what the Anglos did to the Saxons, or what the Huns did to the people they knocked over as civilization developed, if you can call it civilization. But still since we are a nation founded upon constitutional principles of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness and so on, we have a pretty sordid record. We've tried to make amends. We're trying right now. It's a hard thing to do, because if you're successful in getting our Indian citizens into the mainstream of our society--which is a good word everybody likes to use--then they throw off some of their old culture.

[-28-]

MOSS: This smacks of "termination."

VERKLER: Yes, smacks of terminating the federal responsibility. These are tough questions. What is our responsibility? What about the Indians in the East for instance that have no federal responsibility. We don't do anything for the Indians in North Carolina, you know, or really, in New York, and these other places. They're American citizens just like the rest of us. They go to work and they support themselves. They're part of our economy and our society. But a large part of the Indians that we come to think of now are those tribes in the western part of the United States that have been driven or have been gathered upon reservations and they've built up this security blanket.

Then you talk about terminating; the word termination has an ugly connotation to them, because they don't want to change the status quo, apparently. But the status quo for many of them in my country, in the Southwest, the Navahos, those who are running the Indian tribe are well educated and make good salaries and have a pretty good life because they're entrenched in the establishment. But the Indian and his family that live in the hogans out in the prairies that run a few sheep, they live in terrible nomadic conditions. Now, what is termination? What does it mean? I don't know. I would like to terminate that kind of a condition and get those people into a better economic condition. The question is, just what are we supposed to do for them? The opportunities are there, but I don't know. We spend more, we spend three hundred million dollars a year. There are only about six hundred thousand Indians in the country. We spend more for schools and for education.

Right after the Civil War, of course, there was a proposal to establish a bureau of Negro affairs, and Congress never funded it. Well, as bad as things have been for our Negro citizens, coming from slavery, of course, by and large, they're better off economically than our Indians are. In fact the Negro population in this country, I think, is roughly equivalent to the Canadian population, period. The standard of living for the American Negro, economically and otherwise, is higher than our Canadian neighbors and friends. The Negro

has two and a half strikes against him to begin with because of his color and the prejudice that we've had in this country. But the Negro has come along in spite of all these disadvantages, in my judgement. The breakthroughs have been since 1950, I think, with the court decision in 1954 and so on. But I think they've made tremendous strides for themselves. But they haven't had a bureau of Negro affairs. So my point is, maybe the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the first place is the wrong approach to the Indian problem.

But it's a puzzler. What can you do for these people, for Indians. You provide education, college for them? Then sometimes you find instances of their wanting to go back and

[-29-]

stay on the reservation. I don't know how general that is, but you hear about that. It's a real cultural problem.

[INTERRUPTION]

MOSS: Another question on the Bureau of Indian Affairs, about the right wing static that's aimed at Philleo Nash--how seriously was this taken by the committee?

VERKLER: Well, I don't think that it was taken very seriously. It took time to air, you know, because Mr. Nash had been the target of Senator McCarthy [Joseph R. McCarthy] specifically. I think that he had a lot of political enemies from his tenure as lieutenant governor of Wisconsin. Wisconsin has sure sent a lot of different people to Washington, D.C. from Robert M. LaFollete, Sr. to Joe McCarthy.

MOSS: You were saying that it wasn't taken very seriously by the committee. But it took a while to get it off.

VERKLER: It took quite a while to get it out. I remember we had the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] reports. Philleo, I guess, had done some foolish things--well, I don't know if they were foolish or not. When he was in Toronto or someplace, he leased his house to some people who turned out to be communists or something like that. But it was the old game of smear, primarily. There were some people in our committee who were pleased at the problems he was finding himself in, I think, for political reasons, and they wanted to make the most of it. But we went through it very carefully.

As I recall, Senator Jackson [Henry M. Jackson] was not chairman then, but Senator Anderson [Clinton P. Anderson] was ill at the time and Senator Jackson chaired this particular episode. I remember, I think Philleo was a Hubert Humphrey candidate for this job, because I think he had loyally stuck by Humphrey in the Wisconsin primary that year. I remember one Saturday morning when it was time to decide whether to fish, or cut bait, and Senator Jackson called Senator Humphrey down and Senator Proxmire [William Proxmire] who was still in the Senate, of course, from Wisconsin, and said, "Look, this is the problem

we're in. These guys are raising all kinds of hell about this man and all these communist associations alleged, and so forth." Proxmire was really getting nervous about it, I could tell. I know he was. But Hubert Humphrey, he was in great shape in those days. He started telling spinning stories about how Governor Harold E. Stassen kept him out of the Navy with his bad stories about him, or something of that nature. Anyway, Hubert Humphrey was behind him 100 percent. He was his chief Senate sponsor.

Then the committee heard him and we heard all these noise

[-30-]

makers. Some kid came in and testifies and made a lot of noise. We confirmed him.

Then he got into subsequent trouble in the administration with Udall. They had conflicts. I don't know about the wisdom of the choice. There's no question in my mind but what he really wanted to do the right job. He was an anthropologist. He was a cranberry merchant. He raised cranberries in Wisconsin. I always felt that he kind of had a bad rap. Anybody that I know that's dealing in that subject is going to be in trouble, you know. It's just a real problem.

I think he was a good man. We liked him. He got into trouble with Senator Anderson. He got into trouble with Secretary Udall. He got into trouble with everybody. His congressional relations, generally, I would say, were fairly bad. But I think he was well intentioned. And I think he hated it more than anybody that they were bad. I don't think he was the kind of tough guy that, you know, would tell a congressman where to head in. It's just circumstances. I think he was just a nice little fellow who kept stumbling every time he tried to walk down the road. That's my impression of him. But I know I worked very closely and had access to the FBI reports on him. You know, how FBI reports are, 95 percent of the people we talked to say this guy is great, and then they go on for pages in telling you what the 5 percent, how they feel about somebody. But there was more noise than there was real problem as far as his confirmation was concerned.

MOSS: Okay, fine. That's all I have for today.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[-31-]