

**Lee C. White Oral History Interview –JFK #4, 1/9/1970**  
Administrative Information

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**Biographical Note**

White, Lee C.; Legislative assistant to John F. Kennedy (1954-1957); assistant to Joseph P. Kennedy, member of the Hoover Commission (1954-1955); Counsel, Small Business Committee, Senate (1957-1958); Assistant Special Counsel to the President (1961-1963). White discusses his responsibilities during the Kennedy Administration, including his involvement with the Department of the Interior, and he describes the process surrounding the business of natural resources, among other issues.

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Lee C. White – JFK #4

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Fourth Oral History Interview

with

LEE C. WHITE

January 9, 1970  
Washington, D.C.

By William W. Moss

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MOSS: All right. I think we might start this interview by reminding whoever is going to be looking at this thing that it's been, what, about five years since you had your last interview with Milt Gwartzman [Milton Gwartzman]?

WHITE: That is correct.

MOSS: Right. And in that intervening time you were appointed chairman of the Federal Power Commission and served there, and now you're practicing law.

WHITE: Correct.

MOSS: Okay, fine. Let's move on then to the topic of

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the discussion on this interview, and that's the Interior Department and its appointments. Let's start right off with Stewart Udall himself, and I'll ask what you know of the way that appointment came about.

WHITE: Very easy, nothing.

MOSS: Nothing?

WHITE: He was already selected. No, that's not quite right. He was not already selected, he may have been selected, but he hadn't been announced at the time that it was clear that I was going to join the White House staff. But certainly I knew nothing about the reasons for selecting him other than what appeared in the press, and I don't see any benefit in recounting that.

MOSS: Yeah, okay. How much did you get involved in the actual selection process, first of all, in the Interior Department appointments?

WHITE: The first batch, I think the answer was zero -- the first batch meaning those that came in in January '61. I either knew before or got to know all of the principal appointees and I was involved in

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some personal problems that developed subsequently, but the first batch, I'm just really not the right guy to talk to. I presume that Ralph Dungan and Sarg Shriver [R. Sargent Shriver, Jr.] and Adam Yarmolinsky, that crowd, might be able to be of some help.

MOSS: Okay, did you get in at all into the hassle over Philleo Nash's problem with the right-wing crowd in Wisconsin trying to blackball him on the appointment?

WHITE: No, I was up to my eyeballs in question when he left the commissionership, but not when he came. That was somebody else's problem and I really could give absolutely no information or insight into that.

MOSS: Okay, there's another appointment under which there was some special circumstances, or at least I've been led to believe there were, and that was John Kelly's appointment for [Assistant Secretary] for mineral resources. It's my impression that he and Udall and President Kennedy had an understanding that Kelly was to be "the oil man" no matter what the chains of command were.

WHITE: I can't say that it wasn't the case, but I simply

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didn't know about it. It was probably beneficial at the outset to point out that

even though I probably was the White House staff man who had the most to do with Interior, I certainly was not the only one.

MOSS: Right.

WHITE: It is, I think, much more important to know that with respect to oil, at least during the time that he was there, Mike Feldman [Myer Feldman] was the guy who had the liaison with the department on that particular subject.

Whereas Mike and I shared the same suite of offices and in many ways were interchangeable, he certainly is the primary source of any information on what might have happened or did not happen with respect to oil. To some extent both of us had some familiarity and some responsibility in coal problems. Certainly with respect to oil and petroleum, Mike had the major assignment.

MOSS: Okay, how did it fall out that one of you had one kind of assignment and another one another?

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WHITE: That's a fascinating.... Well, I don't know if the question is fascinating, the answer is. In part, it depended upon a couple of different factors: One of them was as simple as who do you happen to know who was in the administration handling a particular area and who called you on the telephone. People in the White House staff had their own constituencies, so to speak. For example, on regulatory agencies, for the most part, Mike Feldman would work with regulatory agencies. I worked with the Federal Power Commission, partly because the guy who was the chairman of that was Joe Swidler [Joseph C. Swidler], who had been my boss when I was at TVA [Tennessee Valley Authority] in the legal division.

Part of it depended upon who happened to be assigned the responsibility for shepherding a special message through the process before it went to Congress. If, for example, I was working on a special message that had to do with natural resources, then I all of a sudden was the guy who was responsible for that.

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MOSS: Did you in fact handle that message?

WHITE: Yes, yes. If, for example, just in the distribution of responsibilities -- normally the guy who would make this distribution would be Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] -- if he said to Mike and me and Dick Goodwin [Richard N. Goodwin], "Look, now you take.... We've got to schedule messages. The President wants to get a whole bunch of them up there very early so people won't say that, 'Well, if we had only had them in time, we could have acted on them.'" And of course, there was the clear impression that permeated the atmosphere that President Kennedy wanted to

demonstrate some vigor and some initiative, some imagination, some drive as contrasted with the preceding administration. So we got humping and par to fit was to assign specific messages once the decision had been made as to what the subjects would be the subject of individual special messages.

MOSS: How was that decision arrived at?

WHITE: Basically presidential, and I presume with considerable

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consultation although I did not participate personally -- I presume with guys like Sorensen, probably Lawrence F. O'Brien. Since there were a couple of the security matters, both defense and foreign economics, I presume, Bundy [McGeorge Bundy].

Having had those subjects sort of outlined, a schedule was arranged and the funnel was Sorensen. Sorensen would assign to those of us in his little apparatus special messages to be responsible for. Some he would take himself. That particular assignment, which in some senses was really haphazard, a tendency not necessarily to freeze, but certainly to give a direction in terms, again, of that apparatus alone. It certainly had nothing to do with the basic clearing apparatus that the Budget Bureau provided or the role played by the Council of Economic Advisers or the Office of Science and Technology or any other umbrella group.

I'd had sufficient background in resource problems so that it was not an unnatural thing for me to do. It started from the message in '61, carried right

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on through, and, I would guess, basically I was the individual to whom people in those fields tried to get in touch within the White House staff.

MOSS: Okay, did you rely much on the Frank Smith operation during the campaign, the product of that operation or the message?

WHITE: Well, to some extent, but not a great deal. The message or the report of that particular task force, in my view, is.... Well, it's hard to say that it was bad; it's just that it wasn't good. I mean there wasn't enough to it. I'm sure you will find from other sources, if you haven't already, the bureaucracy was sort of bursting with ideas they had been trying to foist on the policy-makers for years, and all of a sudden in 1961 there was an administration that was receptive to these ideas. So I think we got a hell of a lot more good, solid suggestions and recommendations from the basic bowels of the government that necessarily came from outside. This is not true all the way across the board.

MOSS: No. Where did your best suggestions come from?



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Could you differentiate?

WHITE: Talking now about the...

MOSS: Natural resources.

WHITE: ...natural resources. I'd say that.... Well, it's an interesting question. I hadn't focused on it previously. Any time you start talking about best or second best or worst you run into difficulties. But accepting the pitfalls of the question, I think probably they came not in the first year, but in subsequent years from those people who came from the outside into the policy-making positions.

Now, I've answered the question as to where I thought they came from, I don't know what the genesis of the ideas were. There were, I'm sure, some ideas that Steward Udall proposed that I put in that category, but I can't tell you that they were dreamed up in his mind, or that any assistant secretary that came into this administration had thought of them full-blown. It may well be that from any particular source they came through maybe the solicitor's office or an assistant secretary's

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office, got to the secretary and the secretary then either embraced them or modified them to make them his. I think some of the programs that were ultimately enacted and for which that administration is most likely to be known came after the first year. If I had to give the answer, I would give them to the secretariat, who were the people that I dealt with.

MOSS: Okay, specifically with the people who were in the assistant to the secretary slot, people like Orren Beaty and so on?

WHITE: Well, I'm really talking more about the secretary himself because it was he who made the presentations.

MOSS: Okay, this is the way the ideas came to you.

WHITE: Correct.

MOSS: In the form of a formal presentation.

WHITE: Right. In fact, in some ways and sometimes even more formal than formal, full-blown, you know, with charts, diagrams, and "Come over and see his whole damn spread." You know, "When can we get a chance to present it to the President and to Sorensen and everybody else?"

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MOSS: Okay now, once you got all these ideas, what did you do with them? Here you have got a mass of full-blown ideas.

WHITE: Well, that sort of goes to a general question of how did administration policy get fixed in this, and indeed, in other areas. It was a pulling together of people from different perspectives, people with different assignments and trying to amalgamate them into one office. In a major sense this is one of the important responsibilities of the White House staff. Obviously the President isn't going to sit around and goof his way through a whole host of ideas, he hopes there will be some apparatus for screening and solidifying and consolidating and offering to him in an acceptable form, something for him to look at and make a decision on.

The traditional fashion was for -- this was not so much the first year as the subsequent years -- what might be characterized as a policy booklet to be put together by Sorensen in which he would have memos from those of us who were responsible or had some supervisory obligation over various major

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activities. These memos sometimes a page, sometimes five pages, sometimes longer -- would outline some of the principal issues, the alternatives together with recommendations, and basically ask for the President's approval or disapproval. I think that not all policy decisions were made there, but many were. Of course, the President had a very superb working relationship with Sorensen.

My own emphasis is primarily on the domestic side. I have had a little experience, but I'm really not the right guy to talk to with respect to matters on the national security or the Bundy side of the White House operation. On that domestic side, it was in large measure the imagination, the creativity, the strength and the verve of the agency heads, department heads, filtered a little bit with the Budget Bureau contribution. The Council of Economic Advisers in some matters, had a great deal to say, as did the people in the Office of Science and Technology on some issues. On occasion the Treasury Department's views would be quite

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critical because of fundraising or revenue securing was a piece of it, as it almost was, they had their two bits to offer.

From that point on it was kind of White House staff doing some sifting and sorting with a clear implicit understanding that any time a department head or an agency head didn't like what was recommended that he would have some opportunity to appeal that decision up the chain, either to Sorensen, the Budget director, or in some rare instances, directly to the President. Each department head had to figure for himself when he thought it was important enough to use whatever credit he had to go to the President.

I can't remember very many instances in which I was personally involved where there were fundamental appeals to the President where he sort of had to listen to a disgruntled agency head telling him why that silly White House staff didn't know what the hell they were up to. There's a sort of a sifting process that goes on and one of the strengths of the Kennedy Administration, as I viewed it, was the general ability of most people to believe that their arguments had been

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taken into account, and to only go to the President when they truly felt that either a mistake was being made or that if the President understood what was going on, he would modify something.

I remember one instance that has nothing to do with natural resources, it had to do with a tax issue. The reason I happened to be in it was because it involved housing, a big dispute about what ought to be the Administration's position with regard to taxation and savings and loan associations. The parties involved had sufficient confidence in Secretary Dillon's [C. Douglas Dillon] ability to state the arguments thoroughly and succinctly and objectively that they said that, no, they didn't want to exercise their prerogative to go to the President, they would be satisfied with Dillon's presentation. A little unusual, but at least, I think, is illustrative of the way the process functioned.

MOSS: I've gotten an impression from several of the Interior Department people that the whole business of natural resources was not exactly the bag of

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the White House, that it was largely an eastern White House and left the westerners in the Interior Department to run the Interior Department. Is this fair?

WHITE: No, I wouldn't say it's fair; I think it's incomplete. One of the great accomplishments, I believe, of Secretary Udall's Administration under two presidents was to take the Department of Interior, which had been regarded as sort of a western-oriented mechanism and to make a national department out of it. The fact of the matter is, I was one of those who were sorely distressed with President Nixon's [Richard M. Nixon] remarks at the televised introduction of his new Cabinet officers where in one fell swoop he characterized the Department of Interior as a western department in introducing Governor Hickel [Walter J. Hickel] as his secretary-designate. If I gathered from reading the newspapers, the potential secretary, Rogers Morton from Maryland, was ruled out because the westerners said to President-elect Nixon, "How can you do that? This is a western department."

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Well, I don't know how Stewart Udall felt about it, but I felt terrible. I thought it was most unreasonable because the Department of Interior may indeed have started off as only a department of interest to the seventeen western states, but by the year 1968 and '69, the damn thing was indeed doing things across the country that made a great deal of sense. I always had regarded Udall's Administration as deserving of considerable credit for having achieved that objective.

I think to some extent, despite the fact that Secretary Hickel is clearly a westerner and what I regard as the unfortunate observations by President-elect Nixon, I think the department is still more likely to be a national department than was true ten years ago. Partly this is because of greatly heightened concern about the environment, about water, about green space, parks, scenic vistas. And I think that Secretary Udall, despite whatever administrative shortcomings he may have possessed personally or the people around him may have possessed, served two

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totally diverse presidents admirable. I think he, really, over the long pull, built that department into something that many, many millions, tens or how many hundreds of millions, but certainly tens of millions of people kind of recognized as a constructive and positive influence in a nation that seems to be gobbling up its land and its resources without much rhyme or reason or understanding of thwa they're doing.

MOSS:            You mentioned shortcomings. Did you have something specific in mind or was that just a general reference?

WHITE:           Well, it was a general reference. During the first few weeks I kept a yellow pad on the radiator cover behind my desk and every time the Interior Department or somebody with the Interior Department did something that I thought was outrageous, I used to make a note of it. After, oh, no more than three weeks or so, I realized I was wasting too much of my time doing that and it wasn't very useful so I stopped. It was one of the most peculiarly administered departments I've ever had anything to do with. In part,

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it's because the fact that the thing is a conglomerate with built-in jealousies and rivalries and conflicts. I have a hunch, however, that even the best organization administered by a fellow like Stewart Udall would have run into difficulties. With all of his strengths, he just plain, in my view, wasn't particularly one of the world's great administrators.

MOSS:            What sort of things were you keeping on your pad, aside from the obvious ones -- the Jack Evans dinner boner and the mixing in with the House Rules Committee thing and Udall's getting thrown out of the Anglers' Inn, a couple of things like that? What else, what other kinds of things were you saving?

WHITE: I'm sure that by the time this particular incident I'm about to relate came to pass, I'd long since abandoned the yellow pad.

MOSS: You didn't keep it?

WHITE: Oh no. But I dare say the granddaddy of them all was the day that I looked at President Kennedy's schedule of events for the day and found that he was

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meeting with the, I can't remember, I think it was the New England congressional delegations -- certainly it was the Maine group but it may have gone beyond that and included all New Englanders -- to discuss the Passamaquoddy project. Well, being as bureaucratic as most people and as sensitive as, I'm sure, the next guy, I called O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] and asked what the hell was going on. Ken said, "Well, it's kind of a big deal. We're going to.... Who set it up?"

MOSS: Excuse me, approximately when was this, real early?

WHITE: I can't remember. My guess is it would have been in the late summer or early fall of '62.

MOSS: Okay.

WHITE: And O'Donnell said, "Well, I can't remember exactly where it was set up," but he assumed that Udall knew, and why was I so interested about it? Well, I don't know, but I just hadn't heard anything about Passamaquoddy and it was worth sort of taking a look at. This was something that wasn't free of some problem. Well, he said he didn't know and he was busy, and off I

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went to do some checking. It turns out that, indeed, President Kennedy was going to meet and did meet with these people from Congress at which time he was going to make a statement and did make a statement stating his Administration's support for the Passamaquoddy Tidal Project.

Well, the White House was certainly not one of the most bureaucratic operations, but it seemed to me that the Department and certainly Secretary Udall had scored almost a clean sweep. Among the people that they had not checked with -- this is somewhat startling -- well, first of all, the Budget Bureau, which had been very much aware of the Passamaquoddy Project for decades and very much opposed to it, but the Office of Science and Technology, which, of course, should have had a legitimate and did have a legitimate interest and were about as irate as I. They did not check with me, who regarded himself as sort of the guy in

the White House staff that you check with; but perhaps even more astonishing, Larry O'Brien, congressional liaison, was not aware of it. I don't know, there may

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be another group or two on the fringe that should have known about it but didn't. I regarded this as one of the masterful end runs of all time.

Sort of innocently and without anybody having checked, the President was in the peculiar position of about to commit himself, and by that time too late, to a program that I have a hunch that if all the bureaucrats and the bureaucratic types, including myself, had gotten a hold of would either not have come to pass or would have come to pass in a much more modified form.

I think it's a good illustration because it demonstrates that on occasion Secretary Udall, who knew that if you went through standard procedures, would be thwarted, used the most unorthodox, unconventional of approaches and sometimes accomplished more than all of the same conventional grubby types would have been able to achieve. This particular one did not happen to fall in that category of smashing successes but there is one that I think falls in that category. [Interruption]

MOSS: You had just mentioned, I think, that there was at

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least one occasion in which Udall met with some success in making an end run.

WHITE: Yeah, highly successful. That was the land conservation fund. I think there's another...

MOSS: Land and water, pollution...

WHITE: Land and water conservation fund. Secretary Udall -- I'm not sure of this -- I think, he first announced it to the press that he had such an idea. The way it was originally proposed was absolutely unworkable. But bless his heart, he had, I won't say unwittingly, probably wittingly committed Administration to him because, you know, the President can't quite disassociate himself from his Cabinet despite President Eisenhower's [Dwight D. Eisenhower] success in that direction. Before you knew it, a whole bunch of people at the Treasury Department and the Budget Bureau, including me sitting in on some of the meetings, were doing every damn thing we could to make the thing work.

It would be an interesting exercise to compare

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the original proposal with that that was only recommended by the Administration. There was some adjustment and compromises that came subsequent during the congressional treatment of it, but the thing was really almost totally recast even though it was the same concept. At the time that we were working on trying to make some sense out of the proposal, I don't think any of us were quite so laudatory about Secretary Udall and his approach to life. But now that it is passed, I am convinced that without a guy like that the damn thing would have never been done. He sort of rushed out, committed himself. The basic notion was good enough, but it was just a case of a lot of technicians spending a lot of time trying to make the thing workable, and it was done. Otherwise, I'm not sure it would ever have been done. That, I think, is the best illustration I can think of, of the manner in which Secretary Udall did a good job for two Presidents and was still a pretty crummy administrator.

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MOSS: Was there any time at which Udall's job was in danger because of these things? A lot was made of it in the press.

WHITE: Gee, I don't know. I never... I wasn't close enough to President Kennedy to have heard him say, you know, "We ought to throw that skunk out." But something like Secretary Rusk [Dean Rusk], it's inconceivable to me that there weren't times when he was irritated or annoyed at everybody who was in his Administration that he knew, and say, you know, "How the hell did I ever get that guy?" and, "Let's throw him out." But that didn't mean the next day or two days later that he meant it.

One of the tricks of success in White House staff operations, as I view it, is the opportunity to know or the insight, maybe more than insight, but that's a pretty good starting point -- to recognize when you should do something that the President tells you to do immediately or whether you wait until tomorrow to make sure that with the passage of a little time circumstances alter.

Again, to demonstrate that with a

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specific: a guy who promptly took the President's literal words and cancelled the subscription to the *Herald Tribune* ought to get fired because, you know, presidents are entitled to say, "Oh, that goddamned newspaper. I never want to see it again." But that doesn't mean somebody is supposed to go out and cancel subscriptions to it. So I think the answer to your question is I can't believe that there weren't times when President Kennedy didn't say, "I'll fire the bastard!" But I don't know that his job was ever in jeopardy. If it had been up to me, it would never have been. I would not have recommended his being fired.

MOSS: Okay, let me, just as a matter of talking about President Kennedy and the way he conducted himself and the way he spoke and so on, was it habitual

for him to speak in those terms? Certainly the public doesn't have the view of President Kennedy as saying, "I'll fire that bastard," and so on, one or two things like "My father always told me steel men were sons of bitches," and this kind of thing.

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Was he a normal man who loses his temper and that sort of thing or was he more reserved, because there are two conflicting views in the public eye at any rate.

WHITE: Oh, I don't think I'm the right one to answer because I just plain didn't see the President enough hours a month to be a good judge. But if the question is, was he a whole human being and a complete man with the capacity to get annoyed and mad and irritated and show it? The answer is "Sure, of course he was. I don't have enough of a feel for whether he used sort of earthy expressions, but I think that you can find that from others.

MOSS: Because this is the public view that came out -- you know, Kennedy was the cool and urbane man, and Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] was the earthy and profane man.

WHITE: Oh, you know how those things go, they are not clean, sharp cleavages.

MOSS: Okay, back to Udall. Let's see, on the second of February in '61, the economic recovery message went to Congress. On, I think it was the 21st

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there was a natural resources message. But sandwiched in between, Udall came out with his own policy statement on Interior policy. Was that cleared through the White House before he came out with it, do you recall?

WHITE: I can only say that it certainly wasn't anything that was cleared with me and I'm not sure that at that early stage there was any reason for it to have been cleared with me. He may have called Ted Sorensen on the telephone or may even have said something to the President at the Cabinet meeting like, you know, "I'm planning to have a little statement." Those things are sometimes sharp and crystal clear and you can run a chronology on them; more frequently, however, I think they're rather hazy and fuzzy. If a guy has a good idea.... At that stage of the game hardly anybody knew who was doing what, what the mechanics for reaching policy decisions would ultimately be.

MOSS: Okay, into a particular area now, on the revision of budget circular A-47, were you involved in this?

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WHITE: This is the cost and benefits business?

MOSS: Right.

WHITE: Yeah, yeah. I was in it very deeply.

MOSS: Okay, not it's my...

WHITE: That isn't to say that I can remember anything that happened but....

MOSS: Okay, it's my understanding that the initiative really was in the Senate with Clint Anderson [Clinton P. Anderson], that he was pressuring for some kind of revision. He sent a letter, he and the Democratic members of the Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, or in sixteen western Democratic Senators at any rate sent Udall a letter asking that something be done about this old budget circular that was sort of cramping the style of people who wanted to build new dams and to justify the cost of new dams and electric power. Then it was directed that the Interior people and the Corps of Engineers people, [Department of] Agriculture and HEW [Department of Health, Education, and Welfare] people get together and come up with something. Now what was your role in all this?

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WHITE: My recollection is not sufficiently clear that I can tell you precisely that I know at which stage of the game that I was aware of it and precisely what I did and who I checked with. But I have a general recollection of the situation, and without trying to answer as a precise a question as the one you've asked, I can just tell you roughly, I frankly had forgotten the letter from the Democratic senators.

Generally our basic operating document was President Kennedy's speech made in Billings, Montana as a candidate. One of the watchwords was the abolition of the "no new starts" policy. One of the ways you go about changing that is to look at the criteria used to evaluate various projects. So we decided the thing to do was to take a look at it. In addition to those groups or agencies that you spoke about, the Budget Bureau and the Council of Economic Advisers were right in it very deep. Carl Schwartz from the Budget Bureau was kind of the knowledgeable technician.

I can't talk about other White House staff people, but I know that I relied very heavily on people

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from the Budget Bureau for evaluation of conflicting data. Where there was some question about what had been done in the past, a reliable agency and the one that, oh, a little bit gray,

but nevertheless quite competent is the Budget Bureau. They played a good central role, and certainly within that in terms of policy.

One of the good, clear strong voices was Elmer Staats who was then the deputy director. There was a feeling on the part of many outside groups that the best thing that President Kennedy could do would be to fire Elmer Staats. I'll admit that the idea seemed attractive at the beginning, but as I stayed there I soon realized that Elmer was a superb technician and that he believed that the new President had a new policy. He was as able a man to implement it as any that you could find anywhere. So he was certainly right in the thick of it. He would always raise the policy issues in what I thought to be a fair and accurate fashion. When he had policy recommendations to make, he would put them in such a fashion that

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if they were disregarded or overruled or reversed, well, you know, he didn't break him up; he didn't go in a corner and cry, and he didn't resign. He recognized that the President and the policy-makers that he had brought with him had this responsibility. I think this A-47 was a good case to illustrate that.

In many ways the Budget Bureau, particularly after Dave Bell was succeeded by Kermit Gordon, had a view that there was something basically screwy about a government that on the one hand was paying people not to raise crops in part of the United States and spending a whole lot of money to reclaim land to grow crops in another part of the United States. Well, this gets into some pretty tight political situations. Kermit Gordon, too, is no fool. He had his views and he expressed them. He became somewhat of a villain that used to be hissed by western senators, but these were the means by which policy issues were flushed up and to some extent that policy issues were presented to the President.

A-47, one of the questions was

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of how you could go forward with what might be called an easing of items that were to be regarded as benefits, but not at the same time being a little tough on the items that ought to be costs. It was a political decision to separate them and do one first and then the other. With the benefit of hindsight I think it was probably still as good a decision now as it was then.

MOSS: It was not until May of '62 that they finally came up with the revision. Why the long lag?

WHITE: Because it's awfully tough stuff, just terribly tough stuff. You get into some extremely complex issues. For example, take just one of them taxes forgone. Oh, my goodness! You know, you get some of those guys from the Treasury Department and Council of Economic Advisers and the Budget Bureau to try to get through Stewart Udall's head and my head what the hell they're talking about, let alone get

agreement. You know, you can see where it's remarkable that anything got done. It was sort of constant pushing and pressure to be done

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that early.

MOSS: On another matter and somewhat similar -- again it's on the reclamation business -- on the Kinzua Dam controversy. You chaired a meeting at the White House, didn't you, between the engineers and the Reclamation Bureau for the Interior people, the Bureau of Indian Affairs people?

WHITE: Yes. Reclamation wasn't in it really.

MOSS: Yeah. What transpired at that meeting? I know -- I've talked to people who have been there, but nobody seems to remember just how the thing was resolved.

WHITE: Well, I don't have any sharp recollection, you know, of a particular meeting. I have some recollections about the issue and how it was resolved. There had to be a number of meetings. That was kind of a blockbuster you know. It was a tough one, and it was an early one. I would say it was rather interesting to read the *Wall Street Journal* article of either Monday or Tuesday of this week which sort of knocked the daylight out of the Corps of Engineers and didn't even refer to this project.

It was a tough one because it involved a treaty

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obligation. Although President George Washington's name was associated with it all the time. I don't think we ever actually had a document presented that had President Washington's signature on it, I think somebody else may have signed it. But it did have some tough issues that have during the past two or three years come sharply into focus, and without being sure, my guess is that if it were to develop today, I can't say that it would have gone the same way in the sense that the Kinzua project itself would have been recommended by the Administration and ultimately authorized. Classic case of the engineers saying that the city of Pittsburgh downstream with a million or a couple million people who were jeopardized by the runoff of this river and that the project and Kinzua was an essential element to the protection of them.

Where the engineers looked better inside than outside was in what they had done by way of analyzing the alternatives that were offered. I'm not a, oh, good enough economists or analyst of these water projects to know for sure, but

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with the assistance of the Budget Bureau types and with the opportunity to put questions to the engineers and to spend quite a bit of time with them, they persuaded me that Doctor Morgan [Arthur E. Morgan] certainly had some legitimate points to make, but that they had all been taken into account and that from an engineering and technical point of view this was undoubtedly the best of all the alternative sites for a project.

The problem became sort of a political one and was one of their early celebrated cases of making the engineers prove their case. I saw other cases that I was involved in personally, where I don't think they did as good a job. In the analysis, this particular case looked pretty good to me, but they had sort of a club footed way of expressing it publicly. They looked worse outside than it seemed to me they should have. Philleo Nash, who was then the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, I don't think ever took a hard headed issue that this project should not be constructed.

When the decision was made to go with the Corps of Engineers,

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and really it was -- I don't think President Kennedy got into this -- Ted Sorensen and I who took all of the factors and discussed it and decided that the merits of it were strong enough. Then the big question began to be, well, if you have to go forward with it -- which is a big "if" but getting over that "if" -- then we had a sincere obligation to really use the federal establishment to minimize the dislocating effect. I remember numerous meetings with the counsel for the Senecas, Arthur Lazarus, in which we pulled in, I believe, the Small Business Administration and certainly the Bureau of Indian Affairs, maybe one or two other agencies. A highway was an issue too, so we got the Bureau of Public Roads to bend a little bit. In part, I think it was a guilty conscience because we were not very happy with having to do it.

I think one of the best tests -- I'm sure you'll recognize this as somewhat defensive now -- was the fact that Hugh Downs of the "Today Show" had this brought to his attention through either the *New York Times* or

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some people who wrote about it, in fact many people did, and concluded that this was indeed not only a travesty, but an unnecessary one. You'll understand why I said to his credit, but to his credit he kind of decided he ought to do more than just take their letters and he asked for the opportunity to come down and talk about it. Well, we said sure. We arranged for him to go over to the Corps of Engineers who were then at Gravelly Point and with somebody from the Bureau of Indian Affairs present and myself and one or two other agencies. He spent about four hours and the engineers explained, in considerable detail that they had to me in the White House, to the Budget Bureau, what had been their steps, how they had taken each of the alternatives and what their figures were. Now, I don't know that anybody had absolutely taken their figures apart with a critical view, but accepting them somewhere near face value, it made a compelling case. I think Mr. Downs so stated not only to us but publicly when the matter presented itself.

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I don't know, I say with the knowledge of the ways things have gone in this field of looking even more carefully at the proposed major projects, it may well be that the same group of people today would reach a different conclusion. My information is that if you accept the fact that there must be a dam, that the Senecas generally believed that they had had a fair crack, that their arguments were considered -- which is an important consideration, the attitude of people toward the government -- and also that the efforts to ameliorate the impacts of it were sincere and, for the most part, successful.

MOSS: Do you recall any serious consideration of a reorganization that would put the Corps of Engineers into the Interior Department?

WHITE: Yeah, that idea comes along about, oh, once every three or four years, and certainly every new administration thinks of it. The *Washington Star* of Friday, not Friday, Wednesday reported to us that President Nixon is likely to

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propose that to Congress in the State of the Union message.

I think the general feeling was that it made sense, but that it was either impossible to accomplish or so disruptive, and primarily because of Congressional committee jurisdiction with the Agriculture committees, the Public Works committees, the Interior committees each having a piece of it. If you could figure out some way that they could all agree that one committee would have jurisdiction over the new department, you might have some little chance.

There were those who -- I wasn't in this particular fold -- who even believed that it was not beneficial to consolidate them on the ground that a little bit of rivalry might be beneficial. I'm really not sure about that, but we did engineer some agreements. I don't know whether you've stumbled on those yet, but...

MOSS: Particularly the northwest.

WHITE: Yeah. Oh, these are almost as formal as, you know, multi-nation agreements, you know, with the secretaries all signing, everybody congratulating each

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other, and good words about reasonableness, and, "Yes, fellows, that's the way to get together."

MOSS: Yes, I've seen the microfilm of the documents so I know what you mean by this being formal.

WHITE: Semicomic.

MOSS: Yes. On matters of interdepartmental coordination and so on, do you know anything of George Ball's committee and its operation, of undersecretaries?

WHITE: No.

MOSS: No. This is an elusive thing. I've had one or two people mention it, John Kelly particularly mentioned it to me as a regular, ongoing thing on routine matters at the sub-Cabinet level. I can't really find anybody else who knows anything about it.

WHITE: Wouldn't surprise me. Being an undersecretary is normally a pretty wretched job, as I'm sure you have discovered. Contact John Carver, if you haven't.

MOSS: Yeah. He says by the time he became undersecretary it either wasn't meeting or had disappeared or something.

WHITE: Call Jim Carr [James K. Carr] and ask him.

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MOSS: Were you involved at all in the Udall-Freeman [Orville L. Freeman] agreement, another treaty....

WHITE: Yeah, oh sure, this was the Park Service-Forest Service. Oh, yeah, yeah. Yeah, I was - one of the catalytic agents that brought this to pass. We all congratulated each other for statesmanship all the way around, and I must say, I really do have a tremendous admiration for both Stewart Udall and Orville Freeman. These were two very able and impressive guys in my view. Now, as frequently as happens, those people were so busy with other matters. You know, the Park Service is an important animal, but it's just one of the animals in the Interior zoo, and the Forest Service is, you know, my goodness, terribly significant. But when you're Secretary of Agriculture and you have got crop programs coming out your ear and people knocking your brains out about poor old farmers who aren't getting enough, you pay attention to it, but you don't wake up in the morning wondering what the hell happened to the Forest Service.

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So these guys could in the best of faith and without any reservations or anything else that they're all appointees of President Kennedy and the thing for them to do is to cooperate and to work together. And they mean it and when they affixed their signature, as the saying

goes to the treaty. They truly mean it. Then the guys who have got to live with these agencies, these sub-agencies and with these responsibilities day in and day out and who have got congressional pressures and who have to live with their own bureaucracies begin to figure out that, well, I'm sure the Secretary really didn't know what he was getting into, or if he did he didn't mean it, and it erodes a little bit.

But at that lofty level, there was no doubt in my mind that these were a couple of guys truly trying to be cooperative and for the most part it worked. Toward the tail end, this was during the Johnson Administration, the princes had a falling out over some damn project and all hell broke loose, but during the Kennedy years, I think the agreement held. Certainly neither one of

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them disavowed it, I won't say openly, because the whole thing wasn't open, but semi-openly. So as I said, I think of these guys, both of them, as truly fine men and not afflicted by bureaucratic insecurities.

MOSS: How were they gotten together on this? Who got them together? Was it their own initiative or somebody else?

WHITE: Well, the natural tendency, since I think it worked pretty well, is for me to take all the credit for it, but I can't remember how it came to pass. It may have risen out of the preparation of the message. It's interesting how a number of problems would get kind of highlighted in the preparation of the congressional messages as you circulated it around the various departments. Guys would naturally send a copy down to each of their constituent groups and then somebody would say, "Hey, you know, better watch that one."

MOSS: Have anything to do with the creation of the [Bureau of] Outdoor Recreation Advisory Council?

WHITE: No, that came later. I think it was....

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MOSS: Because this was sort of in the works beforehand with the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission report. It has recommended such a council. I was wondering if maybe this had prompted it.

WHITE: No, I think it's the other way around. There must have been some kind of a dispute. Sometimes the.... I don't know why, it was Oregon, it was the Oregon Cascades or something like that.

MOSS: Oregon Dunes.

WHITE: Oregon Dunes?

MOSS: Yeah, there was a forest service interest in that.

WHITE: And during the jockeying over that I think there came to be the need to work something out as to how these would operate. It may have been that in the preparation of the message in which the President was going to recommend that the Oregon Dunes be made a, no, I don't know whether it was a national park or a national seashore or a national forest or some damn thing, that the duality of interests flushed itself up, and people then began to talk about the

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bitter rivalry and struggles that had existed between those roughly comparable sub-agencies of Interior and Agriculture. I can tell you one incident which, oh, I can't say it's one of the most bizarre that happened to me that I was aware of personally, but it's a contender. It certainly is a superb illustration of the improper working of the basic principle which is that the President always does good things and the Secretaries and the departments always do the bad things. The preparation of one message on natural resources, and my guess is, it's the '62 one -- President Kennedy, bless his innocent heart, was about to send up a message and in it all of his trusted advisers were giving him the best of information. The fact of the matter is I think this one came along at a time when some damn thing happened and Sorensen didn't even review it, which was unusual. Most of the time he reviews it, and reviewing means anything from taking a look at it to rewriting it depending upon how much time he had. There's just no question about his capacity to take the same

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subject matter and do a much better job than the guy who handed it to him.

In any event, in the message the President was going to recommend a number of specific projects to be made national parks, national seashores, or national monuments. The message had been typed up by Bill Hopkins' [Williams J. Hopkins] office in the White House. Bill Hopkins is the executive clerk who does all these things. I got a call from Congressman Henry Reuss...

MOSS: Hold it just a moment. I want to...

[BEGIN SIDE II, TAPE I]

MOSS: Okay, you said....

WHITE: Well, the message that was prepared for the President to send to the Congress -- I believe it was '62. it may have been '63 -- detailed the specific



recommendations for the creation of national parks and seashores and national monuments. The thing was in the process of being typed up for the President. You know, we had a schedule and it was moving right on schedule. The newsmen knew it was coming out. That afternoon that it

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was being typed and ready for delivery the same day, I got a call from Congressman Henry Reuss, who was ever so slightly out of his head. He was just ape, saying, "Now, listen." He said, "I'm just going to tell you, I'm going to blast President Kennedy all over the place. In fact we called O'Donnell. I want to go in and see him because you have, or he, or you guys in the White House have taken out the Ice Age National [Scientific Preserve] Monument." I said, "Henry, what the hell are you talking about? I never heard of it before in my life. What is it?"

Believe it or not, there is up in the great state of Wisconsin in his congressional district a project known as the Ice Age National Monument. I said, "Listen, I've been over that draft four hundred times and I swear to you I have never heard of it." He said, "Listen, don't give me that stuff because I just talked to the Interior Department and they assured me that they had recommended it and that the White House had deleted it." I said, "Listen, you know, scout's honor, you can believe me or not,

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but I have never before this telephone conversation heard of the damn thing." He said, "Well, there's got to be something wrong." I said, "Yes, indeed, there's got to be something wrong." I said, besides, Henry, for goodness sakes, you know, if we were going to knock it out, we would tell Interior to knock it out and tell them that, you know, if you asked us, we'd say, 'They knocked it out.' It isn't the other way around."

So we found out and I checked it right away because, you know, this guy was really going to blast President Kennedy. And I was annoyed and disappointed and frustrated and trying to figure out how this could've happened because I just knew, unless I'd slipped every wheel I've ever had, that we had not knocked out any projects.

So we called over to the Interior and I found the guy in the Secretary's office who told me, "Oh, yeah, sure." He said, "Don't worry about Henry. He's a good guy." "Oh, what do you mean he's a good guy?" I said "He's out of his mind! He's just raving mad. He's going to tear the President limb from limb." He said, "About what?" I said, "About what?"

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About the Ice Age National Monument." "Oh," he says, "is he yaking about that?" "Is he yaking about it? He told me that he had talked to Secretary Udall and Udall had told him that the White House had deleted his project and he is just sore as a boil." "Yes, well, I guess we did tell him we sent..."

And then I got mad. You know, what the hell. That is not the way you play the game. So I said, "All right, is there any reason why we can't put that in?" He said, "No, no. If you guys want to put it in, hell, that's all right." So I called the Budget Bureau and got, they said, "Well, you know, it's not that big a deal, but we certainly wouldn't have any objection to it, and if Interior had recommended it, I don't think we would have opposed it. "

So I called Henry Reuss back. I'm sure I didn't check with the President. I may have. I may have told him afterwards, and I don't think I could get Sorensen. So he just kind of after having touched these bases, we

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put the project in the list, but too late to get it in the mimeographed copy of the special message that Salinger's [Pierre E. G. Salinger] office distributed. But because of the timing, Hopkins was able to take the original, get that page on them and retype that page and include the Ice Age National Monument in the two original pages, one for each body, the House and Senate.

So, so far as I am aware -- and I'm sure there must be other examples -- the only one I'm aware of where the message that was distributed to the press had any deviation from that what was actually said, included the Ice Age National Monument.

MOSS:           Okay, fine. We'll cut that off there.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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