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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 Gwirtzman.

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
the discussion on this interview, and that's the Interior Department and its appointments. And 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, 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 January '61. I either knew before or got to know all of the principal appointees, and I was involved in
some personnel problems that developed subsequently.

But first batch, I'm just really not the right guy to talk to. I presume Ralph Dungan and Sarg Shriver 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 the question of 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 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
didn't know about it. And 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: And it is, I think, much more important to know that with respect to oil, at least during the time [Myer] that he was there, Mike Feldman was the guy who had the liaison with the Department on that particular subject. And 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 not happened with respect to oil and to some extent both of us were in the... We 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?
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 you happened 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. And, for example, on the 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, who had been my boss when I was at TVA [Tennessee Valley Authority], 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, and I all of a sudden was the guy who was responsible for that.
MOSS: Did you in fact handle that message?

WHITE: Yes, yes. If, for example, just in the distribution of responsibilities and normally the guy who would make this distribution would be Ted Sorensen. If he said to Mike and me and Dick Goodwin, "Look, now you take... We got to schedule with messages. The President wants to get a whole bunch of them up there very early so people won't say that, 'Well, if we'd only had them in time, we could have acted on them.'" And of course, there was the clear atmosphere, 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 part of it 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 consider-
able 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—[McGeorge] Bundy. And 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. And that particular assignment, which in some senses was really a haphazard had 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 that it was not an unnatural thing for me to do. And it started from the message in '61, carried right
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 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. And 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, and necessarily came from outside. This was not true all the way across the board.

MOSS: You know, where did your best suggestions come from?
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'll answer 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 Stewart Udall proposed that I put in that category, but I can't tell you if they were dreamed up in his mind, or that any assistant secretary that came into his 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
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 through which that Administration
is most likely to be known came after the first year
and if I had to give the answer, I would give them
to the secretariat, who were the people 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. That 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, to Sorensen, nobody and
everybody else?
MOSS: Okay, how once you got all these ideas, what did you then do with them? Now you've got a mass of full-blown ideas.

WHITE: Well, that sort of goes to a general question of how did the Administration policy get fixed in this, and indeed, and other areas? And it was a pulling together of people from different perspectives, people with different assignments and trying to amalgamate them into one office. And in a major sense this is one of the important responsibilities of the White House Staff, because obviously the President isn't going to sit around and goof his way through a whole host of ideas. He hopes there'll be some apparatus for screening and solidifying and consolidating in offering to him 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--for 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
activities. These memos, sometimes a page, sometimes five pages, sometimes longer, would outline some of the principal issues, the alternatives together with the recommendations, and basically ask for the president's approval or disapproval. And I think that not all policy decisions were made there, but many were. And 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 a large measure the imagination, the creativity, the strength and the verve of the agency heads, the department heads, filtered a little bit with budget bureau contribution, 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
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 would have some opportunity to appeal that decision up the chain, either to Soren- sen, the Budget director, or in some rare instances, directly to the President. And 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 or 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 is that the idea that he was the general ability of most people to believe that their arguments had been
taken into account, and to only go to the President when they truly felt that either a mistake was being made or that the President understood what was going on, he would modify something. I remember one instance that has nothing to do with natural resources, had to do with a tax issue since it involved the reason I happen to be in it because it involved the housing dispute about what ought to be the Administration position with regard to taxation and savings and loan associations. The parties involved had sufficient confidence in Secretary [C. Douglas] Dillon's ability to state the arguments thoroughly and succinctly and objectively they said no, they didn't want to exercise their prerogative to go to the President. Would they 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
the White House, that is 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 incom-
plete. One of the great accomplishments, I believe,
of Secretary Udall's Administration under two Presi-
dents 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 [Richard
M.] Nixon's 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 [Walter
J.] Hickel as his Secretary-designate. And if I
gathered from reading the newspapers, the potential
secretary, Roger Morton from Maryland, was ruled out
because the Westerners said to President-elect Nixon,
"How can you do that? This is a Western Department."
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, and 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 clean 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
totally diverse presidents admirably. And he, really, over the long pull built that department into something that many, many millions of tens or how many hundreds of millions, but certainly tens of millions of people kind of recognized that it was 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 what 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 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. And it was one of the most peculiarly administered departments I've ever had anything to do with. In part,
it's because of the fact that the thing is a con-
glomerate 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 run into difficulties. With
all of his strengths, he just plain, in my view,
wasn't particularly one of the world's great adminis-
trators.

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: Well, I'm sure that by the time this particular in-
cident 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
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 the 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 [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--this?

Little "Who set it up?"

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

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

MOSS: Okay.

WHITE: And O'Donnell said, can't remember exactly where it was set up," but he assumed that Udall knew, and what 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. And he said he didn't know and he was busy and off I
went to do some checking. And 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. This, I don't know, there may
be another group or two that were on the fringe, that should have been known about it but didn't. I regarded this as one of the masterful hand-runs of all time. And sort of innocently 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 of all the bureaucrats and 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 would have 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 that I think
least one occasion in which Udall met with some success in making an end run.

WHITE: Yeah, highly successful, and that was the land conservation formula. I think there’s another . . .

MOSS: Land and Water Pollution . . .

WHITE: Land and Water Conservation . . . Fund . . . And that’s Secretary Udall—-I’m not sure of this—-I think he first announced it to the press that he had such an idea.

And the way it was originally proposed was absolutely unworkable. But bless his heart, he had, I won’t say unwittingly, probably wittingly committed the Administration to him because, you know, the President can’t quite disassociate himself from his cabinet despite President Eisenhower’s success in that direction. And 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. <And the original proposal—be an interesting exercise to compare
the original proposal with that that was only recom-

cmended by the Administration. There was some
adjustment and compromise that came subsequent
during the congressional treatment of it, but the
thing was really almost totally recast even though
it was the same concept. And at the time that we
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've been
never done. It just wouldn't have 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.
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: 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 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 meant it. One of the tricks of success in the White House staff operations, as I view it, is the opportunity to know or the insight—may-be 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 till tomorrow to make sure that with the passage of a little time circumstances alter. Again, demonstrate that with a
specific: A guy who probably 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's supposed to go out and cancel subscriptions to it. So I think the answer to your question is I can't believe 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.
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. I think right.

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 the answer is that from others.

MOSS: Because the thing is, the public view that came out, you know, Kennedy was the cool and urbane man, and Johnson was the earthy and profane man.

WHITE: Oh, you know how those things go, they're 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. Oh, I think it was the twenty-
first 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 state-
ment." Those things are sometimes sharp and crystal
clear and you can run a chronology on them. More
frequently, however, I think they're rather easy and
fuzzy, and... If a guy has a good idea... at that stage of the game hardly anybody knew who
was doing what, what the mechanics were reaching
policy decisions would ultimately be.

MOSS: Okay, into a particular area now, the provision
of budget circular A-47, were you involved in
this?
WHITE: This is the cost and benefits business?
MOSS: Right.
WHITE: Yeah, yeah. I was in it very deeply.
MOSS: Okay, now it's my...
WHITE: Better than 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 Clinton P. Anderson, that he was pressuring for some kind of revision. He sent a letter, he and the Democratic members of Interior and Insular Affairs 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 and then it was directed that the Interior people and the Corps of Engineers people, Agriculture and HEW [Health, Education and Welfare] people get together and come up with something. Now what was your role in all this?
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. And one of the watchwords was the abolition of the 'no new starts' policy. And one of the ways you go about changing that is to look at the criteria used to evaluate various projects. And so we decided the thing to do was to take a look at it. And 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 a knowledgeable technician and I can't talk about other White House staff people, but I know I relied very heavily on people
from the Budget Bureau for evaluation of conflicting data, and 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, and 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 President Kennedy could do would be to fire Elmer Staats.

Well, I'll admit that the idea seemed attractive at the beginning, but sort of 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 as to implement this any that you could find anywhere. So he was certainly right in the thick of it and he would always raise the policy issues, what I thought to be a fair and accurate fashion, to form an opportunity even when he had recommendations to make, policy recommendations to make, that put him in such a fashion that
if they were disregarded or overruled or reversed, well, you know, he didn't break them 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. And 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, and Kermit Gordon, too, is no fool. He had his views and he expressed them, and 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 the policy issues were presented to the President. A-47 was one of the questions was
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. You know, like it was a political decision to separate them and do one first and then the other. The benefit of hindsight, I think, 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, just one of them, taxes forgiven. 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
that early.

MOSS: On another matter and somewhat similar to the Kingwood 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: Yeah, reclamation wasn't in it really.

MOSS: What transpired at that meeting? I mean—I've talked to people who've 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 a kind of a blockbuster and it was a tough one and it was an early one and 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 daylights out of the Corps of Engineers and didn't even refer to this project. It was a tough one because it involved a treaty
obligation and 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. And somebody else may have signed it, but it did have some tough issues that are 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've gone the same way in the sense that the Kinzua Project itself would've 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 run-off of this river and the Project at Kinzua was an essential element to the protection of them. While 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 economist or analyst to these water projects to know if for sure, but
that the insistence 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 [Arthur E.] Morgan certainly
had some legitimate points to make, but that they
had all been taken into account and that from a
engineering and technical point of view this was
undoubtedly the best of all the alternative sights for a project. The problem became sort of a po-
itical one and was one of their early celebrated
clauses of making the engineers prove their case.
So other cases that I was involved with 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,
and really it was I don't think President Kennedy got into this,

Ted Sorensen and I who took all the factors and discussed it and de-

cided 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 and I remember

numerous meetings with the counsel for the Senecas,

Arthur Lazarus, which we pulled in, I believe, the

Small Business Administration and certainly the

Bureau of Indian Affairs, maybe one or two other

agencies. Highway was an issue too. We got the

Bureau of Public Roads to bend a little bit. Part

I think it was a guilty conscious because we were not very happy with having to do it. I think one

of the best tests--I'm sure you'll recognize

t his 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
some people who wrote about it, like many people did, and concluded that this was indeed not only a travesty, but an unnecessary one. You understand why I say 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 Greatly Point and with somebody from the Bureau of Indian Affairs present, myself and one or two other agencies, we spent about four hours and the engineers explained 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 somewhat on your face value, and made a compelling case. I think Mr. Downs so stated not only to us but publicly when the matter presented itself.
don't know. As I say with the knowledge of the way 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, then it was generally, that the Senecas generally believed that they had had a fair crack, that their arguments were considered, which is an important consideration, and 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—oh, about once every three or four years, and certainly every new Administration thinks of it. Now if you... The Washington Star of Friday, not Friday, Wednesday reported to us that President Nixon is likely to
proposed 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—but there were some 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-agency agreements, you know, with the secretary all signing, everybody congratulating each
other, and good words about reasonableness, and, "Yes, fellows, that's the way to get together."

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

WHITE: Semi-comic.

MOSS: On matters of inter-departmental coordination and so on, do you know anything of George Ball's committee and its operation, or under secretaries?

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, 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 under secretary is normally a pretty wretched job, as I'm sure you've discovered. What about John Carver, if you haven't...

MOSS: Yeah. What about the...? He says by the time he became under secretary it either wasn't meeting or had disappeared or something. So well...

WHITE: Call Jim Carr and ask him.
MOSS: Were you involved at all in the Udall-Orville L.Freeman agreement and other treaties . . .

WHITE: Yeah, oh sure, this was the Park Service-Forest Service . . . oh, yeah, yeah. Yeah, we were 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 it happens, those people were so busy with other matters you know, the Park Service is an important animal, but he's just one of the animals in the Interior Zoo, and the Forest Service is, you know, my goodness, it's terribly significant, but when you're Secretary of Agriculture and you got crop programs coming out your ear and people knocking your brains out about poor old farmers aren't getting enough, the Forest Service is now you pay attention to it, but you don't wake up in the morning wondering what the hell happened to the Forest Service. So
these guys could in the best of faith and without any reservations or anything else agree 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 when they fix their signature.

The same goes to the treaty. They truly mean it.

Then the guys who got to live with these agencies, these sub-agencies and with these responsibilities day in and day out and who got congressional pressures and who have to live with their own bureaucracies began 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 for during the Kennedy years, I think the agreement held. Certainly neither one of
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 afflicted by bureaucratic insecurities.

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

WHITE: Well, the natural tendency, since they worked pretty well, is for me to take all the credit for it, but I can't remember how it came to pass. It might have arisen out of the preparation of the messages--it's interesting how a number of problems would get kind of highlighted in the preparation of the congressional messages you circulated around 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 Outdoor Recreation Advisory Council?

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

WHITE: No, I think it's the other way around. It must have been some kind of a dispute. Sometimes... 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 about them.

WHITE: And during the jockeying over that I think there came to be a need to work something out as to how these would operate. It may've 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 national seashore or national forest or some damn thing, that the quality of interests flushed itself up, and people then began to talk about the
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 and it certainly is a superb illustration of the improper working of the basic principle which is the President always does good things and the secretaries in the departments always do the bad things. 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 best of information. Fact of matter is I think this one came along at a time when some damn thing happened and Sorensen didn't even review it, which is unusual. Most of the time he review it, and reviewing means anything from taking a look at it to rewriting it depending upon how much time he had. And there's just no question about his capacity to take the same
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' 
office in the White House. Bill Hopkins is the 
executive clerk who does all these things. I got 
a call from Congressman Henry
MOSS: Hold it just a moment. I want to ...

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

MOSS: Okay, you said . .

WHITE: Well, the President was going to . . . 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. Then we had a schedule
and it was moving right on schedule. The newsmen
knew it was coming out, and that afternoon that it
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 tell you, I'm going to blast President Kennedy all over the place. In fact I 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 monument." I said, "Henry, what the hell are you talking about? I never heard of it before. 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've 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,
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." 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—he was 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, 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, 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 from limb to limb." He said, "Well, about what?" I said, "About what?
About the ice age national monument. "Oh," he says, "Is he yackin' about that?" "Is he yackin' 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, it'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 told him afterwards, and I don't think I could get just kind of after having touched these bases, we
put the project in the list, but too late to get it in the mimeographed list or the mimeographed copy of the special message that [Pierre E. G.] Salinger's office distributed. But _we did_--because of the timing, Hopkins was able to take the original, to get that page to them and retype that page and include the ice age national monument and then that those 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 were the message that was distributed to the press, or that had any deviation from that what was actually said included the ice age national monument.

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