REMARKS BY
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I am pleased to be here tonight at this Reclamation family gathering.

Darrell Webber asked me to talk informally about a few of the personal aspects of the Commissioner's job, including some of the politics involved and our relationship with Congress, the Administration and environmental groups. I also want to comment briefly on our program for the coming fiscal year—which will be the largest in the Bureau's history.

At the outset let me say that it is a great personal honor and privilege to head what I consider not only one of the great technical
organizations in the world, but one of the most people-oriented programs in government.

Some often lose sight of our true purpose—and from time to time I feel a need to remind them of it. Reclamation is famous for its great dams, powerplants and other facilities which certainly are monuments to man's engineering genius.

But more important is what these facilities do for the long-range benefit of people by putting water to good use—to grow food; to create clean energy; to supply cities, homes, and industry; to provide outdoor recreation for millions; and to maintain fish, wildlife and environmental values.

I think the record shows that over the past 75 years Reclamation has probably done more for people in the West and in the entire Nation than almost any other Federal program you could name.
One of my most important duties is being an advocate and spokesman for the Reclamation program—and it's the task I probably enjoy most because I deeply believe that what we are doing contributes to the quality of life for people in the West and throughout the Nation.

Of course there are many other roles one must assume in this position—and while the job has many demands, it also has its rewards.

One of the greatest demands of course is simply time. The Bureau presently has over 8,000 employees and a budget well over a half-billion dollars a year. Like any other large organization, the volume of paperwork alone can be crushing.

The workload is such that I find I'm usually in the office until 7 or 8 o'clock at night, long after most of the Washington staff has gone home. I use this period—free from interruptions—to get much of the paperwork done. Sometimes
physical comfort becomes a factor in staying late at the office. In the Interior Building they turn the heat off in winter and the air conditioning off in summer at the end of the normal work day, and it sometimes gets too uncomfortable to stay late.

So very often I take a briefcase full of work home at night and on weekends. And whenever I travel, I work on the airplane polishing speeches and so forth, usually on the way to the event at which I am to speak.

There are some social demands connected with the job—although I have found that it's pretty much up to the individual. Washington is a very social town, and it is said that you could attend a dinner or reception or party every night of the year. The opportunity is certainly there if you have the time and the inclination.
Personally, I have found that most of my meetings with top administration officials and members of Congress have been business meetings or ceremonial affairs rather than social gatherings.

Politics, naturally, is an important element in the Reclamation program. The politics most affecting the Bureau is not necessarily the partisan kind, although partisanship does have some influence, especially in the long run.

I recall that when the Republican Administration took over in 1969 we were asked why there were so many Reclamation projects underway in Democratic States. We pointed out that one reason was that Democrats had been making decisions—in the Congress and in the White House—for the previous eight years.

But with few exceptions, the politics in water resources is more the politics of priorities—
and as far as the Bureau is concerned, partisanship is not a factor in the projects we recommend for authorization and funding.

We are often asked to prepare lists of projects by order of priorities--based on benefit cost ratios, social, economic, and environmental returns--and we strive to be objective.

However, the Administration and the Congress can and often do have different ideas--and it's sometimes difficult to find a direct relationship between our own list of priorities and theirs.

The Administration, for example, may view the reduction of Federal spending as a number one national priority. Many times public works projects become an easy target for budget cuts, even for projects with highly desirable benefits. This might hold up a project or slow its construction.
Construction timetables are also heavily influenced by the Committee system in Congress. I'm sure most of you who followed Congressman Aspinall's career here in Colorado are aware of how this system works.

Committee and Subcommittee chairmen wield enormous power in deciding which projects should be started and at what rate they should progress. Since seniority is largely the key to becoming a committee or subcommittee chairman, the longer a Congressman or Senator represents a certain area the more power and influence he has. Some of them have been known to use this power to change our priority list.

For the most part, however, we work closely with all Congressmen and Senators regardless of party labels—and we have a very close relationship with both the majority and minority members of the Congressional committees we deal with.
Generally there is tremendous support for the Reclamation program in Congress. It is true that some of the newcomers to Congress sometimes have preconceived notions about the program or question its value.

But I have found that once they learn a little more about us, they usually come around. And if they stay in Washington for awhile, they usually end up as supporters of the program.

Of course there are some mavericks and headline hunters, but even our most vocal critics are usually hung up on one or two features of the program such as the 160-acre limitation or certain environmental aspects. I have met very few in Congress who are opposed to the entire program per se.

In fact our image with both Congress and the Administration is quite good, and I can't
remember in my 16 years experience in Washington when it has been better.

Perhaps the best illustration of this is our annual budget hearings before subcommittees of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees. When I first started to attend these hearings 16 years ago, they often lasted as many as five full days. Last year in the House and again this year the hearings lasted only half a day.

I lay this to the fact that Committee members have confidence in the integrity and credibility of Bureau personnel. It's obvious to them that we do our homework, and that we know what we are talking about. And the more we are prepared to answer questions, the less likely they are to ask them.

So those of you who participate in or prepare material for our annual program conferences and
skull practices will be glad to know that your work really pays off.

I said that our image was generally good, but we do have a problem with one Congressional committee—the House Government Operations Committee. This committee does not normally deal with Reclamation, but it recently issued a report charging that the Bureau is spending or is about to spend millions of dollars over its authorizations, which is simply not true. The Committee report was based in large part on a previous study by the General Accounting Office on our cost indexing procedures.

I won't go into the details, except to say that this is purely a dispute over computation methods used in determining how inflation has increased the base or authorized expenditure limit for a Reclamation project.
But to put it into perspective, I think you should know that if we were to use the methods they suggest we would have already exceeded the total cost authorization on at least one project which we haven't yet started to build.

This does not imply that their suggestions are all bad. We have already made many of the changes recommended and will continue to implement others.

Unfortunately, this matter was blown out of proportion in the press. However the report had little effect on other members of Congress.

During our budget hearings before the House, Chairman Joe Evins asked me if I had anything to say about the charges. I said, "I'm sorry but I haven't seen the report. That committee is one of those which feels that it should release copies of its reports to the press before it
gives the agency involved a chance to read the charges against it."

Chairman Evins then picked up a copy of the report and asked, "You haven't seen this?" I said no, and he said, "Here, take my copy."

A couple of days later before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee the chairman asked me, "Are you exceeding your authorized ceilings?" I said, "No sir," and that was all there was to it.

I have been dwelling on our relationship with Congress, but equally important is our interaction with the Administration and officials of the Department.

This relationship has been greatly complicated during this Administration by the many changes taking place, particularly in the last two or three years.
For example, during the Johnson Administration we had one Secretary of the Interior, Stewart Udall, and one assistant secretary, Ken Holum, dealing with the Bureau for eight years. Well, in the last year alone we have had three Secretaries of the Interior and a musical chairs situation among the personnel in the assistant secretary's office.

Key jobs have been filled by many different bright, young, capable men—almost all of whom knew nothing about Reclamation when they came on board. With few exceptions we have had to educate these young men as to our mission and purpose, and then have watched in frustration as they were moved elsewhere just when they were beginning to understand what the program is all about.

We are making progress, though, and I think
our program increases reflect the rapport we have achieved with both the Administration and Congress.

As to our relationship with environmental groups, I can't help but believe that the environmental pendulum is beginning to swing the other way.

And one of the reasons may be the extreme number of environmental suits which have been filed solely to delay action, thus increasing costs by millions of dollars.

At a recent meeting of the Water Resources Congress in St. Louis, attended by environmentalists as well as water resource developers and members of Congress, I was surprised to hear so many people talking about what must be done to halt these delaying tactics.

It was pointed out that practically anyone with the $24 fee could file a suit that would
automatically delay a project and boost the costs. There was a great deal of talk about modifying the environmental protection laws, perhaps to give the courts the right to determine whether an action was frivolous—and if so, to assess the plaintiffs for the damages resulting from their actions.

I am not predicting such changes in the law, but I think those discussions indicated that more and more people are becoming aware of the problem and feel that something must be done about it.

Incidentally, Reclamation has not yet lost an environmental suit, although we've had a total of 27 filed against us—some of which are still pending.

Now I want to talk a little about our upcoming program. The proposed fiscal 1977 budget for Reclamation calls for a total program of about $850
million—and as I mentioned earlier, this is the largest program in our history.

At present we have some 218 major equipment and construction contracts underway, and during the next 19 months we expect to issue 65 major new specifications with an estimated total contract value of $985 million. That is going to throw an almost unprecedented load on you people who work at the Engineering and Research Center.

This budget level will give us an orderly and realistic program. But it takes both dollars and people to do a proper job, and although we're getting the dollars, we are being pressed to handle constantly growing programs with constantly decreasing numbers of personnel.

Ten years ago, for example, we had a budget of about $329 million and over 11,700 people. Our current fiscal year budget is almost double what it was a decade ago, but we only have about
8,600 people on board and we are already over the personnel ceiling set by the Office of Management and Budget.

Although we are doing everything possible to increase productivity, we simply need more people to do an efficient job. We have made an urgent request for an increase in our employment ceiling--and I know that those of you who are working many hours of overtime each week recognize this pressing need.

Aside from the personnel problem, however, the Reclamation program is in very good shape--and our future looks exceedingly bright in my view.

Our program has undergone almost constant evolution over the past 75 years as we went from a simple irrigation program to today's multi-purpose program which creates many lasting benefits for people.
That evolution is continuing as we move into the era of total water management, which will include increasingly sophisticated water augmentation, conservation and reuse programs to get maximum use out of limited supplies--and to meet all the growing demands for water in our changing society.

In closing, I want to express my appreciation to each of you for your contribution to the Bureau. I know of no other group within government--or anywhere--that can match the talent and dedication of our Reclamation employees. I think we can all take great pride in our accomplishments.