

Washington Update – December 17, 2008

You are receiving this report two days late because I anticipated the announcement of the Interior Secretary nominee on Monday and wanted to share my reaction. And word did finally leak out late Monday that the nominee will be U.S. Senator Ken Salazar (D-CO).

This news made me discard not one but **three** passages I prepared over the weekend, one each for the three persons I had concluded (wrongly) were finalists in the selection process for the post!

Let me share some information about the man President-elect Barack Obama **will** nominate for the post. Ken Salazar has served Colorado in the United States Senate since 2005. Mr. Salazar served as Secretary of Colorado's Department of Natural Resources under Governor Roy Romer where he played a key role in that state's campaign to create the Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) Fund using state lottery receipts. He also participated in a number of scenic byways and byways kiosk dedications in the state. He has been a centrist in the Senate, opposing some of the oil and gas leasing initiatives on public lands that had adverse recreation and wildlife impacts but working with Senators of both parties to open up new offshore oil and gas leasing opportunities. He has a long and strong relationship with current Assistant Secretary of the Interior Lyle Laverly.

Now, for the politics of all this. First, Ken Salazar was a player in then-Colorado Governor Roy Romer's rehabilitation of Bruce Babbitt in 1994. You may recall that Babbitt came to Washington from Arizona, where he had been a popular governor. But his Washington persona as Secretary of the Interior was as an active environmentalist, aggressively pushing for policy change on hard-rock mining, grazing and more. And he became radioactive in the West – so much so that Western Democrats told the White House to keep him away as the mid-term elections of 1994 neared. Roy Romer set up a series of dialogues for Babbitt in the West and provided a personal demonstration of consensus development among diverse interests. Salazar was a key player in that effort, and I think the experience helped define him. Ken Salazar has now successfully run for statewide office in Colorado as both Attorney General and U.S. Senator, and has sought to balance rural and urban interests in a bellwether Western state. Second, some of the advisors in the Obama camp did not want to risk gains in Colorado and other Western states by putting an activist at the head of a department with major influence on Western lifestyles and economy.

Sen. Salazar's nomination came despite very active efforts of the "green community" to support the nomination of U.S. Representative Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ) and an inside game led by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) to secure the nomination for U.S. Representative Mike Thompson (D-CA). And it also withstood a strong movement pushing former Interior Assistant Secretary John Berry, now heading the National Zoo – and a bright, centrist and capable inside-the-Beltway guy. Sen. Salazar's name was mentioned early in the appointments process but

had not been highlighted recently because of, among other reasons, the anticipated interest in a strategy to retain Democratic Senate seats in 2010, when he would have run for reelection and would have been tough to beat. He is the fourth Democratic Senator in the current Congress who will be part of the new Administration (Obama, Biden, Clinton and now Salazar).

Some of those recently noted as candidates for the top Interior job, including John Berry and Jim Lyons (former Under Secretary of Natural Resources and Environment in the Department of Agriculture under President Clinton), may now emerge as top candidates for the Deputy Secretary spot.

The nomination has other interesting consequences. Colorado voters elected U.S. Representative Mark Udall to an open Senate seat beginning in January – he now becomes Colorado’s senior senator. And while Ken Salazar served in the Senate, Udall’s appointment to the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee was unlikely – since Salazar was on the committee already. Now, Udall is likely to get the committee assignment, and perhaps even a subcommittee chairmanship. And he is an active and recreation-focused guy, who recently introduced legislation to permit and encourage ski areas on national forests to provide diverse, year-round recreation services. And he is part of a potent Western political clan – the son of the late Mo Udall, an influential Member of Congress for 30 years, and nephew of former Interior Secretary Stewart Udall and cousin of newly elected U.S. Senator Tom Udall (D-NM).

While talking about the Senate, I’ll note that the movement of Hillary Clinton to the State Department is a loss to us in surface transportation legislation efforts later this year. She had shown interest in scenic byways, park roads and more – a part of her upstate strategy and national perspective. The two leading contenders for appointment to her seat – Caroline Kennedy and Andrew Cuomo – offer different perspectives. Cuomo is an avid boater and understands the “connecting kids to the outdoors” issue. Kennedy’s views are less known but appear to be more city-centric and aligned with cousin Bobby Kennedy, Jr. on environmental matters.

And now for other key developments. First, recreational trail interests are aggressively seeking economic stimulus monies to grow the Recreational Trails Program, administered by the Federal Highway Administration, from just under \$100 million annually to nearly \$200 million annually for three years, emphasizing a backlog of applications “shovel ready,” an in-place distribution process and the connection to the new “green infrastructure” touted by the President-elect. We are leading that effort. We are also actively supporting a coalition effort to create a new Green Corps for youth and returning servicemen and servicewomen that is focused on America’s public lands – and adds to the lure of these lands for recreation experiences.

Second, the National Tour Association deserves kudos for hosting a summit of travel and tourism organizations this week at the new U.S. Capitol Visitors Center

to develop consensus on initiatives for the new Administration.

And third, RVIA, NMMA, RVDA and others continue to make progress in calling attention to the trauma to recreation businesses created by constriction in commercial and consumer credit. The same groups are leading efforts to help recreation business with tax-code changes and other steps that will ease the challenges of the next few months.

Washington is preparing for Inaugural events expected to be far larger than ever before – it is even forecast that the Washington area cell phone system capability will be swamped. And the President-elect has a great deal of political capital as his term begins. If that energy begins to generate new optimism and a rise in consumer confidence, we may see reason for smiles by mid-2009.

Until next week.....

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