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THE WHITE HOUSE

EXCHANGE OF REMARKS
BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT
AND

THOMAS S. KLEPPE
UPON BEING SWORN-IN
AS

SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR

THE EAST ROOM

11:38 A.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Secretary-Designate Kleppe, Vice President, Mrs. Kleppe, Justice Stewart, distinguished Members of the Congress and the Administration, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

In the great State of North Dakota there is a town with the wonderfully self-confident name, and I quote, "Can Do." (Laughter)

Today it gives me great pleasure to honor a man from North Dakota who doesn't come from Can Do but he sure lives up to that name, or that title, in spirit. In Government service he has proven beyond any doubt that he can do and actually has done, and I am certain he will continue to do an outstanding job in the new post as Secretary of Interior.

Of course, I speak with great emphasis on Tom Kleppe. Into his trust will be placed many of the vast, vast resources that have made this Nation great.

Tom, I know you will faithfully serve the 214 million Americans whose natural resources are now pledged by you to protect. I am sure that your rural roots and your love of our country will be the basis of sound, constructive policy.

I look at your background and see how much an individual American with initiative and good common sense can accomplish.

Tom was born in the small North Dakota farming community of Kintyre. Tom is the first native of his home State to serve in the Cabinet of the United States.

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Tom dropped out of college to work in his father's grain elevator, became a bank vice president at 21, the youngest mayor in the City of Bismarck, North Dakota, president of a manufacturing company in Bismarck, elected to the Congress twice--and I was honored to serve with him for four years--a young man who earned money at an early age as a rodeo rider. (Laughter)

He has always maintained a very active interest in sports. He is, according to many, a top handball player and tennis player. (Laughter) He allegedly shoots golf in the low 80s and I am told the history books record that he even made a hole-in-one on one occasion.

Tom, I know another golfer -- and I won't mention any names -- who swings on occasion a mean 9-iron and who is looking for a partner with all of your alleged prowess. (Laughter)

All I can say, Tom, is not only will I look forward to your advice and counsel on environment, and our natural resources, but if you have any thoughts, any constructive ones on my back-swing, I will be very grateful. (Laughter)

In Tom's four and a half years as a small business administrator, small businessmen received nearly \$8 billion in loans to start or expand their businesses and help our economy. That figure represents more than one-half of the loans in dollar amount that SBA has approved in its 22-year history.

As a result of SBA initiative, about \$65 billion in contracts from the Federal Government went to small business during Tom's tenure as its administrator. Small business now gets approximately one-third of all Federal Governmental contracts.

Tom, I know you will bring to the Department of Interior the same dedicated professionalism that you brought to SBA. I have great confidence that you will meet your new responsibilities in a way that will benefit the Nation and all Americans.

One of your most important challenges will be to protect the environment of our public lands, the tremendous beauty which is one of our greatest natural heritages. At the same time, you must find a way to extract energy from those lands, energy that is critical to our economy.

You must assure the best possible Federal-State relationship as we develop the oil resources of our outer continental shelf, the oil shale resources of the Rockies and the coal resources throughout our Nation.

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You must reconcile the national need for energy which makes possible the jobs which we must have if America is to continue progress with the demand for environmental quality. You must forever be mindful that the public lands under Federal stewardship belong to all Americans. Even when we grant privileges to one portion or another of our citizenry to use these public lands, they must never be used to benefit the few to the detriment of the many.

I know you will do a first class job, as you always have; that you will bring dedication to this job that will benefit our entire country.

Now I am very pleased to ask Justice Potter Stewart to swear-in our new Secretary of the Interior, Thomas Kleppe.

(Swearing-in.)

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SECRETARY KLEPPE: Mr. President, Mr. Justice Stewart, members of the Cabinet, Counsellors, my many friends that are here in this audience from SBA, from Interior, my friends from out of State, and all of my family:

First of all, thank you very much for coming. How much I appreciate this, and how much this means to us, and, yes, how much we hope and believe it means to our native State of North Dakota.

Mr. President, I am extremely grateful to the observations that you made about our State and the observations that you made about my terrible backswing -- I can be no help to you. I am a shanker on occasion and that is a bad thing.

Let me, for a moment, if I can, tell you about a claim to fame that we think we have in our family. This is a county in Michigan by the name of Ottawa -- if there are any Democrats in the room let me apologize because it is a very strong Republican county. It is the native home of my wife and when she became old enough to vote, she voted for a Congressman by the name of Jerry Ford and that was the first time she ever had a chance to vote.

Little did she know then (Laughter) that this event today would take place.

Might I also suggest to you that it is a long ways from Kintyre to this podium and this microphone right now and I recognize it very acutely. That is why, I guess, I have a special appreciation for so many members of my total family structure that can be here for this occasion.

It seems to me that the President has pretty well covered the area of responsibility that exists. How are we going to conserve and protect the natural resources of our country, how are we going to protect the environment? How are we going to preserve and restore the quality of air and water? How are we going to develop more energy from the resources that we have? How are we going to improve the life of our first native Americans, the American Indian? How are we going to live up to the responsibilities that fall to us in the trust territories.

These and, yes, many others come in the category of the problems that I like to address them today as the opportunities and the objectives that we have--and I hope all you people in Interior are listening, because we are going to be together--are to take those problems and to translate them into answers, into accomplishments.

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Somehow or another there has got to be a way. I love this land of ours, this United States of America, with its wealth, with its strengths, with its people, with its resources. There has got to be a way we can communicate with others, in the States, in the Congress, in our Administration -- people in all walks of life -- to bring about solutions, a translation, a movement from problems to accomplishments. Those are our objectives. To that task, Mr. President, I and we are dedicated.

I would be totally remiss if I did not, at the close of these brief remarks, tell you, Mr. President, how deeply proud and grateful that I am for the respect, the confidence and the trust that you have shown in selecting me and nominating me and the blessed Senate for their vote of confirmation.
(Laughter)

And, Mr. President, that was a blessed event. I am extremely happy and I am extremely proud and pleased over the response of the committee and of the full Senate. And we are going to do some communicating that is going to bring about some answers to America, because what we have got to deal with, the resource of the environment and all parts of it are so critical to this Nation, that one would be hard pressed to know of anything that could be more important to us as we look five, ten, fifteen, twenty years down the line.

I have one little member of our family here that is going to be awfully involved in what happens down the line. And so thank you, Mr. President, for your confidence, thank you for your friendship, and I would say to this audience assembled and to you press people, thank you for coming and for being here. I guess you don't have any trouble getting in.

I want to say what I said to the President when he asked me, what I have, my total being, all parts of my experiences of my life, all motivations of the future, I give to you in the form of a total commitment.

Thank you very much.

END (AT 11:51 A.M. EDT)