

Statement of Senator Ken Salazar
Nominee to be Secretary of the Interior

January 15, 2009

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Committee. I am honored to appear before you today as President-elect Obama's nominee to be Secretary of the Interior.

Before we begin, I want to thank my entire family, especially my wife, Hope, and my daughters Melinda and Andrea. Without their courage and unwavering support, and the support of all my seven brothers and sisters, I would not be here today.

I want to thank my late father, Henry, and my mother, Emma. A soldier and a public servant in World War II, they instilled in me the values that enabled all of my siblings and me to achieve the American dream. I also want to thank my Senate staff, in Colorado and Washington, for their service.

I have been blessed to represent the five million people of the State of Colorado in the United States Senate. I have come to know my colleagues, Democrats and Republicans, as good friends and dedicated public servants. I am grateful to have served on the Energy and Natural Resources Committee and to have worked with you all on many of the energy, environmental and lands issues facing our nation. If confirmed, I look forward to continuing our work together.

My story in the West goes back 400 years, to when my ancestors helped found the city of Santa Fe – the city of Holy Faith – in New Mexico. I grew up in the San Luis Valley in southern Colorado, on lands my family has farmed and ranched for five generations.

My family's livelihood depended on the health of our land. Our parents taught us, and their parents taught them, that we have a responsibility to be good stewards of the water, soil, and wildlife around us, so that we can preserve the balance that allows us to ranch and farm, generation after generation.

This sense of stewardship is the foundation for my deep appreciation of our public lands, most of which are managed by the Interior Department. Our nation's parks, forests and seashores are national treasures.

I also firmly believe that those who work in government must hold sacrosanct the trust of the public it serves. If confirmed, my first priority will be to lead the Interior Department with openness in decision-making, high ethical standards, and respect for scientific integrity. I will work to ensure that the Interior Department's decisions are based on sound science and the public interest, and not on the special interests. I want the public to be proud of the Department's work, and I want those who work for the Department to be proud of their service.

If confirmed, I will remain committed to helping our nation reduce its dangerous dependence on foreign oil. President-Elect Obama believes, as I do, that our foreign oil dependence is a grave threat to our national security, our planet, and our economy.

As part of the President-Elect's energy team, I will work to modernize our interstate electrical grid, expand the use of renewable energy like solar and wind on public lands, and help tribes develop renewable energy resources on their lands.

We must also make wise use of our conventional natural resources, including coal, oil, and natural gas. We should promote responsible energy development in areas like the Alaska National Petroleum Reserve and prioritize the construction of the Alaska natural gas pipeline.

But as we develop our natural resources, we must adhere to the principles of good stewardship, and we must protect some of our nation's most treasured landscapes.

One of President-Elect Obama's top priorities is to protect our national parks, public lands, open spaces, and farms and ranchlands. It is a passion I share.

As Executive Director of the Colorado Department of Natural Resources, I authored the Colorado constitutional amendment creating the Great Outdoors Colorado program and served as its first chairman. It has proven to be one of the most successful land conservation efforts in the United States. If confirmed, I look forward to building on

these good ideas and to working tirelessly to protect and restore our national parks, wildlife refuges, and public lands across America for future generations to experience and enjoy.

I also understand the water supply challenges our nation faces. I grew up on the back end of a ditch and the top end of a shovel, so I know the effects of a water crisis on communities, farmers and ranchers. I started working in water law a quarter-century ago. I have worked on scores of legal disputes over water in the private sector and as Colorado's Attorney General, and several of those cases went before the Colorado Supreme Court or the United States Supreme Court.

President-Elect Obama believes, as I do, that we need to help local communities reduce water use by investing in new water conservation technology, while also encouraging innovative, market-based conservation programs such as voluntary water banks to help communities develop programs that work for them.

Another top priority will be to support and serve Native American communities across the nation. If confirmed, I am committed to restoring the integrity of the nation-to-nation relationship with Indian tribes and to meaningful reform of the broken system that manages the trust lands and other trust assets.

I believe the Interior Department should be a partner with tribal communities to advance sustainable economic development – this is fundamental to true self-determination.

Education is the key to improving the lives of all children and empowering tribal nations to build a better future. President-Elect Obama is committed to repairing and building Indian schools, and increasing educational opportunities for Native American children.

President-Elect Obama has a bold vision for youth programs across America, which I share. During my tenure at the Colorado Department of Natural Resources, I created the Youth in Natural Resources program to educate thousands of young people about Colorado's natural resources. I saw firsthand what a difference it made in their lives.

A new national youth conversation corps program would introduce young Americans from all backgrounds to the beauty of our national parks and refuges and promote an ethic of volunteerism and conservation among our children and grandchildren.

When I first entered elected office as Colorado's Attorney General, I pledged to "Fight for Colorado's land, water and people," and it is a pledge I still live by today. If confirmed, I will continue to serve as a strong voice for our nation's land, water and people.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, distinguished members of the Committee.