

Processed by: DJH
Date: 11/9/85

BENNETT

BENNETT, ELMER (OH-401) 192 pages Open

Legislative Counsel, Department of Interior, 1953-56; Assistant to the Secretary of Interior, 1956-57; General Counsel, Department of Interior, 1957-58; Under Secretary of Interior, 1958-61.

DESCRIPTION: Interview #1: Educational background: undergraduate degree from Colorado State College and law degree from Stanford Law School; his decision to attend law school. Comments on his interest in history and economics and mentions professors who influenced him. Talks about his employment history: position with Standard Oil in California as clerk specializing in legal work; his work during World War II at the Raritan Ordnance Depot in New Jersey involving the handling and shipping of spare parts. Comments on the use of German and Italian prisoners of war at this ordnance depot. Mentions Bennett's transfer to the Pentagon after V-E Day where he planned and managed ordnance work. Mentions interest in anti-trust and trade regulations and describes his employment with the Federal Trade Commission in 1948 as a trial lawyer. Mentions a steel anti-trust case.

Interview #2: Continues discussion of work at the Federal Trade Commission. Mentions philosophical struggle within the Commission over its role in settlements; discusses in detail consent order procedures. Talks at length about his duties as Legal Assistant for Senator Eugene Millikin (Republican from Colorado). Cites legislative problems: water and land matters and mining law problems involving constituents. Discusses work on issue of U.S. diplomatic relations with Vatican and comments on President Truman's proposal to send representative to the Vatican. Mentions Senator Millikin's views on reciprocal trade matters and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, his involvement in a hearing concerning the role of gold in international exchanges, and President Truman's attempts to establish price and wage controls during the Korean War. Lengthy discussion of Senator Millikin's activities as Chairman of Republican Platform Committee at Republican Nominating Convention in 1952; mentions lack of organization by the Republicans in preparing platform and Bennett's re-writing much of platform; mentions other issues at convention: Millikin's support for Robert Taft as Republican candidate for President and Bennett's own preference for Earl Warren; also, the maneuvering behind the drafting of a civil rights plank. Mentions Taft and the Morningside Heights Conference. Comments on Richard Nixon and compares him with John F. Kennedy. Mentions his appointment to position as Legislative Counsel in Interior Department.

Interview #3: Describes his job as Legislative Counsel in the Interior Department; organization, problems and procedures involved in coordinating legislation. Cites legal content of Interior Department legislation. Critically discusses adverse influence of holdover bureaucrats within the Department on the Administration's policies and the resistance by some to Administration programs. Mentions Floyd Dominy, Commissioner

of Reclamation, and Conrad Wirth, Director of National Park Service, as two examples and criticizes Wirth's "backdoor" the Administration in obtaining authorizations for Gateway Arch in St. Louis, opposed by the Administration. Discusses Hawaiian and Alaskan Statehood as political issues and talks about the role of Orme Lewis in selling Alaskan Statehood issue to President Eisenhower. Talks about Saturday morning meetings in White House of agency representatives involved in legislative affairs.

Interview #4: Discusses the White House legislative coordination meetings and relations between the Interior Department and the White House staff. Comments on Wilton Persons, Bryce Harlow, Gerald Morgan, and Hatfield Chilson. Talks about Bennett's taking post as Solicitor in Interior Department. Considerable discussion of Interior Department's struggles with the Bureau of the Budget's attempts to affect policy implementation through the budgetary process. Compares Douglas McKay with Fred Seaton and discusses McKay's limitations: poor public relations and his being blocked out of Interior Department operations by such individuals as Assistant Secretary Raymond Davis, Clarence Davis, and Felix Wormser. Detailed discussion of McKay's role in the Alaska fish trap issue. Contrasts McKay's poor public relations with Fred Seaton's alleged drinking and health problems, his travels and Bennett's frequent attendance at Cabinet meetings. Comments on role of Cabinet.

Interview #5: Nomination of Fred Seaton as Secretary of the Interior and Bennett's continuing work within the Department. Comments on problems facing the Department: public power and the oil and gas leasing problem. Discusses Fred Seaton's approach to public power issue and describes the partnership approach in the Central Valley Project in California. Mentions briefly the functioning of the Office of Oil and Gas. Comments on McKay's U.S. Senate race in Oregon and remarks favorably about McKay as person and his progressive instincts. Criticizes Felix Wormser, the Assistant Secretary for Minerals, and his assistant John Liebert.