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HONORING SALLY JEWELL

CHARLES WILKINSON*

Introduction of Secretary Jewell as Keynote Speaker
Martz Winter Public Lands Symposium
Getches-Wilkinson Center
March 1, 2019

John Leshy, who served eight years as Interior Department Solicitor under Bruce Babbitt, has said in a reflective moment that the Solicitor has two duties: respect the institution and respect the people. And so it is for the Secretary, the highest officer of the Interior Department. Trustee for the tribes. Trustee for the rivers and the wildlife. Trustee for the land. Yes. Respect that high institution. Give it your all. Capitalize on its greatness. Repair its weaknesses. Be a great trustee during your tenure. Respect the institution.

Respect the people. Your immediate staff, to be sure. Build a camaraderie and a commitment to the mission. Nikki Buffa, Sally Jewell's talented Deputy Chief of Staff who had her office right outside the Secretary's office, underscored that: "It meant so much to me. I never had a single doubt that what we were doing was the right thing. It was good that she wanted people around her who care about the outdoors, the planet." Respecting the people also means keeping an open door and open mind for all staff, including career professionals and those who have differences with you. Thank, and show appreciation for, all the people of Interior—the people who run the elevators, prepare the meals, and guarantee our safety.

As one who has followed the Interior Department for half a century, I can tell you that no Secretary ever fulfilled that high calling better than Sally Jewell.

Mike Connor, Sally's Deputy Secretary who is a graduate

*Distinguished Professor, Moses Lasky Professor of Law Emeritus, University of Colorado Law School. Special thanks to Nikki Buffa, Kate Kelly, Mike Connor, Justin Pidot, and John Leshy, who, by way of interviews, provided many insights and information concerning Sally Jewell's tenure as Secretary of the Department of the Interior. I also send my personal admiration and respect to Secretary Jewell for her profound commitment to the federal public lands and Native American peoples.

of this law school and is here today, was awed by her administrative abilities. Like others, he believed that she made superb use of her background as a CEO. She set clearly described priorities and kept to them. She was always on top of the big issues, but as Mike explained: “She knows when to jump in and when to just let things happen and allow good to coalesce. She had high expectations for her staff and, most of all, for herself.”

Sally’s intelligence and diligence became the stuff of legend. As her Senior Advisor, Kate Kelly, put it: “She never rested on her credentials. At every meeting she was the smartest person in the room *and* the best prepared.”

The Sage Grouse Initiative of 2015, which was mentioned this morning, is the science-based, collaborative, nonpartisan effort to protect the habitat of these modest-sounding but magnificent birds that are in sharp decline. The extraordinarily ambitious initiative, which encompasses much of the sage grouse’s expansive habitat, affects a large amount of the open rangeland between the Front Range of the Rockies and the Sierra Nevada and Cascade Ranges far to the West.

Secretary Ken Salazar started the initiative and Sally put it to bed. The heart of the broad-gauged project is that it achieved sweeping, solid conservation objectives and employed a rich mix of science, collaboration, economic incentives, and regulation, all without bringing it under the specific provisions and procedures of the Endangered Species Act.

By any standard, the Sage Grouse Initiative, along with the Northwest Forest Plan, is one of the premier land planning accomplishments ever adopted in the name of species protection.

Sally immersed herself in it. A natural listener, she worked tirelessly with Western governors, ranchers, conservationists, and other members of the public to achieve consensus. A scientist, she steeped herself in the on-the-ground details. Notably, she learned about, and explained well, how a significant benefit of the initiative would be to reduce fires at a time when range fires were a rising threat; the plan would reduce invasive, aggressive, highly flammable cheatgrass fields and create green, fire-resistant stretches of land.

The Sage Grouse Initiative has been battered by the Trump Interior Department, but much of it is still in play. Why is it still operating? As Justin Pidot, who did outstanding work in the Solicitor’s office during the last part of Sally’s tenure,

explained, this epic plan, which Sally had so much to do with, is still alive because many leading westerners in the nonpartisan coalition continue to recognize the value of the initiative and resist seeing it weakened further.

Long before coming to Washington, D.C., Sally was passionate about outdoor education for children. One of her favorite programs as Secretary was “Every Kid in a Park.” What a great concept: every fourth grader in the country could go to a website and get a free pass for her and her family to visit parks and all other federal public lands as well. Last year, Secretary Zinke came close to canceling the program but finally backed off in the face of sharp criticism.

Now the program is about to be protected by statute. The Senate voted to make it permanent earlier this month and the House approved it three days ago, both by overwhelming majorities. Presidential signature is expected. Not all great ideas survive, but some do.

Sally also placed high value on what she described as “fulfilling our sacred trust and treaty obligations to tribes.” From her first major address through the present, she has identified the trust responsibility as one of her overarching priorities along with addressing climate change and honoring our nation’s proud conservation heritage. She had excellent staff working on Indian issues—certainly including Kevin Washburn, Larry Roberts, and Mike Connor, who are all here today—and, even though legislation was mostly impossible because of the House, the accomplishments during her tenure are many, significant, and broad. On tribal matters, she has to be at or near the top of any list of outstanding Secretaries of the Interior.

One of her major achievements in Indian policy was the creation of the Bears Ears National Monument. Several agencies outside of Interior had influence, but the tradition for national monuments is that Interior does the workup and makes the primary recommendation. For that reason, and also by virtue of her interest in Indian affairs, Sally—outside of the White House—was the most important figure in the decision-making process.

Bears Ears required a lot of work for the Administration. The tribal proposal was ambitious in terms of size. Drawing the exact boundaries required intensive analysis of numerous cultural, environmental, recreational, economic, and political

considerations. The idea of tribal-federal collaborative management had never been tried before on the public lands. The mining industry was dead set against the proposal. And then there was . . . we need to pause here and take a deep breath . . . the fierce and unrelenting opposition of the San Juan County Commission and the Utah congressional delegation.

Wanting to let members of the public make their cases in the local area, Sally called a wide-open public meeting in Bluff, Utah, on Saturday, July 16, 2016. More than two thousand people came, making it the largest gathering ever held in Bluff and probably in all of southern Utah. Sally chaired the meeting and brought with her several top departmental officials. Names were drawn out of a hat for two-minute statements. Nearly two hundred people spoke. The statements began in midmorning and went until dinnertime. The presentations came from many different perspectives—conservationists, businesspeople, local and tribal officials, and many others. A goodly number of presentations began with “I am a fifth or sixth or seventh generation Utahan” Emotional though this issue was for so many people in the hot, stuffy room (and in several large tents erected outside the hearing building), there were only a few bumpy moments.

Of the speakers, a slight majority of Bears Ears supporters outnumbered opponent speakers, but that was not the point. This is how it should work. Somehow, despite years of rancor, this important day was marked first and foremost by civility. When it was over, I just stayed in my chair and thought, over and over: “Good government. This is what good government *means*.” There were many reasons for that. First in line has to have been the straightforwardness, fairness, dignity, and grace of the woman who chaired the meeting.

As for the tribes, the leaders liked and trusted Sally, and her staff and top officials, from the beginning. They knew that she knew that this sweeping, red rock landscape in the Canyon Country holds profound cultural meaning for Native people as well as extraordinary conservation values. That feeling grew over time. The tribal leaders knew that the top people in the Department could do no miracles in that complex political setting but took heart in the fact that they strongly supported the tribal cause, had great influence, and served as something of an anchor for the tribes.

For me, the most moving example of Sally’s relationship

with the tribes took place at the broad, open meadow just below the Bears Ears formation on the evening before the public meeting in Bluff. The Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition hosted a gathering of supporters for an informal evening and dinner at that landscape that calls out so much meaning to tribal people. The tribes invited Sally and her staff, and they accepted.

Not long before dusk, the tribal leaders and elders invited Sally and a few other guests—I was included—into a large Teepee-style tent. People sat down with their backs against the canvas, creating a circle. They talked softly, intimately. It was not always easy to hear the comments. But one thought that Indian people had often expressed about Bears Ears came through. They talked slowly and deliberately about the way that Bears Ears was so *healing*. They knew the land and the stories from way back, and being there lightened some of the pain from all of the wounds over all of the years.

After a while, the air inside the tent became especially thick with emotion. Sally was sitting next to a few elder Indian women. They were talking very softly. I couldn't completely make it out, but then the elder Indian ladies and Sally teared up. Many of the others teared up. I know I did.

The quiet continued on. Then people got up, hugged, and made their way out through the tent flap.

And by the way, know that the real Bears Ears National Monument, the one proclaimed in President Obama's luminous proclamation, will be back. Remember: not all great ideas survive, but some do.

Sally's last day as Secretary was January 20, 2017. She and her husband Warren had decided to make it back to Washington State by car, taking a long, circuitous route that would last four months. They made many stops at federal parks, monuments, wildlife refuges, and other installations. Sally, bless her, wanted to thank people in the field, to say goodbye to her Interior Department people. On their drive back home, Sally and Warren also stopped at several youth and tribal gatherings.

Sally, all of us here, and a great many others as well, thank you from the bottom of our hearts. Thank you for applying your mind, values, and spirit to such valuable endeavors and for accomplishing so much pure good.