

Portrait Unveiling Ceremony: Secretary Dirk Kempthorne
June 30, 2011

Yates Auditorium

Presentation by Lynn Scarlett

Good morning! How wonderful it is to be among so many friends and colleagues at the Department of the Interior. Thank you, Secretary Salazar, for your leadership and for hosting this event.

We gather for a special occasion. We honor Dirk Kempthorne, Secretary of the Interior from 2006 to January 2009. It was my very special privilege to serve with him at this very special institution. The Interior Department is guardian of the Nation's spectacular natural, historic, and cultural places. It is steward of lands, waters, and wildlife. It is the center of pioneering science. It is an institution with special responsibilities to Native Americans.

I begin my tribute to Secretary Kempthorne by highlighting the mission of the Department because I know how fully Secretary Kempthorne embraces this mission. I know how fully he understands its significance. As we celebrate him, we celebrate the Interior Department's legacy.

Above all, I know how inspired he was during his tenure by the 70,000 people who work here to fulfill Interior's mission. Let us give these people a hand of applause.

It was their wisdom Secretary Kempthorne sought. It was their skills upon which he relied to translate a goal into an accomplishment. He used to convene these "white board sessions"—yes, I remember one eight-hour session on Mother's Day as we faced a looming deadline to determine whether to list the polar bear under the Endangered Species Act.

At these white board sessions, we'd all be hankering to get a decision on something. Secretary Kempthorne would look around the room and ask: "Where's the park superintendent?" "Where's the Fish and Wildlife Service biologist?" "Where's the US Geological Survey's earthquake expert?"

Secretary Kempthorne would convene folks with experience and knowledge. He'd listen. He'd write on the white board. And then, weighing all this input, he'd decide upon some action.

1,000 years ago, Zen Master Yuanwu wrote:

"Leaders make the knowledge of the community their knowledge. They make the minds of the community their mind. They are always wary of failing to comprehend the feelings of even one person, or failing to apprehend the principle of even one thing."

Secretary Kempthorne displays a leadership in which people matter. At Interior, this meant not only tapping their knowledge. It meant thinking about how to make Interior the best it could be. It meant thinking about how to make Interior a great place to work. The old cafeteria just would not do!

We are not here today to delineate Secretary Kempthorne's big ideas and big accomplishments—and there were many. He envisioned the next century of national parks. He modernized Indian schools. He laid the groundwork for landscape-scale stewardship at the Bureau of Land Management. He made *LandSat* imagery freely available. Some accomplishments—like the Colorado River shortage-sharing agreement—were historic in their importance.

But sometimes it's the little things that really distinguish the character of a man. Secretary Kempthorne knew the names of our sons and daughters. He would visit soldiers healing at Walter Reed Hospital. He would comfort the bereaved.

And he would have fun with the whole Department of the Interior team. He'd host pizza parties in the cafeteria. He'd play the role of Alex Trebek of Jeopardy, quizzing us on how many time zones the lands and waters managed by Interior span. Can anyone here today tell me?

Often, one acknowledges leadership through big ideas. And Secretary Kempthorne had many. But he had other qualities of a leader. He was tenacious, never letting an important action drift. "Have we fixed the radio interoperability problem in the Southwest," he would ask. "Has each and every radio been fixed?"

And Secretary Kempthorne would not take "no" for an answer—not even from the Office of Management and Budget.

Yet he is always gracious, kind, and civil. Perhaps the greatest civic virtue is civility—the art of achieving what author William Isaacs called "conversation with a center, not sides."

In behalf of all our Interior friends and colleagues, I thank Secretary Kempthorne for his leadership. It is my great privilege and pleasure to introduce to you Mayor, Senator, Governor, Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne.