

STATEMENT OF MARK REY

Before the Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health

Committee on Resources

U.S. House of Representatives

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, the opportunity to serve as Under Secretary of Agriculture for Natural Resources and the Environment is the greatest honor I have been accorded in a long career in the natural resources area. It is also the greatest challenge I have been asked to meet since arriving in Washington, DC almost 26 years ago.

I would like to express my deepest thanks to President Bush and Secretary Veneman for their confidence and trust in my ability to fulfill the responsibilities of the office.

I come before you today sincerely convinced that the job of Under Secretary of Agriculture for Natural Resources and Environment is one of the most vital positions in the federal government. Other offices will undoubtedly make a greater contribution in important areas such as national security or public health. However, no other assignment carries a greater trust responsibility to the American people than the stewardship of our nation's soil, waters, and forests.

David Ben-Gurion once wrote, "The soil is the source of life, creativity, culture, and real independence." Earlier, Franklin D. Roosevelt spoke that "forests are the 'lungs' of our land, purifying the air and giving fresh strength to our people." Still earlier, Samuel Langhorne Clemens wrote that "whiskey's for drinking, but water's for fighting about."

Given the importance of this assignment, I would like to begin our time together today talking about what you can expect from me, as the Under Secretary of Agriculture, in working with Congress.

First, I am committed to bipartisan collaboration in overseeing the stewardship of America's soil, water, and forest resources. In my years of service with the Senate, I am most proud of the initiatives to which I contributed that passed Congress with overwhelming, bipartisan support. For over a century, our greatest gains in securing the enlightened stewardship of our natural resources have occurred when men and women of both parties have bridged their differences and found common ground on behalf of the American people.

Second, I want you to know that I respect the special role reserved for Congress in the Constitution for the development and implementation of America's natural resource policies. Having spent six years working for the Congress, I appreciate first hand the importance of congressional oversight and involvement in the development and implementation of these matters. My advocacy for an active congressional role in this area has not changed with my transfer to the Executive Branch of our government. Secretary Veneman has often stated that she believes "in working cooperatively with Congress." I strongly share her belief.

Third, I offer you my experience. For over a quarter-century, I have worked with and around the agencies I must now oversee. A good portion of the enthusiasm and humility I bring to this task stems from recognition of the dedication and skill of the public servants working in this area. They need attentive

critics, but they have earned my respect, gratitude, support, and affection.

Fourth, I offer you an open mind. I consider myself to be a good and active listener. You won't be hard pressed to find people who have disagreed with me. But I think most, if not all, of them will confirm that we disagreed without being disagreeable. In order to fairly sort out conflicting facts and opinions - and, in this policy area, everyone claims his or her own set of each - an Undersecretary should be physically and intellectually accessible to all parties. I pledge to keep open both my office door and my thinking processes.

I understand that Chief Dale Bosworth presented similar testimony before this Committee on May 15, 2001 when he discussed his views and vision as Chief of the Forest Service. I have reviewed this testimony and share Chief Bosworth's priorities to: (1) provide support and resources for "on-the-ground" work; (2) reconnect the Washington Office headquarters of the Forest Service with the field; and (3) empower local parties in natural resources decision-making.

Both the Chief and I are also committed to Agency accountability by implementing financial reforms to bring financial management and accounting of agency assets into full compliance with best business management standards. Finally, the Chief and I are committed to the National Fire Plan, with a strong focus on: (1) protecting communities from the dangers of catastrophic fire; (2) managing the Nation's forests and rangelands to protect communities and natural resources; (3) and providing services and products on a sustainable basis. I support these commitments from the Chief as top priorities for the Forest Service, and I look forward to working with him and this Committee in seeing to their achievement.

Winston Churchill once wrote that "we make a living by what we get, we make a life by what we give." President Bush, with the consent of the Senate, has given me an opportunity to serve the American people. Working together, I hope that we can use this opportunity to advance the enlightened stewardship of our nation's resources.

Thank you very much.

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