Statement of Assistant Secretary of the Interior John A. Carver, Jr. at Briefing by Mr. Anthony Solomon before the Subcommittee of the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, October 15, 1963

Mr. Chairman, and members of the Committee:

The presentation today will be made by Mr. Anthony M. Solomon, who led a Survey Mission in the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands last summer. The President commissioned the study, and it was staffed by both governmental and non-governmental experts. Director of Territories Taitano accompanied the Mission, and one of its members was Dr. Pedro Sanchez, well known to this Committee for his work in both Guam and Virgin Island education.

The briefing today follows a precedent established in April, 1962, when representatives of the Departments of State, Defense, and Interior set forth the considerations from the point of view of each Department for United States policy in the area in a similar session of this Committee.

It is our desire to keep the Congress, through the appropriate committees, fully informed. Mr. Solomon’s report will be submitted to the President. Implementation of many of its recommendations will require legislative action, in substantive policy areas, in appropriations authorizations, and in appropriations. Therefore, it is considered appropriate and desirable to furnish the Committee this briefing.
The chief problem disturbing the grazing industry on the public lands is not related to the fees we set or the limits of carrying capacity we require them to observe. These can certainly affect their economic welfare, but they are not matters of life or death. Tenure is just such a vital matter. If a grazer is suddenly displaced -- as is happening every week and month -- by some other use of the land, then his whole business structure is likely to collapse because the economy of his ranch has been built upon the expectation of continued access to public grazing areas. It is a part of his capital base -- and when it is taken away it is as if you had eliminated a part of the base ranch itself. It is no wonder then that the public land livestock operator feels insecure in his position and reluctant to invest in improvements which would make the land more productive.

The ways in which he can be displaced are myriad and often out of joint with the times. But regardless of how he is displaced the certain fact is that he faces constantly increasing pressures toward that end. The needs of an exploding population -- for living space, for industrial development, for raw materials, for recreational open space -- all of these look to the public land base. And the present tenant-at-will is in an exposed position indeed.

But the situation of the cattle man is only symptomatic of a general condition arising out of the accelerating competition for land. The insecurity of the grazer is one aspect of a legal structure which has not been reformed to keep up with social and economic change. As managers, we need tools to use the resource committed to our custody for the greatest public benefit. Those tools are not available at the present time and we are acutely conscious of our inability to do the job Congress and the people expect us.

But there is light on the horizon. This is why we have supported the concept of a comprehensive Commission review of the public land laws -- to come up with modern criteria to govern disposal of the public lands where that is socially desirable and to formulate policies for the management of the land resources which are retained for public benefit. We think this step is critically needed in the legitimate interest of the cattleman and the miner; it is even more needed if the interests of the real landowner -- the general public -- are to be protected.