Byron Mock's invitation on your behalf to speak at this luncheon came as I was enroute to Guam and American Samoa, United States Territories in the Western and South Pacific. He had in mind, however, the fact that under his chairmanship a field hearing of the Public Land Law Review Commission would be taking place today, which I would be attending as a member of the Advisory Council. In a few minutes I will talk about the administration of the public lands, and the work of the Commission, but I am so recently returned from my Pacific trip that I cannot resist imparting some of my impressions.

Viet Nam is 2500 miles west of Guam. For American bombers based on Guam, this is eleven and a half or twelve hours of continuous flight for the round trip, punctuated by a refueling rendezvous over the ocean.

As the tropical dusk settled fast into night on Guam, I watched on several evenings the returning bombers. They came into sight and hearing, spaced a minute or two apart, and as the procession strung out until it was pitch dark, suddenly the war in Viet Nam had immediacy.

On my final day, the Memorial Day holiday, I went fishing with some Air Force officers. One of them at least had flown a mission the day before, the kind I've described. While out, we could see the Russian trawler which is stationed outside the entrance to Apra Harbor--a "fishing" vessel well equipped with looking and listening gear of all kinds. Surely the comings and goings of our aircraft and our vessels does not go unnoticed or unreported--and reports well may go to Peking or Hanoi.

As I said, I'm not here to talk about the war in Viet Nam. But I must tell you that on the American soil of Guam, the American citizens of that territory who earned their citizenship the hard way are not confused or divided. In the shadow of the coming and going of these planes, this particular visitor was acutely, perhaps overly, conscious of the island's potentiality as a target. But our people there go about their business. A United Nations official asked a Guamanian how he felt about the American bombers stationed on his island. His reply was simple: "They are our bombers."

After something like a hundred speeches on one or another aspect of the subject of your session, I have evolved the very strong feeling that the public land policy issues of our day are public issues in the broadest sense. They should not and must not be left for decision by the technical experts, whether lawyers, economists, technicians or administrators. These issues have such serious implications for the future of our society that the whole public should have a voice. But it requires study and evaluation to arrive at informed judgments.
Under the chairmanship of Wayne Aspinall, the Commission is structured to accommodate the complexity of the subject and interests in it, and it will operate in public. The Commission members know that the public rarely speaks with one voice and that it is critically important that all segments of interested, responsible and informed opinion be heard.

First, let me say a little about our Federal public domain as a proportion of our total land and inland water area. For our continental mass, excluding Alaska and Hawaii, this figure is just short of two billion acres. Of this, 476 million acres were in private or other non-Federal ownership upon coming under American control. Thus, nearly 1-1/2 billion acres have held public domain status at one time or another since 1785. Today, the residual Federal ownership over original public domain amounts to 352 million acres, or less than a fourth of our common land heritage. The balance has been disbursed to settlers, as a dowry to newly created States, as grants to subsidize a railroad network, as a homeland for the displaced native Indian population and through other devices.

An even smaller land area remains in technical public domain status, that is, the vacant and unreserved land base not allocated on a permanent basis to any other Federal use. Out of the 352 million acres remaining in Federal ownership more than half, 179 million acres, has been set aside for national forest purposes, national parks and wildlife refuges, defense installations, reclamation projects and a variety of highly intensive governmental uses (hospitals, prisons, test areas, navigational facilities and the like).

So when we talk about the public domain in its technical legal sense, or in the realistic sense of that which can be made available without particular consideration for an existing special use, we are really concerned with about 173 million acres. In sum, this is perhaps one-ninth of the original landed birthright of the Nation. Stated in the reverse, we have either conveyed away or allocated to other specific public uses eight-ninths of the land that was once thought by Jefferson, for example, to be growing room for a future of thousands of years.

In these terms, the figures maintained by GSA show 718 million acres in the "public domain" category, and 52 million acres by acquisition. This does not match the jurisdiction of the Commission, owing primarily to return of O & C acreage in the GSA report. Seven major departments and several independent agencies have primary responsibility for Federal land which is carried in this public domain category. Of these agencies, the largest Federal land manager other than Interior is Agriculture, whose Forest Service has 160 million acres in this category. Defense has sixteen million acres on its military side, and a little less than one million on its civil side principally flood control under the Corps of Engineers. Atomic Energy has a million and a third acres of public domain land in its reservations.
Smaller reservations of public domain land serve the needs of agricultural research, soil conservation, weather bureau, prison, international water commission uses, coast guard uses such as lighthouses, Federal aviation uses, and the like.

Of course the largest acreage is in the Interior Department, which succeeded to the functions of the Old General Land Office, is the bookkeeper of the public lands, as well as the nominal manager or custodian of lands "pending disposition", to use the term in the Taylor Grazing Act.

But the Department is also responsible for various programs which are authorized to "draw upon" the Federal lands in public domain status in about the same way as the various other programs I've listed above.

Thus, we find that 18 million acres of public domain land are now in national park status; twenty-four million in wildlife refuge or similar status (including 9 million in the Arctic Wildlife Range); four million held for the benefit of Indians; a few thousand for the Alaska Railroad and the Bureau of Mines, and less than a hundred for the Geological Survey; and seven and a half million in reclamation withdrawn status.

This leaves almost five hundred million in the nominal custody of the Bureau of Land Management. Deducting Alaska, the BLM would list this figure as about 170 million acres in the lower forty-eight States.

This explanation of the acreages in the several programs, however, can be misleading until it is remembered that considerable precision is necessary at any given time to specify the "management" responsibility which is being discussed. For example, oil and gas leasing on public domain-derived national forest land and the wildlife refuges and reserves is under the BLM; and the Forest Service itself asks the BLM for permission to set aside national forest land for administrative, recreational, or other purposes so as to cut off the rights of prospectors to enter the forest land under the provisions of the mining laws.

Reclamation withdrawals have a similar effect--they make the withdrawn land unavailable for entry under other agricultural entry laws, such as the desert land law. In other words, the seven million plus acres in reclamation withdrawn status represents, generally speaking, determinations made over the past half century or so of lands potentially suitable for reclamation projects. Revocation of these withdrawals is a very significant resultant of a continuing review of withdrawals which is a part of the Bureau of Land Management's responsibilities.

One of the most important things to understand about the Federal Government's ownership and management of public lands is the pattern of ownership. This requires mention of some of the laws by which the original billion and a half acres passed into private ownership.
For example, consider the pock-marking of landownership patterns by these types of dispositions:

a. Beginning with the Northwest Ordinance of 1785, the practice of reserving two or four sections per township of 36 sections for the support of schools has found the orderly grid of the rectangular survey shaded in sections 16 and 36, or sections 2, 16, 32, and 36, as State lands. If reservations for forest or other purposes predated survey, States had the option generally of selecting equivalent land in the unreserved public lands. Some States are still exercising this right.

Alaska was granted, not sections in place, but the right to select an aggregate of 100 million plus acres. This constitutes a sort of floating option, for the State is limited in its right of selection only by withdrawals already made—and these are few.

b. The railroad grants created a far worse situation, for on a band of land forty miles wide, the railroads were given alternate sections—a checkerboard pattern of ownership which still exists in all the arid areas where, until recently, there has been no economic incentive to get the retained Federal sections into private ownership.

c. Homesteads and patented mining claims, naturally, were located where, respectively, the arable land and water were found, or in the mineralized zones. Particularly the latter has caused great confusion of ownership patterns, because the peculiarities of the mining laws caused the land to go into private ownership on a basis almost totally unrelated to the rectangular surveys. The result has been the necessity for very expensive surveys, and this responsibility subsists.

Having in mind the proliferation of Federal agencies which may be involved, and the pattern of ownership, we are then in a position of understanding another often-used statistic—the percentage of federally owned land in the western, or public land, States. Alaska is 98 percent Federal, Nevada 85 percent, Utah 72 percent (46% BLM), Idaho 63 percent, Oregon 52 percent, Wyoming 48 percent, California 44 percent, etc.

These statistics are not really meaningful as aggregates. Some counties and some Congressional Districts may be almost entirely Federal, and others have almost no Federal lands, even in the States which are over fifty percent in Federal ownership.

But the relationships have to be understood if we are to grapple successfully with questions involving sharing of the revenues from the disposition of lease of public resources to States or counties, or consideration of the real meaning of public land when it comes to its usefulness to support expansion of cities, growth of industry, or continued use for grazing or other commercial purposes.
The land demands of our maturing society dictate that the totality of Federal holdings be subjected to close scrutiny.

New dimensions in natural resource objectives have re-emphasized long-standing needs for improved coordination of Federal management services.

Proper understanding of the various proposals advanced for coordination requires an understanding of the land management roles to be coordinated and the objectives which are sought.

President Johnson has asked for a "new conservation" which would deal with the problems of urbanization and growth which already have deprived too many Americans of the privilege of living in decent surroundings. The challenge he has given is to build a "Great Society," a society of quality.

The thrust of the new conservation is creativity. It assumes a common purpose. It recognizes that the profit motive is properly on the conservation team. It sees the necessity of Government regulation, but gives attention also to Government-sponsored research. It particularly emphasizes the role of industry in research and development.

Creativity and the highest order of statesmanship are essential if we are to meet the demands upon our inelastic land and resource base--not just that under the jurisdiction of the Federal Government, but the entire natural resource on which our economy and society depend.

The President's articulation of national goals does not rest on simply assuring an adequate supply of food, fiber, and fuel; he has added a concern for the quality of our life, and concern for the total environment.

This means that an even wider choice of alternative decisions will be available. For this "creativity" the Commission itself will be a major instrumentality.

"The solution to these problems," the President said at Ann Arbor, "does not rest on a massive program in Washington, nor can it rely solely on the strained resource of local authority. They require us to create new concepts of cooperation, a creative federalism, between the national capital and the leaders of local communities."

The Public Land Law Review Commission will foster mutual trust and confidence between the two branches of Government, and between the people and their Government, and we pledge our cooperation to this end.