REMARKS OF UNDER SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR JOHN A. CARVER, JR., AT INDEPENDENCE DAY CEREMONIES, AT CHAUTAUQUA INSTITUTION, CHAUTAUQUA, NEW YORK, JULY 4, 1966

THE FACE OF AMERICA -- CHOICES FOR OUR TIME

No one with any appreciation for America's intellectual history could resist the invitation to speak from the platform of the Chautauqua Institution. This morning we commemorated the illustrious history that has transpired here by officially recording the Lewis Miller Cottage in the National Historic Landmark Registry. This afternoon I have the great privilege of adding one modest chapter to that same noble tradition by speaking to you on a subject of increasing national concern.

This historic significance of the Miller Cottage is unique among the structures and places which have been accorded Landmark recognition. Many of those places are so designated because they exemplify in a special way some notable period of our architectural development; others because they were the scene of a significant historical event and still others as the home or work place of an historic figure.

To some extent, Miller Cottage is a little of each of these. But in a broader sense, it is quite different because its real significance lies in the fact that it was the birthplace of an idea. To more than two generations of Americans, Chautauqua and its offshoots provided an intellectual ferment unlike any that the world has ever known. A half century before radio could link the American people, this platform and its tent counterparts focused the attention of the Nation on the public and moral issues of the day. As the frontier passed, culture came to some people. Chautauqua can be proud of its contribution to the democratization of ideas and art. The common man of America was not denied, as had been the case in every previous civilization until radio and television eliminated class monopoly of these rich gifts.

Thus it is fitting that we should honor this place and the idea it represents on this Independence Day. The ideals expressed in our Declaration of Independence are attainable only through an informed populace. Chautauqua provided the forum for Presidents, would-be Presidents, teachers, reformers and leaders of all kinds to reach the people. Out of this grew the concepts of university extension and adult education which made learning available to people of all ages and in all locations. Without it, the American dream of universal education would have been an empty one indeed.

In essence then, Chautauqua provided a means of communication in an era when communication was difficult. Today, less than a century after its founding, our principal problem of communication is selectivity. Our technology has even conquered the curvature of the earth by orbiting relay stations in space.
We are literally immersed in a cacaphonous ocean of sound. Sense and nonsense alike have ready access to our ears and eyes. Unlike our grandfathers, we have all kinds of values pushed upon us from all sides. The chief task of modern man is to choose those, in their modern garb, which will ultimately serve best the ideals of the Declaration.

Just as we are exposed to many voices, so also have the issues we face multiplied manyfold. Foreign and domestic, economic and aesthetic, social and technological -- each facet of a society living in the shadow of thermonuclear force and computer automation presents its difficult alternatives.

There is a great temptation in our complex social situation for the individual to abdicate the responsibility for decision-making -- to delegate it to the technical experts, to elected or appointed leaders or simply to those who have time and motivation to study the issues. This is not the democratic way. Such abdication of public responsibility is a serious threat to public control of the public business. More, not less, public involvement is needed if the values of the people are to become the governing consensus of the Republic. Our sophisticated techniques of communication must be dedicated to the ideals that Chautauqua served in earlier generations -- the enlightenment of the people to play their necessary role in the democratic process.

This need for public involvement and participation is evident in practically all national policy issues -- in foreign affairs, or civil rights and social welfare questions. But nowhere is it more relevant than on the policies which should govern the uses of our natural resources and environment. Each of us is intimately and individually concerned with these judgments. They touch our every-day lives and govern the way we shall live. In some measure they are matters of personal taste and no one can undertake to express another man's preferences in such a highly personal judgment area.

America's great strength, its emergence as the most powerful Nation in this century, has its source in the people who were attracted to its promise of freedom and opportunity. They were the people who dared to challenge the wilderness or to brave an unknown future in a new society. Their hard labor, their idealism, their ingenuity created the wealth and the institutions which made the democratic state an unassailable reality. Whether they arrived at Plymouth Rock or Ellis Island, the real creators of national being were pioneers intent upon carving their own foothold in a land of promise.

Yet they would have been condemned to failure and disillusionment had it not been for a provident nature. America offered the richest base and the most universal variety of natural resources that man had ever encountered in a single place. Forest and stream, sweeping prairie and fertile valley, precious metals and basic ores, vast reserves of energy fuels: all of these were the raw materials for the technological mastery and industrial empire that is our history.

And above all, America was "America the Beautiful." With all its riches, its most perfect gift was a natural environment which could elevate the spirit of man, offer refreshment in a life of toil and inspire his noblest thoughts and deeds.
European settlement and development originated more than 350 years ago. Today we celebrate 190 years as a Nation. And we have been an industrial Nation, drawing upon our resources at an accelerating rate, for just about a century -- just about the life span of the Chautauqua Institution.

From the birth of our Nation to the birth of Chautauqua our total population multiplied about ten times -- from less than 4 million to about 40 million. But in that period our land area to support that population expanded from less than 900,000 square miles claimed by the original thirteen States to more than 3-½ million square miles, including Alaska. Since the 1870's, population has nearly quintupled and we have predictions of another 50 percent growth -- to nearly 300 million -- by the end of this century. Yet there has been no further expansion of our continental land area since 1867. Our future growth must rely on the resource base that existed in 1870.

There is no better evidence of our physical maturity than the translation of these statistics into population density terms. At the time of national emergence, there were about 4-½ people per square mile of area. By 1870, this had grown to 11 per square mile; currently it is more than 55 and by the year 2000, more than 80 Americans will rely for their sustenance on each square mile of our land area, or twenty times the density that existed when our independence was proclaimed.

What does this mean for the face of America? This is an issue for our generation which is worthy of the forum that Chautauqua gave to the issues of earlier years. The question is not merely the cosmetic one of safeguarding our landscape -- although that is part of it. The real problem is the extent to which we are willing to forego the benefits of a fully developed resource potential. Or, in the alternative, how much of our resource wealth are we willing to reinvest in healing the scars that development imprints upon our landscape? And how much urgency are we prepared to attach to this aspect of national maturity?

Nor is this a private controversy between consumptive resource industries and those generally referred to as conservationists. Every element of the public, every citizen has a serious stake in the answer. Uncontrolled exploitation of our resources -- our forests and lands, our lakes and streams, our minerals and mountains -- can reduce all of America to a vast slum in our lifetime. But total preservation -- the other extreme -- must necessarily place a brake on our rising standard of living, or cause an actual reversal of the trend which has been uninterrupted for over a century. Without raw materials and energy, our economy must falter and drift.

As in all things, the extreme alternatives provide no real choice. Yet people who feel and think about resource problems, feel and think deeply about them. The men who seek out and mine our minerals, or build dams to reclaim fertile but arid lands, or even those who design highways to speed us across the land -- all of these pursue their goals with the zeal and idealism of creators and builders. But with equal or greater fervor the defenders of wilderness areas, free-flowing streams and wildlife resources tend to present their case in absolute terms. Both camps insist that they are true conservationists -- and who is to decide which has the greater claim to that diadem?
The great danger of posing these conservation issues in crisis terms is that so little light is cast on the ultimate questions. The combatants concede no plausible alternatives between the extremes of their polar positions. And they customarily come up for public decision with inadequate time for the bulk of the populace to properly inform itself.

Many such controversies are raging across the Nation at this very time.

Conservation controversies are generally stated as simple and contrasting issues, in stark terms. In the black and white form usually used, consider these questions:

Grand Canyon: Which is more important: To preserve the Grand Canyon from any intrusion of impounded water or to improve the economic welfare of southwestern cities whose continued growth is dependent on development of these same waters?

The Upper Missouri River: Is it more important to preserve in its present free flowing or wild condition the only portion of the Upper Missouri River now undeveloped by dams, or to have the power production and flood control for the city of Great Falls, Montana, with a dam and reservoir on this stretch of the river?

The Everglades National Park: Is land drainage and flood control for central Florida agriculture more important than the ecological balance of the Everglades?

California Santa Barbara Channel: Should the scenic beauty and cleanliness of the channel between mainland California and the nearby Channel Islands be preserved, if preservation means sacrificing the development of oil reserves off shore?

Natural resources policy questions are complicated, and the mastery of their complexity is the most important challenge in the field of natural resource policy development. The issue is more than the ultimate choice about what to do in the natural resources field. These decisions tend to change—consider coal. Rather, the issue for public servants is how to inform the people of the existence and nature of their choices, and the consequences of alternatives. This problem is a constant.

With this in mind, let me review some aspects of the Grand Canyon and Everglades controversies.

First, Grand Canyon: The construction of two power dams in the canyon of the Colorado River will not destroy the Grand Canyon. One of the dams would destroy some of the values of the Grand Canyon; these values are real. The view of the canyon from the rim would be unimpaired; but the esthetic value of the inner gorge would indeed be importantly diminished.

The Western States do need further development of water resources if they are to continue to grow. At present, the accepted method of financing such development is by economic pooling of regional expenditures and regional
receipts of which hydroelectric power production is the principal source of income. Failure to develop hydropower where available means that other sources of financing must be found, some of which might be more expensive. What these alternatives are and whether or by how much they would be more expensive is exactly what the Congress and the public should know. Present procedures, in my opinion, do not provide an adequate comparison of such alternatives.

Present procedures in resource planning, resource project evaluation, and public presentation have not been conceived, and are therefore not well equipped to cope with the issues in these terms. Classically, legislation, whether it be for a project or a governmental policy, has been presented by the executive branch to the legislative branch as an act of advocacy, the best possible case for a particular course of action or a single project. The process of identifying alternatives -- indeed of discovering whether any exist -- is left to the arena of countervailing powers in the political process. One of the great miracles of our democratic process is the success we have in discovering acceptable compromise when we place so little emphasis on the development of alternatives for consideration by decision makers.

Congress, of course, can and does consider alternatives to the plans submitted by the executive Departments. Alternatives presented in the heat and under the pressure of debate and vigorous disagreement do not always have comparable technical or engineering soundness, and whether they do is itself a major debating issue.

In the case of financing additional water development in the Southwest, there are alternatives to dams in the Grand Canyon for the needed electrical power. The responsible Department, Interior in this case, is not free to revise the procedures at will, in order to, say, propose an alternative source of energy from a federally financed thermal power plant. Current planning procedures do not encourage the presentation of the details of alternatives which have been considered only for the purpose of making comparisons, or considered and rejected. In both our public and private activities, we, the people of this country, are willing for various reasons to choose a higher cost alternative, but we like to be able to weigh the consequences of our choice.

The question may be differently posed: How can the public -- or their representatives in Congress -- choose a course of action when they do not know the range or scope of possible choices open? I have no disposition to quarrel with any decision taken by the people of this country if that decision follows from an understanding of the alternatives available and the consequences of each. Such is the essence of our system. But I am indeed worried by the headlong incursions of the public and private sectors into complicated resource development schemes lacking knowledge of the possible alternatives.

The Everglades problem: Some years ago Congress established a national park to preserve a portion of the complex of islands, swamps, birds, and animals unique to southern Florida. A national park is defined as a place to preserve a sample of landscape in the condition seen by those of our forbears who first explored it. Much later, the value of agriculture in central Florida and the
growth of cities led to water impoundment and drainage, also authorized by Congress as in the national interest. But it was only dimly foreseen that the action taken in the interest of agriculture and flood control would be antithetical to the other avowed public interest, the maintenance of the ecological balance in the Everglades area.

The water control structures deprived the parkland of an essential ingredient to such ecological balance. Uncorrected, it can now be seen that the drainage and impoundment must eventually result in destruction of some of the very values for which the park was established.

Let us not ascribe these dilemmas to ill will or even to shortsightedness of the groups. Their interests are diverse. Each is following authorized or legal directives under presently accepted procedures. To be sure, as controversy develops, positions harden, single points of view are expressed in extreme form, and ill will develops.

The examination of alternatives should not be equated with mere compromise, or seen as the acceptance of a lowest common denominator. Believing as I do in the efficacy of the democratic process, I would be content with whichever alternative solution to a natural resource problem the public may choose. But I am far from content when such choices continue to be made on insufficient knowledge in an atmosphere which presupposes only the polar extremes.

In the Everglades, for example, the realities do not in fact mean a national park destroyed on the one hand or catastrophic floods and agricultural ruin on the other. There are a variety of alternatives, each with certain social gains and concomitant costs. Choice should involve knowledge of the full panoply of possibilities.

Steps to revise resource planning procedures are being taken under a Government-wide managerial innovation being introduced in all of the executive Departments at the request of President Johnson. It requires the examination in detail of alternative goals and alternative programs which would under different assumptions or conditions meet the same basic needs.

I think the alternatives developed should be presented to the public in full, to be followed by sufficient time for full consideration of the alternatives offered, and the expression of opinion. But such changes in the way of planning public programs will not come overnight.

Undoubtedly there will be resource and conservation issues involving principles of such high order that compromise would be unthinkable. When they arise, they will become readily evident to all and they will be contested with the vigor they deserve. But this is no reason to put all conservation controversies in that category. Properly applied, reason and good faith will lead us to acceptable alternatives in many of the cases.
The great danger of handling resource problems in an atmosphere of polarized controversy is the danger of stalemate, of no action when action is needed, or of bad decisions whose faults are obscured by emotionalism and bad temper. We are spending billions of dollars each year to repair conservation's mistakes -- of both commission and omission -- of the past. As we approach the third millennium of our culture and the prospect of a vastly increased population load on our land and water base, mistaken actions or inaction in the future will cost infinitely more. Indeed, the damage done may prove irreparable.

The American people in this decade have demonstrated their conscientious concern for our resources. They have evidenced their willingness to tax themselves heavily to repair the scars of the past. The cost of abating and controlling the pollution of our lakes and streams alone, for example, will cost $70 billion in the near term.

This popular commitment to conservation deserves inspired and constructive leadership and direction. It is incumbent upon the technical experts and the ideological spokesman for the conservation ethic to inform the Nation in an objective way.

In this, let us be true to the democratic ideal which we commemorate today. Let us, in the spirit of Chautauqua's great tradition, provide the forum for rational evaluation of alternatives.

We live in a highly technical age which threatens to submerge the individual and the public. But the future face of America, the nature of environment in which we live, must be the unique product of national taste and preference. Change in our life and our landscape is inevitable, but let the ultimate nature of that change reflect the consensus of a deeply concerned and widely informed Nation.