

1. **TRANSITION: Salazar will head Obama's Interior Department** (12/16/2008)

Noelle Straub, E&E reporter

Colorado Sen. Ken Salazar has been picked to lead the Interior Department in the Obama administration and will be announced officially later this week, a senior Democratic source confirmed today.

Salazar, who headed Colorado's Department of Natural Resources and served as state attorney general before his election to the Senate in 2004, is seen as a more moderate pick than some of the other names that have been floated for the position.



A member of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, the Democrat has been involved with land-use and energy development issues since taking office. His expected appointment drew praise from some conservation groups and caution from others.

Craig Obey, senior vice president of government affairs for the National Parks Conservation Association, lauded the choice. He said Salazar fought attempts by the Bush administration to rewrite national park management policies, championed the Centennial Challenge program to increase funding for the National Park Service and promoted educational use of the parks.

"He has been a real leader for national parks in the Senate," Obey said. "He'll make an outstanding secretary."

But Noah Greenwald of the Center for Biological Diversity said he will take a wait-and-see approach on Salazar's actions to implement the Endangered Species Act and reliance on science to make decisions.

"We're cautiously optimistic based on his opposition to oil shale and also his opposition to oil and gas drilling on the Roan Plateau," Greenwald said. "Our concern is that Ken Salazar hasn't really been tested on those issues, he doesn't have a record on endangered species and scientific integrity. It's our hope he'll come to be a real champion."

Rep. Raúl Grijalva (D-Ariz.) has long been the top choice of many conservationists for Interior secretary. He had the backing of more than 100 conservation groups, a coalition of scientists, parks and Latino organizations, and House Natural Resources Chairman Nick Rahall (D-W.Va.).

Luke Popovich, National Mining Association spokesman, said Salazar is not an ideologue. "Those who have most experience with Salazar would say he's a reasonable man who is open-minded, who is willing to let the facts speak for themselves," he said.

The Independent Petroleum Association of Mountain States lauded the choice, saying Salazar will provide a strong Western voice and play a pivotal role in the administration's goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing energy security.

"We look forward to working closely with Senator Salazar and are pleased that the president-elect has chosen someone who understands that there is a direct connection between federal lands and access to affordable, clean natural gas," said the petroleum group's executive director, Marc Smith, in a statement.

Salazar fought hard against the Bush administration's efforts to open Western public lands to commercial oil shale development. Last month, he said he may seek to impose new legislative restrictions on oil shale development in Western states in the wake of the commercial leasing rule the Bush administration finalized.

He also sponsored legislation to repeal fees and increase access to public lands for low-income families.

But Salazar also supported some offshore drilling. He backed the "Gang of 10" proposal, unveiled shortly before the start of the August congressional recess, to scale back leasing bans in the eastern Gulf of Mexico by allowing drilling as close as 50 miles from Florida's shores. It also proposed drilling in the Atlantic Ocean at least 50 miles off the coasts of four Southeastern states, if the states were to allow it.

Salazar has supported the use of alternative energy and sponsored legislation calling for additional research on carbon capture and sequestration. He has been outspoken on the dangers of climate change, but also voted last year against plans to consider global warming in Army Corps of Engineers decisions.

He has taken moderate stands in other areas, as well. Salazar was part of the "Gang of 14," a group of lawmakers who worked to broker a compromise on judicial nominations. He introduced Alberto Gonzales, Bush's nominee for attorney general, at his Senate confirmation hearing, drawing criticism from liberals, but later called for Gonzales to resign.

Although he has long been mentioned as a possible Interior pick, Salazar at first downplayed his chances, calling his selection "highly doubtful" and saying he liked being in the Senate. He even suggested other Westerners who might do well in the job.

Salazar will be the second Latino selected to serve in Obama's cabinet, along with New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson (D), who was selected for Commerce secretary.

Salazar grew up on a ranch and has worked as a farmer. He and his wife have owned and operated small businesses, including a Dairy Queen and radio stations in Pueblo and Denver. He practiced water and environmental law in the private sector for 11 years.

Salazar served as state attorney general from 1999 to 2004 before winning election to the Senate. From 1987 to 1994 he served as the governor's chief legal counsel and as executive director of the Colorado Department of Natural Resources. He fought to uphold Colorado's interstate water compacts, created the Youth in Natural Resources program to educate young people about Colorado's natural resources and authored the Colorado constitutional amendment creating the Great Outdoors Colorado conservation program.

Other names floated

At a press conference yesterday, Obama named all his top energy and environmental picks except for Interior secretary. His transition team has floated numerous trial balloons of possible candidates, but took longer to settle on a pick for Interior.

Grijalva drew the most support from conservation groups, but Obama said during the campaign that he wants a sportsman in the job, a background Grijalva lacks. "I think that having a head of the department of Interior who doesn't understand hunting and fishing would be a problem," Obama said in a pre-election interview with *Field & Stream*. Grijalva was also seen as more liberal than other choices.

Hook-and-bullet groups pushed Rep. Mike Thompson (D-Calif.), but environmental groups objected to him because of his support for the Bush administration's Healthy Forests legislation.

John Berry, director of the National Zoo and an assistant Interior secretary during the Clinton administration, also was mentioned. Berry, 49, was promoted by the gay and lesbian community and would have been the first openly gay Cabinet member. But the Interior job traditionally goes to a Westerner, while Berry hails from the East Coast. And Berry recently was named to the American Recreation Coalition's outdoor resources review group, which favors increased motorized vehicle recreation in national parks, leading conservation groups to oppose him.

Reports also circulated that David Hayes, a deputy secretary at Interior during the Clinton administration who is overseeing the energy and natural resources transition for Obama, could take the position himself. But some in the environmental community objected, noting that Hayes has worked as a lobbyist for several groups, including Sempra Energy and San Diego Gas & Electric, and as a lawyer represented the Chemical Manufacturers Association and Ford Motor Co.

E&E reporter Eric Bontrager contributed.