

PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE UNITED STATES MISSION TO THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

SECRETARY OF INTERIOR

December 12, 1968

WALTER J. HICKEL: SECRETARY OF INTERIOR DESIGNATE (PROFILE)

When Walter J. Hickel was 21 years old he arrived on the frontier of the territory named Alaska with total assets of 37 cents in loose change. He promptly borrowed \$10 and got a job as a dishwasher.

Alaska is now the largest of the 50 United States, and Mr. Hickel, a millionaire, is its Governor.

The man named as Secretary of the Interior for the Nixon Administration is an individualist in the classic sense. Change has been one of the chief characteristics of his 50-year life. Walter Joseph Hickel did not want to go to Alaska. He wanted to go to Australia. He started his business life as an insurance man. He made a fortune in construction.

In the midst of building, raising six sons, traveling to Japan as Chairman of Alaska's State Chamber of Commerce Economic Development Committee, Mr. Hickel also had time for politics.

He has been a member of the Republican National Committee for ten years and challenged Democrat William Egan, who governed Alaska since the territory was made a state in 1958, for the Governorship. Mr. Hickel won a close victory and became Alaska's first Republican Governor.

When Mr. Hickel took office in 1966 he said he would concentrate on the economic development of Alaska's natural resources. "It has always been said that Alaska is a vast storehouse of just about everything. Now we must let the world know what we have and put it to use."

Governor Hickel was born in Claflin, Kansas, August 18, 1919, one of ten children in a family of German tenant farmers. When he was 19 he opened an insurance business, but sold it one year later and went to California, where he worked as a carpenter.

He was set on immigrating to Australia. But he was also impatient. When told it would take 60 to 90 days to get his embarkation papers in order, he demanded to know "Where can I go without a handfull of visas and a passport?" Someone reeled of a long list of places, the last of which was Alaska. He left immediately.

Through the years he worked with the Alaska Railroad, then as a bartender, a carpenter and a civilian inspector for the U.S. Air Force.

He married Janice Cannon in 1941. They had one son. Janice died in 1943. In November, 1945, he married Ermalee Strutz; they have five sons.

* * * * *