

I regret that because of other commitments, it will not be possible for me to be present on Monday, February 19th, and participate in the subcommittee hearings on S. 2630, the Washakie Wilderness bill.

In my absence and to clarify this matter, in order that we may be assured that the Wilderness Act will in the future be administered in accordance with the intent of Congress, I will appreciate your asking the appropriate administration representatives the following questions:

Now here are the questions: First, "Have any U.S. oil and gas leases with the right of surface entry been issued in wilderness or proposed wilderness areas since the passage of the Wilderness Act in 1964?"

Mr. CLIFF. No. There have been no oil and gas leases issued in wilderness or primitive areas with the right of surface entry since the passage of the Wilderness Act. Possibly there may have been a case of an exploratory permit where directional drilling from outside the wilderness area would be possible, but I don't know of any cases that have been approved.

Senator CHURCH. So your answer to Senator Hayden's first question is "No?"

Mr. CLIFF. That is right.

Senator CHURCH. His second question is, "What is the practice of the Forest Service when requested by the Department of the Interior for its recommendation to an application for a Federal oil and gas lease within a wilderness area?"

Mr. CLIFF. Well, as you understand, Senator, the oil and gas leases are issued by the Interior Department, after referral to the Department of Agriculture where national forests are concerned. The Department of Agriculture has the opportunity to recommend for or against the issuance of a lease or permit.

Even before the Wilderness Act passed, it was our policy to recommend against oil and gas leasing in primitive areas, and wilderness areas. The Wilderness Act provides that policies and authorities in effect at the time of the passage of the act continue.

We have continued our policy of recommending against applications for oil and gas leases in established wilderness areas and primitive areas, except where these resources could be exploited by directional drilling from outside.

It is possible in places, and it is common practice in the oil and gas industry, to extract oil and gas by directional drilling. We have not objected to that, but we have objected to the construction of roads, the use of drilling equipment, and all the other disturbances that would result from oil and gas exploration with other types of drilling.

Senator CHURCH. The practice you are following now is consistent with the practice that you followed prior to passage of the Wilderness Act. Is that correct?

Mr. CLIFF. That is right. That is absolutely correct.

Senator CHURCH. Does the Department of Agriculture possess a veto power in connection with the decision as to whether or not an oil and gas lease will be issued, under the present law?

Mr. CLIFF. It is not an absolute veto power, as I understand it. The Secretary of the Interior has final authority to issue these leases on the lands derived from the public domain.

We have an advisory role, but in every instance, the Secretary of the Interior has followed the recommendation of the Secretary of Agriculture with respect to these lands.