

Press Pool Summary, Obama at Interior, 2009.03.03:

In brief remarks at Interior, the president said that he had signed the memorandum to "help restore the scientific process to its rightful place at the heart of the endangered species act." Obama said the work of scientists and experts will be respected in his administration, an obvious reference to his unnamed immediate predecessor, who in December, 2008 had changed the rules and allowed projects to go ahead without certain scientific reviews.

As for the endangered species act, "we should be looking for ways to improve it, not weaken it," the president said. Obama said it was a "false choice" to say that America must choose between economic growth and protecting the environment.

His reference to the reversal of the Bush administration action garnered loud applause, as did his remarks about portions of the stimulus law that will provide financial assistance to Indian reservations (see transcript).

Obama touched on his trip to the mainland as an 11-year-old, which included a grand tour of national parks (and is told in "Dreams from My Father").

"That was an experience I will never forget. It's an experience I want for my daughters and all our daughters and sons," he said, reading from a PrompTer. He added that it is "only possible because of the work you do each and every day."

The event at the Interior department seemed more like a campaign rally than a birthday party. Mentions of Obama's name drew spontaneous applause, and the president received an enthusiastic welcome when he entered Yates Auditorium with Interior Secretary Ken Salazar.

Salazar gave Obama a hug after introducing him as "my good friend." Obama upped the stakes by calling his former Senate colleague a "great friend."

About 500 workers (most of whom whipped out their digital cameras at the event) were on hand for the celebration of the 160th anniversary of the swearing-in of the first Interior secretary, on March 3, 1949.

"We love you, Barack," shouted a man in the back of the art deco style hall (the Interior department headquarters was the first federal government building designed and built during the New Deal) when Obama came onstage (no response from the president, who grinned widely during the generous applause).

Many of the department's 67,000 employees were linked in via teleconference and satellite video, according to Interior.

One-minute motorcades to and from were routine. Departed the grounds at 1:55 pm and the president was back in the Oval at 2:30. Obama was accompanied in the limo by Reggie Love, perhaps reliving their recent basketball exploits in the Interior gym.

[The press pool reporter who issued the above summary was Paul West of the Baltimore Sun.]