

Ken Salazar
Secretary of the Interior

Ken Salazar, a fifth-generation Coloradan, was confirmed as the 50th secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior on Jan. 20, 2009, in a unanimous vote by the U.S. Senate.

Prior to his confirmation, Salazar served as Colorado's 35th U.S. senator, winning election in November 2004 and serving on the Finance Committee, which oversees the nation's tax, trade, social-security, and health-care systems. He also served on the Agriculture, Energy and Natural Resources, Ethics, Veterans Affairs and Aging Committees.

As a U.S. Senator, Salazar was a leader creating and implementing a vision for a renewable-energy economy that is less dependent on foreign oil. He was involved in every major bipartisan legislative effort on energy since 2005, including helping craft the Renewable Fuels, Consumer Protection, and Energy Efficiency Act of 2007. Salazar also tackled the challenge of providing affordable health care by fighting to broaden the Children's Health Insurance Program and by working to improve health care for older Americans.

Salazar has been a champion for farmers, ranchers, and rural communities, leading efforts to pass the 2007 Farm Bill and to create food and fuel security for America. He worked to help veterans in rural communities get better access to health care by creating the Office of Rural Health in the Department of Veterans Affairs and by pressing that agency to open new rural outreach clinics in Colorado.

He also exercised a leadership role in championing a new defense and foreign policy that restores American security and influence around the world and pressed for a change in mission in Iraq to better advance America's national security interests. Salazar worked to strengthen our military to ensure that we are able to confront emerging threats.

From 1999 to 2004, Salazar served as Colorado's thirty-sixth Attorney General, winning statewide elections in 1998 and 2002. He chaired the Conference of Western Attorneys General and received the Profiles in Courage award from his fellow state attorneys general for his dedication to preserving and promoting the rule of law.

As Colorado's attorney general, Salazar led efforts to make communities safer, fight crime, strengthen the state's sex offender laws, address youth and family violence, enhance and enforce Colorado's consumer protection laws, combat fraud against the elderly, and protect Colorado's environment. He established the first-ever Colorado Attorney General Fugitive Prosecutions Unit to apprehend and prosecute fugitive murderers, the first-ever Attorney General Gang Prosecution Unit, and an Environmental Crimes Unit.

From 1987 to 1994 Salazar served in the Cabinet of Gov. Roy Romer as chief legal counsel and executive director of the Colorado Department of Natural Resources, where he crafted reforms for oil, mining, and gas operations to better protect the environment and the public. He fought to uphold Colorado's interstate water compacts, created the Youth in Natural Resources program to educate thousands of young people about Colorado's natural resources, and authored the Colorado constitutional amendment creating Great Outdoors Colorado. He served as the first chairman of that movement, helping make it one of the most successful land conservation efforts in the United States.

Salazar's family settled in the American West before the United States was a country. After settling in New Mexico four centuries ago, his family planted roots in Colorado's San Luis Valley, where they have farmed and ranched the same land for five generations. Raised on a remote ranch without electricity or telephone, Salazar learned the values of hard work, family, and faith. Thanks to his parents' lessons, he and his seven brothers and sisters all became first generation college graduates.

A farmer for more than thirty years, Salazar was a partner with his family in El Rancho Salazar. He and his wife have owned and operated small businesses, including a Dairy Queen and radio stations in Pueblo and Denver.

Salazar worked for 11 years as a water and environmental lawyer with some of the top firms in the West. During his time in the private sector and as Colorado's Attorney General, Salazar worked on cases from the trial courts to the Colorado and U.S. Supreme Courts.

He received a political science degree from Colorado College in 1977, and graduated with a law degree from the University of Michigan in 1981. He also received honorary doctorates of law from Colorado College in 1993 and the University of Denver in 1999. Salazar and his wife, Hope, have two daughters, Melinda and Andrea, and one granddaughter, Mireya.