Preparing for Interviews
Jane Curlin, Udall Foundation

Know what to expect:

- Talk to people who have been through similar interviews to find out what helped them and what they wish they'd done, or not done.
- Use mock interviews to listen to yourself, to practice framing answers that include the information you want to convey, and to help you with your sense of timing. Twenty minute interviews go by fast.

Prepare yourself:

- What points do you want to be sure to make? What character traits do you want to project? Write them down, and review your list before each interview.
- Go over your application carefully. Interview questions will mostly derive from your application materials: the personal statement, study or policy proposal, activities, transcript, and letters of recommendation. Mentally review past course material, consider what activities matter most to you and why, and be prepared to discuss anything and everything.
- Brainstorm a list of possible questions, and practice speaking the answers. Although actual interview questions will most likely be very different, the practice you'll gain from thinking on your feet could transform a hesitant and cautious response into an articulate, confident and effective statement.
- Also, brainstorm a list of potential questions in your major field of study. Ask your advisor to help you. Focus on issues that would interest an educated generalist (and since you've been reading the New York Times, The Economist, or the Wall Street Journal, you know what these are). Formulate your answers verbally.
- You may be asked questions on current events. Know what is happening in the world, and have opinions to articulate. Be able to defend knowledgeably your positions on cloning and stem-cell research, campaign finance reform, the federal budget, missile defense, etc.
- Don't be surprised by questions that touch on your extracurricular interests, the kind of books you read, and what you like to do in your free time.

Managing the Interview:

- Remember that the committee members are intelligent, accomplished, successful and occasionally famous people. Don't, however, let yourself be intimidated. Engage confidently in the exchange of ideas; respectful differences of opinion are expected and even welcomed. Know the difference between a debate and an argument, and avoid
engaging in the latter. Remember how short your time is, and how many other things you have to say.

- Take a moment to think before you answer. Ask for clarification if you need to. Don't be afraid to admit you don't know; do be afraid to fake it.
- Know when to stop. If you feel you could talk forever on a particular topic, ask the committee if they would like you to go into more detail.
- No matter how well you prepare, you will be asked questions you can't anticipate. Expect the unexpected. Even if you feel you've just made a fool of yourself, remember all the other questions you answered well and move on.
- Be honest; be confident; be yourself.