



***Thomas Kleppe
Mayor, Member of Congress, Director of Small Business
Administration,
Secretary of the Interior (Ford Administration), Son of
Homesteaders
1919-
Kintyre, North Dakota***

Thomas S Kleppe was born the son of homesteaders in 1919. His father, Lars Kleppe, operated a grain-elevator business that served local farmers and cattle ranchers. By the time he was a teenager, Kleppe was working for his father.

Kleppe spent one year in college before leaving to work as a banker. In 1942, during World War II, he left North Dakota to serve four years in the United States Army. During his service, Kleppe played baseball on an Army baseball team. Shortly before being honorable discharged, the St. Louis Cardinals offered him a contract, which he turned down to return to North Dakota.

After the war, Kleppe worked as a bookkeeper and a banker and also served in numerous civic organizations. In 1950 he became the youngest-ever mayor of Bismarck, the capital of North Dakota. He served in that capacity for four years, and later worked as the treasurer of the North Dakota State Republican Party. Defeated in a bid for the U.S. Senate in 1964, he was elected from North Dakota's Second Congressional District to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1966.

Kleppe held his congressional seat until 1970, when he again ran unsuccessfully for the Senate. Shortly afterwards, President Richard Nixon named him the head of the Small Business Administration. Kleppe served in this post until 1975, when President Gerald Ford tapped him to become Secretary of the Interior. When he took office on October 17, 1975, Thomas Kleppe became the first native of North Dakota to serve in a presidential cabinet. Secretary Kleppe remained in his post at the Department of the Interior until January 20, 1977.

Now retired, Secretary Kleppe make his home in the suburbs of Washington D.C.