

An Oral History Interview

with

JAMES McNULTY (part 3)

Tucson, Arizona

conducted by
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JF: Okay, we're back on the air here. On November 23, 1974, in New Hampshire, Mo announced his candidacy for president of the United States. Did Mo ever talk to you about running before he announced?

JM: Yes.

JF: Did he seek your advice?

JM: Well, I don't remember the exact words, but we talked about the possibility. I was concerned with what he was going to try to do in terms of trying to recruit members of Congress to help him. I thought that he had to look there for help, in a very strong way. And he did.

JF: Was that before colleagues of his all signed a petition urging him to run?

JM: Yes, I think that was later on. I think that just kind of floating the idea past a lot of different people. Initially, it would be the bright-eyed, the bushy-tailed folk. The really tough, hard-boiled guys--we save them for later.

JF: Why do you think he ran? What do you think his primary motivations were?

JM: I think that he's a man of so many talents that this just seemed to be something else he could undertake. He had the ability and the political skills. He was healthy and widely respected. I think he stayed pretty sanguine about things. I don't think he was one to get carried [away] with the enthusiasm of the moment.

JF: Did you work on the campaign at all?

JM: Here, yes.

JF: Do you remember what you did, or what role you played?

JM: It would have been probably talking to a lot of the folks who were already converted to the things that he wanted to do, and how wholesome that would be for the state. The campaign was probably as well organized as it could have been under the circumstances, but the tides of opinion and feelings, when the stakes get as big as they were in this, really gets to almost overwhelm you. Small things get magnified way out of proportion, either way. You hear something that really pleases you, and you're fascinated by that and pleased by it, but it wasn't that important.

JF: In the end, Mo lost twenty-two primaries, finishing second in, I believe, seven of them. What do you think were the primary factors leading to his defeat? Do you have any thoughts about that?

JM: Is this not true? Nobody from Congress has ever gone to the presidency.

JF: That's correct.

JM: Yes. There is a historical lag with a statistic like that. It just kind of permeates the proceedings--perhaps never being specifically identified. What's the expression now? "I've been there and done that"? That means I don't want to do it again. Well, the opposite of this is, "I haven't been there, and it hasn't happened." So the inertia of these people and institutions is such that unfairly it accrues so terribly [to your?] disadvantage. I think of Mayor Coleman Young of Detroit who said he couldn't vote for Udall in that primary in Michigan, because he was from a racist church. In later years, Young apologized for that, but did that have any effect in that Michigan primary?, and would that have made a hell of a lot of difference if it had not been said? I think so. Young just didn't know what he was talking about. Somebody told him, "Oh, the LDS [Church] doesn't consecrate black people bishops, so that's all we need to know about this guy."

Mo made a speech to a peace group in Washington in which he said he'd be willing to try unilateral disarmament. I don't know if that was widely heard. Have you ever heard that said before?

JF: I don't remember that.

JM: No. I didn't hear it, it was printed in Commonweal magazine. "So it hadn't been done, and it wasn't being done, and this guy hasn't got any kind of a power base. He's kind of a troublemaker, too--he stirs things up with various efforts." I can't believe Mo was ever unkind to people. I never heard him speak an unkind word about anybody. He was double-crossed by some people who just ought to know better. Who was the Irish guy from Detroit? O'Hara? United Automobile Workers. Jim O'Hara? Kind of a big name. Birch Bayh, another guy Mo had every reason to believe was going to be in his corner. Mo looks down at the newspaper, and he's sitting there (laughs) in the newspaper clippings, and says, "Bayh Going to Test the Water." So that's the way Bayh was going to help Mo, by running, himself, for president. That didn't go anywhere, and it shouldn't have.

JF: And Frank Church.

JM: Frank was another one, wasn't he? That was really disappointing. I didn't believe.... Well, he wasn't around much longer after that, if that had anything to do with it--probably didn't.

JF: In 1976, the Democratic Convention, Carter was nominated. Did Mo ever speak to you about his impressions of Carter, or share with you his impressions of Carter?

JM: I'm not going to answer that.

JF: Okay. What kind of president do you think Mo would have made?

JM: Very good. He really had a sense of politics and the art of compromise. And with his formidable intelligence and his sense of humor, he'd have done pretty well, because

he could walk into a hostile room and walk out with a bunch of adherents. You listen to him, you'd be persuaded by him that he knew what he was doing.

JF: In 1980, I understand you ran for U.S. Senate.

JM: I did.

JF: Who was that against, who was your opponent?

JM: Frank Depauli [phonetic spelling], a kid born and raised in Globe, and later became a medical doctor and did sports medicine--good fellow. I knew I could beat him, but a guy name Bill Schultz decided right at the end that he was going to run, and that he was going to spend \$1.3 million doing it. He did both. We proved that he couldn't raise that amount of money. We didn't know he'd write himself a check--they weren't doing that in those days--a guy writes himself a check for a million bucks for his campaign.

JF: It's hard to compete against that.

JM: Oh, yes. I won Cochise County. That's nice.

JF: In 1980 to 1983, you served on the Board of Regents. And then in 1982 you ran for and were elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. Before we get into that, I'd like to just ask you a couple of questions about the 1982 redistricting plan. Apparently Mo and a number of Democratic associates threatened to take the legislature to court over that redistricting plan.

JM: They did take it to court.

JF: Did they? What are your recollections?

JM: That's what I just read you.

JF: Okay. What do you think the legislature's motivation was in the redistricting?

JM: To clear the way for Republican domination.

JF: And this was the redistricting that lumped eight incumbents....

JM: No, no, that's an earlier time. We've got a 1960, a 1970, and a 1980 census, and [demanding?] the redistricting that comes out of the census. I was there three times. I had a different district each time. I always lived in Bisbee. At one time, the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum and Bisbee were in the same senatorial district! That takes a stretch.

JF: Sure does. It really does. As to your House race, what prompted you to run?

JM: I was certain I could win. The numbers were there--slight Democratic registration advantage. And in terms of voting patterns, Republican advantage. Well, I'd had a pretty good profile with the Board of Regents--that helped me out. And I ran before the district was finalized. I just called people together on St. Patrick's Day and said I was going.

JF: Did Mo encourage you to run?

JM: Oh, yes! He thought that was fine, and said he would help me any way he could. He spoke kindly for me back in Washington, among the political action committees.

JF: How close was the election in the end?

JM: That I beat Kolbe? (chuckles) By 2,500 votes. That's more than Mo won by, thirty years before.

JF: (laughs) When you went back to Washington, Mo had--as you mentioned before--in 1968 Mo had written a book called *The Job of the Congressman*, that was more or less a job description for incoming freshmen congressmen. He also had been instrumental in starting a school for incoming congressmen--I think it's called the Freshman Seminar. Did you attend that when you went back there?

JM: I did the Freshman Seminars, but I didn't remember that it was Mo's idea--I thought it was the party's idea.

JF: I think Stewart actually may have been one of the first to instigate the seminars and Mo followed up on it--as I understand.

JM: We had a week, a week, of preparation. They brought in all the heavies. It was very explanatory. It was a hell of a lot of stuff you [had to] learn in a hell of a hurry.

JF: Is the book, *The Job of the Congressman*, still useful? Or is that fairly outdated now?

JM: I haven't looked at it in ten years. I read it most carefully when it was published.

JF: Your first few months there, did Mo help you? just get acquainted?

JM: Everybody knew--and I'm sure he told people--that I was his...companion. I guess you can't use that word today--that means....

JF: Something different now.

JM: They knew we were close.

JF: Did he offer you any advice as an incoming?

JM: We conferred all the time.

JF: Was there any particular advice that you recall?

JM: No. He and I--our votes were 95% the same.

JF: In his book, *Too Funny to be President*, he stated a view that "no man ever brought so much talent to the national legislature." In fact, you were the only congressman to override a presidential veto in the twentieth century, as I understand it. That was after being in office only thirteen months. Can you describe what happened?

JM: There was a continuing program studying water and the problems associated with it, and funded through the land grant institutions, and the state university had a program where they were trying to find all the polluted waters, heavy sulphur infestation, as part of the mining process--and the like. That bill came up and was fairly routinely passed without a great deal of attention paid to it, and got to the president, and he vetoed it. Oh yes, over in the Senate there was a senator from one of the Dakotas, named Abourezk, and he was really offended. He was up for reelection that year, and his University of South Dakota was one of the land grant institutions of this water study money. But mainly, this was a good program and a good thing to do. So I went over to see Abourezk and he said, "You want to try and override it?" "Sure, that'd be good fun." He said, "I'll have to get some Democrat votes, because I probably won't even get a majority of my guys." So we said, "Okay," and we set in motion the procedure by which this would come back before the House.

I remember I went to a caucus--there was just about a dozen guys there--Tip and Jim Wright, and Tony Coelho and Tom Foley, and I said, "There's a bill coming up tomorrow on this water bill, and my legislative director, Dr. John Crow, said that vetoes are most often overridden if they are voted on the same day that the report comes back to the House for action. Jim Wright said, "Well, we won't be able to do that today, we'll have to wait until tomorrow." And Tip said, "The hell we will! That's all I need to hear. Do whatever it takes, we're going to vote on that veto in the next forty minutes!" I ran it down on the floor and checked around with some of my Republican buddies, and they said, "Wow! what did you do? You really got the White House upset." "Why?!" "Well, they're calling around now, they're not going to let you [override the] veto [on] that water bill." And I said, "Well, it's a good bill, and I don't know why Republicans wouldn't support it, and it's not a lot of money." Well, the upshot of it was, the matter came before the body, and I got up and said, "I think the president was badly advised in vetoing this bill. It's an excellent bill, it's done good work, and I'm going to call it in just about three minutes," and sat down. Bam! they voted, and the Republicans voted 67 to uphold the veto and 45 to override it. And the Democrats voted 241 to override, 1 to sustain. So it wasn't even close. Tip came running over to me, insisting that I go back in his office and take a picture with he and I standing there together. (chuckles)

JF: That's wonderful. By the time you arrived in Congress, a number of holes had been put in the seniority system by the likes of Mo Udall. How was the seniority system working when you were there?

JM: Well, that class of, what was it, 1978?, that tipped everything over? They made it a much more decent place. These committee chairmen would not have a committee meeting all year long! But after the turnover--it wasn't as much of a turnover as it should have been, and there's still things that need to be done, but it was vastly different, I'm told. Certainly, if you got three signatures, you could force a meeting of the committee, so some of these old dinosaurs just had to face up to things that they didn't want to--and in my view made things much more open. I didn't have a sense of debate being foreclosed by gimmicks.

JF: You served on the Interior Committee (JM: I did.) as did Mo. In 1984, the Committee passed the Arizona Wilderness Act. Were you involved in that?

JM: Oh, yes. Yes, he let me do it on the floor.

JF: Oh, really?

JM: Yes.

JF: What did the Act do? What was the gist?

JM: It created wilderness area in the Huachuclas, in the Chiricahuas, and Mount Graham, up in the Galiuros. Mo let each congressman pick what he wanted from his district--as long as it was responsible. Of course some guys, they didn't believe in it. I think Bob Stump said, "No, I'm not picking out anything. I don't think they ought to do it." So when that happened, Mo went back to the drawing board and he denominated the area that the congressman wouldn't....

JF: In Stump's district?

JM: Yes. I think Eldon Rudd probably didn't designate much wilderness himself.

JF: Who were the major players in that?

JM: In Arizona, or in Congress?

JF: In passing the Arizona Wilderness Act. Was it primarily the Arizona delegation?

JM: Yes--and not all of that. Mo was the overriding influence. Everybody looked to him for stuff like that.

JF: What was your impression of Bob Stump?

JM: I served six years with him in the state senate, and I have a very personal affection for him. There's no blarney about him. He tells you what he thinks and why he thinks it, and says, "Take me as I am, or toss me out." So I've never had anything but a personal,

warm relationship and a view of him. I expect (laughs) he and I didn't vote the same 30% of the time.

JF: How about Eldon Rudd?

JM: Same thing.

JF: Mo has long been honored as being one of the most well-loved and effective legislators. You had an opportunity to watch Mo operate on the floor and with his colleagues. Based on those observations, what, in your opinion, was the key to his effectiveness?

JM: His intelligence and his thorough familiarity with anything that was being brought before you, and with total fairness in the expression of counter-views. He was willing to put into reports that there was controversy about this or that. Some folks, you know, wanted a nice clean record where it only reflected what they thought. He would answer anybody's question. He never declined to yield on the floor. And he did an enormous amount of preparatory work before he actually got down to arguing on the floor. I don't know, probably the most important dialogue was mark-up. That's when the rubber hits the road, when you do that full committee mark-up. It isn't going to change a whole lot from that moment until the president signs it.

Mo was very generous to guys, too. People would say, "Gee, I don't really care all that much for your views on wilderness, but a lot of people in my district [do], and it would help me out if you'd come along down there and talk to them. They'd love to hear from you." He had really become a hero of youth and environmental and ambitious kids. So it made a nice climate.

The only guy I ever heard criticize him was Phil Burton, who was a wild man from San Francisco.

JF: What was his criticism?

JM: He said, "Udall, your idea of a compromise is to go in and say, 'Okay, you guys can have anything you want.'" (laughs) Well, it's true, Mo wasn't much into the game-playing business, or "I'll swap you this if you swap me that." Burton wanted to make it more political. Mo wanted to make it as politically palatable as possible. And if the Republicans liked it, all the better! But Burton couldn't get (laughs) one Republican vote for anything that he ever did.

JF: Do you have any examples of Mo's ability to bring consensus and resolve disputes?

JM: Well, I remember an Indian bill where he actually talked me into voting the way I didn't want to vote—but that didn't happen very often.

JF: How did he do that?

JM: Very gently. I was offended by the bill--it had to do with Indians. The guy who was offering the bill was [named] Packwood, whom I really grew to dislike--and I'm proud to say I still dislike him.

JF: Bob Packwood?

JM: Yes. I'll give you an idea of Mo's standing. There was a bill that had to do with the additional electricity that was generated by the new units, new turbines, being installed in Boulder Dam. So one school of thought said, "Well, the guys that signed up for this years ago took big chances. They ought to have first crack at it." Barbara Boxer [who] was a representative then from Northern California, said, "No, no, we're going to open this up to bidding, all brand new." And Mo would say, "You don't have a system that's designed to handle that." "Well, we will, in time." Well, the matter went to the floor, and they called it "the Boxer Rebellion," which kind of gave it a little cache. She was very vocal, "It's time to bring an end to these subsidies for these farmers in the West. We're going to do this and that." Mo didn't want Ms. Boxer's amendment, and he spoke very vigorously. But finally, ran down the time showed, and Mo was losing by one vote. The old fellow from Tennessee was the Speaker of the House, and technically at fifteen minutes, if it's a fifteen-minute vote, you hit down the gavel and say, "By your vote of this and this, you have carried" or "you have defeated." So the Boxer people were starting to shout, "Vote! Announce the vote!" The old man just sat up there, just very calmly, and he would look down to Mo, and Mo would go, "No. No." And he wouldn't call for the vote. And Mo called me over and he said, "Boy, this is a close one. But I think I know, maybe we can do some good. There's a guy from New York named Bob Garcia. [He's always] been a friend of mine and I've helped him out in a few minor details. You go find him and say, "Would you please consider changing your vote from 'yes' to 'no'?" So I ran around the room. I had to find him. There were 300 guys milling around. I found him, and I said, "I'm from Mo." He said, "I know." I said, "Mo wants to know--this is important to him--could you see your way clear to change your vote to ['nay']?" He said, "If Mo wants it, it's done." And he jumped up and ran down into the well. You had to take a card and you had to sign it, turn it in, and as soon as you did that, they read the card, and it said, "Mr. Garcia changes his vote from yes to no." And Mo looked at old Bill Naylor and nodded like that, and then (raps table as if with a gavel) he said, "By your vote of 217 no and 214," or whatever, "yes, you have defeated the amendment."

JF: That's a wonderful story. In 1979, Mo was officially diagnosed with Parkinson's, although I think some people knew before that.

JM: They did. Tom knew first, I think I knew second.

JF: Do you know about when it was that you knew?

JM: After I heard, I went right to Chandler, and I remember I was really choked up. I had heard he was sick, and I jumped to the conclusion that it was cancer--I didn't know

what it was, really. I remember Chandler saying, "It's serious, but it's not as bad as you think. This is what they've said...."

JF: Was that before 1979?

JM: I don't know. Shoot.

JF: According to Stewart Udall's oral history, by as early as 1984, when you were in the House, he was already trying to encourage Mo to resign, wanting him to resign before his powers waned. Were you aware, at all, at that time?

JM: Yes, that's so wrenching. You know, what's your responsibility? What's the fair thing? What difference does it make?

JF: What were your memories of Mo's condition at that time when you were serving?

JM: Well I remember seeing, sitting in the front room with all the hangers-on, Ella and the Talahers [phonetic spelling], Ed Coyle, Terry Bracy--it was Sunday, in fact. I remember that so well, because (laughs) Mo got up and he said, "The debate's over. McNulty and I are going to see the Redskins beat the Cowboys. Good-bye." And we got up and walked out the door. But before that, we had been asked to say should he run again. So what year would that have been?

JF: Was that 1988?

JM: I would say he was in fairly good shape. I told him, "Don't do it, it's just too much." About a week later he announced to the Press Club that he was not going to do it.

But the ailment, oh boy! You know, Mo had to wear trousers with Velcro--he couldn't button, so he had to have this velcro. It was hard for him to even pull the velcro apart to use the toilet.

JF: Was there a time when it became obvious to you that you felt like he really should resign?

JM: Yes.

JF: When was that?

JM: Well, certainly that day down in Yuma--I'd never forget that.

JF: That's the day you were talking about earlier?

JM: Yes, that was his last race.

JF: That would have been 1990?

JM: Yes, I guess. He was elected in 1961, thirty years later, 1991--he resigned in May of 1991. So he'd been elected November of 1990. Well, I remember being over here at the Ramada Inn, a week or so before the election. I came up to see him. He'd left the door cracked open. He was by himself. He was in a fetal position with a bottle of Budweiser and a straw, and that's how he was drinking the beer. But then a few nights later he walked through the Hotel Viscount. He walked through there that night on a, quote, "Victory March." God, that was ghastly. It couldn't have lasted twenty minutes, and they got him on out of there. The Parkinson's attacked his voice, he didn't speak loudly enough, and the people couldn't hear. And then he had the head-wagging business. Boy, that was hard times. So 1992 was when he fell down the stairs?

JF: I think it was 1991. In early 1991 is when he fell down the stairs. That April, I believe, is when he resigned.

JM: Of 1991. Yeah, you're right, he did resign. Thirty years, that sticks in my mind. It was April, not May?

JF: I've got it as April.

JM: You're probably right. But wait a minute, when does he fall backwards?

JF: Early 1991 is all I have here.

JM: So who signed his name in April 1991?

JF: As I understand, I believe it was Norma who spoke to the Speaker at that point. Or later, they waited for a while.

JM: So 1991 to 1998, seven years since he fell.

JF: And since he's been in the VA Hospital.

JM: Yes. I saw him about three weeks ago.

JF: Were you able to communicate at all?

JM: No. None whatsoever. Bruce Wright and I went up there. They put him in the Capitol Hill Society Athletic Hall of Fame, and I got a letter from what's-his-name--he was the second-ranking Republican, decent guy. He said, "You come back and accept for Udall, we'll pay your way and hotel and meals and so forth," which was very nice, and I did. So I had that morning, and Bruce and I went out to the VA Hospital.

JF: This is Bruce Wright?

JM: Yes.

JF: Getting back to your congressional campaign, in 1984, you ran again (JM: I did.) against Jim Kolbe.

JM: Well, he ran against me.

JF: Exactly. (laughter) This time, you lost. What happened?

JM: Reagan carried the district, something like 58[%] to 42[%], and Kolbe and I were 50-49.

JF: Do you remember the vote spread at all?

JM: Yes, about.... Gee, I did know those numbers--2,400 maybe.

JF: So the primary difference, you think, was the Reagan landslide?

JM: Yes.

JF: On August 2, 1996, after a group threatened to "out" him, Congressman Kolbe announced publicly that he was gay. Did that announcement surprise you?

JM: I don't answer that either.

JF: Okay. Let me ask you just a couple of other questions here, and I think we'll be done. Ed Pastor was elected to fill Mo's seat after he resigned. Do you know Mr. Pastor?

JM: Sure.

JF: What are your impressions of him?

JM: Well, he did long years of dues-paying as the one Democratic member of the five-member Maricopa County Board of Supervisors. I would think twelve, sixteen years of that. Boy, that's a long haul! Well, he has gotten in on the redistricting business for the most recent one, and has transformed that district from a Pima County probably Democratic district, to a Maricopa County certainly Democratic district. So Tucson has one member. And that worked out fine with Mr. Kolbe, who got rid of a bunch of Pinal County where he ran very poorly. So, if a politician's first business is to get reelected, they have done so.

JF: Just a general question here. We've talked a lot about Mo's strengths. What, if any, were his weaknesses, in your opinion?

JM: Oh, he could be impatient with people. He felt if he explained something, he shouldn't have to explain it again. And I think he felt that he knew he had the background. He understood this as well as anyone, or better than most, or better than all.

I think people perceived more than was there. But geniuses are often unappreciated in their times.

I think he's paid a terrible domestic price--wives, kids. Not intentional neglect, but in terms of the greater good and the bigger picture, he had to do this and he had to do that. I think he feels badly about that. I don't know the kids hardly at all. I know Anne. She and I did a thing on Mo. We did that for the Literary Club and the Graduate Club. I met--was it Mark that's running....

JF: Yes, running for Congress.

JM: Yes, he's a big, fine-looking, interesting kid.

JF: "The good-looking Udall" I think he describes himself.

JM: He is. He is good-looking, and a very good-natured kind of guy. I've met.... Who's the other one? Tommy. That'd be Stew's kid, though, wouldn't it?

JF: Stewart's son, yes.

JM: So I don't think I know. I remember being in their home in Washington, and Pat trying to prepare meals for all of her tribe and me and Jackie coming in on the "noon balloon."

JF: Now, is that Pat or Ella?

JM: Pat.

JF: Did you know Ella?

JM: Oh, yes.

JF: What were your impressions of her?

JM: (Latin) *De mortuis nil nisi bonum est. De mortuis*--concerning the dead; *nil nisi*--nothing except; *bonum*--good; *est*--is.... Supply a verb--"said," "spoken," "felt."

JF: I think we're just about to run out of tape, and I know you have a lunch appointment. So I want to thank you for coming and participating in this program. Thanks, Jim.

[END OF INTERVIEW]