

An Oral History Interview

with

MARK TRAUTWEIN (part 1)

San Anselmo, California

conducted by
Julie Ferdon

July 31, 1998

The Morris K. Udall Oral History Project
University of Arizona Library, Special Collections

©1998
The University of Arizona
Arizona Board of Regents
All Rights Reserved

JF: This is Tape 17 of the Morris K. Udall Oral History Project. Good morning, it's Friday, July 31, 1998, and we are at the home of Mark Trautwein in San Anselmo, California. My name is Julie Ferdon, and I would like to welcome Mark to another in a series of oral history interviews that form the Morris K. Udall History Project.

All right, thank you for participating, Mark.

MT: My pleasure.

JF: I'd like to begin first with just some biographical information. You were born on August 14, 1949, is that correct?

MT: Yes.

JF: In New York City?

MT: In New York City.

JF: (aside about microphone) Did you go to high school there?

MT: I actually grew up in Stamford, Connecticut, which is just about forty-five minutes outside of New York. All my schooling was there in Stamford. My father was a book designer, worked for various publishing houses in New York City, and commuted in and out of New York every day. My mother was a housewife and a real estate agent. And then I went to school at Georgetown University in 1967, went to the Foreign Service School with the intention of becoming a diplomat, but quickly realized in the late sixties that going into the service of American foreign policy was not exactly (JF: Not good timing.) what I had in mind, really. I kind of panicked about what I would do with the rest of my life at that point, and transferred to Berkeley in 1970, and graduated from Berkeley in 1971 with a degree in journalism. I then went to work right after I graduated for the Berkeley Daily Gazette, which was a hundred-year-old daily newspaper for Berkeley.

JF: You were a journalist, I assume. (MT: Yes.) Did you have any special area you were covering?

MT: The things I liked to do most and spent the most time working on was covering the Berkeley City Council and Berkeley city government, which at the time was a very--all the activism that everyone thinks of with Berkeley had moved off campus in the early seventies with the election of a so-called radical majority on the Berkeley City Council. That was my beat, and it was very exciting, crazy, and wild and bizarre. It was my first introduction, actually, to government, and to how strange and wonderful government could be. I often used to say that after four-and-a-half years of covering the Berkeley City Council, that working in the United States Congress was a piece of cake, because nothing could be as strange as the Berkeley City Council. But I did that for four-and-a-

half years, and then quit that, and eventually took a job with the Environmental Study Conference in Washington.

JF: What is the Environmental Study Conference?

MT: ESC still exists. It is a bipartisan caucus of the House and Senate that produces informational materials on environmental and energy issues for members of Congress--issues that are active in the Congress, conducts seminars and briefings on those issues.

JF: How did you get that job?

MT: I was looking for work because I had quit my job at the Gazette after parting ways with my editors there. I had come back to D.C. to visit a friend of mine that I had known while I was in Berkeley, and she had moved to D.C. She introduced me to the guy who ran ESC and it kind of just developed into a job, which I was eager to take at the time. I moved clear across the country; left California, which I loved dearly; and moved clear across the country in 1977 to take a \$14,000-a-year job, which seemed kind of crazy to me. But I had always been interested in the Congress. It had always been a dream of mine to work in that institution, I was fascinated by it, and this was an opportunity to at least get my foot in the door.

JF: Now, in 1977, Mo was named chairman of the Interior and Insular Affairs Committee. In 1979, as I understand, you began working for Mo as, was it chief legislative assistant then, or just legislative assistant?

MT: Well, I was one of many legislative assistants on the committee, working for Mo in his capacity as chairman.

JF: How was it that you came to work on the committee?

MT: While working for ESC, the Environmental Study Conference, my primary responsibility there was covering the Alaska Lands Act, which was progressing through Congress--had been for three years in 1979. So I was very well informed about the Alaska Lands Act per se, and about other kinds of environmental issues. And my predecessor, who was Fran Sheehan on the committee, was leaving the committee to seek other opportunities. And they specifically needed someone to do the Alaska Lands Act for them. This was fairly late in the game of the Alaska Lands Act. It had already passed the House in its second version. The first version had passed the House and the Senate in the previous Congress and then been torpedoed at the last minute by Senator Mike Gravel from Alaska, and that whole sort of....

JF: That was his filibuster?

MT: It wasn't a filibuster, it was that in the sort of informal conference committee that had been created late in the Congress in the year 1978, I guess it would have been, they had days and days of these intensive, private, secret discussions between all the

principals, including Mo, to try and reconcile the differences between the House bill and the Senate position. The Senate had never actually passed a bill--typical of the Senate, they didn't consider it necessary for them to actually pass a bill to have a position. And they made compromise after compromise after compromise to Mike Gravel and Senator Stevens--the other senator from Alaska--and at the very end, right when they were just--they had virtually reached agreement on the entire thing, Mike Gravel comes in with this whole list of new demands, which included, as I recall--I was covering this for ESC at the time--some huge hydropower plant and a bunch of other just totally non-germane and nonnegotiable kinds of demands, and it blew up the entire process.

JF: As I recall, I think he was asking for some sort of hydroelectric dam that would have been the biggest project since Panama Canal.

MT: One of the biggest. Yes, it was unbelievable. At that point everyone threw up their hands. President Carter then took the very, very bold and visionary step that he took to designate 100 million acres of national monuments under the Antiquities Act, which was a 1912 act that gave the president authority to....

JF: Why do you think Carter did that?

MT: There were a couple of reasons. One was that there were a lot of these lands that were under discussion as potential parks and wilderness areas and wildlife refuges which had interim protections on them that were going to expire without some congressional action to extend them. But really, the primary reason was to put pressure on the Alaskans, and on the development interests that they represented, to say to them, "Look, you can't win just by stalling this process. You can't win just by killing everything. You've gotta play, because if you don't, you're gonna have 100 million acres of parks shoved down your throat that you can't do anything about, and you can't do anything in. You can do better by your standards by getting a bill done." And it proved to be an absolutely correct strategy. It was a very courageous strategy by President Carter. Mo always felt that it was the one thing that Jimmy Carter did that Carter could be most proud of, and that Carter deserved an enormous amount of credit for, because it really did set the stage for the passage of the Alaska Lands Act in the next Congress.

JF: Well, it's interesting to me because I understand that Carter set the Alaska Lands Bill as his absolute number one environmental priority. (MT: Yes.) And yet a matter of only a few years before, he and Mo were duking it out in the primary for Democratic presidential nominee. Did that ever come up in conversation with Mo? I gather there was no....

MT: No, not that I recall. I mean, certainly.... You know, Mo had an extraordinary capacity to.... He never held grudges. He never allowed kind of petty, personal problems or issues with other members or other politicians to get in the way of accomplishing a goal, or of him giving credit. He may have, very well--I really was never a part of this part of Mo's life or career--harbored some resentments about the way Jimmy Carter conducted the 1976 campaign. I'm sure he did, and felt things could have been different

if Carter hadn't done "X," "Y," and "Z." But I can't ever remember a single occasion in which that got in the way of Mo and Carter working together on things that they both cared about. And Jimmy Carter, frankly--I mean, here we are in 1998--Jimmy Carter was the last president that we have had that really gave a damn about the environment and about conservation, who had the same kind of personal feeling and personal commitment to it that Mo did. So working with Carter and working with Cecil Andrus, who was secretary of Interior at the time, who had a very similar kind of personal feeling about conservation and about the land... You know, it's an old cliché, that Mo used to repeat quite often and lived quite often--it's amazing how much you can get done in Washington when you don't care who gets credit for it. And Mo lived that, and Alaska was certainly one of those examples.

JF: It's interesting, your comments about his ability to not hold a grudge, because in the oral histories that I've done so far, there's been a continuing theme of his amazing ability to forgive, even those who'd done him real wrong.

MT: Yes. You know, it was often difficult for us on a staff level. You know, day-in, day-out, we had to deal with people kind of screwin' Mo in some way or another, or just doing all those kinds of.... It's part of the air you breathe and the water you drink in the Congress, that your opponents or your competitors are "stickin' it to you" in some way. And sometimes that's unfair and unnecessary and personal. It's staff tendency to want to hit back when that happens. And this happened countless times, and you'd go to Mo and say, "You know, Mo, we need to teach that guy a lesson!" And I can't remember a single occasion in which Mo rose to that bait. That experience, over a long period of time with Mo, taught me invaluable lessons--not only about politics and government and legislating, but about human relationships. They were the kinds of lessons that you could apply to your own life. That was something that I was most, most grateful to Mo for teaching me.

JF: Now, in 1979, your first year on the staff, in May of that year, Mo introduced the Alaska National Interests Lands Conservation Act, otherwise known as the Alaska Lands Act. And obviously you worked on that bill. What exactly was your role?

MT: I actually came on in October of that year, after the House had already passed the bill. So the bill at that point was over in the Senate and was going--the whole campaign to "save the last frontier," which was a national campaign that we haven't seen the likes of since, had moved to the Senate, and was concentrated in the Senate. So my role during that whole time was really a very limited one. It was mainly as a conduit between the environmental community and Mo, to maintain communication between Mo and the environmental community in terms of what was going on, what their fears and hopes, and what the latest little fire was where Mo might be effective in terms of, oh, it was dealing with a senator or with an interest group or public relations press issue--whatever. So I cannot take any credit for any of the heavy lifting that took place in the Alaska Lands Bill, but I was around and playing my little role at that point. I was thirty years old at that point, it was my first legislative job. I had come into this, there were people that had been working on the Alaska campaign for a decade or more who knew far more than I

did, and whose relationship with Mo went back much further than mine did. I was just beginning with Mo, I was just being established in my relationship and my credentials with Mo, so my role was pretty limited. But I was witness to a lot of sort of wonderful and interesting little pieces of history.

JF: As a witness, maybe you can tell us something about some of the players that were involved.

MT: Oy!

JF: I'm thinking there was....

MT: An extraordinary group of people.

JF: There was Seiberling and Don Young and Mike Gravel and Senator Ted Stevens.

MT: John Seiberling was Mo's right-hand man through this whole process. They had a very interesting relationship--one which was repeated many times in the future with other members. John Seiberling was the workhorse. John Seiberling was the guy who conducted the hearings, and he had an extraordinary capacity to sit through hour after hour after hour of these hearings without ever leaving the chair. We used to call him "Iron Butt," because he.... Staff would have to kind of get up and go get lunch or just wander out in the hall or something like that, and Seiberling would sit there hour after hour and really listen and engage witnesses. He would actually read these endless reams of documents that were generated. Seiberling was the guy who really understood the innumerable kinds of issues that were there in a bill of this size--and it was a huge bill. Mo was the commander-in-chief, he was the idea man, the guy who set out the broad agenda for dealings.

We used to have a joke at the staff level, as a matter of fact, that if Mo and John Seiberling were running D-day, and it was the morning of D-day, or it was the meeting to plan D-Day, and Mo and Seiberling would come in to address everyone else who was going to be involved in this, it would go something like this: Mo would come in and he would give a stirring speech about how important this operation was, they were going to defeat Nazism, make the world safe for democracy, and triumph over evil. "Now I'll hand over the briefing to General Seiberling." And General Seiberling would come in and say, "On D-day the Air Force will attack from the air, and the Army will attack by land, the Navy will attack by sea. And now, staff will work out the details." (laughter)

And that was kind of the way it was. Mo was never a detail guy. Mo was never the kind of guy who would want to sit down over a bunch of maps and say, "Let's move the boundary over here instead of over there." He was the big picture guy. And it was up to people like John Seiberling, and especially up to staff, to do the detail work, to know the issues, to know why a boundary's going to be drawn here instead of there, or who stood to gain by going one way on an issue, and who stood to lose what, and all that kind

of thing. And Mo just would set the tone for where the balance was, what the equities were, what was fair. So anyway, John Seiberling was just a relentless worker.

JF: How about Don Young, the congressman from Alaska?

MT: Don Young was both sort of a joy and a curse to work with. Young is a man of great good humor, a very "hale fellow, well met" kind of guy. He and Mo got along on a personal level very, very well. Of course Mo got along on a personal level with almost everybody very, very well--if they didn't, there was something wrong with the other guy. Don Young had a very volatile and occasionally violent temper. He had a great sense of being wronged by this whole process, that a bunch of outsiders were coming in and telling his state what to do. He was frankly not very constructive or very cooperative in the whole process. He basically just wanted to stop the whole thing and defeat the whole thing.

JF: Was that pressure he was getting from the folks back home, do you think?

MT: Oh, very much so. I don't think he was not representing a ... very powerful view in his state, and probably the majority view in his state. But, you know, there was a way to do it and a way not to do it. Often his approach was rather personal. It just wasn't constructive. He wasn't the kind of guy who would come up and offer constructive alternatives to solving a problem. It would be just, "Don't do that!" kind of thing. But he didn't have the votes, and everyone knew he didn't have the votes, and he knew he didn't have the votes either, so that has a way of (chuckles) shaping the way you approach the issue. In the final analysis, he really was quite irrelevant, politically and legislatively, to the process.

JF: How about Senator Mike Gravel of Alaska?

MT: Gravel, of course, was gone. After his famous bomb-throwing incident, he was defeated.

JF: Which famous bomb-throwing incident?

MT: In the conference discussion over the Alaska Lands Act at the end of the previous Congress, which blew up that attempt at the Alaska Lands Act.

JF: Do you think his having worked against the act went against him in his election in Alaska?

MT: My memory is a little hazy about this. I think there were a lot of other issues in Alaska, a lot of other issues about Mike Gravel. I think he might have even had some sort of personal issues, some personal scandal around him at the time.

JF: Well, and he nominated himself for vice-president at the convention, which I gather didn't go over well.

MT: He was a strange man, and it showed. Alaska is a very Republican state, anyway, and he was a Democrat, and Frank Merkowski was a Ketchikan banker.

JF: Is that who succeeded him?

MT: He succeeded him. The main figure, by far, in the Senate, was Ted Stevens, who even in a Democratic Senate was a very, very powerful figure. He was a very senior republican. Party doesn't matter very much in the Senate, really. The Senate's all about personalities and back scratching.

JF: More so than the House?

MT: Oh! the House operates totally differently from the Senate. The Senate is all.... I used to say "in the Senate, every man's a king." The Senate operates under unanimous consent, 95% of the time, which means that one senator can stop anything he doesn't like and doesn't even have to have a good reason for it. They're always concerned about each other's prerogatives as senators. There's enormous deference between senators. And here we're dealing on a bill on Alaska, Ted Stevens was one of the senior members, Republicans, on the Appropriations Committee, and had himself appointed to the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, of which Scoop Jackson from Washington was the chairman, and he and Stevens were old friends and colleagues. Jackson also very much fashioned himself a great expert on energy issues, and this was at a time when energy and foreign oil and the availability of oil was probably the most important domestic issue. And the biggest issue in the Alaska Lands Act was the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, whether to open that up to oil and gas development. So the Senate was an extremely difficult place to get a bill of any kind.

The most important figure in the Senate from the conservation point of view was Paul Tsongas. Paul Tsongas had been a member of Mo's committee as a member of the House. He had served for one or two terms on the committee, and then had gotten himself elected to the Senate, and agreed to be the primary spokesman for the conservationist position in the Senate. And Paul Tsongas did a stupendous job.

JF: Did he introduce the legislation in the Senate?

MT: He did offer the Senate version of HRÿ39, the Udall-Anderson Bill, in the Senate, and did all of the negotiating with Ted Stevens and Scoop Jackson and the other interests that controlled the process over the Alaska Lands Act. It was an enormous amount of work on something that he really had no particular reason to.... He was a freshman senator, he had nothing really to gain from doing this. He was just not convinced that it was the right thing to do--and Mo was one of the people that convinced him that it was the right thing to do. And he did it, and he's largely responsible for the fact that a bill passed the Senate ... eventually.

JF: Now, you mentioned that HR39 was the Udall-Anderson Bill. The Anderson part of that is, I assume, John Anderson of Illinois.

MT: John Anderson.

JF: I'm curious, how did he become cosponsor of that bill?

MT: Mo always sought to have Republicans involved in the conservation work of his committee. He believed in bipartisanship on a purely practical level. It helped to have someone from the Republican side say, "This is not a party issue, this is a right and wrong issue." So even on the committee, he was constantly looking to kind of nurture and develop Republicans that he could work with. John Saylor from Massachusetts, before I got to work on the committee, was someone like that. I think they'd worked very closely together on the Strip Mine Act.

John Anderson was a moderate to liberal Republican congressman from Illinois who just had the conservation bone in his body, and he was very articulate. He was a very prominent man at the time. He ended up running for president as an independent in 1980.

JF: In fact, that was something I was curious about, too. It was Carter and Reagan running against each other, and then Anderson ran as an independent. Did the Alaska Lands Bill ever become a campaign issue, to your knowledge?

MT: I don't think so, but I think that being associated with HR39 and the Alaska lands fight helped increase John Anderson's profile on a national level. It gave him access to a constituency in a community that he might not otherwise have had. Whether that was part of his personal calculation in deciding to join Mo on that bill, I don't know. I never got the feeling that John Anderson was a very conniving kind of man. He was a deeply principled man, and I think he did it because he believed in it. Just parenthetically here, it's quite fashionable, of course, to think of everything and everybody in Congress as very calculating and very conniving, and everything sort of being a personal calculation of what benefits me and what gets me ahead or what gets me behind, or what hurts my opponents and helps my friends, and all that kind of thing. And certainly there's an enormous amount of that in Congress. But in my eighteen years of working in the institution, it's also true that there's an enormous amount of principle. There are men and women who believe in things, because they care about them, and do things, or try to accomplish things because they think it's the right thing to do. And working with those people and being around those people is one of the most rewarding things about being in Congress. Mo had a way of bringing out that better part of a lot of people's nature, because he had a way of showing that way to people--not that Mo could not be calculating, not that Mo could not be fairly conniving. I mean, his whole humor thing was a very complicated thing for Mo, but one of the things it was, was a weapon--which we can talk about later.

But, you know, to me, Congress was a place where you had the best and the brightest, but you also had fools and knaves and crooks and bumbling idiots, and a lot of mediocre people in between. People like Mo and John Seiberling and John Anderson, to me were the heroes, were the best and the brightest, and it was an honor and a privilege to be associated with people like that. It just made you feel good to get up every day and say, "I'm a foot soldier for a man like that."

JF: On the Alaska Lands Bill, as I understand it, passed the House on May 24, 1979, or somewhere in that vicinity, and a much less protective version didn't pass the Senate until a year later, in August 1980. Why the delay?

MT: Well, it is solely because that's the way the Senate works. And for my entire career, working on that committee, this was always true of the Senate. The House would pass--and our committee, Mo's committee, produced more pieces of legislation that got enacted into law, than any other committee of the House. And we would churn these out regularly, month after month after month, and they'd go over to the Senate and they'd sit there, and they wouldn't do anything, because the Senate doesn't have a process.... The House has rules under which things get done, and the majority rules. The majority actually runs the institution of the House, and gets things happen[ing]. In the Senate, it's like a gigantic bumper car, amusement park ride. You've got a hundred cars running around that place, all going in different directions, bumping into each other, and it's very difficult to get anything done. So in this case, the Senate would not act on a bill until everything had been worked out ahead of time. The Senate doesn't believe in holding a hearing, then holding a markup in which everybody gets a chance to offer their amendments and you vote them up or down, and move the bill out to the floor, where it gets out to the floor, and then everybody, again, can offer their amendments, you vote them up or down, you've got a bill. The Senate doesn't work that way. In the Senate, nothing gets to the floor until basically it's all been negotiated out between whoever's interested--and it can be anybody. So this is all a very private, behind-the-scenes kind of process. Well, in this case, with such a huge bill, there were a million issues to be negotiated out. Senator Stevens and others did not.... There was a big question about whether they wanted to see a bill done at all. In fact, their ace in the hole was always this notion of, "We'll just stop any bill from happening."

Now, President Carter's action to designate these 100-million acres of national monuments really trumped that card of theirs. So they really had to get a bill done, everybody knew that. But they were very hard negotiators. And so it was just a hard, long process. And when you're dealing with 100-million acres of parks and wilderness, and issues like ANWR, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, transportation corridors, mining language, subsistence issues, protecting traditional ways of life and traditional cultures--it was enormously complicated and it took a lot of work. But ultimately, with the clock running down, this was a presidential election year, Carter and Reagan running against each other, all this was being done against the backdrop of the presidential race between those two men, and it really was quite extraordinary that a bill got done at all.

JF: Now, the bill that came out of the Senate was considerably less protective than the bill that came out of the House. From what I've read, the congressmen who were initially involved in this, refused to compromise to the Senate version until Reagan won by a landslide.

MT: This is a key factor. The normal process, of course, for a piece of legislation is if the House passes a bill, the Senate passes a bill, they aren't the same bill. There either has to be a conference committee in which the differences are worked out, or you get into this ping pong thing where the house takes the Senate bill and amends it, sends it back to the Senate; the Senate amends that bill; until finally there's a bill that everybody agrees on. There was enormous pressure on Mo to not accept the Senate bill. In fact, the entire negotiations in the Senate were conducted sort of on the understanding this would not be what was called "the last bite of the apple," that Mo and the House would have an opportunity to get back into the process as the House, representing the House position, to say that many of the things that the Senate had done in terms of not protecting particular areas, or some of the policy issues--Southeast Alaska was especially a place where the Senate had really done what I would consider a particularly poor job of protecting resources that really deserved to be protected. And Southeast Alaska, in particular, was an area where it was felt that the House had to get another bite at the apple.

But time was running out, and an election was.... And it was really a question of who was going to win the election. If Carter had won, there's no question that the House would have not accepted the Senate bill. But I remember this very clearly after the election. The staff had lunch with Mo. I think it was over in the cafeteria in the Madison Building. In my role as the person communicating the wishes and the point of view of the environmental community to Mo, I said to him--because the environmental community did not want Mo to accept the Senate bill--I said, "Mo, the environmental community thinks that we should reject this and we should try to come back again next year and take another shot at this." And Mo just cut me off. He said, "No way! No way! Doesn't anybody understand?! Ronald Reagan is about to become the president." This was a no-brainer to Mo, to take the bill as the best that we could get, with the hope that at some point we could come back and improve on it.

This reminds me, by the way, of a story (chuckles) that's so indicative of Mo and so like him. When the House was considering the Alaska Lands Bill--this was just, actually, before I'd come to work for him--and was in this sort of historic event of process of passing--this was in the spring of 1979--the passing of the Alaska Lands Bill--this whole debate was televised back to Alaska. This was in the days before C-SPAN, so this was quite an extraordinary thing. So everybody in Alaska is watching this debate on TV, and Mo stands up and he gives one of his sort of grand conservation speech[es], and he says, "You know, I've been through these fights a hundred times, and when you first try to establish these parks and these wilderness areas, everybody hates you, they think you're a Communist or worse, that you're coming in and you're taking their livelihoods away, and you're just vilified. You come back five years later, and they sort of grudgingly admit that maybe this wasn't so bad after all. You come back ten years [later], and hell, they all act as if it was their idea to do this. You know, if you come back

twenty-five years later, they'll name a mountain after you." Well, some guy in Alaska, watching this on TV, sent Mo a letter. This was a letter that Mo kept in his desk and would bring out of his desk. He would show it to people he was having visits with, really, up until the day he retired. He loved this letter. The letter said, "Udall, you son of a bitch! On the back of this letter is a picture of the only mountain they're ever gonna name after you." And the guy had drawn this beautiful snow covered mountain with a flag pole and a big flag flying on it, and on the flag it said, "Mount Bull Shit." (laughter) Mo loved this thing! This was totally self-deprecating. Mo knew he had a lot of bull shit in him. It was really a measure of the man that he, for years and years and years afterwards, he found great humor in this. That's an aside, but it was always one of my favorite things about Mo.

But anyway, he was absolutely clear that he understood that with Ronald Reagan becoming president, that the show was over as far as the Alaska Lands issue was concerned. That, and the fact that Mo always saw this bill as an absolutely.... It was not only....