

An Oral History Interview

with

JOHN ANDERSON (part 3)

Tucson, Arizona

conducted by
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August 7, 1998

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

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JA: He had this Carter Center down in Atlanta, Georgia. I'm president of the World Federalists, the old organization started fifty years ago, and Norman Cousins was president for many years, and we believe in world government. We think that the U.N. is a start, but it needs to be empowered and restructured and so on. And we thought.... Carter had tried with the Carter Center to get himself into the international arena, and that it would be useful to have a talk [with] him about what we thought our approach as an organization might possibly do to complement the efforts that he was making, which we certainly supported, to be an effective negotiator in situations that might otherwise break down and cause nations to go to war. And to make a long story short, I never could get an appointment to see him. Every time I called and asked for an appointment, he's got appointments just staggered as far ahead as we can see.

JF: What year would this be?

JA: This would have been after.... Well, it was a long time afterward, because the campaign was in 1980, and I was elected president of the World Federalists in 1991, when Norman Cousins died. So it was early in this decade, so it was ten years after--more than ten years after the election. By that time, I thought, you know, if he had any hard feelings--because he blamed me for taking votes that would have otherwise gone to him. It wouldn't have made any difference, he wasn't going to make it anyway. But you know, his staff could never have come up with a date when it would be possible for him to sit down and give me even ten minutes. So I think he is the kind of a guy that you have indicated he might be, of holding a grudge against someone who has opposed him, and therefore being just as uncooperative as he can be.

JF: Well, let's move on to the Alaska National Interests Lands Conservation Act. The year after Mo ran for president, in 1977, Mo and Ohio Democratic Congressman John Seiberling introduced H.R. 39, which became known as the Udall-Anderson Bill, setting aside more than a million acres of Alaska land.

JA: Yes, I got that mixed up today. I said 300 million. I don't keep figures in my head.

JF: Wishful thinking! Were you involved with the bill at this point in 1977?

JA: He came to me, and I think he really wanted a Republican cosponsor. He didn't want it to be a Democratic bill alone, much as he admired the indefatigable efforts of John Seiberling. I liked John, I always got along with him well, but he was a little prickly. Not everybody on the Republican side of the aisle was that infatuated with John. I'm sure that doesn't bother him--nor should it! But the important point is he wanted this to be a bipartisan effort, and I think also he sensed that this fellow, Don Young, who was just a terror--representative from Alaska--just a terror on trying to defeat anything that would keep the developer's blade from plowing up any part of Alaska. He wanted somebody on the Republican side who had a position in the leadership, which I did, even though it was pretty low on the pecking order, as Conference chairman, to be identified with the legislation, in the hopes that that would maybe tend to draw off the kind of Republican opposition that Young was sure to try to stimulate. That was in 1977, and

then we had an election in 1978, and then the bill that finally was signed by Carter had to be the bill that was reintroduced in 1979. Do you follow me?

JF: Yes, it is.

JA: The numbers somehow stick in my mind, though, as being the bill that originally I put my name on.

JF: Because H.R. 39 eventually basically.... Senator Mike Gravel....

JA: But it got another number, didn't it?

JF: You know, I don't think it did. Actually, I'm thinking it may have been the same number. I think it was reintroduced.

JA: Well, then it could be 1979. Maybe it got the same number, because sometimes members arrange to do that.

JF: I honestly couldn't swear to it. I don't have the memo here for that.

JA: Well, I was for the bill from the start. I don't want to hog any credit where credit isn't due, and in any event, I deserve no credit. It was Mo that really put a shoulder to the wheel and pushed it through. I did what little I could do as a minority member, and I made no secret of my pride in being a cosponsor, but I'm not kidding myself. He's the guy that went to Alaska and spent days and days and days there.

JF: Did you ever go to Alaska with him?

JA: I never did. You know, I didn't go. One distinction I was going to say today, and forgot, we both had the distinction of being hanged in effigy in Alaska, because I know when I was campaigning, I was trying to get to every state--for the presidency--and all of my advisors said, "If there's one state you'd better stay out of (laughs) stay out of Alaska! They'll hang you in effigy." I think they did. And so I never went up there. Because I was that sufficiently known to be a cosponsor of Udall's bill, that they said, "You ain't got a chance there!"

JF: Yes, last time Mo went to Alaska, I think he said things had improved, they were now waving at him with more than one finger. (laughter)

JA: Well, maybe they will forgive me. I've been to Alaska a couple of times, but I've never really gone out and seen the beauty of the country that we saved from these developers, and I still hope that I can do that someday before I get too decrepit.

JF: That would be nice. So in May 1979 Mo introduced the Alaska National Interests Lands Conservation Act, which you were a sponsor of.

JA: Yes. We'd better double-check [the 1977 date]. I don't want to mislead.

JF: Okay. Do you remember who introduced that in the Senate? Or whether it was simultaneously introduced in the Senate?

JA: Let me think a minute and see if I can.... For some reason Hatfield's name sticks in my mind, because he might have been a Senate sponsor of that bill, but I'm not sure. The only honest answer is "I'm not sure." I'm trying to recall, and I think, but [I'm not sure].

JF: The principal players, you mentioned John Seiberling. There's Don Young, Senator Mike Gravel, Senator Ted Stevens. What were your impressions of some of those people and their motivations?

JA: I thought it was totally scandalous that they would feel that somehow--they were the fiftieth, weren't they? Were they after or before Alaska? Or before Hawaii? I think they were the fiftieth state. Well, that's nonmaterial, maybe. But anyway, perfectly scandalous that they would feel that being part of the union and having applied for and been granted statehood, that they had this nationalistic view that this is State land, and only State land can be disposed of if a majority in our state decides that that's what should be done, as opposed to looking at that state and the "crown jewels" as Mo referred to them, as belonging to all the people, being part of the great American heritage, once they had been embraced and brought within the union. They arrogated to themselves a role of almost being the envoys of a separate nation-state, who had to be listened to, or they would declare war on the lower forty-eight for presuming to tell them how to deal with matters that they regarded as being their inherent right, whereas it was a national interest, as the bill's title sets forth. It was in the national interest that those lands be preserved forever and held in the reserves and forests and other arrangements provided for in the bill. No, I remember the astonishment that I felt. And frankly, particularly with respect to Young, whom I could observe much more closely than I could Stevens and Gravel--that Young was somebody who just was totally blind to the idea that this was part of the nation, and that it was his--like this guy who didn't want to save the Kettle Moraine up in Southern Wisconsin--"This is my territory, and it's for me to say what is or is not going to be given to the rest of the nation." So it was this extremely nationalistic, in a state context approach, rather than nationalistic in a truly federal scheme of things that amazed me. And then my feeling that the developers were pouring money. The people who had bought land and were going to make big bucks, they thought, by mining and gouging out the earth and doing this, that, and the other thing, were pouring money into the campaigns of these guys, and they were determined that they would pay off. So, really....

JF: Don Young is now the chairman of the Interior Committee, is he not?

JA: Yes. And you remember, you've heard the story I'm sure, he changed the name. It used to be the Interior ...

JF: ... and Insular Affairs Committee?

JA: Yes. The Interior and something. He's changed the name. We ought to get a copy of the Congressional Directory. That's easy to get. [Editor's note: Young changed the name to the House Committee on Resources.]

JF: I wasn't aware of that.

JA: To emphasize the fact that it's not just a national department, it's development, as well as preserving (wry chuckle) federal lands. Oh, he's a piece of work! that guy. God, I remember he was also just so upset with me on gun control. Oh! he scorned me and belittled me and derided me, because I was for gun licensing and gun registration and everything else, way back fifteen years ago, before all of these horrible crimes of recent days have occurred. We just got into a terrible set-to about that. And he wasn't nice about it, he was ugly.

JF: The House passed the bill on May 24, 1979. (JA: Yes.) In August 1980, a much less protective bill passed the Senate. As I understand it, the House members refused to compromise. (JA: Right.) But then Reagan was elected. (JA: Right.) And I gather that spurred the House to go ahead and accept the Senate bill pretty much verbatim? What are your recollections about that?

JA: How the election of Reagan had an impact on the final form (JF: Yes.) of the legislation?

JF: Or if it did.

JA: Because Carter signed it in December, if I recall. He signed it a month after the election. Yes, that was the time sequence. I can't honestly say, but my impression is the landslide that Reagan.... And, you know, he made fun of the tree-huggers. Reagan, in his campaign, made it abundantly clear. You know, he had this crazy idea that trees gave off things that poisoned the atmosphere, and that they really weren't as wonderful as the tree-huggers said they were, and maybe we needed fewer trees--particularly redwoods--than we had. I remember I campaigned on the campus of a college in 1980 in Southern California. And in honor of my arrival, they had draped signs around the trunks of a lot of trees on the campus, "Save me! before he kills again!" (laughter) They were making fun of Reagan's preposterous ecological ideas that, you know, trees weren't all that great, you've seen one redwood, you've seen 'em all. You know, that philosophy. Why not cut 'em down? And these kids made fun of him, my supporters on the college campus. [See *Too Funny to be President*, p. 27]

JF: What was it like to cosponsor a bill with Mo?

JA: Well, you know, he was very generous, and went out of his way to make a cosponsor feel that it was part of his legislative record, as much as it was his. He was not parsimonious about parceling out credit, or giving credit to people who helped him. He was very generous. And he was also very attentive to when changes had to be made, when accommodations had to be made, when strategy had to be devised to maybe get

over some bump in the road that would interfere with getting the bill through committee and out on the floor and so on. He was, again, very attentive to making sure that he brought in a cosponsor on those plans, and explain his reasons for thinking thus and so, and "do you think of anything better?" and so on. It was a partnership of equals, in every sense of the word. You never felt that you were just kind of somebody who was hanging onto the tail of the dog, and that was the end of it.

JF: The bill was signed in 1980, and in 1980 you ran for president. (JA: Yes.) Did the Alaska Lands Bill ever become a campaign issue?

JA: Well, it did in Alaska! (laughs)

JF: But not otherwise, in debates with Reagan, or any other televised debates?

JA: No. I don't recall that it did, except to the extent that many people who probably thought I was too liberal anyway, because the complaint was that Anderson was moving to the left while the country was moving to the right, would have said that sponsoring environmental legislation, which that clearly was, indicated that he was one of these people who was a little bit out of the mainstream, instead of concentrating on the immediate and important problems of cutting taxes (chuckles), as Reagan wanted to do by 30%. "He's making it impossible for people to develop!" I'm sure there was an undercurrent of that among the conservatives who were out to gut my campaign and me as well. But I can't honestly say that it was ever hurled at me in a debate, "Why did you do this?"

JF: Did you ever talk to Mo before you decided to run?

JA: Oh, yes. I'm sure we shared some thoughts on what it was to conduct a campaign, because he had gone through the mill. He hadn't been nominated, but nevertheless, he'd run in all of these primaries, and that covered a good stretch of the country. And I had never campaigned outside of my own state, obviously, as a member of Congress from one little corner of the state. So I can't recall the specific substance of what he may have told me, but in getting together and talking to him, he certainly gave me some appreciation of what you were up against when you were running on that scale.

JF: According the book by your former aide, Mark Bisnow

JA: Yes, *Diary of a Dark Horse*.

JF: He mentioned that you asked Mo on two different occasions to be your running mate. Is that correct?

JA: I think without really believing and expecting that he would, I certainly would have raised the possibility with him, because I wanted to get a Democrat, I wanted to allay the suspicions that there was this wild-eyed independent who was so totally out of sync with the political system that he wouldn't be able to get along with anybody. And I had to

convey the impression that I could be a coalition-builder. I don't think I ever wrote him a formal offer or anything of that kind, but I think Mark's recollection I would say is correct on that, yes.

JF: What would Mo have brought to the campaign, other than being a Democrat? And obviously a rapport.

JA: He had a national following, I think because of his effort, unsuccessful though he was. He had more of a national following than John Anderson did! And besides, he presented that rare combination of somebody with the skill at campaigning. Pat Lucey was good, the governor. I liked Pat, and don't discredit what he tried to do when I finally got together with him. But, you know, I admired Mo's skills at articulating positions, at campaigning with people and creating that instant bond of the people liking him. So I thought both from the practical standpoint of being a real asset to the campaign, that to be bonded with a running mate whose total outlook was so synchronous with what I felt, and the way I looked at how we ought to approach the problems of the country, it would have been the happiest of marriages, and there wouldn't be that danger of falling out. You know, I had to take Pat Lucey a little bit on faith, because, frankly, by the time I got down to him, the time was growing short, and I don't know whether we did all the research on his eight years as governor--or six years, because I think he quit in the middle of his second term to take the job from Carter as ambassador to Mexico. But anyway, he'd been elected twice to the governorship. You know, I didn't have the personal friendship with him that I had with Mo.

JF: Why do you think he didn't do it?

JA: Oh, (chuckles) I don't know. He never told me that mine was a hapless cause and that I ought to go soak my head in a bucket of cold water, but he probably indicated that the odds were not extremely great that I would succeed. But I didn't feel like a rejected suitor on the grounds "who the hell are you to be running for president?!" What qualifications could you possibly have for carrying out the duties of that office?!" No, I respected him as, after all, despite his defeat in 1976, still a prominent national Democrat who might not want to sever his ties with his party. And I could see why that would be. He was still young and vigorous and had a future, we had hoped, stretched out long before him.

JF: He had been officially diagnosed with Parkinson's in 1979, so this would have been the year after that. (JA: Yes.) How did his health seem to you at that time?

JA: As I recall, I was not aware it was anything that was that disabling.

JF: So you don't think it would have become an issue (JA: No.) at any point?

JA: No.

JF: What do you think of the viability of the two-party system now?

JA: Well, I think that the system is broke and it needs fixing, but it will not be fixed as long as we have the electoral system that we have, which makes it very, very difficult, if not impossible, for a candidate as an independent outside the two-party system, to win a majority in the electoral college, for one thing, which you have to win to be elected president. And that's winner take all. Even apart from the electoral college, when you run alone as a candidate for president, and do not have the armature of a party marching with you, people almost inevitably ask, as they asked me 10,000 times, it seemed, "How can you possibly govern?!" Now, if we had proportional representation, if we had a system where you have more than one person running for a congressional district--if you had multiple member districts, you could install what they have in virtually every other democratic country in the western world, except Canada and Great Britain--and we inherited, both Canada and the U.S., the British system--you would have a chance that you wouldn't have to win a plurality in a three-man race. An independent--I don't care how many times he's running as a member of Congress, say, in a single-member district--he's going to have a terribly hard time in ever getting past the Republican and the Democratic candidates, and winning a plurality of the vote. But if you have three members in that district, and you could have some form of proportional representation, obviously with three people being elected from the district, if you got 30% of the vote, you'd get one of the three seats. And you could do this, you could change the way we elect Congress from single-member districts to multiple-member districts simply by states passing statutes to that effect. It doesn't require a constitutional amendment. And I think until we make some fundamental changes in the political structure of the electoral system, in the structure of the system itself, you'll never be able to elect anybody to Congress. We only have one, as you know, Bernie Sanders from Vermont--but that's a rather unique situation where he'd been mayor for five terms, and he comes from Chittenden County, which gave me, next to my home county, the second-highest percentage vote of any county in the country, so it's pretty liberal up there.

But if you could begin by electing a few members of Congress as the Republicans did--they didn't elect a president until 1960, even though Fremont ran in 1856. But, they so totally displaced the Whig Party, because they had that huge cross-cutting issue of slavery that so divided the party system. If you have some cross-cutting issue like that, I would amend all of what I have just said, and say that a new party could probably run for some House seats and win, even with our plurality, first past the post system of single-member districts. But barring an issue of that magnitude, which has not come along in 140 or 150 years, it seems to me you have to revise the electoral system, so that you can begin the third party or the new party by electing some congressmen. Once they then are elevated to the national stage, and have the advantage then of espousing the new party's platform, then if they four years later nominate a candidate, I think then he might have a chance to win. But the two-party system otherwise has got so many built-in advantages in financing, in the way the votes are counted, and the way representation is determined, that barring this huge cross-cutting issue--and I don't know what that's going to be, if it ever will emerge--I think I've come to the conclusion that independent candidates can win in a state, as the current governor of Maine was able to do, Angus King, and as James Longley did before him, or as Walter Hickle did in Alaska. And you can maybe win a

single seat, as Bernie Sanders did in Vermont, but you have to have a scattering across the country of people who belong to this new party who run for Congress. That's where I fault [Ross] Perot. He's had all the time in the world to really put organizers in the field, to comb the lists and find good strong candidates to run for his Reform Party....

JF: Nothing seems to be happening.

JA: I think it's such a one-man show that I have come to the conclusion that even though he's going to get the money in the Year 2000, as you know, on the basis of.... He won't get as much as he would have gotten if he had replicated what he did in 1992 when he got 18.9% of the vote. He only got about 8% in 1996, but that's still above the 5% threshold, so he'll get some money. I forget what the formula is and how much he'll get, but it's more than money, it's this national visibility for the ideas of the new party that I think can only be generated if you can elect some people who are congressmen, and then they have a national platform on which to.... Other than that, I think that the prospects are dim.

JF: Now, did you make another race in 1984?

JA: No, I decided not to.

JF: Did you know that Mo had considered possibly running for president in 1984?

JA: Well, was I so much out of the loop?

JF: I'm not sure how much it was discussed.

JA: I guess I was not really tuned-in on that. At least he never talked to me about it, and I wasn't aware of it. Well, God, after the way things turned out.... As I tell people, old Ed Rollins, the old professional consultant, that was his campaign, his national campaign, and his slogan was, "It's morning in America!" And I don't know, people were still gulled into thinking Reagan's program was the right one.

JF: As you know, the U.S. Institute for Environmental Dispute Resolution--the funding has not come through yet, but it's been approved by Congress and will be established under the auspices of the Udall Foundation. Part of the honor of Mo's name being attached to this was his having been known as a consensus-builder, or someone who was able to take two warring factions, as in the Alaska Lands Bill, and come up with something concrete. How would you describe his method of doing that? What was his secret?

JA: Well, there was an openness and a frankness, a willingness to listen to different points of view, a willingness to tell the hard truth to people sometimes, that "that is not gonna fly, and we might as well accept it"--this I remember from conversations, particularly on campaign finance--and "let's be practical, let's be pragmatic." It's not a sell-out to think that sometimes you have to take incremental approaches that don't get you the whole way, but you get a start, and on that you build and a foundation emerges

that then can support a larger objective that you had in mind initially. So he had a winning way of being both idealistic and realistic at the same time. In him, those were not polar opposites and polar attributes--there was a way, a bridging the idealism with the practical, more pragmatic approach. And I guess that was the secret of his reputation for being a coalition-builder.

JF: We've talked a lot about Mo's strengths. What would you say his greatest weaknesses were?

JA: Probably a little bit too good natured and too good humored. I have credited him with being frank and honest, and I don't take back a word of that. But at the same time, there was an innate kindness about him that made it hard for him to really sometimes step on people that needed to be stepped on. There are just some people--at least that's my opinion, for which I take sole responsibility--maybe they have to be handled a little roughly. I'm reminded of a story that I just read in this *Reprise of History: from Roosevelt to Reagan* that I've been reading, by MacGregor Burns, when he tells how tough it was for Roosevelt to get rid of people. I mean, General Hugh "Iron Pants" Johnson, who was head of the NIRA, the National Industrial Recovery Act, you know, "the Blue Eagle." [Editor's note: The NIRA established the National Recovery Administration, led by Hugh Johnson.] He was getting drunk in public and behaving obscenely and making a spectacle of himself. He was a royal pain in the butt, and people kept telling Roosevelt, "You gotta get rid of this guy! This program's too important." And finally, I forget what Johnson did, he did something in public that was obscene. It was so obscene, I guess, that old MacGregor Burns didn't even tell us what it was. But he called in Frances Perkins, who was secretary of labor and his secretary of state, who at that time.... It was after Cordell Hull--I forget who it was. [Editor's note: Edward Stettinus, Jr. was secretary of state from 1944-45, after Cordell Hull] - But anyway, two cabinet officers. And he said, "General Johnson, I've got to tell you, you've got to go. I've made you an offer to send you as an emissary abroad to investigate something. You have been unwilling, you have refused to accept that assignment, and I simply cannot have you continue in your present position. You must go." And old Johnson, whether he was drunk or sober at the time [Burns] doesn't say, he said, "Well, I will listen to my commander in chief and take my orders." So he left. And after he left, Madame Perkins, and the other person said.... They were so embarrassed, you know, to have to listen to this--it had nothing to do with their respective departments particularly. They said, "Why on earth did you put us through this?! make us sit here?!" They were looking at their feet I guess, while this tirade was going on between Johnson and FDR. And FDR said, "Well, I just couldn't do it by myself. I had to have somebody in the room with me. And besides, you can be witnesses that I told him he really had to go. He may go out and say he wasn't fired. Now I've got two witnesses that I really did it." But he used that as an illustration of how Roosevelt, for all of his strengths, had that one great weakness, that it was hard for him to really step on people when they became totally obnoxious and had to be gotten rid of. And maybe Mo suffered from the same (chuckles) disability. But worse things could be said about you.

JF: That's right. Well, I don't have any other questions.

JA: God! We've been going for a couple of hours, huh?

JF: We have!

JA: They told me--I forget who it was that talked you up to me-- said, "you'll like her. And she said, "you'll be surprised, once you get started talking with her, you can't stop! I mean you just keep going and going." And I'm sure I put on that kind of a performance for you. Those are your talents, see.

JF: Well, thank you very much! And I thank you for your participation.

JA: I enjoyed it. It brought back memories, it brought back a chance to, more adequately than I could in the little snippets we had this afternoon, truly honor the man who I think was a truly great man, a great patriot.

JF: That sounds like [a good note on which to close].

[END OF INTERVIEW]