

# An Oral History Interview

with

## **ROBERT NEUMAN (part 2)**

*conducted by*  
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JF: All right, we are back on. We were talking about the political game of lowering and raising expectations.

RN: Well, everybody plays it, because it's a hedge against the outcome, and those races were so close. It was hard to say who was going to win, so it was smart just to say the Carter people are well-organized and well-financed, and they're on a roll, and they're getting good coverage, and they're a centrist attracting a lot of attention, and they're picking up support from the dropout candidates. Those were indisputable facts. They would say, "Well, Udall, the press loves him and he's got the liberal activists who turn out, and his message seems to be ringing true according to our polling," and all that was true. So it came down to luck and weather and getting the troops out. Time after time they did better at it than we did.

JF: You mentioned Stewart Udall a little bit ago. I guess a lot of this is 20 x 20 hindsight, but how would you describe Stewart's role in the campaign?

RN: As a loving brother who was protective of Mo and Ella and their future, who was proud of him, envious of him, but most of all loved him. It was a complex relationship, and Stewart's relationship with Mo and with the campaign was one of great complexity. You could take hours just explaining the nuances that went on there.

JF: By the end of the presidential campaign, how do you think the press' feelings or impressions of Mo, and of Carter, had changed, if at all?

RN: They didn't like Carter.

JF: Do you know why?

RN: His personality, because he was defensive and not open. He wasn't a schmoozer, he was a very serious guy. They loved Mo because just the opposite reasons. I mean, they respected Carter's intelligence, and they liked very much Jody Powell and Hamilton Jordan and Tim Craft and the other key Carter people--they were very affectionate with them. But as an individual, as a person, no one really sat down and schmoozed with Jimmy Carter. We had open access--Mo, if he wanted to talk to the press, he talked to the press. We kind of had somebody sit around, because we were worried about what we called "terminal candor," and that he would say something--and he did more than once. He gave indication to somebody that he was getting frustrated, and at one point in time, after coming in second by 2,000 votes, both in Connecticut and Michigan, the "vice" word crept up, "Would you accept a vice-presidential thing?" And Mo offhandedly said, "Oh, if I had the opportunity." Then we had to spend a week fighting that one off, because the fund-raisers got furious at that! They were saying, "Why are we giving money to this guy?! He's just running for vice-president." So we had to be careful there, too. Candor could get you in trouble.

JF: I like the term "terminal candor." When, for all purposes, do you think the campaign was actually over? After Wisconsin?

RN: No. Pennsylvania was the worst moment. We were out of money, we couldn't get the matching funds. It was hard to raise the money, and the specter of.... This was Jackson's last stand. If Jackson or Udall did not win Pennsylvania, it was clear that Carter had everything wrapped up. (tape turned off and on)

JF: Pennsylvania?

RN: So we didn't have any money, and it was clearly everybody's last stand. Jackson was putting everything he had into it, and he had significant labor support, and it was Milton Shapp's home state, and he was there. But I don't think we had any late entries. Yes! Jerry Brown was starting to make sounds about coming in. He actually came into Maryland and he did something. So from the press point of view, it was clear that Udall was not in the run, that this was his last shot. We put everything we had in terms up there without being able to buy any advertising. It was all grass roots. It was a lot of love and humor. Mo was keeping everybody's spirits up, but it was a tough, tough campaign, and a very quiet night. The press was respectful of Mo and guarded against hurting his feelings of calling it an inept campaign or anything else. I think that they just said that the stars were aligned wrong at that particular time. And there were a number of reasons why it didn't happen. Mo would make the inevitable election night pronouncement that "we're not through, we're going to go on to Ohio. We refuse to concede anything." We continued to throw some zingers at Carter, irritating the Carter people no end. And so we geared up, I think, for the last go-around. At this time, Jerry Brown was in, so nobody was thinking of going to California, except to raise money. We were profoundly irritated--especially Stewart--when Frank Church made a belated entry in time to muddy things up in Ohio, which was really our last chance, where we had some labor support and we had some organizational help, and we thought maybe if there was an effort to do in Carter by everybody ganging up on him, that would be the place. But it was so split up, and Church's entry really threw a monkey wrench into the whole strategy.

JF: Do you think Church really thought he could win?

RN: Everyone thought at the time that no one is going to allow this party to be led by this hick from Georgia nobody knows. And all the powers that be in labor were worried about this. Liberals were worried about it. Civil rights people knew him pretty well, but on a national basis didn't know him very well. No one could bring themselves to believe that he's going to carry this off. But it was inevitable, and [unclear] it happen.

JF: How did Mo deal with it when it became obvious that the campaign was over?

RN: Well, there [were] a couple of days of real thoughtful contemplation by Mo, and that was when the date came--I think it was in April or May--I can't remember, you might remember this--when you had to make a decision whether to gather signatures for petitions to get on the ballot in Arizona, either running for the House or running for the Senate. And petition day came, and Mo made a decision, knowing full well what the outcome would be, to have petitions gathered for the House. And of course people just

said, "Well, then he doesn't think he's going to win, and it must be over." And it was hard to refute that. The Arizona press had been writing all along that they thought this was going to happen, felt justified. *The Arizona Republic* had been relentlessly negative to Mo.

JF: A number of people in Arizona really noted how the *Republic* did just massive coverage, very positive coverage when Mo died--and how nasty they had dogged him for years.

RN: There were different people at the helm.

JF: How did Ella feel about the campaign being over?

RN: I think she felt some relief. It had been a great strain on them. They had to travel apart sometimes, didn't like to do that. They found great comfort, traveling together. Ella was worried about the financial impact. She didn't want to spend the rest of her life paying off for this campaign. But again, Stewart had been very cautious about that. Stan Kurz, who was an old school and military friend of Mo's, was their treasurer and was watching over the books out of his office in New York, and was very careful not to get Mo hopelessly in debt. And they couldn't spend the matching money, so we're probably fortunate there that matching money didn't come until it was pretty much over and you could retire some of the debt with that.

JF: Is Stan Kurz still in New York?

RN: No, he's dead.

JF: By the end of the campaign, how did Mo feel about Carter? How did you feel about Carter?

RN: That's difficult. I think he felt somewhat embittered by the fact that Carter wasn't as forthright as he was on issues, tough issues, that he was trying to have it both ways. He was envious of him for his ability to get grass roots efforts out there. They had never really gotten any degree of warmth, and I think Mo felt that Carter should have repudiated the mayor of Detroit when he used the Mormon card against Mo with the black community, and Carter did nothing to call him off from doing that. That was probably the bitterest moment.

The Carter people were angry at Mo, especially Rosalyn, for not dropping out and throwing his support, even after Ohio, when it was inevitable. And Mo had been told by delegates selected on his behalf that the delegates wanted to go to the convention as Udall delegates, they didn't want Mo to drop out, that if he dropped out they would lose all standing and any clout that they might have would be lost. And that was especially true of the delegates Mo had won in New York state, which he had come in second again in New York state. And that delegation was a formidable one, led by Bella Abzug, and she was damned if she was going to let Mo drop out.

But no matter what kind of conversations amongst the campaigns, the bottom line was that the Carter people felt it was critical that they be able to marshal all the forces, show that it was a unified convention, and allow them to go into the convention without any opposition, and of course Mo wouldn't do that, so they were very bitter at him. Of course that meant that any consideration of Mo for a second spot was gone.

JF: There seemed to be a certain amount of animosity on the floor of the convention, at least early on.

RN: Yes, I think it was lingering. And you'd fought hard, and with all your heart and soul, against these people for six months--it was hard just to stop.

JF: That year after the convention, still 1976, a tough year for Mo, he fell off a ladder, broke both arms, contracted viral pneumonia, suffered a burst appendix, and got peritonitis. How did he deal with all this?

RN: With humor, as usual. He never really felt sorry for himself--at least publicly. And Ella wouldn't let him feel sorry for himself. She was always raggin' him. And his colleagues were great. And I think that the lingering friendliness of the national press people covered him. He realized that he had come out of this thing not a loser. And he found some great solace in that. He went up to--in November, after the election, he went to Yale and was the guest of Yale for two days, and participated in a seminar with Johnny Apple and several others on a panel on what the 1976 election was about. And he went through several classrooms and had sit down Q&A with the students and had dinners with prominent professors. He came out of that feeling very, very good, that he was clearly a national figure, a figure who had won respect from people in the party and the journalists, from the academics. And I think that he felt that he had earned himself a national reputation. And I would say right after the primary when Carter got the nomination, Mo said, "Well, I don't know if he's going to win this thing, I don't know if he can beat an incumbent president. And if he doesn't, there's 1980 for us." So there was always that kind of a hope. He never felt depressed or downcast at all. In fact, right up to election night, this was a close race with Carter and Ford. I think right up to that point he kind of held out some fond hope that maybe 1980 would be another opportunity for him.

JF: I was just thinking of a question on that. I guess I'm just curious, just fishing a little bit--did Harris or Bayh or Frank Church or anyone ever come to Mo in later years and say, "You know, looking back, I really wish I'd dropped out earlier"?

RN: Not to my knowledge.

JF: Okay. The remaining years that Mo was in Congress, he was just incredibly productive. In 1977 he was named chair of the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs. Am I correct that you joined him as the public affairs director of the committee in 1977?

RN: Yes. What I did was split my time, and I split my paycheck to be on committee staff and on the personal staff. So I stayed, I had desks in both places, and kind of stayed in that capacity.

JF: What did it entail, being public affairs director for the committee?

RN: Well, the committee, prior to that, didn't have any kind of communication strategy or press release strategy or anything else. No committees really did. Mo kind of brought the Interior Committee into the twentieth century. So we would put out schedules to the press, we would put out bill summaries. We did things that hadn't been done before on the committee, because there were issues that came up of great national significance like Three Mile Island, like Alaska. We did a much more aggressive outreach of telling what was going on in the hearings, and inviting press to travel with us.

JF: Tell us something about Three Mile Island.

RN: I used to monitor a wire service machine, just to keep an eye on what was going on, and I saw it come in one morning that there was an alert at a nuclear facility in Pennsylvania called Three Mile Island. And nuclear energy was one of the areas that Mo had retained on his Energy Environment Subcommittee. We had divvied up the nuclear issue with John Dingle, and Mo retained the energy element of it, and safety and nuclear wastes. So when that came up, I went in to Stan Scoville and Henry....

JF: Stan was staff director of....

RN: Energy Environment Subcommittee, yes. And what was Henry's name? [Myers] He was the Ph.D. who was our nuclear expert, and I said, "This wire story came over about...." Of course Henry jumped up and ran in and saw what had happened, called some friends at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and told Mo about it, and we had a statement out immediately, and we got into the immediate news flow of that story. Mo, within days, took a delegation up there, including national television and what have you, and was a leading congressional figure in that whole investigation.

JF: In 1978 the Indian Child Welfare Act was passed. Do you recall that all?

RN: Not too much.

JF: Was Mo the key sponsor on that?

RN: He was, and that was really an issue that Frank Ducheneaux worked most on. I don't know if you've spoken with him yet (JF: No, I haven't.) but he would be an important guy to talk to on it, because Mo did magnificent work on behalf of Native Americans.

JF: Would that be true also for the 1979 Archaeological Research and Protection Act?

RN: Yes.

JF: I'll save those questions for him. The Alaska Lands Bill was clearly a huge thing in Mo's career. In 1977 Mo and John Seiberling of Ohio introduced HR-39, the Alaska Lands Bill, setting aside over a million. (tape turned off and on) We were just starting to talk about the Alaska Lands Bill, introduced in 1977. Hearings were initially held on that in Sitka, Juneau, and Ketchikan. Did you go to those hearings?

RN: I went to the hearings that were in Anchorage and Fort Yukon and several of the Native American villages, all above the Arctic Circle. So there were two different sets. Karen Scates went on the lower part, the Juneau part and Sitka part. I went on the upper part, when we did the 6,000 miles in ten days.

JF: Was Karen Scates doing press then?

RN: She was my assistant, yes.

JF: What do you recall? What was the major press challenge for the Alaska Lands Bill?

RN: We had *The Washington Post* traveling with us, and we had the Associated Press reporter traveling with us. I just think -- where Mo wanted to courageously show the flag and try to reassure people that this would not be the end of the world for the people of Alaska, that in fact in time they would be thankful that it occurred. He also didn't want to over-promise to the Indians and Aleuts and Eskimos that this was going to be the end of the rainbow for them. And we were under the unrelenting opposition of the Alaska press--the Anchorage paper was just vicious anti-Udall.

JF: What was its sphere? What was its concern?

RN: That he was locking it up, that the extractors--oil and mining--would not be able to use what was there, and it would cost them jobs and royalties and everything else. Some of the Native American groups were worried that wilderness designation would threaten subsistence hunting. There were a number of issues there, so it was not easy.

JF: Was that a matter of misinterpretation, or misleading?

RN: Well, I think it was a negative abstraction from worrying too much, and not trusting Mo's sense of fairness and compromise, that the thing would be in the hands of the enviro-crazies and would lock up the whole state.

JF: Of course they didn't really have any reason to know Mo Udall, did they?

RN: No, they only knew Stewart Udall, and Stewart had, in fact, locked it up. (laughter)

JF: What was your impression of Don Young?

RN: Don Young was on the edge of fanaticism about his opposition to the D-2 legislation, that he would foment falsehoods and mistruths and half-truths. He was kind of an eco-Nazi, I think the term is, and I don't think he's changed much.

JF: He's now chairman of that committee.

RN: Yes. The first thing he did was change the name.

JF: that's right. The Committee on Resources. How about Ted Stevens?

RN: Stevens was somebody that Mo could talk to. He was a pro. But he had a tragedy occur to him while this thing happened. He and his wife were traveling into Anchorage on a small plane which crashed, and his wife was killed and he was badly hurt. I think he was bitter about the fact that he had to come back because we were holding hearings and what have you, and he held that somewhat against Mo.

JF: I had heard that he never quite forgave Mike Gravel for that, because the trip was made necessary by Gravel's later filibuster.

RN: Yes, I think that's right.

JF: How about Mike Gravel? What were your impressions of him?

RN: A flake.

JF: Period?

RN: Period.

JF: Okay. How about Governor Jay Hammond?

RN: I think that he and Mo had a more open and forthright relationship than he did with a lot of other Alaska leaders. He was a pretty good guy.

JF: And John Seiberling?

RN: A great American. Just one of these tireless workers. A man of great empathy and wisdom. I remember him belting out Bach while taking a cold lake bath in the morning. Just a hysterical man.

JF: Who were the key staff players?

RN: In the Alaska....

JF: Yes.

RN: Well, Stanley was.

JF: Stan Scoville.

RN: Yes. Seiberling's staff people were very, very important. I know I'll blow the names.

JF: One was Loretta Neumann. Was she involved?

RN: She was involved. Stan [Sloss]--now working for Mark Udall. I can't think of his last name. Harry.... I can't think of his last name. Anderson? He was a staff director. They had come from the environmental community and were really good.

JF: Mark Trautwein?

RN: Trautwein. Francis Sheehan.

JF: What was Francis Sheehan's position?

RN: He was kind of a junior staff person, but on the natural resources side of it. A hard-working guy, young guy, eager to help. He was great. Carla Kish [phonetic spelling] was also involved.

JF: In May 1978, the bill was brought to the floor and the House approved it. It went to the Senate, which passed a different bill. It then went to conference committee, and they passed a conference bill over Gravel's objection, but the bill then died in the Senate because of Gravel's filibuster. What was Gravel's problem?

RN: He just didn't want it to happen. He was dead set against it.

JF: And was that a concern about him? How it would reflect on him and his getting reelected?

RN: Yes. Yes, I think all he had to do was read the Anchorage papers and you know where he had to be. No Alaska representative could have supported any kind of compromise. It was frustrating to everybody.

JF: But Senator Stephens did, didn't he?

RN: Yes, but he wasn't up [for election].

JF: Yes, it makes a difference. In 1978--I've heard this story in a way, maybe you can confirm it, maybe not--there were some dirty tricks, besides the one that's in *Too Funny to be President*, about them trying to get Mo on not having a fishing license. I've heard that Tony Motley of the CMAL, which was the organization against the Alaska Lands

Bill, flew to Arizona for the purpose of riling up the miners in Mo's district. Those miners subsequently started a recall.

RN: Sure.

JF: Do you recall that?

RN: I do, yes.

JF: It did happen?

RN: Oh, yes. What he did is, Motley craftily heard Mo speak out against the Mining Law of 1872 and suggested that it was time for it to be reformed, and this would go after the whole system of patenting claims, which was the lifeblood of small miners, and the larger mining companies who would take advantage of any claims filed that might have something that they would buy from the small explorers and turn into a very profitable large mining operation. So the mining industry itself was steadfast against any change in existent law. And Motley and the mining industry saw a point of vulnerability here, and went after Mo parlaying Alaska and the Mining Law of 1872 opposition into a recall movement against Mo. And it was annoying to Mo, and distracting to him. And our polling had indicated--we had retained Peter Hart to do a real poll, because a lot of us thought that Mo would be more vulnerable in 1978 than he was in 1976, because it would take a year or two to sink in that Mo had run as a liberal, and the people in Arizona (chuckles) were not liberal. We felt that his race in 1978 would be far more difficult than in 1976, and so Peter Hart took a poll, came back and said we were right, that in fact while Mo was held in high esteem, there was considerable opposition to him, and that the right well-funded Republican could knock him off. So when this came up, it was a distraction and worried a lot of us who saw that Mo could . . . Because this would make a very long, negative campaign--these guys were well-financed, they put in ads, they put out flyers, they did radio spots against Mo, and gathered a lot of negative names on a petition. So it was worrisome, and somewhat successful on their part.

JF: Thus comes the term Motley Crew? (chuckles)

RN: Well, Mo did back off on reform of the Mining Law of 1872, so I think that they felt that they had done something.

JF: Did he ever come to regret backing off of that?

RN: Yes, I think so. I think so. As it turned out, he won 1978, but only by 52%. So I think he said you pick your fights, and there's some fights you just choose not to pick at this time, and this was one of them.

JF: In May 1979, the Udall-Anderson Bill, sort of the second Alaska Lands Bill, was introduced. It was passed in the House and went on to the Senate. And in August 1980, the Senate passed a far less protective bill. My understanding was that the House refused

to compromise until the Reagan landslide, and at that point they thought, "Well, we'd better get what we can get," and they reluctantly approved the Senate version. Is that your recollection?

RN: No.

JF: What is your recollection?

RN: My recollection is that Carter signed the bill.

JF: Well, Carter did sign the bill, but this was after the election itself, and before.... It was December 2, I believe, 1980, that....

RN: I wasn't there. I had left in June of 1979, so I wasn't in on the final negotiations.

JF: Oh, you did leave the staff in 1979? (RN: Yes.) By 1980, Mo had gone public with his diagnosis of Parkinson's disease. When did you first become aware of it?

RN: It's funny, I was out at the Mo memorial in Tucson and ran into Dr. Jerry Targovnik, and in 1975 I was with Mo, we were going to go out to Arizona and then to Los Angeles for the Democratic telethon. It was in May 1975. I went out early to do some advance work in Phoenix, waiting for Mo to arrive. He was going to come in, do a local taping that would be cut-ins for the national telethon, and then go on to Los Angeles and be there live where the party was deploying all the semi-announced presidential candidates around the country to drum up local interest. I was out there, and Ella came out early as well. Mo came in, and he was not feeling well. He got off the plane and he was hunched over and he said he'd hurt his back. He went to the hotel and we called a doctor, and they sent an internist over. He said it didn't seem to be the back, and they didn't know if it was maybe a kidney stone or something. But they decided that he was in such pain that they had to admit him. And of course here we were in the early days of a campaign, in your home state, and you're hospitalized and have to break off a campaign schedule. It was terrible, negative stuff, really a momentum stopper.

Jerry Targovnik was at Good Samaritan, and did all kinds of tests on Mo. They didn't know what the heck it was, so they finally decided that it was a prolapse [phonetic spelling] infection of the sac around the heart, and that was what was causing the pain and the discomfort. And it could also be a little touch of arthritis in the back--that's why the pain there, from the wear and tear from basketball.

So we didn't know exactly how to deal--we had to deal with this with the press. So the consensus was that Ella was to make a public statement about Mo's health and how he was in good hands and whatever. Well, she had never done this before--never! Did not want to do it, was very worried about it. (comment about background noise) So I talked her into doing it, we did a script, we did a run-through, we practiced it, she carried it off beautifully with the help of Dr. Jerry Targovnik. They became wonderful, dear friends. Jerry later told me that that probably was the first onset of the Parkinson's. It was a

neural issue, but it was so early that no one could really track what it was, but he said that that probably was.... And after that, Mo complained of cramping up and stiffness, and that was because of, he thought, being in cars and airplane seats and no sleep and not having his own bed and all. But we noticed in 1977 that his gait changed, that he was shuffling. None of us knew anything about Parkinson's, but it was a sure sign. And in fact, in 1978, the House physician--and they were giving him all kinds of nostrums and chiropractors and everything else that they could think of--sent him to a neurologist. Mo said later that before he even walked across the room to shake the doctor's hand, the doctor told him he had Parkinson's, just from his appearance.

JF: Really? Is that right? In 1978?

RN: Yes. So he kept it in-house. He didn't tell me--I learned of it at the convention in 1980 before he'd gone public with it. It was certainly a huge downer. I was at the DNC and I'd worked long and hard to get Mo to be the keynoter for the convention, and I learned before that what this was. It was terribly crushing. So that's the Parkinson's.

JF: Was there any speculation that the stress of the campaign may have brought it on?

RN: No, I don't think so. It may have brought on some of the symptoms--stress is associated with symptoms of Parkinson's.

JF: During the Alaska Lands Bill and the traveling and the committee hearings and things like that, did you notice any effect during that time?

RN: Not really. He was having a wonderful time. I mean, he just loved that kind of work.

JF: Do you have any recollections, any stories or anything you'd like to share from Alaska?

RN: We were on a DeHaviland Twin Otter. Those things could land in 500 yards in a riverbed. And we traveled in a Grummond Goose and we traveled in a helicopter. We just did everything and saw everything. Mo went head over heels to give everyone a day in court, to provide a forum for every side of the issue. I remember in a small Aleut village, letting the elders go on and on and on and on, and being tremendously patient. We were all going crazy because we were losing our schedule and we didn't know if we'd have to fly in this little plane in pitch black to an airfield with no lights, and here's Mo listening to these elders go on and on and on, without a sign of impatience at all. What a man.

I remember--and it's in the book, too--we were out on the Bering Sea at a fishing village, and the elders, the chief, took us out to see the seal meat and the salmon drying on the lines to await the coming winter, and the chief taking a bit of the seal meat off and giving it to Mo and having him taste it, at which time he invited me to come over and have some, too. And I said, "I don't think I'd want to." And Udall said, "When Udall

eats, everyone eats!" (laughter) So we did!

The fishing license was really my problem. Mo had a license, but I had neglected to get it, and I was out there on the boat with them, wearing a yellow slicker. It was misty and kind of cold and we noticed on the other end of the lake, these guys are coming down in a plane and we're fishing down the other end of the lake, but it was not unusual that somebody else would come into this remote place. So we were out fishing, I was wearing this yellow coat, and we went back in. Mo caught a real nice pike; I didn't catch anything. We went back in and these guys came over in their boat and took off their outer coats and revealed that they were Natural Resources Department Police. And they checked Mo's license, and he had it, fortunately. Then they said, "Where's the guy with the yellow coat?" Well, I had shown the smarts to go out and ditch the yellow coat under a tent. I just stood there and didn't say a word. They asked a few more questions, didn't find anybody who was fishing without a license, and took off, but they clearly had been tipped from within, and we suspect that it was Don Young's guy who had told them.

JF: In 1984, am I correct, that Mo considered another presidential run?

RN: He considered another presidential run from the day after Carter won (chuckles) to the day after Carter lost. And then when Carter lost--we called them "The Gang of Four"--there was [Ed] Coyle and Scates and a few others that thought that Mo should make another run at it. And Ella called them "The Gang of Four." Mo--you don't let that presidentialitis go. He said the only cure for it was embalming fluid. And he was absolutely right. He was tantalized with the idea when prominent Democrats would come up and say, "Mo, you ought to make another shot at it. You did so gallantly and so well. What you said was so right. Do it again!" And of course it wasn't widespread that he had Parkinson's when that first.... Then afterwards, that was a problem. He went so far as to talk to physicians and all about Parkinson's, how long it [took to] develop, and he was assured by neurologists that if he made a run in 1984 that he would not be impaired, that the medication would not stop him from making a run. And they were wrong. It was clear in 1982 that it was taking a toll on him.

JF: I'm going to stop and put a new tape in before it quits.

[END TAPE #34, Side B]