

An Oral History Interview

with

PRESIDENT JIMMY CARTER

Atlanta, Georgia

conducted by
Julie Ferdon

November 15, 2000

The Morris K. Udall Oral History Project
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JF: This is Tape 47 of the Morris K. Udall Oral History Project. Good afternoon, it's 1:30 p.m. on Wednesday, November 15, 2000. My name is Julie Ferdon, and I'm in the office of former President Jimmy Carter at the Carter Center in Atlanta, Georgia. Our sincere thanks for participating in this project, President Carter.

JC: Well, I'm delighted to be talking about Mo Udall, one of my friends and one of my heroes.

JF: Because our time's limited, I'm going to go directly to the point of this interview, which is to record your impressions of, and relationship with Mo Udall. In December of 1975, you and Mo both announced your candidacy for the Democratic presidential nomination. Had you met or heard of Mo before that time?

JC: Well, I had heard of him, but I don't think I had ever met him, unless he happened to have been at the 1972 convention, when I nominated Scoop Jackson, as a matter of fact. I think Mo was probably there.

JF: Mo was there.

JC: In Miami. I think, as a matter of fact, Mo announced about a month before I did, in 1974. I think he announced in November, maybe December. You can check the records.

JF: Did that surprise you? I had read that you wanted to be the first to announce.

JC: No, not really. I really planned to run for president ever since 1972, with a pretty firm commitment. It was a secret among me and about four or five other people. My goal then was to run against George Wallace on my right, and Ted Kennedy on my left. The presumption was that Ted Kennedy was going to run. So when Kennedy announced that he was not going to run, I was really taken aback, because I saw kind of a flood of more liberal Democrats coming into the picture, who may not have run if Kennedy had been there. And so I was still determined to go, but I had to change my strategy to some degree because, as you know, I think nine other Democrats ran.

JF: Yes.

JC: And I doubt—I don't know if Mo would have run or not, against Ted Kennedy. My guess is that he wouldn't have.

JF: I doubt seriously that he would have.

JC: When Kennedy withdrew, that left a vacuum there in the congressional delegations, in particular. And so I was a little bit distressed that I had to change my whole entire strategic approach.

JF: When did you first meet Mo?

JC: Well, as I say, I think I may have met Mo in 1972, since I was a fairly prominent governor, and since Mo and I were both at the convention in 1972, when McGovern was nominated. I was

opposed to McGovern's nomination, because I thought that it would be an automatic loss. And I had known Scoop Jackson earlier. He had visited me in the governor's mansion in Georgia, so I agreed to give the main nominating speech for Scoop. Of course in '74 we had what we call a mini-convention, as you may remember, every two years. And so I guess that was the first time I really shook hands with Mo.

JF: What were your first impressions of him?

JC: Well, I think that impression in my mind now is quite cloudy. I had learned about him. As soon as he announced, obviously one of my assignments for my staff was to give me a biographical background on everybody that was going to be one of my potential opponents. And I very quickly learned how long he'd been in the U.S. Congress, the fact that he was interested in environmental issues, the fact that he'd been a professional basketball player, the fact that he was from Arizona. I was told that he was a friend of Senator Goldwater. That was probably about all I knew about Mo at the time.

JF: So when he announced, did that come as a surprise to you?

JC: No, because it was a generally accepted fact that once Kennedy let it be known that he wouldn't run, that there would be a number of other people who would run. We were looking at Fred Harris, we were looking at Mo, we were looking at Scoop Jackson to run again. We were looking at possibly Hubert Humphrey running again. We didn't know about Governor Brown from California, and others. But I was not surprised, because I didn't really know those people. I never had served in Washington, I'd only been to Washington a few times in my life, so I didn't know any of them personally. The only ones I did know were the ones who had sought the presidency in 1972. I was a prominent southern governor, we had a beautiful mansion, and I would go out of my way, whenever a candidate came down to Georgia, to invite them to spend the night with me at the governor's mansion. And I would spend several hours, late at night, talking to them about domestic and international affairs. And it was really during that year that—to be blunt about it—I came to the slow realization that I was as well qualified as they were. And I could see that as a member of Congress, either House or Senate, had what I thought, as a governor, was kind of a parochial attitude toward issues. They talked about House Bill 1143, and I talked about and thought about how that particular education bill, when put into effect, had its impact on the people of Georgia. So it was a different concept, looking at it from....

JF: More of an applied concept.

JC: It was an applied concept. And then I also began to realize—which may or may not have been fair—that a member of the House or Senate, of necessity, concentrates his interests and his studies on a few particular issues that relate to one or two committees. And so it led them, through no fault of their own, to have kind of a minimal awareness of the broader concepts that a president has to face. So that's an explanation from the completely biased point of view of a governor. (laughs)

JF: You have to be biased to run for president, I think. (laughter) Iowa was your first face-off with Mo and with the others. You came in first, and Mo Udall came in fourth. What do you think made the biggest difference there?

JC: My presence. That was a big advantage that I had, that was realized by the other candidates when it was too late. I had left the governor's office in January of '75. And for me, the campaign for president was a full-time commitment.

JF: Plus some.

JC: And I went in one direction. My wife never campaigned with me, she went in a different direction. My mother went in a different direction. My aunt went in a different direction. My three sons and their wives went in different directions. So we, in effect, had seven or eight campaigns going on every day, in different parts of America. And we would always get together back at my home on Saturday night to talk about our experiences, to share notes, and to make sure when we went out again Monday, that we were talking about, using the same ideas. And so I visited personally 115 towns in Iowa. And at first, I couldn't get anybody to pay attention to me, or to listen to me. But I got to know Iowa. Went to hog sale barns, and I would talk the auctioneer into letting me make a few remarks to the farmers there buying or selling livestock, and those kinds of things. And so I had built up—compared to an array of other candidates—a substantial portion of the votes in Iowa, which were still less than one-third. But when you divide the other two-thirds among seven or eight different people, it let me come out ahead. And so I think the reporter from *The New York Times*, Johnny Apple, finally went into Iowa, and he went out into the rural areas, which was different from most other reporters, and he began to talk to people and found out, when he asked them which person they were going to vote for, an amazing number said Jimmy Carter. And he had really never met me or known about me, but there was a headline in the paper when he finally realized that I was ahead as we approached the Iowa Caucus. That was what gave me the advantage then. I was not a good speaker, I was certainly not well known, I didn't know anything about Washington. But I brought kind of a fresh point of view. My family and I were ubiquitous—we were everywhere. And the others had to go to Washington to keep their voting records up to date. It's a handicap for a candidate for Congress or for president, if their opponents say he's missed three-fourths of the votes in the last two months. That's a very serious challenge or criticism. Well, I didn't have any votes to meet.

JF: I remember that you were ubiquitous. (laughs)

JC: I was! But people didn't know about all the rest of the members of my family who were campaigning simultaneously.

JF: Did you run into Mo in Iowa ever, that you recall?

JC: There were one or two events there, if I remember correctly, when all the Democrats were invited to make a brief speech, and I think there were nine of us or something like that, who

maybe were given five minutes to speak to the audience. So I got to know all of the candidates, as well as Mo.

JF: Next was New Hampshire. You came in first, Mo second. By the end of New Hampshire, Mo, as well as the press and a number of other people, were very impressed by—as Mo was quoted as saying in Kandy Stroud's [phonetic] book, *How Jimmy Won*—he was impressed by your tenacity and sheer power and determination to be president. In retrospect, do you think that Mo Udall maybe lacked that same drive, the hunger, if you will, to be president?

JC: I don't really feel that way. If you or anyone else asked me who was the most tenacious opponent that you had in 1976, I would quickly say Mo Udall, because he never gave up. But I think that, again, my advantage in New Hampshire was what I just described to you in Iowa. I had full time to campaign up there and other places at the same time. And I didn't have the stigma of Washington because, through no reflection on Mo Udall or others, the Vietnam War, the Watergate scandals, the revelations that the CIA had committed horrible crimes—all those things indirectly were a reflection on Washington. And so I came out of a peanut farm and a governor's mansion to present a different point of view. With the exception of Jerry Brown, I was the only one that did that, and Jerry came in later. So I had that advantage in Iowa. The other thing was, that we organized what was called the Peanut Brigade, and literally hundreds of Georgians, at their own expense, travelled to New Hampshire, walked the streets in the key contested areas, knocked on people's doors, avoided dog bites and frostbite, handed out my pamphlet and said, "I know Jimmy Carter, he's been my state senator, he's been my governor. We have confidence in him. Will you vote for [him]?" So I would say those three factors helped me most of all in New Hampshire. And that's where the Peanut Brigade paid off the richest dividends.

I basically skipped Massachusetts. It was obvious to me that Scoop Jackson was going to do well in Massachusetts, and I didn't have any money to spend on TV advertising and so forth, compared to the others. So I skipped Massachusetts and I went to Florida to confront George Wallace. I had some campaign promises from the black community, from Martin Luther King, Sr., from Andy Young, from Vernon Jordan, and also from some of the labor unions like the UAW, Leonard Woodcock, that they would only support me through Florida. And they made it very plain to me that their primary reason for supporting me was that I was the only one that might beat George Wallace, because Florida was a very conservative state. I went into Florida thinking that I might possibly come in second. I knew that Scoop Jackson would be very strong in the Jewish community in Miami and other places. But eventually I came out first in Florida, too.

JF: Mo stayed away from there as I recall.

JC: He did. And then, and maybe a little bit before that, there was, I think, a highly publicized report that the other candidates were saying "A-B-C," "Anybody But Carter," because they began to see, since I had won three major elections in succession, surprisingly I was the one to stop.

JF: So they started ganging up on you?

JC: Well, they did. I think the epitome of that ganging up was in Pennsylvania, when all of them withdrew, basically, from Pennsylvania, except Scoop Jackson. And Hubert Humphrey came into Pennsylvania to campaign for Scoop, and all the labor unions endorsed Scoop Jackson. And that was a very difficult late test for me. I won. I think I won all but one county in Pennsylvania. But by then, I think after Florida, there was a general consensus that this is the guy we've got to stop.

JF: Exactly. Wisconsin was the critical do-or-die state for Mo.

JC: I remember that.

JF: There you beat him again, but this time by only 1%.

JC: I know!

JF: And in the wee hours of the morning. Were you getting worried?

JC: Well, yes. Everybody except CBS—somebody reminded me of that recently, because I was in Wisconsin just three days ago—but the news reporters up there reminded me that every network, except CBS, called it for Mo. And the newspaper, *Milwaukee Sentinel*, I think, they came out with a headline, "Udall Defeats Carter," something like that. It was in the morning headlines. But about four or five o'clock in the morning, we found out that I had basically won by just a very few votes, as you know. I had campaigned an awful lot in the rural areas of Wisconsin. I actually went from one dairy farm to another, one livestock sale barn to another, and although Mo was very strong around Madison with the University of Wisconsin there, and of course the labor organizations were not basically for me, but the rural areas came in late for me, and I finally defeated Mo there. That was the closest election I had anywhere in the country.

JF: There's a lot of speculations—after Mo lost Wisconsin, as there had been before, but particularly Wisconsin—that if Fred Harris had dropped out, it would have made the difference, and Mo would have won Wisconsin.

JC: I think that's true, because it was so close. Any factor like that. And Fred and Mo, justifiably or not, were looked upon by Democrats as to the left of me. I was looked on as one of the more conservative members of the Democratic group. Later, we went to Oklahoma, and Lloyd Bentsen, who was a very active candidate—it's hard to remember now—from Texas, he and Fred Harris, who was from Oklahoma—of course Texas is next door to Oklahoma—they made a major campaign in Oklahoma. And that was Lloyd Bentsen's big thrust, and I luckily came out first in Oklahoma as well.

JF: Harris lost Oklahoma, as I recall.

JC: Very narrowly. But then, by the time we got to Texas, when Lloyd Bentsen was still a

candidate, I won Texas against Lloyd Bentsen, two-to-one. But it was mainly because he had been defeated already in the neighboring state of Oklahoma. That's where he spent most of his money, most of his TV advertising effort was in Oklahoma. So by the time we got to Texas, he was not looked upon as a likely [candidate].

JF: And by Wisconsin, as I recall, Fred Harris was as good as gone. I think Oklahoma had occurred before then?

JC: I can't remember—they were right together. It was about the time of Oklahoma and Wisconsin—I'd have to look it up in the records—that I had been asked a question when I was in northern New York state or something, about a little community that had an altercation about white and black people living side-by-side in a suburban area. And I said something about the fact that an ethnic group had a right to choose where they lived, and if they wanted to share a radio station, say, in the Polish language or something like that, that they ought to have a right to do so. And that response about ethnic purity was resurrected three weeks later by some news reporter in New York state, and it became a burning issue that Carter was for ethnic purity. And that was right in the Oklahoma time. And I came back to Atlanta, and Daddy King [Rev. Martin Luther King, Sr.], by then, was my full supporter. So we had a very famous picture made, which you probably wouldn't remember, with Daddy King and me holding hands like this, and Daddy King said, "This is my man." And so that tended to alleviate that problem. But that was a hectic time, and as you say, that was as close as Mo came to me. And I was hoping that Mo would drop out, but he never dropped out, as you know.

JF: Still in Wisconsin, in Peter Bourne's book entitled *Jimmy Carter*, he mentioned that you believed that Hubert Humphrey was encouraging Wisconsin voters to support Mo so that he himself might run.

JC: Exactly. There was no doubt in my mind that Hubert had, in the back of his mind all during the '76 campaign, becoming the Democratic nominee. And this was most apparent, as I said, in Pennsylvania, where everybody else withdrew, except Scoop Jackson, and Humphrey came into the state to campaign for Scoop, to try to knock me off. So it was obvious to all of us who were in it—I'm sure to Mo as well—that Hubert had ambitions to be anointed, in effect, at the convention.

JF: At a split convention?

JC: At a split convention. And I have to say that that was a difference, too, between me and the other candidates in that none of them really tried to get a majority of the delegates. Every one that I've mentioned so far, thought that they would get a certain percentage, and then go to the convention and horse trade to get the nomination. I knew that I couldn't do that, because I was not one of the Democratic Party stalwarts, I hadn't been involved in . . .

JF: You didn't have anyone to trade with.

JC: I didn't have anybody to trade with. And so I entered every primary in the whole nation,

with one exception. That was West Virginia. And that was because I was asked specifically by Bob [Senator Robert C.] Byrd or something—I've forgotten exactly the details—but I entered thirty primaries, and we went all out in thirty primaries. And sometimes I would come in third, like in Idaho or something like that, when I didn't have a chance to come in first. But I was there campaigning, and Rosalynn and my children were there, too. So my goal from the very beginning was to get a majority, and not just to get a plurality or enough to horse trade.

JF: Right. Now, at the convention, when Mo had not dropped out, and waited until the convention to release his delegates, until his name was placed into nomination, did that cause any hard feelings between you?

JC: No, because the day after the last primary vote, I got two commitments that put me over the top. One was from George Wallace, who had 260-some votes. He called me on the phone at two o'clock in the morning, after the last five states voted. And when I got back to Plains, Georgia, in the middle of the night, I had a call from George Wallace who said wake him up, no matter what time it was. I woke him up and he said that although I had defeated him in Florida, and defeated him in North Carolina and so forth, he thought it was time for a southerner to be given the nomination, and he was releasing all his delegates to me. And prior to that, I had an agreement with Mayor [Richard J.] Daley from Chicago, that if I won in Ohio, which was the last state, that he would release all of the delegates that had been pledged to Adlai Stevenson, Jr. Mayor Daley was supporting Adlai as a favorite son in Illinois. I beat Adlai two-to-one, but he had about 200 and something votes. So when Mayor Daley and George Wallace both gave me their delegates, that put me over the top. Later, Scoop Jackson asked me to come to Washington, which I did, and he released his delegates to me as well. So before we got to the convention, I was way over a majority.

I don't think that Mo and I ever had a cross word or a lack of respect for each other. I know I didn't have any lack of respect for him. Mo was filled with honor and integrity, and as you know, a superb sense of humor, as good as I've ever known. And when he would say something, you could depend on it. He was very attractive to the voters, and I think the main thing that worked against Mo, in my opinion, the reason he wasn't elected president, is that he was looked upon by a lot of people out in the country as just one of more than a half a dozen candidates that came out of the Congress, and there was nothing, really, that set him apart, except his height and the fact that he had a superb record. But there was nothing really that distinguished him from the others who had served in the House and the Senate. And by the time his sterling qualities became obvious, I had so much momentum going that people began to look on me not only as an acceptable candidate, but also as someone that had a good chance to win. And of course everybody likes to get on a bandwagon.

JF: Once you had the nomination, did you ever consider Mo for a vice-presidential candidate or a cabinet position?

JC: Well, I would have been glad to have him as a cabinet officer, but he preferred to stay in the Congress. He was so deeply involved in some of the environmental issues, and he had been frustrated by President Ford's vetoes or threats of vetoes. And I think in the realm of strip

mining legislation, or air pollution control, Alaska Lands and so forth, Mo was so deeply committed to those issues that he saw that his chairmanship of that committee would be much more valuable with a president who would sign the legislation, than if he left the Congress and joined the cabinet.

JF: Did you ever speak about that?

JC: I don't remember that, but I'd have to look at my notes. I kept meticulous diary notes. When I got home from the White House—I never had looked at them before—but when I got home from the White House, I had 6,000 pages of detailed diary notes, and I could look up and see the answer to that question, but I don't recall. But Mo and I worked side-by-side, and whenever I signed a major piece of legislation that related to the civil service or to any environmental issue, Mo was always there. I always said some very gracious things about Mo. He always responded graciously and in very humorous terms. So we were buddies, you might say. And so far as I know we never had a difference while I was president.

JF: You assumed office in 1977, and I think soon after that you signed the Strip Mining Control and Reclamation Act.

JC: Exactly.

JF: Did you and Mo collaborate on that?

JC: Absolutely. We collaborated most intimately on two other things that I just mentioned: one was the civil service reform legislation, with which Mo helped me. And the other one was the Alaska Lands Bill. Of course those were, I think, the best thing that I ever did domestically. And the best thing, maybe, that Mo ever did, domestically was the ANILCA [Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act] legislation, which we'll soon be at the twentieth anniversary of.

JF: That's right, December sixth. I notice you're having a celebration of that.

JC: That's correct.

JF: Mo and John Seiberling had actually introduced the Alaska Lands Act in, I think, '77. Were you aware of it that early on?

JC: Oh, yes. I've looked at my records on that, because I was up in Alaska this fall, I think in September, to celebrate the twentieth anniversary, and I reviewed my notes so I could make a reasonable speech when I got up there. I called for Clinton to put the wildlife refuge in the monuments, so that they can't explore for oil. [JF: Excellent.] But I reviewed my notes.... In fact, Mo had come to the White House pretty often with Cecil Andrus, who was my secretary of Interior, and they worked by themselves quite often, with Cecil representing me in the cabinet. And then Mo and Cecil and I would study the maps and try to evolve some acceptable proposals.

JF: Compromise. So you were a very active part of the decisions all along.

JC: Absolutely. I think our time is up. Maybe one more question. She keeps looking in. I've got another interview.

JF: Well, I'll go to the last question I ask everybody, and that is, What did you think were Mo's greatest strengths and weaknesses, or what do you think his legacy will be?

JC: I think Mo was looked upon then, having spent almost thirty years in the Congress, as courageous, enlightened, farsighted, tenacious, a man of absolute integrity, respected by Democrats and Republicans. I think within his own committee arena, neither Democrats nor Republicans ever looked upon him as being different from them, or antagonistic to them. I think he was the kind of leader they respected. During the later years of Mo's service, obviously all his friends knew that he was ill. I think that when the country starts assessing who in the House of Representatives had the greatest and most beneficial impact on America's environment, the unanimous decision would be Mo Udall. And other issues are transient in nature: even education bills, welfare bills, trade legislation, international agreements. They're transient in nature. But adding 1.3 million acres of wilderness areas, which Mo led the fight to do early in my administration, or the final addition of about 105 million acres of land in Alaska to the parks and also to the wilderness areas, is something that will last for a thousand years. And I think Mo deserves the greatest credit for that of anyone in the House or Senate.

JF: And Mo has called you the best environmental president ever, with the possible exception of T.R.

JC: I understand. Well, thank you.

JF: Thank you, very much, Mr. President.

JC: I enjoyed it.

[END OF INTERVIEW]