An Oral History Interview

with

**Henry S. Reuss (part 2)**

Belvedere, California
July 10, 2001

*conducted by*
Julie Ferdon

*transcribed by*
Jardee Transcription, Tucson

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

© 2001
The University of Arizona Library
Arizona Board of Regents
All Rights Reserved
JF: Okay, we’re on Side B.

HR: So that was the next big contact. Then I successfully broke the seniority system at the start of the new Congress in January 1975. I deposed Wright Pattman as chair of the Banking Committee when I was Number Four on the committee. So it took some doing. Mo must have been for me, but I never asked him for his support, but I’m sure he was.

JF: It would be hard to believe that he wasn’t, given how he felt about those things.

HR: I’m sure he was.

JF: So the seniority system began to crumble a little bit under this pressure from the Young Turks who had come in.

HR: Yes the first to fall was Judge Smith in the Rules Committee, an important forward step. And then came the revival of the Democratic Caucus and Steering Committee, an important structure. And then….

JF: What led to Chairman Smith’s….

HR: I think Kennedy got behind his ouster. He was ousted early on. And McCormack had something to do with it, too, which is why I liked McCormack.

JF: Were you aware at all of—I have heard that McCormack never quite forgave Mo for running against him, and actively worked against him for majority leader. Is that anything you’re aware of?

HR: I don’t think he was vindictive. He used to call Mo, “Maurice,” (chuckles) making an Irish Catholic out of him.

JF: Out of a one-eyed Jack Mormon!

HR: I had no feeling that he was doing the dirty to Mo. He would have supported Boggs, because Boggs had seniority, was the heir apparent, and was a liberal Southerner. I should have supported him, really.

JF: Backing up a little bit to 1968 again, in your biography, your 1999 book, you referred to the Vietnam War as “surely the saddest chapter in the history of our country.” Mo was one of the very first members of Congress to come out publicly against the Vietnam War. Was that anything you ever discussed with him, or were even aware of at the time?

HR: I think my answer has to be no, which simply indicates that we weren’t daily confidants. We each were on different tracks. Exactly when did Mo come out against the Vietnam War?

JF: It was in 1968.
HR: Right. Well, I came out in late ’67, by supporting publicly Gene McCarthy. So Mo came out a few weeks later. Did he support McCarthy? I don’t think so.

JF: I don’t believe he did. I don’t believe he actively supported him, no. His brother, Stewart, was a member of Johnson’s cabinet at the time.

HR: Right. So that was a good reason not to.

JF: And as you said in your book, that Johnson could be autocratic at times. Do you think that Mo’s announcement would have hurt either Stewart’s relationship with Johnson, or Mo’s relationship with Johnson?

HR: Yes. I can see Johnson at his earthiest, chewing him out, and maybe firing Stewart.

JF: And you mentioned a little while ago, having heard from Stewart—or was it in his book?—where he said he was very against the Vietnam War.

HR: In his book, though I also—he called me up just to say hello about a year ago, vowing to come up here, which he hasn’t yet done. You can remind him.

JF: I will do so. (chuckles)

HR: So then it’s ’75. As I say, I’m sure Mo was for me in my internal fight. Then a year later, Mo, egged on by Congressman Obey, myself, and others, but largely Obey and me, announced for the presidency. I think Jimmy Carter was out there, but Mo announced. You’ll know all the dates on that.

JF: I believe that was approximately two years before, so it would be, I believe, in 1974 or so, that you and fellow Wisconsin Congressman Dave Obey encouraged Mo to run, and passed a petition among other members of Congress, urging Mo to run for the presidency. One thing I’ve always been curious about is how that petition got started, who drafted it, where’d the idea actually start?

HR: Obey and I must have dreamed it up. Have you interviewed Obey?

JF: Yes, I did.

HR: I just don’t remember. If he claims exclusive authorship, he should get it.

JF: Oh, not at all.

HR: It’s the kind of thing we would have done.

JF: Yes. I believe he said he wasn’t sure where the idea first originated.
HR: I think it was sort of both of us.

JF: Where was Mo on that at the time? He had certainly considered running for president.

HR: I think he didn’t mind a bit! (laughter)

JF: Was he aware that you were going to pass the petition?

HR: I don’t know. Must have been.

JF: But you-all wrote it?

HR: I don’t remember.

JF: Do you remember someone on Mo’s staff named Terry Bracy?

HR: Yes, who’s now head of the Udall Foundation. Yes, a very good staffer and a nice guy.

JF: Did you have much contact with him during that time?

HR: Enough so I can remember him favorably, yeah. Was he your boss—well, were you there then?

JF: When I was in the congressional office, he and John Gabusi were both sort of my boss. They were both legislative assistants at the time.

HR: You and I never met—or did we?

JF: I don’t believe we formally met. I think I saw you in the office a couple of times, but I was over at the campaign office by then. How realistic was it for a member of Congress to run for president?

HR: The record is not particularly good. No senator seemed to be on the horizon, and being a member of Congress is certainly better than being a notary public. But the record isn’t very encouraging—and it’s less so after Mo’s defeat.

JF: What are the drawbacks of running for [president] from the House?

HR: Several. One is, you’re likely to lose your seat in Congress. Secondly, you’re one of 435, rather than one of 100—big difference. Thirdly, you don’t represent a whole state, except in rare cases, like Mo’s.

JF: And that would have an effect on fundraising, I would imagine.

HR: Yeah.
JF: Did you go on the campaign trail for Mo?

HR: Oh, yes. Just to recollect my contact points, after Obey and I and others had urged him to run, and after he’d announced…. When did he announce, do you know?

JF: He announced—I know it was two full years before the election. It was the earliest anybody had announced.

HR: In September 19[7]4?

JF: I think it was—I want to say November 1974.

HR: He needed to raise some money, and I went to the usual liberal Wisconsin fundraiser, who had a large home near Milwaukee, and said, “Why don’t you do this for my friend Mo?” He said, and his wife said, “Well, why don’t you do it? You’ve got a home!” And I had to admit, there was a certain logic to that. So my wife and I gave, at our large and comfortable home in the country—an inheritance from my family, which I’ve since sold—we gave a very successful fundraiser for Mo, at which, among other things, he dedicated the first electricity-generating windmill—which I had installed—with much gusto. And it was a really good party, with beer and bratwurst to eat, and a Polish band, and polka. So that was quite a success.

Shortly afterwards, when the snow was on the ground, Dave Obey and I took him—this may have been a waste of time—through what was to become the Ice Age National Scenic Trail throughout Wisconsin. And we posed for photos on the Trail. Probably in retrospect it was three hours without adequate payoff. But it was my idea, so…. It’s like Bush’s going to the giant sequoias, except Udall really liked trails.

JF: Well, it’s something—I was going to say—that Mo would have really enjoyed, I think.

HR: I think he did, yeah.

JF: And would have really wanted to see.

HR: He never resented the fact that there was not a huge crowd there. You know, you couldn’t get one to go out there. Then, Obey and I were very active in his campaign in Wisconsin. And as I say in my book, it looked early in the evening as if Mo was going to carry Wisconsin. In fact, he went from his room in the Hotel Schroeder [called the Marc Plaza in 1976] down to the ballroom, urged on by some of this supporters. Obey and I held back, because the precincts not heard from tended to be rural, evangelical precincts, and we knew that Jimmy Carter would do well there. So Mo narrowly lost. And on the plane back to Washington, the next day, it was filled with jubilant Georgians who’d come up to campaign for Jimmy.
I continued to work for Mo, notably doing a lot of stops in upstate New York, some in Pennsylvania, some in Maryland—all, I’m afraid, ending up in Mo coming in, in the second column. In New York, I worked closely with Mo’s staunch supporter young Harold Ickes, to whom fate has since dealt an unhappy set of cards, in that he was the fall guy in the Clinton administration, and so on—inadequately recognized and rewarded. I was his friend because his mother, Mrs. Harold Ickes, since deceased, had been an old girlfriend of mine, whom I admired very much. So it was natural that the kid and I should get together. But we were not a success in New York. There you are.

JF: The Wisconsin Primary was probably Mo’s greatest chance of winning a primary, and he lost it, I believe, by only 8,000 votes or something.

HR: You don’t know out of how many?

JF: No, I don’t know out of how many.

HR: It was very close.

JF: I want to say it was 200-and-something-thousand that he and Carter each had.

HR: Sounds about right.

JF: Like 250,000 versus 260,000.

HR: That’s what there should be, yeah. Not worth a recount, but very close.

JF: But very, very close indeed.

HR: That would have changed everything, because after that, opportunists like the mayor of Detroit and the Autoworkers [Union]—Woodcock—signed up with Carter, and that’s why he lost Michigan. And in every state there was some damned reason why he was ill-fated. It wasn’t that he didn’t put on a good campaign, and he certainly did everything that Obey and I suggested he do.

JF: What do you think the problem was in Wisconsin?

HR: I think it was Jimmy Carter’s superior organization. Obviously Obey and I should have worked harder. We should have worked full-time at it. We sort of let Mo’s organization do it. Nobody asked us to work any harder than we did, but we perhaps should have pushed them aside—pushed you aside (chuckles)—and said, “Look, we’ll take over.”

JF: Did you know the people working in Wisconsin in Mo’s office?

HR: Some of them. I knew that Charming daughter of the great woman historian….

JF: Jessica Tuckman [Matthews]?
HR: Jessica Tuckman….

JF: Bob Bedard? Does that name ring a bell?

HR: Not really. He obviously had his best campaign staff there. I forget now, was Stewart his campaign manager?

JF: Stewart was the campaign chair, and the campaign itself had several campaign managers. There was John Gabusi, Jack Quinn, and to some extent Martilla and Kiley at one point.

HR: Who?

JF: Martilla and Kiley, they were a firm from Boston. But were you familiar at all with Jack Quinn or John Gabusi? No?

HR: Uh-uh.

JF: Now, one of the things in Wisconsin, the New York Primary was held the same day as Wisconsin. And from what I recall, it was pretty well conceded that Jackson was going to win it. And I just wonder, had….

HR: Did he?

JF: Yes. Should Mo have stayed out of New York?

HR: I don’t know, that wasn’t my decision. If it was the same day as Wisconsin, obviously my campaigning in New York, which included Ithaca; Elmira; Corning; Binghampton; Erie, Pennsylvania, across the border; Buffalo, Jamestown, possibly Schenectady—I really worked it. But I was just doing my duty. “Sorry Mo, can’t be with you today, but here’s the word.” What happened in New York? [Scoop] Jackson won?

JF: I believe so.

HR: I’ll bet he got the Jewish vote.

JF: And he had campaigned there for a very, very long time, I believe, and had spent a lot of money there.

HR: The Jewish folk believed that he was a mensch, because he kept advocating moving our embassy to Jerusalem. But that must have been it. I would have told Mo (laughs) to claim that Udall was a Jewish name—which a lot of my Jewish supporters in Milwaukee thought. (laughter)
JF: What other members of Congress worked in the campaign, like you and Congressman David Obey did? Do you recall who else went on the stump for him?

HR: I hesitate to—oh, the late George Brown of California, a good man, with whom I went to Alaska…. Oh, wait! Oh, God, I left out a lot! I covered Alaska: Fairbanks, Juneau, Anchorage. I covered Washington. I covered Oregon, where I debated. I claimed victory in Oregon for Mo. No! wait a minute! That was Bobby Kennedy. I meant Gene McCarthy. Strike the West Coast, I didn’t do anything for Mo there.

JF: Actually, I think with the primaries and all, the West Coast ended up not getting much attention from Mo’s campaign. Fred Harris was one of the liberal candidates who had run.

HR: Was he running?

JF: He had run in all the primaries and all—maybe not all of them—but up to then, and it was evident that he was going to lose, and he had no chance at all to win.

HR: But he would have taken votes from Mo.

JF: And some people have said that had he dropped out of the Wisconsin campaign, that Mo would have won. Is that anything you’re familiar with?

HR: Do you recall who was on the ballot, and how they ended in Wisconsin? I don’t. I just know that Mo was second.

JF: I don’t recall. I do have that information, but I don’t have it with me right now. It was Carter, Mo….

HR: So Harris would have gotten some votes.

JF: Mo lost by 8,000 votes. I think Harris got something like 9,000-10,000 votes.

HR: That would have done it.

JF: Which would have done it. But I wondered if you knew anything about why he wouldn’t withdraw.

HR: Nothing.

JF: Nothing. Okay. Now, I understand also that there was a money issue involved in Wisconsin, that there was a real need for money for late TV buys and things, and that this caused some squabbles within Mo’s campaign. Was that something you were aware of at all?

HR: What you just said is the first I’ve heard of it. If true, I just don’t know. I assume there always was a money problem, as there is in all campaigns.
JF: In all campaigns—that’s absolutely true. Much of this comes from a book written by Jules Witcover called, *The Marathon*, where he mentions some of that, that was written about the ’76 campaign.

Now, what was your impression of Jimmy Carter?

HR: I liked him very much at the start. Some book, I don’t know whether it was Witcover’s, said that I was considered by Carter for his vice-presidential choice.

JF: Yes, it was in Witcover’s book.

HR: I don’t know whether it’s true or not. I never was approached on it. But anyway, we started out great friends. I tried to get Mrs. Carter interested in housing in cities, with some mild success. Carter was very kind and generous to me, had me up for a one-on-one lunch at the White House. I was very supportive of his Federal Reserve Chairman and Secretary of the Treasury Bill Miller, and got along fine, really, until Carter’s energy efforts and his “malaise speech,” in which the poor guy never really used malaise, but the word was put in his mouth. His energy approach, in my view, was about as feckless as Hillary Clinton’s healthcare approach—ill thought out, and a failure.

But what turned me against Jimmy, and in support of Teddy Kennedy in 1980, was what I thought was Carter’s terrible economic performance, being the first Democrat in history to bring on a deep recession. That isn’t a good way to win. And this was done by overreacting to the OPEC-inspired inflation by raising interest rates through the Fed to a tremendous 20% level, which absolutely ruined the economy, and ruined poor Carter. Since then, he’s been a marvelous ex-president. He also exploited the Iran hostages issue, against poor Teddy, by staying engaged with it every day, when the way to handle a crisis, as has been proved many times, including recently with the Hainan American spy plane, is to keep quiet about it, and work diplomatically. Things then fall into their place.

So all of this led me—here we leave Mo…. No! we shouldn’t leave Mo. He and I and a few others were invited out to Teddy’s house for breakfast just before he announced, asking us, “Should I run?” And both Mo and I said, “If you feel you’re up to it, by all means.” Teddy then had that unfortunate first interview, for which he was not prepared, with—who was the lanky television mogul of the day? He’s still alive, I think. Anyway, he interviewed Teddy one-on-one, asking “Why do you want to be president?” And Teddy didn’t have a ready answer, which was fatal.

JF: In 1980, Mo considered running again for president. Were you aware of that?

HR: Yes. In fact, I wrote, with his permission, a letter, which *Time* magazine published, captioned, “One Mo Chance,” saying, “this guy is good.” And Mo was delighted to have me write that. But for reasons I don’t recall, nothing came of it. I obviously wasn’t going to urge him again, that he had to run.
JF: But you would have supported him in running again?

HR: Oh, yes.

JF: What kind of president do you think he would have made?

HR: I think a little depends on what went before him. And in my fantasy footnote in my book, I make that person an unassassinated Robert Kennedy. So you have Mo taking over for two terms in ’76. I think he would have made an excellent president, and would have avoided the degradation and deception of the American public, which Reagan introduced, and would have brought us through the eighties nicely, with an expanding economy, and with a good, slightly left of center, government. Would have been a superb president.

JF: Obviously, I agree, as do many people. We haven’t really talked about the environment. I know Wisconsin was the home of John Muir and of Aldo Leopold.

HR: Not to mention John Wesley Powell; Increase Lapham the sponsor of the U.S. Weather Service; and Carl Schurz, the forest- and Indian-loving secretary of interior, under Hayes. And I’ve just opened an outdoor pantheon to these five environmental heroes, all of whom had their early years in Wisconsin. So it isn’t just those two.

JF: That’s amazing. And you said in your book that you came to Congress as a passionate environmentalist. I know you were put on the Government Operations Committee, never got on the Interior Committee with Mo, but did your paths ever cross in environmental legislation?

HR: Yes, we were working opposite sides of the same street. I got the rather know-nothing Government Ops [Operations] Committee to set up a subcommittee on conservation and natural resources in about 1964 or thereabouts. And I kept that subcommittee until I became Banking Committee chair eight years later. It did some wonderful work, all of which I brag about in my book. But Mo, meanwhile, was pursuing his own much more focused course, as an increasingly senior Interior Committee member.


HR: And on the Ice Age Trail—the same place where I took Mo.

JF: Did Mo or Stewart ever join you on the C & O Canal walks?

HR: No. This was a one-day-a-year affair for me.

JF: So really your paths did not cross that much on environmental issues, even though you were both avid environmentalists.
HR: Right. He must have been…. Well, it was mainly Phil Burton who put together the National Parks Act of 1980—a huge pork barrel of wonderful things, which included my Ice Age National Scenic Trail, for which I repaid Phil by being very upfront on gay rights—a somewhat odd tradeoff.

JF: Is he still living?

HR: No, no, he died in 1983. His brother, John, a good guy who also was in Congress and had a narcotic addiction, which he threw off, is now the Democratic leader of the California Senate.

JF: Oh, I didn’t realize that.

HR: Where he’s a big shot who represents little people.

JF: I didn’t realize that. You retired from Congress in 1983. What prompted that?

HR: Mainly, I was seventy. I did want to spend my last two years as chair of the Joint Economic Committee, because I saw that as the place to attack Reagan’s economic policies. That done, I would have reverted to chair of the Banking Committee, where I had really accomplished everything in sight on that committee. I’d also had a heart attack in ’79, from which I’d recovered, but in a way I wish I hadn’t retired, but had kept on for a few more years, though I’m not…. It probably would have been a lonely and unhappy life, because the Democrats, with a few noble exceptions, tended to cop out during the Reagan years—except for the Obey-Udall-Reuss Amendment of September 1981, trying to undo the Reagan tax cut for the rich effect, by closing some loopholes.

JF: How did that come about, that you three co-sponsored that amendment?

HR: I originated it, because I’d been—even though I wasn’t a member of Ways and Means, I’d always been a big plugger of tax loopholes, and I think I encouraged Obey and Udall—old pals now—to join me. And we put up a good fight, but of course were not successful.

JF: By the time you retired in 1983, Mo’s symptoms of Parkinson’s disease had become pretty evident. Did you or anyone you know ever encourage him to resign before ’91, which is when he had to resign for health reasons?

HR: I certainly didn’t, and wouldn’t have. Many did, that I’ve heard of. Was it Barry Goldwater, who was a friend of his? Was it his brother Stewart? I just don’t know. I’ve some inkling that it may have been brother Stewart. Whoever did, I think did the right thing. I didn’t become aware of…. Let’s see, when did Mo marry Norma?


HR: As late as that? Anyway, I don’t think I saw…. 
JF: Oh, I’m sorry, no.

HR: A little earlier? Well, whenever. I just didn’t see Mo during the early years of retirement, part of which I spent as a lawyer in a large firm in Washington, and then getting bored by that, as a philanthropic board type, before we moved here in ’95. I saw Mo…. I’d heard that he had Parkinson’s, and I saw him and his wife Norma, whom I met for the first time, at a party given by a charming young couple, whose name escapes me at the moment. He had been on the staff of my Joint Economic Committee. Norma was an old friend of his, so that’s how he knew Mo. And they were there. Mo had a little problem, but was very clear in the mind. It must have been earlier than ’88….

JF: When they were married. I’m sorry that I don’t know that right off.

HR: Because if he died in ’91, it was more than three years before his death. Anyway….

JF: Oh, I’m sorry, 1991 is when he was forced to retire.

HR: And when did he die?

JF: Not until a couple of years ago.

HR: Yeah. Anyway, shortly after—or I think we may have told Norma [unclear] meeting her, and she was and is an outgoing person. Is she still alive and well?

JF: Yes, she is.

HR: And adequately taken care of?

JF: Oh, yes.

HR: Good. She deserves it. And where does she live—Alexandria?

JF: She’s in, I believe it’s Alexandria, I think in the same town home that she and Mo had moved to just before he retired.

HR: Anyway, we must have told her that we had found, to take care of my one-hundred-and-two-year-old father-in-law, Margaret’s father, who was in an apartment right near where we lived, we’d employed a very nice Filipino dentist to take care of him, which he did fine. And Norma called, saying, “Look, I really need somebody to get Mo into and out of bed. Does your Filipino have any pals?” And Ernesto said, “Yeah, I’ll send over So-and-So.” We must have later heard from Norma, perhaps sometime later, that she didn’t think they could afford his salary—which was too bad, since then Mo fell. And that was the end.

JF: Right, exactly.
HR: Thereafter, I saw him at least once in the Veterans Hospital, where he was sort of unconscious, but I could feel his hand, and I sort of kissed him goodbye. Norma told me, “You’re the second person to kiss him. George Bush, the first.”

JF: Oh, is that right?

HR: Isn’t that interesting?

JF: That’s very interesting, very interesting.

HR: So that’s about it. But please, jog me with any questions you might have.

JF: I wondered, you’re one person who worked with both Stewart and Morris Udall on the congressional level. Can you compare or contrast their styles?

HR: Oh, no. (tape paused) They both were very efficient congressmen. Mo, of course, wrote a book about it, which was well received, and a big help, even to veterans like myself.

JF: This was The Job of the Congressman?

HR: Yes.

JF: How were their styles different as legislators?

HR: I can’t pinpoint any difference.

JF: I have one last question that I ask everybody. We tend to talk a lot about Mo’s attributes. I wonder if you could say what were his weaknesses?

HR: Well, I haven’t really said what his strengths were.

JF: I was just thinking of that, that we hadn’t!

HR: Basically the old familiar ones of integrity, intellectual power, great sense of humor, loyalty. Loyalty. For instance, after the Obey-Udall-Reuss tax effort in late 1981, that I described, I came back from a quick trip abroad to find that Obey and Udall, presumably with me, had announced they were going to try it again, because you know how these bills rotate. Hearing of it, that disturbed me, because I thought we would wear out our good will, become like the anti-abortion crowd, trying the same amendment time and again. So I called Obey. Well, he wasn’t in. And I called Mo and gave him my doubts, and he said, “Well, if you have your doubts, get off. But I told Obey I would. While I think you’re probably right, Henry, I wouldn’t want to leave him in the lurch.” Well, that was fine. So I quietly stepped off. Maybe I was being too cautious, but he was very loyal.

On his weaknesses, I don’t count his Central Arizona Project as a weakness, I count it as the price you have to pay for representing your district. He may have been a little
premature in running against both McCormack and Hale Boggs. That must have made him some enemies in the House, because we never generated a great many Udall supporters: outside of Obey, me, and George Brown, I have difficulty thinking of any.

JF: Well, there were forty-four, I believe, signers of the petition, but that doesn’t mean that they worked for him actively.

HR: Yeah. So those . . . unrealistic political expectations. On the other hand, he couldn’t have made a name for himself if he hadn’t done some of these dashing things. I think running against McCormack was a mistake. That’s aiming too high. Even running against Hale Boggs, he would have done much better to make a deal saying, “Look, can I be whip?” or something like that.

JF: I had the impression always that he was sort of jousting against the seniority system, to some extent. But he would not have run without thinking he could win.

HR: I don’t know. If so, he was mistaken, and that’s a weakness to which we all subscribe.

JF: Right.

HR: But the weaknesses are very minor, or I wouldn’t be the passionate devotee of Mo that I am.

JF: I really don’t have any more questions.

HR: Well, thank you very much.

JF: I’d just like to thank you for taking the time to do this.

HR: I’d like to interview you now, on problems of . . .

[END OF INTERVIEW]