JF: This is Tape 51 of the Morris K. Udall Oral History Project. Good morning, it’s Friday, January 25, 2002, and we’re in the office of Senator John McCain, in Phoenix, Arizona. My name is Julie Ferdon, and I would like to thank you, Senator, for participating in this project.

JM: It’s a pleasure.

JF: I understand we don’t have much time, so I’m going to hit the ground running. In 1982, you were first elected to the House of Representatives, and later elected to the Senate to replace Senator Goldwater. Had you met Mo before you went to the House of Representatives?

JM: I had not. I had been to a couple of gatherings where he spoke, but I had never personally met Mo.

JF: Do you remember the first time you met him?

JM: Yes, it was in January of 1983, and I received an assignment to the Interior Committee, of which he was the chair, which was my first choice. I went to see him, and hit it off with him immediately.

JF: You’ve said that Mo, a liberal Democrat, took you, a conservative Republican, under his wing (JM: He did.) when you came to Congress. In what way?

JM: Well, first of all, on the Interior Committee, the first thing he did was recommend that I seek the responsibility for Indian issues for the Republicans. There was no subcommittee for Indian Affairs, due to the fact that nobody wanted a subcommittee. A guy named Meeks from Washington had gotten beat because he was perceived, so the story went, that he was too sympathetic to Native Americans, and he had been defeated. So Mo suggested that I be the Republican for Indian affairs; and I was a junior guy, and he asked Manuel Lujan, later secretary of the Interior, if I could have that designation. And Manuel Lujan basically made it happen, since it was a Republican decision. And he and Manuel Lujan got along well. And so that was the first meeting that we had of many, many meetings that we were together. He was the most popular man in the House. That was proven by a vote that the Democrat Caucus had, confirming the committee chairman. He was always the one that was voted unanimously by the Democrat Caucus. So the Interior Committee was very busy. This was before his Parkinson’s became impactful to him. So we literally would have hearings almost every day. And so I interfaced with him with great regularity.

One anecdote was that that first year, he told me that during one of the breaks, which I think was like March or April, that he was going to go back to Arizona and have a news conference in Casa Grande, to talk about all the issues on the Interior Committee that affected Arizona. And he invited me to attend. I knew very little about these issues. One of the reasons why I was so intent on getting on the Interior Committee was so I could learn some of these issues, because of the great importance to the state of Arizona. But anyway, he and I drove down together from Phoenix to Casa Grande, and we had this press conference. All the Arizona media was there, and Mo would constantly say, “Well, Congressman McCain and I are working
on this issue, and we’re working on that issue. We’re working on this issue together.” In the interest of straight talk, most of them I didn’t have a clue what those issues—anything about those issues.

JF: Was that unusual for a Democrat to invite a Republican along?

JM: Yes, very unusual. It was very unusual.

JF: How about other members of the Arizona delegation? Did they also take you under their wing?

JM: No. I mean, we got along all right. I mean, we rarely saw the senators, Goldwater and DeConcini—which is not unusual. And the other members of the House were Jim McNulty, who was new when I was; Eldon Rudd; and Bob Stump; and Mo. So I didn’t have a lot of interface with either Rudd or Stump. McNulty some, because he, I believe, was also on the Interior Committee, I think.

JF: Yes, he was. And you were both freshmen?

JM: Yes, both freshmen.

JF: You’ve also said that Mo, more than anyone else, taught you how to do your job in Washington. How did he go about doing that?

JM: Mainly by example. I fell far short of his performance, because I, to some degree, was less mature, and also more tempermental. In other words, my passion sometimes spills over into anger, and Mo never did that.

JF: You never saw him angry?

JM: I saw him passionate, but I never saw him display anger. I’m sure I saw him at times when he was angry, but I never saw him display it. In fact, the opposite: when things would get very tense, that’s when Mo’s keen sense of humor would enter in. He would always, at the right appropriate time, tell a joke. It might have been the hundredth time I’d heard the same joke, but it fit so appropriately at the time, that it would diffuse the tension of the situation, whether it be in a hearing or a meeting, wherever tough issues were discussed. So he taught me a lot. I’ve often regretted that I was unable to emulate him to the degree that I would have liked.

JF: You’ve also mentioned Barry Goldwater as a mentor.

JM: Well, Barry and I—he was certainly a role model in that Barry spoke plainly, he let the chips fall where they may. His honesty and his forthrightness were, I think, one of his great virtues. In that way he was a role model to me, but Barry and I were never close. He was in the Senate when I was in the House, and then I took his place in the Senate. I got along with him, I showed him the respect that he deserved, but I never had the close relationship with him that I
had with Mo. Mo and Barry had a very close relationship, but I never had to interface with Barry. And when I really was starting to get to know Barry, he was really in a lot of pain, a lot, with his knees and his hips. It was constantly painful to him, because of his knee replacements and hip replacements. So as much as I would have liked to have had the kind of relationship with Barry that I had with Mo, it just never....

JF: It was more timing and availability . . . .

JM: Yes, because working together with Mo for four years in the House, on his committee, and on the same issues, and particularly wilderness bills where we spent hundreds of hours together; and on the issues, for example, Navajo-Hopi relocation, which he made a valiant attempt to solve, and he and I met—I can’t tell you the number of hours with the Hopi and Navajo leadership. Unfortunately, we never succeeded, but it wasn’t through Mo’s lack of effort. So I spent all those hours and hours—hundreds of hours—with Mo, working with him on issues. I never had that opportunity with Barry.

JF: How was Mo to work with?

JM: Lovely. He understood the issues, and he had a keen sense of timing and what the chances are. He was a consumate politician. That’s why more legislation always came out of the Interior Committee than any other committee in Congress, while he was the chairman. Part of that was because of a broad range of issues; but another part of it was that Mo was very effective. I mean, I was not there during probably the biggest fight of his career, the Alaska....

JF: Alaska Lands Bill?

JM: Yes, the Lands Bill, I guess. And it took him years—years and years—but he prevailed on one of the major landmark pieces of legislation—still controversial to this day—but more and more Americans, I think, agree that Mo was right, as America becomes more and more environmentally sensitive.

JF: As he said, they were now waving at him with more than one finger. (laughter)

JM: That’s right.

JF: What do you think made Mo so effective as a legislator and so popular as a legislator?

JM: Well, it was obviously his humor. It was obviously his grasp of the issues. It was his willingness to work with people. But he was also a great shmoozer. I mean, he was a great shmoozer. I’ve seen him go up to a guy, “How’s your family? Yeah, I was in South Carolina once. Yeah, I think it was in that town.” I mean, he was extremely good on a people-to-people basis. But remember, Mo was also a great reformer. He fought the system. He ran against the leadership. He lost, but he made fundamental changes in the way that Congress does business. Even though he lost, he won in the end. But he did lose. And in the interest of straight talk, he had some very tragic aspects of his personal life, which are terribly moving, as we all know, but
in some ways, make him, in my mind, even a greater figure, because of the personal travail that he experienced.

JF: You’re speaking, I’m assuming, of the death of his wife.

JM: Suicide of his wife, this breakup of his first marriage, the long period of illness, which was so terrible in the last few years. It’s really a sad, sad story in many respects. But yet one of the great pleasures of my life is to see Mark, because when I see Mark, I see Mo. I mean, I literally see Mo. And it’s a wonderful thing to see that legacy passed on—not only to Mark, but also to Tom.

JF: Mark even looks amazingly like him—more so every day.

JM: It’s startling! It is startling. And he has the same wonderful disposition that Mo had.

JF: How is he as a legislator, from your experience?

JM: Oh, he’s good, he’s fine. He’s going to be great.

JF: And how about Tom Udall?

JM: Tom’s just fine too. A little different personality, more like Stew, naturally. But he’ll be fine, too. I see Mark as more of an environmentalist. And Tom, although certainly an environmentalist, a lot more of a judiciary kind, because he was an attorney general and all that. So they may have a little bit different high priorities. Not to say Tom isn’t a committed environmentalist—he is—but he’s also had the background as the attorney general of his state. I see a little bit of difference there.

JF: Do you get a sense of whether—I mean, they’re both, I believe, in their second term—do you get a sense of how effective they’re being?

JM: Both of them are very highly regarded. It takes time in the House, though. It really does. It takes time. It’s not like the Senate. The Senate, you can come in and get going right away. The seniority system in the House works, but both Tom and Mark are already carving out niches.

JF: Yes, despite Mo’s efforts, the seniority system is still there. I keep thinking how proud Mo would be.

JM: Oh! Oh, God, Mo and Stew were ... yes, yes, absolutely.

JF: You mentioned Mo’s humor. Was his humor something he primarily used for certain purposes?

JM: Well, see, anybody can tell a funny joke in politics—anybody can. Mo’s magic was that he would tell the right joke at the right time. In other words, it wasn’t just Mo giving a speech and
giving a couple of throw-away jokes. I mean, Mo—things would be tense and he’d say, “Well, that reminds me of a story....” And that story would then put the discussion, or the issue, in a much better perspective, as well as diffuse the tensions in the room. So his great humor was not the fact that he’d memorized a thousand jokes—which he had—many of which he recycled many, many times—but his great talent, which was unique, is that he used the humor at the right time for the desired effect. And that was the difference between him and ordinary politicians. Ordinary politicians all memorize a certain number of jokes and tell them before any gathering or dinner or whatever it is. Mo had that, of course, but he had it a lot better. Who else but Mo could have said, “The people have spoken—the bastards!”?

JF: (laughs) That’s true.

JM: Who else but Mo Udall could have said that?

JF: That’s true—except maybe Anne Udall.

JM: (chuckles) Yes, maybe. Maybe so.

JF: Anne has a similar sense of humor.

JM: She does.

JF: As you know, Mo ran for president in 1976, and lost. What kind of president do you think he would have made?

JM: I think he’d have been a wonderful president. I think he would have moved Teddy Roosevelt’s agenda along, both in the area of reform, as well as environmental issues. He knew how the Congress works, very well. He’d have been an extremely effective president. The only person I ever heard Mo express any resentments towards—ever—was Jimmy Carter. He felt that some of the tactics used in the presidential campaign by the Carter campaign were not appropriate. And he never discussed it in detail. But I must say, the only person that I never heard Mo have a kind word for was President Carter, and I can understand that. They went through a tough campaign. He finished second, twenty times, you know. A little bit of difference and he would have been president of the United States.

JF: Yes. I’ve read a number of things (unclear).

JM: Wisconsin, yes. All these “what might have beens” drive you crazy if you don’t look out.

JF: Just an example of what you’ve been saying, after that race, Mo went right in, held hands with Carter, and got the Alaska Lands Bill.

JM: Oh, yes. Mo never let any hard feelings he had towards Carter or his people interfere with his job. He’s too big a man for that.
JF: In 1980, Mo was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease. He nevertheless continued in
Congress and as chair of the House Interior Committee. Did there come a time when he was still
serving that you ever thought that he was no longer capable of serving in that position?

JM: Well, you always respect people’s personal decisions on something like that. I guess there
was a time when I came to the conclusion that Mo shouldn’t serve longer, and that was when we
were in his office—and I don’t remember the issue—it was a delegation meeting in his office,
and he had a piece of paper, and he dropped the piece of paper, and he bent over to pick it up and
he fell forward and hit the glass on his table with his forehead. We were shocked—you can’t
imagine the impact in the room. We pulled him up and sat him back, but that was when I
thought Mo should go. Of course he stayed too long, and of course it was sad to see, and of
course.... But, you know, Mo was effective right up to the end, even when he was incapacitated.
So you have to balance that against the public spectacle of a guy having to wear a microphone
just to be heard as chairman of a committee. So these kinds of things are such personal decisions
that it’s hard.... And the other thing about it is, the reason why I don’t begrudge him for staying
too long, it was his whole life then. I mean, it was his whole life. He knew that his life,
effectively, was at an end—whether he stopped breathing or not. The fact was, his life was at an
end when he left the Congress

JF: Did he and you ever speak about him leaving?

JM: No. We never spoke about that kind of thing.

JF: I get the feeling he didn’t speak to a lot of people about that. The he didn’t really speak to
people about those kind of things.

JM: No. He was afraid of what he was going to hear.

JF: In 1991, Mo was forced to retire because of complications from Parkinson’s. He was
confined to the V.A. Medical Center in D.C., and lingered there until his death in 1998. During
those years, you visited him regularly. Why?

JM: Well, I loved him. I just thought so much of him. And in the early years when I’d go to
visit him, he would be able to say a few words, and I would read him the clips that I had from the
Arizona newspapers and stuff. I just had such affection for him.

I asked Norma one time early on if I could take him and have him come and sit in my
office during the day, and she didn’t agree with that idea. I often regretted that she didn’t do
that, because....

JF: Oh, I think that would have meant the world to him.

JM: She was worried about how he looked, and I understand that, but anyway....

JF: Did you feel like he was there, that he was aware that you....
JM: I always did. Probably near the end, I used to kid myself. But sometimes I could see his eyes . . . At first, in the first two or three years or so, maybe four years, if I listened real close, he would say some phrases. But it was also clear to me that he was not happy there. I mean, no one could be—it’s just a warehouse.

JF: And a man who’s very life was his speech.

JM: Yes.

JF: Did you speak to him, read to him?

JM: Oh, yes, I’d talk to him and tell him what was going on, and then I’d read the clips and that kind of thing. It’s interesting: the two people probably that I respect more than any in this world were Ronald Reagan and Mo Udall. Reagan lives in a body that’s been deprived of its mind, and Udall lived in a mind that was deprived of its body. It’s very interesting.

JF: Yes—and tragic.

JM: Yes, equally tragic.

JF: You sponsored the Morris K. Udall Parkinson’s Research Act that ultimately passed in 1997. How did the sponsorship come about?

JM: Well, Anne Udall was a prime factor in the Udall family; Norma Udall; Morton Kondracke, whose wife has Parkinson’s. A number of people played very important roles. I mean, there’s no doubt, I’m unembarrassed and unashamed to say that Mo’s plight is what got me involved in the issue. Maybe from a theoretical standpoint, it’s wrong. Maybe I should be as concerned about lung cancer as I am about Parkinson’s. But when you see someone that you have such affection for undergo it, it obviously affects you as a human being.

JF: Is that the case with the fetal tissue research?

JM: Well, Anne Udall convinced me of that—came to see me, and convinced me that the body of scientific opinion is that that can lead to cures for not only Parkinson’s, but other diseases as well, including Alzheimer’s.

JF: You took quite a beating from the right on because of changing on it.

JM: Oh yes. Oh yes. It’s all right. That was one of many.

JF: (chuckles) And the Udall Foundation: in 1992, the Morris K. Udall Foundation was established by an act of Congress. What was the background on that bill?
JM: Well, Terry Bracy was one of those who had the idea for it, and so many hundreds or thousands of friends of Mo who thought that he should be remembered in one way or another, and this seemed to be the most appropriate way to do it. But it was really the effort of so many people that wanted him to have a legacy. And I think the Udall Center is a very good legacy. And this conflict resolution part that’s been added, I think is really something, because Mo was at his best in conflict resolution—of anybody I’ve ever known.

JF: I think so, and environmental. I think that the institute will be something that really represents his legacy. I just have a couple of other questions.

JM: Take your time.

JF: Do you have a vision for the Udall Foundation?

JM: Environmental issues are going to be bigger. When we established the Udall Foundation, climate change or global warming—whatever you want to call it—was an issue that only idiots like Al Gore cared about. Most of us thought it was kind of on the fringe. Climate change is real. Climate change is real. There will be more and more of a need for institutions like the Udall Center, for example.

The other thing is, as far as Arizona is concerned—and that’s why I’m glad it’s in Tucson—we’ve had tremendous strains on our environment in the state. I mean, they’re already there, we see them all the time, and there’s some very intractable issues that are going to be confronting Arizona. So I think the future of the Udall Center is that it’s going to have more and more challenges to meet in the future. I know of no one, no matter where you are on the political spectrum, that believes environmental issues are going to get anything but more and more important.

JF: Exactly. Did your relationship or friendship with Mo change your thinking about any issues like the environment?

JM: Sure, yes. When we did the wilderness bills, it was the first time that I really got to know Arizona and its beauty. He and I flew over or walked over or drove over huge amounts of the state of Arizona when we were doing these wilderness bills, and had tens of hearings that were long ones, so we could hear from everybody. That certainly had an impact on me. I think it was about three years it took us to get those wilderness bills done. So that had a significant impact.

That, and of course, the Native American issues. I never would have been involved in Native American issues if it hadn’t been for Mo.

JF: And campaign finance reform? That was another real favorite of Mo’s.

JM: Well, yes, sort of. But at that time it was kind of not that big an issue, because it wasn’t ‘til the late eighties that the soft money explosion took place. So certainly I found it very interesting that Mo and I both were involved in that. But I didn’t really get involved in that until later on,
because frankly, during the eighties, the reforms that Mo had been part of in ‘74 were still keeping the system pretty much under control.

JF: That’s true, they were in effect at that time.

JM: Yes. The post-Watergate reforms that Mo had such a huge hand in were still in effect. Tomorrow, if we pass McCain-Feingold tomorrow, twenty to thirty years from now they’ll be two more guys—I hope one of them’s from Arizona—that’ll be pushing for reform again, because smart guys will always find loopholes.

JF: Oh, sure. Wouldn’t that be fun if that passed tomorrow?

JM: We got a little boost, but we’ll see.

JF: We talked a lot about Mo’s strengths. Did he have any weaknesses?

JM: We know of his physical weaknesses. His intellectual weaknesses? (pause) You might argue from a pragmatic standpoint that he got too far out front too early on some issues, like the Alaska Bill, or some of the reforms that he was pushing which he was defeated on. He used to run for the leadership, and he was defeated. But later on, obviously, those things came to fruition. But I don’t think he would have been Mo if he hadn’t been willing to get out front on issues. He’d have just been another member of Congress. In politics, there’s always contradictions. Mo had to support the Central Arizona Project and several other, quote, “Arizona issues,” in order to make sure that he was reelected. He got a scare in 1980, where this guy came very close to him, and Mo had to spend some time back in Arizona, which happens to all politicians. But I don’t view that as a particular weakness. I just think it’s some of the vicissitudes of a long political career.

No, the only other thing—and I’ve never really understood it, because so much of it happened before Mo and I became so close, is he obviously was so dedicated to his work that his marriage—or two marriages—didn’t stay together: one ended in divorce, and the other in tragedy. But there’s always a tradeoff you’ve got to make in public life. And I’m not sure that Mo didn’t realize that he was running some risk because of his absolute dedication to knowing more about the issue than anyone else. Many times he told me that was his strongest point: he knew the issue better than any of his opponents.

JF: That shows the lawyer in him.

JM: Yes. But, you know, he loved life. He love Arizona. He loved the beauty of our country. He reveled in the natural beauty of Arizona, as well as Alaska, and other parts of the country. He had a great appreciation, which some of us don’t have until maybe too late in life, for the great natural beauty of our state. He truly loved it, and he truly, truly, felt this affection and love for Native Americans, for which there was no political upside. There was no possible political gain that Mo could have achieved, and he could have spent a lot of time on other issues which would have gained him much more politically. I think one of his legacies is this obligation that
some of us who follow him feel, to try to carry on that effort, anyway.

JF: And that leads sort of to my last question: What was Mo’s greatest and most lasting influence on your life personally and professionally?

JM: Well, first of all, as I say, I haven’t succeeded very well, but....

JF: I think he would disagree with that.

JM: But the absolute requirement to try to treat your adversaries or opponents or those who disagree with you, with respect, and even affection. The absolute importance of trying to understand that you have other obligations besides the issue of de jure. Native Americans is a perfect example of that. And I guess finally the importance of trying to work with people, as opposed to drawing partisan or ideological boundaries between yourself and others.

And finally, an unfailing and unflinching good humor—in good times and in bad. “The people have spoken—the bastards.”

JF: (laughs) Well, that about sums it up.

JM: Yes. The other one, you know, is: “Tom Wolfe says you can’t go home again. Well, you can, and the people in New Hampshire just told me to.” Just marvelous. He was marvelous. hardly a day goes by that I don’t think about him.

JF: Well, I think that’s true for a number of us. Thank you, Senator McCain.

JM: Oh! I have one other final item. It’s also interesting to me, the number of people that were associated with Mo who still are in positions of responsibility and authority. Hardly a day goes by that I don’t run into somebody.... Mark Shields. Mark Shields got his start with Mo Udall. So his legacy does live on in the people that he attracted to his banner.

JF: Ken Bodie, and just a number of them.

JM: Oh, yes, a lot of them. It’s nice.

JF: Yes. Well, that’s a legacy, too.

JM: Yes.

JF: Thank you very much, Senator McCain.

JM: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]