

An Oral History Interview

with

STEWART L. UDALL (part 5)

Santa Fe, New Mexico

conducted by
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October 24-25, 1996

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

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[END TAPE 2, SIDE B; BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE A]

SLU: ... John Rhodes, and the way we put aside partisan politics, was quite remarkable. After all, he was a leading Republican in the leadership echelon, even before he became the minority leader. And I had this experience a year ago last winter when they shut the government down, and Governor Symington in Arizona was trying to take over the Grand Canyon and keep it open. A reporter called me from Phoenix, and I told him what a national park was, and I said, "Have you talked to John Rhodes?" (chuckles) And he did talk to him, and John said the same thing that I did, that there was no way, unless you changed the law, that Arizona could operate a national park. But I just have--Mo and I both had a lot of personal affection for Rhodes—and a mutual respect. It was quite remarkable.

PS: Stewart, as we look ahead in the next century, conservation and sustainable growth emerge as two significant themes. How do you think the country can address these in the coming decades?

SLU: Well, I guess you're asking me to write a long essay or book on that subject, and I think about it a lot of the time. Of course woven into that or hanging over it ominously is population growth. I've thought for nearly thirty years now--you know, going back to Paul Ehrlich's book, which may have been overwritten, *The Population Bomb*, that you can't have sustainable policies, you can't look far into the future, carrying forward the policies that were suitable for a modest world population or national population. Growth brings a whole new set of problems, just as Phoenix today has, from a social standpoint, from an environmental standpoint, it's a different place, with a whole different set of problems. The dynamo of growth which is driving this on and on appalls me. But I think this United Nations conference that they held three or four years ago in Brazil, this earth summit, where you had people coming from a lot of the nations of the world to talk about it, and they came out with the theme that sustainable growth was what was needed. This was sort of intellectual conclusion, the world isn't doing much about the greenhouse effect, the greenhouse problem. We'll see how that plays out. It may be overstated. But the fascinating thing is that Rachel Carson's book, which to me is kind of a wellspring or source of a lot of this thinking, is ostensibly about birds and poisoning the birds, pesticides. And yet you go back and read it now, and the worldwide implications are there, because if we have to have more food to feed people and this means we have to have all kinds of poisons and everything else, and they get into the bloodstream.... You know, the problems are enormously complicated, and what she said is, "You're not saving anything unless you understand the side effects." And we're seeing that now with the leftover products from radiation, the wonderful nuclear world we were going to have, you know. God, problems are enormous.

PS: Stewart, also in *The Quiet Crisis*, in 1963 you wrote, "America stands poised on a pinnacle of wealth and power, yet we live in a land of vanishing beauty, of increasing ugliness, of shrinking open space and of an overall environment that is diminished daily by pollution and noise and blight." Thirty years later, if you were to rewrite this passage over, for a new edition of *Quiet Crisis*, what would you say?

SLU: Well, the same problems are there. Of course I was trying--some may say I was being overdramatic, trying to dramatize the shortcomings. The big growth machine was already underway. You know, the philosophy in the 1950s was that pollution was a local problem, the national government had no business getting into it. That was the philosophy in the Eisenhower administration. Until Senator Muskie got this water pollution program going, where the federal government put up half the money to build sewage plants all over the country, a lot of the rivers were a mess. The situation has changed, it's changed in our awareness, it's changed in the programs that we have, but there's still a lot of activities going on. You know, air pollution hasn't gone away in a lot of these big cities. The growth pressures are still there, but we do have the values that the environmental movement has brought into the thinking of the nation. And anything that's proposed now is usually questioned sharply by some people.

PS: Stewart, I have one last question. In evaluating Mo's career as a legislator, with an enormous quantity of environmental legislation that he was involved with, both directly and indirectly, what do you think were Mo's great strengths as a congressman, seeing compromise and building consensus to get some of that legislation passed?

SLU: Well, he was a very skillful, persuasive, eloquent spokesman for the conservation cause. One of the reasons he was able to get as much done as he did, and to be involved and then emerge as a leader, was that he stood by his convictions. But he also had this wonderful way of being reasonable with his opponents, of making them laugh and so on. That was very invaluable. But if we have a memorial service when Mo dies, one of the themes that I'm going to mention is that he was a reformer. Of course any conservationist pursuing new policies as a reformer. But he was a reformer as a lawyer, in terms of the legal system. He deserves a lot of credit for the reforms which have now been corrupted, on financing elections, and so on. That was the theme in his life, and I think I had some of that, too—is that the world is changing, you have to change institutions.

He also had a boldness, and I expressed some of that with my interview or conversation with Senator Goldwater. Mo did it with such a flair and so fearlessly when he gave that speech with regard to the Vietnam War, went home and took it on. Very few members of Congress dared to do that. He dared. And he did other things that were daring. That was part of his makeup. He would have made a hell of a leader in the House if he could have forced the door. He tried twice. It's interesting, when you look back now, what I've just written for *The New York Times* says, "Look, Democrats, look what Gingrich did. The Speaker's office ought to be powerful." And that's under, really, the right interpretation of the Constitution. And Mo saw all this--his willingness to challenge the old Speaker. (PS: McCormack.) Yes. Here's this kid, he's been there eight years, he's a junior congressman, he's the chairman of the committee, and he challenges in the caucus. That took guts--took a lot of guts-- and self-confidence.

PS: Stewart, I actually have one more question that you brought up in your answer to the last one. When Mo made the speech in Tucson in 1967 where he broke with President Johnson on support of the Vietnam War, how did that affect you? Did you take any heat

from the White House on that?

SLU: Well, not really, because he handled it in the right way. Mo used to drop by the house--this was after the kids had left--and we'd have him over to dinner, and Ella would come sometimes, and we talked. We both had about the same view of Vietnam as the thing went along. We were both doves. When he decided to give that speech, he told me he was going to do it. I didn't argue with him. I didn't tell him what to do, really. He just said, "I'm going to do it." And I said, "Well, I'm not going to try to talk you out of it, but don't advertise it in Washington. Write your speech, go home, and when you leave, send a copy to the president at the White House. Because if you advertise that you're going to do it, Johnson will call me and say, 'your crazy brother--stop him!' That'll put me on the spot." You have to realize, too, this is October 1967, the Central Arizona Project is coming into sharp focus. Arizona may need Johnson. Actually, the need wasn't great, because of Carl Hayden and all that Johnson owed to Hayden all over the years and so on. But this again was a high risk venture. I didn't see the speech. He told me and I said, "Well, I don't want to see it, but go home and give it." I don't know how much national press this got at the time--it surely got some. But the thing that he told me later--you know, Mo was the same height.... (phone rings, tape turned off and on) So he told me--you know, Johnson looked down his nose at shorter people, and here they are eyeball to eyeball. The next time Mo saw him, probably at a White House reception or something, going through the line, and Johnson--this is about all the compliment you get out of Johnson--Johnson said something like this, "Wasn't a bad speech," which showed he'd read it. But none of the Johnson people called me. That was rather interesting. It shows also that I had a standing where they didn't think that I could intimidate my brother or change his mind.

You know, Johnson began to suspect that a lot of us had deep reservations about Vietnam. And that same fall of 1967. . . I can tell a story sometime about a cabinet meeting he had when he accused the cabinet of not supporting the Vietnam policy. Somebody said, "Well, we don't know how to defend it. We don't have any information." He said, "Well, have a cabinet meeting without me, and Rusk and McNamara will tell you what the arguments are." And we had two meetings, and they were a disaster. I wish I'd made a lot of notes about that, but....

PS: Stewart, in relation to that comment you just made, when I was at the motel room last night, I flipped on Ted Koppel and he was doing an extensive interview with former Secretary of Defense McNamara last night.

SLU: On what subject?

PS: Well, more on Bay of Pigs, the Cuban missile crisis, and other issues. McNamara has become increasingly vocal, his writings, in the last few years, about that. Do you communicate with him at all, or have you had any contact with him?

SLU: No, I've got notes and I have a McNamara file. That's out at the house. The last talk I had with him was when the Cold War ended. I called him, we talked for about

fifteen [fifty?] minutes, and I told him about some of my thinking and that I was writing a book. I said to him, "Bob, we owe it to our kids and we owe it to history to, now that the Cold War is over, and we look back, to admit our mistakes. We're always talking about things that we did, and you're the one person.... Rusk was still around but he was failing--that can do this, and help the country understand." And he very crisply responded. He said, "Doesn't do any good to rehash the past!" And that's my last conversation with him. I tried to reach him when his book came out, to express my pleasure and satisfaction. He didn't return my call. I also wrote him a note. He didn't reply. So our relations aren't strained--they just aren't.

PS: Stewart, I want to take you back to Arizona for a minute. The state of Arizona has been plagued in recent decades by what seems to be an endless series of government scandals, land developer scandals, the problems that Governor Mecham had, the problems that our current governor [Symington] is involved with. In some ways, political leaders in Arizona, of recent times, have become almost a laughing stock around the country. Do you see anyone emerging on the horizon who may provide what I believe is strong leadership, whether it's in the position of a governor in Arizona's future?

SLU: You don't see him now. I'm not living over there and reading the paper every day, the way you do. Barry Goldwater said something to me--well, he wrote it in a letter--I've got a Goldwater file, too. When I left Phoenix he said, "I'm sorry to see you go." He said, "Arizona's been fortunate. It's always had the kind of strong leaders that it needed." He was thinking of myself and Mo and Carl Hayden and John Rhodes and so on. In that context, I don't see the successors. I like John McCain, to be frank with you. He really liked Mo and was influenced by Mo. He's the only one in Arizona leadership now. I don't have much regard for Pastor, who succeeded Mo. He's a lightweight, shouldn't expect all that much. And the congressional delegation has become very hard line. It wasn't in John Rhodes' day. But I don't see leaders of stature. With Mecham, and particularly Symington, it's tragic to have this kind of leadership come to the top.

PS: Stewart, back in the fifties and sixties there seemed to be--even though there were political differences--there seemed to be, for lack of a better word, a gentlemanliness, a civility between leaders in different parties, and we seem to have lost some of that. Is there any hope that we'll regain that?

SLU: I don't see it. These right-wingers in the congressional delegation, it would be hard for me to have a conversation with them. There was a lot of civility. You now, in the old congressional delegation when we had meetings there was rarely backbiting or accusations made. And we were respectful of the other person's position. That's the reason we got along so well. It would be hard to find a more different voting record than Morris's, my brother's, or mine, and John Rhodes's. But we understood where he was coming from, he understood where we were coming from. And we didn't "muss up each other's hair" and try to score a little point within the congressional delegation. Even with Goldwater, as partisan as he'd gotten to be when he ran for president. Oh, I took a swing at him once in Los Angeles during his presidential campaign, but he never did hit at me in a serious way.

PS: Stewart, I think we'll end it there. Thank you again. I appreciate the time.

SLU: Okay.

[END OF INTERVIEW]