

An Oral History Interview

with

TOM UDALL (part 3)

conducted by

Peter Steere

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The Morris K. Udall Oral History Project
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[END FIRST TAPE (#8), SIDE B; BEGIN SECOND TAPE (#9), SIDE A]

PS: Tom, when the tape ran out on us there, you were responding to my question about the old extractive economy versus what may be moving in a new direction, what might be called an attractive economy.

TU: Yes, we're moving from economies of extraction to economies of attraction. That's very dramatic here in New Mexico. Just one example: In the 1980s we had 10,000 jobs in the uranium mining industry right around Grants, New Mexico. Today, we have zero. Those were very high-paying mining jobs, and most of the trade in uranium has now gone to foreign countries. I think Canada is able to produce it much cheaper, and so we're seeing that kind of global competition that is replacing some of these activities out here.

What it's being replaced with, we're seeing incredible growth in tourism. New Mexico has almost three billion dollars of activity in tourism every year. We're getting more urbanized. The people that are living in the urban areas very much want parks and wild and scenic rivers and places to ski and fish and hunt. And all of that is very important to them, and so they've gained much more of an appreciation of where we live and the out-of-doors and the quality of life that this provides. And so increasingly, I think, the West is going to be more protective of what it has, and more caring, and think more about preserving, rather than pillaging the land.

PS: Tom, this question raises another question in my mind—and I'll speak more about Arizona than New Mexico, because I know Arizona more. Even though what you just said, we still have sitting governors in Arizona, and certainly senior members of the legislature, who deal with issues and bills and still argue various protective things for mining, this sort of backlash coming out of the election of Gingrich and the number of very conservative Republicans in Congress, this tremendous backlash against the Endangered Species Act, efforts on the part of conservative Republican congressmen in Washington, including Mo's long-time colleague on the Interior Committee, Don Young, who's now chair since the Republicans took over, and George Miller became a member rather than chair. And George Miller thinking probably a little bit much more along Mo's lines, than Don Young of Alaska ever did or ever will.

Do you think this sort of backlash against a number of the pieces of legislation that your father was involved with, that Mo was involved with, is a passing thing—much as the Sagebrush Rebellion sort of came and went—do you think this is again something, or is this going to be a hard political fight to deal with some of these people who want another bill introduced to open up some of the Arctic wilderness that Mo had set aside, for oil drilling. Do you think this is still going to be an ongoing battle?

TU: Well, Mo always used to say that they keep coming back. And what he was referring to, he always couldn't believe it, that you'd set up a national park, that you'd think you'd resolved an issue—the Alaska Native Land Claims, or some of the Alaska parks issues, or the drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge—and then two or three

years later, they'd be back again, trying to do the same thing.

And so I think in order for us to keep protecting the environmental jewels that we have out there, and the environmental treasures we have, I think there needs to be, every generation, a renewal and recommitment to these environmental values, because the big special interests are always going to want to pillage some of these national treasures, and view that they're being held back by these laws, and so they're going to go into the Congress and into state legislatures, and be advocating for changes.

The people, as a whole, need to have a recommitment to the kinds of things that we've done in the environmental area, to elect people that aren't going to buy that.

PS: Tom, one of the last things I wanted to talk to you about: You, in your present position, and Mo's son, Mark, is running for a position up on Colorado, you represent the fourth generation of the Udall family to be involved in public service, going all the way back to David King, who was a territorial legislator in Arizona, and his church leadership roles, and a number of other people in the family coming up through time, in a wide range of positions.

Do you have any sort of closing thoughts on your family's history, and long involvement with public service? I think in the earlier generations, it was a public service that was different, I think, in perspective from today. There was some political things, there was also leadership in the church. It was leadership within the small communities that the families had settled in. Any sort of overall thoughts about your family history and how that has influenced you?

TU: Sure. In a light way, just to tell a story of the brothers and sisters and cousins, they always used to kid me that I was the one that got the defective gene, in terms of wanting to pursue a political career, and now Mark wants to do it.

But I think that there must have been something that was passed on through all of these generations in terms of public service. And I think one of the individuals that said it the best was my Grandfather Levi Udall. He didn't talk about "politics," he didn't talk about politicians. He talked about public service. And he said, "If the good people don't go out and serve the public, the bad ones are going to take over. And then you know what you're going to get." And it was just a very simple way of approaching things, a very down-to-earth way, but it's when you look at it over time, it's a very time-tested kind of axiom.

We need some of the best and the brightest out there, leading us. And if we don't have them, if we scare them away by the process that we've set up, which increasingly discourages me right now, the whole political process—the thirty-minute attack ads, the incredible amount of money that needs to be raised, the fact that you don't have that much of a chance unless you can raise very significant sums of money for most of the major offices—all of that, I think, turns some of the best young people away from politics. And if we have that, we're going to be relegated to really second-class

leadership. And it doesn't take long for second- and third-class leadership to drag you down as a nation, drag you down as a state, or drag your local community down.

That's one of the reasons I spend a lot of time with younger people. Whenever I get an invitation to go to high schools, grade schools, elementary schools, all of these different young people, if they want to stop by my office and have a visit and spend an hour talking about issues, I always see them, because I think they're getting a very distorted vision, and distorted perception about what public service is all about.

You can just look at these far-off politicians on the television, and it's like, "We're not a part of that." And they don't realize they are a part of it, they have to get involved. It'd be fine if we lived in a dictatorship to not be involved and not care, but when you live in a democracy, you have to care, you're invested in the system. And unless people get involved and try to make it better, the whole situation's going to deteriorate. And so I think we're in some trying times, and I really believe that we need an emphasis on more public service, rather than less, and encouraging young people to get into it.

PS: Tom, I think that's a good place to end. I want to thank you very, very much to take the time to talk with me, and I think we'll stop the tape machine.

TU: Okay, sounds great.

[END OF INTERVIEW]