

Remarks of Sen. Mark Udall  
Event Honoring Stewart L. Udall  
Udall Foundation, Tucson, Arizona  
November 13, 2009

It's a wonderful, emotional day for all of us. It's really a labor of love for me to be here in the town where I was born and to look out in the crowd and see so many great friends and mentors.

And it is fitting that Stewart Udall's name will now join that of my father, Mo Udall – after whom the Udall Foundation was originally named.

When my dad was alive, he and Uncle Stewart were partners in fighting for the landscapes, waters, wildlife and people of this country and for the West in particular. And so it's right to see their names together – partners again – this time to promote the great work of the Udall Foundation.

It's also a labor of love for me to announce that the Udall Foundation's Board has decided to name the "Parks in Focus" program after my uncle Stewart.

Stewart Udall was not only an extraordinary public servant – one of our greatest and most influential Secretaries of the Interior – he is also, as most of you know, a prolific chronicler of the history of the West, and a celebrated author and activist whose voice and vision have been focused on educating his fellow citizens on Mother Earth's beauty ... and fragility.

So it is fitting that a program designed to educate young people by giving them a camera and an opportunity to experience our National Parks, should be named after a man who loves young people, has a passion for great photography, and who has done so much in his professional and private life to expand, protect and preserve our National Park heritage.

Uncle Stewart has a talent for words. His book, "The Quiet Crisis," written more than four decades ago, is still a foundational work on environmental policy and the cause of conservation. It has resonance with a new generation – one now concerned about a new set of challenges like global climate change – a crisis that is no longer so quiet.

To understand and experience the call to environmental action is, of course, something one can read about. But as the old saying goes, "one picture is worth a thousand words."

No essay can match the eloquence of the Grand Canyon ... or Yosemite ... or Canyon de Chelly at dawn.

That's the vision behind the Udall Foundation's – now the Morris K. Udall and Stewart L. Udall Foundation's – Parks in Focus program.

It is time to unveil the sign for the renamed Stewart L. Udall Parks in Focus program.

Before I conclude, I want to say a few words about the partnership my father and Uncle Stewart forged – as brothers – as public servants – as political allies – and as leaders.

While Stewart and Mo left extraordinary singular legacies as public servants and statesmen, ultimately their individual achievements are bound together. That is because they gave energy to one another – they nurtured each other – they trusted each other – they protected one another – and they challenged each other.

I would add that they also had sibling rivalries. One of the great stories that my father used to tell, at least to his children, is about the big bump he had on his head, in the back near the place where your hair parts in a hundred different directions. We would ask him about that as children. He said, “Well here’s the story. We were on the farm and Stewart found a big piece of iron that was lying around. Stewart threw the iron up in the air and yelled ‘whatever goes up, comes down on your head or on the ground.’” And this piece of iron brained my father Mo, and from that point on my dad carried that mark that Stewart had inflicted on him.

But most important, the common roots of Stewart and Mo brought forth a common purpose.

A friend of our family (Timothy Bracy) put it this way: “As individuals, the remarkable trajectories they plotted were the consequence of a shared vision and a commonality of purpose unique in public life. Mutual skepticism over Vietnam, a resolute focus on civil rights, and a solemn commitment to the environment were far more family ethic than position paper. As often as not, the views they held were as politically inconvenient as they were morally and intellectually sound.”

In retrospect, it’s easy to applaud the legacy of the Udall brothers.

At the time, though, their shared vision frequently meant a treacherous uphill climb on often stormy, dangerous political mountains of Washington, D.C.

What they had – what inoculated them against avarice, unhealthy ambition and the short-term thinking that all too frequently defines a life in politics – was one another.

Their love and respect for each other, the inspiration they drew from one another, a genetic instinct for recognizing the absurdity in life and a good sense of humor to deal with it, a fierce and uncompromising anger at injustice of any kind. These shared qualities were a bedrock – foundation – not only for surviving public life but for taking great risks and thereby achieving great things.

To disappoint one another would have been worse than any political defeat.

The thought of betraying people because of the color of their skin, or fleeing from a fight against injustice because bigger and more powerful interests might be offended was shameful and never worth the cost of political victory.

They stood up for values and interests that otherwise would have had no voice on Election Day – disenfranchised communities of color, the great landscapes of our country, the plants and animals with whom we share this marvelous place, Planet Earth.

Their legacy – their example – is one of vision and courage, toughness and togetherness.

I want to conclude by emphasizing this last aspect of their legacy – togetherness.

Mo's ghost visits me quite often. He was always suspicious of the U.S. Senate and he is checking up and keeping his eye on his nephew Tom and his son to make sure we are carrying on in the proper way in the U.S. Senate.

If Mo were here today he'd be reminding me that neither he nor my Uncle Stewart would have been successful in public life without their family – and not just the family named Udall – but also the family of close friends and colleagues, the family of staffers, former staffers and interns – the Udall family writ large.

In the end, the Udall legacy is one we are all invited to participate in, no matter your last name.

It is a legacy that I am so proud to be part of and one that continues to inspire me every day of my life.

So in honoring my father Mo and my uncle Stewart, I believe we are honoring what is best in all of us – and what we hope to – and can – achieve together.

Thank you.