

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Hearing on H.R. 1035
"Morris K. Udall Scholarship and Excellence in
National Environmental Policy Amendments Act of 2009,"
Statement of
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Chairman Rahall, Ranking Member Hastings, and distinguished members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear today. My name is Clara Pratte and I was privileged to be a Morris K. Udall Native American Congressional Intern in 2003. I am an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation from Lupton, Arizona, a small rural community on the reservation. I am currently serving as the National Director for the Office of Native American Affairs at the Small Business Administration.

I am pleased to present testimony today on the "Morris K. Udall Scholarship and Excellence in National Environmental Policy Amendments Act of 2009". The work of the Morris K. Udall foundation has and continues to make lasting impacts on my personal development and professional growth. Of the many programs that the Udall Foundation administers I would like to speak specifically about the Native American Congressional Internship Program.

The Udall name is well known and respected all over the country but especially so in my home region of the Southwest, so when I had the opportunity to apply and was subsequently accepted to the program I was thrilled. I never anticipated the long term effects that one summer would have on my life and career. Upon placement in Congressman Grijalva's office I began work on various issues directly affecting the constituents of Arizona and Native Americans. It was then that I realized the far reaching effect that policies determined here had on Indian Country, and that I wanted to be a part of it.

The internship ignited in me a passion for public service. Federal policies and regulations have a disproportionate effect on Native Americans versus other racial groups due to the unique relationship the federal government has with tribes and tribal entities. However, the representation of Native Americans in high level decision making positions in government remains small. These realizations further drove my commitment to public service and shaped my perspective.

Following my experience in the Udall Native internship program, I have had the opportunity to work as a civil servant with the Department of Commerce, to work for my tribe, the Navajo Nation, and now to serve in the capacity of directing the Office of Native American Affairs at the Small Business Administration. I can without hesitation say that I would not be in the position that I am in had it not been for the Udall Native American Congressional Internship. I undoubtedly would have become a public servant, but I would not have had the opportunity to engage with high level policy makers so early on in my career.

The work of the foundation to train and provide levels of access to young leaders is a unique and important facet of the internship program. The network opportunities are tremendous and the level of access to decision makers is unprecedented. The internship program has grown to include not only congressional internships but agency placements to give participants a wider range of experience in the federal arena. As I see each new crop of interns make their way here in Washington every summer I am hopeful and excited about their leadership potential and the repercussions that will have on Indian Country. This program is unique and affords possibilities that would otherwise not be available.

Since the program's inception in 1996, the goal has been to provide individuals access to the inner workings of Federal government in the hopes that they would then relay that knowledge and experience into work that would benefit their tribal communities. Although only 13 years old, we have seen leaders emerge from this program. Many alum have gone on to work in Federal, State, and Tribal governments serving their people in those capacities and working to find solutions to the real challenges that face Indian country. These former interns are fulfilling the hopes of the program and doing exactly what was a lifelong mission for Mo Udall – bringing talent, integrity, and passion to public service.

The Udall foundation continues to make very real impacts on Native communities. Whether we are talking about the internship program, scholarships, or the Native Nations Institute for Leadership, Management, and Policy, the effects are significant.

The legacy of the Udall name is indeed a legacy that began long before Mo Udall's service. Members of the Udall family have been model public servants. Mo's brother Stewart served both in the U.S. House and later as Secretary of the Interior where he advocated energy conservation policies that were ahead of the times. It started with the strong values instilled in Stewart and Mo by their family, and continues now with the public service of Udall descendants. I am amazed and humbled by the fact that I sit before you a mere 61 years after Native Americans, including my grandparents, were granted the right to vote in Arizona. Justice Levi Udall, Mo and Stewart's father, argued for that right stating that "to deny the right to vote...is to do violence to the principals of freedom and equality".

The Udall's have been champions for Native America, and the foundation in its many works continues that legacy. I can think of no better fitting tribute than to support the foundations ongoing work and to champion the inclusion of Stewart Udall's name in the title of the foundation. Both Stewart and Mo's commitment to the conservation of the environment, the advancement of public service and the unwavering commitment to American Indians is exemplary and continues through the policies enacted under their watch. Both Stewart and Mo embodied admirable public service. We can all only hope to continue on in that commendable tradition.

Thank you.