

# news

Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs  
Morris K. Udall, Chairman

House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

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## UDALL, SEIBERLING, RAHALL PROTEST COLORADO LAND DEAL

Three congressmen today (8-5-86) sharply protested a sudden and unexpected decision by the Department of the Interior to give more than 82,000 acres of oil shale-rich public lands to several major energy companies.

"They are giving away this land for \$2.50 an acre," said Congressman Morris K. Udall, D-Arizona, chairman of the House Interior Committee. "I couldn't even buy the Yuma Bombing Range for \$2.50 an acre."

Udall joined Congressman John Seiberling, D-Ohio, chairman of the Subcommittee on Public Lands and Congressman Nick Joe Rahall, D-West Virginia, chairman of the Subcommittee on Mining and Natural Resources, in signing a letter to Interior Secretary Donald Hodel protesting "this unannounced policy reversal."

Udall said he will schedule an oversight hearing to address the issue, "to review the complete chain of events" that led to the Interior announcement.

The Interior Department has proposed to grant title to land in Colorado to the Tosco Corp. of California, Exxon Co., and Union Oil Co. of California, among others, for \$2.50 an acre. The proposal represents a significant policy reversal for the Interior Department, which has long held that the companies had no legal hold on the land, despite some mining claims that date from World War I.

The Interior Department decision came over the protests of the former Bureau of Land Management director for Colorado, Kannon Richards, and the Colorado Office of the Regional Solicitor.

"We cannot justify to the public, as trustee of the public lands, the giving away of 360,000 acres of land at \$2.50 an acre under the mining laws when no prudent man would develop the mineral resource," Richards wrote.

Despite the protests, Interior Solicitor Ralph W. Tarr wrote Asst. Attorney General Henry F. Habicht II in April, declaring that "it is no longer in the public interest to continue to attempt to invalidate these mining claims."

"This action may be legally defensible, but it is morally wrong, and the Administration knows it is morally wrong," Udall said. "The principles of stewardship and the 'sacred trust' of Teddy Roosevelt's day have been thrown aside, and it is the public who will suffer for it."

"This is a real estate fire sale, without the fire."

"If the Administration were pulling this off within the board room of a private corporation, they would be booted out of a job within five minutes. At a time of soaring national debt and a dangerous budget deficit, this Administration is saying it's better to get rid of a public resource at the lowest benefit to the public treasury, rather than wait and gain the maximum benefit to the taxpayer. That smells of good politics for good friends, but it isn't good business or good sense," Udall concluded.