

# news

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

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*House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515*

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CONTACT: Ken Burton 202-225-2844  
Bill Shafer 202-225-5082

## UDALL, RAHALL ASK COURT TO INTERVENE IN INTERIOR OIL SHALE DECISION

The chairman of the House Interior Committee and the chairman of the Mining and Natural Resources Subcommittee have asked the 10th U.S. Circuit Court to intervene in an Interior Department decision granting 82,000 acres of oil shale-rich public lands to several energy companies.

Congressman Morris K. Udall, D-Arizona, the committee chairman, and Congressman Nick Joe Rahall, D-West Virginia, the subcommittee chairman, said they filed motions with the National Wildlife Federation asking the court to consider the case on appeal because they believe "it is in the public interest to pursue this case," both to test the propriety of issuing the patents at stake and to challenge an earlier, related ruling.

The congressmen protested the Interior Department decision when it was announced in August. Udall then likened the Interior Department action to "a fire sale, without the fire," and declared that the 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, but bad business."

"What we are witnessing is the adoption by the Department of the Interior of a policy that favors transferring vast tracts of public lands to private speculators who, in my view, have not maintained these claims in a fashion consistent with the intent of the mining laws," said Rahall.

The Interior Department announced in August a proposal 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 represented a significant policy reversal for the Interior Department, which had previously held that the companies had no legal hold on the land, despite some claims dating from the World War I era.

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.