



CONGRESSMAN'S REPORT

MORRIS K. UDALL • 2d District of Arizona

House Office Building, Washington, D. C. 20515

November 10, 1970

Vol. IX, No. 3

Every summer since I first came to Congress in 1961 I have provided two or more college students with an opportunity to work as "interns" in my Washington office, helping with everything from major legislation to stuffing envelopes. Through the years this parade of young talent has been an inspiration to me, providing me with fresh ideas and insights into many problems.

This past summer, as always, I found an occasion when I could have a good, long conversation with my interns about the issues of the day. In the course of our discussion I asked them a series of questions which I had found

to be on the minds of many older people. Their answers, I feel, are worth sharing with you; they may provide some clues to the mystery of the "generation gap" and what to do about it.

One final word: I delayed publishing this newsletter until after the fall elections in order to avoid the appearance of using either the work of these students or my franking privilege for political purposes.

What follows is an edited summary of our conversation as prepared by the interns themselves.

What's Happening With Our Youth?

A Dialogue With Three Interns

UDALL: As I read my mail, I find in some cases what amounts to a sense of betrayal being felt by many adults. They can't understand why so many young people are so "turned off" by the very system which has made it possible for them to have advantages of financial security, access to education, and a range of opportunity far beyond those available to any past generation. They have the feeling that nothing can satisfy today's youth. What is it, they seem to say, that you and your contemporaries want that you don't already have?

INTERN 1

Well, first of all I think that you have to define who are the young people who are being turned off. When you look, you will find that they are white, mid-to-upper-class students. That constitutes a very small portion of the total population of what you call the young. These people are totally rejecting the life styles they see as favoring one socioeconomic group. These students want to change the very society that creates

these inequities. The consequence is that they develop what scholars refer to as an "identification with the lowly." What I mean by this is that these people feel guilty that they have had the highest standard of living ever. They feel guilty because while they are enjoying this highest standard of living, American Indians are starving and black ghettos are overrun by rats. What they see is that in America, home of that "glorious dream," all sorts of people are *starving*. This goes on while they eat steak every day. Their sense of moral indignation can't stand this; and they realize that the blame rests on the shoulders of their class. But then this strange identification with the lowly occurs. Their "heroes" are oppressed so they want to be oppressed. Their "heroes" are poor so they want to live a non-material life. They want to live without any goals of some distant and abstract place called the future. Today is all that matters. They have never had to worry about tomorrow so they only have to worry about today.

INTERN 2

Young people may not communicate it very often or very well, but a lot of them are extremely grateful to their parents for the many opportunities they had that no previous generation ever dreamed of. And none of us would deny that living in America has made possible the extraordinary education and material advantages we've been favored with.

But that does not mean that everything is right with this country or that because we personally have been treated so well we should mute our dissatisfaction with some of the things going on around us. The anger and concern of youth is not merely directed at the war, although most students believe that what we are doing in Vietnam in support of what amounts to a petty dictatorship is an absurd waste of lives and an orgy of destruction. What is most distressing to us about our continued preoccupation with the war is that it is causing us to neglect some very urgent problems at home which are not being met. One only had to be on the East Coast this summer to see that the pollution of our air and water is nearing disaster -- and I might add that a lot of students would trade all their material benefits for the chance to wade in a stream that wasn't polluted. Very few people seem to realize that unless there is not merely a national but an international commitment to population control, there will be millions more people starving to death within a decade. Our large cities are rapidly becoming unfit to live in as well.

Advantages and all, I still can't tolerate the richest country on earth allowing migrant children to grow up thinking they are "bums," and letting slum children be bitten by rats in their sleep, while the government gives money to farmers *not* to grow crops, and appropriates funds for a supersonic transport which could damage our

environment, and an anti-ballistic missile system which may be obsolete by the time it's installed. I should think that would be enough to turn *anybody* off!

What is most distressing of all to young people is that at such a critical time in our history they see automobile manufacturers conspiring to deny development of an anti-smog device, and large corporations letting farm workers live in miserable conditions. We have almost unlimited resources to do good in this country, and yet we so often use those resources destructively and wastefully. Students want to reverse some of the country's priorities, and make the nation's institutions respond to the very real needs of its people. You might say they want America to live up to its promise and its promises.

INTERN 3

All that I would like to add is that students are not the only segment of youth which is questioning the country's progress. The disenchantment, as Stephen Hess, chairman of the White House Conference on Children and Youth, points out, is not only from the college "pampered generation." There are 40 million young people between 14 and 24. Some have been disenchanted from the American dream since birth.

UDALL: I'd have to agree that there are some injustices in our society. But why is it, do you think, that some of our young people, particularly students who are the best educated, feel that their only recourse in the face of such problems is to riot or to engage in other forms of mindless violence?

INTERN 3

Violence is promoted by such a small minority of my generation, and it should be condemned. On my campus, I don't think more than 50 out of 12,000 students participated in violence, and that's less than 1/2 of 1 percent. But it is time that we start making a distinction between violent protestors, non-violent protestors, and innocent bystanders. This distinction should be made both in speech and in action. And I think it is time that we realize that innocent bystanders do exist -- they may be your children. When I walk from my dormitory to the library, I have the right to do that. I am an innocent bystander of any action which goes on during the course of my walk. When I walk in a national park, I do not want to be stopped, questioned, treated rudely just because I am 22 and someone else is 45. If a person participates in a non-violent protest which is illegal, he is subject to arrest or fine. But I don't want to see him beaten over the head and perhaps have his brain scrambled for the rest of his life. His action was non-violent.

Concepts of overkill just encourage the violent dissidents and force non-violent dissidents into another realm. Overkill is what is happening in this country. I am getting tired of the paranoia and hate reflected by policemen, students, parents. No one is the sole possessor of right. Let's face it -- just because a man is a policeman does not mean he is automatically good or that he is automatically bad. All youth aren't sweet and innocent. Fine. But we'd better start making the distinctions, and we'd better listen when there are grievances on both sides.

Many people are saying privately, "Throw away the key," when a person is arrested in a chaotic protest situation. We cannot afford to say that. The person's guilt or innocence must be proven -- whether he be young or old. After all, he may have been an innocent bystander who got arrested because he wasn't running away from anything and therefore was easy to catch. Let's get the facts straight before we start making useless generalizations.

The rights of the young should be no different than the rights of the old; if they're treated differently, there will be people out on the street asking, "Where are our rights?"

INTERN 2

We ought to start asking why violence occurs instead of merely condemning rioters out of hand. If we can make our social and political institutions more responsive to human needs, the causes of violence will be uprooted. I think this has to be done quickly, while most young people still believe in the political system. That's why it's so important that college campuses make it possible for students to get out and work for political candidates, so that young people, even if their candidates don't all win, will become committed to peaceful processes as the way to bring about change.

UDALL: Obviously, as you say, only a small number of young people are so extreme, just as are a few people of any age group. But isn't there some validity to the charge that the complaints of youth are often presented in a very moralistic way, which makes it appear that they believe that their elders don't judge actions by any moral standard? If so, isn't this a bit arrogant?

INTERN 1

I definitely don't think so. I think the basic arrogance lies with the people who can only relate events to the money in their pockets. People criticize the anti-war student for saying the war is immoral because the U.S. napalms children, and so forth. This

doesn't affect the older generation. The only thing that will make them indignant is when the war starts costing them more in taxes. That's arrogance!

INTERN 3

Sometimes I feel that youth doesn't express its beliefs in the most effective manner for sympathetic understanding. However, I don't think that the term "arrogance" can be applied to most of the young. Most have simply been taught two things in America. One, that independent thinking is good. Two, that the independent thinking should follow certain ideals. For example, we have been taught that killing is wrong, that all men are entitled to the same rights, that somehow we have a responsibility to our neighbors, that the laws should apply equally.

In a recent CBS poll 76% of the adults questioned -- three out of four -- said that citizens should not be allowed to organize protests against the government, even if there appears to be no danger of violence. Yet our constitution guarantees the right of the people peaceably to assemble. Perhaps we have been too carefully taught that in a very selfish way we must preserve the right of the minority to speak -- if only for the fact that some day we may be in the minority.

In our independent thinking we have determined that America has not lived up to its ideals. And further, I suppose, many believe that if those ideals do not become a workable reality, the world will come apart. Literalness, not arrogance, may be the fault of youth.

It would be arrogant for me to tell you that all young people share the same views -- or that youth automatically means right. I, in turn, find it quite arrogant and contradictory when a man can go to a church or synagogue yet see no conflict when he exposes his employees to health hazards which could ruin their lives.

UDALL: Let me turn to another question. Impatience with the way things are is one of the virtues of youth. Young people can force us to take another look at things to see if changes can't be made. But it's been my observation that many young people expected to end the war in Southeast Asia by a single moratorium or to save the environment between Earth Day and commencement. I've found, to my dismay at times, that the work of social renewal is tougher than that. I wonder if we can take the efforts of young activists seriously when much of what they do seems to show a transient interest rather than a continuing willingness to expend the time and effort necessary for real change.

INTERN 2

I think your criticism is largely justified. When the time has come for hard work and research, and the enthusiasm has died down, a lot of students involved in the initial protest seem to have disappeared. And that is unfortunate. Student governments on almost every college campus find themselves without volunteers by mid-semester.

But I think that most students are sincere anyway, and when they seem to have only a temporary concern, it is often the result of their belief that whatever they're doing is hopeless. Students were the first to start the civil rights "sit-ins" and similar protests as far back as *ten* years ago -- and yet even today they are often almost alone when they march against the war or fight pollution, and that's enough to disillusion anybody. I can recall public hearings on air pollution where hardly anyone in the room was over 30. The apathy and unconcern of many adults is not exactly the thing that encourages their children to keep trying.

Students are often criticized for not taking responsibility, but when they seek to influence changes in areas where they are affected, whether on the campuses or in the political system, they are often ignored. I find it very difficult to understand, for instance, why there is so much reluctance to allow students to participate in meetings of college boards of trustees or regents, or to let them be involved in the choosing of new university presidents. Young people, simply because they are fresh upon the scene, are bound to contribute something new to a discussion, or notice something that would never have occurred to their elders. Students at the University of Arizona have already done marvelous work in helping make curriculum improvements, in developing new programs to orient freshmen, and in establishing procedures for handling disciplinary cases. And they've added something to every university-wide committee they've been on. Yet the state's Board of Regents doesn't want the student body presidents to have a dialogue with the board for a mere half hour at their monthly meeting!

We've got to be fair about this. It's true that a lot of students have "copped out" when their particular cause was no longer glamorous; but by the same token a lot of adults have turned a deaf ear to students even when they have made intelligent proposals and were begging to be heard.

UDALL: One thing we share, I'm sure, is a feeling that great tasks lie ahead of us if society is to be better in the future. I'm quite optimistic about our future, and about our chances of success in righting many of the social wrongs which afflict us. But aren't the bitterness, anger, resentment, and desperation of many young people counter-productive? I mean, not only because they have a negative effect on others whose help will be needed, but because they are in some cases a

substitute for hard work to correct these wrongs?

INTERN 3

I would clarify your first statement. Great tasks lie ahead of us *if* this society, this world is to survive at all. Anger, resentment and desperation are often counter-productive; you are right. Anger and resentment often start wars. However, anger, resentment and desperation concerning needless deaths on all sides can often stop wars.

To say that sometimes these emotions are counter-productive does not eliminate the fact that they exist. We are the first generation to be taught of the possibility that this world could be blown up for the sake of one man's conception of honor. We are the first generation that has been told that world famine is a real possibility within a decade. We are the first generation to be told that the earth cannot sustain unlimited life. And we've got the privilege of probably seeing it all in living color on our TV sets! We are the first generation that has been told that man has the ability to make it impossible for his species to breathe.

Yes, I get angry. I got angry when I went to New York and found the air stifling. I'm lucky, though! I could leave. Most of the people in New York City cannot even go away on the weekend to escape the choking air. They can't afford it. I get angry when people talk only about the *American* deaths in Vietnam. Some of those Americans were my friends. Yet in that war we may have made the place safe against attack only to leave behind thousands of Vietnamese civilian graves -- and a land so destroyed by bombings and defoliant activity that it may not be able to support the survivors. Have we destroyed Vietnam in order to save it? I wonder. I get angry when people talk as if we could afford to have a "next war."

I'm sorry to say that most of your optimism is not shared by young people. Many feel that they have neither the time nor the power to determine whether our world is going to be here. To be sure, many of our generation will limit the size of our families to two children. But other people of my age, getting married now, have seriously considered not having any children at all -- and not for reasons of over-population. Rather, they think there won't be a world suitable for any limited pursuit of happiness. A child is the greatest and most beautiful commitment to the future that exists. Yet some young people are willing to deny themselves children -- and their parents grandchildren, I might add. Why? Many of my generation don't believe there is much of a future left; they are pessimistic. Unfortunately, this pessimism is crippling.

UDALL: This kind of pessimism is very distressing to me. I assure you I don't share it, even though I understand why many of you feel as you do. I think this human race still has a great untapped potential, and you people are proof of this. One of the things that troubles me most is the current lack of understanding between young and old. Sometimes we're told that we cannot, by virtue of differing experiences, really understand what motivates students and others of the same age group. But if young people are as well-prepared for a major role in the way our society functions as they believe they are, shouldn't they also feel a responsibility to understand their elders? Isn't it likely that there are no absolute answers, and that we are all captives to a certain degree of our own backgrounds, needs, and experiences? And how do we bridge the gap?

INTERN 2

I think we'd better do something about the growing mistrust and misunderstanding between the generations, and do it in a hurry. One sign that went up after the Kent State tragedy actually read, "National Guard 4, Kent State students 0." The same people who have always yelled "Communist" at anything they didn't understand are now blaming students for all the world's ills. We've got to do something about that kind of ignorance and hatred before it tears the country apart.

The young and the old should be teaching each other, because each generation has a level of experience that the other has not had and should benefit from. But instead we seem to be condemning one another out of hand, staring at each other as if we were enemies and forgetting that it's our parents or our children that we're talking about.

Young people can do their share to bridge the gap, by curbing their self-righteousness and remembering that they are certainly not going to be always right. I still find myself learning things from my parents, just as I hope I teach them something once in a while. We ought to speak in a language our elders can understand, and lower our voices so they can hear us. And when we are particularly impatient and perceive our elders as slow to catch on, we ought to temper that impatience by asking ourselves what *our* kids will think of *us* when *we're* fifty.

I would think that my parents' generation has at least equal responsibility. Too many parents have forgotten that their children are what they are largely as a result of customs, values and ideals learned right at home. I'm sure it's difficult for many older people to get used to being taught things by their sons and daughters, something *they* never did to *their* parents.

But we are better educated and more aware of wrongdoing than they were at our age, which is in part a tribute to them, and we've got some thoughts that ought to be communicated and heard.

A lot of people have the mistaken idea that young people want everything done just their way. That's just not true. What students do want is the opportunity to be listened to, the right to participate. That's why it's so urgent for my parents' generation to treat young people as intelligent and valuable members of our society, whether in the home or on the college campus, or in a governmental agency.

I might add that older people do a great deal of damage when they ridicule students who are merely exercising their right of dissent or peaceful protest. We don't have to agree on everything, and we shouldn't. But we ought to be listening to one another, and encouraging a diversity of viewpoints. As Henry Steele Commager put it, it is not ideas that are subversive, it is the lack of ideas.

I would hope that if the war continues and the skies become more polluted, that more adults might join the students in their constructive dissent. But mostly we can heal the divisiveness in our society by mutual toleration. One of my favorite philosophers, Hillel, wrote that we should not judge our neighbor until we are standing in his place. I think that's worthwhile guidance for young and old alike.

UDALL: I suppose, too, that differing life styles add to the problem. As I travel around Southern Arizona, talking to all kinds of people, I find that many of them have no sympathy for the ideas and reforms suggested by the young, simply because they say that it's hard to believe that young people are idealistic or serious when they insist on trying to shock older people. They look at young people's long hair, different styles of dress, use of language. And they wonder if all these things aren't better indications of young people's attitudes toward society than all their demands for improvement. What would your answer be?

INTERN 1

First off, let me say that in a certain sense these cultural aspects such as hair and clothes and drugs have something in common with the political aspects in that they are all part of a search for something different, something better. Yet I don't believe that you can point to any one thing and say that it is an indication of how youth feels. Anytime you classify youth as one homogeneous group that thinks, acts, and reacts in one defined pattern, you will run into trouble. "Youth" is as diversified as any other group of people. I think that adults make a false assumption that long hair and unconventional dress are designed to shock older people. You talked about arrogance

earlier; there is nothing more arrogant to me than someone who discriminates against other persons because of the length of their hair or style of dress. You just can't say that such and such a group has long hair but believes in the system, or such and such a group has short hair and hates radicals. Just because a kid smokes marijuana doesn't mean that he is a revolutionary. But I do believe that there is a growing alienation between the young student and adults. Whether his reasons are just or unjust isn't the point. What is important is that a growing number of students are becoming totally dissatisfied with the entire social and political functions of this society. They are looking for something new, they are experimenting with new modes of life. The hair, the clothes, they are all part of the investigation.

INTERN 3

I agree with your cautionary note. I don't think it is right to say that all young people dress the way they do, or act the way they do, to shock older people. Older people don't wear crew-cuts to shock me.

Let's look at it in another way. We are all victims of generalizations -- generalizations gone wild. One young person may have long hair because he just likes it -- and he may be more conservative politically than his parents. Another may want to shock. Still another may want to identify himself with something changing. I understand one congressman discovered that during 90% of the world's history, men have worn their hair long. Maybe the youth are the traditionalists.

But if long hair is a way of identifying with change today, I see nothing wrong with this. Symbolic identifications of this kind *can* be divisive, of course, but I don't think they have to be.

So, personally, you may not like the way long hair looks. Fine, I don't like the color purple. We have differences of taste. That shouldn't make us enemies.

I resent the fact that the American flag has become a symbol of division. Just because a man carries an American flag does not mean that he is a good American. Just because a person does not agree with certain things going on in this country does not mean he is less of a citizen. If patriotism is not questioning, is not always seeking betterment, is not striving to make those constitutional ideals reality -- then I wonder what patriotism is. Right now I have one country and I would have to agree with a man who said, "I'm very critical of the United States, but get me outside the country and all of a sudden I can't bring myself to say one nasty thing about it. You can't renounce something unless you have something else."

But in America today I am concerned by the utter hate, distrust, lack of the most basic civilities on all sides. Foul language, many young people feel, is far more honest than the language of the deceptive diplomat who may say "equality" -- and mean the exact opposite. In the long run no one can communicate because such language alienates people.

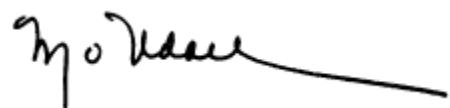
We are dealing with people, not pigs, not bums. I cannot ask anyone to abandon symbols, but I can ask him to abandon the symbols which convey inaccurate messages -- like "I'm somehow better than you are." Use of symbols in this manner is a substitute for communication and action.

Contrary to all opinion expressed, most of the young are just people and commonly regard themselves as such. I assume my elders like to think of themselves as people. With that common understanding, perhaps, we can figure out how my children and your grandchildren are going to exist as people.

UDALL: On that note I think we're going to have to terminate our conversation. I thank you all for your frankness and candor. If we haven't agreed on everything, at least I think we have shown that members of your generation and mine can sit down and exchange ideas.

* * * * *

That's how it went. As always, I'll appreciate having your reactions and comments.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ted Udall", with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the "l" in "Udall".