

Mike Noel
Utah State Representative

Interviewer-John Howe

Mike, we were talking about the Grand Staircase, or the creation of it. What was the reaction of the town, and what do you think should have been done there?

Mike Noel

The people in town were really unhappy with the creation of the monument in '96 with Clinton and Gore Administration. They were very unhappy because we were anticipating 350-400 new jobs and coal development. What should have happened is they should have gone through a full process there, and that did not occur. It was done as a political move. Clinton was behind in the polls in California, and he decided to up his stature by creating this 1.9 million acre monument in Kane and Garfield County. Of course, Utah was gonna vote Republican no matter what so he just kind of threw Utah under the bus and went for the California vote and took away a lot of state sovereignty and the potential for some development of coal resources in our state.

Interviewer-John Howe

Tell me about that coal issue there. How important was that coal issue?

Mike Noel

It's very, very important. The Kaiparowits Plateau has about five billion tons of low-sulfur, high-BTU coal, and, with the opportunity now, and even then, to meet the Clear Air Act requirements without any additional use of the coal that was actually compliance coal, so a big deal, I think, for both the state of Utah, for mineral resources and for the country in terms of being able to use that coal now for syngas, or hydro-gasification, which can meet some of our energy needs and not create problems with knocks and socks. It was a bad move on their part to lock up that many resources in the state of Utah.

Interviewer-John Howe

Tell me about the off-road rally that happened last week. You were talking about it earlier. What was the purpose of it?

Mike Noel

We had a rally last week down in the Pariah Canyon area in response to a decision by the Bureau of Land Management to go ahead and implement part of their Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument plan, which is to close down about a thousand miles of roads in Kane County and Garfield County. So, the people looked at that as the first shot across the bow of shutting down all the roads. We got together. There were about five hundred of us that went down the canyon. This canyon's been open for road use from Cannonville to Pariah for over 150 years. We went down the canyon and pretty much mobilized and said, you know, no resource damage, make a statement. We think this canyon needs to be open. It's a beautiful area. All Americans should have the right to see it. You shouldn't have to hike twenty-six, twenty-seven miles when there's a road going down there. There are beautiful areas for others to hike it and get the solitude they want in those side canyons, but we don't believe that the mechanized

recreation is a bad thing in Kane County and in Utah. So, I didn't support the BLM in the closure, and we're working hard, both legally and through our congressional delegation to try to turn that around.

Interviewer-John Howe

We were talking about locking up the land and whether you think that's a possibility as to what's happening now.

Mike Noel

You know, when you talk about locking up the land in Utah, we should have resolved this thing back in 1976 when the Bureau of Land Management went from, basically, a disposal agency, a land agency and a grazing agency, to a retention law, but with that law, the Federal Land Policy Management Act, it said that there would be access. It said that water rights would be retained by the states. It said that grazing rights would be maintained. It said that we would manage these lands with a multiple-use and sustain yield program. What's happened over the years is the environmental laws have gotten more stringent. There's been more pressure on Congress to micro-manage these lands such that some of the roads now we have never been able to fully capture the county roads that we've maintained for over a hundred years. We've built them with taxpayers' money; Utah taxpayers, state tax monies and county monies, and now the agencies don't recognize those roads, the mineral resources, where we get a lot of our revenue. We got over one hundred and fifty million dollars to the state in revenue that goes to, to provide monies to our educational system, to our health system, and to all assets of state government. We're losing those severance taxes and, withholding taxes, jobs. So, what's happening is, we're, two-thirds of our state is locked up in federal land management. The resource management plans and the environmental community, basically has, I think, an undue influence on the Congress, with their lobbying efforts, and the huge eastern block of environmental groups are really dictating what can happen on western lands. Utah, and Kane County, is at the forefront, and right at the bull's eye of the environmental community to shut down as much opportunity for development and access to these beautiful public lands in Kane and Garfield County.

Interviewer-John Howe

We were talking about what happens to rural economies and towns when wilderness is created.

Mike Noel

You get a lot of backpackers in here that come down. They bring a twenty dollar bill and a pair of shorts and stay here for a week and they don't change either one of them. I'm being facetious, but you don't get a lot of money out of wilderness. It really doesn't create a lot of jobs. We talked about movie filming. That's gone. We talked about the OHV community. They seem to want to spend a little more money and bring their families with them and seem to be more revenue generated. The wilderness takes away the opportunity for a lot of these jobs on public land whether it be cattle grazing, and even though they say that you can continue to raise cattle, they make it so restrictive, it's very, very difficult to continue that business when you can't take any mechanical equipment in to clean out your ponds, when you can't check your cows and put your salt out with your pick-up truck. It really makes it difficult to do. If you talk about any kind of mineral extraction, that's pretty well shot, even if you could go in and drill--horizontal drilling and not have, what we call, no surface occupancy--they eliminate that too because they

withdraw the mineral leases. They withdraw all of the right to mine minerals. So it's pretty much a lock up. It takes away the multiple use concept and sustained yield of public lands, and it really does hurt the economy of Utah and the counties where they create wilderness. And that's not to say that there couldn't be some areas that you could have some wilderness, and I think that needs to be studied and looked at and make sure that there aren't these issues that would, in fact, create problems, social-economic problems for the communities where there are wilderness. It should be spread around the state. My feeling is that they had wilderness issues like this in the eastern states, in the Midwest, and it created wilderness area there, people's attitudes would change about how much wilderness we need to have in the West.

Interviewer-John Howe

We were talking about the idea that one of the reporters said you might be a "hobby rancher." Tell me what you think about that.

Mike Noel

Yeah, somebody told me that a, one of the writers, one of the gossip columnists up there that doesn't have anything better to do than to check on me--that's a little offensive. You know we put up fifteen thousand bales of hay. We run over two hundred head of cows, had as many as three hundred head of cows, and it's just pretty offensive when they say that, when a man's out working and trying to earn a living. There are several families that depend upon what we do down here. And you know, to me it means being able to ranch and farm, and put some production and protein back into this economy is important. I like the idea that we have home on the range rather than homes on the range, not that I'm opposed to that, but keeping agriculture viable in Utah and having another economic arm, economic engine. I think it's important for the state of Utah. It's good for wildlife. Wildlife congregates on these ranches and farms where there's water, where there's ponds, where there's saltlicks out there, a lot of birds, a lot of wildlife. We've seen them today. We've seen ducks and geese--there's over three hundred head of deer that come to these alfalfa fields in the winter, and fawn in the springtime. So, it's a good thing. And they can make their jokes and castigate the real folks, but real folks are the heart of this country. They're my constituents. I love them all and they vote me in about 75% every year and I think I'm doing something right, and I think most people think I'm doing something right in this area.

Interviewer-John Howe

You were telling me something earlier too about the redneck. Tell me that story again.

Mike Noel

I hear all these things about these rural folks and I don't read the blogs but people tell me about them. The Speaker of the House told me the other day he's getting all kinds of emails from the Wasatch Front. They want to string me up and throw me out of office and we're nothing but a bunch of hillbillies and rednecks. You know, redneck is really a term of honor. That red on the back of your neck means you've been out in the sun. You've been working. You grab hold of my hand and you'll see it's got a lot of calluses and because I don't mind working with my hands. I don't begrudge anybody else, but for people to look at you with disdain because you're out and you're working and you're sweating, and you're putting protein back into the economy and feeding people, putting out bales of hay and taking care of God's creation here, I think that's

wrong. That's hypocrisy and rural people are some of the best people in the world. Come down here. You'll be treated well, no matter what your philosophy is. Just don't come down here and tell people how to live their life and we won't tell you what to do up there in the Wasatch Front.

Interviewer-John Howe

You were mentioning that you had debated on a talk show with Timothy DeChristopher. Tell us about that case just a little bit and the complexity of that, if you will.

Mike Noel

We had an issue here with Tim DeChristopher. He's kind of the poster child now for the environmental community, and I guess I'm the poster child for the anti-environmental community, so I was asked to debate him on "Take 2" and Rod Decker. Tim's a young man, 29-years old. He moved here from West Virginia, coal country. The people of the state of Utah have paid two-thirds of his education there at the University of Utah, and yet he decided he wanted to go out and monkey wrench a lease sale of oil and gas leases. That's a big part of our economy. It brought in over one hundred and fifty million dollars in revenue on those royalties last year, and so when he went in and was determined to monkey wrench that by bidding for leases that he knew he didn't have money for. In my mind, that's like writing a check out when you don't have money to pay for it. And there are those that are out there bragging that it was the right thing to do. It was the wrong thing to do. It was the wrong thing to teach them, to go out and do something that he knew for a fact was wrong. We went through a long process on those lease plans and the RMPs that are out there, over seven years of study, over one hundred and eighty thousand comments, a hundred public meetings, the Governor of the State of Utah signed off on a consistency review. It was a good thing. It was really a good thing. Tim really decided he was going to go around all those issues and take that upon himself, and it was wrong. I think it's wrong, and I think he is having second thoughts about that, especially if he ends up going to federal prison over it.

Interviewer-John Howe

I'm sure you know that the courts and newspapers have talked about that since DeChristopher was prosecuted; they think some of the road rally people should be. What do you think about that idea?

Mike Noel

Well, I believe it's a different situation altogether, and I would be one of those people to be prosecuted because I did go out on that road rally that day, but here's the difference in that. The difference is, number one; the Grand Staircase plan that was implemented in 2000 closes over a thousand miles of road. This road has not been closed. The implementation of that plan has not occurred. The Federal Government itself went into court and said, "You can't sue us on the monument plan until we implement it." In other words, we have no case for controversy at this point in time. So, they go into court and they argue that we can't sue on it because it's not implemented, and then shortly after that case is--we lose that case essentially in court, or say you're not right for discussion, they come back and say they're going to implement this plan to close it. Now, when they made that decision, they talked to the County Commission. They did write a letter, but we also went to the local BLM, the state BLM, and several, at least five, BLM officers, line officers said there would be no tickets issued. When we started the rally we said, if

they do, in fact, turn you around, then you need to obey the law. This is a protest; this is not civil disobedience. So, in my mind, there's a huge distinction there. There was no resource damage caused. People can go down and take a look at that. No one rode off the existing road. No one drove over vegetation. No one took anything from anybody on that ride. Mr. DeChristopher, on the other hand, took millions of dollars out of the pockets of the taxpayers, and monkey-wrenched a lease sale that cost the taxpayers millions of dollars, including the input from the state of Utah, and here's the environmental community parading him around as if he's a hero. That's the wrong message to give. If, in fact, they do close that road down, we'll go to court and we'll sue. We'll bring our data forward. We'll let the environmental community and the BLM bring their data forward, and we'll let the courts decide. If we lose it, that's the way it's gonna be. That was a protest. That was not a civil disobedience, like Mr. DeChristopher.

Interviewer-John Howe

How important are those oil and gas leases to rural economies? What do they mean to the school trusts and other parts of that economy? How important are they?

Mike Noel

The oil and gas leases in Utah are extremely important to the state's economy, and the revenues of this state. They're very, very important to the school trust lands, and each township in Utah, Section 2, Section 16, Section 32 and Section 36, are school trust lands, and the revenues from the royalties, both bonus bids and the ultimate revenues that come in from the sale of those oil and gas leases, mostly gas, go to the school kids of the state of Utah. Those monies are used for the school kids, and, with 160,000 kids coming on board, we need all the money we can get for the school kids. So, when you go in and you cancel federal leases, you basically sanitize school trust land leases, so we lose the federal money, we lose the state money, the royalties, the bonus bids. We lose the opportunity to develop the trust lands, all of that. It's a huge impact on the state of Utah. A lot of these leases that Mr. DeChristopher went in and sabotaged, and also which Secretary Salazar pulled off the--were what we call no-surface occupancy. In other words, they were drilling from either trust lands into the federal leases underground, thousands of feet underground, so you wouldn't even be able to tell if they drilled them. What you've got here is you've got a new administration that has debts owed to the environmental community which helped get them elected, and this is the method they're using, and they're using Utah as the whipping state to bring that message across.

Interviewer-John Howe

What's it like to work with the environmental community?

Mike Noel

I've been working with them. I say, I don't know if I say, "Working with them." I've worked with the environmental community for many, many years, probably over twenty five years, maybe even thirty years, and what I find them to be, in general, I'm generalizing here, but, for the most part, dishonest. They have an agenda specifically to stop development of any kind on public lands. There's very little room for compromise. I've found that even environmentalists that were supposedly moderate, this is when we had public meetings, they would talk a great line, and, "Oh yeah, you're doing a great job," and then get up at public meetings, and even come up to me and say, "Hey, don't take this personal," but just thoroughly rake me over the coals and

rake the Bureau of Land Management over the coals, and the agencies. I look at the environmental community as a business entity, and it's funny, we hurt a lot of small business owners with the regulatory processes we have to go through because only big business then can deal with all the myriad of laws and regulations and stipulations in these leases. We hurt small businesses. The environmental community loves that. The one that comes to mind for me is SUWA, the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, and I just call those guys flat-out dishonest. One of their lead attorneys, Stephen Bloch, has been chastised for lying in court. It was right in the record that I read. Two of their directors, Bert Fingerhut and Mark Ristow, are sitting in federal prison right now. Long-time directors--one was a finance chairman--for stealing money from credit unions of all sorts. Their Chairman of the Board for many years was a guy by the name of Hansjorg Wyss, a multi-billionaire, a Swiss national, that owns stock in Texaco Corporation, so, they put on a good show, like they're these poor guys in tattered Levis, and holes in their Levis, but in reality they're business people. There's a ton of money coming in. I've looked at SUWA's record. They've got six million dollars in litigation funds and so, I have a great disdain for groups like SUWA, and The Wilderness Society, and some of these ones that come to rural Utah and take jobs away from our people, for my kids and my grandkids, and I think most of the people down here look at them that way.

Interviewer-John Howe

Talk to me a little bit about climate change and that issue, and how it affects the American West, from your standpoint.

Mike Noel

You know, I've got a whole lot of opinions about climate change as the Chairman of the Public Utilities Committee in the Utah House. We deal with this on a regular basis. We've had testimony here just as late as yesterday that talked about the impacts of eliminating all coal-fired generation, and mainly the gas they're trying to eliminate is carbon dioxide with coal-fired generation, and what it would do to the climate over the, a period of time. I think it's the next thirty to forty years. It would, by eliminating that it would increase the climate heat cycle by about .07 degrees Centigrade. Again, the way to get to reducing CO₂ is through nuclear power, which is the base load supply, and before we get to nuclear power, use gas-fired generation, much less carbon dioxide creating for greenhouse gases. So, there's ways to get around this. If we took out all of Utah's coal-fired generation, within in twenty-six days, it would be replaced by the worlds. So, the Chinese are building power plants. The Indians in India are building power plants. We can't just crush our economy and take jobs out of our economy to meet a very minimal amount of increased climate in our country.

Mike Noel [Same question; alternate answer]

Climate change has been in the news for the last four or five years. It's a big issue at the Legislature, important issue. We deal with it at the Public Utilities Committee, which I chair. It's interesting that the latest poll that came out from Rasmussen shows that it's way down the priority list of the public and that the majority of the public now believes that climate change is not a man-caused, but it is a natural phenomenon. I'm one of those that believes that way. My information that we've received just recently in testimony is that, just shutting down all coal-fired generation, would only have an impact of about .07 degrees Centigrade to our heat cycle here in the United States, and that within twenty-six days, if we shut down all of Utah coal-fired

generation, which, we're at about 95%, in twenty-six days, it would be replaced by countries, from countries like China and India, and, for me, that's too big a price to pay for jobs and increased cost of energy to really take that seriously that we would actually shut that down. The way to get to reduction in greenhouse gases and other gases, those that are really polluting such as knocks and socks, is to move to nuclear power. It's definitely the way to go. Dr. Patrick Moore, one of the founders of Greenpeace, pushes this agenda, and he believes that's the only way we can get there, and he's a strong believer in climate change. He thinks that's the way to do it. So, we could go to nuclear power. We could go to plug-in hybrids. We could reduce pollution, and we would have energy at a reasonable cost for the citizens. We have a great standard of living in this country. That's why everybody wants to come here. Why shut down our standard of living to do something with coal-fired generation right now that we can solve with nuclear and other sources of fossil fuel, until we can get to totally renewable power.

Interviewer-John Howe

What do you see as common ground on this issue, and what do you want the environmental community--is there common ground? And, what do you see for the future?

Mike Noel

I wish I could say that there was some common ground with the environmental community. We've really set up some barriers here, but I'm open to discussion. The one area I think we could look at is we have so many regulations and laws and restrictions out there on the public lands right now. Let's deal with those that we have. Let's not create more restrictions, more bureaucracy, more layers of federal control of public land that cost us money; they create problems that put people into court. Let's deal with the issue that we have now at hand. There are enough regulations out there in the code of federal regulations to have proper development of public lands, multiple-use of public lands, and not harm the environment. It can happen. I think, what we have to do is get the public out there to recognize that, in many instances; the environmental community is not acting in their best favor. If you really want to access these public lands, you've got to have roads, and when you get to this area here, you've got to have water and power so you can stay here. And, we could do that without harming the environment.

Interviewer-John Howe

We were talking about common ground between the environmental communities and land use communities, do you see common ground? And, what do you see for the future?

Mike Noel

When we're talking about common ground and trying to find common ground between the environmental community, and some compromises, I'm not sure that the environmental community really wants to compromise, because I really believe that the more they can stir up, and create controversy, the more it helps them with their collection efforts, with their fund-raising efforts. So they really don't really want to find common ground, in my mind, but here where I would say we could go. Let's start with the regulations that are there. Let's start with the National Environmental Policy Act, which is a very extensive set of laws and regulations that we can go through to make better decisions on multiple uses of public lands. Let's look at things like visual resource management and riparian areas, and those areas we want to make sure we look after and protect. Let's start with resource management plans, and have public input. Look

at the plans that are in place on a state level, on the county level. Consider those strongly. Consider the social-economic values of the people in this area here; what they need to survive, people that have lived here for over a hundred and fifty years, and not just say that hey, this is our land too. Recognize that the people who live here, that have to live here, that choose to live here, should have some say in what goes on in these public lands, and should have a greater impact on what the say is here.

Interviewer-John Howe

We were talking about common ground and what you see for the future.

Mike Noel

You know, when I think of common ground, the thing that comes to mind for me is I look at the environmental community. They've got a lot of streets in Salt Lake City named after them. They call them One Way, and that's kind of the way they are. It's either my way or the highway. Being able to create controversy through a lot of their statements on their website, statements to the media, and they get a lot of support from the media. The media seems to support their efforts. We have a hard time getting our message across. That creates funds for them, so it's not in their best interest, I believe, economically, to find common ground. It seems to be in their best interest to create controversy and to really squash down local communities, to pile on industry, even though the industry is creating jobs and not harming the environment. They don't seem to want common ground. But let's say that they do at some point say, "You know, let's quit this argument. Let's quit fighting," and where would I say we should start? We should start first with the National Environmental Policy Act. That was put together by Congress to get better decisions and better decision-making. We can do that. Look at those laws and myriad of regulations and the Code of Federal Regulations that are already out there, that allow for proper mitigation of resource development that allow for cattle grazing. Look at the roads and access that was given to the people in the state of Utah, and recognize that they have a right to use the public lands in their area because they live here. They choose to live here. And they have a greater right than those people in New York or New Jersey, who do have an interest in the public lands, but the Federal Land Policy Act gives the local people a much greater right to use these public lands. Go read it and research it and you'll find out that sovereignty, and what FLPMA said, needs to be important as we manage these public lands. They've taken a lot away from us in terms of being able to develop these resources, the jobs that are available, and I think we've had enough of it in southern Utah. We're going to have a march on August the 8th at the Utah State Capitol, and there's going to be multiple users from all over this state of Utah. They're going to step up and say, "You know what? We are very, very interested in the multiple-use of these public lands and it shouldn't be just a single use." Maurice Hinchey from New York City, and Dick Durbin from Illinois, clean up your own state first before you come to Utah and tell us how to manage these public lands. You know, we've been here for a hundred and fifty years, and they're good enough to create wilderness areas, they're good enough to have people come from all over the country to view them. We've done a darn good job of managing the public lands in Utah. Stay out of our state with your ideas. Let us control our own state.