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CONGRESSMAN'S REPORT

By Morris K. Udall

A Break for School Taxpayers

Federal land for sale -- \$2.50 an acre.

That was the cheerful word from the Interior Department the other day. It was especially pleasant news for Arizona where the federal government owns or controls some 70 per cent of the land.

The cut-rate price was established for education sites sought by states, local governments, school districts and non-profit private organizations. It is the same price Interior set earlier for sites needed by states and localities for parks and recreation activity.

The new price schedule looms as a potential boost to Arizona where some school districts are hard put to keep up with mounting enrollment. It may also give a boost to emerging plans for junior colleges in Yuma, Douglas and other communities. And it greatly advances plans of Prescott to open by 1963 a four-year privately-run college.

Federal land has been available for educational purposes under the Recreation and Public Purposes Act of 1954. But the price was often high. Schools and other groups wanting federal land were charged up to 50 per cent of market value -- \$1,000 per acre for land worth \$2,000 per acre on the open market, for instance.

The low price should spur education groups to take a hard look for federal land before buying costly private land. They should consult with Interior's Bureau of Land Management office in Phoenix. Some federal lands, such as national parks, monuments and Indian lands, are not available, of course.

Eastern congressmen who don't have federal lands in their states will be keeping a watchful eye to see that the public domain lands are retained for public use. Therefore, educators will be forced to show detailed development plans when they seek sites for immediate use.

If school districts and others don't need sites right now, they should survey their long-range needs. If nearby federal lands can meet some of these needs, the Interior people should be consulted. This way the department can mark down education interest on specific plots so such interest can be considered if the plots are sought by others.

The fact that the federal government controls so much of Arizona is often a great disadvantage to our state. This particular situation, however, may turn what is ordinarily a disadvantage into real help to reduce the costs of the many new schools our growing population requires.

