

Transcript of 3 KMYR series on The Public Affair:

UNM Student Elections

Aired on May 12, 1975

“P.I.R.G. – Public Interest Research Group”

Aired on May 13-15, 1975

“Bosque del Apache Bird Reserve and the Whooping Crane Arrival”

Aired on November 12, 1975

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Albuquerque Museum, gift of Zane Blaney

This reel covers three programs aired on KMYR in 1975:

The first segment is a brief report on UNM student elections, dealing with the violence surrounding the impeachment of Ernesto Gomez. Reporting by Zane Blaney.

The second segment is a three-part report by Zane Blaney that was aired prior to the UNM student elections and which deal with the Public Interest Research Group.

The third segment is a special report by Larry Barker on the whooping crane arrival at Bosque del Apache Bird Reserve.

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ZANE BLANEY: Once again, it's election time at UNM [University of New Mexico]. An election in which, historically, only ten percent of the eligible voters participate. However, since the UNM Student Center convicted ASUNM [Associated Students of the University of New Mexico] Vice-President Ernesto Gomez of tampering with votes in the last election, politics on the UNM campus have been charged with threatening phone calls, property damage, and physical violence. Louis Tinken, an ASUNM Senator:

MAN'S VOICE: What happened to me was the night following the senators vote for conviction, um, I received a phone call telling me that, um, I was one of the people that they were going to get and that, um, you know, I should be watching myself and [mumbled]. And, um, then, uh, they – well, I told them fine and then they proceeded to hang up. It was a short phone call. [mumbled] Had received such a call and most of us have just been disregarding them. I believe its threatening people who are opposed to the senate's conviction of Ernesto Gomez and

they're probably followers of Ernesto. Though I don't believe that he personally is organizing it, you know. I think his attitude, uh, such as when John Bowman was beat up and the next day he appears in *The Lobo* office and says, uh, that if it was my people, he wouldn't have walked away. You know, I think that sort of attitude and doesn't discourage them, but I don't believe he is behind it.

BLANEY: After writing an editorial in the university paper, *The Lobo*, affirming the conviction of Gomez, editor John Bowman, was beaten.

JOHN BOWMAN: People were asking around who had written the editorial. And they had wanted to know who had written the editorial, so um. I was approached on about the editorial. It was Orlando Medina, I was with Orlando Medina at the time, and he co-wrote the editorial with me. And, um, he told David Garcia that we had written it. He's a senator, an ASUNM senator. He was one of the four senators who voted not to impeach him and not to convict him on charges. That Friday night, I went to the SUB [Student Union Building] movie and, uh, it was about twelve and we were walking home. I was with two other people, two women, and uh, we made it to the corner of Yale and Lead. At which point, two cars stopped. First car was three people and three people jumped out of the car. They, um, headed towards me and um, one person – the only thing they said was, "You fuckhead." One person said, "You fuckhead." And then, um, they kicked me in the balls a few times and then, um, someone – one of them punched me in the eye. And one of the women who was with me approached, you know, to stop it. And um, they hit her in the eye and pushed her in the ground. She has a fractured hand. It's really difficult to say whether it was connected or not. It seems to me really, um, startling that that would happen. I've never been beat up like that before. I've lived in this area for about four or five years and never had that happen to me before. And, um, it could very well not be connected. And it very well could. I would have, you know, no way to say whether it was or not.

BLANEY: Several weeks ago, a student running for the student senate had her car windows smashed. Michael Benevides, her campaign manager, told us:

MICHAEL BENEVIDES: Well, she wrote a letter to *The Lobo* saying that she was a Chicana and that she didn't go along with all this. You know, that this wasn't a racial thing. Uh, Ernesto calls her up, gives her his rap, you know, why it is a racial thing. And, uh, then asked her why she did it, mainly. And there was nothing more that she could say, you know, because he was obviously in an upset mood. So she just tried to go along with the conversation the best she could, told him she had to go, and that was it. That night her windows are broken out. I saw the same thing with another senator. His name is Eric Baca. And he's supposed to be Chicano. He voted against Ernesto. He voted to convict. And then his windows get popped in. For all we know, it could be vandalism. It's awfully coincidental, but there's no proof that it's anybody that we know.

BLANEY: Why is all this happening? Michael Benevides, who is also head of the Student Office of Research and Consumer Affairs opinions:

BENEVIDES: It's somewhat of a civil war almost. It seems Ernesto has taken the position of it being a racial issue. Um, but truly it's not. I remember walking out of the conviction hearing and as I was walking out, the person who was with me, and he told me, you know, we'll get you later. And with that, he called us, including me, "bandito", which means bandit, which has a connotation of being a traitor.

BLANEY: The UNM elections have been scheduled for April sixteenth unless delayed again by court or administrative appeals. Racial overtones have made their way into the fore of student politics this election and UNM's political scene bears watching.

Tomorrow, a look at P.I.R.G., the Public Interest Research Group, which is trying again this year for student funding at UNM. A referendum item requiring student approval. I'm Zane Blaney on KMYR.

[06:07]

ZANE BLANEY: Last year, consumer advocate Ralph Nader came to town and talked about P.I.R.G.s, or Public Interest Research Groups. He founded the consumer projects in 1970 and there are now PIRGs on one-hundred-and-thirty-five campuses in nineteen states with a membership of more than five-hundred thousand. The P.I.R.G.s are located primarily on college campuses where they receive funding and apparently find enthusiastic supporters. Since Nader's appearance in Albuquerque, a number of UNM students have been attempting to get a student-funded P.I.R.G. going on the UNM campus. Last year, the proposal was defeated. This year, the push is on again and the matter will be decided during the student election April sixteenth. One of those students is John Leibendorfer.

JOHN LEIBENDORFER: Now I was -- became involved in P.I.R.G. about a year ago after hearing Ralph Nader speaking on campus. And he inspired students to set up a Public Interest Research Group and I've been active in it since then. I served as chairman of the organizing committee -- or co-chairman. And I currently serve as secretary of P.I.R.G.

BLANEY: Another is graduate student Ed Coles.

ED COLES: I'm presently the chairperson of New Mexico P.I.R.G. I got involved, like John, after Nader spoke here. Um, and have been working on this ever since.

BLANEY: P.I.R.G.s are not exactly student movements, but they have filled a certain activist void.

LEIBENDORFER: What it is it's an organization where students who feel concerned about a particular issue, a current social issue, environmental problems, or consumer problems. They have a kind of organization where they can plug in to and do some research. The organization consists of a staff of professional people: lawyers, scientists, um, people in mass communications. Basically, anything the students feel they need. And they would direct the

students and provide a kind of expertise that the students don't have. And they would also provide a means for students to actual make change on whatever kind of conclusions they came to. Whether it be litigation, um, news articles, taking someone to court, or whatever – whatever need be done on a particular issue.

COLES: The idea for P.I.R.G.s come from Ralph Nader. Uh, he kicked off this drive for P.I.R.G. here. It's his idea to, uh, channel student energies into, um, -- into establishing and, uh, running a P.I.R.G. He has also urged people to form citizen action groups around the country for the same purpose. Uh, students have an ideal setup as far as I said before, the funding mechanism that's provided by the university and also their idealism, but there's no reason that, uh -- they have no corner on the market on idealism or on being affected by the problems of their community. So, um, it's just – it's just a start.

BLANEY: Although a small P.I.R.G. currently exists on the UNM campus, its operation has been severely hampered due to lack of funds. And the solution to the money problem lies initially in the pockets of the students.

LEIBENDORFER: Last Spring, we had a petition drive on campus and we got a majority of students signing our petition. The petition said basically two things. One, that they were willing to set up a P.I.R.G. – that they thought it was a good idea. The other was a funding mechanism. A two dollar fee increase that would be refundable to any student that wanted one. Um, that was the basis of it. You need some kind of substantial funding and some kind of definite funding plan. Um, activity fees as they exist now don't allow for any kind of dissent for students who don't want to support it. But a refund mechanism built in and anyone that did not want to support it could easily obtain one.

BLANEY: Why funding from university students and not a community campaign?

LIEBENDORFER: There's some certain things about a student that fits this idealistically. First of all, a student is idealism. I mean, he doesn't have the – the responsibilities that a number of people in the community have. Um, I think their actions against the Vietnam War in the late sixties indicates that they are socially concerned. Um, also, the university is just a warehouse of knowledge. The facilities are there to do the research. Those two things fit very well into setting one up on a university.

COLES: It's ideal from a very practical point of view in that the university has a built-in system of collecting funds. If it became an or—an organization say, like Common Cause, or any kind of social action group, uh, these types of groups spend a good fraction – a lot of times over half of their budget on fundraising.

LEIBENDORFER: I think the university, I guess in theory, is supposed to be producing leaders in the community. And if we're going to make change in a social system, in a political system and what not, um, this is where it should start. There's no question about that in my mind.

BLANEY: Tomorrow, a look at P.I.R.G. projects.

LEIBENDORFER: If we make an accusation against Southern Union Gas, for instance, we had better have the facts to back it up.

BLANEY: And I'm Zane Blaney on KMYR.

[11:36]

ZANE BLANEY: Not everyone supports the concepts of P.I.R.G.s or Public Interest Research Groups and Ralph Nader contends that many of those who don't are often blatant conflicts of interest. Quoting a Jack Anderson column on P.I.R.G.s, "Board of Regents or Trustees are traditionally made up of the very corporate nabobs most likely to be P.I.R.G.ed."

What if the P.I.R.G. at UNM decided to take on Southern Union Gas Company and Southern Union decided to put the pressure on the Regents of the university? John Liebendorfer and Ed Coles:

LIEBENDORFER: One of the – one of the first things that a P.I.R.G. has to do is to become respectable. I mean, you can't go around on witch-hunts. I mean, any accusations we make are going to have to be backed up by hard fact, which is the basis of the research. Um, if we make an accusation against Southern Union Gas, for instance, um, we had better have the facts to back it up. And if we have the facts to back it up, I think the students will support it and if we are right, then the university should support us also. But like I say, we can't go around and witch-hunt and just accusing everyone that comes along.

BLANEY: What if you investigate the Regents?

LIEBENDORFER: What do you mean?

BLANEY: I mean, would you do that? Is there a sacred cow?

LIEBENDORFER: Um. I don't think we'd want to investigate the Regents until we had some support in the community to back us up. Like you say, the Regents have final say on, uh, on the funding.

COLES: We are going to be looking at, uh, social problems. Uh, I think utility prices in the energy crisis is a thing that P.I.R.G.s around the country have already been looking into. Uh, I think, uh, particularly utility rate increase hearings I don't think citizens have been – have had an adequate input around the country and I think a P.I.R.G. would be ideal for at least providing a balance for, uh, another side to the experts at the utility companies provide. Maybe they would agree, maybe not though. Um.

LIEBENDORFER: One of the distinctions that has been made is that, you know, what we are going to be working on is going to be affecting the whole community and why should students

be stuck with it? Well, students are members of the community. We are affected by the laws and policies of the state and we're affected just as much as anybody else and it has to start somewhere. We hope that by our actions on campus, perhaps citizens groups around the city and around the state will become organized and work with us. That – a number of P.I.R.G.s in Vermont, in particular, that have allowed the citizens – groups of citizens to join P.I.R.G., pay dues and elect members to the Board of Directors. Um, no reason why that could not happen here.

BLANEY: In Oregon, a P.I.R.G. sent women out for a quote loans. They found, among other things, that a major bank required women to produce a certificate of sterility or an affidavit swearing that she was using birth control measures in order to get a loan. In Michigan, a P.I.R.G. has belabored a doctor's conspiracy for refusing to help the state with poor patients. In South Carolina, students exposed a private blood collector who had faked records, was willing to take blood from donors on pills and alcohol and had no doctor on hand. A Vermont P.I.R.G. rolled back a telephone rate increase. And Minnesota, Massachusetts, and Vermont P.I.R.G.s have blocked road projects. But these endeavors were backed with substantial funding.

LEIBENDORFER: There's a definite distinction between the kind of projects that students on a part-time basis can carry out as compared to the kind of projects you can do under the guidance of some lawyers and people with PhDs and some of the natural scientists and whatever else kind of staff you hired. The kind of projects we've done have been limited pretty much to surveys. We did some food surveys on food prices in supermarkets. We did some surveys on the accuracy of scale in the supermarkets. Um, we looked into the environmental planning commission here in town. Just got some background information on how – what kind of decisions the environmental planning commission has been making. And we did another one on, um, the Truth in Lending Law, which federal law requires banks to quote interest rates in a certain way so consumers can shop around and compare one bank to another as far as how much they are going to pay. Um, we found out that sixty-two percent of the banks in the city are violating federal law.

BLANEY: Liebendorfer and Coles say they have the support of most of the candidates running in the student election April sixteenth. All the presidential candidates, except one. But even with ASUNM's support it will take approval of the voting student body to get a meaningful P.I.R.G. operation going at UNM.

LEIBENDORFER: Some of our policies have definitely got to be established and I think students are idealistically suited for it. The university is suited for it very well.

BLANEY: A few corrections are necessary in reference to Monday's *Public Affair* concerning tensions at UNM following the vote to impeach ASUNM Vice-President Ernesto Gomez. Gomez has been reinstated as Vice-President of the ASUNM, and his impeachment was remanded back to the ASUNM Senate after the Regents reviewed the matter without taking a position.

Also, it was stated in Monday's program that UNM student Eric Baca had the windows in his car broken out after voting to impeach Gomez. That statement was in error. Baca's car windows were broken out during an earlier election at the UNM campus.

I'm Zane Blaney on KMYR.

[17:24]

ZANE BLANEY: Concluding *The Public Affair* look at P.I.R.G.s, a few comments from Mike Berman, whose job it is to coordinate and assist in the formation of Public Interest Research Groups across the country. Berman is an attorney for Ralph Nader's Citizens Action Group.

MIKE BERMAN: Nader believes strongly in the individual. The individual can have an effect on our society and that the individual has to believe that and the individual has to get involved. Now, the, um, the various interests of individuals on different issues may be opposing and seem very large and very strong and seem very well organized. But, it's important -- it's important that everybody participates and, um, the other side -- whatever that may be on a certain issue is -- is not as strong as it appears. It's, uh, some of it is only good public relations image. And, um, if you have your issue and you have your facts, you can oppose the other side. Basically all -- all the people we usually oppose on different issues, um, usually up -- present an effective case. They have lawyers, they have public relations specialists, they have scientists, they do their research, they get their facts together and present their case. And one reason they've been so effective is that they're the only group that's been presenting their case.

Like before the utility commission. Basically, it's usually been either the utility or the larger industries who have been able to present their cases effectively before the utility commission in most states. Usually the citizen or consumer -- it's not that he's been under-represented, he hasn't be represented. No one has even walked in the room and asked, "What about the taxpayer?" No one's asked the first question in a lot of places. Today, they're starting to ask the first question, especially in light of the energy crisis and these pass-throughs on, uh, -- pass-throughs on higher fuel prices. Citizens are starting to ask the questions as well as some of the state's attorney generals. And, uh, that's important. It's never been done. The level of citizen participation has really been low, it's been minimal, its been non-existent. And we're saying, you've got a muscle, why don't you flex it? Try and use it. You'll find it won't be as difficult as you think. You'll find, if the facts are on your side, that if you participate, if you raise the question, if you ask that question, you'll be halfway there. And that's the first step. And, uh, it's not necessary to sit back at home and shake your head and say how hopeless it is. Because you're basically, uh, you know, we've got to convince our people. The citizens, the consumers, the taxpayer that he does have a voice and he can be effective. We have to have a good PR program and a, uh, good factual program that can show the citizen how he can participate and be effective and convince him he can be effective.

BLANEY: Nader attorney, Mike Berman. And I'm Zane Blaney on KMYR.

[20:34]

ZANE BLANEY: Today on *The Public Affair*, Larry Barker follows the rare Whooping Crane to the Bosque del Apache.

[John Denver singing his song, "The Eagle and the Hawk": Come dance with the west wind and touch on the mountain tops / Sail over the canyons and up to the stars / And reach for the heavens and hope for the future / And all that we can be and not what we are]

LARRY BARKER: For perhaps the first time in almost a hundred and twenty years, the majestic, endangered Whooping Crane has appeared over the skies of New Mexico. As part of a historic experimental project, sponsored by the Department of Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service it is hoped a total of six Whooping Cranes will winter this year at the Bosque del Apache Wildlife Refuge south of Socorro.

Two weeks ago, the first one made its dramatic appearance. In 1974, there were only forty-nine of these birds in the wild, making them one of the rarest creatures in the world. The Whooping Crane flock spends its summers at Wood Buffalo National Park in northern Canada and then migrates twenty-five-hundred miles to winter at the Aransas Wildlife Refuge [Aransas national Wildlife Refuge] on the Texas Gulf coast. In an effort to increase their dwindling numbers, the Fish and Wildlife Service focused its attention on a very similar bird, the Greater Sandhill Crane.

The Sandhill Crane summers in Idaho and then migrates only eight hundred miles to New Mexico's Rio Grande Valley. This past spring, fourteen eggs were egg-napped from Whooping Crane mothers in Canada, flown to Grays Lake, Idaho, and placed under nests of specially-selected Sandhill Cranes. Of the fourteen eggs, nine hatched. The foster parents are raising the Whoopers as if they were their own. Now, the Whoopers are migrating with the Sandhills and are arriving in New Mexico. Public Information Officer Tom Smiley elaborates:

TOM SMILEY: Twenty-five-hundred miles compared to an eight hundred mile migration route cuts down on the hazards that these birds will face moving throughout the United States. Remember, in 1938, there was only fourteen of them left. The other reason why this flock was established, I think I should re-emphasize too is the fact that the Aransas Gulf Coast area there is a very big shipping area. Oil spills can occur, toxic chemicals can leak and we could wipe out the whole flock overnight. Also, hurricanes. So this is the reason why we want to establish two flocks. We've got, to quote, we don't have all our eggs in one basket.

BARKER: A Whooping Crane stands four and a half feet tall making it the tallest bird in America, and has a wingspan of seven to eight feet. Bosque del Apache Refuge manager, Dick Rigby, describes the Bosque's new arrival:

DICK RIGBY: We call him Corny, 'cause that's what he eats. He's the corn-eatingest thing I ever seen. He's quite a spectacular bird when he flies. He has a wingspan of about seven-and-half feet to eight feet. It's bigger than – he's bigger than his parents. He's a rust -- uh, has a lot of rusty feathers on his head and, uh, neck area. And going on down into the body. So, when he's standing, facing you, he's quite rusty in appearance. When he turns away from you, then you can see the white feathers. Now, when he spreads his wings and flies, he is principally a white bird with black wing tips and there's no mistaking him.

BARKER: It will be four or five years before anyone knows if this experiment will succeed. One of the big questions that remains to be answered is when the Whoopers in this new flock mature sexually, will they mate with other Whooping Cranes, or with their adopted family, the Sandhill Cranes? One of the big dangers the Whoopers will find here in New Mexico are coyotes. Rigby comments:

RIGBY: Uh, I have seen a Sandhill kill a coyote with one whack right in the eye. And, I thought he was going to have his neck wrung off by the time the coyote stopped thrashing, but then very unceremoniously put his foot up on his head and pulled out its head and went off and that was the end of that.

BARKER: According to Tom Smiley, another danger is from hunters in this area.

SMILEY: We want to make the hunters aware of this bird in the area. We do have snow geese hunting in the Rio Grande Valley, they do have black wing tips. There's a lot of difference in size, they also don't have the big legs dangling out. But we've made a very concerted effort with the State and with our agency to make people aware the fact that the Whooping Cranes are in the area and don't mistakenly shoot one.

BARKER: The Whooping Crane is an endangered species and to shoot one or at one is a violation of Federal law. Dick Rigby talks about the penalties:

RIGBY: If you kill an endangered species, uh, it's an automatic arrest situation. I don't have any prerogative but to arrest you. Um, you will go to jail and bail would be set, and I hope it's high so you don't get out because someone's gonna [laughs]-- Some conservationist will probably do you more harm than anything. And the fine can go up as high as twenty-thousand dollars and six months in jail.

[John Denver sings his song "The Eagle and the Hawk": And all of those who see me, all who believe in me / Share in the freedom I feel when I fly]

BARKER: And I'm Larry Barker on *The Public Affair*.

[26:24]

[end]