

When the Landscape Is Quiet Again: The Legacy of Art Link

Transcript

Garrison Keillor:

When the Landscape is Quiet Again.

Governor Arthur A. Link, October 11th, 1973.

We do not want to halt progress; we do not plan to be selfish and say North Dakota will not share its energy resources. We simply want to ensure the most efficient and environmentally sound method of utilizing our precious coal and water resources for the benefit of the broadest number of people possible.

And when we are through with that and the landscape is quiet again, when the draglines, the blasting rigs, the power shovels and the huge gondolas cease to rip and roar and when the last bulldozer has pushed the spoil pile into place and the last patch of barren earth has been seeded to grass or grain,

let those who follow and repopulate the land be able to say, our grandparents did their job well. The land is as good and in some cases, better than before.

Only if they can say this, will we be worthy of the rich heritage of our land and its resources.

Mike Jacobs:

A good story about Art that I've heard several times from several different people, about Art going into Alexander to buy a tractor. And he walked around the tractor, sat in the seat, kicked the tires, went home.

Next Saturday, Art shows up and walks around the tractor, kicks the tires and sits in it and goes home.

A couple weeks later, Art shows up at the implement dealership, walks around the tractor, kicks the tires, sits in it, goes home.

Fourth Saturday comes, Art drives up to the implement dealer and the dealer looks at him and says, "Damn it Art, buy the tractor!"

And so Art needed to be satisfied that he was doing the right thing.

Sarah Vogel:

I have a great story about Art and Grace.

I was on the campaign trail once and I was driving through North Dakota, and I stopped in a

restaurant. It happened to be the year of The Centennial and Art was chairman of The Centennial.

And this rest area on the side of the road was dirty. So Art picked up the phone and called it in. And they said, "Who's calling?" And he said, "It doesn't matter who's calling."

He wouldn't say he was ex-governor Link, he wouldn't pull rank. All he had to do was say, this is Governor Link, Chairman of the Centennial Committee, and this rest area needs to be cleaned."

I think he even had his tuxedo and old-fashioned outfit on.

Bob Valeu:

We were in the eastern part of the state and he had to be back the next day. And it was really a long, long drive, and I thought, I can take a shortcut. And it's like 12:30 at night and I'm running out of gas.

And of course, Art always would watch me on two things--speed limit and whether or not the tank was full. And this was one of the few times when Art really got mad at me. I mean, he really got mad!

Because what I had to do is, I had to call the local sheriff, who had to wake somebody up to get a key to allow us to go to the co-op station to get gas, and Art did not like that. We were being inconvenient to someone else, and it just wasn't the proper thing to do.

And he was right; I should have filled up back in Bismarck.

Congressman Earl Pomeroy:

This was a fellow that loved to have a burger and pie ala mode at 11:30, midnight, on his way home from these long trips.

Jim Fuglie:

I can recall an instance where we had been, I believe, to Leroy's Quonset at Esmond and to a dance.

And we're driving back to Bismarck. And Art and Grace were dozing off, off and on in the car, and I'm hoping that Art's dozing as we approach Sterling, so I can get by the truck stop and get us back to Bismarck, 'cause it's getting pretty late at night. Well, no such luck.

Darrell Dogan:

And there's a routine that he and Grace have worked out over the years, because they really do like pie and coffee. Now keep in mind, just three hours previous, we'd been at a banquet.

Earl Pomeroy:

Many, many nights, at point of exhaustion, come back, lights of Bismarck really look good, you know, you're about home.

Katherine Satrom:

We were driving back, maybe two or three hours. It got to be midnight; we were pretty tired.

Congressman Earl Pomeroy:

That's about the time Art Link starts looking for the truck stop and a place to load up with a nice big old breakfast, and again, a little dessert.

Katherine Satrom:

And the Governor says, "Let's pull over and have breakfast." We kind of roll our eyes.

Darrell Dorgan:

So as soon as you get in the car, it's, "Grace, how you doing? You ready for coffee?"

Jim Fuglie:

If you were smart, you made sure you were the one that was going to drive home.

Darrell Dorgan:

"Grace, what kind of pie do you like? You know, we'll buy."

Mike Jacobs:

I think Art Link is in some ways the quintessential American immigrant story.

Host: Clay Jenkinson:

Arthur A. Link was born on May 24th 1914 on a farm near Alexander in McKenzie County, North Dakota. Although he had five sisters, Arthur was the only son of John and Anna Link, who had immigrated to the United States from Germany in 1900. The farmhouse Art grew up in had no electricity, no indoor plumbing, and a hand pump that provided cold water. Yet he went on to become the Speaker of the North Dakota House of Representatives, a United States Congressman, and the Governor of North Dakota.

Like many sons of German immigrants, he left school after the eighth grade to make himself useful on the farm.

It would be tempting to call Art Link the last agrarian, but he would be the first to insist that even as the 21st century begins, North Dakota's social and economic foundation continues to be family farming.

He was the last governor of North Dakota who watched the returns on election night from his farmhouse.

Art Link:

I'm an offspring from immigrant parents. My father left his homeland, which is Sudetenland, which was a province in Czechoslovakia. He migrated then to America.

And my father was developing some respiratory problems. The doctor said, "John, if you want to live a long life, "find a place where you got lots of free air." He found it by coming to western North Dakota.

Host: Clay Jenkinson:

In 1939, Art Link married Grace Johnson, a girl from nearby Cartwright. Together they had five sons and a daughter. They've been married for nearly 70 years.

Grace Link:

That is the type of life that we really enjoyed. The freedom of living on the farm. We didn't have much in money when we were on the farm. Money isn't everything.

Art Link:

If you were there, I wouldn't mind taking you in the house, because there's a little bit of homeliness there that touches us every time we go there. We raised six kids in that little house.

Grace Link:

I've told Art not too long ago, I can go back in that kitchen and I could cook and work, be more comfortable than I am in any other kitchen. I enjoyed being out there on the farm, very much.

Art Link:

Sure, it's home, it's home. Yeah... I don't know how else you can express home.

Senator Byron Dorgan:

I think part of his political success was despite not being flashy at all, he was authentic. And I think people see authenticity and they could certainly see it in Art Link, no question about that.

And the other part of it is Grace Link was an important part of who he was. She was a real extension of the Link Administration because she came from identical stock and identical set of roots, and those of us who were around them understood that Grace Link played a very substantial role as well in the kinds of things that Art Link did and thought about, decisions he made.

Art Link:

That's the girl I fell in love with, that picture up there.

Clay Jenkinson:

This one?

Art Link:

Yup.

Clay Jenkinson:

You can remember that.

Art Link:

Oh, without question. That's the girl. . . . Charbonneau Hall.

Grace Link:

Oh, he was playing the violin for a dance in the Charbonneau Hall and my two older brothers took me along to the dance. And as it was with the hall, there were all these benches all around the hall, but never room enough for everybody to sit, so I was sitting on the edge of the stage along with one of my friends, and he reached down to my friend and kind of nudged her and said, "Who is that with you?" And she told him and then he turned and he said, "Now I know who you are!" And so that was really how we met.

Clay Jenkinson:

You were dancing.

Grace Link:

That's right.

Art Link:

And I didn't like who she was dancing with.

Clay Jenkinson:

Why not?

Art Link:

He didn't look like the right guy to be with her.

Clay Jenkinson:

She had you right from the beginning, Governor.

Art Link:

She really...

Mike Jacobs:

Art Link clearly is the product of a place and time that produced a unique person.

Jim Fuglie:

He was always conscious of where he came from. And knowing where he came from and how far he had come was a very conscious thing for him. He could stop and look back and say, boy, I grew up out there in that hardscrabble farm, and I got an eighth grade education, and I could be governor!

Sarah Vogel:

I suspect it's the land where they grew up, the conditions under which they grew up. If you didn't work together and didn't cooperate, you didn't have much of a society.

Joseph Satrom:

I think it's being so close to the land and understanding the land and its fragileness as prairie. And he is such a person of not only commitment to his morals and his ideals, he's also very much a person who's committed to what those ideals stand for, family and community and state. So he connects all of that in the fabric, I suppose, of his life and doesn't let go.

Congressman Earl Pomeroy:

In North Dakota I think we value the school of hard knocks above all other schools and so this is someone that had clearly, very substantial intellect, and the education, that was achieved in real life, not fancy institutions.

Grace Link:

He got his training from the Farmer's Union. He was a Farmer's Union Junior and he learned his public speaking through them.

Robert Carlson:

Art Link said that he never would have been in politics if it wouldn't have been for the training he got in Farmer's Union. And he said that so many times, I think he had natural skills that would have brought him there probably anyway.

Senator Kent Conrad:

When I think of Western North Dakota and I think of Art Link, they're intertwined because one has rubbed off on the other. And there's a fierce independence and a spirit of absolute honesty, and you see that in Art Link. He didn't need a bunch of advisors around to tell him what he thought. He didn't need to take a poll to figure out where he intended to lead our state. That wasn't Art Link; it came from inside. He knew what he believed; he knew what he stood for; he knew the values that he had been raised with and that was something unshakeable in Art Link.

You never had to wonder, is he going to come out on the right side? You knew that Art Link would think it through very carefully, very patiently, and he would consult Grace, and at the end, he would be there rock solid.

Host: Clay Jenkinson:

Although he is an exceptionally modest man, Art Link is a larger-than-life figure in the history of North Dakota. His life has been characterized by a series of incidents that have achieved a legendary, even a mythic status.

Like the Roman farmer citizen Cincinnatus, he was called to office by his fellow North Dakotans.

Like Mr. Smith, who went to Washington, he took up his seat in the United States Congress without for a moment forgetting his humble roots in the hardscrabble lands of Western North Dakota.

And then there are the legends!

He's said to have changed the oil in Chevrolet Impala on the streets of the nation's capitol, importing Farmer's Union oil for the purpose.

He invited complete strangers to the Governor's residence for coffee, without informing them that he was the sitting governor of North Dakota.

He stopped to change the tires of motorists stranded on North Dakota's highways.

And on October 11th 1973, in Mandan, North Dakota, he departed from his prepared text to deliver an impromptu speech that has been called his "Gettysburg Address."

These stories are widely reported, but they almost seem too good to be true.

Mike Jacobs:

He so represents what we thought we were. And so we just grasped on to it. I don't know to what extent Link was personally conscious of this capacity of his, but you know I'm a little suspicious because of the enduring quality of these things. They keep cropping up, and because some of them seem strangely manufactured.

I mean, if you're a congressman from North Dakota after all, don't you think it would make a great story to change the oil on your vehicle in the street in Washington? Don't you think that would be worth a vote or two?

Bob Valeu:

He actually changed the oil on his vehicle in the parking lot, Farmer's Union oil; he put on his coveralls, and go out in DC where they had their apartment, and he'd change his oil out there.

Harvey Link:

I wasn't aware that he changed his own oil. Now, driving the Number Five car, that was his favorite car, and he had a sentimental value to that car, that old Chevy that he had there. But I don't think that there was much that Dad did for the purpose of endearing himself to the electorate.

Jim Fuglie:

You know, you've got to understand where he came from. His father was an immigrant; they settled in some of the worst dirt in North Dakota, and he came from hardscrabble roots. And to get to where he got to, was a pretty incredible climb. And an ordinary man doesn't make that climb. It takes something; it takes more than ambition, it takes talent, it takes thoughtfulness, and it takes the ability to really believe that you can make a difference.

Art always believed he could make a difference. I know that about him. He always believed he could make a difference.

And so, if that's ambition, that's ambition.

Harvey Link:

I mean, obviously, every politician seeks acceptance. Most people seek acceptance. But I don't think that he ever did it to manipulate or to do that, and so that was just kind of the way Dad was.

Sarah Vogel:

He was quite the politician.

Mike Jacobs:

It's hard to see Art Link as a calculating individual. But when you see these stories and these sorts of myths that have accrued to him, you have to wonder whether he didn't understand that he had this capacity and to use it to his advantage.

Art Link:

I believe that!

Clay Jenkinson:

Is it true that you changed your own oil in Washington, DC?

Art Link:

No.

Jim Fuglie:

He might have swam the creek though.

Darrell Dorgan:

A neighbor drove to the creek bank and hollered at Art across the way that "You've been nominated," that's how he found out.

Congressman Earl Pomeroy:

I have heard that one, that's a great story! He goes out and this neighbor hollers across the creek, that he's just been nominated for the state legislature.

Grace Link:

This fellow, who happened to be a neighbor from where I grew up, just came and walked down the hill, because it was rainy and muddy and stood on the other side of the creek and called over to Art and said, "We nominated you for the state legislature."

Congressman Earl Pomeroy:

The NPL, the Nonpartisan League had this old adage, "The office seeks the man."

Art Link:

Antelope Creek was flooding; I couldn't get to the county caucus because the only road we had was a rock crossing over the creek. We couldn't cross it at that time, and I just didn't go. And about 4:00 in the afternoon, Art McCall, who was a delegate from Sioux Township, which incidentally is the township where my good wife Grace was born and raised, he came with a car and he said, "Art, I just stopped to tell you that we nominated you to be our candidate for the legislature from this district."

Jim Fuglie:

"Those who have the ability to lead," Governor Link has told me, "ought to accept that responsibility." He was told that as a young man. I think that he was a typical Nonpartisan Leaguer and that the office did seek the man, that indeed, when someone called him from across the creek, and said, "It's time for you to serve," he accepted that responsibility.

Host: Clay Jenkinson:

In 1970, Art Link ran for a seat in the United States Congress to represent the Western District of North Dakota. Back then, we qualified for two congressional seats.

Although this is when Art Link first became a household name, he had already spent decades in public service.

Mike Jacobs:

As a democrat, serving 14 years as Minority Floor Leader and Speaker of the House in 1965, he was also a member of the Randolph Township Board, from 1942 to 1972, the McKenzie County Welfare Board, from 1948 to 1969, the Randolph School Board from 1945...

Grace Link:

Art, as a legislator, was a very quiet individual. He did his work, but he did not get the

publicity that a person running all over the state needs to get.

Bob Valeu:

Politics, in sort of the pure sense of politics, wasn't his suit.

Darrell Dorgan:

I think I went to work for Art Link on the 16th of September 1970, and I was essentially his driver, his gofer, took care of the press, when we were traveling around North Dakota. He was running for congress and he had certain ideals that he was imbued with, that by golly he was going to take to Washington, and it really was a Mr. Smith goes to Washington type deal.

Grace Link:

When he started to run for congress, he didn't have any name identification, even though he'd been speaker of the house. Nobody seemed to know who he was.

Bob Valeu:

He wasn't like a typical politician. He wouldn't go and just walk up to you and hold out his hand and say, "Hi, I'm Art Link, running for congress." That just was not his

nature.

Byron Dorgan:

Well look, this was a period when Elvis was alive. Art Link was not Elvis, Art Link was not a rock star, he didn't send shivers through the bones of an audience, but this was a different time in politics. This was a time when people were closer to their government. They really did trust their government, felt that their government cared about them.

Bob Valeu:

And I'll never forget, we're campaigning, and I said, "Art, look, I'm going to fill up the car. "Why don't you go inside and just shake hands?" I had to nudge him to do that-- honestly. And he said, "Well, okay." So he goes in, and I'll never forget this, I walk in behind him and he's talking to this young gentleman behind the stand there, and the young man says, "I know you, you're Art Link."

Art Link:

Seeing as many people as possible and inviting as many people as I can to vote for me.

Bob Valeu:

And it was just like a light had turned on and from that day on, Art never had a problem in meeting, greeting, and extending himself to people.

Senator Byron Dorgan:

And he won that seat in the U.S. House and moved to Washington, DC, which I think was a very big move for him because in many ways, his roots remained in western North Dakota, northwestern North Dakota. Even as he became a member of the state legislature and moved to Bismarck for a certain period of time, his roots were still in ranching in northwestern North Dakota.

Grace Link:

Neither one of us ever had any idea that he was going to be doing what he did. As an only son on that farm, that's where we expected, and I expected to live my life on that farm. I didn't have any wishes for anything more than that.

Darrell Dorgan:

Incredibly enough, people today would find this, they wouldn't believe it, but the day after the election, when he had defeated Robert McCarney by something like 560 votes, he called the office in Bismarck and he talked to Bob Valeu and I, and he said, "How much money do congressmen make? Am I going to make enough there to live on?" He really didn't know. Now think about that--he really didn't know! When it came time to move to Washington, DC, they loaded up the farm truck, car, and one of the sons drove and away they went. It really was a "Mr. Smith goes to Washington."

Harvey Link:

Did you ever have it up to 100, Dad?

Host: Clay Jenkinson:

By the end of the 1960's, Art Link had built a long and distinguished career in public service. But his place in the history of the Great Plains will always be measured by his time as the Governor of North Dakota. He was elected in 1972.

Grace Link:

When they started asking him to run, they had asked him to run for governor earlier and he had said no because of the family.

Bob Valeu:

The democrats had been in charge for 12 years, a lot of people had been groomed to succeed in the event that Bill Guy were to retire. That was within the Democratic Party, let alone the circumstances in the Republican side, in which people felt that it was long overdue. And Bill Guy just said, "Bob, there's just no way that he'll be able to win." And I said, "Well Governor, I disagree, I think we can do it." And of course then, when I left, I knew that I really had a situation on my hands here because things were going to get difficult, politically.

Congressman Earl Pomeroy:

So back he comes for this uphill race for governor, and it was kind of a long-odds deal. Three weeks out you wouldn't give him any kind of chance.

Bob Valeu:

Then Lieutenant Governor Larson, who was his opponent, they were both at a meeting, and it was in Grand Forks. I remember this so well because it was so evident what was transpiring. The young lieutenant governor, bright, very articulate and the whole bit, had to leave. It was sort of like hi, I'm here, good-bye and gone. And he left; he said his words and then he left. And Art stayed, and of course, that really made an impression on those folks, and it made an impression on Art. And I can remember going to meetings in which Art Link--he always insisted that we be there early. And he wanted to meet everyone, and he did. And he was the last one out.

Senator Byron Dorgan:

Unlike some years, where you've got things just collapsing for the party in power, a real tailwind suddenly benefiting those down the ticket, George McGovern didn't even carry South Dakota. So for Art Link to somehow close this gap, and becoming governor of North Dakota, it was a real political achievement.

Art Link [file footage]:

I think probably, Dewey, the most interesting experience is the realization that the governor's office is certainly the nerve center. It's the focal point of the entire state. It seems that the governor's office is close enough to the people so that they feel very comfortable about approaching the governor and his staff on a wide variety of problems and questions. A very significant realization too, is the fact that, to use an old cliché, "The buck stops here."

Bob Valeu:

There were two things that he and I talked about when he became governor. And the two things were, I want young people in my administration and I want women. And one of the first appointments that he made, in terms of his own internal office, was Katherine Satrom.

Katherine Satrom:

There are two reasons, and I actually made note of that, I think one reason is that he received from his father this great feeling of justice. So equality for all people would certainly fit into that for Art Link, and did. And the second thing, I think he had such a high respect for many women in his life, his sisters and his wife, Grace. He just had this high esteem for women, and I don't think it occurred to him to not think that they should have equal rights with men.

Art Link [file footage]:

It is difficult to believe that women have had the right to vote for only 53 years.

Katherine Satrom:

And I think it surprised some people. I know it had a big influence on the legislature.

Wayne Sanstead:

He was insightful; insightful and so fast to come to the nub of the question.

He would get to it if anybody would and I think some of those folks coming in there talking to him thought, ha, this will be a walk, we'll just go in there and we'll lay this all out and it will be done. Oh no, it was immediately put on hold until the governor had every assurance that there was something happening for the citizens and the people of North Dakota.

Host: Clay Jenkinson:

Art Link's two terms as governor were dominated by a world energy crisis

that played out part of its drama on the prairies of Western North Dakota.

There was serious talk of coal slurry pipelines all the way to Arkansas, a proliferation of coal-fired electrical generation plants, massive diversions of the waters of Lake Sakakawea and dozens of coal gasification plants.

Some said North Dakota would, some said it "should," become a national sacrifice zone to meet the country's suddenly desperate energy demands.

Although Art Link's governorship will always be remembered for the great energy debate of the 1970s, other important initiatives occurred during his tenure.

Governor Link helped establish the North Dakota Heritage Center. He obtained public funding for kindergarten. The North Dakota Legislature passed and he signed the Equal Rights Amendment. The State Laboratory and new chambers for the North Dakota Supreme Court were built.

He championed state ownership of the magnificent Cross Ranch on the Missouri River. And notoriously, Governor Link vetoed a bill that would have lowered the legal drinking age to 19.

And by the way, Elvis Presley died on August 16th 1977.

Art Link:

I think it's circumstances that challenged my beliefs that were honed out on that farm. It was important that he was governor during that time because as this state moved down the road towards a much, much greater effort with respect to energy, the question was not "whether" there was going to be additional energy development, the question was, how were we going to develop this energy?

Art Link: [file footage]:

I have no intention of allowing North Dakota to become a sacrifice area in order to run television sets and air conditioners on the east and west coasts.

Mike Jacobs:

Both sides thought that the one was exclusive of the other. And that if the development went ahead, you sort of said good-bye to the environment. If the development didn't go ahead, you sort of said good-bye to success and prosperity and all of that. And I think that "When the Landscape is Quiet Again" speaks directly to that point.

Governor John Hoeven:

Energy's a big thing for our state and it's going to be bigger, no question about it, but we do have to have good environmental stewardship. I believe he tried to strike that balance, although again, at the time, if you go back and look at some of the debates in the legislature and just the public debate at that time, different schools of thought and there's no perfect way to do it.

Katherine Satrom:

The coal gasification company was surprised to meet resistance and not to be welcomed with open arms.

Jim Fuglie:

Governor Link was caught in-between those people in the environmental community and the energy industry, which was his friends in the co-op movement. The co-ops were the power generators in the '70s. They were building the power plants. So he had to walk that line between his friends on either side.

Former Senator Quentin Burdick [file footage]:

Well there's no question about it, we have an energy crisis in the offing, as you know. Our fossil fuel supplies are running down and we have to use something like this. And I think the lignite coal supplies of this state, which are enormous in amount, will be used, either for the production of gas or other fuels, and I think Western North Dakota is going to be a real development area.

Robert Carlson:

But there was a real fight about coal mining in Western North Dakota. And I was one of those, as a young person, who loved North Dakota and loved agriculture, who didn't want to see, I guess I was a young traditionalist. I didn't want to see the state ripped up for a "one-time harvest" and I think Art Link coined that phrase.

News Reporter [file footage]:

The governor opened his special message by saying, "I'm not here to confront the legislature or to find fault, or to criticize what has or has not been done to date, but," he said, "a feeling of increasing urgency has developed in my mind to the point of requesting this meeting." The urgency I am referring to is that of establishing an adequate severance tax on coal for future decades in North Dakota.

Jim Fuglie:

He used the power of the governor's chair. As Chairman of the Water Commission, he was able to write into permits requirements for reclamation, requirements for water use, really pushing the limits of the governor's office.

Art Link [file footage]:

In the development of coal, you are the business agents for the people. The resources of air, water, land, and coal belong to the people of North Dakota. If we sell these products economic and environmental depression in the decades ahead. The people are depending on this legislature. You are drawing the blueprint, which will establish the selling price of our resources. Don't under price that which belongs to the people.

Jim Fuglie:

The conditions that he attached, really set the stage for environmental protection in North Dakota into the 1980s. The legislature was forced, ultimately, to adopt those things that he had written in as regulations, into law.

Art Link [file footage]:

Postponing the job won't make it easier; it could make it impossible.

Sarah Vogel:

This spirit resulted in the adoption of quite a few laws that saved North Dakota from becoming just a big pit. That was the plan; that was the plan, to make North Dakota an energy sacrifice area. And then they bumped up against Art and others.

Senator Byron Dorgan:

Well, there are all kinds of different people that aspire to leadership, and a different governor might well have said, you know what, this is economic activity, just Katie bar the door, come on in, we love you. And by the way, don't worry about these requirements, we understand it's costly, so we're not going to impose them. Some would say, and they did at the time, would say to Art Link, this is anti-business, well, it wasn't.

Art Link [file footage]:

I think good business means adequate conservation of our resources, concern for our environment. I think one of the healthiest business climates that we've got going for us in North Dakota today is the fact that we've got a healthy environment and that these are the concerns and basic considerations that I have.

Art Link:

It just had to be; we had to see that if you removed 80 or 90 feet of topsoil to get the coal to burn and make electricity, and you destroy that much productive soil, it had to be put back or we wouldn't do it.

Bob Valeu:

Art didn't say no, he just said we're going to do this responsibly.

Darrell Dorgan:

But it was just a gut-wrenching fight and in more than 25 years of being a reporter, I've never seen anything that was as hard-fought as that. Feelings were very raw, and as I said, I saw grown men cry out in the hallway of the legislature so much pressure was being put upon them by utility companies or cooperatives or that kind of thing.

Art Link:

You'd better do what's right. These were difficult times. You're all right, but I said, "Jake, that's your problem, this is my problem." "You're asking us to sell a part of North Dakota. And North Dakota is not for sale."

Jim Kusler:

The energy industry misunderstood. Governor Link was very much for coal development, but having been on the inside looking out, I never for one moment doubted Governor Link's commitment to the development of our natural resources. He just wanted them done in a way

that made sense for the people of North Dakota.

Mike Jacobs:

I think Art's sense was we're going to have to do this. They've got us here; we can't fight them, we can't hold them off. And so we're going to do this deliberately, and when we get done, the landscape will be quiet again. So there's a fatalism in this, I think, that is, I mean, it's seen as an environmentalist credo, but in fact, it's a concession that the development is going to occur and then we have to make the best of it afterwards.

Jim Fuglie:

I think the words "cautious orderly development" became the phrase of the 1970's. Development was certainly a part of it, because there was going to be development, there were going to be power plants built, there was going to be coal mined.

Bob Valeu:

Now here we go again on another energy boom, and what we have before us is a statement that we should read again, because there will probably be those who once again say, we need to let go, we need this independence and be willing to give up.

But if you read what Art is saying in this statement, we can't, we've got to hold on. He's saying that this land is for all generations, not just our generation, and we have a responsibility to care for it and leave it better than it was left for us. And that's the part of the Art Link legacy that I think is so critical. It's about leaving things better for the next

generation, rather than just reaping everything for ourselves.

Host: Clay Jenkinson:

Although the terms of the environmental debate have shifted dramatically since the 1970's, from reclamation practices to global climate change, for Arthur A. Link, the story always begins and ends with North Dakota's grass and grain.

Jim Fuglie:

What I know is that he was given a speech to read at an REC annual meeting and found it wanting and said, "I can do better than that." And so he penned some lines while he was waiting to be introduced. I think those lines are probably some of the most important words ever written in North Dakota's history, and it began with, "When the landscape is quiet again," I think.

Art Link:

"We do not want to halt progress, we do not plan to be selfish and say North Dakota will not share its energy resources."

Senator Byron Dorgan:

I recall being at a banquet one evening, I think it was at a banquet when he wrote on a menu, a verse, a whole series of verses which then became a part of that which was published. It kind of described the credo of Art Link with respect to development. And it's beautifully done. It's the kind of thing that you would think if you were to sit down and write prose, Hemingway once said that "Genius is in the seventh draft." Well you would think, well maybe this was drafted 10 or 15 times, because it is beautifully done and represents a value that is extraordinary, a value system that just transcends a lot of things. And yet, Art Link just sat down in kind of a plain spoken way, and wrote down how he felt.

And what he wrote down in terms of how he felt, became a piece of prose that is elegant and beautiful, and I think stands as a testament to who he was and what he did.

Congressman Earl Pomeroy:

This is Lincolnesque. "When the Landscape is Quiet Again" is Art Link's Gettysburg Address. And the words really captured, those of us who know Art, these are transcendent words for generations of politicians. But those of us who know Art, know it came so from his heart.

Jim Fuglie:

There were going to be 22 coal gasification plants in Western North Dakota, and that was about this time. I think Art probably knew that when he wrote this speech, that we were facing the biggest threat ever to our environment. 22 coal gasification plants--unthinkable.

I think you'll always be able to look back on that period and say, that was a time in North Dakota history when a leader came forward that saved things for the future, that understood we shouldn't just have a one-time harvest, that understood there were generations to come that we had a responsibility to honor. And Art Link had that vision and that integrity

and that decency.

Art Link:

"And when we are through with that, and the landscape is quiet again, when the draglines, the blasting rigs, the power shovels, and the huge gondolas cease to rip and roar, and when the last bulldozer has pushed the last spoil pile into place, and the last patch of barren earth has been seeded to grass or grain, let those who follow and repopulate the land be able to say, 'Our grandparents did their job well.'"

Jim Fuglie:

He needed to tell his friends in that audience that we're going to go ahead, but we need to be very, very careful, and we need to do this right. But what he did is he found a way to say it emotionally and not sternly; he wasn't lecturing. He was making an emotional connection when he said, "Let those who follow and repopulate the land." What is more important to a North Dakotan than to leave a legacy for our children? There is nothing in anyone in that audience's mind that was more important. Those were the most important words that he said, "When your grandchildren . . . he didn't say when your grandchildren, he said, "when our grandchildren." "When our grandchildren." Boy, I bet you could have cut the air with a knife when he said that line.

Art Link:

"This land is as good, and in some cases, better than before. Only if they can say this, will we be worthy of the rich heritage of our land and its resources."

Clay Jenkinson:

So how do you feel about that 34 years later?

Art Link:

Feel darn good!

Host: Clay Jenkinson:

Governor Link stood for reelection in 1980, the year of the national Ronald Reagan landslide. He lost that election to North Dakota Attorney General Alan Olson. He took the loss very personally and very hard, but he soon regrouped and returned to the arena as a senior statesman. He fought the normalization of gambling in North Dakota.

He was the chairman of the North Dakota Centennial Commission in 1989. He has been a steady champion of the North Dakota Heritage Center. He became one of the state's leading philanthropists.

Art Link has been, by universal agreement, one of the best former governors in North Dakota history.

Governor John Hoeven:

Art and Grace have come to events since they've been governor and first lady, more so than anyone can think of. If something's going on, they show up. And so that's a commitment to the state that to them is natural and real, it's genuine. I mean, they live it. And there's no pretense to it. I don't think they're looking for anything from it, it's just who they are.

Jim Fuglie:

Quietly, in the late 1980s into the 1990s and even in the 21st century, Art and Grace became probably some of the biggest philanthropists in North Dakota. People don't know this about them. My guess is they've given millions of dollars to good works in North Dakota.

Congressman Earl Pomeroy:

Politics at its best, you have leaders emerge, merge where they grow up, they internalize the values and the ethos of the place and bring all that as they step forward or events propel them forward, toward more of a public application of their talent. That sure happened with Art.

He was born of hard-working stock up there in the northwestern part of North Dakota and worked very hard, fell in love with a lovely and talented, intelligent local girl. They set about creating their lives together in the prairie of Alexander.

They didn't anticipate, I think, the kind of public role, really public icon status they'd ultimately achieve.

Host: Clay Jenkinson:

In the summer of his 94th year, Art Link and his inseparable companion Grace, made a sojourn to the state capital to revisit old haunts and to meet with the rising generation upon who's shoulders his legacy rests.

For some of these young people, it was their first meeting with a governor of North Dakota.

Young People's Voices:

"When the last bulldozer has..."

"...better than before."

Host: Clay Jenkinson:

They came to pay homage to one of the most venerable figures in North Dakota.

Art Link:

You have good grammar and good enunciation!

Young People's Voices:

Thank you!

Thank you for everything you've done, we appreciate it.

Host: Clay Jenkinson:

But as always, Governor Link did not lose the opportunity to explain his vision of North Dakota.

Art Link:

Thank you all for coming, and Grace and I are very delighted to meet each of you individually. And we're waiting for your questions. I think you want to know a little bit about me.

Host: Clay Jenkinson:

Governor Arthur A. Link, delivered his most famous speech, "When the Landscape is Quiet Again," almost 40 years ago. Yet it is still widely recalled with affection and the deepest respect, displayed on the walls of offices and private homes, and invoked in arguments as the final word on the agrarian foundation of North Dakota life.

And now, as a second and much more dramatic energy boom comes to the northern plains, Art Link's words about the timelessness of grass and grain are more than a historical legacy.

"When the Landscape is Quiet Again," is a cry of warning, by a son of the North Dakota soil whose authenticity is beyond question. It is not merely a statement of who we thought we were, but also a vision of who we might still be.

How deep the legacy of Arthur A. Link is rooted in the North Dakota soil, depends upon those whose lives are still largely before them.

Singer Chuck Suchy:

♪ Where the sky is high as heaven

And easily some are lost,

Without clear direction

Heedful of the cost;

Born by those whose shadows

To earth have yet to fall |

Yields the land,

Wielding hand,
Father for us all.

With a heart of a dreamer,
Eyes keen for truth,
Aging wise redeemer,
Perpetuating youth;

Tempered in the spirit
By the lone coyote's call,

Yields the land,
Wielding hand,
Father for us all.

Hand on the tiller,
Steady as she goes;
That winds through the tall grass,
Tomorrow gladly knows.

Winds through the tall grass,
Tomorrow gladly knows !

Father for us all,
Brother in the soil,
Mothering in toil.

Father for us all.♫

Host: Clay Jenkinson:

Thomas Jefferson's most famous pronouncement was, "Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God."

That has been the creed of Arthur A. Link and the chosen people who live
out where the landscape is quiet.

Art Link:

Life is too short. I'm at the end of it and I can't believe it.

Grace Link:

You've got too many things you want to do yet. Can't go to, won't be able to...

Clay Jenkinson:

If you had 50 more years, how would you spend them? I haven't gone into that. It's just the fact, well, one of the things is . . . to clean up the garage!

Jim Fuglie:

What I know is that he was being interviewed by a reporter from the Fargo Forum and Art was notorious for staying up all night long and nodding off in his office. And then in the middle of a very long question, from a pretty snooty reporter, Art just nodded off in the middle of the question! And the reporter sat there and waited and Art didn't wake up. So the reporter left.

Senator Kent Conrad:

He would always want to stop on the way back to Bismarck at around midnight to have breakfast.

Senator Byron Dorgan:

You know, it's only midnight and Art Link says no, we've got to stop at the truck stop here at Sterling and have breakfast. And you'd think, oh, not again, but we stopped.

Senator Kent Conrad:

Another thing I remember is, he never wanted to go more than 55 miles an hour. And of course, I was young and I was impatient, wanting to get someplace quickly, but it was very clear, we were not going more than 55 miles an hour.

Senator Byron Dorgan:

My picture memory of him is eating his eggs and his toast, and taking his toast at the end of his fork and scraping every bit of moisture left from the egg yolk on his plate, so that when his plate was clean, it was dishwasher clean. And that's what I remember about the value system of Art Link eating breakfast!

Senator Kent Conrad:

But Art is not a man to waste money, not his own money, not the people's money, not anybody's money. Art Link is famously tight with a buck.

Mike Jacobs:

He basically changed the oil on the street in Washington, crawled under the car, took out the plug and drained the oil. And all the while, talking to somebody from back home.

Art Link:

I don't remember doing it, maybe I did it, maybe I didn't.

As Will Rogers said, "Take care of the land, boys, they ain't making any more of it!"

I believe that!

The End
