

Has Ken Salazar Lost His Way?

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“The land and the water and the people of the San Luis Valley have defined my life...Everything goes back to that place of the ranch.”

Rutinel: Meat comes from, “tortured and slaughtered innocent animals”
Animal agriculture/beef is, “a horrific, exploitative industry.”



Has Ken Salazar Lost His Way? Why Is He Endorsing a Known Animal Rights Activist?

Former U.S. Senator, Secretary of the Interior, Colorado Attorney General, Ambassador, and prominent Colorado rancher Ken Salazar has endorsed Manny Rutinel for Congress in Colorado’s 8th Congressional District. Given Salazar’s own history and work supporting agriculture, his endorsement raises a question that Colorado’s farmers, ranchers, and livestock producers have every right to ask:

Did Ken Salazar fully investigate Manny Rutinel’s long record of animal-rights activism and opposition to animal agriculture before deciding that Rutinel would “represent everyone”?

Rutinel has a long history of animal-rights activism from his teenage years through college, Yale Law School, and his 2023 appointment to Colorado’s state legislature. Now, Rutinel is seeking to represent Colorado’s 8th District, an agricultural region with ranches, feedlots, dairies, and businesses. Animal products in the district totaled about \$1.2 billion in 2022, including the large JBS beef plant in Greeley. For Salazar, this contradiction is especially notable.

Ken Salazar Says the Ranch Shaped His Life

Salazar isn't just casually linked to agriculture; he grew up on his family's ranch in Colorado's San Luis Valley and served as Colorado Attorney General, U.S. Senator, and Secretary of the Interior. In an *On Land* interview, Salazar stated: “Everything goes back to that place of the ranch.” He described the land, water, and people of the Valley as shaping his identity as a young person, student, rancher, and public official, calling these principles the “north star” of his life. Given this context, Salazar’s endorsement of Rutinel is worth examining.

Did Salazar Know Rutinel's History?

Salazar emphasized the importance of working agriculture for America's conservation, crediting farmers and ranchers for responsible land stewardship, and stated, “We cannot have a conservation future in the U.S. without incorporating working lands in a very significant way.” He appears to view working farms and ranches as indispensable.

In contrast, Rutinel, during his undergraduate studies in Florida, participated in a PETA demonstration against beef production and, later, at Yale Law School, labeled animal agriculture a “horrific, exploitative industry,” advocating carbon markets to shift farmers toward plant production.

These differences reflect contrasting attitudes toward the legitimacy and future of raising animals for food.

Rutinel Has A Record of Supporting Animal Liberation and Veganism

The *Colorado Sun* reported in July 2026 that deleted Reddit posts showed Rutinel supporting an 'animal liberation' framework, where animals would no longer be raised or slaughtered for food. In 2017, he envisioned veganism reducing livestock until an “animal liberation amendment” allowed remaining animals to live in sanctuaries or as pets. He also asked, 'Can't we all just adopt a r/vegan lifestyle already?' and described meat as coming from “tortured and slaughtered innocent animals.”

These beliefs imply the eventual end of livestock farming, which is significant when voters consider a candidate asking ranchers, dairymen, and livestock producers to elect him to Congress.

Rutinel's Beliefs About Animal Rights Began at Age 14 and Haven't Changed

Rutinel explained that his beliefs began after watching a documentary at 14. He has stated that he no longer holds animal-rights views and now eats meat. But do we really believe that?

He told *The Colorado Sun* that conversations with ranchers changed his perspective. True, people can change their views. But describing this as a “youthful” belief omits the full timeline.

Rutinel's activism continued into adulthood: participating in PETA protests against beef, calling animal agriculture a “horrific, exploitative industry” in 2021, testifying for policy shifts, and founding Climate Refarm to promote plant-based diets and policy changes. This is a record of his beliefs extending into his professional life.

2023: Rutinel Cites Animal Treatment in Agriculture as Motivation for Political Involvement. Didn't Salazar Get the Memo?

Ken Salazar may need to address this: In October 2023, just days after Rutinel's appointment to the Colorado legislature, he spoke at the University of Denver law school. According to *The Colorado Sun*, Rutinel cited animal treatment in agriculture as a reason for his political involvement. He addressed the concern from meat and oil industries about his motives, saying, “Maybe they're right. Maybe they should be a little scared.”

Rutinel called two Denver ballot measures, banning slaughterhouses and fur sales, “really awesome,” though both were rejected. This was just before he became a legislator.

Then, in fall 2024, after he was appointed Colorado State Representative, he spoke at the Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF) Student Convention, discussing the use of Trojan Horse tactics to infiltrate companies and government.

Rutinel's beliefs are clearly no longer just "youthful ideas."

But Salazar Says Struggling Family Farms and Ranches Need Help

How does Salazar reconcile those beliefs with endorsing Rutinel - a politician whose adult record includes advocating a global transition away from animal products, and whose earlier stated vision contemplated animal agriculture eventually disappearing?

The stark contrast between Manny Rutinel's true ideological agenda and Ken Salazar's apparent beliefs becomes even harder to overlook. Salazar told *On Land* that rural America was becoming "forgotten America." He described communities shrinking and questioned whether some would survive another 20 or 30 years. He spoke personally about growing up poor on a ranch his family had occupied for 150 years and about how difficult it was for that ranch to support eight children. His conclusion was that society needs to find ways to keep family farms and ranches economically viable and to recognize the benefits they provide.

Colorado agriculture should ask Ken Salazar for clarification and hold him accountable for endorsing this candidate.

Rutinel Says He Has Changed; the Record Shows a Different Story

Rutinel now says his views are "nuanced" and is cosplaying as a cowboy, wearing a cowboy hat backward most of the time. That claim does not eliminate legitimate questions about the timing and depth of his so-called "nuanced" view.

The Colorado Sun reports that Rutinel cannot pinpoint when his views on animal agriculture changed. That's significant because his documented activism wasn't merely a blip in time. He is on record protesting in a PETA costume and participating in other events protesting animal agriculture at the University of Florida (2016). It extended through Yale in 2021 and far into 2024, as an appointed Colorado State Representative.

Did Ken Salazar Perform Due Diligence?

Before putting his name and reputation behind Rutinel, did Salazar know about Rutinel's:

- Participation in PETA activism?
- Description of animal agriculture as a "horrific, exploitative industry"?
- Advocacy for dramatically shifting global consumption away from animal products?
- Work through Climate Refarm promoting plant-based institutional food systems?
- Support for an eventual animal-liberation framework?
- Statements envisioning livestock disappearing from food production and remaining animals being placed in sanctuaries?
- Alliances with the Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF), Mercy for Animals, Earthjustice and HUSU (Humane World for Animals).
- 2023 statement that animal treatment in agriculture helped motivate him to enter politics?
- Praise for Denver's proposed slaughterhouse ban?
- Joke, as concerns circulated among meat and energy interests, that "maybe they should be a little scared"?
- 2024 appearance on the ALDF panel and his recorded comments about taking steps in animal rights activism that have a tenfold impact compared to just individual actions, like diet change?

If Salazar knew all of these things about Rutinel, Colorado's agricultural community deserves to understand why none of it prevented his endorsement.

If he didn't know it, then Colorado's agricultural community should be asking why he didn't.

The Bigger Picture

Rutinel's radical animal-- and environmental-activist record would be consequential for a congressional candidate anywhere. It is particularly consequential in Colorado's 8th District. The district encompasses thousands of farms and ranches, feedlots, dairies, and major meat-processing operations.

Animal agriculture generated roughly \$1.2 billion within the 8th District in 2022. Statewide, agriculture represents an estimated **\$47 billion industry supporting nearly 200,000 jobs**, while Weld County is Colorado's most agriculturally productive county.

If this endorsement focused on party politics or identity rather than Rutinel's record and the district's interests, Colorado's agricultural community deserves to know. Ken Salazar spent much of his life telling Colorado that working lands, family ranches, and rural communities matter. His endorsement of Manny Rutinel gives those same communities every reason to ask whether they still matter when politics enters the equation.