

An Oral History Interview

with

John J. Rhodes (part 2)

Mesa, Arizona

conducted by
Peter Steere

March 19, 1997

The Morris K. Udall Oral History Project
University of Arizona Library, Special Collections

© 1997
The University of Arizona Library
Arizona Board of Regents
All Rights Reserved

PS: Mr. Rhodes, I wanted to go back into the fifties again. We left off with talking about the Bracero Bill. There was another issue that came up--and you can correct me if my timing's wrong--fifties, early sixties--in relation to right-to-work legislation. Could you talk a little bit about the right-to-work legislation? I know it became somewhat of a political hot potato for Mo, I think, at one point in time. Can you talk a little bit about your involvement in right-to-work legislation?

JR: Yes. After World War II, and after the Republican Eightieth Congress, which is when the Taft-Hartley Act was passed, there the AFL-CIO really went all out to try to repeal Taft-Hartley in general, and particularly that part of Taft-Hartley which made it possible for the states to have right-to-work laws. In other words, it negated the preemption doctrine. The federal preemption doctrine, as you know, is that part of the Constitution which says that if there is a conflict between state laws and the Constitution, that the Constitution and federal law would be supreme. So anyway, there were all these efforts on the part of the AFL-CIO to repeal that. In the meantime, Arizona adopted a right-to-work law by initiative. And I think that was in 1948 or 1950--I forget which--and it was not only adopted, but two years later there was an initiative offered to repeal it, and it failed. So Arizona was a right-to-work state--still is. And the Democrats, of course, were in favor of repealing the whole Taft-Hartley Law, and particularly the part having to do with right-to-work. I was a target, certainly, because of the fact that I was on the original board that put the Right-To-Work Law together and got it done. Organized labor was out to get me, practically every election, until the Central Arizona Project came about. And after the Supreme Court decision in which it became apparent that Arizona had rights to the water, the people who were running organized labor in the state said, "There's no reason to waste money on this guy. Let's just leave him alone. And after all, he's gonna be important in getting the money for the CAP, and that means jobs for us!" (chuckles) So from then on, I had very little problem as far as reelection was concerned. And I imagine if Mo, being as important as he was, probably the people who.... Well, actually, I think by the sixties, right-to-work was not as much of an issue as it had been before. The unions would still like to have done away with it, but I think they realized they were spinning their wheels. In other words, I don't think right-to-work was as much of an issue for Mo as it had been for me.

PS: You don't recall any specific conversations you had with Mo or Stewart about right-to-work legislation?

JR: No. I don't think we would have brought it up.

PS: Mo Udall is known for his legislative record--not exclusively, but certainly very strongly--on a wide range of environmental issues of one sort or another. Do you remember any specific conversations you had with Mo about certain environmental issues, certain bills, or....

JR: No. The main things I recall would be wilderness areas and things like that, which were very important in the sixties and seventies, and in fact several laws were passed affecting Arizona and setting out wilderness areas, and Mo was very much involved in

that, and I was too. I was in favor of the wilderness areas. I think there were one or two that I was a little leery about, because they were in areas that were high for water production, and I think the Salt River Project was worried about some of 'em. But mainly, that is what I recall in the thrust of legislation, especially in the Interior Committee, in Mo's tenure.

PS: Were there any ways in which you influenced Mo, or Mo influenced you on environmental or wilderness issues?

JR: No.

PS: No specific memories of conversations relating to....

JR: No. We might very well have had some conversations about the coal-fired plant at Page. But I don't think that we would have been on opposite sides. The interesting thing about that coal-fired plant, of course, is that it was put there practically at the request of the conservationists because it was going to provide the electric power for the CAP, which otherwise would have been at Bridge Canyon. I'm sure many of them feel that they bought a bad bargain when they did this, because there was some thought that the smokestacks coming from the Page plant had something to do with the deterioration of the air over the Grand Canyon, and therefore the capability of people to see the beauties unobstructed by the particulates from a plant like that. But I don't recall we had any conversation about that.

PS: Specifically about that.

JR: Yes. Now, later on, long after I had left Congress--in fact, this was when Jay Rhodes was in. Jay and Mo were good friends and got along extremely well. There was legislation involving putting scrubbers on the Page plant. I think it cost something like \$200 million to do it, but nevertheless, it was done. The main issue was that the prevailing winds through the Grand Canyon would have had a tendency to have the particulates from Page go east rather than west into the canyon. But that didn't prevail. They decided to spend the \$200 million and put the scrubbers up anyway.

PS: Mr. Rhodes, during Mo Udall's career in Congress, Mo had--I won't say a total unique way--but his own way of resolving conflict, trying to bring consensus together. One of the tools that Mo used was his sense of humor, clearly, over the years. Barry Goldwater characterized you--I think it was in the introduction to the book that you wrote--"John Rhodes exhibited a rare capability to bring warring factions together," end quote. One of the goals of the Udall Center at the University of Arizona is following on Mo's footsteps and his environmental conflicts in which they try to deal with. Do you have any comments on your approaches to bringing warring factions together or getting consensus, and Mo's way of doing it? Mo used his sense of humor, certainly, because that was one of the things he was known for. Do you have just any thoughts on Mo's approach to doing that?

JR: Well, Mo had a different situation than I did, because he was in the majority, he was the chairman of the committee, he had the clout that even the minority leader didn't have. So he could not only use his humor, but he could either by innuendo or by direct confrontation cause people to consider his point of view, which I really didn't have. But his humor was absolutely wonderful and it was spontaneous. You could just tell that that brain of his was just grinding it out. It was very good. Incidentally, if you haven't seen it, you should get a copy of the video of the Arizona State Society meeting in Washington, where the program was a conversation between Barry Goldwater and Mo Udall. It was one of the best and most humorous pieces I've ever seen in my life! Of course they were both from pioneer families and they had memories--actually memories which they'd gotten from their forebearers--about things that were going on in Arizona in the territorial days and life. One of the things that they chortled about was that Mo's grandfather or great-grandfather--I forget which--was put in jail in Prescott as a polygamist. Morris Goldwater was the mayor of Prescott at that time--Barry's Uncle Morris--and the story is that (chuckles) in the dead of night Morris Goldwater went down to the jail with the keys and said to Udall, "You shouldn't be in this damned jail. Get out of here!" (laughter) So he did! Back in those days I guess they did things like that with some impunity.

PS: I have a copy of that tape, and it is absolutely delightful.

JR: It really is.

PS: The tape is one of those ones I sort of find myself watching over and over again. It's a tape I often recommend to students. I say, "If you really want to sit down and get a good introduction to these two men, sit down and watch this tape."

We talked a little bit about this before, but this question, you may have additional comments to what we said before. Were there any environmental issues that you and Mo agreed on? We talked a little bit about some of the wilderness bills that you did agree on, on ones you disagreed on. Did party affiliations play any part in your positions on this at all?

JR: Probably did. Probably did. Of course--I call 'em "the radical conservationists"--it sounds like a pejorative term, but I don't really mean it that way, but it's more descriptive. But they were mainly Democrats, and I think maybe because that's where they got their support. So I suppose that things like that were issues that they thought were important but would not appeal to me. I really don't have any particular thing in mind, but as a general statement, that's probably what would have happened.

PS: Most of the wilderness legislation that came before Congress relating to Arizona in the sixties and seventies, perhaps with a few exceptions, most of that there was pretty strong support on the Arizona delegation for these?

JR: Yes, that's correct.

PS: Even though Mo may have taken the lead on some of these bills and so on, there was fairly strong support?

JR: Yes. Well, he took the lead because he was in a position to do it. I mean, when you're committee chairman, you've got all kinds of clout in your committee jurisdiction. He knew how to use it, and he used it well.

PS: When we were talking earlier about the various people that were involved in the final push for the CAP, you had mentioned in the course of talking some of the congressmen who came in later on: Duke Sener and Sam Steiger. I recall--I can't remember the specifics about this, I didn't make a note on it--but I recall, was there some problem toward the final push here, with an additional bill that Sam Steiger had pushed forward or something relating to the CAP? I recall Senator Goldwater mentioning something about it when I talked with him, and I can't remember, was there something that Sam Steiger had done with a different bill to cause some problem toward the end?

JR: No. Actually, I think what you're thinking of is that when Sam Steiger ran for the Senate and was defeated.... Incidentally, John Conlan was his opponent in the primary, and I told--they hated each other, really. I never did quite know why. They were both in the State Senate at the same time, and it's a thing that happened then, I believe. But I told 'em that "one of you is gonna be nominated and will be defeated in November, and we'll probably lose both houses, both seats in the House," and we almost did. But anyway, Sam Steiger, after his defeat, he came back home and he started immediately doing silly things like shooting asses, mules, or whatever they were. And one of the things that he did was a complete reversal. I never quite could understand it. He started blaming Stew Udall and me for selling out Arizona to California, because he said that we gave in to California too much on the priorities of water in the event of a scarcity. We did, after all, but it was necessary. We were looking for support where we could get it. And California had been against the Central Arizona Project until the Supreme Court decided in favor of Arizona. And that was about the time that we were then moving in for the authorization thing, and finding opposition from the ones who had previously been our allies--the Colorados, the Utahs, the New Mexicos. Hey, we were looking for support. And we didn't sell out to California on anything that we thought--and I still think--that was important. But we did agree with them, and I think that probably the Court would have upheld their position anyway, because of the doctrine of first in use, first in right. And it provided that if there was a shortage in the river that the Central Arizona Project would be last on the river as far as the disposition of the shortage was concerned. And we said, "There isn't going to be any shortage, because the upper basin isn't going to be able to use its water." We couldn't say that out loud, but that was exactly what we knew, and at least for many, many years, and probably so many years that by then we will be able to get water from other sources if we need to do it. So with that, that was what Sam was doing, and I think he was mainly doing it to attract attention, and he had his reputation as a radio personality or whatever. We don't meet each other very often.

PS: That Senate primary race that he ran against Conlan was a very acrimonious....

JR: Just awful.

PS: And turned out to be politically a disaster for the Republican Party.

JR: Absolutely.

PS: Because if my recollection is right, Sam won the primary and then proceeded to lose to Dennis DeConcini.

JR: That's absolutely true. He won a battle and lost the war.

PS: And then Senator DeConcini was in the Senate for three terms.

JR: That's right, although he said he wouldn't run more than two. (chuckles) Nobody believed it, including me.

PS: You had mentioned just a minute ago, when you were talking about the Central Arizona Project again--at some point--I think this was a little earlier than 1968, I think it was Stewart Udall that had introduced this idea. There was a, something called the Pacific Southwest Water Plan in which they, I believe--and you can correct me if I'm wrong--they proposed to pump water from the Columbia River and bring it down. Do you remember much about that?

JR: Oh yes. I don't think Stew had anything to do with that. That was an engineering firm in Los Angeles, I believe. There was this idea that we would pump water from, I think, the Snake River and bring it down into the Southwest--Arizona and California. And actually, Scoop Jackson, the senator from Washington, after that came out, before he would let the Senate pass the Central Arizona Project authorization, he put in there a provision that for ten years there would be no action taken to take any water out of the Columbia River Basin. So that was in the bill.

PS: So that never really was a viable....

JR: No. There's another one we thought of, or people thought of. It was to reverse part of the flow of the Yukon, and to bring it down into the West. In order to get support--at that time, the Great Lakes' level was going down because of a lack of rainfall for several years' drought. And the idea was that this tremendous amount of water, something like 20 million acre-feet a year, you'd bring it down into the United States, and then part of it would make a neat left turn and go over to the Great Lakes, and the rest of it would go right on down through California and Arizona, and into to Sonora. The engineers had it worked out so that with hydroelectric power--there were quite a few water drops along the line--you would be able to pay for it in the long run. I never believed it myself. But of course the conservationists were up in arms about that, because you're going to do all sorts of terrible things to the ecology of the Yukon Basin and to the capability to support the wildlife that was there. And they probably were right, although there's a lot of water that goes down the Yukon and goes into the Arctic Ocean. Nevertheless, if you cut the

flow to the degree that it would have been cut, you would certainly make some big changes in the ecology of Alaska.

PS: I had never heard of that one before. They actually had feasibility studies that were done?

JR: No, I don't think it had any, except another engineering company.

PS: Had done some work on this?

JR: Yes. And I don't know how they were financed, but they were not publicly financed--at least I don't believe they were.

PS: But this never emerged as a serious alternative issue?

JR: It was reasonably serious at the time because, as I say, there was great fear that the Great Lakes were really going to dry up.

PS: Those two other plans, did you and Stewart and Mo talk about those at all?

JR: Oh, yes, from time to time. Sort of chortling.

PS: They sound so grandiose in a way--even more grandiose than the engineering feats that built the CAP. I mean, because when you're changing river courses, let alone getting the Canadians to agree to it. But those never proceeded beyond discussion, really?

JR: No. And you mentioned Canadians, and that's one reason that it didn't proceed, because Canada, British Columbia and Alberta, were up in arms immediately. So we knew that there was just no way that we could get Canada to agree to it.

PS: Mr. Rhodes, the Yukon scenario you just described, did that have a name? Was it just called the Yukon Project?

JR: It had a name, and I'm sorry I don't believe I remember exactly what it was, but it was sort of a grandiose name like the Western Water Project, or something of that nature. But anyway, Yes, it certainly did have a name.

PS: Looking back, the CAP is done, it's accomplished, it's built, it's constructed. Probably, at least in my mind, it will be one of the last, at least for a while, of the really large government projects. There were many, many large government projects in this century, many Reclamation projects that benefited Arizona--Coolidge Dam, Roosevelt Dam--but it sounds like the Central Arizona Project was really one of the last large federally-funded projects going to take place. In reminiscing, Senator Goldwater has said he's had second thoughts about Glen Canyon, maybe we shouldn't have done this. Mo, in his book, had sort of second thoughts. I think people normally do that.

JR: I think they were thinking about Marble Canyon, not Glen Canyon. But we didn't build Glen Canyon, but we did build Marble Canyon, which is Lake Powell.

PS: Barry Goldwater was talking, I think, in a sense, he was one of the last people that floated down. (JR: Yes.) So I think in later years he had reminiscence about maybe Glen Canyon should not have been done. But I was just curious, where I was sort of leading with this was, have you had any second thoughts about the Central Arizona Project? in terms of do you think it could have been done differently considering some of the problems that have cropped up with it?

JR: No, not really. There are problems. Some of these siphons, I think engineeringly they're perfectly okay, but the construction was not as well done as we wish that it had been done. But things like that happen on such a large project. The thing that was a great surprise was the quality of the water when it got to Tucson, and being used. From what I understand, the chemistry of the water, and the water distribution system in Tucson are just--they're inimical with each other. Nobody ever dreamed that that would happen, I guess. Betty and I went down to Tucson when the water first was brought into the water plant in Tucson, and I said, "Boy, this was the day we've been waiting for." I used to go around this country, and usually trying to elect Republican members of Congress. People sometimes would ask me about the Central Arizona Project, and I said, "Well, the main reason we have it is because Tucson is the largest city in the world completely dependent upon an underground water supply." "Oh, well, that does make sense, doesn't it?" There we were, and there was the water coming in, and now it's going to take a lot of scientific know-how, and probably some replacement of pipes to make it potable as far as the household use is concerned.

PS: Mr. Rhodes, in reading some of the earlier documents coming out of Congress in the late sixties as the project got started, and with the finishing of the project, some of the customers who they anticipated, have not turned out to be there. I think they thought there would be more agricultural use of the water, and as far as I understand, some of the agricultural use has not manifested itself to that extent, because it's too expensive.

JR: Right.

PS: Is there some way that that can be worked around? (break for a drink of water)
Mr. Rhodes, when we left off, we were talking about some of the anticipated users of CAP water, back when the bill was being authorized, and the various parts that were being built. Agricultural use has not materialized to the extent I think perhaps you or Mo or Stewart thought it would. And I think probably one of the driving forces is that farmers find the water too expensive.

JR: That's correct.

PS: Is there any way that will be remedied? Or do you think that the CAP will continue to function more as a support for people's homes and residential use, as opposed to agricultural use?

JR: Well, the CAP will be mainly used for municipal and industrial water. And that became apparent way back in the early sixties, that this was likely to happen, because, as you say.... Well two reasons: one is that when we were trying to sell the Central Arizona Project, one of the areas of resistance came from people who said, "You're going to use that water to produce products that we're paying subsidies on anyway! We don't need it, and we don't want it, and we don't want you to use our money in growing more of it!" Well, then we were able to say, "Well, but you know, the cities are growing so rapidly, and you've got to have water for people." So anyway, it turned out to be a break as far as getting the project authorized was concerned. There is friction between the agricultural interests and the city interests. The agricultural interests, in order to use the water profitably, have to have a subsidy. And the subsidy, naturally, is coming from prices that are charged to the city residents and it is not popular. But then of course in order to get the Central Arizona Project authorized, the state had to enact a groundwater code, which says, in effect, that Central Arizona Project water will be used for other purposes, but mainly in order to cut down on the pumping from the underground storage of water. So that is the law, and that's the way it's done. And so as a result, I think that the only reason that agriculture has not sunk lower in respect to the economy of Arizona than it has, is because of the capability of the farmer to do a better job and grow more of the produce and products from the supply of water that he gets, than he had before.

PS: Also, I think part of it, too--I'd really appreciate hearing your comments on this--the economic position of agriculture in this state, and the economic position of the mining industry in the state, has greatly changed, from today, going back fifty years. The percentage of money that they bring into the economy, the business, all that has declined to some degree. New kinds of industry are coming into both Tucson and Phoenix--industries that don't bear any relationship, a lot of them--in the electronic industry, computer industry, which are sort of characterized as so-called "clean" industries, which in fact they are. I mean, there's not nearly the environmental problems. Mining and agriculture have been in decline. They're not eliminated, I'm not trying to say that, but they certainly have been in decline. Do you think the changing economic picture of Arizona is going to affect the water usage? I mean simply that most of this water will be used, perhaps for other things than what it was originally designated for?

JR: Oh, absolutely. It's already having that effect. But you mentioned pollution from these so-called clean industries. That's true, as far as the air is concerned, but there are a lot of pollutants going into the underground water aquifers that are devastating, and that's something that the state has to be very careful about.

PS: After the authorization was achieved on the CAP in 1968--as you said earlier, that wasn't the whole battle, that wasn't the check. But between 1968 and during the rest of the time that you were in Congress--I believe you retired in 1983 from Congress?

JR: Yes, January of 1983.

PS: Could you talk a little bit about battles in the intervening years, once the big battle

was done with? There's a wonderful photograph--I think it's of you and Senator Hayden and Mo and Stewart, toasting with glasses of water. I think it was after President Johnson signed the bill and so on. Could you talk a little bit? Were there other battles in the intervening years to continue the financial [authorization], the money to pay for it, the continuing building, as the thing was built down to Tucson? Could you talk a little bit about between 1968 and the early eighties, other battles that may have occurred?

JR: The first one--and this has something to do with the Indian Bend Wash, which is important to this area. At that time I was ranking Republican on that Public Works Subcommittee, and there was \$20 million in the budget to build a concrete ditch right down through the middle of Scottsdale to take care of the flow of the Indian Bend Wash. And I got a call from the mayor of Scottsdale, Bud Timms, a good friend, [who] said, "John, we don't want your \$20 million." I said, "What are you going to do about the flow of Indian Bend Wash?" He said, "We don't know, but we don't want a concrete ditch going right down the middle of our beautiful city!" I said, "All right, you'd better hire an engineer and figure out some way to take care of the flow, because if you don't, you're going to have a tragedy on your hands." They did it. They came up with this green belt. So I told his engineer whom I had known for some little time, "Are you satisfied that that plan will take care of a hundred-year flood on the Indian Bend Wash?" And he said, "Well, John, yes, I really am. I'd feel a lot better if there was some way we could cut about a thousand second-feet off that flow." I said, "How would it be?" He said, "Well, you'd probably have to have a dike across Paradise Valley to do it." So I said, "Okay." So I went to my good friend, Stewart's successor as secretary of Interior, Rogers C. D. Morton, and I said, "Rog, I'm gonna put a million dollars in the appropriations bill for fiscal 1969, and it's gonna be for the Central Arizona Project. I want to tell you how to use it." He said, "Well, what do you want?" I said, "Well, I want you to build a dike across Paradise Valley." And he said, "What for?!" I said, "Well, you're gonna have to do it sooner or later anyway because the canal for the CAP is gonna go right across Paradise Valley, and you've got to have some way to keep that water from Indian Bend Wash from washing out the CAP canal. So I just want to do it ahead of time, because I've got this plan for the Indian Bend Wash." And Rog was a real conservationist, I mean, he really was. And so he was just tickled to death. "John, this is wonderful!" (laughs) But that was the first money for the CAP. I put a million dollars over the budget for the purpose of this dike across Paradise Valley.

All right, that was the first year. The second year I put another million dollars in, just because I didn't want to have a complete dry-up. And I said to Paul Fannon, "You know, I don't know how long I can keep doin' this. What we need to do is to go to the Office of Management and Budget, and see if there isn't some way that we can get them to put money in the budget for the CAP." So the two of us went up and talked to Roy Ash, who was then the director of the Office of Management and Budget, and said, "Roy, we just feel that it's necessary to have a schedule of future appropriations." Bear in mind for a project like that you don't appropriate a billion dollars, you appropriate what can be used in the next fiscal year, and so on and so forth. "We need to have a schedule up to completion of the CAP." And Roy said, "Well, let me think about that a little bit." So about six weeks later, I get a call from Roy Ash saying, "Could you and Senator Fannin

come and see me?" "Yup, we sure can!" And we did. He handed us this schedule for appropriations for the CAP to completion. I said, "God! that's the last battle!" It really was, because after that, there always was money in the budget, and if it's in the budget, it's like shootin' fish in a barrel. Nobody's gonna be able to take it out. Well, it would be very difficult to. And they didn't try. So that was the last battle.

PS: Mr. Rhodes, I think our tape's about to run out, so I'm going to take a break again here.

JR: Okay.