

# An Oral History Interview

with

**RICHARD OLSON (part 2)**

*conducted by*  
Julie Ferdon

September 9, 1998  
Fairfax, Virginia

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

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Richard C. Olson

Dick Olson was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, on September 13, 1922. He attended the University of North Dakota and the North Dakota Agricultural College before enlisting in the U.S. Naval Reserve in 1942. After being discharged in 1946, he returned to North Dakota and worked for the *Fargo Forum*.

In 1948 Dick moved to Tucson to attend the University of Arizona. After receiving his degree in 1950, he began working for the *Tucson Citizen* as a reporter and eventually editor. He left the *Citizen* in 1955 to begin a public relations business and to work part-time for then Congressman Stewart Udall. When Stewart Udall became Secretary of the Interior in 1961, Dick moved to Washington, D.C. to become legislative Assistant, and eventually Executive Assistant for Congressman Morris K. Udall, who had replaced his brother in a special election.

Dick left Udall's employment in 1971 to become editor of *Living Wilderness* and Director of Information for the Wilderness Society. He returned to Congress in 1976 to serve as Special Assistant to House Majority Leader Jim Wright. In 1982 he left Capital Hill to work for DynCorp as Director of Corporate Government Relations and, eventually, Vice President for Public Affairs.

RO: So Mo agreed with me. So we then proceeded to write long, sort of scholarly newsletters (JF: Real substantive....) on serious subjects. Now, one of the arguments that Roger had made, and other people made, was that most people aren't going to read these things, they're too long, they're on subjects they're not interested in, and the newspapers aren't going to do anything with them. "They're just too verbose." My argument was, first of all, "I acknowledge, probably most people wouldn't read them, but," I said, "nevertheless, some people will read them. And those who don't read them will at least be aware that their congressman really works at this job, that he looks very thoroughly at every question that comes along, and that he is very fair in the judgments that he exercises." And I think that that is what came across.

JF: It was pretty unusual, wasn't it, to have that sort of comprehensive newsletter then?

RO: Yes, it was. There have been only one or two people prior to that, who had done anything similar. One was Clem Miller of California, who was a great congressman, very thoughtful, very intelligent, who made the mistake of pushing on for a campaign stop about 1962, flying in a private plane, crashed, and was killed--and incidentally was replaced in a special election by a Republican.

So anyway, Clem Miller was one who had done something similar, and we were aware of that. I think I cited that as a precedent for what we wanted to do. But I don't know--I mean, even Clem did not go to the lengths that we did in exploring things so thoroughly. I mean, for example, having a whole series of newsletters on some topic.

JF: Who actually wrote those newsletters?

RO: Mo and I.

JF: And they were edited also by you?

RO: The final editing was done by me.

JF: How did it work? Did you do an initial draft and then give it to Mo?

RO: Most of the time Mo did an original draft, did an initial draft. I would then embellish it and polish it. Once in a while I would do the original draft. For example, the one on nuclear disarmament, or on the arms race, was one that I originated. But I'd say that most of the time, the original draft was done by Mo.

JF: And then in later years, as I understand, there was something like eighty newsletters, and in later years something like twenty-three or so, were compiled into a book (RO: Yes.), *The Education of a Congressman*, which I find still very instructive on a lot of these issues.

Let me just ask you one more question before we sort of get back to the chronological thing. It brings up something I've wondered about, when you mentioned

the foreign aid issue, and how Mo voted based on what his constituents had written him. I remember when I worked for him, I remember a conversation we once had where he was saying, "You know, a congressman is sort of torn between Who do they represent? their state or their nation? And particularly, are they elected by the constituents to vote their conscience, or to vote their constituents' conscience?" I certainly had the distinct feeling that at that time he was saying he pretty strongly felt that a representative was elected to vote their own conscience. And yet I hear you mention this about the foreign aid. And I also have to look at the issue of gun control. As I understand it, Mo was personally very against--or for gun control, I should say. And yet, his constituents--it's Arizona, after all, the West...

RO: Yes. I think that there were a handful of cases where he felt that he had to vote a way differently than he personally preferred. And incidentally, one of the functions of the newsletters was to educate the constituency, so that we could do what we wanted to do. (chuckles) And that really was the primary purpose of it, to create a constituency for ourselves, that we felt would allow us to vote, to use the best judgment that we had. Now, I say "we"--that's pretty presumptuous on my part to say "we," because Mo is the one who did the voting. But I was certainly a part of that process, and sometimes took him to task.

JF: What issues can you think of besides gun control where he went a way other than his conscience?

RO: Oh, 14(b). Section 14(b) of the Taft-Hartley Act, the attempt in 1964 to repeal it.

JF: Is this the right to work?

RO: And thus to invalidate all of the right-to-work laws in the seventeen states. And that was a very, very tough one for Mo both personally and politically. He was not in favor of right-to-work laws. But in Arizona, we'd had three statewide votes on the subject--referendum or initiative, one or the other--and on each successive vote, a larger margin had prevailed in support of right to work. And that not only was in the state as a whole, it was also the case in our congressional district. So for him to have voted to repeal 14(b) would have been to oppose the expressed views of our own constituents, three successive times. And he simply couldn't do it.

Now, at the time, he was the whip for the Democratic Study Group, and so it was his job to get votes for the bill on the floor. And he actually voted for the rule. And not only that, he succeeded--or the Democratic Party succeeded--in passing repeal in the House. But it's one of the many, many things that irritate me about Lyndon Johnson, that he forced the Democrats in the House to walk the plank on 14(b), knowing that there was not a chance that that could pass the Senate. So there were Democrats who suffered the consequences in the next election. In fact, we lost twenty-five Democrats in the 1966 election, and Mo Udall could have been one of them. So I had no quarrel with Mo in voting the way he did. It incenses me today--I mean, to this day--that George Meany held it against him from that day forward.

JF: Is that right?

RO: Right. And worked against him when he was running for majority leader.

JF: Based on that one vote?

RO: Based on that. It tells you something about the labor movement that you'd rather not know.

JF: Well, let's go back to 1962, and Mo was reelected in 1962, defeating Richard Burke by 56%. Did you manage that campaign?

RO: Yes.

JF: Do you remember anything about Richard Burke?

RO: Well, I remember he was a good candidate. It was an indication that the Republican Party now sensed that they could win that seat. And so they put up a serious candidate. He was a quality candidate. And fortunately, they did not prevail, but he was a good candidate. His campaign manager was Conrad Joyner, and early in the campaign, before I got out to Arizona, somebody else on the Burke campaign had been in contact with our office about setting up a debate. Nothing had come of it, and this person got the idea that we were resisting debates. So about the time I got out to Tucson for the campaign--it was usually in August that I went out--I got word that they were getting very upset. And so I called Conrad, and I said, "Conrad, let me make it clear, we're perfectly willing to debate Dick Burke. No problem about that. But we're not going to do it on just every street corner. I mean, if we're going to do a debate, we want to have a real audience. Have it worth the candidates' time." Conrad said, "I couldn't agree more." So we worked out plans for a debate at the Tucson High School auditorium, with television cameras and the whole works. And then I think we had about three other debates, all in proper settings. It was a gentleman's campaign. On election night, Conrad called me and congratulated me, and we became good friends.

JF: That's an interesting story. Let's see, in that first year that you worked in Mo's office, can you give me an idea--just for sort of a reference for later--what your first impressions were about Mo's relationship with his staff, his work style and ethic, his approach to issues, his relationship with colleagues.... That's sort of a lot (laughs) to throw out there. Maybe we ought to start out with his relationship with his staff in those early years.

RO: Oh, it was always good. He was someone who knew the value of delegating. He delegated authority to Roger and me to run that office, and never interfered with decisions that we made, people that we hired, or anything. I think Roger and I certainly always had just the best possible relationship with Mo. He was just a great guy to work for. And he was very hard-working--he'd get to the office before we did in the morning. In fact, our only complaint was that he'd open the mail before we got there, and he would

leave this mess. He'd just tear open the envelopes and lay the sheets of paper here, there, and everywhere! (laughter) Whereas, we liked to have a systematic way of opening the mail. (laughs)

I remember one morning I came in. He and I had just written a newsletter about the budget, analyzing the federal budget, and showing that there's very little money that anybody would argue about, that most of it would have to go to things that we're all in agreement with. And so it had just been on the press the day before--it hadn't yet been mailed out--and here was a letter in my typewriter from President Kennedy commending Mo on this outstanding letter. He said, "The rest of the Democrats ought to have something like this!" And Mo had been in already, he'd already opened the mail, he'd seen this letter from Kennedy, put it in my typewriter (laughs), and then gone off somewhere." (laughter)

JF: What was your relationship with Roger? Wasn't this sort of an unusual situation where you basically shared a job?

RO: Well, I think we had the only partnership on Capitol Hill. I don't know of another case of an office that was run by a partnership. But Roger and I jointly ran that office, made all decisions; about, for example, such decisions as whether to bid for a different office, after there's been an election, who to hire and so on. And then we also divided our responsibilities. He handled certain things, I handled other things. But anyway, he and I had just a very nice partnership/relationship for nine-and-a-half years.

JF: Who was secretary then?

RO: Mo's secretary?

JF: Yes.

RO: Louise Greenfield was. I'm pretty sure she was Mo's first secretary. Now, actually, we hired her to replace Bob Reveles. Bob Reveles briefly served as Mo's secretary. Bob had been in the Army, he'd learned shorthand, and was able to take dictation. And so he filled that role for a while, and then Bob got a better-paying job.... No, I'm a little bit hazy on that. Bob was going to Georgetown University at some point, and then eventually he went to work for Congressman Frank Thompson. So, I'm a little bit hazy on all that, but I do remember that when I first arrived, Bob was still in that job. And I think we hired Louise probably before.... Well, it might have been in 1962. Probably it was 1962 before we hired Louise.

JF: Now, am I correct that Mo took shorthand?

RO: Yes, Mo does take shorthand, yes. I can't remember how it was that he had learned it.

JF: I seem to recall him saying he learned it in law school, in order to get through law

school a little easier.

RO: Well, it's possible. I myself had intended to take shorthand when I was in the Navy, but then I was reassigned, and never did. I got a new rating, so I didn't have to know shorthand, but I came close to it, and I wish I had, because as a reporter later, it would have been so handy.

JF: It would have been nice to have. You know, it seems to me I either heard that, or he told me that, that he learned it for law school, and had found it very useful since.

RO: Yes.

JF: In 1964, Mo was reelected again, defeating William Kimble, who was an attorney in Tucson, by 59%. Did you manage that campaign as well?

RO: Yes.

JF: Did Roger work on any of these campaigns?

RO: No. Generally, we'd have him come out for the last few weeks of the campaign, just to be there, maybe attend some things. But he didn't plan the campaign or really handle any of the details of the campaign. He continued to operate the Washington office while we were out there playing around with politics.

JF: Okay. What do you remember about the William Kimble campaign?

RO: Well, once again, they put up a very good candidate. That was the last strong candidate that they put up for a while. I think when we defeated Kimble, the Republicans kind of gave up on--the main line of the Republican party kind of gave up on this race for a while, and then they got much less attractive candidates after that. But Kimble was a good solid candidate. (sigh) I don't remember much about it, except I remember he had a couple of nice young fellows handling his campaign. It seems to me they had a public relations business: Pete somebody.... Anyway, they were very nice guys. Once again, it was a decent campaign, no mud-slinging or anything.

JF: Tom Chandler, in his oral history, related a story where in one of the early campaigns, a couple of Mo's workers had been arrested. Do you remember that at all?

RO: Arrested?!

JF: Arrested, yes. Do you remember that at all? I'm sorry I don't remember the details, but it was something about.... I can't even recall.

RO: The only thing that stirs in my mind at all has to do with a fellow named Ted Heyl--his last name was H-E-Y-L--who we hired for a time to be in the district office. He got into some kind of trouble, I don't remember what it was. But this may not relate to the

story.

JF: No, this was a campaign thing, and it sounded like it was just one of those things that people didn't realize was illegal. I think maybe they had even put a sign on private property or something. It wasn't anything major, but apparently they got in trouble, and he still laughs about it. And I just wondered if you remembered anything like that.

RO: No, I don't.

JF: Maybe they never told you. (laughs)

RO: Yes, I have no idea.

JF: The same year, 1964, Mo was floor whip for civil rights legislation. Did you work on that at all?

RO: Oh, yes.

JF: Do you recall what the legislation was?

RO: Oh, well, that was the Civil Rights Act of 1964. You know, the preceding year Martin Luther King had had his March on Washington--I myself participated in it, and went down to the Lincoln Memorial, heard him speak.

JF: And Mo led that bill on the floor?

RO: Mo was just one sponsor of that. I think that the.... I mean, first of all, it came out of the Judiciary Committee. Manny Sells would have been the principal sponsor, I think. But Mo was the whip of the Democratic Study Group at that time, I'm quite sure, and I ran the whip system for him. So I had like a tree of names to call. You start out calling five people, they call five people, and so on. And the purpose was to get votes to the floor in time to affect the outcome on teller votes, principally. On roll call votes you have fifteen minutes to get over there, it's not such a problem, but on teller votes, you didn't. So we had the whip system to get northern and western Democrats to the floor in support of desirable amendments and to defeat undesirable ones. There is a supreme irony in the positions taken by the liberals and conservatives in the Democratic Party on one amendment: the Women's Rights Amendment. It was offered by none other than Judge Smith, the chairman of the Rules Committee, on behalf of the Southerners, to so mess up the bill that it would be defeated on final passage.

JF: Is that right?!

RO: And so the Southerners voted for women's rights, and the Northerners voted against women's rights.

JF: Isn't that interesting?!

RO: Because it was thought by everyone that this would make final passage impossible. Because they called it at a time when the whip system wasn't working and so on--they won! And we added sex to the list of characteristics that you can't discriminate against.

JF: That's fascinating (RO laughs), it really is. Now, around this same period, also, I believe 1964, the District of Columbia home rule issue was up again. (RO: Right.) Mo apparently sponsored a bill that would establish an office of delegate within the House of Representatives, and provide for the election of that delegate.

RO: I think that was after the crucial vote, which was on home rule itself.

JF: Oh, you think that came after? (RO: Yes.) Because the home rule case itself, as I understand--in 1965, at least--failed for the fifth time since 1949.

RO: I just came across something yesterday, looking through my papers, on that very subject. I'll check this out on the sequence, but I can speak with some authority on the home rule vote as it occurred on the House floor. This was another of the initiatives that came from the White House. It was Lyndon Johnson wanting to take care of that part of his constituency for the 1964 election. I mean, we got in the Vietnam War for another part of that constituency. He got most of the members of the Texas delegation to sign a discharge petition, because the Rules Committee would not release a bill in the regular order for consideration of home rule. And so this is a very, very difficult and restricted procedure, a discharge petition. But with Johnson's arm-twisting, the signatures were obtained for a discharge petition to bring the home rule bill to the House floor. Well, unlike other measures that come to the floor, a discharge petition cannot be amended. It's subject to an up or down vote. And Judge Smith, who was very vehemently opposed to home rule, offered a substitute. Oh, there can be only one vote, but there can be a substitute--he offered a substitute. If the substitute were defeated, that would be it. So suddenly the House was presented with this difficult question of accepting Judge Smith's version of home rule, or no home rule at all. And so Mo then, in his capacity as DSG whip, and in his capacity as, by that time, a recognized leader, had to get up and urge his colleagues to vote for the Smith substitute. So that was the bill that passed, but it left much unhappiness and so on. I think, as I recall, then Mo offered this delegate bill to provide something more for the District of Columbia.

JF: Why has home rule been so difficult to get through the Congress? The Senate, I gather, has passed it several times, but it apparently can't seem to get through the House.

RO: Yes. (pause) Well, I think that it is a combination of anti-black feeling on the part of not only southern conservatives, but some northern conservatives, and anti-federal government bias, anti-Washington bias. So the City of Washington becomes the symbol of everything that's bad about the federal government.

JF: So you think this is congressmen following their constituents' desire to not have home rule?

RO: Oh, I don't think so. I don't really think--well, it could be in the case of Southerners, the feelings against--I mean, recognition that this is a black majority city. There's that element. And then I think there is also legitimate concern about the interests of the federal government, that they be protected, that public places--the Mall, government buildings, government parks, and so on--be under the control of the Congress, rather than a local government. I don't know, I haven't really analyzed it thoroughly.

JF: Yes. It just interests me.

In 1965, Mo also, as I understand it, proposed amending the Constitution to provide a four-year term for members of the House of Representatives. (RO laughs) This, I believe, was a measure also proposed by President Johnson. Were you involved? Obviously, it didn't pass.

RO: Yes, I was involved in that. Mo testified before a joint committee of the House and Senate on reorganization of the Congress, and he and I drafted a statement which he read. One of the arguments we made was that most people are unaware that congressional terms are only two years. You can ask an educated person, a college graduate, who you happen to meet on the street, about service in Congress: He won't really know that it's just two years. And oftentimes, people will say, "Are you up this time?" The answer is, "I'm up every time." And so anyway, we made the case for that. I think it's a difficult case to make, and there are plenty of good arguments against it. But anyway, yes, he did come out with such a proposal. (laughter)

JF: Also in 1965--it seems to have been a big year, 1965--the fight for the Central Arizona Project began.

RO: Yes. Well, I guess that was the year that the Supreme Court handed down its decision.

JF: *Arizona versus Colorado*?

RO: Right, *Arizona versus Colorado*. It took twelve years.

JF: The decision took twelve years?

RO: Yes. The court appointed a special master, who then did all of the difficult research and study and reading of briefs and so on back and forth, to come to the conclusion that Arizona was entitled to 4.4 million acre-feet of water a year, out of the Colorado River. So it was a big victory, but it then presented just a monumental political task in getting the votes in Congress, especially from the big California delegation, to take their water, and to pay for a project enabling us to use it! (laughter)

JF: Didn't sit well, huh?

RO: [No.] (laughter)

JF: Mo sort of got off on the wrong side of environmentalists in this issue by supporting two dams in the Grand Canyon.

RO: Oh, yes.

JF: I think he later dropped that support, but didn't this create sort of an ideological conflict for Mo?

RO: Oh, yes, but he did just as much as he could to rationalize it. (chuckles) I've heard this speech of his so many times, which he delivered back in the days before the dams were dropped. The Bureau of Reclamation had prepared this marvelous three-dimensional model of the Grand Canyon, showing what portion of the "Grand Canyon"--which I put quotes around it--was flooded. Now, the Grand Canyon at that time, Grand Canyon National Park was not as large as it is today, and it did not include Bridge Canyon, and it did not include Marble Canyon. It was that portion of the Colorado River between Marble Canyon and Bridge Canyon. So this model showed Bridge Canyon flooded, but that was outside the park. And then it showed just a few miles of very low-level flooding at one end of the park itself. So Mo, when he had that three-dimensional model, would point this out. But when he didn't have the model, he would nevertheless point it out in this way: He would say, "Let us suppose that this big room--whatever it is--is Grand Canyon. And let's say that we have built Bridge Canyon Dam. How much of this room is going to be flooded by that dam, by that lake?" So then he would go over to the corner of the room and put his hand about a foot above the floor and so many feet in from the corner, and say, "That's as much water as would invade the park." (laughs) So it was a very good argument, it seemed to justify what we were proposing to do.

Now, this didn't address Marble Canyon, but it was outside of the park, as then constituted. So that was a separate issue. I might just go on to say that years later, Mo and Barry Goldwater sponsored legislation to add Marble Canyon and Bridge Canyon to the park. (laughter)

JF: That's interesting. As I understand it, Mo and Sierra Club's David Brower debated this issue (RO: Yes.) of the [dams] before an audience of national press corps on the rim of the Grand Canyon.

RO: Yes, that's right.

JF: Were you present for that?

RO: No, I didn't go out there for that, but I prepared him for it--not that he required much preparing on that. I mean, he already had a set speech. But anyway, we strategized about it. And by the way, the Bureau of Reclamation delivered that model (chuckles) out to that site at Grand Canyon. Well, prior to that--I think it was prior to that--the Sierra Club had published a book about Grand Canyon as part of the case against our project. So

when we received the book, I looked at it, and I said, "Mo, we're gonna have to respond to this." I said, "Let me write a speech for you to answer this," and he said, "Fine." So I felt that we had to do something that day. So I sat down and I started writing. We had a secretary named Angie [McGinnis], who would do the final typing for me. I'd rough things out, and then she'd type it up nice and clean. So I gave the first five pages of that speech to Mo, and he looked at it and said, "Oh, looks fine." So I kept on writing and wrote 5,000 words. We put it in the *Congressional Record* that night. The next morning, Mo said, "Dick, let me see my speech" (laughs) "on the Grand Canyon." But anyway, that speech then was published in *The Arizona Republic*, it was published in various places, and became one of our weapons in the fight with the Sierra Club.

JF: I need to switch the tape over one more time.