

An Oral History Interview

with

RICHARD OLSON (part 3)

conducted by
Julie Ferdon

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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.

JF: Okay, we're back on again.

RO: All right. Now, I think that that speech in 1967 did contribute to the.... (abrupt change to JF in mid-sentence--something missing from tape? (Tr.))

JF: ... raft trip with ten representatives.

RO: I didn't go.

JF: You didn't get to go on that either?

RO: I didn't go on any of those, no.

JF: Oh! No fun!

RO: No. But I did mention Oren Beatty a while ago. He went on one of those trips, and he leaned the wrong way sometime, and ended up getting banged up. I think they had to take him away in a helicopter.

JF: Oh, really?! Oh, dear!

Did Mo ever express to you any regret about the CAP project? A lot of things have come out about the CAP project in much more recent years, and especially in Tucson, and I realize you probably don't have the benefit of knowing much about that, but I'm just curious if from the Virginia and D.C. perspective, if Mo ever expressed any regret about his participation.

RO: I don't think that he ever specifically stated any reservations about it. Of course it's really in more recent years than I was with him that one would realize that it wasn't such a great idea. At the time that I left, it was just a couple of years--two-and-a-half years or so after passage of the bill, and it had a long ways to go before we'd see the consequences. I think Mo always felt that he was doing what the people of Arizona wanted him to do. I'm sure that he always had reservations about the dams, always had reservations about even the cost of the project--and in particular spending all that money just to enable a handful of well-to-do farmers to get cheaper water. We always felt that in the end the water would be needed by the metropolitan areas of Phoenix and Tucson, and that ultimately the role of farming would decline. But, to answer your question, I can't recall his ever specifically stating that he regretted having done that.

JF: Also in 1965, Pat Udall, Mo's first wife, asked for a divorce. Were you aware of that at the time?

RO: No, I wasn't aware of any serious difficulties between them. I did know that she did not like politics and did not like Washington.

JF: You had said earlier that she didn't want Mo to run for Congress when Stewart ran,

because she didn't want to go to Washington.

RO: That's true.

JF: I wonder what changed her mind when he ran again?

RO: In 1962 she got kind of interested in the campaign, and she worked with me quite a bit, and sort of got into the spirit of it. However, sometime in 1963, she acquired rheumatoid arthritis and her joints were swollen and it was becoming difficult for her to just go about everyday life. Mo and Pat had moved from one house to another in Cleveland Park, and they briefly wondered how she was going to get up and down this flight of stairs--there was a long stairway. Pat asked me to look into elevators. I looked into the kind of elevator that travels up and down a stairway. But after I got the prices and found out about that, she said, "Oh, no, I don't want to do that." I think, first of all, it is assumed by many people in the medical profession that rheumatoid arthritis is psychosomatic, that it's the result of emotions. Whether or not that's true, I don't know, but it could have been. I haven't seen Pat but once in recent years. She didn't appear to be arthritic--she appears to be all right. So it could very well be that her arthritis was a reaction to the emotional conflict that she was going through. So anyway, she felt that she was better off in the Arizona climate, instead of this damp climate back here. So she moved back to Tucson and was living out there during the winter months of 1963-64. Well, actually, she was still here in November of 1963, because I remember being over at their house after Jack Kennedy was shot. But probably early in 1964 she had decided to stay in Tucson.

JF: Did the children stay with her?

RO: Yes, the children were with her. I can't remember just whether that was a permanent decision or temporary one, or what. but she was living in Tucson. About this time, Barry Goldwater was then emerging as a possible candidate for the Republicans. It struck me if that's the case, he can't possibly run for the Senate and president at the same time--he's going to have to resign. And if so, there will be a special election. It might be an opportunity for a Democrat. So I mentioned it to Mo. He said, "Well, I can't talk about that right now." And then a few days later I mentioned it again, and he said, "Well, I have to discuss it with my wife." And then one day the phone rang and it was for Mo, but I answered it. The lady on the other end told the operator, "I'll talk to this gentleman." And so it was Pat. She said, "I understand you're trying to press Mo into running for Barry's seat." I said, "Well, no, Pat, that's not the case, but I do think that it's something that needs to be thought through, it needs a decision. It can't just be put off, put off, put off. We need to look at the pros and cons and see whether it makes sense. I don't know whether it makes sense, but it might make sense. And she said, "Well, let's face it, I hate Washington, I hate politics, and all I've ever wanted to do is live in Arizona, which I love." So that was the feeling.

JF: Yes. So to your knowledge, that may well have been the primary reason behind the break-up?

RO: I think it probably was.

JF: What can you tell us about Pat as a person? What were your impressions of her?

RO: Terrific! Very, very charming. Everybody was charmed by her. Very intelligent. As far as I could tell, a very good mother, well read, just an interesting person, and had a lot of friends in Tucson. Didn't make so many friends back here. It's difficult for a congressional wife. She made friends with some other congressional wives, but I think she felt pretty isolated back here.

JF: Was she ambitious at all, do you think?

RO: Ambitious? No. In fact, her position in regard to Mo's career was she'd give him a two-year lease on life: "Okay, well, you can run one more time."

JF: Did Mo ever seriously consider running for Goldwater's seat?

RO: (sigh) I don't think so. But I would say entirely because of Pat--otherwise, I think he would have. I mean, there were some pretty compelling arguments that I could put together at that time. I said, "For one, here's an opportunity for an Arizona Democrat to raise a lot of money, because there would be a lot of interest in Goldwater's seat, and on the part of Democrats, it would be a race that would get national attention, we'd be able to raise money." And Mo, I think at that time was better-known, had a better reputation, than Fannin did. (chuckles) When Fannin ran for governor, he ran against Bob Morrison, who'd been the county attorney in Pima County. Bob was kind of a gruff, unpolished guy, and Fannin had the gall to use the campaign slogan, "A governor you can invite into your own home."

JF: Wow! (laughs)

RO: Imagine! (laughter)

JF: Boy!

RO: But anyway, I think that Mo could possibly have won that race. In the end, he might have decided against it. Incidentally, that brings to mind something else, a matter that you would never know to ask me about--same era, so it's chronologically okay. Senator Hayden's administrative assistant, Roy Elson, had hopes of running for the Second Congressional District. And so he wanted to get Mo out of the way. And so he got Hayden to offer Mo a judgeship, a federal judgeship.

JF: Oh, really?!

RO: Right.

JF: And this was around 1965 or 1966?

RO: Probably in late 1963. Pat thought that would be a great thing, they could go back to Arizona, and he could be the judge that he always wanted to be. That was always his ambition, to be a judge, like his father and his uncle and so on. So it was quite tempting. I then sent Mo and Pat a memorandum arguing against it. One of the arguments I made was that if you're really interested in a judgeship, you ought to be interested in the Supreme Court, and look at the history of appointments to the Supreme Court. Your chances of being appointed to the court are far greater if you're a politics, than if you take a judgeship. (laughs) Well, I did a little research on that in order to make that particular point.

JF: That's an interesting observation, though.

RO: And the decision was made to turn it down. At the time, I felt that Pat agreed to it, and that she was not resentful for my making that argument.

JF: How was your relationship with Pat?

RO: She was a very good friend.

JF: Did the divorce affect you in any way, affect your work in the office at all?

RO: My making the case for the Senate race kind of spoiled our relationship. She ceased to think of me as a friend. It's too bad, I felt badly about it. I thought I didn't handle it very well.

JF: And then the divorce itself, did that affect any of the workings of the office at all? I mean....

RO: Well, Mo probably simply devoted more time to his work than before. I remember traveling with him quite a bit in his airplane in Arizona, and back and forth between Washington and Tucson, and flying with him, staying in hotels with him, and so on. I mean, he was kind of shattered, he was kind of forlorn and feeling kind of lonely. It was kind of a painful time for him.

JF: Was Pat a flyer too? Was she a pilot also?

RO: Yes, she was.

JF: That's what I thought.

RO: Yes, she was. She loved to talk about her experiences flying.

JF: That's what I kind of remembered that she was.

RO: Right.

JF: In 1966, Mo defeated Alfred McGinnis by about 60%. This was the first time he ran against him.

RO: Oh, McGinnis! Yes, that's the one--I couldn't remember his name. Yes, right.

JF: Did you manage that campaign?

RO: Oh, yes.

JF: And do you recall anything about that campaign?

RO: It was not a very gentlemanly-type campaign. I mean, it was kind of--a lot of cheap shots.

JF: On both sides?

RO: No, only on his side. No, we continued to conduct ourselves in a proper way.

JF: How had the campaign evolved between the least few campaigns? Had it evolved in any way-- more staff, more sophisticated?

RO: I think... (long pause) I guess I don't remember very much about it. (pause) That was a bad year for Democrats, as I mentioned earlier. We lost twenty-five Democrats in that election.

JF: Ooo!

RO: And I think that was the campaign in which I got acquainted with Terry Bracy. He was working in the News Department at KVOA-TV, and I think was still doing graduate work at the University. He came to me, I think, during the campaign and said he'd be interested in coming to Washington. And I said, "Well, you know, after the election there are generally some openings." Well, it was just the opposite, there was a loss of twenty-five members, with all of their staff, and so jobs on Capitol Hill were pretty few and far between. But I had encouraged him to come back--he came back to Washington after the election, and I felt I had to do something for him.

We had a crazy pay system back in those days called Basic. It was based upon what people were paid back about 1912 or so, with percentages of increase every couple of years, with the largest increases going to the people at the bottom of the pay scale. And so Roger and I had used this trick any number of times to get a little bit more money for staff: And that was to assign somebody a small amount of Basic, which would turn out to be more than you can imagine. For example, \$5.00 of annual Basic came out to about \$78.00 a month. (chuckles) Not seventy-eight cents--seventy-eight dollars. And so I found four other members of Congress to share Terry with us, and we'd each employ

him for one day a week for \$5.00 a year Basic, and so we created a few hundred dollars for him to get him started, and that's how he got to Washington.

JF: What did he start doing for you?

RO: Oh! in each case, the case I made with each of these members--like Brock Adams was one of them--was, "Here's a guy who can handle your TV press releases for one day a week." Now, Roger and I were both former newspaper men, so we didn't need to hire some guy to handle press releases for us, but we realized we didn't have a lot of time to do everything. So if we just had somebody who could spend one day a week, just putting out TV spots or whatever, that that would be a big help. So that's what we did.

JF: Okay, that's interesting. I never knew how he got his start with the staff.

In the meantime, Mo had helped organized bipartisan seminars for new representatives. (RO: Yes.) The freshman seminars, I gather, have become sort of institutionalized (RO: Right.) and are still used. Were you involved in those?

RO: That was pretty much Mo's own doing. It was really remarkable that in his very, very first election, I mean, when the first incoming class came in after he himself was elected to Congress, he then was putting together a class for incoming members. I think it was because he realized that he himself really needed that kind of information, like, "What's it mean when the committee rises? What's it mean when there's this kind of a vote, that kind of a vote? and so on. How do you go about staffing your office? How do you go about getting electrical allowance and so on? So he realized there was a need for that, and so he and I--maybe one other member--organized this class. And it built on that. Each year it became more institutionalized.

JF: Where were they held, then?

RO: They were held in various committee rooms in the House. Now, we had some outstanding congressional fellows during those years, from the American Political Science Association. One of them was Don Tacheron, who had been a newspaper man on the Portland, Oregon, *Register-Guard*. And he was also a political scientist. So he was around to help Mo during the time that he was on our staff. He helped him in many ways to work out classes and subject matter and handouts and so on. Ultimately, Don and Mo together wrote this book, *The Job of the Congressman*. We all contributed to it one way or another, but it was mostly Don's work, with Mo overseeing it.

JF: Did you do any editing or writing of that?

RO: No, I did a little bit of writing. I contributed a little bit of research for some things, but that's all.

JF: The primary issue in the 1960s was the Vietnam War, and in October 1967, Mo became one of the earliest members of Congress to speak out against the war, at the

Sunday Evening Forum in Tucson. Did you help Mo write that speech?

RO: Yes, I did. Let me give you the whole history.

JF: I'd love that.

RO: Back in 1964, after the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, Mo and Roger put together a newsletter. It was a rough draft of a newsletter. They brought it to me, or Mo gave it to me and asked me to read it and tell him what I thought. So I read it, and I was just appalled, because what they were saying was that we've got to get behind the president on the Gulf of Tonkin, we've got to get behind the president on the invasion of the Dominican Republic. And I went to Mo and I said, "My God! you can't say that! That's terrible!" (laughs) "You simply can't do that!" He said, "Well, see what you can do with it." (laughs) So I then edited it rather severely, and it ended up asking for some patience for the president to kind of justify his actions, but it wasn't an endorsement. So that was published.

JF: When was that, approximately?

RO: That would have been, I think, in the fall of.... (sigh) When was it? Probably early 1965. I think it was probably early 1965. It was probably shortly after the Dominican Republic invasion, because the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution was before the election, as I recall. In fact, it was probably early 1965. I continued to be very much opposed to the war. I thought it was absolutely the wrong course, and I kept complaining to Mo about these votes that would be coming up from time to time, requiring additional funding for the Vietnam War. Mo felt that he had to vote for these funding measures--it was pretty difficult not to. But anyway, he allowed me to.... I think each time that he cast one of these votes, I'd write a speech for him to put in the record about why he didn't want to do this anymore. (laughter) "Stop me before I kill again!" (laughs) So I wrote several such speeches, which ended up in the record. And it was the way Mo felt, too, but also, politically it was pretty impossible not to vote the way he did.

Of course we began getting a lot of mail on the subject, and occasionally people would show up from Tucson, and I'd talk with them. Friends of mine from the University would say, "What can we do about this?" And I'd say, "Write Mo! Write Mo, tell him what you think." So he got a lot of serious mail in opposition to the war. So I suggested at one point in 1966, I think, that we ought to have a hearing on the subject. Now, he wasn't on the Armed Services Committee, wasn't on the Foreign Affairs Committee, but I nevertheless felt we could stage some kind of a hearing, give people an opportunity to vent their feelings about the war. And so he decided it would be a good thing to do, and we got Congressman Ed Roybal of California to join him, so that it was two members of Congress, not just one. I arranged for the ballroom at the Pioneer Hotel in Tucson, and we invited people to testify. We told them they had to bring us twenty-five copies of their remarks and so on. So we had all the television stations there. We put on this congressional hearing without even having a committee. And so there was a great outpouring of opposition to the war--all of which was solidifying Mo's position to take a

tougher stand on it. That was the whole idea. The reception was excellent. Nobody accused these congressmen of trying to stir up trouble.

JF: And nobody complained about the fact that it wasn't a real hearing.

RO: Nobody complained about it. It was well-received. We took all of these statements that were turned in, and we published a book. I don't think, in my things, I don't think I still have a copy of it--I wish I did. I mean, I even designed the cover with the outline of Vietnam in red.

JF: Was it a published book?

RO: It was a published book. We published it.

JF: What was the title?

RO: (pause) I can't remember the title.

JF: But the book was made up of the statements?

RO: Statements about the Vietnam War--some of which were supportive of the war, but most of which were opposed. So we published it. What it did was add to the support for Mo to be a little bit more outspoken on the subject. So then in the mid-19[60s], 1967.... I mean, the war had just become so terrible. We were getting reports of 550 Americans killed last week. Next week, another 500. Next week another 600. Next week another 700. For what?! So Mo and I discussed it. I don't know how the idea of this speech actually originated, whether it was Mo's idea or my idea, but in any event, we decided that he ought to make a speech in which he would propose something different than the present course of action. We decided that it ought to be a major speech, we ought to do it in such a way that we get maximum attention. So I called Mary Jeffries, who was then the director of the Sunday Evening Forum, and arranged for this date on October 22, [1967]. So we then had about three months to get ready for that. So Mo typed out about thirty pages of ideas. I then began putting it in the form of a speech. It went through many drafts. Mo was a bachelor at the time. I would go out to his apartment in Arlington, to get away from the office and work on it. So it was a three-month labor of love.

When we finally had it ready, and the event was approaching, we then knew that with his brother in the cabinet, we had to let the president know what we were doing, but we deliberately waited until the very last minute to do it, and we sent it over to the White House on the twentieth. And then Mo took off for Tucson. On Saturday morning, the twenty-first, he got a phone call in Tucson from Nick Katzenbach, who was then on the White House staff, and Katzenbach said the president had read his speech and wondered if he could deliver some other speech. (laughter) And we were prepared for that. And Mo said, "Gosh, I would do it, but we already put it into the mail." We had printed it as a newsletter, and we had put it into the mail on Friday. So it was literally too late to stop.

JF: So basically you all planned so that President Johnson would not get the draft until it was too late to do anything about it?

RO: Yes. We were told that it went with his evening reading on Friday night, and Saturday morning we got the phone call. Now, whether he had actually read it, I don't think is true, because Don Carson has now sent me something I hadn't seen before, and this is Walt Rostow's analysis of the speech, which is dated Saturday, October 21, [1967]. On the twentieth--I guess we had it hand-delivered, of course, to the White House, so they got it on the twentieth. Here's a memo from Barefoot [Harold] Sanders, to the president, saying, "I attach a letter received this morning from Congressman Udall, enclosing a copy of a speech on Vietnam he intends to deliver on Sunday." And then in Johnson's handwriting, it says, "Walt, analyze and send back to me. LBJ, 10-21, 11:10 pm. (laughs) (JF: Interesting.) And so Rostow's analysis actually got to the president--the time on it is 2:40 pm Saturday. So we really had them stirring on it at the White House. (laughter)

JF: Well that's interesting! Did Stewart know the content of the speech before it was made?

RO: Oh, I'm sure Mo must have told him. I mean, I didn't tell him, but I presume Mo must have told him.

JF: Did this have, ultimately, any effect between Mo and Johnson, on their relationship?

RO: It's amazing that it did not. I'm going to have to stop for just a minute. (tape turned off and on)

JF: Okay, we're back on after a break.

RO: All right. What I was starting to say was that this could very well have hurt Stewart's chances for reappointment by Johnson the next year, but there was something else that happened that I think offset this, and that was the beautification program that Stewart came up [with] for Lady Bird. That, in my opinion, is the reason that Stewart was reappointed secretary. He didn't expect to be reappointed. In fact, one day I was driving my wife and Lee Udall, Stewart's wife, somewhere, and I commented that Congress was about to pass a bill increasing the pay for cabinet members and members of Congress. And Lee's response was, "Well, that'll come too late for us."

JF: Interesting.

RO: Yes. So between June of 1964 and, say, December of 1964, Stewart's working with Lady Bird on this beautification program I think assured his reappointment. But otherwise, Johnson might very well have pointed to the defection of his brother as a reason for not....

JF: For not reappointing him. Well, we haven't been on very long here, but before I get into something else, we're close enough to the end of the tape, I'm going to flip it over.