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WATER POLITICS: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

HELEN INGRAM

Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press. Pp. \$29.95, hc/
\$15.95, sc

Why did New Mexico play a pivotal role in the “most expensive” water development “package ever approved by Congress in a single stroke.” The answer is to be found in two New Mexico leaders—State Water Engineer Steve Reynolds and Senator Clinton P. Anderson. Strength of political leadership made the difference.

The initiative for the Colorado River Basin Act, which the author calls “a water development spectacular,” came from Arizona. Arizona wanted the Central Arizona Project (CAP) for her thirsty cities of Phoenix and Tucson located far from the Colorado River. For the “CAP” to succeed, Arizona needed the support of the other Colorado River Basin states. Senator Anderson was a pillar of power in the Senate with which Arizona had to contend. “His immense reputation in Congress, the administration, and among groups concerned with water development, magnified his influence” (page 52). And the Senator from New Mexico was anxious to protect and extend the entitlement of his state to Colorado River Basin water. Senator Anderson, on water matters, teamed up with State Engineer Steve Reynolds, the persistent and formidable New Mexico “water czar.” Reynolds made it clear to Arizona that New Mexico would not support the CAP unless there were a negotiated settlement giving New Mexico more water on the Gila River in southwest New Mexico before it flows into Arizona.

This threat was potent because of his partnership with Anderson. Anderson was a “crucial power center” for Arizona. They had to have his vote, even though giving up the water on the Gila was a “hateful” pill for Arizona to swallow. In the end, New Mexico won this hard fought, often bitter, two-decades-long struggle and Arizona agreed to an enlarged entitlement for New Mexico to the Gila River in southwest New Mexico. Congressman Mo Udall was the leader for Arizona because the Arizona Senators were no match for Senator Anderson. He called the settlement “a terribly bitter one for Arizona” and with reluctant admiration said to Reynolds in the congressional hearings, “You are a very able, very aggressive and very statesmanlike representative of your people. We think you drive a hard bargain.”

In northwest New Mexico, the other bargaining chip for New Mexico was the Animas-La Plata Project. New Mexico and Colorado had long wanted to develop more Animas River water for the Durango, Farming-

ton, Aztec, and La Plata areas. The river flows from Colorado into New Mexico and joins the San Juan River as part of the Colorado River System. Here with Congressman Wayne Aspinall of Colorado playing a lead role, the Animas-La Plata Project was made a part of the Colorado River Basin Act. Congressman Aspinall was "absolutely necessary" for Arizona. He was placed in the category of vital support because of his position as Chairman of the key committee with jurisdiction over the Colorado River Basin Bill. He let it be known that in order for the Colorado River Basin Bill to be reported out of his committee, it would have to include five projects in his state including the Animas-La Plata Project.

Thus, with Congressman Mo Udall leading the way for Arizona and the CAP, the Colorado River Basin Act was signed into law by President Johnson on September 30, 1968, and Arizona celebrated the date as the greatest day since statehood. Congressman Aspinall got his Colorado Projects, and Senator Anderson and Steve Reynolds won the Gila water as well as the Animas-La Plata Project. New Mexico got its water projects approved in two far flung corners of the state. Plus, the other basin states such as Utah, Nevada, and California each got something out of this seven-state agreement. The Colorado River Basin Act truly was a "water development spectacular."

In the case of New Mexico, the irony is that after these years of struggle, of complex and even Byzantine legislative maneuvering, of maximizing her seniority and superior senatorial leadership, both of these projects now, years later, are in jeopardy because of possible conflicts with endangered species. The Hooker Dam, proposed to capture water on the Gila for New Mexico, may have met its match in the form of a fish called the spiked dace.

And, the Animas-La Plata project may be stopped by the presence of the endangered Colorado Squaw fish which in turn threatens New Mexico's ability to develop its full entitlement to Colorado River waters under the Upper Colorado River Compact.

What can we learn from this fascinating book? Yes, we are riveted by the political intrigue and exercise of political power by larger than life congressional figures—Aspinall, Anderson and Udall, and Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall and State Engineer Reynolds—but the book goes beyond that. It provides insight into the marshalling of water coalitions. In water politics:

- the focus is almost always local;
- even areas with common problems of scarcity seldom perceive shared interests;
- in Congress, localities with senior representatives can have influence on policy out of all proportion to their population;

- conflict is avoided in Congress by not bringing up broad questions of priorities and ultimate goals; and
- questions of whether a basin should be developed and for what purposes are avoided in favor of such details as number of projects, sizes, and amounts to be spent.

The author observes that the over-exploitation of water continues to take place whether it is facilitated through construction projects or the diverting of water to users remote from the areas in which water naturally occurs as illustrated by the Central Arizona Project. She concludes that "until aridity is accepted as the natural limit to which humans must adapt their expectations and institutions, water resource decisions will continue to pay insufficient attention to impacts on the environment and the social and cultural values of this fundamental resource."

This is a marvelous book, a compelling yarn, and a must for students of western water policy.

Albert E. Utton
Editor-in-Chief