

Speech of

Honorable Catherine May
U. S. House of Representatives

15th Annual Farm Forum -- Agriculture Committee

Greater Moses Lake Chamber of Commerce

February 14, 1967

This morning Dr. Tinney and Mr. Peterson gave what I am sure you agree were excellent presentations on closely-related and very vital subjects: The requirements for water use in the Pacific Northwest for agriculture and industry; and, the economic impact in the Pacific Northwest through development of our water resources.

I have been assigned a subject which requires taking a deep breath before making it: The political ramifications and the necessity of making the Northwest public aware of what must be done to keep our water resources.

Maybe I could shorten that title a bit by telling you that I am going to talk about how the battle is shaping up in Congress on the question of raiding the Northwest of it's water.

The villian of the piece, as you know, is the pending legislation to authorize what is referred to as the Colorado River Basin Project. Let me give you just a little history. The big push in Congress for authorization of the Colorado River Basin Project last year -- which was really only a trial balloon of a precariously put-together compromise of the 7 states that obtain water from the Colorado River Basin -- is a 1.7 billion dollar water project -- the first stage of the multi-billion dollar Southwest Water Plan. The main feature of the proposal is the Central Arizona Project, designed primarily to transport water from existing reservoirs to parts of Arizona.

Let me digress at this point for just a moment to point out that Arizona's first study of a plan to bring Colorado River Water into the center part of the State was made almost 50 years ago. And even many of those persons who are opposed to the Colorado River Basin Bill as it was presented last year are agreed that Arizona does have a desperate need for supplemental water.

The Colorado River Basin Project, however, includes much more than just the Central Arizona Project. It contains a number of additional projects and features. It's a kind of "something-for-everybody" of the Southwest approach. Among these features are two very controversial hydro-electric dams in the area of the Grand Canyon National Park: The Bridge Canyon and Marble Canyon hydro-electric dams would be constructed in the Grand Canyon in order to produce revenue to help finance the rest of the project, particularly the works to import water from the Columbia River through inter-basin transfer.

The Johnson Administration, speaking through the Bureau of the Budget, recommended last year against construction of the Bridge Canyon Dam, pending further study of the project in a National perspective. Nevertheless, both dams were retained in the legislation (H.R. 4671) which cleared the House subcommittee on Irrigation and Reclamation, and then it's parent committee, the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs. It was perhaps fortunate that both of these highly controversial dams were kept in the legislation at that time -- fortunate for the Pacific Northwest, that is. Both dams vehemently opposed by conservationist groups throughout the United States. These groups fear the spoiling of the Grand Canyon.

The Committee strategy, as planned by Southwest State Congressmen, was to drop one of the dams during a point in the debate on the floor of the House of Representatives, as a "concession" to conservationists, hoping to thus gain their support, or at least to soften their opposition.

But the bill never saw the light of day after it left the Committee.

An editorial in the Los Angeles Times described -- fairly accurately -- what happened then.

Quoting from the paper:

"Although finally afloat, the inter-state legislation soon ran into dangerous political shoals.

"First, the militant partisans of the Sierra Club attacked the proposed Marble and Bridge Canyon Dams, necessary components of the Central Arizona Project. Club members couldn't prove their contention that the dams would "ruin" the Grand Canyon, but they were able to drum up a lot of uninformed sympathy and thus weaken the regional plan's chances.

"Then the Pacific Northwest's representatives moved in to prevent any congressional action that could lead to even the slightest diversion of the vast surpluses of Columbia River water that are wasted annually." (I am still quoting the Los Angeles Times).

"In the face of such opposition, the Southwest states fell to quarreling among themselves. Their long-sought unity strained at the seams, and for a time it appeared that only an emaciated bill would emerge.....Congress adjourned before the measure reached the House floor."

That is part of an editorial from the Los Angeles Times of January 3, 1967. Incidentally, I think you will also be interested in what else that editorial has to say. Remember, these are not my words. They are the words of a foremost proponent of diversion of water from the Pacific Northwest to their area. I quote again:

"In the months that followed (since Congress adjourned last October) a great deal of soul searching has gone on in the Colorado River Basin States. The temptation to scuttel the inter-state alliance and the original regional plan was surely strong, particularly in Arizona, where some water leaders advocate that the state build the Central Arizona Project on its own as a last resort. Other states are

prepared to accede to the dam protestors on at least the proposed construction at Marble Gorge.

"Worst of all, some basin states seem willing to give up the feasibility study for water importation.

"Yet nothing during the past year has changed the basic principles upon which the original regional plan was built.

"Only the stubbornness -- and political muscle -- of Northwest senators and House members prevents serious consideration of diverting surplus Columbia River water. Only the vehemence of Sierra Club members and like-minded special interests could cause the abandonment of reclamation dam projects in the name of 'conservation.'

"California's congressional delegation must not yield to this counsel of despair." (the editorial goes on) -- "We have joined in a sound and proper compromise to further the common cause of western water development. We recognize the water rights of every other state except the 'right' to hoard water that it can never use." End of quote.

Well! Dr. Tinney, I am sure, considers as fighting words an indictment like that about our motives in the Northwest -- "hoarding" water that we "can never use"!

As false as we know that statement to be, that, my friends, is what our neighbors to the south of us think. From the way they look at things, I suppose, it makes a good-sounding argument. But it just isn't true.

That's why I was so shocked when I found that the Commissioner of the United States Bureau of Reclamation was saying the same thing -- in different words -- and saying it in speeches -- right here in the State of Washington!

I was astounded when the Commissioner, in a speech last October 18 to the Inland Empire Waterways Association meeting at Walla Walla, said, and I quote:

"You are a part of the United States and it is not the American Way to let one sector of the Nation suffer while another prospers with renewable resources wasting to the sea." End of quote.

Well, I called the Commissioner on that one. We both found ourselves on the program of the Washington State Reclamation Association meeting in Yakima on November 3 of last year. In a way, it was kind of amusing. The Commissioner -- and by the way I think we are still friends -- departed from his prepared speech and denied that he had inferred we of the Northwest are un-American. But then, returning again to his previously-prepared text, read the same precise statement he had made at Walla Walla. "You are part of the United States," said he, "and it is not the American Way to let one sector of the Nation suffer while another prospers with renewable resources wasting to the sea."

My answer to that is that water raids -- any kind of raid of one area's resources by another area -- are not exactly my idea of the American way, either!

The point I want to make is this: We have some educating to do. Dr. Tinney and Mr. Peterson, and other fine and completely competent experts are gathering the facts -- the facts that all of us know -- but which we must be able to prove. The fact that we of the Northwest are -- surely enough -- blessed with an abundance of fine water. But also the fact that we have vital uses for this water, and the fact that if the water we need is diverted to the Southwest, it would be a disaster to us.

And it appears that we not only must prove this to the Pacific Southwest, we must prove it to everyone -- including the Bureau of Reclamation, the Department of the Interior, and the Nation as a whole.

If others want to call us "stubborn", as did the Los Angeles Times, that's alright with me. We can prove that we are stubborn because we are right!

I think Cal Marks, the chief editorial writer of the Spokesman-Review, and a Washington State Member of the Western States Water Council, stated the situation well, when he wrote for that newspaper's recent Progress edition: "The greatest natural resource of the Pacific Northwest has never been truly measured for its potential contribution to the economy of the region and the nation. Almost everyone in the area knows we have an abundant supply of clean fresh water in the Columbia River system -- that it powers the massive generators in many hydro-electric dams, nourishes the farm lands, keeps the forests green, sustains fish and wildlife, provides river navigation, satisfies our thirst, and fulfills the needs of commerce and industry. It is only when there is talk of possible diversion of some Columbia system water to the Pacific Southwest that we realize how little we know about our present requirements, our fluctuating supplies, our dangers of pollution and our potential needs for vast quantities of water to meet the demands of the future for a great variety of uses." Mr. Marks summed up his article by saying, "While the Federal government remains dominant and national and regional policies are determined by Congress, this region is expecting an increasing display of state responsibility for the wise planning, use and conservation of the abundant water resources with which we are blessed." End of quote.

But let's get back to what is going on right now in Congress. We must never lose sight of the fact that the political muscle of the Southwest, numerically, is strong. California alone boasts thirty-eight Representatives in Congress, and although the other Southwest states cannot match this, they do have political muscle in the personage of Wayne Aspinall of Colorado, who happens to be chairman of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs in the House of Representatives.

On the other hand, although we of the Pacific Northwest do not have the votes that States like California enjoy, we have some muscle too -- like Henry Jackson of our State who happens to be the Chairman of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs in the Senate.

Chairman Aspinall, in the House, lost no time in paving the way for a renewed battle this year. On the first day of the new Congress -- January 10th -- he introduced a new version of the Colorado River Basin bill. Chairman Aspinall's new bill, incidentally, would authorize only one dam, the half-billion-dollar Hualapai (formerly Bridge Canyon) dam below Grand Canyon National Park. His bill is like bills also introduced the opening day by the three-man House delegation from Arizona. A bill introduced by Representative Craig Hosmer of California has both the dams in it and is similar to the measure approved by the House Interior Committee last year.

At the same time a number of us from the Pacific Northwest countered with introduction of bills to create a National Water Commission. This legislation calls for a comprehensive review of National water resource problems and programs. Under the terms of these bills, a National Water Commission of seven members would be appointed by the President to "review present and anticipated National water resource problems and identify alternative ways of meeting water requirements."

I feel formation of a National Water Commission such as this would help insure that the President would be fully advised on alternative means of satisfying National and regional water requirements, and this could turn out to be very important in helping to stem the drive of the Southwest states to tap the Columbia for additional water supplies.

The Commission would give consideration to conservation and more efficient use of existing supplies, increased usability by reduction of pollution, innovations to encourage the highest economic use of water, inter-basin transfers, and technological advances including desalting, weather modification, and wastewater purification and re-use. In addition, the Commission would consider economic and social consequences of water resource development, including its impact on regional economic growth, on institutional arrangements, and on esthetic values affecting the quality of life of the American people.

A similar bill passed the Senate last year, but was modified and included as a part of the controversial Colorado River Basin bill. This was an attempt to put a "sweetener" in diversion legislation, but obviously none of us from the Pacific Northwest was about to buy that!

This year, the National Water Commission bill was the first bill to pass the Senate, and it was dropped squarely in Chairman Aspinall's lap in the House of Representatives. We are now waiting to see what his pleasure will be.

What we received in 1966 was time. It was precious time. It gave us that chance we needed to take inventory of our resources and our need for those resources. We are now taking that inventory as you know from this morning's speakers.

But the next time we do battle in Congress, we are going to need some real, honest-to-goodness facts and figures. We have got to prove what we have been saying. We have got to prove that we do not have enough water in our Columbia River system to satisfy an unending and unquenchable thirst of seven states served by another river system. We have got to show them that they had better be giving the most serious and active consideration to alternatives -- alternatives such as those enumerated in the bill to authorize a National Water Commission.

We in the Pacific Northwest -- unlike the Pacific Southwest -- are united. We will remain united when the facts are in. This will be our strength. And from the strength of our arguments will come National consensus....to solve all of our Nation's water problems to the benefit of all and at the sacrifice of none.

Thank you.
