When asked to discuss the subject, politics of water in Colorado, I could feel the feathers begin to palpitate in my mid-section. My emotions were extremely confused. I wondered why anyone would relegate me to be trampled by the Republican elephants or severely kicked in the rear by the Democratic donkeys. Neither of those probable reactions to a dissertation on party politics, as related to irrigation or water resource developments, appealed to my delicate and timid nature. Perhaps a better idea would be to lambaste both the Republicans and Democrats, step outside the ring, and let them fight each other over the questions of which party should get the credit for supporting irrigation or receive the blame for the adversities cast upon it in recent years. That did not seem to be a very good idea either; especially after discovering that Congresswoman Smith is to be on your program. After all, she knows much more about party politics than I do. If she didn’t, she would not be the highly-respected member of Congress that she is.

In seeking a logical excuse for steering away from party politics, and after indulging in some degree of retrospection, it soon became apparent that there are a couple of things that a life-long supporter of irrigation and water resource development should not forget. For instance, under a Republican administration in 1956 the Bill to authorize the construction of the Colorado River Storage Project was enacted into law. That project was the largest multi-purpose water resource development ever authorized by the Federal government. In 1968, under a Democratic administration the Colorado River Basin Project Act, which included the Central Arizona Project, supplanted the Colorado River Storage Project Act as the largest irrigation-reclamation authorization in history.
At that point—hooray for both parties! They had recognized the true value of irrigation to the Nation and to the world.

On the other hand, in 1977, the Democratic Carter "hit list" descending as a battle-axe on the skull of a beautiful woman crushed the irrigation-reclamation program of a proud Nation along with the rest of the water resources management and development programs so vital to the economic and social welfare of our citizenry. The story does not end there. We now have a Republican administration in Washington that professes to be in favor of irrigation and water resource development. The Reagan administration has effectively demonstrated that it does not have either a policy, unless that policy is a continuation of the Carter "hit-list", or a program for irrigation and other water resource development. For two years we have been listening to a lot of rhetoric about up-front money and cost sharing with the States, as a new policy for water project funding. For two years the administration's lack of policy even after a number of States, including my own, have expressed a willingness to participate in cost sharing with the Federal government, has been as effective a road block as the Carter "hit list". One can only conclude that killing projects can be accomplished by delays that are sometimes more treacherous than a "hit list".

So much for party politics. You will have to admit that the parties were given equal time.

I was told to confine my remarks to politics of water with a small "p". I was not sure whether that meant less water or something else. I found one definition in the dictionary that interpreted politics as being, "the methods or tactics involved in managing a state or government". That interpretation seemed to be applicable.

In thinking about politics of water one must remember the fundamental fact that decisions about irrigation or water development at all levels of government are political
decisions. Engineering and legal facts are necessary as foundations for decisions, but the engineer’s and the lawyer’s opinions become subverted to politics in the final analysis. Even at the level of an irrigation district or canal company the decisions are not made by the engineer, lawyer, or other technical individual. They are made by an elected or appointed board of directors.

At the State level the same basic procedure is used. Looking back into the early history of our State, we note that the decision to base water rights on the doctrine of prior appropriation, also known as the “Colorado doctrine”, instead of on the riparian system used by our forefathers in the east was made by the legislature, because it had been demonstrated to the politicians that the riparian doctrine would not work efficiently in Colorado.

I am not berating the making of political decisions with respect to irrigation and water resources. In our democratic society this manner of resolving issues is proper. In addition, if we do not like certain policies that are adopted we have the opportunity to override those policies by, as they say, “turn the rascals out of office”.

Colorado is located on the roof of the nation from which water originating flows downstream in interstate river systems and is used in eighteen other States. Colorado has had to enter into nine major interstate water compacts and three subcompacts in order to protect her rights to use water that might otherwise be put to use and claimed in perpetuity by other States. This policy of fostering interstate agreements has placed limitations on my State’s use of water. As a result, on all of her major streams Colorado is now being very careful in choosing which new water projects are to be constructed. On the other hand, Colorado realizes that unless her remaining water supplies
are developed and put to beneficial use within the State, there is danger in these rapidly changing times that some of the water to which Colorado is legally entitled may be physically lost to others by political changes, particularly with respect to changes in policy by the Federal Government, or the courts.

It is becoming more apparent with each passing day that we are living in a new world compared with that of only a few years ago. Some of the trends in natural resources development are obscure, some are still dim, and gradually some trends are emerging into daylight. At times, we are seeing traditional practices becoming obsolete. No wonder well-intentioned water people are confused by the indecision and chaos about us at all levels of government.

It is clear that the Federal government is retrenching from its traditional role in development and management of the Nation's water resources. Please note that I said retrench rather than withdraw. There is no way that the Federal government can purge itself of all water responsibilities. Nor is there any indication or intention on the part of the Federal establishment to do so.

During my career in water resources there have been many changes, usually associated with accomplishments. This has not been true of the past several years. Our water program nationally, and in Colorado, too, has seemed to lack purpose and direction and has been erratically going down hill mostly as the result of changes in policy emanating from Washington. Let us not lose sight of the fact that regardless of the constantly changing patterns of life—changes made possible by new technologies and our ever-increasing population—we are still facing a series of basic facts.
First, we will always require water for the many uses it serves. Think about trying to do without it, or without sufficient quantities for your present way of life. Second, we can expect uses of water to increase with respect to purposes, places, and time. Third, water management programs must keep pace with changing requirements and demands of a dynamic society. Fourth, priorities may vary from time to time, but we can safely predict that nationally, and in Colorado, water demand and water use will continue to increase--regardless of what the priorities may be.

It was inevitable that these demands for a finite commodity are creating conflicts among competing uses of water. In some parts of my state the heavy demands for municipal and industrial water, for which high prices can be paid, are taking water away from irrigated agriculture. We do not like to see this happening, but until new supplies of water can be developed at costs cheaper than those that have to be paid for agricultural water this trend will probably continue. If the agricultural economy could be substantially up-graded so that irrigation farmers could demand a higher price for their water when it is to be transferred to other uses, this trend might cease or, at least, slow down.

Political decisions to resolve these types of conflicts must be very carefully considered in order that we may achieve a reasonable balance in meeting not only requirements for water, but other related requirements, too.

At the Federal level, we hope that we have an administration, and perhaps a Congress, that understand the role of irrigated agriculture and water resources for human welfare, and in our economy. We realize that high inflation, need for a balanced budget, and increased expenditures for defense have forced our national water program to lay on the table. In Colorado, we have tried to turn this period of marking time to our advantage by concentrating on urgent development of a constructive state water program.
We are no longer in a position where we can wait for a crisis to occur, and then fix it with band aid operations.

We are doing our best through the deliberations of responsible people to resolve our in-state differences over the development, use, and management of water. Governor Lamm has created a Water Round Table that is on the verge of getting almost all entities, environmental, east slope, west slope, etc. together on a master water concept for the State. Under the Governor's leadership this Round Table has all but accomplished the impossible. Colorado is now climbing uphill to a new era of constructive, state-directed water management. With the vast majority of the population on the east slope of the State, and the major quantity of the unused water supply on the west slope with its more pristine wilderness-type environments, the differences of opinion in the past have been vociferous and wide. The decision is not far distant to establish a policy under which, when more water is to be diverted from the west to the east slope there will be concurrent agreement to construct water storage facilities on both slopes. In this manner the east slope will be able to use water as soon as it is needed, and the west slope will have its storage reservoirs in place and ready for use when required in the future.

We are very fortunate, if we take into consideration changing priorities of water use, in having sufficient water for our needs for a long time in the future. Unfortunately, in some instances we face severe problems, both financial and legal, in making water available where and when it will be needed. With an $80-million deficit in its 1983 budget, Colorado will continue to face difficult times with its water management program during the next several years.
Please note that I have been talking about a water program by which we will get things accomplished. A number of experts have advocated developing a national water policy. There is a difference. We have a water policy, or a maze of water policies to fit differing situations. Policies are generated from legislation enacted by the Congress and the regulations promulgated thereunder to implement them. Therein lie the roadblocks to developing a positive water conservation, management, and development program, because in recent years policies and regulations have been developed by no-growth advocates or extreme environmentalists. Now the Reagan administration, facing an unprecedented economic situation, is unable to act. Net result - a negative water policy and no viable water program.

In Colorado - I believe that our time is overdue for developing a water program to meet our future water needs and be prepared for emergencies. It now appears that Colorado is heading toward that goal.

The 1981 session of the General Assembly enacted legislation creating a Colorado Water Resources and Power Development Authority and blessed it with the responsibility to find ways to finance multi-million dollar water projects. The Authority is entering the process of making feasibility studies of several projects which, if feasible, will be financed from the sale of revenue bonds.

Where the Federal government is involved the most effective way the State’s money can be utilized is for the construction of water projects on a cost-sharing basis. One of the partners will have to be the federal government for two very good reasons. First, the Federal government owns many of the involved lands. Second, remember those roadblocks to water development programs in policies regurgitating from rules and regulations promulgated under at least 13 Federal laws known as the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, Wilderness Act, Federal Water Pollution
Control Act, Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, National Trails System Act, National Environmental Policy Act, Environmental Quality Improvement Act, Federal Water Pollution Control Act Amendments, Endangered Species Act, Safe Drinking Water Act, Toxic Substance Control Act, Federal Land Policy and Management Act, and Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act, all of which are inherently integral parts of our national water policy. Only the Federal partner can get around those Acts by changing policies - and some of the Acts may need substantial modifications by the Congress for that to be possible.

Thus, you can see that financing water projects is only a part of our water resource development problems. It is an important part. I am glad my State is positively interested in cost-sharing, which has appeared to be imminent. We need to be ready for it, although we don’t know the rules yet. The point is that we are doing first things first in removing impediments to development of a Colorado water program.

The Greek philosopher, Pindar, as early as the fifth century B.C. said, "Water is the best of all things." That may have been an overstatement because wine in those days undoubtedly was superior to untreated water, but it is certainly not a surprising statement. You must realize that water has been one of the most precious commodities throughout the history of man. Civilizations could not have developed and survived without it.

Water has always possessed potent political and economic power. Wars have been fought over the availability of water. Since the beginning of recorded history, water has been an important facet of political activities between nations and within nations. As examples involving international politics, there are Pakistan and India, the Middle East countries along the Jordan River, Egypt and
other countries on the Nile - and the United States and Mexico involving the Colorado River and Rio Grande. In fact, on almost every continent there are international politics involved in apportioning water of some river system between and among nations -- and, in all of them, water for the production of food and fiber for expanding populations is the primary motive force. Is there any wonder that we have found politics involved in disagreements between States, or between political subdivisions within Colorado?

Of course, there are politics in all phases of water development, water conservation, and water management. As you look around you will soon realize that a genuine "politics of water" ethic has already developed in the United States. It is rapidly becoming a major center of interest. In fact, it has become so potent in Colorado that a couple of the candidates for election to the legislature campaigned on the issue that one should not even study the feasibility of constructing a potential project in order to determine the engineering, legal and environmental facts upon which to make a decision to build or not to build a project. Both were elected. There must be an infamous lesson there someplace.

The Northeastern States have become fully aware of the politics of water. They have formed the Consortium of Northeast Organizations. Among its members are:

Northeast-Midwest Congressional Coalition
Coalition of Northeastern Governors
Council for Northeast Economic Action
New England Congressional Caucus
New England Regional Commission
Coalition of Northeast Municipalities

This Consortium has identified a number of significant issues of an agenda for united Northeast action in water policy. It hired the NOVA Institute to prepare a report
called "The Northeast Water Resources Project". Heading a list of problems identified is the problem of water supply. The report points out that many northeastern cities and towns face growing problems in maintaining and repairing their water supply systems. While most engineering standards call for replacement of water lines every 75 years, New York City's replacement rate is every 300 years, and Jersey City has a 500-year cycle. Boston loses almost 50% of its water through leaky pipes. Other northeastern cities facing water shortage troubles include Providence and Pittsburgh. At least $4-5 billion will be required to correct these long-term mismanagement practices—and they want the money from federal grants—and they bitterly oppose water management projects in the West—as late as last month, while considering the continuing resolution for public works appropriations for fiscal year 1983 in the congress.

The report states that the range of water problems facing the Northeast clearly demonstrates the need for strong regional action, and that greater attention will be devoted to federal water programs and legislation in the future for opportunities to include items of greater relevance to the Northeast. The report bemoans the fact that the Bureau of Reclamation was established to help the water-short areas in the West, but that no federal assistance is available for rehabilitation and maintenance of water supply systems of the Northeast.

The implications of action by this Northeast Consortium relating to competition for funds for water resource development between the West and the Northeast are not all bad. Here is a beautiful and powerful political situation for the Northeast. Maybe it is a good lesson for us, too. We have just as many Senators per State in the West as they have in the Northeast. All we need to do is inculcate Western Senators with the idea that they support appropriations of federal funds for rehabilitation and repair of the water systems of the Northeastern cities—but at a price. What should that price be? As a starter,
how about turning some federally owned lands in the
west to State ownership and requiring the Northeast to
repay the $4-5 billion to the federal treasury under a
loan system similar to that imposed upon the West by the
Reclamation Act.

One of these days the political forces in Washington
will recognize the fact that agriculture--including
irrigated agriculture--is the most efficient sector of
the American economy--especially in establishing a
more favorable international balance of trade and
stabilizing the American dollar. Right now we need
national leadership with the intestinal fortitude to make
food and fiber from agriculture an effective weapon in
international politics--in a manner similar to that used
by the Arabs with respect to oil--and let's let the world
know that irrigated agriculture is the most successful
of all agricultural systems.

If there is any broad general lesson that irrigation
farmers should have learned from the events of recent
years, it is that they need to become better oriented in
the "politics of water". Get organized. Let those who
represent you know at all levels of government that you
have the political power to make a major impact on the
economy of your State and our nation. You may find it
expedient to form an irrigated agriculture political action
committee, just as hundreds of other special interests
do, in order to accomplish your goals.

The bottom line is--get involved in the politics of
water--stay involved and never give up. You will be
surprised at the support you can generate, especially
after one little touch of success.

In conclusion, I wish every one of you an improved
irrigated agriculture economy in 1983.