

COLORADO GOVERNORS

Stephen McNichols



Scope and Content Note

The Governor Stephen McNichols collection comprises approximately 230 cubic feet of material spanning his term as governor from 1957-1963. The collection is described down to the file folder level. Major series in the collection include correspondence; the Executive Record; newspaper clippings and other material concerning public relations; photographs; speeches and messages; proclamations; and reports. Correspondence makes up the bulk of the collection.

Governor McNichols' entire administration is well documented through the 230 cubic feet of records in custody at the Colorado State Archives. The strengths of the collection include documentation concerning water reclamation, highway building, and legislative topics. There is also material concerning different aspects of the Cold War and the domestic response to it including foreign policy, nuclear strategy, civil defense, and

"subversive" activities by communist sympathizers. Atomic energy development in Colorado is also well documented.

Biography

Stephen Lucid Robert McNichols, Colorado's Democrat Governor from 1957 to 1963, was born in Denver on March 7, 1914. McNichols' father William H. McNichols, Denver's well-respected auditor for over thirty years, was undoubtedly influential in steering his two sons Bill and Stephen toward their success in state politics. Stephen McNichols graduated from East Denver High School and Regis College to pursue a law degree from Catholic University in Washington. After graduating in 1939 he joined the Federal Bureau of Investigation as a field officer in Baltimore and Boston. After a year of service McNichols returned home to assist the Denver District Attorney, John A. Carroll. He later became an assistant in the U.S. Attorney General's anti-trust division in Denver. In 1942 McNichols married Marjory Hart to which five children would eventually be born. McNichols' family life as well as his municipal and judicial aspirations were put on hold, however, when the U.S. Navy required his services as an officer in the amphibious corps in 1942. He distinguished himself in the service earning the Bronze Star and was promoted to lieutenant commander.

Less than ten years after receiving his law degree McNichols opened his own law firm McNichols, Dunn & Nevans and was elected to the state senate. As a senator McNichols soon became recognized as a skilled planner and was respected for his ability to cross party lines to achieve his goals. During his two

terms he was instrumental in developing a plan for long-range highway development, a school district reorganization proposal, and a scheme to centralize public utility management. McNichols' abilities to plan and pass legislation were rewarded in 1954 when he was elected as Edwin Johnson's Lt. Governor. When Governor Johnson was ill, which was much of the time during this administration, McNichols learned the daily responsibilities of the governorship. It was this experience that helped McNichols to successfully become elected Colorado's Governor in 1956.

Controversial activism and far-reaching plans distinguished McNichols' administration. As governor McNichols championed an improved system of school financial aid distribution and successfully lobbied for an increased university faculty salary cap. McNichols also advocated institutional reform for the State Hospital in Pueblo and State Penitentiary in Canon City, both organizations fraught with corruption and aging structures. McNichols pushed public works projects securing federal funding for his long-range highway development program and seeing that the Fryingpan-Arkansas water development project was begun. He was also instrumental in the development of the Colorado State Archives and the governorship grew from a two to a four-year term during his administration.

To pass this tremendous package of legislation McNichols often alienated members of his own Democratic Party, and to pay for it he lobbied for an unpopular tax hike. Furthermore, McNichols' Fryingpan - Arkansas water diversion project caused friction between the Western Slope and Front Range regions. Another source of contention was McNichols' acceptance of the Executive Residence from the Boettcher Foundation. Many legislators disagreed with this decision and believed that it showed McNichols to be arrogant and power-hungry. Ironically, the same package of legislation that got him elected to the governorship in 1956 brought him defeat in his 1962 reelection campaign.

McNichols' defeat at the polls did not stop him from securing a successful bid for the U.S. Senate in 1968, serving as a Democratic National Committee member, or as the Rocky Mountain Regions U.S. Commerce Director in 1977. His public service came to an end on November 25, 1997 when he died due to heart failure. Governor Roy Romer said this of former Governor Stephen McNichols, "I served in the state legislature during his tenure as governor and remember well his character, unique style and commitment to Colorado...He was one of our best governors, in an important time in our history."

Bibliography

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- Newspaper Files: Steve L. R. McNichols. Denver Public Library, Western History Collection.
- Oral History Project: Steve L. R. McNichols. Colorado Historical Society.
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Series Descriptions

Correspondence

The correspondence series is divided into a subject file and a numerically arranged file which contains correspondence with state agencies. The subject file includes documentation concerning water reclamation projects as well as other water-related topics. There is considerable material relating to the development of atomic energy resources in Colorado, such as uranium, as well as correspondence with the Atomic Energy Commission. There is also correspondence concerning the Rocky Mountain Arsenal. There is material concerning the Cold War, including information concerning foreign policy, nuclear strategy, civil defense, the Cuban Missile crisis, and the "Investigation of Communist Activities in the Rocky Mountain Area (1956) - Hearing Before the Committee on Un-American Activity." Legislative bills and actions as well as the governor's role in the legislative process is well documented. Other miscellaneous subjects such as disasters and disaster protection, the smelter shutdown at Leadville, the Colorado Centennial Commission (1959), and migrant laborers are also covered in the correspondence series.

Executive Record

The Executive Record contains executive orders; appointments; legislative messages; pardons; extraditions and requisitions; honorary citations; and proclamations which were issued by Governor McNichols during his term of office from 1957-1963.

Photographs

While there are not a large number of photographs in the collection, a few exist which document miscellaneous subjects such as migrant labor, the U.S. Department of Interior, the Colorado Centennial Commission, former governor Edwin Johnson, Colorado Week, and the National Governor's Conference. There are additional photographs throughout the newsclipping series.

Newsclippings/Public Relations

This series is comprised of newsclippings, news releases, and other materials regarding public relations. There are newsclippings concerning many of the speeches that Governor McNichols made during his term.

Speeches and Messages

Copies of topical speeches concerning subjects including taxes, government, agriculture, industry and economics, and speeches by former governor Edwin Johnson comprise this series. Within the Executive Record Governor McNichols' messages and speeches to the General Assembly exist.

Proclamations

This series consists of Executive Proclamations issued by the governor and deposited as filings in the Office of the Secretary of State.

Reports

This series consists primarily of reports from state agencies and one report entitled "Western Reclamation States to President Kennedy."