

What Is Being Done In Reclamation Work

Extracts from the following address, delivered by Chief Counsel Will R. King of the United States reclamation service, before the Chamber of Commerce at Billings, Mont., will be of interest to Yuma water users.

The speech was delivered last March, but the extracts from it furnished by Claude R. Burson of the reclamation service will be as interesting now to the water users here as they were then to the hearers of Judge King at Billings.

"I realize, that you expect me to talk about irrigation and kindred topics, rather than that I should give my experiences. I have been in reclamation work as chief counsel of the reclamation service for about eighteen months. During that time a great many changes have taken place, but when I say that the reclamation service has very materially progressed in its work, it does not necessarily reflect upon those who have gone before, for, as all know, reclamation work in this country has merely passed through the experimental stage. That is, it is passing through the experimental stage. In a great undertaking like this, it requires years to reach the point where the machinery may move along more easily and smoothly. Remember our first automobiles. What difficulties they had in climbing precipitous mountains and in ordinary hills: but now we find them even climbing are beginning to be attached to flying machines, all in only a short period of about 15 years has this been brought about. Reclamation work is now beginning to move along with about the same rapidity, largely due to the present eminent secretary's progressive ideas; progression, not only over the political route, but in a public business way as well. After calling together representatives from all arid states, who were and are interested in the reclamation service, and hearing their

criticisms of the service, he discovered that one of the weaknesses of the service was the fact that it was too remote from the people who are obligated to pay the bills; that there was not enough of the human element being injected into the service; that the people had too much difficulty in communicating with the people in charge and that some new and more effective method of dealing with them was necessary.

With a view to remedying this, he placed the reclamation service under a "commission form of government," consisting of five commissioners, each one having his own special line to look after, but who acting collectively, should, and do, constitute the administrative body of the service. While I am a member of the legal profession and the chief counsel for the reclamation service, yet, as one of the commissioners, I also have the double duty of being one of the administrative officers as well. Mr. O'Donnell is in charge of irrigation, and as supervisor of irrigation is required to travel about looking after special matters throughout the various projects; he is at the same time one of the five administrative members of the commission, along with the chief engineer, chief counsel the comptroller, and the newly appointed chief constructionist. By this method the secretary has adopted a much better and more effective method of handling the business end of the work and at the same time get into touch with the people who are vitally interested in the work. For example, Mr. O'Donnell, as supervisor of irrigation, is going about from one project to the other, hears the complaints and thereby becomes familiar with the weak points of the government work in any particular locality, especially as affects the administrative end of the work, and seeks a remedy, and while on the ground learns where and how to apply the remedy.

For example, day before yesterday morning at our meeting at Newell, South Dakota, a man arose and asked why he could not get his headgate fixed so there would be no waste of water. Mr. O'Donnell immediately directed the project manager, who was in the audience, to "fix that headgate." When he asked if there were any others who needed headgates fixed or repaired, some, some one whispered in the audience, though it didn't get around very far, that some of them needed their heads fixed instead of headgates but, as I said before, that remark did not get around very far.

Thus, as stated, the secretary, thru his new system, has succeeded in getting in touch with the people. We are not flattering ourselves, however, that we have solved all the problems

along this line. We recognize that there are more to follow. With the next few years it may be decided to go much farther than we have gone. So much so that we might not cheerfully admit that we were members of the commission at this particular time. I hope so, at least, and we promise not to be at all envious or jealous of any further progress, however great, but do reserve the privilege upon being asked about it, to give among our excuses that we were members of the service in the early stages, etc.

But, coming down to the practical part of the work. There is one feature connected with the reclamation service policies which but few realize. They appreciate it when called to their attention, but I fear it seldom occurs to them. That is, we have problems to solve in this bureau with which no other department of the public service has to contend. That is to say, the government now, for example, has expended nearly one hundred million dollars in the building of reclamation projects. It has not only spent it very wisely and most effectively, trying to secure the greatest possible service for every dollar spent, but has at the same time been required to provide a way by which to get that money back again.

When the other departments spend money it is gone; they tell it goodbye. A warship is built at large cost and whether it sinks a foe or itself should land at the bottom of the sea, the money spent never returns. When money is expended in building harbors, improving the navigability of the rivers, etc., we never expect to see it returned directly to the government in dollars and cents; we only expect its return, if at all, in the way of general benefits to the public. Hence the difficulties confronting the departments making such expenditures are not so great as in the reclamation service, where we must provide a way to have returned to the reclamation fund every dollar expended in our work.

As stated in the case of Baker vs. Swigert, by the United States supreme court, it is contemplated that every dollar of the reclamation fund shall be returned to it; the expenditures bear no interest hence unless a means is provided whereby the money expended shall be returned, the fund will eventually become depleted and just to the extent it may not be returned to that particular fund, the funds needed for new projects are depleted. I fear the water users under the various projects too often forget this particular feature. When their projects are placed in operation they realize the great benefits derived, but forget the millions of acres of arid land waiting for the expenditure of more money. It is very important that this money be returned to the fund in order that we may further conquer the desert. We must have it to carry on our warfare; not upon men, but upon the desert.

If we but had the money now being expended in warfare in Europe today, or even one-tenth of it, we could conquer and reclaim more territory in the western states than the total area of some of the principal nations engaged in these wars. And not the desert alone; but about seventy-five million acres of swamp land in the southern

states. And, taking into consideration that we may carry on a conquest without loss of lives, but by the protection and preservation of them, you should remember that it becomes the duty of every one receiving the benefits of funds expended by the service to do his part toward securing its return.

Some say to us: "If they expend funds for rivers and harbors and give such funds a parting goodbye, why don't they say the same for us?" But they forget the very important distinction that when it is expended for the betterment of harbors, the entire country, if not the world, may use them, but when expended in the reclamation of arid lands, the beneficiary is given the land, and as such occupant or owner has the exclusive right to the use of such particular tract of land. The public, it is true, receives the general benefit of having all this land added to the wealth of the nation and many of us incline to the view that the government should take into consideration these general benefits received, and, accordingly, should be willing to contribute at least a part of the cost.

The difficulty, however, is to know where to draw the line, but it would seem the government should contribute at least a part of the expenditures that inure to the general welfare of the public, without reference to any particular individual. But when we take into consideration the further feature that this is the only enterprise upon which the government is embarked, at least as far as I know, where it furnishes the money to the people with which to supply the water so essential to the upbuilding of the homes and that it supplies this money without interest, it certainly should be deemed the taking of a very generous step in the right direction on the part of the government.

Under the 20-year extension act, it furnishes the money for the first four years at 2 per cent, the next two years at 4 per cent, and the rest of the time at 6 per cent. I can remember when I first entered into politics away back in the year 1892, that for some years there was a certain political party comprised of a considerable number of the people, that advocated the making of government loans to the farmers at 2 per cent. The majority of the people at that time questioned the sanity of such proposed policy, yet we now find the government furnishing money to the people without any interest, and we join in the thought that it is right in doing so. But if you want to figure upon an interest basis, we must remember that the government furnishes the money from the reclamation fund at 2 per cent part of the time and then 4 and then 6 per cent, and that for an average for twenty years you pay but 5 per cent annually.

This reminds me of a sign placed upon his farm over in Utah by a big farmer who concluded to go into the real estate business. His sign read: "This is the place to get your home. The government furnishes the money to reclaim the land, charges you 5 per cent interest for twenty years and then gives you the principal." And that is in fact what the government is doing, presenting you with the principal at the end of twenty years, providing you pay the equivalent of