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Maverick Republican

JOHN SAYLOR wanted to celebrate his mother's seventy-ninth birthday with his colleagues on the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee. He ordered platters of ham and turkey and an assortment of liquor and approached newly appointed Republican committee chair A. L. Miller about holding the event in the House Interior Committee meeting room. A teetotaling physician from Nebraska, Miller agreed to the request so long as no liquor was served. "Doctor, what is a party without a highball?" Saylor inquired.

Determined to proceed, Saylor sent out the invitations. Miller became incensed at Saylor's defiance and sought guidance from Republican House speaker Joseph Martin. Even though alcohol was commonly served at social functions in federal buildings, Martin supported the liquor ban, perhaps because he too was a nondrinker. Miller sent a letter to Saylor reminding him of their earlier conversation: "I am assuming you are using the room for a social get-together minus hard liquor. If such is not the case, you do not have my permission to use the committee room. If the room is used in violation of this letter, I would expect to take the case to the floor of the House for an airing. The resulting publicity could cut two ways." Saylor decided to call off the party but thereafter held "no-cocktail Miller" in disdain. Indeed, he was often at odds with party leaders, including Martin and President Eisenhower, especially on economic and natural resource policy. And when it came to issues affecting his district and federal reclamation projects, Saylor was not as quick to back down as he was with the cocktail party.¹



In his personal habits, Saylor was a moderate drinker. He usually had a cocktail before dinner and sometimes wine with his meal. He drank socially and was indifferent about whether he consumed beer or mixed drinks, rarely if ever overindulging. His children do not recall ever seeing him intoxicated and point out that he always gave up alcohol during Lent.²

Saylor was less disciplined about eating. He enjoyed preparing and consuming food and often cooked for his staff, dinner guests at his home, or companions at the hunting camp in Potter County. And he seldom scrimped on quantity and portions. A nondiscriminating and robust eater, he eventually bulked up to nearly 250 pounds. He never smoked, but his excess weight and poor nutrition may have contributed to the heart disease that plagued him in his later years. Except for brief visits to emergency rooms following minor traffic accidents and a weeklong hospital stay for an appendectomy, he enjoyed robust health prior to the onset of heart disease.³

Saylor's husky physique and booming voice made him an imposing and at times intimidating figure. "He was a large man, with a large voice, and he liked to use it," recalled House Interior staff member Pat Murray. For some associates, his image sprang to mind when the radio carried the popular 1950s Jimmy Dean hit "Big John." Saylor was never called "Jack," always "John," "Big John," or later "Uncle John" and "St. John" by conservationists. When he became angry, he could grow caustic and explode in a torrent of swearing. But even when he was not agitated, he swore casually. "Hello, you little bastard," he would address Representative John Dingell of Michigan. "Hello, you big bastard," Dingell would respond. At one point, Saylor became so disgusted by his own habit that he decided to fine himself ten cents each time he cursed at work. Would he still be effective? a reporter wondered. "You'd be surprised," he responded, "how emphatically I can express myself without using a single cuss word." In spite of Saylor's disclaimer, however, the experiment proved inhibiting and was soon abandoned.⁴

When vexed, Saylor could be "prickly" and a "crusty old son-of-a bitch," but generally he was even tempered and quick to laugh. He was a captivating storyteller, his affability, ebullience, frankness, and sense of humor making him popular on both sides of the aisle. Indeed, one of his closest associates was Democrat Dingell.⁵

Perhaps because he had such high regard for his mother, sister, and wife, Saylor was always courteous toward women. He was polite without being patronizing, recalled one female acquaintance. A female constituent noted that he “is a gentleman. He is not arrogant nor insulting toward women.” Saylor appreciated female intellect and beauty, but Grace was the one love of his life, and there is no evidence that he ever dishonored his wedding vows.⁶

Saylor had few hobbies. Like most Pennsylvanians, he got caught up in the excitement when the Philadelphia Phillies “Whiz Kids” edged out the Brooklyn Dodgers in the final game of the 1950 season to capture the pennant. And he inserted tributes in the *Congressional Record* to western Pennsylvania athletes such as the baseball star Stan Musial. But Saylor was not a dedicated baseball or football fan, nor did he participate in many sports. He joined the Johnstown country club, but he did not golf or play tennis.⁷

When his hectic schedule permitted, he liked to hike, fish, and hunt. He carried his fishing gear in his car and held licenses in several states. He prized landing a twenty-five-inch, nine-pound, nine-ounce black bass that he took with a fly rod on the St. John River in Florida’s Ocala National Forest. He and Dingell occasionally escaped to the Eastern shore to hunt birds. Saylor also made periodic excursions to the hunting camp in Potter County, although he cooked and socialized at “Lost Cabin” more than he hunted. When he did take to the woods, he almost always reported seeing prey, but his companions do not recall that he ever returned with game—only stories.⁸

For relaxation, he played bridge, poker, and canasta, the rage of the 1950s. His taste in literature turned to light reading—outdoor and nature magazines—rather than books. He relished stories about the American frontier experience and appreciated Western art, particularly works by Charles Russell and Frederic Remington. His romantic (and debatable) view that the frontier served as the forge of American individualism and democracy no doubt contributed to his advocacy of wilderness protection. He developed a close association with the leaders of what were then relatively insignificant conservation organizations—the National Parks Association, the National Wildlife Federation, the Izaak Walton League, the Audubon Society, the Sierra Club, and the Wilderness Society—making himself available to their officials and reading their magazines and newsletters.⁹

When the House was not in session, Saylor tended the flower garden at his home at 411 Orchard Street in Johnstown. Sometimes he was mistaken for

the gardener, visitors driving by and asking if the congressman was at home. Saylor would direct them to the entrance and delight in their reaction when he greeted them at the door in his gardening clothes.¹⁰

He also enjoyed traveling. In the summer, he frequently drove his family cross-country to visit national parks. At Grace's insistence, however, lodging consisted of motels instead of tents. Saylor's spirit of adventure also lured him to far-flung destinations such as Hawaii, Alaska, Guam, Samoa, Vietnam, and Antarctica. As an officer with the Naval Reserves, he visited both the North and South Poles, the first member of Congress to do so.¹¹

Like most politicians, Saylor thrived on attention and publicity. Photo opportunities included poses with President Eisenhower, Senator Joseph McCarthy (before his downfall), and a variety of other national and local notables. Press photos featured him in parka and mukluks behind a dogsled, in a baseball uniform, and in mining garb. Democratic Representative D. R. "Billy" Matthews of Florida envied Saylor's penchant for publicity: "If I could get my pictures in the papers of the 8th Congressional District of Florida one half as often as you get yours in all of the great periodicals throughout the country, I would never be worried again about any opponent."¹²

But Saylor's trips did not always gain favorable publicity. A Pennsylvania journalist, for example, could not understand how a visit to Antarctica could possibly benefit the district. Angry enough "to spit tacks," Minerva Saylor urged her son to ignore the criticism and "don't mention [the] South Pole unless asked about it. I can still play politics even at [age] 83. So just ignore it and keep making friends."¹³

With his penchant for publicity, Saylor made certain that he capitalized on surviving gunshots. As the House deliberated a farm bill in early March 1953, three Puerto Rican nationalists from the visitors' gallery opened fire on the members below. Saylor escaped unscathed, but five of his colleagues were wounded. He agreed to write a firsthand account of the attack for the *Johnstown Tribune-Democrat* and provided verbal renditions for several other district newspapers, describing the assault as his most frightening peacetime experience and demanding swift justice for the perpetrators. The 231 members who were on the House floor were fortunate, he said, that the attackers were not armed with hand grenades. On a lighter note, Saylor expressed regret that the incident forced the cancellation of a White House party because it was his wife's first visit to Washington that term.¹⁴

Politics served as Saylor's vocation and principle avocation. He had a knack for remembering people's names and seemed to savor conversations with con-

stituents. Appearances at county fairs, school commencements, building dedications, patriotic celebrations, and political rallies seemed to energize rather than exhaust him. His thunderous voice, hearty laugh, and storytelling ability made him a popular speaker, and he seemed to delight in providing constituents service, whether helping an individual deal with federal bureaucracy, nominating a young man to one of the service academies, securing federal funds for a highway, or obtaining trout from the Interior Department's Fish and Wildlife Service for stocking Pennsylvania streams. And no constituent request seemed trivial: he told the story of a woman who, late one evening, telephoned her representative at home to complain about an odorous dead cat in an alley. The representative expressed sympathy and advised her to telephone the Department of Sanitation in the morning. "Oh, I would never think of bothering them with something so trivial," she responded.¹⁵

He was also adept at convincing his constituents that they were his top priority. He declined an invitation to socialize with the president and party chieftains in Gettysburg, a district newspaper reported, because he had made a commitment to speak in Johnstown. This may have been true, but it should be noted that the 1954 congressional election was only a week away, and Saylor had grown exasperated with Eisenhower on the issues of taxes, tariffs, and federal reclamation. At any rate, the *Johnstown Tribune Democrat* portrayed him "as one of the most independent, hardest-working and ablest members of the House of Representatives of whom any district would be proud."¹⁶



Saylor looked forward to Republican rule, but the Eisenhower administration, in many ways, disappointed him. In 1954, for example, Eisenhower's advisers recommended a revision in the general tax code. The administration bill gave businesses greater latitude in claiming depreciation costs and slashed the tax on stock dividends. It also made it easier for individuals to take deductions for medical treatment, child care, and charitable contributions.¹⁷

Sounding like a Democrat, Saylor claimed that the administration bill did more for corporations than it did for ordinary working people. He preferred to reform the tax code by increasing the personal exemption from \$600 to \$1,500, plus \$1,000 for each dependent. It was time, he said, for Congress to show wage earners that "'of the people, by the people, for the people'" was "taking precedence over the phrase 'from the people' which has become a truism in years past." He pushed his bill personally with Eisenhower but had no success. Realizing that without the president's support his own bill stood little

chance for approval, Saylor came out in support of a Democratic proposal that raised the personal exemption from \$600 to \$700. Eisenhower went on television to oppose this modest proposal as a budget breaker, and Republican House leaders pushed hard for party unity on the administration bill. To support the Democrats' substitute, they declared, would constitute a "vote against Ike." Saylor was unconvinced, becoming one of only ten Republicans to support the Democratic proposal, which failed by a vote of 210 to 204. While Saylor's vote was unpopular among party chieftains, it pleased his constituents and enhanced his reputation as an independent-minded congressman dedicated to the interests of miners, steelworkers, and other ordinary working people.¹⁸

Saylor also proved antagonistic toward Eisenhower's foreign economic policy because its approach too closely resembled that of the New and Fair Deals. In terms of foreign aid and tariffs, Saylor generally adhered to traditional Republican doctrine. He grudgingly supported the 1954 \$4.5 billion foreign aid bill, mainly because much of the assistance went to help the French fight Communism in Indochina, but he reversed himself the following year because U.S. taxpayers needed relief. Besides, he noted, U.S. generosity was shoring up the European coal industry and permitting foreign operators to undersell Pennsylvania producers. He regretted the fact that the Marshall Plan of 1948 had not required aid recipients to purchase a certain amount of American-produced coal.¹⁹

Eisenhower's advocacy of lower tariffs, Saylor insisted, was another departure from traditional Republican economic policy. Eisenhower, like most internationalists, believed that freer trade fostered prosperity and world peace. When the president in 1953 asked for a one-year extension of the Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act, protectionists like Saylor proved unreceptive, believing that over the years lenient trade policies had damaged industries in their districts. Saylor contended that the coal industry had been devastated by the importation of cheap residual fuel oil, mainly from Venezuela. Pennsylvania miners who dug the coal and railroaders who transported it had been thrown out of work because power stations increasingly were being fueled by cheap foreign oil. He called for a quota, claiming that "we do not need foreign residual oil in this country. Not a drop of it. We have coal to supply the energy requirements of our industries."²⁰

While Saylor was more conservative than Eisenhower on tax and tariff matters, he was slightly more liberal than the president and House leaders on social issues. Representing a working-class district, Saylor generally aligned

himself with liberal Democrats in his support for public housing, increased pay for postal workers, Social Security expansion, and civil rights. Unlike Eisenhower, he heartily supported the 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, which declared segregated public schools unconstitutional. He also favored a court decision mandating the desegregation of public housing and held in contempt those members of Congress, mainly from the South, who used color as a reason to deny statehood to Alaska and Hawaii.²¹

In a decade of conformity, consensus, and intense patriotism, Saylor, following a recommendation from the president, introduced successful legislation inserting the words “under God” into the pledge of allegiance. The inclusion of that phrase, he declared, “will reaffirm the principle that this great nation was created and preserved under God.” He also favored the establishment of a prayer room in the capitol building and the printing of “In God We Trust” on currency and postage stamps.²²

Saylor was generally weak in defense of civil liberties. He approved the continuation of programs first implemented by Truman to remove alleged subversives from government offices, especially the State Department. Like Eisenhower, he refused to publicly denounce Senator Joseph McCarthy’s scattershot charges of disloyalty, which endangered civil liberties, destroyed reputations, and created a climate of fear. In May 1954, shortly after McCarthy had demonstrated his viciousness and recklessness in the televised Army hearings, Saylor gave a speech in his district saying: “Let us not be afraid to speak of whatever we wish without having someone who disagrees with us call us names.” In another address, he said that “no one disagrees with Senator McCarthy’s ends, which are to get rid of communists in government, but rather people disagree [on] how he goes about it. No one should hide behind the Fifth Amendment for immunity—especially if they are in government service.”²³

But Saylor exacerbated the canker of McCarthyism when he parroted the senator’s charges that the lenient and economically injurious trade policies of the 1930s and 1940s had resulted from treachery in the State Department. “The planned deterioration of American industry and American wage standards began when carefully-placed individuals in important positions in the State Department succeeded in making those offices a veritable infiltration plant for Soviet intrigue,” he declared. “A horde of State Department dandies—looking like adult Lord Fauntleroy bound for an international cotillion—would hopscotch from one conference to another searching for representatives of other countries ready and willing to accept handouts . . . in the form of

trade concessions.” Like McCarthy’s, Saylor’s charges were unsubstantiated and ridiculous.²⁴

At the request of a religiously affiliated athletic organization, Saylor invited McCarthy to be the keynote speaker on Catholic Day in Johnstown. A local Democratic newspaper wondered why the congressman would want to identify himself with such a mean-spirited figure, a local Republican insisting that McCarthy’s presence would bring the party into further disrepute, but Saylor pressed ahead. He kept his introductory remarks brief, emphasizing McCarthy’s popularity as a speaker to the crowd of fifteen thousand at Ideal Park. McCarthy spoke to the charge that he had used unsavory methods in searching out Communists. “You can’t hunt skunks with top hats and lace handkerchiefs,” he declared. “I have yet to hear one person say that we should not hunt out Communists.” Three months later in December, the Senate completed its investigation of McCarthy by condemning his cruel and reckless tactics. Discredited, McCarthy became a tragic figure and died three years later.²⁵



Initially, Saylor was enthusiastic about the Eisenhower administration’s stance on resource and power development. In his first State of the Union address in February 1953, Eisenhower advanced a partnership approach toward resource development. “The best natural resources program for America,” he asserted, “will not result from exclusive dependence on Federal bureaucracy. It will involve a partnership of the States and the local communities, private citizens, and the Federal Government, all working together. This combined effort will advance the development of the great river valleys of the nation and the power they can produce.”²⁶

To manage the program, Eisenhower appointed Douglas McKay secretary of the interior. A conservative Republican, McKay had been a car salesman, mayor, and two-term governor of Oregon. His supporters, including Saylor at first, believed that he would downsize the department, chop spending, curtail the reclamation program, and encourage private and local participation in resource development. Detractors, such as independent Republican senator Wayne Morse of Oregon, feared that McKay would be a stooge of special interests.²⁷

Eisenhower also planned to name Assistant Commissioner Goodrich Lineweaver to succeed Michael Straus as head of the Bureau of Reclamation. Saylor considered Lineweaver “more dangerous to our country than his predecessor”

and vehemently opposed the change. He provided evidence, probably supplied by Floyd Dominy, assistant director of the bureau, demonstrating Lineweaver's "unfitness" for the office. In 1951 and 1952, Dominy had prepared memoranda admitting that in the past the bureau had undertaken some ill-advised projects. Those "honest mistakes," Dominy asserted, should not be compounded by trying to rescue failed irrigation projects, such as Riverton in Wyoming and Heart River in North Dakota. To Dominy's and Saylor's dismay, Lineweaver allegedly responded to the memoranda by expunging them from the files and pushing ahead with the projects. Their protests, however, were enough to block Lineweaver's chances, and the appointment went to Wilbur Dexheimer, a native Coloradan and career bureau engineer who would serve until 1959, when he was replaced by Dominy.²⁸

Initially, Saylor was pleased with the performance of McKay and Dexheimer. In his first year in office, McKay slashed the department's work force by 10 percent, claiming that some of the casualties were "screwballs," a term used by McKay to identify alleged subversives. In a wartime economy move, Truman had already downsized the Reclamation Bureau from twenty thousand to seventeen thousand employees. McKay made additional cuts that left the agency with thirteen thousand workers. In addition, Congress continued its policy of paring the bureau's budget, which had been shrunk from \$364 million to \$165 million between 1950 and 1955. The Budget Bureau also issued Circular A-47, which advised all federal agencies to use restraint in the pursuit of water and power projects. Moreover, in 1953 Congress created a special task force, chaired by ex-president Herbert Hoover, to review federal resource policy. Not surprisingly, perhaps, its report called for minimal federal involvement in reclamation and power projects.²⁹

As he had promised during the campaign, Eisenhower, early in his first term, urged congressional leaders to enact legislation transferring to the individual states ownership of the offshore lands within their "historic boundaries." Often referred to as the tidelands, these submerged lands were rich in resources, particularly oil. In the so-called tidelands decision of 1947, the Supreme Court had established federal title to submerged lands on the outer continental shelf but remained vague on the rights to lands within three miles of the seashore. In 1952, Congress had enacted legislation granting ownership of these submerged lands within a three-mile limit to the states, but Truman vetoed it. In the spring of 1953, the Eighty-third Congress again took up the issue. Some legislators, especially those from noncoastal states, denounced the bill as a raid

on a national resource; others argued that state historic boundaries extended beyond the three-mile limit. Saylor, for example, claimed that the Treaty of Paris ending the Revolutionary War in 1783 had established the offshore boundaries of the thirteen original states at twenty leagues, or more than sixty miles. Congress decided to enact two separate bills. One granted state title to submerged lands three miles offshore (ten and a half miles in the cases of Texas and Louisiana), and the other recognized federal ownership of submerged lands beyond state historic boundaries. Saylor supported both measures.³⁰

The administration also announced two policy decisions that enraged advocates of public power. In 1953, McKay withdrew the Interior Department's objections to private power development on the Snake River at Hells Canyon. The year before, Secretary Chapman had thwarted the attempt by Idaho Power and Light to obtain a license to build three small hydroelectric dams by informing the Federal Power Commission of the Reclamation Bureau's plan to build a single high dam. McKay's decision, however, now removed a major obstacle to private development. The following year, Eisenhower erected another hurdle in the path of "creeping socialism" by instructing the Atomic Energy Commission to deal with a private concern, Dixon-Yates, instead of the Tennessee Valley Authority, to provide energy for the city of Memphis. Opponents denounced the Dixon-Yates, Hells Canyon, and tidelands decisions as "give-aways," tagging McKay with the title "Giveaway McKay." Saylor had supported McKay's moves but soon became disenchanted because decentralization had not gone far enough. He wanted the federal government to step in when it came to protecting domestic industries in his district from foreign competitors but to step aside when it came to the development of water resources. The irony of this position seems to have escaped him.³¹

Early in his presidency, Eisenhower had cautioned that some development projects were too massive for companies, communities, or states to undertake. One of those projects was the St. Lawrence Seaway. The seaway scheme had been in the plans of engineers and politicians for decades. The United States and Canada would jointly finance the construction of a twenty-seven-foot-deep channel along the St. Lawrence River to permit ship traffic from the Atlantic Ocean to the Great Lakes. Representatives from Eastern states had heretofore blocked legislation creating the seaway because they believed it would take traffic away from their ports and railroads. By 1953, however, three factors made the project more palatable to U.S. legislators. First, iron ore supplies in the Great Lakes had been nearly depleted. Second, new ore nests had been discov-

ered in Labrador that could feed Canadian and Midwestern U.S. steel plants. And third, Canada had threatened to proceed unilaterally. Thus, in April 1953, Eisenhower came out in favor of the \$105 million project, pushing hard for its approval as a matter of national security.³²

Saylor vigorously opposed the seaway because it would bring further injury to the already distressed economy of his district, facilitating the importation of cheap foreign oil and thus posing “a direct and serious threat to the security and well-being of the bituminous coal industry.” He was not persuaded by Eisenhower’s argument that the giant ditch would strengthen U.S. security. By neglecting the American coal industry, he warned the president, “you are greatly injuring the national defense.” Saylor voted against the proposal, but it passed the House by a vote of 241 to 158 and became law in May 1954. Following passage of the bill, Saylor, again with his constituents’ interests at heart, urged Eisenhower to relieve youth unemployment in Pennsylvania by reviving New Deal Civilian Conservation Corps camps, but the administration balked because the problem was regional, not national, in scope. Saylor and other representatives also met with Eisenhower to renew their requests for relief of the bituminous coal industry by a rate hike on imported foreign oil. Other than a photo with the president in the Rose Garden, however, their appeal came to nothing. Saylor’s stance on the seaway, reciprocal trade, and relief for the coal industry was appreciated by the Rochester and Pittsburgh Coal Company of Indiana, Pennsylvania, and other employers in his district. One constituent hailed him as “the best friend the miners ever had.”³³

Saylor also conflicted with the Eisenhower administration over wilderness issues. Initially, the administration seemed to appreciate the tradition of national park inviolability. When plans emerged to reduce the acreage of Everglades and Olympic national parks, for instance, Secretary McKay spurned them, as did Saylor. As a member of the House Interior Committee, he toured Olympic Park; attended field hearings in Port Angeles, Washington; and decried the assault on the park by timber companies. His passionate defense of Olympic Park convinced one Sierra Club member that he was “a true supporter of our National Park System.” Saylor and McKay also proved unreceptive when the Bureau of Reclamation and Democratic Montana congressman Lee Metcalf sought to revive a plan, earlier discarded by the Truman administration and the Army Corps of Engineers, to build a dam on the North Fork of Montana’s Flathead River. That project would have submerged twenty thousand acres of Glacier National Park.³⁴

The threat to Glacier prompted the first of what would be many Saylor speeches in defense of the national park system. He denounced the proposal, scolding Metcalf for revisiting it. The plan, he reminded Metcalf, had already been proposed and dismissed. Why waste taxpayers' money on new studies? Did Metcalf know that the proposed dam would destroy an elk and deer refuge? Did he realize that Glacier National Park was one of the premier wilderness areas remaining in the continental United States? Did he understand that the dedicated area belonged to the people of the United States and not to the state of Montana? "Have not the people a right to hold just a few spots in this great country of ours for their own enjoyment and call it their own?" he asked. Those familiar with national parks, he counseled, "expect them to be defended and protected against destruction by small groups of individuals who seek temporary or local gains of a limited nature." He implored his House colleagues to "make sure that our generation does not go down in history as the generation that destroyed the finer things in life and deprived our children and our children's children" of their wilderness heritage. Similar criticisms from conservationists helped persuade McKay to suggest constructing a dam beyond the park boundaries.³⁵

While pleased with McKay's stance against dam building in national parks, Saylor grew disgruntled with the administration's reclamation program. In spite of reductions in bureau staff and appropriations, its projects seemed to abound. Saylor introduced legislation to contain costs. One bill proposed revoking congressional authorization for all projects that had not yet been started; another sought to make it a criminal offense for the Bureau of Reclamation and Army Corps of Engineers to contract for work in excess of the total amount authorized for any project. Neither bill got out of committee.³⁶

Eisenhower had promised Westerners in his first State of the Union address that "soundly planned projects already initiated should be carried out." Aside from authorized projects, the administration proposed and Congress approved fifty-three new ones between 1953 and 1961. Eisenhower would later boast in his memoirs that "we efficiently carried on one of the greatest reclamation programs in our history." Floyd Dominy, an assistant under Dexheimer in the 1950s, would portray the administration's promise to slow reclamation as a sham. In reality, he recalled, neither the Democrats nor the Republicans in the 1950s and 1960s sought "to discredit" the reclamation effort.³⁷

Saylor was not duped by the administration's retrenchment rhetoric. When Secretary McKay boasted about restraining the bureau's activities, Saylor shot

back a discomfiting reply: "I am sorry to notify you that as far as I am concerned, I can find no change whatsoever in the Bureau of Reclamation. The projects presented today are as fantastic, if not more so, as those presented by the Democrats. . . . Dexheimer is continuing the strategy of Mr. Strauss [*sic*]."38

One of the most "fantastic" of the bureau's schemes was the upper Colorado River Storage Project (CRSP). Bureau historian Michael Robinson has described the CRSP as the agency's "most dramatic application of basinwide planning and development concepts." After years of study, the bureau proposed in 1950 the construction of ten dams on the Colorado River and its tributaries to provide flood control, water storage, reclamation, hydroelectricity, and recreation for the upper basin states of Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, and New Mexico. Two of the proposed dams were to be built at Echo Park and Split Mountain in Dinosaur National Monument on the Utah-Colorado border. Interior Secretary Chapman held hearings on the proposal at the Interior Department in 1950. Conservationists and the department's National Park Service director, Newton Drury, protested that the reservoirs created by the two dams would mar the park's scenic grandeur and thus violate the principle of preservation. Chapman approved the CRSP in June 1950 but later reversed his decision because of the intensity of conservationists' protests.³⁹

The Korean conflict stalled the project for three years, but with the end of the war, Secretary McKay revived it in late 1953, Eisenhower providing his endorsement the following spring. Several factors explain Eisenhower's commitment to the scheme. First, the project retained some elements of private enterprise. The Reclamation Bureau would construct the generating plants, but private companies would string the transmission lines and market the power. For this reason, private utilities generally supported the CRSP. Second, Eisenhower did not wish to alienate voters and legislators of the intermountain West, who wholeheartedly supported the endeavor as an economic boon to their region. Third, Eisenhower perhaps had exchanged his support for the CRSP for backing of the St. Lawrence Seaway project by Western representatives. Finally, on matters relating to natural resource development, Eisenhower usually followed the advice of McKay. "He sees no newspapers, no magazines, and has not the slightest understanding of conservation (or any other nonmilitary and nonforeign) issues," grouched the conservationist Irving Brant. "His inclination will be to do whatever McKay asks him to do."⁴⁰

When the CRSP bill came before Congress in 1954, Saylor served as its foremost critic in the House of Representatives. He denounced it as an eco-

nomie extravagance and a menace to the sanctity of park preservation. As he was already hostile toward reclamation, it was not difficult for Saylor to sympathize with conservationists who saw the project as a threat to the principle of national park inviolability. During the battle over the CRSP, Saylor allied himself with park defenders and wilderness champions and for the first time made his mark as a preservationist.