

# **Arizona's Statesman: Congressman John J. Rhodes**

## **Going to Congress**

---

John Rhodes served at Williams Field in an administrative capacity until 1946. Upon his separation from active duty, he was commissioned a lieutenant colonel. The following year, he joined the Arizona National Guard, in which he served as staff judge advocate until 1952.

John and Betty had decided to settle in Arizona, and he opened a law practice in Mesa with Max Killian. He was modestly successful, and soon after, with his friend Jim McNelis, founded The Farm and Home Insurance Company.

By the late 1940s he began to examine the local political situation and seek out other Republicans, who were a rare breed in Arizona at that time. This led to his founding and organizing Young Republicans clubs. (John Rhodes remained active in the Republican Party all his life; he was a delegate to the 1952, 1964, and 1968 Republican National Conventions, and chaired the 1976 and 1980 conventions.)

His involvement in Arizona's Republican Party led to his first venture into politics when he ran for attorney general in 1950. (He told Barry Goldwater, then gubernatorial candidate J. Howard Pyle's campaign manager, that he did not want to be attorney general; Goldwater assured him that he would not, since Arizona was nearly seventy-five percent Democratic at that time.) John Rhodes lost as Goldwater predicted, but Howard Pyle became governor, giving Republicans a foothold in Arizona politics.

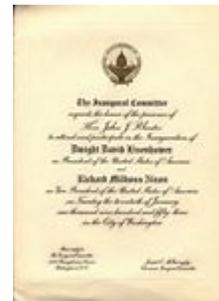
In March of 1952, state Republicans began to encourage John Rhodes to run for the U.S. House of Representatives from District 1, which encompassed all of Maricopa County. It was a formidable challenge. Arizona had never elected a Republican to the House; the incumbent, John Murdock, was very popular, had served in Congress since 1937, and was chairman of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs—a committee vital to Arizona's water interests.



**CLICK  
ANY  
IMAGE TO  
ENLARGE.**



Rhodes, waging a hands-on, low-budget campaign, the theme of which was “Ike needs me,” defeated Murdock by eight percent of the vote. He joined the Republican legislative majority that accompanied President Eisenhower to Washington in 1952—a majority that lasted only two years and did not recur until 1995. He was about fulfill his childhood dream of becoming a United States Congressman.



During his early years in Congress, John Rhodes was appointed (to his great satisfaction) to the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, as well as the Committee on Education and Labor. He traveled to the Soviet Union 1955. In 1959, he was appointed to the prestigious Appropriations Committee on which he served until 1973. He was also a member of subcommittees on the District of Columbia, Independent Offices, Foreign Operations, Public Works, and Defense (on which he eventually became the ranking minority member).



[Back to Previous Page](#)

[Go to the Next Selection](#)