

ASU colleagues remember former US Sen. Jon Kyl's legacy of leadership, collaboration

Through the Kyl Center and decades of public service, Kyl's vision continues to influence Arizona's approach to water policy and leadership

By Suzanne Wilson, ASU News
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Former U.S. Sen. Jon Kyl, whose nearly three decades of service in Congress helped shape Arizona's role in national policymaking, is being remembered by colleagues at Arizona State University as a statesman, mentor and champion of collaborative water policy.

Kyl died on Sept. 17 at age 84. His influence continues through the [Kyl Center for Water Policy](#) at ASU's [Morrison Institute for Public Policy](#), founded in 2014 with support from the Morrison family. The center was created to carry forward the principles that guided his public service: rigorous analysis, civil dialogue and the pursuit of practical solutions to Arizona's most pressing water challenges.

Throughout his career, Kyl emphasized that Arizona's future would depend on responsible stewardship of its limited water resources. "God isn't making any more water," [he often said](#), a phrase that aligned with his belief that long-term success requires cooperation, foresight and a commitment to the common good.

Those principles remain at the heart of the Kyl Center's work today. Founded in Kyl's honor, the center continues to convene water leaders, policymakers and stakeholders to address the challenges facing Arizona and the broader Southwest.

For colleagues who worked closely with him, Kyl's passing is also a deeply personal loss. Among them are [Sarah Porter](#), founding director of the Kyl Center, and [Kathleen Ferris](#), senior research

fellow, both of whom collaborated with Kyl on numerous water policy initiatives over the years.

"Senator Kyl set an example for how to approach water policy," Porter said. "He listened carefully, treated people with respect, dug diligently into the facts and never lost sight of the bigger picture. His absence will be deeply felt, but the example he set will continue to guide us."

For Ferris, who worked alongside Kyl on some of Arizona's most consequential water initiatives, his impact was both professional and personal.

"Working with Jon on the Groundwater Management Act was one of the defining experiences of my career," Ferris said. "He combined deep legal knowledge with a genuine respect for differing viewpoints and a determination to find common ground. Arizona's water future is stronger because of his leadership, and generations of Arizonans will benefit from the foundation he helped create."

Ferris and Kyl worked with other leaders in the state on Arizona's landmark [Groundwater Management Act of 1980](#); legislation widely regarded as one of the most important achievements in the state's history. The law established a framework for managing groundwater resources, helped protect Arizona's aquifers while supporting the state's continued growth and removed the final obstacle to the development of the Central Arizona Project canal to convey renewable Colorado River water to Maricopa, Pinal and Pima counties.

After learning of Kyl's dementia diagnosis last year, Porter and Ferris led the creation of a tribute book celebrating his life, career and contributions to Arizona (see below). The publication brought together reflections from water leaders and others from across the state, highlighting the profound respect and admiration Kyl inspired throughout his decades of service.

As Arizona faces increasingly complex water challenges, the center remains committed to advancing the values Kyl championed throughout his career: serious engagement, collaborative leadership and responsible stewardship of the state's water resources.

Kyl is remembered not only as a respected statesman and policymaker, but also as a mentor, colleague and friend whose commitment to collaboration continues to shape Arizona's approach to water policy. Through the work of the Kyl Center, his vision for thoughtful stewardship and consensus-driven leadership will continue to influence generations of Arizonans.

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Main image



Former U.S. Sen. Jon Kyl (right) speaks on a panel with Kyl Center Director Sarah Porter (left) and Kyl Center Senior Fellow Grady Gammage (center). ASU photo

Text image(s)



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