

COMMENTS OF WILLIAM REHNQUIST, MADE JUNE 15, 1964, AT THE PUBLIC HEARING ON THE PUBLIC ACCOMMODATIONS ORDINANCE PROPOSED FOR THE CITY OF PHOENIX

Mr. Mayor, members of the City Council, my name is William Rehnquist. I reside at 1817 Palmercroft Drive, N.W., here in Phoenix. I am a lawyer without a client tonight. I am speaking only for myself. I would like to speak in opposition to the proposed ordinance because I believe that the values that it sacrifices are greater than the values which it gives. I take it that we are no less the land of the free than we are the land of the equal and so far as the equality of all races concerned insofar as public governmental bodies, treatment by the Federal, State or the Local government is concerned, I think there is no question. But it is the right of anyone, whatever his race, creed or color to have that sort of treatment and I don't think there is any serious complaint that here in Phoenix today such a person doesn't receive that sort of treatment from the governmental bodies. When it comes to the use of private property, that is the corner drugstore or the boarding house or what have you. There, I think we—and I think this ordinance departs from the area where you are talking about governmental action which is contributed to by every tax payer, regardless of race, creed or color. Here you are talking about a man's private property and you are saying, in effect, that people shall have access to that man's property whether he wants it or not. Now there have been other restrictions on private property. There have been zoning ordinances and that sort of thing but I venture to say that there has never been this sort of an assault on the institution where you are told, not what you can build on your property, but who can come on your property. This, to me, is a matter for the most serious consideration and, to me, would lead to the conclusion that the ordinance ought to be rejected.

What has brought people to Phoenix and to Arizona? My guess is no better than anyone else but I would say it's the idea of the last frontier here in America. Free enterprise and by that I mean not just free enterprise in the sense of the right to make a buck but the right to manage your own affairs as free as possible from the interference of government. And I think, perhaps, the City of Phoenix is not the common denominator in that respect but that is over on one side, stressing free enterprise. I have in mind, the state of the Housing Ordinance, last year, which a great number of people—you know, the opinion makers, leaders of opinions, community leaders were entirely for it. I happen to favor it myself and yet it was rejected by the people because they said, in effect, "we don't want another government agency looking over our shoulder while we are running our business". Now, I think what you are contemplating here is much more formidable interference with property rights than the Housing Ordinance would have been and I think it's a case where the thousands of small business proprietors have a right to have their own rights preserved since after all, it is their business.

Now, I would like to make a second point very briefly, if I might, and that is on the mandate existing to this Council and this again, of course, is a matter of one man's opinion against another. As I recall, the position taken by the preceding Council, of which I know you, Dr. Pisano, Mr. Hyde, Mr. Lindner were all on, was that there would be no compulsory public accommodations ordinance and as I recall, when this Council ran against the Act Ticket, which I would have thought would be the logical ticket, if elected, to bring in an ordinance like this, nothing was said about any sort of change that the voters might guide themselves by in voting in this particular matter. I don't think this Council has any mandate at all for the passing of such a far reaching ordinance and I would submit that if the Council, in its wisdom, does determine that it should be passed, it has a moral obligation to refer it for the vote of the people because something as far reaching as this without any mandate or even discussion on the thing at the time of election for City Council was held is certainly something that should be decided by the people as a whole rather than by their agents, honorable as you ladies and gentlemen are. I have heard the criticism made by the groups which have favored this type of ordinance in other cities that we don't want our rights voted on but of course, it is they who are bringing forward this bill. The question isn't whether or not their rights will be voted upon but instead, it's a question of whether their rights will be voted upon by you ladies and gentlemen who are the agents of the people or the people as a whole.

Thank you very much for your time.