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Transcript for Episode 37: Small "d" Democratizing: Opening Up the Montana Democratic Party

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[Begin Small D of Democratizing-Opening Up the Montana Democratic Party]

00:00:00

[Music]

00:00:03

Narrator: From the beginning of Montana's distinctive yet troubled history, the Treasure State was dominated both economically and politically by powerful outside interests who shipped in capital and bought control the State.

00:00:15

Historians tell us that as the Anaconda Company and its friends ran Montana, economic and political power flowed out into the hands of distant capitalists and corporations. Policy was determined in far off New York City and control of the press was rigid. Anaconda's corporate dominance in Montana's political affairs was unique in American history. For its first 75 years, Montana was a one-company state.

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But then, big winds of change roared across the Treasure State. Between 1965 and 1980 Montanans ripped off their copper collar, transforming Montana from a corporate colony into a free modern state. The people finally controlled their own destiny.

00:00:59

The pitched battle between the people and the established power structure was not easily won. But fired in a *crucible of change*, a new Montana was born. Join Evan Barrett and real history makers of the time as they shine the light on this remarkable era.

00:01:17

Evan Barrett: Welcome back to In the Crucible of Change. You know the subtitle of this series is about the empowerment of people; it's about Montana shedding its copper collar and people being empowered. And one of the ways in which empowerment took place during this period of In the Crucible of Change was in the political arena. And tonight we're going to talk specifically about the changes inside the Montana Democratic Party. We call this Small D--Democratizing of the Democratic Party. And so while we focus so much upon the change from being

a corporate colony to a citizen state, in this case we're going to be looking at a specific institution, a political institution of the Democratic Party in Montana and see how it was democratized by the events and the movement of the period we're looking into.

00:02:17

So the crucible of change period started in 1965 and the real change inside the Democratic Party in Montana started to shape, take place in the 1967 to '68 period. And it was in the context of the national movements as well; the Vietnam War specifically was causing great concern all across the country and it found a focal point in change within the Democratic Party because people who needed to run for President had to go through that process.

00:02:57

Now our two guests for this show were both heavily involved in the Democratic Party at that time. One was a long-time top leader of Labor in Montana and as such a top leader in the Democratic Party in Montana, and the other was just emerging as a newcomer in the political arena at the time. And we're lucky to have them both here with us today because they have so much to offer on the subject.

00:03:28

So I want to introduce the people who are here with us today. First I want to introduce Marilyn Maney, Marilyn Maney Ross. She was known as Marilyn Maney back then. Marilyn was a McGovern activist in the 1972-period. She later worked in the job program for the Montana State AFL-CIO. She worked about 20 years with the Butte Archives. She is a noted historian. She led the Butte Archives into winning a National Historic--History Award for Labor History. She later became a Madison County Commissioner, so she's a former elected official now, and has been eight years the Chairman of the Montana Heritage Commission. So we want to welcome Marilyn here, and then also glad to see you here.

00:04:22

Marilyn Maney Ross: Thanks for asking me Evan. This is a real pleasure.

00:04:25

Evan Barrett: And--and next we have Jim Murry. Jim is--was 26 years with the Montana State AFL-CIO, 24 as its top leader, and heh was one of the top Labor leaders in the nation. and as I have mentioned before, in 1982 right at

the end of this period of crucible of change a top survey of Montana's top 100 leaders was who was the most influential leader in Montana during this period, and at the time, and it was in 1982? And number one on that list was Governor Ted Schwinden and number two was Jim Murry.

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So he was up to his eyeballs in everything that was going on politically and economically and governmentally in the period of change that we're talking about including huge involvement with the Democratic Party which again is our subject for today.

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Now I want to also mention that you know I have often said Montana is a small town with really long streets. We all know each other still. We're--frankly we're all friends for all these years, 40 years, and so this is as much a conversation--it's not an interview; it's a conversation about things we're all familiar with.

00:05:36

And so back to the context, Vietnam; Vietnam was causing great fuss in the Democratic Party and across the entire nation. Tell us a little bit about your thoughts as a young person just entering the process at that time; what brought you to the table to want to find--find a voice or whatever?

00:06:00

Marilyn Maney Ross: Well I think calling the Vietnam War a major fuss--sort of an understatement. *[Laughs]* But for--I think for young people, people my age and I was 18 in '68, the--that was the one sole issue that we were all completely focused on was the Vietnam War.

00:06:34

Some of us had family members that had been drafted. Others--we all had friends; we all knew somebody. So that was the galvanizing issue. And I think we tended to see things as absolutely black or white. You were either against the War or you were for the War. And it was the Democratic Party that seemed to be the only vehicle expressing that anti-war feeling.

00:07:06

In 1968 in Chicago, the Convention in Chicago, there were actually two conventions. There was the one on the inside that was actually deciding things and then there were all the rest of us that were on the outside and as everyone knows it was very violent, a lot of tear gas; it was really a--a very, very--that was a fuss, a big fuss.

00:07:32

And the lesson that at least personally that I took away from that was if we had any hope of changing things, ending the War, changing that Military focus that we couldn't stay outside in the street. We had to somehow figure out how to get inside that Hall and be one of those people that was--whose opinion counted; that somebody cared what we thought.

00:08:04

Evan Barrett: Your voice--not just your voice but your vote essentially.

00:08:07

Marilyn Maney Ross: Exactly; yes, yeah.

00:08:09

Evan Barrett: And that--that was the--where it kind of all started back in Chicago. Jim you were back there as a--as a Delegate.

00:08:14

Jim Murry: I was a Delegate. I was on the inside--

00:08:15

Evan Barrett: You were a Delegate.

00:08:16

Jim Murry: --that--for that Convention.

00:08:19

Evan Barrett: And--and it--and there were big problems happening in '68. The context of that was that because of the Vietnam War everyone wanted Bobby Kennedy to run for President, but he wasn't ready to so Eugene McCarthy from Minnesota declared and after he went through New Hampshire he almost beat Lyndon Johnson the incumbent President. He was so close that they called it a victory for McCarthy.

00:08:48

Four days after that Bobby Kennedy declared so now Bobby Kennedy and McCarthy were both running and Lyndon Johnson was the President and his Vice President was Hubert Humphry, a real hero to Labor and to Progressives, a real genuine hero who was the Vice President to Lyndon Johnson. And low and behold, 14 days after that Lyndon Johnson withdrew and it--and everything was in turmoil and so McCarthy and Kennedy moved forward trying to get Delegates and Humphry announced his candidacy obviously as Vice President at that time. But there were no more nominating conventions he could take-- So he had to run outside the process and low and behold, outside the process he was winning. And that caused a lot of concern which led to the Hughes Commission being named the head of there and the Hughes Commission came in and says we need to change some things inside this room, inside the Convention. We need to change some things. And time would show that they really did need to.

00:09:54

Give us your reflections on how that was playing out nationally and then how that affected things in Montana.

00:10:01

Jim Murry: Well first Evan thank you for having me here again and this is kind of--it's really a--a reunion isn't it?

00:10:07

Marilyn Maney Ross: It is.

00:10:08

Jim Murry: Of old friends; we've--the three of us have worked together for so long. Marilyn was not only on the other side in that--in that--during the years, she supported George McGovern. I was on the other side. But she was a sister from the Labor--from our Labor Movement. And--and was deeply involved with a whole bunch of young people that said hey; we want to change things. We--we have to change things.

00:10:36

We--as the years went by we worked together at the AFL-CIO and we've had a friendship that has gone on all these years and it is really wonderful and this--this is just great.

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But the thing that I remember about all of that was that there was really a concern. At that time I was one of the--I was one of the youngest leaders--I think I was the youngest leader in the nation of all the State Feds so I was surrounded by older--older people, both brothers and sisters that had a pretty conservative view about these changes that these kids were insisting upon. And they resisted that; they resisted that with all their might.

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I was a little bit, probably more inclined to be with the kids than I was with the older folks but those were Delegates to the Conventions where--where I had to seek--where I had to seek reelection. And it was kind of like walking across the--a mine field trying to keep all of this straight and all together. But the--the one thing I would emphasize in those years that I think was really great and that was we--we had the great disagreements. And gee, Marilyn, you talk about those Conventions and boy people really were--

00:11:50

Marilyn Maney Ross: Oh they were really--yes.

00:11:51

Jim Murry: --they were--people were really upset. But what we did is we focused on keeping this coalition together in Montana that allowed all of us to work together. That was--we had to figure out how we were going to facilitate that as much as anything. And--and in those days as we were going through these dramatic changes in Montana that meant we had to work together in political campaigns to elect people to public office that cared about-

-that cared about people. We had to have an impact legislatively during those--during those Legislative Sessions and we all worked in our communities year-round to set a--to set a political tone.

00:12:35

And all of that fit well for me because I was attracted to the Labor Movement. You've heard me say this so many times in the past; I was attracted to the Labor Movement because to me that was the greatest vehicle there was to bring about needed social change.

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Marilyn Maney Ross: Absolutely.

00:12:50

Jim Murry: For everybody in America whether they carried a Union card or not. What an exciting place to be. And the only way we could make those things happen was by working together and--and keeping us--keeping everybody in the family. And so I used to make the comparison about--about my own family and that we had--we had a pretty large family with a lot of disagreements. And you had to figure out how you dealt with those disagreements always keeping your family together. And we--and we were able to do that; it was a--kind of a--it was really an interesting time.

00:13:21

Evan Barrett: It was interesting that the--I mean ultimately that was the objective and with your leadership, Labor stayed actively and heavily involved. It wasn't always true in every State. In Montana, when the Delegates election started taking place in the spring of 1968, it was based in Democratic Party on the election of Precinct Committee people.

00:13:42

Marilyn Maney Ross: Right; yes.

00:13:43

Evan Barrett: Whoever could get the most Precinct Committee people registered for their candidate might have more votes at the County Convention that would inflect themselves upward to State Delegates.

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Jim Murry: And you'd get--

00:13:52

Evan Barrett: Now--now speaking of grassroots, in Butte, getting Delegates registered to people to run for County Commission, how did a couple of the McGovern people decide to do that?

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Marilyn Maney Ross: Well it was--boy it was not only just grassroots. I mean we were really **[Laughs]**--we were really in the--in the roots. And a couple of the--the really very committed McGovern folks, Don Cooney and Chas **[Jeniker]** were literally going through the neighborhoods and knocking on doors and convincing people that they should go up to the County Courthouse and register and you know throw their name in as Precinct Committee-men.

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Now mind you we didn't know exactly what that meant but they were gathering up and one of them and I don't know which one had an old flatbed truck and **[Laughs]** they were going through the neighborhoods of Butte picking--you know getting people that had said yeah, okay; we'll--we'll do that and loading them on that flatbed truck to get them up to the Courthouse.

00:15:03

Evan Barrett: Taking them to the Courthouse. **[Laughs]**

00:15:04

Marilyn Maney Ross: Taking them to the Courthouse which really **[Laughs]**--and so many of us signed up to--to run and then realized that oh, my name is going to be on a ballot. That means I have to go out and--and you know round up some votes, get some votes. And so I had to do that going door-to-door. The problem like so many of us

had was we weren't exactly sure what a Precinct Committee man or woman would do, but you know we needed the vote to get to the--the Central Committee.

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And because many of the--the Committee people that were then on the Central Committee had been there for many, many years. It was just sort of an automatic nobody paid any attention and--and-- So as it turned out because we had the McGovern people had gone out and done this that it really was a landslide for the McGovern folks there.

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Evan Barrett: Now it's an interesting contrast because I ask you to talk about what happened in '72 as a contrast to '68. In 1968 that energized process really wasn't taking place--

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Marilyn Maney Ross: Oh no; no, no--yeah.

00:16:29

Evan Barrett: --very well. And--and I was in Missoula at the time. I was in Graduate School and I was the Co-Chairman of the Campus McCarthy Campaign. And so when I went to the Democratic Convention in Missoula it was an extraordinary closed process. The fix was in. some key players down there, I remember knew the ropes. They knew how to make it all work. It was Tom Murray the attorney and Roger Murray the railroad engineer and Dick [McGurl] from the Army Navy Store and George Sherwood from [Morton's] and all those all Party guys, they know how to run it. And when you walked in the door people didn't even show up. They just went out and gathered proxies from everybody and said we've got all the votes here in our hands. And here's who we're going to put through to the State Convention.

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So it was an extraordinarily closed process and that was a real eye-opener for me and I went to the State--

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Jim Murry: Eddie [Dusso] was the Chairman of the Democratic Central Committee at that time wasn't he?

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Evan Barrett: Well no; that came in two years.

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Jim Murry: Oh okay; yeah.

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Evan Barrett: That was--that was after we had to change the rules but in '68 I think--I think Tom Murray was the Chair.

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Jim Murry: Ah that's right; that's right.

00:17:39

Evan Barrett: But--but the--the--the process was very-closed. And so I happened to come over to the Convention in Helena at the Placer Hotel, the State Convention and of course in the intervening period as you remember the night of the Montana Election was the same night as the California Election. And Bobby Kennedy was assassinated.

00:18:02

Jim Murry: That's right.

00:18:02

Marilyn Maney Ross: Yes.

00:18:02

Evan Barrett: And it really--it just changed everything and it made people so much more sensitive to closed processes. And I remember testifying at the Credentials Committee in Helena about how this proxy voting worked and it didn't seem right and everything else. And--and but nonetheless, because of what happened in places like Montana, and--and by the way we had a Winner Take All essentially system, so when the final votes were tallied at the Placer Hotel almost all the Delegates except for one were for Hubert Humphry, who didn't run essentially in open processes. And only one was for what was left of the Kennedy/McCarthy stuff and that was Luke [McKeon], and so things were really, really sensitive at that time.

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We ended up, nationally they sensed that and they set up a Commission called the Hughes Commission very quickly before the Convention and they came in and they recommended, we got to quit this Unit Rule. We've got to stop having this Winner Take All stuff. We got to have stuff happen in the timeliness in the calendar year. Some people who were selected for Delegates were based on something that was--happened two years before.

00:19:19

We've got to reflect the vote of the grassroots. We've got to eliminate these proxies. And those were the kinds of things that started to come out of--out of the national as a result of Chicago. It didn't--and so when you walked out of Chicago there was a bit of a mandate for States to start taking a look at that [inaudible] wasn't there?

00:19:41

Jim Murry: Well there was and there was--not only what happened at the Convention itself, but at the same time we had all of this fuss [Laughs] about the Vietnam War, yeah understatement--

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Marilyn Maney Ross: Yes. [Laughs]

00:19:56

Jim Murry: --but there was--there--there was a lot of fuss going on in Montana and the nation.

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Marilyn Maney Ross: Yes.

00:20:03

Jim Murry: Boys were--the kids were growing long hair and their parents didn't know what to do. They were behaving differently. The--the family relationships were changing from what they had been traditionally--had they traditionally been for years before.

00:20:22

Marilyn Maney Ross: Well and the Women's Movement was beginning too.

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Jim Murry: The Women's Movement; there was all of these--

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Marilyn Maney Ross: Roles were changing; yeah.

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Jim Murry: That's right and here in Montana I remember one of the big changes. We depended so much on the People's Voice. That was, you know that was--the people's voice, Harry and Gretchen Billings were so much a part of that farm Labor coalition that was the foundation for the Progressive Movement.

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Evan Barrett: Tell folks what the People's Voice was.

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Jim Murry: And the People's Voice was a--was a publication, newspaper--

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Evan Barrett: The weekly newspaper.

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Marilyn Maney Ross: A weekly newspaper.

00:20:56

Jim Murry: It was published here in Helena; had a wide circulation. It was supported primarily by farm groups, the Farmers Union, the Cooperative Farm Movement, and--and Unions. And then individuals bought--bought subscriptions to the--to the People's Voice also.

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But through all of this--through all of this and I don't remember just exactly what year that was, the--the--the carpenters and Convention of the Carpenters and the Lumber and Sawmill Workers which was one of the--probably the largest organization in the--in our--in the State AFL-CIO at that time, censored the People's Voice because of their position because of Harry and Gretchen's position on the Vietnam War. And it was--and it just broke their hearts, just--Gretchen, and Gretchen was--had been hired to be a secretary at that Convention. She's taking notes as they're--as they're censoring that newspaper. And I--I'll--I'll never forget that. It was a horrible time. I was on the Board for the old People's Voice, representing the Labor Movement at the time. The result of that was--was that we eventually--

00:22:06

Evan Barrett: Tanked; it tanked, right.

00:22:08

Jim Murry: --we tanked.

00:22:08

Evan Barrett: Finally after--

00:22:08

Jim Murry: We--we shut it down.

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Evan Barrett: --after about 30 years.

00:22:11

Jim Murry: Yes, about--

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Evan Barrett: About 30 years of existence.

00:22:13

Jim Murry: --and we went--and of course that led to a lot of other things that the people--that Harry Billings was involved with. We--you played a role in that. We got him involved with our--the organization that we had put together to oppose the sales tax and then when we finished that I hired Harry to go to work at the State AFL-CIO. That wasn't without a lot of controversy. You might remember; corporations put a lot of pressure on people because they thought they'd finally got rid of Harry and Gretchen Billings and I hired Harry to come to work at the Montana State AFL-CIO. And I--there was the--there was some times that I wasn't so sure that I was going to survive that because--because there--there was that sense and that feeling with people that had been so much a part of that system that both of you have described so well; there was just that sense of the wheels were coming off the wagon. What are we going to do?

00:23:06

And so some of us had to--and the three of us worked on that. You think back about that; we had to work to figure out how we keep everybody in the family and we were all going the same way. During the--during the McGovern Campaign when there was so much consternation about the Labor Movement and what George Meany was doing and wasn't doing; you remember that?

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Marilyn Maney Ross: Absolutely; yes.

00:23:27

Jim Murry: Fourteen--I think there was fourteen International Unions endorsed Richard Nixon. They were all those--and all of those Presidents were on the Executive Council of the National AFL-CIO. So we had to figure out and to George Meany's credit and I had a tendency--I'm an old industrial unionist and I have--had a tendency to be critical of George Meany from time to time for being a little too conservative, but he provided the leadership that allowed us to do in Montana what we did and what we did if you'll remember when we adjourned the State Fed Convention that year we then--the--the meeting, the Convention for the Labor for McGovern it was called and we just--and it just continued. And the Labor Movement pulled in behind George McGovern; in fact there was a real shortage of finances and money in that campaign. I--as I recall most of the campaign was run out of our office.

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Evan Barrett: Well you created a shadow organization instead of the official one. Now when we look at what happened leading up between '68 and '72 because when we got to '72 that's when all this started to come together and--and you're heavily involved.

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Marilyn Maney Ross: Yes.

00:24:41

Evan Barrett: But following Chicago with the recommendations that came out of a Convention about openness, about proxies, about Unit Rule, about representation of minorities and women and young people and so on like that--all that stuff was coming out. They recommended--they created a thing--a Commission; it was headed by George McGovern incidentally.

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Jim Murry: That's right; yeah.

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Evan Barrett: It was the McGovern Commission.

00:25:04

Marilyn Maney Ross: Yeah; the McGovern Commission.

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Evan Barrett: Later called the McGovern/Fraser Commission because Don Fraser from Minnesota was the Vice Chair and he ascended to the Chair when McGovern decided to run for President.

00:25:12

But what they did was they recommended that each State reform its own processes and they sent some guidelines down. And so Montana created a Reform Commission. Now the interesting history on this is that I had come to Helena and taught school for a year and then I went to work for Forrest Anderson's reorganization. But in the Placer Hotel Convention in 1968 I ended up testifying on behalf of the McCarthy people about proxies and problems in Missoula in front of the Credentials Committee. And I think they noticed that.

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So when I'm over here working for Forrest Anderson they said--they were saying who do we put on this Reform Commission? And somebody said well why don't we put that kid who testified from Missoula? You know he was one of those liberals; you know well, so all of the sudden I'm on this Commission to reform things with a lot Party regulars, big--. I mean I remember Tom Hanrahan, wonderful Tom Hanrahan, State Roads Committee Chair, lawyer, wonderful guy, headed it. But I remember the women who were on it; Gladys [Mackla] was on it, Lorraine Tweet was on it and Rita [Lindblom] was on it, Norman Kyle was on it, so all the big-wigs in the Party of Women were all on it.

00:26:29

Jim Murry: But these are all traditional leaders.

00:26:30

Evan Barrett: They were the traditional Party leaders. And so but the interesting thing was they all got together and said you know this idea of Winner Take All is not a good idea. So we formed a bunch of recommendations and went to a Rules Convention in Missoula. And that's when Eddie [Dusso] was--

00:26:52

Jim Murry: Okay.

00:26:52

Evan Barrett: --the Chairman in Missoula. And we had--and it was in the late summer or early fall of 1971, right after I had been named Executive Director of the Party. So I all the sudden was no longer on the Reform Commission. I was a staffer. So Hanrahan said sit down and shut up; you're a staffer now. [Laughs]

00:27:10

Marilyn Maney Ross: Yeah.

00:27:12

Evan Barrett: But we went to a Reform Commission Convention which is only the Party regulars because the rules said only the Officers of the Party, not the Legislators had a vote in this. And the recommendation coming out of the Reform Commission was let's stop this Winner Take All. And it was presented to--by the way there were a bunch of other reforms like the proxy vote and stuff like that; all of those were accepted. The timeliness, the openness, the trying to attract minorities and women; they--they were all--they were all accepted but the Winner Take All argument was presented and the Party regulars that were all there said you know we won all that Winner Take All thing in '68. We kind of like it.

00:27:53

And they rejected it. And that set the stage for what happened in 1972, Marilyn--

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Marilyn Maney Ross: The McGovern takeover; yes.

00:28:00

Jim Murry: Marilyn and her friends took it all. [*Laughs*]

00:28:03

Marilyn Maney Ross: Yes; we did. [*Laughs*] We thought it was a pretty good idea, too because we took it all, yeah.

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Jim Murry: That's--that's right.

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Marilyn Maney Ross: And then we got--essentially that's exactly what happened and as I--as I remember the--the shock with a lot of the old Party regulars and elected officials--

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Jim Murry: Don't look at me like that.

00:28:27

Marilyn Maney Ross: Oh no. [*Laughs*]

00:28:27

Jim Murry: But I was shocked. I was shocked, too.

00:28:29

Marilyn Maney Ross: Yes; you were shocked.

00:28:29

Evan Barrett: And this is at a Convention at the Helena Civic Center.

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Marilyn Maney Ross: Right; yes.

00:28:32

Jim Murry: That's right.

00:28:32

Marilyn Maney Ross: Yes.

00:28:33

Evan Barrett: The State Convention.

00:28:34

Marilyn Maney Ross: Absolutely, yes; and we at least our organization coming out of Butte, we had really packed the caucuses with McGovern people. We had the caucus in the courtroom in the--in the County Courthouse in Butte, big room. It was packed. People were standing along the walls and every seat filled and people out in the hallway and of course the majority of them were McGovern folks because we had been out on the streets which I would just like to throw in here, some of those tactics and skills were things I learned in Union Halls growing up [*Laughs*] because I come you know come from a strong Union background and spent a lot of time as--as a kid in Union Halls.

00:29:32

So anyway we had all of the--had packed this--the courthouse and the Party regulars were there, the old--old-timers, we called them, and they were very suspicious of course of who are all these new people; who are all these newcomers? And I'd just like to tell you a funny story about how I was elected State Committee Woman and bear in mind that we were all very new to this process. We just knew that we had a chance to have a voice--

00:30:06

Evan Barrett: To be inside the Hall?

00:30:07

Marilyn Maney Ross: --to be inside the Hall, yes. So we're all in this room and one of the elderly gentlemen, the Elder Statesman really of the Butte Democratic Party Spud Murphy was--

00:30:19

Evan Barrett: Only in Butte.

00:30:19

Marilyn Maney Ross: --only in Butte, Spud Murphy.

00:30:21

Evan Barrett: Spud Murphy.

00:30:21

Marilyn Maney Ross: Yes; Spud Murphy was sitting on the opposite side of the courtroom--courtroom and Gub Shea was running the meeting. And said okay nominations--

00:30:31

Jim Murry: And by the way whose son is now on the Montana Supreme Court.

00:30:34

Marilyn Maney Ross: Yes, Jim Shea; yes.

00:30:36

Evan Barrett: That's great.

00:30:37

Marilyn Maney Ross: This is--yes; this is--is his father. Gub was running the meeting, calls for nomination for State Committee Woman. And Spud Murphy is sitting there and says I nominate Helen White. And everybody started looking around. Finally a voice from the back of the room yells she's dead. **[Laughs]** And--and Spud says again I nominate Helen White. Another guy yells across the room at him for God's sakes; Spud she's dead. And he--and Spud goes okay, okay and points to me and says I nominate Red. **[Laughs]** And--and--

00:31:23

Jim Murry: Oh that's a wonderful, wonderful story.

00:31:23

Marilyn Maney Ross: --yeah; that's how I was--became the State Committee Woman, again not knowing what a State Committee Woman did but--. So that's how I went from that local caucus, moved up to the Helena Convention and--

00:31:41

Evan Barrett: And--and the--the crux of that of course was what was done after the State Convention and after Miami because with the Winner Take All with--with--in Missoula when the Party regulars said no; we--well we can live with this Winner Take All. We like it. The McGovern folks organized up and when the thing--time came to the Convention in Helena, essentially the McGovern folks beat the Party regulars back across the board including our sitting US Senator Lee Metcalf who simply wanted to go and be for his friend Ed Musky, wanted to be a Delegate and he didn't get to be a Delegate.

00:32:21

Marilyn Maney Ross: That's right; yeah.

00:32:21

Evan Barrett: All the Party regulars suddenly found themselves in the alternate seats and all the newbies, the McGovern people were out here--in the Delegates and went to Miami Beach that way. It was a lot of consternation and everything else, but when you were then named to the Party of Executive Board you were sitting there when the issue of what we call Proportional Representation came up. That was a way to get rid of the Unit Rule, to get rid of Winner Take All and reflect the respective strength of the different candidates. And amazingly, after what happened in 1972 when the Proportional Representation Rule came up--I remember Jim you saying I think this is a pretty good idea now. *[Laughs]*

00:33:08

Jim Murry: It gave us a chance--we were going to get another bite of the apple.

00:33:12

Evan Barrett: Well both sides having lost, you began to experience what does it mean to be on the outside looking in?

00:33:17

Marilyn Maney Ross: Exactly, yes; yes, exactly. And that was the important thing is that--

00:33:19

Jim Murry: That's right; that's exactly right.

00:33:21

Marilyn Maney Ross: --everybody now understood what that meant to be cut out of even having any voice in the-- in the process and it was--

00:33:31

Jim Murry: And what that meant--and also what that meant, the--the--the potential for fracturing the relationship that we had all over the State that would--that would create a real problem in our effectiveness in electing people to public office in Montana. Having an impact on the Legislative process and all of that but the--

00:33:52

Marilyn Maney Ross: Absolutely; yes.

00:33:53

Jim Murry: --but there was--you know I think back about that and--and again I was a--I was one of the alternates elected at the [*Laughs*]--

00:34:03

Evan Barrett: You were an alternate I remember.

00:34:05

Jim Murry: Not only that; not only that they elected a guy by the name of Jim Murray as a Delegate--

00:34:12

Evan Barrett: [Trumbles Point]

00:34:13

Jim Murry: From a Black Feet Indian wasn't he as I recall?

00:34:16

Evan Barrett: Now he was Mary Jo Murray's brother.

00:34:19

Jim Murry: That's right.

00:34:20

Jim Murry: Now--

00:34:20

Evan Barrett: From up in [Inaudible]; yeah.

00:34:21

Jim Murry: --as I say that I'm not only Irish, I'm also a Native American myself. But I was left--left out of that process and I think back about it and I--I have to laugh now. But there was--there was a lot of angst because Lee Metcalf, Lee Metcalf in our minds was treated so badly and whatever--whatever Lee Metcalf said was pretty much the way a lot of the old-timers were going to go, people with the Farmers Union, the old-timers with the Labor Movement. He was a musky guy. We--so we had to go in that and we had to go in that direction and it didn't work.

00:34:56

And so after that was--after all that was over I think there was--I think you're right; I think there was a realization that we have to figure out a way that we--that--that everybody can have a voice and everyone can participate in that process.

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But there was some--there were really some wonderful things done during that period because there were some--there was close friendships that were formed with people--

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Marilyn Maney Ross: Absolutely.

00:35:20

Jim Murry: --that were on the other side. That was pretty unique to Montana.

00:35:26

Marilyn Maney Ross: Yeah.

00:35:26

Evan Barrett: And I think the challenge was to not let the passions of national politics break down the relationships inside the boundary of Montana.

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Marilyn Maney Ross: And I--I would agree with that Evan. I think in the heat of the moment, in the passion of the moment at the Helena Convention that wasn't very evident but as we stepped back a little bit from it there really was that realization; well I know for me personally because I came from a strong Union background. When the 13 Unions endorsed Richard Nixon it was just a crushing blow.

00:36:05

Jim Murry: Oh it was.

00:36:05

Marilyn Maney Ross: But there was an understanding that in Montana anyway the Democratic Party spoke for working people, it spoke for those of us who really outside of the borders of Montana we wouldn't have had much of a chance really. We were working-class kids. We came from that background. But it was something precious we had here and that was truly a--a sense that we can't let national passions tear apart what we've built here in--in Montana.

00:36:44

And many of my dear friends it came out of that experience in '72 where trying to sort of bridge that yeah I was McGovern but I'm a Democrat and you're Union and some of my dear friends in Butte came out of the Women's Protective Union and were very active in that--that whole issue with McGovern. But I think that was one of the very good things that--that came for a lot of us was that sense we can't let what's going on, on a national level destroy what we've built--

00:37:25

Jim Murry: I think Marilyn is right about that.

00:37:26

Marilyn Maney Ross: --here in--in Montana.

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Jim Murry: Yeah. There was another thing about that--that I recall. I always talk about those coalitions that came together at that time, the--the coalitions with--with--it started with the--the Farm Labor Coalition. All of the sudden that branched out to include the Women's Movement and included the Environmental Movement.

00:37:46

Marilyn Maney Ross: Exactly; yes.

00:37:47

Jim Murry: It included low income people--were very involved in that whole thing. And--and so we were--as we were building that coalition and Evan, you played a major role in making this happen, an important and integral part of that whole coalition was the Democratic Party.

00:38:08

Marilyn Maney Ross: Absolutely.

00:38:10

Jim Murry: The Democratic Party was very much--was very much part of that and you know that goes back to our friend Ron Richards and--and before that the--the Democratic Party had really played that role--was really close to the people's voice, very close to the--to all of our organizations. I got started in Laurel, worked in the refinery in Laurel where my dad organized my Local Union; I got started by becoming the President of the Laurel Democratic Club because nobody else wanted the--wanted the job. And Chet [Blaylock] was--

00:38:43

Evan Barrett: He looked at you and said pick Red. *[Laughs]*

00:38:45

Jim Murry: Yeah that was about it; that was about it. And I became the--

00:38:50

Evan Barrett: I think Red had a different meaning. *[Laughs]*

00:38:55

Marilyn Maney Ross: Yeah; in that situation it certainly did yeah.

00:38:57

Jim Murry: Yes; it did. That's very good Evan. But my--my dad had organized the Laurel Democratic Club. He organized my Local Union but he organized the Laurel Democratic Club. My wife Arlene was the--was the Treasurer of the Yellowstone County Democratic Central Committee before I was active in the--before I became active in the Party. So it was very clear that we were--we were Democrats. And we weren't you know--when push came to shove we weren't going to vote for Richard Nixon.

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Marilyn Maney Ross: Absolutely; yes.

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Jim Murry: And we weren't--and we weren't going to hurt our friends that were for another candidate. We weren't going to--

00:39:32

Evan Barrett: By the way you know we're talking about this in terms of Small D--Democratizing the Democratic Party. And this is not to be partisan in a sense but it was the Democratic Party that was most challenged during this period.

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Marilyn Maney Ross: Yes.

00:39:48

Evan Barrett: That was most divided during this period that then went through change during this period and it was not a period in which the other major Party in Montana went through that change. When we--and so there was a--a co-joined--conjoining of--of--of things here in terms of politics and government and--and that--that happened inside the Democratic Party that makes it stand out as reflective of the change period we're talking about.

00:40:20

Now part of that found its voice; in terms of when we finally adopted rules of a--as a Party saying we want to reflect upward the strength of the reflective candidates but we were still looking at a process that involved Precinct Committee people. So if you look back at Montana history we had a bit of an interesting history in having Presidential Primaries. And I'll talk about that in a second, but what we ended up doing was proposing that instead of being Precinct Committee people being elected, why not have the voice of Democrats, reflected by the ballot box, by having a Presidential Primary so that the actual pure votes for candidates could be reflected upward on a proportional basis? That would save a lot of angst, a lot of problems; there would be fewer squabbles between different divisions of the Party over candidates because whatever numbers they got, they got. And they got it in an open public process called a Primary.

00:41:26

And so we--we went ahead and--and did that and I'll tell you how. But first let me take a second and refresh for those viewers we have how the Presidential Primary happened in Montana historically. In 1912, during the first Progressive Era we look upon this period of the *crucible of change* as being a second Progressive Era in Montana politics. The first Progressive Era had the big, big changed in 1912, which included the Corrupt Practices

Act, which was Campaign Reform. It included an initiative, and referendums were added to the Constitution of Montana at the time, and at that time Open Primaries and the Presidential Primary were passed in 1912.

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They were used--and you know who didn't like them? The Anaconda Company; the powers that be, the stock growers, the people that knew what backroom deals were all about didn't like openness in--in Primaries including Presidential Primaries. So after using the Primaries in 1916 and 1920 there was an effort by the Legislature to put on the ballot getting rid of the Presidential Primary. And they put it on the ballot and the people defeated it.

00:42:47

Jim Murry: That's right.

00:42:47

Evan Barrett: The people said no; we like this.

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Marilyn Maney Ross: Yes; yes.

00:42:49

Evan Barrett: So they did another election like that and then after that when Joe Dixon was Governor, a Progressive Republican, there was an effort again by the vested interests, by the Anaconda Company and the boys to put it on the ballot again and kill the Presidential Primary. And they put--they passed the Bill to put it on the--on the--on the ballot and Joe Dixon tried to veto the Bill. And it was at that veto that he tried--is where the court said no, no. Governors can't stop things that are going onto the ballot. If the Legislature puts them on the ballot that's the way it is, so Joe had to back away. And they put it on a ballot and this time the powers that be won and we got rid of the Presidential Primary. And we did not have a Presidential Primary then from that time forward from 1924 when that was passed until 1956.

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Interestingly, in 1956--

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Jim Murry: Folks would oppose that.

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Evan Barrett: --the reason why it happened in 1953 the Legislature took it up and they took it up at the behest of six Republican Senators who were offended by the fact that in the 1952 National Republican Convention that Robert Taft the super-conservative candidate had gotten virtually all of the Montana votes instead of Eisenhower who was kind of the middle of the road candidate.

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And it was because of the processes and so those six Republican Senators said gosh darn it; we need to have a Presidential Primary here and they orchestrated it through because they were Republican Senators even though the Anaconda Company opposed it. And in 1956 we had a Presidential Primary.

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Immediately after which the Anaconda Company killed it again and it lied--and it laid dormant until in 1973, late '73 I was talking with a fellow named Pat Williams. We all know Pat.

00:44:59

Marilyn Maney Ross: Yes.

00:44:58

Jim Murry: And you guys drafted the--you--you guys drafted the Bill.

00:45:00

Marilyn Maney Ross: The Bill.

00:45:01

Evan Barrett: And we thought well you know we think we need this Primary to reflect this--we were saying why don't we let the voters say how many Delegates? But the Republican Party doesn't want this. So we crafted a Bill that said there shall be a Presidential Primary in Montana and the way you get onto the ballot if you're a candidate is you get 1,000 signatures from each Congressional District and you're on the ballot, okay.

00:45:23

And it said it's optional; the political Parties are not forced to use this Presidential Primary. They can choose to use it or they can choose not to use it. And in this case, of course the Republican Party chose not to use it and to this day they still don't use it as a basis of their votes.

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The Democratic Party then said yes; we want to use it. And they made it part of their rules. And so we took that Bill and we--Pat and I took it to a young fellow by the name of John Murphy, often known as Landslide Murphy.

00:45:57

Jim Murry: Landslide Murphy.

00:45:58

Evan Barrett: Landslide Murphy was a freshman Legislator from Stanford--from Stanford who had won by a tie vote and when they came to breaking the tie it was the vote of the Governor that got to say and the rules in those days, the Governor said okay it's a tie. I--I got to pick this guy or this guy or somebody else. I pick John Murphy and was ever-after known as Landslide Murphy. **[Laughs]**

00:46:18

Jim Murry: That's right.

00:46:19

Evan Barrett: But Murphy passed the Bill. And so then the next time we had to have Delegate selection, instead of fighting each other internally in the trenches at the county level over Precinct Committee people, candidates came in

and had to compete for votes and then those were reflected upwards. And that is reflective I think of the change that we're talking about in The Crucible of Change that what is happening is we were empowering everyday citizens with choices and the opportunity to participate and having it mean something.

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How do you get inside that room?

00:46:52

Marilyn Maney Ross: Absolutely; absolutely.

00:46:53

Evan Barrett: So--

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Marilyn Maney Ross: And that is--and to my mind that was--was true small D, democracy because it allowed people to go into a voting booth and--and pick who they wanted rather than trying to--. One of the things I remember kind of in that period between '68 and '72 was trying to wrap my head around all of these arcane rules on who could be there and who couldn't and how--how somebody was elected, which in--discouraged any--discouraged participation except by the deal makers and the Anaconda Company and--and those folks.

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So to encourage and to open up the democratic process and the Democratic Party which I still believe that that's what the Democratic Party represents are those little people down here who can't figure out the arcane rules but they have a right to have a voice in the process and participate.

00:48:07

Jim Murry: And participate.

00:48:09

Marilyn Maney Ross: And I think--

00:48:09

Evan Barrett: And you were part of the implementation of that because you were elected when you--when Red went to the State Convention--

00:48:16

Marilyn Maney Ross: Went to the State--. *[Laughs]*

00:48:17

Evan Barrett: When Red went to the State Convention and became the State--a position on the State Party Executive Board.

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Marilyn Maney Ross: Exactly; exactly.

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Evan Barrett: So--

00:48:27

Marilyn Maney Ross: Yes.

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Evan Barrett: --I think I was still--

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Marilyn Maney Ross: You were Executive--

00:48:30

Evan Barrett: --Executive--

00:48:30

Marilyn Maney Ross: --yes; you were.

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Evan Barrett: Executive Secretary we called it back then.

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Marilyn Maney Ross: Right; yeah.

00:48:33

Evan Barrett: For a while yet and you were there and we had the process of trying to implement all this stuff in a way to create openness. And it was kind of fun to be able to be in the process especially once we got by the idea that both sides had figured out that losing wasn't good.

00:48:54

Marilyn Maney Ross: So yes.

00:48:55

Evan Barrett: That being on the losing side of Winner Take All, I mean if nothing was--seemed more undemocratic either in Montana or think about it--California where it was Winner Take All.

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Marilyn Maney Ross: Yes; yeah.

00:49:06

Evan Barrett: Think about every Delegate in California.

00:49:08

Marilyn Maney Ross: Well one of the--

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Evan Barrett: Suddenly--

00:49:10

Marilyn Maney Ross: --yeah.

00:49:10

Evan Barrett: --being for one candidate or another.

00:49:12

Marilyn Maney Ross: One of the things I remember--

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Evan Barrett: We had to make it work in Montana.

00:49:14

Marilyn Maney Ross: --Evan after that Helena Convention is even though it was wonderful to be on the winning side [*Laughs*] because we had been on the losing side, now the McGovern Delegates--but I remember having the sense of watching people like Lee Metcalf and all of the regular Party Leaders walking out thinking now what do we do, you know?

00:49:42

Evan Barrett: Yeah.

00:49:42

Marilyn Maney Ross: Now what do we do; how do we--

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Jim Murry: Well the wheels were coming off the wagon, there's so many--

00:49:49

Marilyn Maney Ross: Yes.

00:49:49

Jim Murry: --so many folks.

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Marilyn Maney Ross: But if--if we lost all of that, all of that knowledge and expertise, it wasn't going to do the Democratic Party any good.

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Jim Murry: That's right; that's really right.

00:50:03

Marilyn Maney Ross: And if it didn't do the Democratic Party any good it certainly was not going to do Labor any good and I mean that was--that was where I came from that those were the two organizations that for people like myself and other working class kids in Montana, those were the--those were the organizations that represented us.

00:50:27

Jim Murry: Would bring about needed change.

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Marilyn Maney Ross: Right; yes, absolutely.

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Jim Murry: Interesting thing too about all of that; I was always an organization guy. I was always thinking about how do we--how do we facilitate getting more people involved at the local level, boots on the ground? And back in those days you know the Labor Movement didn't put much money into political campaigns. We didn't have much money. What we did is we had--I always said we had the best grassroots organization in the State. And--and so as those rule changes came about Evan and again you really played a role in--in emphasizing all of this, focusing on this was the boots on the ground aspect.

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Yet people had to be involved in the local level in their communities to make their voice heard. The--the deal with Chas [Jeniker] in the truck I think you guys kind of redefined boots on the ground.

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Marilyn Maney Ross: *[Laughs]*

00:51:27

Jim Murry: But that--but it's a great example. That's exactly what we're talking about, just local people involved and out of that--out of that what happens is leaders--leaders develop and are selected. If--if that--if I hadn't had that opportunity a lot of years ago I would have never become a leader in the Labor Movement.

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Marilyn Maney Ross: Well--

00:51:49

Jim Murry: There wouldn't have been anyplace for me to go.

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Marilyn Maney Ross: --yeah and it certainly had a huge impact on my life obviously. I--I stayed involved at so many levels and one of the lessons that I took out of all of that--that served me very, very well in other endeavors was that coalition building, how to identify who you had a common interest with and how to develop those--those coalitions and that was a really, really valuable--valuable lesson.

00:52:23

And the other thing too is just being able to speak in a way that hopefully would help people see in Montana we are this one big family. And yeah; you know we might get in spats and we might bicker and we might-- but in the end, we are all this one family because--

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Jim Murry: We just agreed to disagree occasionally.

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Marilyn Maney Ross: Exactly; yes, yes. And sometimes those disagreements got [*Laughs*] pretty lively but--

00:52:55

Jim Murry: That's right.

00:52:56

Marilyn Maney Ross: --we--that ability to come together at--afterwards I think and again that--that very solid lesson of no matter what we cannot let our passions that are inflamed by national politics tear apart what we in Montana have built over generations. It wasn't just me or you; I mean we are second and third generation of--of that kind of foundation.

00:53:28

Jim Murry: Yeah; and Marilyn is absolutely right about that and that--what developed through all of that and through all of those decades of people working together was we developed a political culture in Montana that was

really unique, surrounded by Right to Work States. I mean States that couldn't pass Right to Work in '53 and '58 had terribly tough Right to Work fights in Montana. Montana would have probably become a Right to Work State had it not been for the Montana Farmers Union and a lot of the Clergy in the State who were a part of that Coalition Movement helping--helping us in that whole thing.

00:54:05

That was our culture. It was--

00:54:09

Evan Barrett: And you know if you look at it and you think about the period in *the crucible of change* that there was a pent up desire of the grassroots of Montana to have more empowerment and more voice. It found an answer in many different ways. We talked about a lot of them on this series. Part of the art form of what we were kind of engaged in was how to build structures in the Democratic Party that allowed that voice to be reflected in a way that did not cause divisions but caused a coming together. So these processes of--including this Presidential Primary took us away from fighting with each other inside little rooms to coalescing for things we wanted to change policy-wise because we didn't have the little fights. Those fights were resolved by votes, by openness, by participation, by crafting rules of fairness and timeliness, and those things all occurred--. You were engaged in it very heavily in a lot of ways as a big winner, a big loser, and someone who was always engaged in the process of trying to make it work for everyone.

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You were engaged in it as a newcomer saying hey; what's this about? Oh I guess this is going to get us in the room and helping implement those processes. I was lucky enough to be involved with it to try to help form it and shape it in a way that helped us to move forward. So it's a very interesting story of empowerment inside a--an institution that is important to the body politic of Montana. You know your reflections?

00:56:07

Marilyn Maney Ross: Well I would absolutely agree with--with what you've said Evan and the--the two different perspectives said--as a newcomer, Jim as someone who--who had successfully in a lot of ways negotiated the old Party structure. But I think the--the real story here is even though the--at 72 the old Party structure maybe didn't see

any need for change. Things had worked well. And this new group comes in to open it up, to you know be able to-- to be a part of it, but I think the real story there is we did accomplish that; we did do it. And afterwards those of us who stayed involved were able to acknowledge all that the other group had brought to the--to us and--and to the State and we were again, we were--we had this wonderful unique way of getting things done in Montana and that we were--we were able to do that in a way that I think the Party and Montana came out of it stronger than we were going into it.

00:57:43

Evan Barrett: Well while we were keeping Labor and people like Jim who were the--kind of the strength in the-- the--almost the backbone of the Party we were bringing in--in this period of change more minorities, women, younger people. You fit two of those categories. You were a woman and a young person at the time.

00:58:04

Marilyn Maney Ross: Absolutely; yes.

00:58:05

Evan Barrett: And that was like whole new stuff. And so we were able to do that successfully. So that's why we call this--*Small D Democratizing the Democratic Property* and it--it was an institutional change in the significance to the history of Montana during that period.

00:58:20

We're running--see; I told you the hour would go awfully fast and it has. And I want to tell you what a pleasure it is to sit at the table with friends like you who have been through so much together with--we've made a lot of change together. This particular thing was very important and it's stood the test of time since the early 1970s in keeping Montana a people-oriented State.

00:58:43

We'll look forward to seeing you in the next Crucible of Change episode.

00:58:49

[Music]

00:59:48

[End Small D of Democratizing-Opening Up the Montana Democratic Party]