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### Thoughts from a committee chairman

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THOUGHTS FROM A COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN -- on February 26, 1972.

The Committee on Natural Resources & Agriculture began its meetings in a friendly enough atmosphere -- each one trying to assess the personalities of the other. Before the work of the group was concluded, and by the end of the final public hearing (Romney hearing) on February 10th, the committee was completely polarized on the environmental article -- 7 to 2. In an honest assessment of why this happened, as Committee Chairman, and for the purpose of future analysis of the work of this committee, the following personal observations are made. They are not meant to be derogatory in nature; nor are they being made to diminish the good intentions or sincerity of beliefs of any individual in the committee.

Looking back, it is my opinion that the makeup of the committee was unfortunate to begin with. The reason I was selected for this committee, I was told by one of the executive officers (Mrs. Eck) was because of my known stand on the environment and natural resources. I presume that was the same reason Henry Siderius was chosen. Since the Chairmen were also selected by the president of the Convention and approved by the executive officers, I suppose this was the reason for my selection as Chairman. Evidently the other seven were unknown quantities. However, I have learned that C. B. McNeil, during his campaign, and in reply to either a questionnaire or letter, said he not only approved of the Illinois article on environment but thought it should be stronger. The backgrounds of the members are: (1) Anderson - rancher; (2) Brazier - lawyer; (3) Delaney - rancher; (4) Gysler - manufacturer; (5) Kamhoot - semi-retired businessman; (6) McNeil - lawyer and metallurgical engineer; (7) Rebal - auto dealer; and (8) Siderius - farmer.

The imbalance of the committee relative to their feelings on what should be done in the area of environment became apparent fairly early in the committee work and by the time the deadline for delegate proposals was reached, an impasse was a foregone conclusion.

From the beginning, lobbyists or representatives from A.C.M., Montana Power Company, the forest and timber interests and (occasionally Montana-Dakota Utilities) etc. sat in the committee room. Very few ordinary citizens found their way to 402 until about the last week of the hearings. By that time their opinions did not carry much weight and the committee was struggling with a majority report.

I also observed that in the hallways and areas off Convention hall, members of the committee were frequently in earnest conversation with those who were opposed to a strong environmental article.

The honest fear of confiscation of private property and the possibility of harassment suits were raised time and again; no assurances to the contrary had much effect. I believe that when

Delegate Proposal 162 (on public trust) was labeled as a social-istic concept, the resistance to it became completely solidified.

On February 1st, the time of the joint hearing of the Natural Resources and Agriculture Committee and the Bill of Rights Committee, I made an urgent appeal for a strong environmental article. At that time I had no specific one. By the time of the Romney hearing, I presented Proposal 162 and the controversy centered on this. My personal mail was 8 - 1 in favor of such a proposal. Mail ranged from students to rock-ribbed republicans -- who said that two years ago it would have been unthinkable to them, but experience had proven its necessity.

In all fairness to the committee, their work on Agriculture and Water was very well done. However, in all their deliberations, one could sense that these were areas in which each may have had a personal stake. Water and water rights are at a crucial point in Montana history -- use it or lose it; the same with agriculture. The latter is rapidly losing its voice and its representation in legislative halls. On these two points the common danger was recognized and action taken.

Reclamation of land and historic sites were included but did not receive a unanimity of approval.

The Minority Report -- which merely states that a citizen may bring action against a governmental agency not doing its job almost met the same fate as the public trust idea. Only upon my insistence that the minutes of the final committee meeting be transcribed -- which indicated four members had voted for this section, and that there had been no objections to it being used as a minority report, and only after recalling the letter of transmittal (which had been sent to printing) but in which unanimous approval had been given to the minority report, did the committee agree to let it go through.

My objections to much of the explanatory material -- which I considered biased and not relevant to the article on environment -- were disregarded and overridden by seven members of the committee. (Siderius excluded)

I have been asked if being the only woman Chairman of a committee could have entered into the decisions made by the others. I don't think so. I certainly hope not. Most of what we decide on any issues are usually determined by philosophies built up over a lifetime. My study on environment goes back several years. By nature, I tend to look ahead, not behind; I have always stood by personal convictions, and have rarely dodged a showdown, though I don't necessarily seek one.

I am convinced that what is done with the environment is one of the important issues of our time and that sooner or later we must face it. My contention has been -- the sooner, the better.

The opportunity presented by the Convention was a golden one.

My feeling of respect and admiration for many of our young men and women was reinforced by the help and dedication of our research analyst, Chuck Sullivan, intern - Mona Earley, and Dave and Lee Ann Jersey. The help of the secretary, Elaine Rung, has also been much appreciated. Without them, the work in the committee would have been immeasurably more difficult.

*Louise Cross*

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LOUISE CROSS, Chairman  
Natural Resources & Agriculture  
Committee

Date: February 26, 1972