

Eck: Not at all. I like being called liberal.

Cole: When did it happen Dorothy Eck that you got the stirrings to get involved with public life, political life?

Eck: I think when I first came to Bozeman I realized it was a very republican place and that I didn't agree with the republicans here. Their main issue was get us out of the United Nations and you know I had from high school days been supporting the United Nations and I found that there was a group starting here to support the United Nations and that was initially the political group that I belonged to. We had regular meetings good speakers. We had one coupe where one of their republican congressional candidate took a trip to South America with some Extension Agents and came back a big supporter of foreign aid and a lot of issues that the republicans were against. We had him as our prime speaker the next year. We also, it was at that time, we had Eleanor Roosevelt visit Bozeman which was good. I didn't become involved in the democratic party because at this time I was also starting to work with the League of Women Voters and found that any political ties were not really accepted there. So it was actually until I ran as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention that I ran as a democrat.

Cole: And that was 1972 and we'll get there in just a second. I want to go back to Eleanore Roosevelt for just a moment. I think this was in the 1950s, maybe early fifties and the college refused to have her speak on campus.

Eck: Yes they did. She spoke, I think, down at Willson School and the local republicans were so pleased because they managed to have her sitting in a red chair. (Laughter) But it was a day that people remember, really quite a coupe for Bozeman.

Cole: To this day the League of Women Voters is non-partisan but that was intriguing that you really didn't identify yourself as a democrat because you served three terms, didn't you, as **state president of the League of Women Voters** and then you identified yourself as a democrat legitimately in 1972.

Eck: I don't know that I served three terms, but as president of the League of Women Voters I certainly did not identify myself as a democrat. However it was during that time where I lobbied the legislature. **The league was the first citizen group who had full time lobbyists at the legislature** and we learned a lot about what was wrong with the legislature and what needed to be done and became strong supporters of having a constitutional convention.

Cole: What was wrong with the Montana State Legislature? The smoke filled rooms literally? In those days the copper company, the power company and some would say on the other side of the street, big labor, but in your opinion Dorothy Eck before the constitutional convention in 72 not that everything has been cured, but what was wrong with the state legislature?

Eck: Well, what was wrong with the state legislature, was the legislature was really run by the big corporations. My first knowledge of this really was when we rented one summer, the students were gone from our apartment, to a group of women, one of whom was a republican woman reporter who had covered the legislature and who explained in detail how the corporations managed to control

everything that went on including who ran for office. They would have a republican and democrat running who were both their people and being at the legislature realizing that everything was done in secret. You could not attend a meeting, a committee meeting where they were making decisions. They were made in private. The second reading votes which were critical were made without any report. We had to have people join with us and sitting in the balcony each one of us would have four or five legislators to watch. They had green buttons or red and that was the only way we could tell how people were voting. It was a very controlled situation and the newspapers also were pretty much controlled by the corporations. Bozeman Daily Chronicle was not, however coming here in a presidential election year and finding almost no political news in the newspaper, front page would have stories about who was running for prom queen, it was obvious that change was desperately needed.

Cole: In years past the Anaconda Copper Company was one of the controlling factors of the major daily newspapers in Billings, Missoula, Butte and Helena and like you said in those years the Bozeman Daily Chronicle was one of the independents but now as we speak in 2012 they're owned by a corporation out of Seattle too, so the media battle continues but the stirrings for a state constitutional convention even in 1972, post 1960s, it was almost unheard of that an entire state would come together and there would be a call for a constitutional convention. Give us some of the history behind this Dorothy Eck. How and why did this happen? Many different interests, many different cities.

Eck: I don't think that the League was entirely responsible but I think the League has a good role in calling attention to the fact that changes had to be made. But there were others who wanted changes also. Our former constitution you could put three items at a time on the ballot, so in order to get a change, a major change, was going to take years. I think one of the strong influences was the fact that Butte-Silver Bow really wanted to become a city-county organization which made great sense for them and they had tried to get it on as a constitutional amendment allowing them to do that but knew it wasn't going to work and so they became a strong supporter of a constitutional convention. Other organizations, there was an organization of attorneys who wanted to see changes in the judicial system and from localities, around the state there organizations that wanted more rights for local government, so that we weren't the only one. So they first called, they were able to get legislation in setting up a commission to look at our present constitution to see how much of it was detrimental and how much of it really didn't matter and what parts were really good. Well, that commission came up with the recommendation that too much of it was really detrimental made it difficult to really pass reasonable laws to have reasonable government.

Cole: Now if I remember correctly, there were approximately one hundred delegates to the constitutional convention. It was in 1972 and did these come from legislative districts or what was the makeup. They were the elected people like yourself who went to Helena for this meeting, this convention.

Eck: It was setup to follow the way the legislature was organized at the time and at that time you had multi-seat districts so that Bozeman was part of district made up of Gallatin and Park counties. We had six seats. There were thirty people filed for those six seats. It was required that you run, that it would be a partisan race and it was. The way it happened was during the time that the time the campaign was

going on there was a tremendous amount of education being done after calling for a convention and finding that people voted for a convention then established a commission to setup the process for the legislature and they hired some wonderful young people to do the studies and candidates during that time had a lot of material to study. They put out booklets and here at the university they had a class on what on what a constitutional convention might be. Larry Pettit ran that class and had a number of students there as well as people who were candidates to become delegates. So we had learned a lot before the convention was actually called and actually about maybe eight, quite a few of the students came over and worked at the convention as interns.

Cole: When did you first meet Max Baucus? Was this the time?

Eck: Yes, he came looking for a job. I was on the committee actually that hired him, the executive committee and I remember talking to him and he was very open about the fact that he had come back to Montana after graduating from law school and having a few years working elsewhere and he wanted to get involved in politics. He wanted to be a U.S. Senator. People really gasped at that.

Cole: An even then he knew he wanted to be a senator.

Eck: Yes, but they said you shouldn't say that. That is too presumptive but we thought it was great and we gave him good advice about the best place to run. The best place would be from Missoula. At that time there was a great interest in doing door to door work and he did that. He went back and it was a multi-county district that was running for the legislature and he walked his district and I think he came in first out of a pretty large slate of candidates.

Cole: So he did serve in the state legislature before he went back to the US Congress.

Eck: Ya, he served in the state, then ran for Congress. He wasn't the choice of the in-group of democrats. I can remember Mansfield calling them the Montana Mafia (laughter) who really liked to select who was going to run and he was not their selection but he won.

Cole: So we have so many things to talk about. Let's go back to the constitutional convention. So you and your colleagues actually met in 1972. What was the atmosphere like at the meeting? Did it last three months, six months. How long was the convention?

Eck: Oh, it lasted fifty-eight days.

Cole: So here are the delegates who were elected to the constitutional convention meeting in Helena, fifty-eight days, lots of work to do. We mentioned you ran either as a democrat or republican. Can you remember approximately how many democrats and how many republicans were actually the elected delegates to the convention.

Eck: I don't remember exactly but I do remember the democrats had a strong majority. I would say fifty-eight to sixty percent and that the state democrats, the official party wanted us to organize a democratic convention and there was enough support, enough understanding that it had to be non-partisan if it were to be successful. But that was resisted and although they called for a caucus of

democrats and republicans when those caucuses occurred they were short. It had already been pretty much agreed that the democrats would have the chair and the republicans vice-chair and the same kind of split would be made in committee chairs.

Cole: So on the fifty-eighth day did you have a document. Was it a proposed constitution? What happened?

Eck: Not at all. I don't think there was any sympathy at all for the proposal that we just take the old constitution and make amendments and actually the call for citizen participation was tremendous. We had had ads in the paper where citizens could write up proposals of something they wanted in the constitution. They were all filed, assigned to a committee and they were all heard. So that really from the beginning it was established that each committee would work on what they wanted their article to say. I was on the bill of rights committee and we had a lot of good ideas of what our article should say.

Cole: You said on the fifty-eighth day it wasn't all said and done and I would assume that you were looking down the road that this constitution, this proposed document that would affect every county in the state Montana would have to go to the voters and did it require a very simple majority and kind of walk us through what happened there with eventual approval.

Eck: Yes it required a simple majority and we were aware of this. There were a lot of issues that came up in proposals that the constitutional convention delegates favored but they didn't put them in because it might alienate a group of voters that they were going to need and as it happened we did have some side issues like gambling that were put on a separate ballot of whether or not it should be there. Once the constitution was signed and every delegate signed it even those who had strong opinions against it.

Betty Babcock signed it and when she found that her husband and a group of his cohorts were making plans on how they were going to defeat it, she went to work full time supporting it. She was the strongest, one of the strongest supporters. She and Daphne Bugby traveled the state, a democrat and a republican really working on this.

Cole: Of course Betty Babcock the wife of Tim Babcock, former governor of the state of Montana and active republican and Daphne Bugby at that time based in Missoula and a very activist democrat in the Garden City. The document, how many days did you go before you had this written document that you were going to submit to the voters.

Eck: We went fifty-eight days and we had in mind all along that we were going to need extra time. We were going to save the extra money that the next two days would cost to promote the constitution so we adjourned early and the court didn't allow us to have the money and we didn't have a lot of money. We were able to get enough support and really the delegates then the time between when we adjourned in mid-March I think it was and the primary in June and we wisely put it on the primary ballot and we had that time to campaign for it and most of the delegates spent most of their time campaigning.

Cole: Can you remember the numbers when the election was drawing near midnight what were the numbers. It passed obviously but what were the numbers.

Eck: It didn't pass so obviously. In fact there were questions. The question was whether it needed the majority of the votes cast or the majority of the votes cast on that particular issue, thinking that there were a lot of people who voted for gambling but didn't bother to vote at all on whether they approved the constitution. Anderson was governor at the time. He knew this debate was going on and he knew that there were people who were waiting to challenge it and he had the document written out that he had received the results of the election and the constitution had passed. And he took that down to the secretary of state's office and there were some shenanigans then but they had to accept it, but even after that it was challenged you know all the way to the Supreme Court. So we weren't sure right away that it had passed.

Cole: Challenged to the Montana Supreme Court?

Eck: The US Supreme Court. Yes really.

Cole: Did they hear and pass down a judgment?

Eck: Yes they did and they passed down the judgment that it had properly passed.

Cole: I was living out of the state at the time and wasn't really aware of all of the implications of what was going on and I remember even though I did come back and in disclosure work for the local government study commission in Helena for a while after the constitution had been passed, I remember some of the significant things for me, Dorothy Eck, were, number one, single member legislative districts where you would not have county-wide legislators elected from a broad geographic area, that there were single member legislative districts and there also was a part of the constitution that required local government review where incorporated cities and incorporated counties would have to go to their people, to the people that lived in that particular city and propose an alternative to their current form of government like if it was a city manager form or strong mayor. Talk about some of the implications of this constitution and of course you were on the bill of rights committee as well.

Eck: Yes that was important and local governments were important in calling the constitution convention to begin with. I can remember one of the statements was that local governments should not be shackled because the law had required for many issues that they the legislature decided what local governments could and could not do so they had a lot more flexibility. We were disappointed that they didn't really use this model as much as they should and that is still a possibility that there are still people in this county who are wanting a change to a different form of county government and maybe eventually they will get it and they have a way of looking at it. But this was true very much in the way that state government worked, the way legislature worked, the governor was given an amendatory veto which he hadn't had before and we still see that that is effective. The judicial system is still up in question. There were strong feelings that the judiciary should be appointed and not elected and I think we still see that happening and the matter of annual sessions. The convention was sure that we should do that but the people decided that they didn't want annual sessions.

Cole: Was this also the time that term limits were put into effect for all the elected offices at state level?

Eck: Term limits, that was a constitutional amendment that came later and it was one of those amendments that was made throughout a lot of states. It's understandable that people would think that this was a good idea after serving in the legislature, and I did that for a lot of years, I could see the advantages. There were always a few doddering old legislators weren't of much use, but on the other hand we could also see with term limits you lose the leadership you need. There's a lot more power going to the lobbyists.

Cole: We're recording an oral history interview with Dorothy Eck and we're in Bozeman at her home and Dorothy Eck is a former state senator, a leader in women's rights to this day in Montana. She served twenty years in the Montana State Senate, elected in 1980 and retired in 2000 and as we discussed just a few moments ago was very active in the 1972 constitution convention. Let's go now to your active political years in the state senate and the forming of a legacy really that you have done so much in public life. What in your mind as you served in the Montana Senate were some of the highlights of things that you are especially proud of.

Eck: Oh, there were a lot of areas I worked in. I think children and families was one that I still think back on where we did good work and there is a lot more to be done. I was especially interested in and still am in proposals for in-home visiting. We have had good reports from states, starting with Hawaii who have done this. Vermont is a marvelous example where they have reduced child abuse to, oh, by fifty percent at least by giving this kind of help to families in their homes. I also was a part of a lot of environmental issues related to coal mining and that was also related to taxes and I think one of the reasons that we proposed and had accepted a high tax on coal, was the understanding that the cost to the communities and to the state of that development was really high.

Cole: How has the state of Montana done as a steward of its natural resources and we see the increasing number of coal trails going out of Montana for exported coal to Asia, certainly to the west and east coast of our own country; but how are we doing with the whole stewardship issue to our natural resources?

Eck: I think it is still an issue and always will be. I think during those early years we realized the potential cost to local government and to the state of this kind of development and we are still seeing this and there are costs. In many ways it has helped us, we are seeing this as having the coal tax as a reserve fund that we really rely on. We can only spend the income from it, but that income is important to the state in managing a lot of important programs. We are especially aware now that gas development is becoming a major issue in eastern Montana and those communities have not been able to keep up with the demands and the demands of longer and longer and more coal railroad cars going through our cities is an issue that most communities have not really been able to prepare for.

Cole: We mentioned a few moments ago of your early friendship and advice that you gave to now very senior US Senator Max Baucus and then as I was reading notes of your papers with the Montana Historical Society, I know that you worked as a local government liaison person when Tom Judge was Governor of Montana and of course, correct me if I'm wrong, you shared an office in the state senate with Jon Tester who is now the US Senator, close friend of Dorothy Bradley who served in the state