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# Transcript for Episode 12: Consiglieri: Ron Richards' Critical Role for Senator Metcalf, Governors Anderson & Judge

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**[Begin Consiglieri - Ron Richards' Role for Senator Metcalf, Governor Anderson, & Governor Judge]**

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**[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 of the State.

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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.

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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. 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.

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The people finally controlled their own destiny. 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 we've been telling the story of so many of the major political players of the era from 1965 to 1980, the elected officials that you know set policy differences and made a big difference in Montana. But you know for every one of those people who was elected there were a lot of people behind the scenes that made things happen.

00:01:44

And we do focus on those people and we often have them around the table here talking about things. Occasionally someone who is a great, great contributor to the period of the *Crucible of Change* has passed on and we don't have the opportunity to talk with them but we do have the opportunity to talk about them when they're really important. And so, we're going to have a--a circumstance like that today because today we're going to be talking about a gentleman by the name of Ron Richards.

00:02:16

Ron Richards was as much as anybody in that entire 15-year period of the *Crucible of Change* the person that provided the--the most glue, the most continuity, the most melding of everyone together in terms of creating a team and making things happen that made a difference to the State of Montana and the people of Montana.

00:02:40

We call this segment Consiglieri; Consiglieri is an Italian term for a counselor, someone who is a go-to person to get stuff done. And Ron Richards was consiglieri for Lee Metcalf. He was consiglieri for Forrest Anderson. And he was consiglieri for Tom Judge. Even later beyond the period of the *crucible of change* he was consiglieri for John Melcher. So this was a gentleman who made a world of difference. And so we're going to focus in on the difference he made today and in doing so we have three wonderful guests who will help contribute their thoughts to the difference Ron Richards made in the *crucible of change*. We're joined by Jim Murry. Jim was a--with the State AFL-CIO for 26 years during this entire period, top labor leader, top leader of all of Montana, who also was a very, very close personal friend of Ron's. And I think it's worth noting that I think we all are friends. We're all--we all work together. We still remain friends to this day. And so what we're going to have here today is a conversation. It's not an interview. And it's wonderful to have you back Jim.

00:03:58

**Jim Murry:** Thank you.

00:03:59

**Evan Barrett:** And--and also Annabelle Richards. Annabelle is Ron's widow. They were married for 20--34 years and she was a partner in crime if you will with Ron. She was an equal partner and a participant in all the things that

happened at that period and she brings the personal insights of Ron and his life and his contribution. And thank you Annabelle for joining us.

00:04:25

**Annabelle Richards:** My privilege; believe me.

00:04:26

**Evan Barrett:** And Dan Newman. Dan Newman is a contemporary of Ron's. When Ron first came back from DC, Dan was the person that was one of the first ones to meet him and was at his arm and his elbow and his shoulder for a decade and a half beyond that, Dan was the Secretary of the Democratic Party in Montana. He was a school teacher first of course in California and in Helena after being--he was also the Field Staff Director for Congressman Arnold Olsen. He was then the State Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity, the Anti-Poverty War Director for Montana for 11 years. He--he later was the National Chairman of an organization with the National Governors Association, a--a low-income poverty fighting organization in all of the States. And after being out of Montana for a few years went to work for the State Fed with Jim Murry, again and finally retired, although you hardly know retirement, but Dan you've been active in all these years and you were an extraordinary close friend, confidante, and advisor to Ron and so welcome to you.

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Now I want to take a second and talk a little bit about Ron himself. And then I want to get this all on the table because he had a remarkable career of amazing achievement and--and again, as I said was really the glue for the whole *crucible of change* period. Ron was born in 1934 in--in Missoula. He loved radio early on. He went to the University of Montana where he ended up with a degree in Journalism. And in fact, playing around in radio and journalism back and forth, he became a Professor at the University in the Journalism School. He was selected from there to be a--what we affectionately call a Metcalf intern. Metcalf intern was a group of people that Senator Metcalf brought back to Washington, DC to teach them the ropes about how to make government work for people.

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And I will say this that it's an extraordinary group of people who were Metcalf interns. The list of those people is just an amazing list of accomplishment and Ron was one of those. And after being there from 1964 and

into '65 Senator Metcalf was looking for--looking ahead to re-election efforts in 1966. And he decided he wanted to have somebody who could help make sure that the Montana Democratic Party would be able to work closely with him and be effective and--and an effective tool in his re-election. So he asked Ron to come back to Montana; instead of going back to Missoula Ron came to Helena with Annabelle and the kids. And he was Executive Secretary. We now call that Executive Director, but Executive Secretary of the Democratic Party during the re-election campaign of Lee Metcalf, a very important campaign because this was a sitting US Senator running against a sitting Governor, very important campaign, a very high-profile one. But Lee won that campaign with Ron assisting from the Party Leadership position working with folks like Dan and Jim. And--and we move forward to the 1968 election which was the next big election. And in that case Forrest Anderson emerged through the Primary and was running against Tim Babcock who again was a Governor running for re-election.

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And in this case Ron was shepherding the forces of the Montana Democratic Party very, very effectively and Forrest won an overwhelming election. And he was appreciative of the skills that Ron brought to the table and his ability to get people to work together that he asked Ron to become part of his Administration beginning in early 1969 and he made Ron Executive Assistant. That's the term they used in those days; now they call it Chief of Staff, but he was the top person under the Governor with Forrest Anderson in 1969 and he served in that for four years, all of Forrest's entire first term.

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And then amazingly when we had a new Governor, Tom Judge was elected Governor in 1972, when he was bringing his own staff onboard he looked and said I can't do any better than Ron Richards. And he kept him on as--as his Executive Assistant. So Ron stayed in that role until--for almost a year and a half at which time he--he headed up the State Highway Department.

00:09:19

He took a break from running a department of State government for the 1976 election and he was Campaign Manager for Governor Judge in the Judge/Schwinden team which ran. That was the first time the Governor and Lieutenant Governor ran together, so Ron was the Campaign Manager for the Judge/Schwinden team. And again they won an overwhelming plurality, a 61-percent win and Ron after that election slid back into State

government as the Director of the Department of Community Affairs where he stayed through the remainder of Governor Judge's term.

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He left in 1980 and he went back to his first love which was radio. He was a--one of the original founders of KMTX Radio here and he was doing work on KMTX when the Montana Democratic Party grabbed him and said we want you to be our State Party Chairman. So he was elected State Party Chair and he served in that position for about a year when Senator John Melcher, the Senior Senator from Montana said Ron I need you to come back to Washington, DC which he did. Now this was now outside what we call the--the *crucible of change* period but Ron served in--with John Melcher in Washington, DC until 19--early 1989. So it was for about five years back in DC and he and Ron--and Annabelle went back to DC.

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He came back to Montana and he dug right back in and he got--took part in the election initiative campaign to raise the cigarette tax which was an irony because Ron had been a smoker and he contracted cancer and he died very prematurely at the age of 56 or 54. And we all miss the strength that he brought and the cohesiveness that he brought when he passed on as a dear friend of ours. But he--but if you think about the record of accomplishments it's--it's un--unmatched record of accomplishment. And so it's because he was that glue, because he was the mortar that held together so many people to make so many positive changes for Montana that we decided it was worthwhile in *In the Crucible of Change* to focus on Ron Richards and talk about what he did and what he meant. And Annabelle I want to kind of start with you with a little question about, how did it feel when you were sitting in Missoula and suddenly you had to run to Washington, DC to work for Lee Metcalf and--and what was that like for those couple years?

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**Annabelle Richards:** Well it was very exciting. And I never dreamed that someday I would be there, but Ron certainly had the--the initiative and the knowledge to go and to make a difference and it was just a very exciting time in our lives.

00:12:17

**Evan Barrett:** You know you were pretty young at that point; if you think about 1964 Ron--you were both, you were high school classmates, right?

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**Annabelle Richards:** That's right; yes.

00:12:26

**Evan Barrett:** High school sweethearts.

00:12:26

**Annabelle Richards:** Sweethearts; yes, that's right.

00:12:28

**Evan Barrett:** And you remained that by the way always--. And you were both just 30 when you went back to Washington, DC.

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**Annabelle Richards:** Uh-hm.

00:12:36

**Evan Barrett:** Did you have all three kids then?

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**Annabelle Richards:** Yes; yes we did. *[Laughs]*

00:12:40

**Evan Barrett:** And you had to drag them right back here two years later, huh?

00:12:43

**Annabelle Richards:** Yes; and it was--it was quite an experience and of course he would go off to work and I would try to keep the kids in line and--but of course I--I was excited and interested in everything that he did and when he'd come home in the evening I'd get a full report of what had happened that day.

00:13:06

**Evan Barrett:** I suspect you gave him a little advice now and then too.

00:13:09

**Annabelle Richards:** Now and then. [*Laughs*]

00:13:10

**Evan Barrett:** Now by the way I was a little derelict in my introduction, not to mention that you are a trained nurse, a Registered Nurse. You were involved in the medical community for a number of years. You worked for the Montana Foundation for Medical Care.

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**Annabelle Richards:** Correct.

00:13:27

**Evan Barrett:** You ran television programs that promoted healthcare and you were also a Helena City Commissioner.

00:13:33

**Annabelle Richards:** Yes.

00:13:34

**Evan Barrett:** So you had your own political career later after Ron was gone and then--and so you've always had such an interest in--in civic affairs. It's--so it's such a pleasure to have you here and--

00:13:46

**Annabelle Richards:** Well thank you.

00:13:46

**Evan Barrett:** --to have you be giving some of these reflections. Now--now suddenly you were asked to come back and--and Ron had not been heavily and deeply in the political world in Montana. It was through Metcalf that he was thrust into the political world, both of you were, and both--Jim both you and Dan were some of the first people he met. Dan, would you talk about that for a second?

00:14:09

**Dan Newman:** Yeah; Fred [Barrett] was our National Chairman and he asked--he asked if I would--or our State Chairman, he asked if I would take Ron around and introduce him to the county and local Democratic Central Committee Chairman. Of course I agreed to do that. And it was one of the most wonderful experiences of my life getting to know Ron and introducing him around to--to our Party officials that--

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**Evan Barrett:** Was he a pretty quick study about things?

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**Dan Newman:** Yeah; there--there really was. He was an individual that was just--had the kind of personality Evan. He could--he could talk to anybody and he would always get something out of it. When he had these conversations he had a mind on him like a steel trap. He never forgot things. He never forgot names. He didn't forget people. He didn't forget the communities and he would know something about the local area, about the people he was talking to; he was a wonderful quick study of people, of what they did, and how he could communicate with them. His whole--his whole life was about communications, about news, about events, and he had a great memory for that.

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**Evan Barrett:** So but suddenly a guy from--who spent most of his time in Missoula was out in Glendive and Sydney and Baker.

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**Dan Newman:** Exactly; exactly.

00:15:47

**Evan Barrett:** And getting the feel of the State for sure.

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**Dan Newman:** Exactly. At--at the same time, he was complemented so much by our friend Annabelle. I mean they worked as a team together. They were--Annabelle was as well-known as Ron and I don't know the years Annabelle on this but I--I do believe that Annabelle served as the Chairwoman of the newly elected Governors longer than anybody has ever done that--Head of the Committee for the Inauguration of the Governors. I know it started with Forrest and it was still going long after I had left the State, so I--I'm sure you have the record for the number of years you served on the Inauguration Committees.

00:16:41

**Evan Barrett:** Now Jim you--you were of course one part of the coalition that made up the Democratic Party as the Leader of Labor when--although you were the COPE Director when Ron came. So then COPE is Committee on Political Education. You were the political guy for Labor and--

00:16:57

**Jim Murry:** Well really--really what happened when--when Ron and Annabelle were asked to come back to Helena and take over the--the Democratic Party, I think that was in 1965; Arlene and I were living in Laurel then. I

was--I was the President of my Local Union in Laurel. And that's when I met Ron. I met him at a--at a Democratic function; I think it was a picnic in Billings and we became--immediately became fast-friends.

00:17:26

Well the next year was the year that Tim Babcock, our sitting Governor challenged Lee Metcalf in that race that you were talking about for the United States Senate. So Arlene and I were asked to move to Helena from Laurel which was the--was quite a move. I always thought Laurel was kind of the center of the universe. I guess I still have that feeling once in a while but at any rate, it was at that time that we were asked to come to--come to Helena and I became the Political Director or the COPE Director for the Montana State AFL-CIO and worked very closely with Ron. We were--we were very, very good friends and from the--from the very beginning. We traveled--traveled a lot together. And Ron had this--that was the beginning of putting together the coalitions that we've talked about on some of the other programs, the coalitions with the--the Farm Labor Coalition; that was a coalition that the Labor Movement had with the Farmers Union. That was kind of the foundation for the Progressive Political Movement in Montana at that time. But we expanded that and we expanded it to include low-income people. Dan Newman had a--had played a role in that. The women's groups, the environmentalists, all of those groups came--came together in coalition with us, and--and Ron saw to it that--saw to it that the Democratic Party played a--a very significant and critical role in that coalition effort. And in other words, the Democratic Party was as much a part of that coalition as anything. And he had the ability as--as Dan has talked about, had the ability to work with all the divergent forces that were at work in those--with those various organizations--did a wonderful, really did a wonderful job. He understood the importance of--he was--he was a--an issue--issues guy and he because of his background in journalism he knew how to work with the press; did a great job with that. He--he just really did a great job with that. But he understood the importance of coalitions and--and boots on the ground, people in communities across the State working locally to set a political tone year-round in Montana. He--he just had a--he was instinctive with that and really played a role in--in making all of that happen.

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And after he left, guys like yourself played a role [*Laughs*], played a very important role in continuing and continuing that--that strategy that--that Ron was the one that really brought together when he was Executive Secretary.

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**Evan Barrett:** Well you know I always like to think that Ron was a great judge of people and able to judge who you should bring in and who you shouldn't and who you could count on and who you couldn't. And I say that; of course I happen to be one of those that Ron said--

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**Jim Murry:** Brought in. [*Laughs*]

00:20:36

**Evan Barrett:** --come here. I'd like you to do some work with us. So I always thought he was a good judge of character anyway. But--but really as a Party Executive it was the early days of the Democratic Party. They didn't have the structure they have now. Didn't he really have to almost--almost have to create a structure that wasn't there? I mean there was kind of a semblance of it but the boots on the ground thing was always an effort because communication was so much different than it is now.

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**Jim Murry:** That's right.

00:20:59

**Evan Barrett:** If you went out to--to circle Montana I mean wow; that was a big effort and there--

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**Jim Murry:** And a long trip.

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**Evan Barrett:** You used to fly around to get there didn't you?

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**Dan Newman:** I guess one of the things is Ron had that kind of personality that made the trip short. It was always fun; it was always interesting. And the thing maybe we've missed a little bit, he was a [inaudible] news man. I mean he loved the news. He loved talking about it. And he was a great reporter. He--he'd dig in and he'd find the things that others didn't and he talked about it in a real straightforward sort of way. And even though he was a very gentle man, he could make his point.

00:21:48

**Evan Barrett:** Well you know--

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**Jim Murry:** Dan's point is well made. And he--and Ron played a very visible role in the--in the press. I mean he--he was--he was in the press a lot, again developing direction for the Party to take, direction for office holder's to take. He was--he understood that; understood not only communications but the message. He developed a message and then he promoted that. He was able to really promote that himself through the press.

00:22:23

**Evan Barrett:** In that vein I want to tell a little story about Tim Babcock but as I lead into that I think it's worth saying that--that Tim and Betty God bless them; they're both gone now, too, over--in later years became very close friends with you and Ron.

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**Annabelle Richards:** Oh definitely; yes.

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**Evan Barrett:** And there was a great mutual respect. But that being said, part of Ron's job as Executive Director or Executive Secretary of the Party was to needle the Governor of the other Party. And he knew how to work the press-

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**Jim Murry:** Oh boy and he did that.

00:22:54

**Evan Barrett:** --so he could say stuff. And I always remember what he said to me one time. He said you know you got to always watch out because if you--if somebody needles you and you're an elected official you--you don't always want to react. He said now when I was dealing with Tim Babcock he said I could needle in and I could always get his goat. He said I could yell to the press fish for sale and Tim Babcock would say how much? *[Laughs]*  
So--

00:23:18

**Jim Murry:** And in the process of that Tim Babcock made it an issue. Whereas, if he didn't say anything at all it wouldn't become an issue, and Ron really understood that.

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**Evan Barrett:** And Ron played the press and that thing to a fare thee well and it--and of course one of the reasons that--that was important was if you're the Party Executive and a high elected official is fighting with you all the time, it doesn't really elevate the official.

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**Annabelle Richards:** No.

00:23:44

**Evan Barrett:** It kind of brings him down a notch or two.

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**Annabelle Richards:** You know I've got to inject this too, Ron and the--his counterpart in the Republican Party were good friends also. And--

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**Evan Barrett:** Was that Ed [Canti] or was that Mel [Engles] or who was that?

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**Jim Murry:** It was Mel [Engles].

00:24:01

**Annabelle Richards:** Yes and but anyway, he would call them. In fact, they would do this back and forth and he would say just to let you know I'm going to give it to you tomorrow in the press [Laughs] so they kept each other informed about what was going to happen. And there was nothing really mean or malicious in their--in their releases. But--

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**Evan Barrett:** A little difference than today.

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**Annabelle Richards:** --a little political. That's right; it's not like it is today. It wasn't like it's--

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**Evan Barrett:** A little if maybe not a lot meaner today.

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**Annabelle Richards:** That's right.

00:24:37

**Evan Barrett:** You know I think we used to fight and then have a cup of coffee afterwards.

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**Annabelle Richards:** Exactly; that's right.

00:24:42

**Evan Barrett:** Because the fights were over policy. Mostly we did that--not always.

00:24:46

**Annabelle Richards:** But it wasn't of a personal nature; no, yeah.

00:24:51

**Evan Barrett:** Yeah; well I never forgot him saying I would yell fish for sale and Tim Babcock would say how much? [*Laughs*] And I never forgot that because Ron of course was--and it's an admission I'm more than happy to make was one of my principal mentors. Both of you guys were mentors of mine--

00:25:11

**Dan Newman:** Well Ron was--

00:25:12

**Evan Barrett:** --and Ron was a big mentor of mine.

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**Dan Newman:** Ron was highly respected as a professional, you know by the news media and that--they believed what he said because what he said was always in earnest. He never tried to mislead someone. And that was kind of the unique ability to have to be able to get along in a political Party and still be able to have the respect and get along with--with the news media. And Ron was in every sense a consummate news man and he had a real love for news.

00:25:50

**Evan Barrett:** Well you know I think the objectivity that comes with that is important for dealing respectfully with the press but it's also an asset so that you don't kind of BS yourself inside of an administration. You always--you get anchored to facts because it's pretty easy to get--mislead yourself and I always felt like Ron would make you face the real music. This is what the issue really is about; let's not get into this other stuff.

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**Jim Murry:** And there's--there's a tendency--there's a tendency with people in public office and political leaders to develop a--a kind of a bubble that--and if you're not careful the bubble is really small. And you just communicate within that bubble and that--that can end up ending your career. Ron had a--he had a bubble but it was a very large inclusive bubble, and--and he--and he did that well.

00:26:48

**Evan Barrett:** Well remember that one of the things you need to be able to do in those kinds of positions and I think Ron did it very well is that most elected officials it's easy to surround yourself with sycophants, people who will tell you what you want to hear.

00:27:05

**Jim Murry:** That's right.

00:27:05

**Evan Barrett:** Anything you want to hear. You want to feel good I'll tell you anything you want to hear to make you feel good and then I want you to like me. And you have to have people around you if you're an elected official who will tell you the truth about things even if it's painful.

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**Annabelle Richards:** Exactly.

00:27:18

**Jim Murry:** That's right.

00:27:19

**Evan Barrett:** That's a responsibility that not everyone who works for elected officials does.

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**Jim Murry:** Very few--very few people can do that.

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**Evan Barrett:** And Ron always did that. He always--he would go quietly into the room, not with a bunch of people around and he would sit down with the Governor and say okay; here's where it's all wrong or here's where it's all right or whatever. He was respectful of his bosses for sure, but he gave them the straight shot on what was going on.

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**Jim Murry:** Ron understood loyalties and he--and he understood and we were really good friends, almost like extended family. All of us were, the--the four of us had that relationship that included a bunch of other people.

00:28:04

**Evan Barrett:** Yeah; we even went to--we even went on vacations together.

00:28:06

**Jim Murry:** Well that's right and would have family picnics and--and would sit around the fire in a rainstorm discussing political issues and sometimes arguing about it and--and all of that. But Ron--Ron had--really had an ability to understand loyalties and he was always loyal to--to whoever it was that he was working for at the time. But he had these close relationships with folks like us Dan that we weren't always in agreement with--with the Governors that Ron worked for. And I for one, I represented workers in the State of Montana and I pushed that envelope just as hard as I could all the time to get as much as I could for workers and their families.

00:28:50

Well once in a while--once in a while that would be a little irritating to Ron and we would--and we would have words, but--but he could remain loyal to those Governors that he was working for but he--I didn't have the feeling that he was disloyal to me. It was--it was--it was just an amazing thing. And he maintained those kinds of loyalties to all of us Dan that--that was in that--was in that coalition. He really did an amazing job.

00:29:17

One of my great memories--one of my great memories and I--and I don't remember, I don't remember if you were with the Party then or not. Yeah; you were there when Harry Billings was working for us at the State Fed.

00:29:28

**Evan Barrett:** Yes.

00:29:28

**Jim Murry:** And we had a big--we had a big issue with the Governor. And I was all upset about something that was going on. And so Harry--Harry got together with Ron and Harry--Harry Billings wrote a letter for the Governor to send to me about this issue. Now I didn't know this was going on at the time, but so--but anyhow [*Laughs*] I get the letter. I get the--and I think you--I'm sure you played a role in that. I get the letter from the Governor and Harry brings--brings this letter in and says we have--said we have to answer this. And he confessed to how this thing had been set up. And I said explain--explain this to me again. We wrote a letter to the Governor or we wrote a letter for the Governor to send to me and now I have to respond to the letter that we wrote for the Governor? And then Harry explained--explained the benefits of all of this because it was really putting whatever that issue was, it was putting it in a little bit better perspective so the Governor and I could reach an agreement which we did and it worked. And--and it worked.

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But I think back about that; that was--

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**Evan Barrett:** Well he was maintaining loyalty--Ron was on both sides of the equation.

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**Jim Murry:** Exactly; exactly and he was keeping--he was--he was keeping the members of the coalition and supporters of the Party, supporters of the--of the Governor, keeping us--keeping us all in line and--and it worked, and it worked fine. But I--gee I think every once in a while--I think about that and I laugh because I said I'll bet there's not many people in my position that ever had to do this. And but Harry said look; it's going to work.

**[Laughs]**

00:31:14

**Evan Barrett:** Well you know I thought of Ron in terms of--often in terms of passing the torch of knowledge and awareness of the way politics worked. He was an extraordinarily good instructor. I'm not sure he thought of himself in that vein but he had been a teacher. I remember going to work every day for Forrest Anderson's Executive Reorganization. Ron had--for some reason he had said you--you need to go to work on this Reorganization Project. I had gone to Grad School in Political Science. I was a teacher in the Helena School System and active politically. He said you need to be on this thing. I felt privileged to have the chance and it was wonderful. It started me down a whole 45-year career before I went back to teaching again. **[Laughs]**

00:32:08

But in that I was working on the fourth floor of the Capitol and doing that work which is so important. But one day a week I would go down to the second floor because on the second floor East Wing was the Governor's Office. And you know getting into the real Governor's Office was something and--and it's the Executive Assistant who is in the same place the Chief of Staff is--a door right outside the Governor's Office.

00:32:36

When you were in there you were in holy territory man; you were--it was really something to be in there. And so I would venture down and I would go in with a brown bag lunch and I would sit there for lunch hour with Ron Richards. And he was so gracious as to--as to humor some young fellow and graced me with the opportunity to talk for an hour. And in that hour he would just talk off the top of his head about well this is going on and that's going on and this and here's the way we need to handle this and here's the way we need to handle that. And all this time it's like routine stuff to him, but every sentence was a pearl of wisdom to me. It was--the--the light bulb was exploding above my head the entire lunch hour, week after week after week for two years, every week. And I

learned so much that was just innately part of his being; he knew how to work with people and how to make things happen.

00:33:37

And I certainly didn't. I was having to learn it, you know across the desk from him. That was--that was the best mentoring I could possibly ever have had. You know I don't know if you experienced anything similar; you guys were in a way partners more than the mentor thing, but--.

00:33:55

**Dan Newman:** Well Ron had a belly roll. I mean he could laugh and did so often. He made serious things--he took the heat off and let it--and let it meld a little bit. But he never failed to use humor when it--when it meant something, but he never wandered away from the point. The humor had to mean something to whatever it was you were discussing. He had a great ability to do that.

00:34:31

**Evan Barrett:** Yeah.

00:34:31

**Dan Newman:** And that's something not all of us have; that's--that's a great--

00:34:36

**Evan Barrett:** Yeah; some of us take ourselves way too seriously and don't have a good sense of humor. [*Laughs*]

00:34:41

**Dan Newman:** A great skill.

00:34:42

James: Lee Metcalf used to say we should take what we do seriously but don't take ourselves seriously. And that's-

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00:34:47

**Evan Barrett:** Yeah; take what we do seriously, yeah.

00:34:49

**Jim Murry:** But--but Ron had--see; he had that--you're talking about the things that he did when he was in the Governor's Office and the inspiration that he provided for you. I worked--I was an organizer. I was always with people out in the field across the State trying to--trying to bring them along. Ron understood that and understood how those boots on the ground kind of political efforts in communities all across the State, how important that was not only to having volunteers working in political campaigns but we developed leadership that way.

00:35:25

Jim--that's exactly the way Jim Murry came to the political scene. I--I knocked on doors; I made telephone calls. I sold COPE tickets for a buck a piece--all of those things and that--and--and that's how I developed the--the few leadership skills I guess that I ever had and--and ended up here in Helena. Ron understood that as well as that--the very thing that you just described. He really understood that well. He's amazing.

00:35:56

**Evan Barrett:** Well you know if you--if you think about it he's--his ability to work with whatever you were strong at, the--the need to--to have boots on the ground, to have an organization structure out there that could deliver some things at the grassroots, at the same time having the right policy stuff and being able to deal with the press, you know you think about the myriad of things that are involved in this and it--it's a pretty wide-range of things to deal with. And I often--in later life thought about his love of art and music and theater. We--you know in my summary of what he did I neglected to mention that he was one of the founders of Grand Street Theater in Helena.

00:36:46

**Annabelle Richards:** That's right.

00:36:46

**Evan Barrett:** And he loved to actually do theater, act once in a while, but I always thought that Ron was like a producer/director. He loved to put a show on and if you think about the skills that it takes to put on a show on stage, are they not a lot of the same skills it takes to meld people together to get involved in a campaign or something?

00:37:13

**Jim Murry:** That's right.

00:37:16

**Evan Barrett:** I don't know; what do you think about that Annabelle?

00:37:16

**Annabelle Richards:** Oh I agree. He--he did love acting and being in--in the--he--when he started the Grand Street Theater along with other--other people, it--it was just something that consumed him almost but he loved acting in--in the plays and worked with the people in the theater and so it was just--I think it's right. He was very knowledgeable about speaking, about being in front of people, and--and he felt such a--a love for it that--that was kind of his--what made him oh what am I trying to say--he--he could just relate to people and on the stage he knew what was right, too.

00:38:19

But politics was a separate thing and he loved politics. And when he was young and barely out of high school he became very you know interested in politics and--and would work on different local things that they were doing in Missoula at the time. And he just loved it, so that kind of was the way he--he developed. And but--but it was--it was exciting to watch him and be part of all of that. I loved it, too and--

00:39:04

**Evan Barrett:** Well you know the team you were and the glue that you guys were as--as a--as both of you was very interesting in the sense that I--people think I'm kidding. We actually did go on summer vacations together.

00:39:17

**Annabelle Richards:** Yes.

00:39:17

**Evan Barrett:** We actually did--if you have a Memorial Day picnic, we were all there and our spouses were there and our children were there, because--. Now there may be a message in that because it was a period of remarkable progressive change in Montana. And I think it maybe speaks to the need that it isn't just a day job to accomplish change. It's a lot more than a day job don't you think Dan?

00:39:43

**Dan Newman:** Absolutely; it was. One of the things we may miss about Ron, as I think back to our relationship and that, was his ability to not talk. He did an awful lot of listening.

00:40:05

**Annabelle Richards:** That's right.

00:40:06

**Dan Newman:** And unlike most of us, he always got something out of it. Listening was one of those things that he liked to do. He really wanted to know what you felt about something. And somehow he transcribed that into being maybe somebody else thinks that way. And that's--that's one of the things that made him so valuable to the political people that he served.

00:40:31

**Jim Murry:** I think that's right.

00:40:34

**Dan Newman:** He really knew what people were saying. He felt it and didn't just know it; he--he felt it. It was part of his personality. He reacted to it.

00:40:44

**Annabelle Richards:** And he wasn't out there trying to be the limelight. He was very content to sit back and--and let others that were more interested or able maybe to--to be in the limelight and politically of course that was very important. But Ron wasn't in it to win a race except for other people.

00:41:07

**Evan Barrett:** For himself, but for others yeah.

00:41:09

**Annabelle Richards:** For himself; for other people, yes, so--

00:41:12

**Evan Barrett:** Well you know when speaking--thinking about this camaraderie which I think you know permeates the whole discussion here, you know a lot of leaders don't foster that. He fostered that and we ended up, the three of us guys because it was kind of a guy thing to do--that's the way it was in those days--

00:41:39

**Jim Murry:** In those days; that's right.

00:41:40

**Evan Barrett:** --we--we had a poker club once a month. We played poker once a month and we went from one house to the other every month and it was an interesting poker club because it was Dan Newman, it was Jim Murry, your COPE Director Ernie Post, it was me, it was my predecessor--Executive Director of the Party, Spike Fuller, Labor Commissioner later, it was Ron--

00:42:08

**Jim Murry:** Bill--

00:42:09

**Evan Barrett:** Well once in a while--Victor but you know Ted Schwinden.

00:42:14

**Jim Murry:** Ted Schwinden.

00:42:14

**Evan Barrett:** Ted Schwinden was there. Pat Williams--

00:42:18

**Jim Murry:** That's right.

00:42:18

**Evan Barrett:** Now that was a pretty interesting group if you think about it to be sitting around--

00:42:21

**Jim Murry:** Harry Billings--Harry Billings.

00:42:23

**Evan Barrett:** Well only [*Laughs*]--but the interesting thing about Ron is Ron didn't belong in the poker club. He didn't even know how to play poker. Whenever it came time for him to deal he dealt three hands of blackjack.

00:42:35

**Jim Murry:** Blackjack.

00:42:35

**Evan Barrett:** And then he'd give the deal to somebody else. But he didn't know how to play poker but he had to be there because the place wouldn't have been right without the glue there, without you know the guy that pulled it all together there.

00:42:47

**Dan Newman:** Part of the action.

00:42:49

**Evan Barrett:** Yeah and kind of making sure it all happened and didn't get sideways. I thought that was always interesting because he really didn't belong at the poker table, but by god he was going to be there. **[Laughs]**

00:42:58

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

00:43:01

**Evan Barrett:** Interesting perspective.

00:43:01

**Jim Murry:** Well I was really interested in what Annabelle was saying about his love of--of theater and all of that. You know there's not greater theater in the world than politics. Politics is just the greatest theater ever and--and so well, so what he did is he--he played in that world of politics the same way as he did with you know with the theater and the things that he did in the community. It was--it was just great theater. It was great theater for all of us for that matter. And--and--and he was--he played such a role in that. He made things happen. He was a producer.

00:43:41

**Evan Barrett:** He was a producer.

00:43:42

**Annabelle Richards:** That's right.

00:43:43

**Evan Barrett:** I really believe that.

00:43:43

**Jim Murry:** He was a go-to guy; he was a go-to guy because he could--he could make things happen.

00:43:49

**Evan Barrett:** You know in 1976 and again he--he was in--remember; being the head of the staff and essentially-- I'll use the term Chief of Staff, being the Chief of Staff for two consecutive Governors is pretty amazing. Going off and running a department, he had the skills to do that. But he really loved politics as we've all said and so when the '76 campaign came up it was a challenging campaign for Tom Judge. And it was the first time that Governor and Lieutenant Governor ran together so he had picked Ted Schwinden to be his running mate. It was like the poker club. Tom wasn't a poker player but Ted was and Ron--Ron was asked to run the campaign. And then I was asked to be his Deputy and it was again another opportunity for me to have a learning experience sitting outside the door and watching him do some things. And--and I think worth recollecting for the folks who are watching here that thing about getting in the face of the opponent when you're not--when you're--you're an Executive Director of the Party, you're a Campaign Manager, if you get in the face of your opponent and make him address things to you, it--it takes them down a notch. And Ron was so good at that. And we had a--an amazing episode where Bob Woodall was running for Governor and had somebody reveal to the press his medical records and they had shown that he had some problems that--. And he wasn't very happy about that. And--and one time his--his staff members had wandered down Main Street, Last Chance Gulch after--about 2:00 at night after closing the Bert and Ernie's Bar and they looked outside our headquarters and saw a bag of garbage. And they took the garbage and they took it over to their headquarters and they opened it up and they saw a bunch of stuff in there that probably you know like any campaign there's stuff in there that's either--when you talk strategy and tactics it--sometimes a little embarrassing on the front page, but they had found all this stuff they thought was really smoking guns and--and they really weren't but they were so excited about it. And so they--they called a press conference and they revealed all these

documents from--from that, from the Judge campaign and asserted that these records had been stolen by the campaign and all this kind of stuff, none of which was true.

00:46:25

And so I remember we had a challenge; well what do we do about this? And I know Ron and I went to Ted Schwinden's house and we sat down and said well what are we going to do about this? I remember what Ted said, but it was how Ron delivered on it that was really good. He said--Ted said well you know I think people understand. In those days no one knew what HIPAA was or medical records really were. And he said I think people understand someone rummaging through your garbage more than they understand **[Laughs]** somebody wanting your medical records. You know we ought to--so Ron came up with the idea that we held a press conference the next day and had all the press come and we took two big garbage bags and we filled them up with garbage and we put Judge Schwinden stickers on them and put one on each pedestal around Ron. And he held forth at a press conference and he had all the press from the whole State come in and said we're going to have some exciting--

00:47:12

**Jim Murry:** Yeah; everybody was there.

00:47:14

**Evan Barrett:** --things. And they were all there. The cameras were there from Billings and from Kalispell and Missoula. We--we really worked hard. I worked very hard to get the cameras there and--and so instead of dealing with the frontal assault of the medical records which was not true but it would have been a messy thing, Ron simply said that he thought that it was--that there had been systematic pilfering of our garbage by the--by their staff and their people and he thought that was unsafe for them to cross the dark streets of Last Chance Gulch at 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning. They could get hit by a car. **[Laughs]** A little humor right, and he said so from this point forward we don't want them to have to steal our garbage. And we know they're stealing our garbage and they've been doing it, but we're not going to make them do that he said. We're going to hand-deliver our garbage to them for the rest of the campaign.

00:48:01

So if you'll set up your cameras over by the Woodall Headquarters, I'll bring--I'll hand-carry the garbage over there the first time. And sure enough they set the cameras up and there was Ron marching across the street, two big bags of garbage and delivered them right into the Woodall Headquarters on the camera, made great fun of it, knew how to work with the press, smile, a diversion, it was classic.

00:48:23

**Jim Murry:** And have fun.

00:48:26

**Evan Barrett:** And having fun and talk about--and turn the whole thing around to where the Campaign Manager ran out screaming at the cameras saying what are they doing delivering these garbage--and he was screaming into the cameras and then they went and talked to Woodall and he started screaming into the cameras and it was you know game set match, you know it's what you can do--a very creative thing that reflected his personality I think and it was perhaps the greatest example I'd seen of a political turnaround, an overnight political turnaround from something very damaging to something where it ended up damaging the other side.

00:49:04

I presented that at an Economic--Democratic National Committee Training School one time by the way.

00:49:09

**Annabelle Richards:** Oh I didn't know that.

00:49:10

**Evan Barrett:** They said give us--they said tell us the biggest turnaround story, all the instructors there to tell it, and the head consultant was going to judge which was the best turnaround. So I told the story about the garbage bags. That guy said this is the best story I've ever heard. This is the best turnaround I've ever heard. And Ron was the orchestrator of that. And he had the kind of the ability, that acting ability too to pull it off. And it was--it was very classic and I, again all I did was--whenever I was around Ron Richards all I can tell you is all I did was keep

learning--keep learning. So and one of the things I learned about--from Ron was not to be excited in the middle of a storm. When there's a political storm--

00:49:57

**Jim Murry:** He always calmed things down didn't he?

00:50:00

**Evan Barrett:** --the calmness. Why don't we chat a little bit about that for a second, I mean because he seemed to always been in control. Maybe internally he wasn't but boy he never got rattled.

00:50:14

**Jim Murry:** And he could have--and yet Ron could really get heated when he--when we'd have internal disagreements and we all went through that. Jeez Ron and I had arguments several times that we didn't talk to each other for three or four weeks and everybody would wait for Annabelle and Arlene to kind of get things back together, so that we were talking again, remember?

00:50:35

**Annabelle Richards:** Right.

00:50:36

**Jim Murry:** But--but in--in the--in the--in another kind of a situation where it really--it really demanded that the leadership be a calming one, he did--he could do that. I guess it--probably for--maybe that's part of the--being a producer, an actor of sorts because what he did, he used his personality to--to impact the--the message that he was delivering. He could get angry. He would be happy with some things and be able to laugh. But when it was really needed he had that calming influence that was really effective.

00:51:20

**Annabelle Richards:** And you know--yeah; I--he--he didn't hold a grudge. He would--in the Legislature when they were convening, there'd be disagreements obviously. But when it was over he wasn't personally angry with these people. He--and he didn't hold a grudge with them. And--and they became friends, too, so it was--it was a very good time.

00:51:49

**Evan Barrett:** Well having--having somebody in the position to advise the Governor and I--we again use the term consiglieri, a counselor, someone the Governor can turn to for good counsel--

00:52:02

**Jim Murry:** A go-to guy.

00:52:03

**Evan Barrett:** --a go-to guy to make stuff happen, when you're in--whether you're on a stage play or whether you're trying to run a government it's crisis du jour. Every day there's a crisis. Some days it's a big crisis; some days it's a small crisis. But in the fact of crisis du jour that kind of calmness to be able to say while everyone else is screwing around to have a Governor to be able to look at you and say how do we handle this Ron? What's it really all about? And in spite of all that inner-turmoil, he was able to keep that calmness.

00:52:40

**Jim Murry:** Evan the last time that I ever talked to Ron it was with--with Danny Newman and we visited with him on the porch of your big house up there. It was shortly before he passed away and we stopped to see him. Boy he was obviously going through a difficult time. But we laughed. Dan do you remember; we told stories, told a lot of the stories we're telling here today by the way, and we laughed, got a little sad at times, but it was the same things that we're talking about, just--it's just amazing. He was just an amazing--

00:53:20

**Dan Newman:** But he was interesting; Jim he was interested in what we were saying that time. If you remember right he kind of lost his train of thought for a while there and we were laughing and he said--and then what happened? *[Laughs]* Remember we were right in the middle of the story and he said and then what happened?

00:53:38

**Annabelle Richards:** Yeah.

00:53:39

**Jim Murry:** And one of the things we talked about, remember when we used to play basketball on the--in the alley--in your alley up there?

00:53:44

**Annabelle Richards:** Yes; right.

00:53:46

**Jim Murry:** And we would argue and fight over the score and who fouled who and--and when we talked about--we talked about the touch football games in our front yard that were just devastating. But yeah; we--but it was a wonderful time. It was just you know it was like everything else that we're talking about. He made it that way. He really made it that way.

00:54:09

**Annabelle Richards:** Well and you were talking about the football, playing football out--down at the park and I can remember being down there watching you and he didn't--he was more of the coach because he didn't play that much but he--he was kind of there coaching *[Laughs]* so to speak.

00:54:30

**Jim Murry:** Well because he let Dan and me run into each other. I guess that was probably the-- *[Laughs]*

00:54:36

**Annabelle Richards:** Oh gosh.

00:54:37

**Jim Murry:** But I remember we'd be all bruised up the next day and--oh it was--

00:54:42

**Dan Newman:** I didn't think we were going to talk about that. *[Laughs]*

00:54:47

**Evan Barrett:** Now we--we, again we're all friends and we all were in this battle and this war together and it's--the war was this--was about this period of change. It was about making--changing us from being a corporate colony to being a State that--where people were empowered. I mean it's--it's an amazingly high-minded goal but getting there is a lot of work, a lot of effort, a lot of organization, a lot of structure, a lot of good ideas about policy, a lot of relationships with your own side, and a lot of relationships with the other side. That's all in the mix of this and--and Ron was part of all that.

00:55:27

Now I want to ask--and we're getting close to the end here, so I want to just ask quickly--a quick reflection from you two. I've heard this from Jim before so I'm not going to ask him, your participation in this period of change and kind of what it meant to you personally if you would just kind of--?

00:55:41

**Dan Newman:** Well it becomes your life. It becomes everything you think about. If you're--if you're kind of born and raised in politics and then participate with it, and I speak particularly as somebody who comes into it from the Labor side as well as the political side, it becomes a religion. I mean it's the way things should have happened in the past; it's the way they should happen now. You've got to be involved. You need to stay--you have to get up early, go to bed late. Jim's the preacher on that more than anyone I know that you know you can't work hard enough.

Nobody works hard enough. There's always a little more you should be doing. And if anybody worked with Jim they'll testify to that; that's--that's how it was.

00:56:40

**Evan Barrett:** And no one worked harder than Jim. *[Laughs]*

00:56:42

**Dan Newman:** Yeah; and--

00:56:42

**Jim Murry:** We used to say early to bed, early to rise; get off your ass and organize. *[Laughs]*

00:56:49

**Evan Barrett:** But Annabelle your thoughts, your just quick thoughts while we wrap it up but your quick thoughts about what this meant to you to be part of this.

00:56:56

**Annabelle Richards:** Well only--oh it meant so much. And I--I love politics. And I--I kind of resented when people start to get too personal or--or antagonistic and--and mean-spirited. And I don't think you can--that you can accomplish a whole lot if that's your attitude. I think you need to be tough, but that's--there's nothing wrong with being tough. But do it with--with good spirits let's say and I think with the Legislature in town or--they were--there's ways of getting through to people. Most people are good people. And it doesn't really--it matters but it doesn't matter that much which Party you belong to, so--.

00:57:53

**Evan Barrett:** Well and Jim of course I've asked you many times and I'm not going to--we don't have time to go into this. We're running out of time, but I know how close you were with Ron and--and all of us together were part of a team and I think there's a message in this. And that is that participating is important; that you don't have to be

an elected official; that if you--in order to make things happen you've got to have soldiers of all levels and the consiglieri concept, you've got to have people in there willing to be in the trenches fighting and making a difference. And I think there's a message today for those who are getting tired and think there's not enough that can be done, a message about participation. Get in there and participate if you want to see change happen. That's the message of Ron Richards and the period of change.

00:58:45

So let's remember Ron as we think about that and we'll see you the next time.

00:58:51

*[Music]*

00:59:49

**[End Consiglieri - Ron Richards' Role for Senator Metcalf, Governor Anderson, & Governor Judge]**