

2015

Transcript for Episode 15: The Other Side of the Doors: The Early Butte Years & Beyond - Congressman Pat Williams

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Recommended Citation

Williams, Pat; Fenenbock, Michael; and Barrett, Evan, "Transcript for Episode 15: The Other Side of the Doors: The Early Butte Years & Beyond - Congressman Pat Williams" (2015). *Crucible Written Transcripts*. 10.
http://digitalcommons.mtech.edu/crucible_transcriptions/10

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[Begin Pat Williams-The Other Side of the Door-Butte & Beyond]

00:00:01

[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.

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.

00:00:41

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.

00:01:20

Evan Barrett: Welcome back to In the Crucible of Change. This is Evan Barrett and tonight we have a special guest; you won't need to be introduced really because I think we all recognize him, but our special guest in this segment is Pat Williams. Pat served as Congressman for Montana in the House of Representatives for the longest consecutive period of anyone in the history of Montana from 1979 through--into 1997, 18 years.

00:01:52

But Pat got his start right in the period of the *crucible of change* and he--it makes him very aware of all the changes we're talking about that occurred in Montana dramatically during this time. Pat started off as an educator and teacher in Butte and I want to say before we get to Pat with some questions and discussion a little disclaimer. You know Pat and I have had a long-standing personal relationship, mostly positive for--for basically 43 years. And I was the manager of his campaign for Congress in 1978. I'm very proud of that. And we'll be discussing that later in the program. But right now we're going to start about Pat's, start talking about Pat's early days and in the 1960s. Pat welcome to In the Crucible of Change.

00:02:45

Pat Williams: Evan Barrett it's nice to see you.

00:02:47

Evan Barrett: Yeah.

00:02:47

Pat Williams: And I--how many years did you say, 43?

00:02:51

Evan Barrett: Forty-three, forty-four or something like that.

00:02:54

Pat Williams: God; you're getting old. [*Laughs*]

00:02:56

Evan Barrett: [*Laughs*] You know, you started as a State Legislator. That was your first cut in real politics, electoral politics and you were elected in 1966 for the first time to the Legislature. And that was the first election inside the period of change we're talking about. I wonder if you would talk a little bit about your running for the

Legislature in Butte and what it meant at that time, what it took to decide to run, and to get out there and actually do it.

00:03:23

Pat Williams: Well there was something about the change in the air. One could almost smell the demand and the need for reform, for a somewhat different kind of politics, undefined at that point. But I thought one of the things that--that change demanded was younger members getting elected to the Legislature.

00:03:52

I also thought it demanded more women getting elected to the Legislature. So being young, I--I threw my hat in the ring and worked [*Laughs*]--really worked hard, campaigned very, very-hard to get elected. And I was surprised at how friendly and supportive to a degree people were as I'd knock on their doors. That too signified something was up. There was some change in the air and it was being driven by the constituency, driven by the people.

00:04:28

Evan Barrett: Well you had the big challenge then because of the way reapportionment had played out, my recollection was that the Federal--Supreme Court said we got to have one man, one vote, and the Legislature of Montana was unable to come up with a reapportionment plan. And so it was imposed by a Federal Court, Federal District Court. And that meant that all the people running in Butte, they didn't run in Districts; they ran county-wide. So your constituency was every single house, every single door, every single voter of Butte Silver Bow. How did you approach that challenge given this kind of need to deal with--work with people and talk to people?

00:05:06

Pat Williams: Yes; well another way to put that, no more accurate than the way you have, but another way to put that change is that with regard to one person, one vote, and running county-wide is that as your viewers and others know, today one person runs against one person basically--at least--

00:05:31

Evan Barrett: In the single member District thing; yeah.

00:05:31

Pat Williams: --in an election. It's one-on-one. Back then anybody could file county-wide; all of their names would be on the ballot and you'd get to select whatever it was in that county, however--however many members of the House, the Legislature in Helena, however many came from that county would be elected. So let's say the top four would win.

00:05:58

I think there were seven or eight--

00:06:00

Evan Barrett: In the case of Butte it was vote for--vote for seven.

00:06:02

Pat Williams: Yeah; I think--

00:06:03

Evan Barrett: Or may you vote for seven.

00:06:03

Pat Williams: --there were six or seven of us, but there were--there were ten of us or twelve of us that ran.

00:06:07

Evan Barrett: Oh yeah. Now you--what did you do? Did you actually try to conquer every door of Butte or something like that?

00:06:12

Pat Williams: I don't think I got all of them, but I didn't get thrown out of any of them, so I felt pretty good about that. [*Laughs*] I tried to--I tried to go to all the doors in the county. You can't quite make it; you know life is not long enough. But I went to a lot of doors.

00:06:28

Evan Barrett: Yeah; and--

00:06:29

Pat Williams: And got a lot of ideas by the way, a lot of ideas.

00:06:33

Evan Barrett: I think part of the--when we talk about the empowerment of people it's not just the empowerment of them to vote, but for them to have ideas and have--you know go upward if you will.

00:06:42

Pat Williams: Right, right; yeah.

00:06:43

Evan Barrett: That's kind of interesting. How--how did that work out for you because you were a new guy and there were a whole bunch of established Legislators running?

00:06:50

Pat Williams: Right; well because it was within this era of change, you know sort of at--not quite the beginning of it, but pretty close--those--that decade, people were supportive as I said earlier of the young person running.

00:07:08

But the other thing I noticed at the doors is they did as I've said have ideas. And the ideas centered around reforming the Legislature, making it--making it less dependent or less adherent to oh, one might say the old bosses, and including corporate bosses, and--and more in tune with what people wanted.

00:07:40

So I would hear at the doors about we have to reform things here. We need to--to do this. I didn't hear it at Democratic or Republican meetings. I didn't hear it talking to the then-Legislators before I was one. They were all still a little resistant to reform and change. But I heard it at the doors. You got to listen but you can hear it.

00:08:05

Evan Barrett: You know we talked about the first 75 years of Montana's history. We were really like a--a corporate colony of the Anaconda Company and other interests that were affiliated with them and that breaking out of that, removing the corporate collar was part of what occurred during this period. So you were sensing that built-up demand for that kind of thing at the doors, but you know they were nice to you, but how did you do?

00:08:36

Pat Williams: Ran really well out of all those wonderful candidates; boy there was some good candidates on the ballot. Now a lot--they were all older than--than was I, but they were really good candidates, very, very nice people. And out of--out of all of them, many of them incumbents, I ran second which was--startled me and I knew I wasn't that good [*Laughs*] but I think the change-thing was there.

00:09:04

And so I ran second and I thought I ran second with a bit of a mission. I thought people sent me there to try to change things and do things a little differently than they had been done before. But yeah; second out of that--that good pool of candidates. I was pretty pleased with that.

00:09:21

Not as pleased as my mother, Libby; she was really proud of that. If any of your viewers remember my mom who used to run the American Candy Shop in Butte and I was living in Helena when I got elected but she was [*Laughs*]--she was a proud mom.

00:09:37

Evan Barrett: And many people knew her as the hostess at Jorgenson's for many years here in Helena.

00:09:43

Pat Williams: Later; yeah.

00:09:44

Evan Barrett: Later and when you ran for Congress. I bet she was really proud. And imagine that; it's interesting that--your comment about kind of the Party leaders and the establishment was not just outside the Legislature, but it was inside. It was existing office-holders who were kind of locked into the current thinking. I always remember the first time I saw you there was a--a forum for young Democrats at the time at Carroll College. And paraded in front of all the young Democrats from all the campuses were a series of young--you mentioned the idea--younger people, young elected Legislators who--who were emblematic of this kind of change, Russ Doty from Great Falls and Larry [Fosbender] from Fort Shaw.

00:10:34

Pat Williams: Yeah.

00:10:35

Evan Barrett: And you were one of those. And you stood up and spoke in front of--by the way; you made an impression on me actually at the time.

00:10:41

Pat Williams: How was that? You borrowed money from me didn't you at the time?

00:10:44

Evan Barrett: Uh--

00:10:46

Pat Williams: [Laughs]

00:10:47

Evan Barrett: You know that--

00:10:47

Pat Williams: That was the impression. You got a good impression because I loaned you \$10.

00:10:51

Evan Barrett: Put it this way I don't want to be paying the interest rate of the late '70s. **[Laughs]** Anyway as you can tell--as folks can tell we really are old friends here.

00:11:02

Pat Williams: Yeah.

00:11:03

Evan Barrett: Yeah; now when you were running in Butte that was the epicenter of the strength of the Anaconda Company in Montana economically, corporately, and politically. How did that--were you cognizant of that the first time you ran and then what happened in the Legislature when you got there?

00:11:24

Pat Williams: I was very cognizant of the--of the importance to Anaconda, the company to Silver Bow County and Butte which I was representing. I also knew they were very well known around the--around the State because the State grew out of Butte and Anaconda was so important here from the very earliest days when Daly formed it as a company, Marcus Daly.

00:11:53

So I was--I was aware of that and I was also aware somewhat painfully of their hold, the old Anaconda Company's grip on politics under the Dome, Copper Dome in Helena. And I thought that hold should be loosened if not broken. And I tried to do some of that when I got to Helena.

00:12:19

Evan Barrett: Well when you got to the '67 Legislature my recollection was the big central issue that year was the sales tax. And the Republicans and Speaker Jim Felt were in charge of the House and the Democrats under Gene Mahoney were in charge of the Senate but that was the large battle that played out. And it took center stage, but lying underneath that were some other major issues that were of import to Anaconda Company and to Butte and you were right in the middle of those other issues weren't you, the--?

00:12:53

Pat Williams: Well one of the issues as always in any government around the world was how are we going to pay for these things that the public is demanding? Sometimes this public demands their individual need and this public a different one. But when you put them together, the public has enormous demands. But the public also doesn't like high taxes [*Laughs*] and that's the great dilemma for any Legislator.

00:13:21

So I understood why Anaconda Company had always opposed and usually killed any increase in any taxes that they'd have to pay. For example, there was a tax on copper called Metalliferous Mines Tax and Anaconda kept that at a very low rate for decades and decades. The State of Montana was short of money and in my view should not depend on a sales tax for that needed revenue, because sales taxes are not very equitable. They hurt middle income and low income people and they really don't help the better off people at all.

00:14:00

So I tried to increase the tax; I voted to increase the tax on the Anaconda Company. The first Legislator from--from Butte in a long time to try to do that and it was--it was very difficult because it wasn't what a Butte guy, right, did when he got to Helena. So it was--

00:14:27

Evan Barrett: The last time that happened by the way was you know back in the 1920s when--when the Anaconda Company supported Joe Dixon for Governor, even though he was a Republican and they were mostly Democratic at that time. And they--because they wanted to oppose Burton K. Wheeler and they said we'd rather have Joe Dixon

than Burton K. Wheeler and they went and elected Dixon and he immediately imposed a Metalliferous Mine Tax on them. And he was not so surprisingly a one-term Governor.

00:14:55

Pat Williams: Yeah.

00:14:57

Evan Barrett: Now how about reclamation issues, because Butte--that's a challenge? Did that come up even back in those days?

00:15:03

Pat Williams: Well look; I served with a lot of good Legislators and a lot of them were innovative but I was the one that came up with restoration legislation that would apply to mining in Montana. And that hadn't been done before. And I was--I was derided. Well what are we going to do Pat, fill in the Berkeley Pit? I mean what do you mean restoration? How are we going to do this?

00:15:33

And I thought we might start off smaller than trying to fill in the Berkeley Pit [*Laughs*] but I couldn't get anywhere with it. And I was told this will cost jobs. Well think about the number of people that had been hired to restore landscapes in Butte and elsewhere. It would have been an enormous Jobs Bill. And by the way it was actually too expensive; I mean I know now in hindsight the cost of doing that was way too expensive for the State of Montana. It needed Federal help and years later EPA came along and--super-fund--to provide that help. But at the time I didn't--I was not aware and you know, no; I don't think anybody else was either of the cost.

00:16:24

Evan Barrett: By the way and just a coincidence that in your first term in Congress as I recall in the Lame Duck Session at the end of 1980, the super-fund passed.

00:16:34

Pat Williams: Yeah.

00:16:35

Evan Barrett: And because of that a billion dollars or more had to be spent by ARCO and British Petroleum doing the cleanup of what--and with the jobs attended to that, so it is--it is just--. Now given that you took on the Anaconda Company if you will, I'm sure they weren't--their lobbyists, who were their lobbyists back then?

00:16:54

Pat Williams: Well they had--they had Dennis--Denny Shea.

00:16:59

Evan Barrett: Denny Shea was the Democratic guy and--

00:17:02

Pat Williams: And the--the main lobbyist was Glenn Carney.

00:17:06

Evan Barrett: Glenn Carney; yeah.

00:17:06

Pat Williams: And a wonderful story; I was sitting on a bench outside of the House Chamber and the House was in session. And Shea was trying to reach a Legislator and talk to him before that Legislator went into the Chamber where lobbyists can't proceed, right. And so they came around the corner; the Legislator was walking and he's only 10-feet away from safety [*Laughs*], and Dennis Shea is struggling to grab his coattail, his coat. And Dennis is running and his mentor, the lead lobbyist Carney reached out and grabbed his coattail. I was sitting right here talking to Carney. And he grabbed Dennis' coattail and he said to him, Dennis; don't run. They'll think we're behind. [*Laughs*]

00:18:05

And I thought how wise is this guy? He knows all the tricks.

00:18:09

Evan Barrett: Yeah; now you went back to Butte and having taken on some of the power that--the vested interest of the Anaconda Company, maybe not planning the difficulty going in and what did that mean when you decided to run for reelection in 1968?

00:18:25

Pat Williams: Well as soon as I got home I realized that at least some people watch what's going on in Helena in the Legislature because some of my--the Democratic friends were very pleased with my efforts to at least try to begin to break the stranglehold of Anaconda on Montana's politics. But frankly for the most part people in Butte were not very supportive of what I had done, and the Anaconda Company was making sure [*Laughs*] that people in Butte were not very supportive of what I had done.

00:18:57

And frankly because my colleagues in the Butte Delegation, all really nice people, really nice, smart people--but they had to defend themselves because people were saying well this young kid Pat Williams is trying to raise the tax on Anaconda and you're against that. Why? Well of course they had to say well Pat's going to put people out of work.

00:19:20

Evan Barrett: He's wrong; yeah.

00:19:21

Pat Williams: He's wrong.

00:19:21

Evan Barrett: Yeah; he's wrong.

00:19:22

Pat Williams: And you know you let that go on for a year or so which of course it does between sessions and so the next time I ran I didn't run next to the top; I ran second to last.

00:19:34

Evan Barrett: But you still made it.

00:19:34

Pat Williams: Well I made it.

00:19:35

Evan Barrett: You made it but yeah.

00:19:37

Pat Williams: But--

00:19:38

Evan Barrett: So they had--there's an interesting micro-analysis of the impact of politics like that at that level.

00:19:46

Pat Williams: And by the way that would belie what people were saying to me at the door. We want you to do things differently over there. We want you to--you know you're a young guy; you ought to have enough courage to take it on. And when I did it didn't seem very popular. [*Laughs*]

00:19:59

Evan Barrett: Yeah; yeah but you made it back.

00:20:01

Pat Williams: I made it back.

00:20:01

Evan Barrett: Now that was the '68 election?

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Pat Williams: Uh-hm.

00:20:03

Evan Barrett: That was an interesting election nationally but in the State of Montana in a big way that was the election where Forrest Anderson and Tim Babcock battled out for the Governorship, Babcock being the incumbent, Forrest the Attorney General, running against him and the battle was over the sales tax, what they had fought over in '67 in the Legislature. And Forrest's famous quote--campaign slogan--

00:20:26

Pat Williams: *Pay More What For?*

00:20:29

Evan Barrett: No one ever--who ever saw it ever forgot it.

00:20:30

Pat Williams: Yeah.

00:20:31

Evan Barrett: *Pay More What For?*

00:20:33

Pat Williams: And he meant the sales tax. He didn't necessarily mean all taxes.

00:20:35

Evan Barrett: No; *Pay More What For?*

00:20:36

Pat Williams: I think it would be a bad slogan for all taxes.

00:20:38

Evan Barrett: Yeah; well I think everyone knew what he was talking about. And by gosh he--and he overwhelmed the existing Governor and became the new Governor. And so when you went--when we went to the 1969 session the sales tax which had been the critical issue in '67 is--my recollection was--disappeared from the radar screen.

00:20:57

Pat Williams: Was gone.

00:20:59

Evan Barrett: For at least a little while; they put it to bed and said no, no, no, and--

00:21:02

Pat Williams: Well Forrest as Governor he's going to veto a sales tax, plus it turned out sales tax wasn't that popular--. [*Laughs*]

00:21:07

Evan Barrett: We found out a few years later didn't we?

00:21:09

Pat Williams: Yeah; right. [*Laughs*]

00:21:11

Evan Barrett: Now and Forrest brought in--and the big issues seemed to have been the education funding and executive reorganization, and we have--we have a program on that and we won't dwell on that here. But you know when you were in that session you had a seatmate. And you had an interesting seatmate your first session but you had a very interesting seatmate in the second session. Tell us a little bit about that.

00:21:38

Pat Williams: I want to say just a word; I know you've had a program on it but I want to say a word about--I want to say a name with regard to reorganization. And that is--the name is Duke Crowley. A lot of people remember Duke, but Duke was a genius and Duke Crowley led the administrative effort to completely reorganize and take the fat out and there was fat in Montana government. And he got it done. And he got it done under the demands of a Democrat Governor. It was very important.

00:22:13

My seatmate in the term before the one you're talking about was a fellow who later became Lieutenant Governor and I think was one of the best office-holders even in a relatively minor position in Montana history and that was a fellow named Bill Christiansen from Hardin, Montana. Both Bill and his really wonderful wife Patty have passed away now, but they were terrific.

00:22:38

And then my--my seatmate later and kind of a lifelong friend in my second session was John Melcher, who people remember went on to become Eastern Montana's Congressman and the Montana's Senator for a good long time. John was--John was the agriculture expert, the farm expert in both the House and the Senate; nobody could match John's knowledge of the law with regard to protecting and encouraging Montana and America's agriculture community.

00:23:13

Evan Barrett: Uh-hm; now he--he had been a State Senator from Forsythe. He had also been as I recall the Mayor of Forsythe.

00:23:18

Pat Williams: Right.

00:23:19

Evan Barrett: But then he--and he was a veterinarian.

00:23:22

Pat Williams: He was. [*Laughs*]

00:23:23

Evan Barrett: And he was a Senator and he stepped out of the State Senate to run against Jim Battin for the Eastern District Congress in '66.

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Pat Williams: That's right.

00:23:33

Evan Barrett: And got his head handed to him pretty well by, you know--

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Pat Williams: Beat him; Jim Battin is a very popular member of the House and he--.

00:23:41

Evan Barrett: And--and but then he came back into--as a House member in the '69 session but what happened in early '69 that thrust Melcher to the forefront?

00:23:52

Pat Williams: Well Richard Nixon appointed Jim Battin to be a Federal Judge, so he picked this House fellow from Montana to become a Federal Judge in Montana. That left a vacancy. And because Melcher had run; his name was fairly well-known in Eastern Montana, these were in the days when there were two members of the House from Eastern Montana. As we know there's only one now. Back then there was an Eastern District and a Western District, so Melcher then ran again for the US House and won.

00:24:20

And I don't think I was a great help to him but I tried. I stopped everything I was doing and I went in from Butte. I was living in Butte. And which is my hometown, and I went into Eastern Montana and spent several months working on John's campaign in Eastern Montana. And John was tailor-made for Eastern Montana as a Democrat. He was tailor-made. You know Republicans do better over there. But it was very difficult to beat Melcher because he knew so much about their economy over there and he was a small town veterinarian.

00:24:55

And when he had to run for reelection he ran against a fine gentleman named Bill Mathers--

00:25:01

Evan Barrett: Mather.

00:25:03

Pat Williams: Bill Mather, Bill Mather from Billings. And Bill had been in the Legislature. And he and John were general election opponents for reelection. I think I'm right about this--the first time.

00:25:18

Evan Barrett: Well in '69 in the Special Session; the second time I think he had Rehberg as his opponent--

00:25:23

Pat Williams: For reelection you're right.

00:25:23

Evan Barrett: Jack Rehberg for reelection.

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Pat Williams: For reelection it was--it was Rehberg; yeah.

00:25:27

Evan Barrett: But you had small-town--

00:25:29

Pat Williams: Jack Rehberg.

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Evan Barrett: Yes; Jack--

00:25:31

Pat Williams: The dad; yeah.

00:25:32

Evan Barrett: Small town veterinarian against big town lawyer.

00:25:38

Pat Williams: That's how we tried to portray it. [*Laughs*]

00:25:39

Evan Barrett: Apparently it must have worked you know although it was a very narrow victory.

00:25:43

Pat Williams: It was.

00:25:44

Evan Barrett: It was 47,000 to 43,000--something like that.

00:25:45

Pat Williams: Three--yeah.

00:25:46

Evan Barrett: So he won the first time narrowly but once in John established himself and that was quite a race. But I think that was also indicative of a sense of change that was going on for--for that was in late June of '69 that this Special Election took place and it's like wow; wait a minute. You just elected Forrest Anderson--Governor and now Battin is gone and John Melcher is in. Something is going on here in Montana it seemed--it seemed to be the--kind of the ring of things.

00:26:11

Now you--did you go back to Washington with John?

00:26:15

Pat Williams: I did. I--he asked if I'd come back. At first I was hesitant to go back but--but I agreed to do it and Caroline, the one child we had then, but I came home within three years, but when we came home, we started out with one kid and when we came home we had three.

00:26:36

Evan Barrett: Something in the Potomac water?

00:26:37

Pat Williams: Well I think it's the humidity.

00:26:39

Evan Barrett: Yeah; you know [*Laughs*]--

00:26:44

Pat Williams: [*Laughs*] And we had a--we had a--you know working in Congress whether you're a member of Congress or you're a staff person is not easy. Those are long hours. And the people have difficult choices, lots of mail to answer, and lots of telephoning but it was a vigorous opportunity. The thing that sort of turned me off about it all was that almost every weekend I'd watch John Melcher pack up on a Friday usually and head to the airport, National Airport, hop on a plane, be gone for a day, a day and a half and then come back.

00:27:27

Members of Congress have to do that because people want to see them and weekends are usually the only time you can get away from the Congress except for these historic August breaks which unfortunately some in the press call vacations but what they really do is go home and work during that time.

00:27:45

Evan Barrett: Probably disheartening to--to look at and say every--every Friday night--. The only--by the way there is a difference today in that. Now they leave on Thursday and come back on Tuesday.

00:27:56

Pat Williams: Well yeah--

00:27:56

Evan Barrett: So it's gotten different.

00:27:57

Pat Williams: Yeah; the--

00:27:58

Evan Barrett: The actual work week is only three days now.

00:27:59

Pat Williams: Right and sometimes it's only Wednesday and Thursday. And now the people are being cheated by that.

00:28:04

Evan Barrett: Yeah; I think so.

00:28:05

Pat Williams: Members of Congress ought to spend more time in Washington.

00:28:07

Evan Barrett: Legislating.

00:28:08

Pat Williams: Absolutely.

00:28:09

Evan Barrett: And getting to work with each other a little bit maybe.

00:28:12

Pat Williams: Boy wouldn't that be good?

00:28:12

Evan Barrett: Yeah; there's a good idea. Hey now when you got back and you were in an education role again with the Mountain Plains Program and Family Training Program but you were called upon when the new Constitution passed, more change--when the new Constitution passed and we had under the Constitution a new mode, a different mode of reapportioning Legislative Districts, a Reapportionment Commission, you were named to

be one of the five members of that initial Reapportionment Commission. Can you reflect on that role and just the whole idea of it?

00:28:43

Pat Williams: The State Senate appointed me to be on the Reapportionment Commission which is this thing about redrawing lines, boundaries for single and--single House seats and then put two House seats together and you have a Senate seat. So it's a very complex process of redrawing political boundaries in Montana.

00:29:08

Evan Barrett: It has a big political impact, too.

00:29:09

Pat Williams: Huge, huge political impact. I must say--that's you know people talk about gerrymandering. Well gerrymandering comes from an old process, but the point is that's what reapportionment--that's what is referred to sometimes as reapportionment. But Reapportionment Commissions in Montana have--and you know; you've been part of it--have worked to try to come into the middle of fairness.

00:29:41

Now sometimes you have to make a choice. If you're a Democrat on the Reapportionment Commission or a Republican on it and you draw the line over here for--for a District you help your Party. If you draw it down here you help the other Party. So it isn't that nonpartisanship is left out of it entirely but members struggled to create some fairness in the State. And Montana's election results in the Legislature demonstrate that.

00:30:14

Evan Barrett: And you know in that new Constitution with that Commission, many, many states still try to do it the way it was done previously which is you let the Legislators draw their own Districts and it's a big mess and it's all screwed up.

00:30:25

Pat Williams: Terrible; terrible idea.

00:30:26

Evan Barrett: And--and Montana has managed with the new Constitution and these Commissions to be reasonably fair and equitable in drawing these lines, not perfect or anything else but this--this was also something--. Was there a great deal of interest of people in these results of what you were doing on the Commission?

00:30:43

Pat Williams: They knew what we were doing. They were confused by all the line-drawing and how we came about decisions and we didn't have computers available to us in any real way back then. So we had a--one assistant; we had one assistant named [Allen] Taylor back then. He was a young guy. And [Allen] was a mathematician and a good one. And then there was a member of the Reapportionment Committee--Commission who had been appointed from the Flathead, from Kalispell and her name is Elsie McGarvey and Elsie McGarvey was a mathematician so between the two of them they were able to work out the numbers. And then those of us who had practiced politics on the ground sort of knew where the neighborhoods were and what wouldn't violate people wanting to stay together, you know politically.

00:31:36

The same way you'd keep the--a--the court requires you to keep an Indian Reservation together.

00:31:43

Evan Barrett: Intact; yeah.

00:31:43

Pat Williams: Intact yes; not drawn down the middle. So the--so the--this part of the Reservation or this part of an intact neighborhood votes for one person or has--you know has one person representing them and this part of the same neighborhood is somebody else representing them. You tried to avoid that. And it's difficult.

00:32:02

Evan Barrett: Yeah; now tell me this. And we're going to do this very quickly. I want to touch quickly on this and then we're going to take a break and go to the--the 1978 campaign but you decided to run for Congress in 1974. And--and there was a three-way race in the Democratic Primary which was yourself, former Congressman Arnold Olsen and a State Legislator at the time named Max Baucus.

00:32:23

Can you just reflect on that quickly in terms of your sense of--of why the results turned out the way they did because you didn't win? And then how that related to this whole concept of reaching people at the grassroots level?

00:32:37

Pat Williams: Right; um, a great old Congressman from Montana named Arnold Olsen had lost in 1970, lost his seat. And Arnold and I were pals. I went to Arnold after his loss and a year had passed and I said Arnold I think I'm going to run for Congress. I'm going to run for your old seat. And he said Pat I wish you wouldn't do it because I've decided to run again and try to regain my old seat. And he went through the reasons he thought I shouldn't run and he should.

00:33:14

And when we discussed it I finally said to him well okay Arnold; I'll back away. And you were a fine Congressman and I'd like to see you back in there. So I won't run.

00:33:24

And he intimated to me that if I would be good enough to do that, if he lost again, he not only of course wouldn't run but he would help me.

00:33:36

Evan Barrett: That would be '74.

00:33:37

Pat Williams: Seventy-four.

00:33:40

Evan Barrett: So in '72 he ran?

00:33:42

Pat Williams: Right and then in '74 I went to him and said okay. He lost and I went to him and said okay Arnold; I'm going to run. Yeah fine; fine. And then he came to me in '73 and said you know Pat I--I really want to run again. I think I'm going to run again. You know he hadn't promised he wouldn't but that was the kind of--my understanding of it--at least my understanding of it. And so along came a--a guy who I had become very friendly with through the years, Max Baucus. And he got into the race and he did that famous walk in Montana where he walked up the highways.

00:34:17

Evan Barrett: Gardiner to Yak.

00:34:19

Pat Williams: Gardiner to Yak which is a long way. It's Yellowstone to the Yukon; I mean it's a long way. *[Laughs]* Yak is a great place. And--and I said to Arnold, look; we both get in this we're going to split that old kind of progressive labor vote. We're going to split Butte. We're both going to lose. And he didn't think so. And that's what happened.

00:34:43

Evan Barrett: That's what happened.

00:34:44

Pat Williams: Yeah.

00:34:44

Evan Barrett: Now I'm going to take a little break here and we'll come back with an additional special guest as we talk about the 1978 campaign.

00:34:53

Pat Williams: Wonderful.

00:34:55

[Break]

00:34:56

Evan Barrett: Welcome back to In the Crucible of Change and we've had a wonderful discussion so far about the early years of change in Montana with Pat Williams, the longest-serving Congressman in--consecutive-serving Congressman in the history of Montana. It's been a good discussion so far about the early years in the *crucible of change*. And now we're going to start focusing on some dramatic episode in the latter years of the *crucible of change* and that is Pat's election to Congress in a very unique grassroots oriented political campaign called Door-to-Door for Congress. And we're joined by another special guest, Michael Fenenbock, who again is a dear friend but also a colleague and compatriot for many, many years. Michael is the head of Fenenbock Group, a media consulting firm of great note in the United States, but also cut his teeth as a member of the staff of the Pat Williams 1978 Door-to-Door Campaign for Congress; so Michael welcome, welcome.

00:36:00

Michael Fenenbock: Thank you Evan. It was--it was an extraordinary 1978. I would touch on something you guys touched on that it seemed to me you didn't quite say the words, which is I think is what was underway in Montana was generational change, because you had the leaving of the Montana Stage of Mike Mansfield and in the middle of the '78 election Pat, Lee passed away. Lee actually passed away. Evan and I were in a car headed for Bozeman and heard the news on the radio. Pulled over and Evan--

00:36:34

Pat Williams: Lee Metcalf.

00:36:35

Michael Fenenbock: Yeah Lee Metcalf. And Evan explained to me as only Evan could what that meant to Montana politics that Lee Metcalf had passed away and how that changed things, and also the great admiration that everybody had--had for Lee. So I actually see it as a generational change. Governor Judge, Pat, Melcher, all replacing these great, great standard bearers of a particular brand of progressive politics, populous politics that I think is unique to Montana or if it isn't unique to Montana it sure does feel that way.

00:37:17

Evan Barrett: Well we--you know '78 was--that's where we first met on your lawn and the rest is history as we would say. But between the time when we met and the time of an election a lot transpired and it was like how long did you--let's talk about your decision to do door-to-door and then that was like nine months of door-to-door wasn't it before the Primary?

00:37:46

Pat Williams: Yeah; it was. Of course the first decision was do I want to run for Congress because I saw--saw how hard when I worked for Melcher. I saw how hard these guys worked. I know people don't believe it; people are wrong. Most of these Congressmen and Congresswomen, there aren't enough of the latter by the way; America is not properly represented by enough women--but they all worked really hard. And you know I had been a hard worker all my life growing up in Butte, working in the mines, working in my dad's restaurants. But I think I worked so hard when I was young I didn't know if I wanted another job [*Laughs*] where I had to work like that.

00:38:23

So first I had to decide do I want to do Congress and do it right and once I decided that then I thought now the times require a campaign that somehow--I had no idea--connects directly to people eyeball to eyeball--that direct.

00:38:51

And together these guys and a fellow named Bruce Nelson and some others came up with this idea of not just going door-to-door but doing it in a systematic, year-long or more way, keeping track of what people said to us and then me writing them a letter about their concerns.

00:39:14

Michael Fenenbock: Personal letter.

00:39:14

Pat Williams: Personal letters. And it was a--it was a--I really think it was one of the first campaigns, at least in west of the Mississippi, areas I know better, I think it was one of the first campaigns and it did set the standard for some others certainly in Montana of (a) the necessity to go door-to-door, and (b) the candidate and the candidate's supporters have to be out there together going door-to-door or you can't get to all the doors.

00:39:50

So away we went.

00:39:52

Evan Barrett: An interesting challenge if you thinking knocking and trying to knock on every door in Butte Silver Bow is tough try the entire western half of the State.

00:39:59

Pat Williams: That's right.

00:40:01

Evan Barrett: Now this went on for nine months. A team of people would go out and be--from Helena with you joined by local people and you had a cadre of people that went out and knocked on doors. You did a lot of doors Michael.

00:40:13

Michael Fenenbock: It was--the--the sense of respect for the folks on the other side of the door, the respect for somebody who is going to talk to you from their living room, they're going to talk to you from their kitchen, and engaging; this--this is the basic hallmark of--of American politics and certainly of Montana politics. And it became a--it had been a hallmark of Pat's. The--the--the crucial thing that it had to be genuine. It wasn't a gimmick. It wasn't something that we came up with or that Pat came up with and said oh, we can--we can snooker them with something like this, or it wasn't a slogan. It was in fact a real movement and we had to knock on doors and we had to do it in a deliberate--deliberate way.

00:41:05

Pat Williams: And we did it by the tens of thousands.

00:41:08

Michael Fenenbock: Extraordinary.

00:41:10

Pat Williams: How many, the number--the number when we were done was 50,000 doors; *[Laughs]* 50,000 and 50,000 sets of people on the other side of the door.

00:41:22

Michael Fenenbock: Do you want to talk about the dynamic of that campaign?

00:41:25

Evan Barrett: Uh-hm.

00:41:25

Michael Fenenbock: There were two campaigns; yeah. There was a Primary and it was a Primary where at the beginning--stop me if I'm wrong--Pat would not have been the favorite, but--

00:41:36

Pat Williams: Was not the favorite.

00:41:38

Michael Fenenbock: Was not the favorite; five people, extraordinary talent in that, five--yeah.

00:41:48

Evan Barrett: It's actually worth noting, six candidates, Pat, Dorothy Bradley, JD Lynch, George Turman, Gary Kimball and John Bartlett, an immense amount of talent there; Dorothy in the Legislature, JD in the Legislature, George Turman, Mayor of Missoula, Gary Kimball Legislator, Native American Legislator, John Bartlett, great public servant.

00:42:09

Michael Fenenbock: Chairman of the Democratic Party.

00:42:11

Evan Barrett: Chairman of the Democratic Party. On the other side, a great group, Jim Waltermeyer, Tippy Huntley, Chet Huntley's widow, Bud Wallace, Bob Brown, who we know and worked with for many years, Richard Fox, and Bruce Jacobson--immense talent going for that seat. It was going to be an open seat and boy everybody wanted to run for it.

00:42:27

Michael Fenenbock: And crazily I would throw another name in, a guy named Pat Williams, a Republican from Kalispell who threw a funny wrench in this.

00:42:40

Pat Williams: It was Williams but it wasn't--

00:42:42

Evan Barrett: Oh Larry Williams.

00:42:43

Michael Fenenbock: Larry Williams.

00:42:44

Evan Barrett: He was running on the Senate side.

00:42:44

Michael Fenenbock: Yes.

00:42:45

Pat Williams: But he--yeah.

00:42:45

Evan Barrett: It was odd; yeah.

00:42:47

Michael Fenenbock: He very much--

00:42:48

Pat Williams: But people didn't know which Williams was--. [*Laughs*]

00:42:49

Michael Fenenbock: He very much benefited from Door-to-Door.

00:42:52

Evan Barrett: He was running against Max. He was a Republican running against Max; yeah.

00:42:55

Michael Fenenbock: And people were saying--

00:42:56

Evan Barrett: But anyway there were 50,000 and you said there's some--there was some dynamic to it. Did you want to--50,000 doors.

00:43:04

Michael Fenenbock: Well you had to go do it. The--the--the process was actually mechanical but--but the explosion that happened that--the dynamic that happened at the door was magic, political magic. That's what happens.

00:43:20

This cadre of people would go out and knock on doors, cold, cold, cold. I'm not a Montanan; I love Montana but I'm not a Montanan but even Montanans were cold. And Pat never turned around and said it's too cold; let's not go. Pat always said no; we're going. So week after week after week we knocked on doors. It was an extraordinary experience. Pat said he thought it was unique. My wife and I added up for some silly reason the other day that I had been involved in some 200 campaigns. That was the best one.

00:44:01

Pat Williams: So the first--the first one is always the best one, pal. **[Laughs]**

00:44:05

Michael Fenenbock: And are we still talking about campaigns?

00:44:10

Pat Williams: Oh you thought we were talking about campaigns?

00:44:13

Michael Fenenbock: Yeah; right.

00:44:14

Pat Williams: Okay; that's it.

00:44:15

Michael Fenenbock: I actually think--I actually think that Evan knocked on the most doors. I think in the end Evan was the winner of the door thing. You know Bruce Nelson, our great friend Bruce Nelson who is not here, who meant so much to this campaign, [*Laughs*] temperamentally as well as intellectually he meant a lot; he always claimed that he knocked on the most or--or--but Bruce wouldn't talk to anybody at the door. You know he'd just say hi; I'm here, we're doing--boom and he'd get onto the next. But it was--it was a special experience for anybody who worked on it.

00:44:54

I remember--and Pat won't like this story but I remember Pat and I the day before the election just outside of Three Forks and it was just--I don't know I think I was driving him, and I said I'm just nervous as heck. And Pat looked at me and he said oh I'm not and he came--and you weren't. You weren't. And I said why not? And he said because I've done everything we could and we've done it right. If it doesn't go our way, it doesn't go our way. But I'm--

00:45:25

Pat Williams: Yeah; it's true.

00:45:25

Evan Barrett: It was interesting that one of the comments--that we did a ton of door-to-door every weekend, weekend after weekend after weekend after weekend, and right up to Christmas day and we did them over and over

and everywhere, every--mechanically through the whole State. The doors weren't mechanical but the process was. And it wasn't until quite a bit later that we made a decision to say Door-to-Door for Congress.

00:45:55

Pat Williams: Well you--you made that decision. We're sitting around and said what--what are we going to call this? We don't want any gimmicks but we need some kind of a slogan. And we didn't know what to do and after about a half an hour, this guy Evan says why don't we call it what we're actually doing? Why don't we call it Door-to-Door for Congress? And all of our ads had a little doorbell do you remember?

00:46:18

Pat Williams: Ding dong.

00:46:19

Michael Fenenbock: Ding dong.

00:46:19

Evan Barrett: Like the Avon bell.

00:46:21

Pat Williams: Door-to-Door for Congress; yeah.

00:46:23

Michael Fenenbock: That too was you by the way.

00:46:24

Evan Barrett: But--but the branding, the branding was important because it was a reinforcement. This was an exciting thing happening and a dynamic thing happening at the doors and then to reinforce that by every time they saw an ad they're thinking yeah; these were--these people are coming to my door and talking about it. Now--now

that had a big impact. I--I think you had an experience in Ramsey, Montana that reflected that--that I wonder if you might want to--.

00:46:50

Pat Williams: The last--it's the last night of the campaign and I was in Butte and going--yeah I guess I was just in Butte and I thought you know there's a couple hours of daylight left and we haven't been to Ramsey yet. And so I drove to Ramsey. I thought I can't--I can't do this. I've got to go to the last door. So I drove to Ramsey and the sun was going down and you know Ramsey is not a--there aren't a lot of people that live in Ramsey and I was going up and down the three or four streets. And I felt pretty good; most people were home and by the time this story ends it's dark. And I'm going back to the car and I saw some lights on in a house way out over here in a field. And I could feel myself being pulled to go into that house--go to that house, one more door, and also pulled to the car because I was cold, right. It's November.

00:47:45

And I thought no; I can't sleep if I don't go to that door. So I went to the door; a guy opened the door and said oh Pat Williams. How are you? Come on in and shook my hand. And he said Mary, Pat is here. Get some tea. And she did and he asked me to sit down and I had time to do it; it was the last door. I sat down and he went over to the mantelpiece above their fireplace and he lifted a clock and he took out a piece of paper and he opened it and he said Mary and I prepared questions for you. We knew you were coming. We saw it on TV.

00:48:21

Does that tell you the power of television, back then and yet today?

00:48:27

Michael Fenenbock: I'll give you two other interesting pieces. Literally the night--and he drove it; the candidate drove it. The night he won the Primary we did not know we were going to win the Primary or am I wrong? We--it was up in the air.

00:48:43

Pat Williams: Yeah.

00:48:44

Michael Fenenbock: The night--and the press came to him and they said well what do you do now? And Pat said well tomorrow morning I get up and go knock on doors; yeah. Trust me I was there; there was some drinking that night. *[Laughs]* He did not want to get up and go knock on doors but he did. He did and I know that because he made me go with him.

00:49:07

Second one, and it just sticks in my mind, if you just take this explosive thing which is meaningful to people, it has to be meaningful, but you repeat it, Pat was in Kalispell at a television station and the television station said you know we do holiday greetings whenever somebody comes in. So Thanksgiving is coming up and wondered if you--this is in the General, wondered if you'd do a--a greeting. And they run these little greetings from celebrities and people that come in.

00:49:38

And Pat's greeting was from Carol and I's door to your door Happy Thanksgiving--bank.

00:49:46

Evan Barrett: Well you know Pat when you say that it says a lot about the strength of TV by having them react that way, but I kind of read it like it was partly that message that was being conveyed by TV.

00:50:04

Pat Williams: Oh I agree.

00:50:04

Evan Barrett: If the message was Pat William, Democrat for Congress, which is what was initially on your brochures, very pedestrian, very normal as opposed to hey this is something that engages you, you know the--. Now the legitimacy aspect of this thing was feedback. Remember this--this whole period of change is about empowering people, changing from power structures and then people being empowered. The feedback mechanism of going to

the doors and getting--eliciting name, address, what are your areas of interest, and then hearing back from you about those specific areas of interest--

00:50:43

Pat Williams: Letters; yeah.

00:50:44

Evan Barrett: --talk about that a little bit here because it seems to me that is what--that feedback loop is what made it genuine and real.

00:50:51

Pat Williams: What we would do, we'd ask them what they were interested in. If I wasn't the one at the door we'd ask them what they were interested in. And even if I was the one at the door we'd get a name and address and then I'd write back to everyone whether I knocked on their door or not. And I'd write back to them about their matter of-

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00:51:05

Michael Fenenbock: The issue.

00:51:07

Pat Williams: --yeah. So 50,000 letters or whatever right; and then we followed that by the way just for campaign information here about the campaign, we would follow that. We ended up following the door-to-door efforts just before the Election Day with a door hanger that said you know my staff or I--my supporters or I were at your door. I'm Pat Williams and we'd have a photo and they'd recognize. And then we also did mailings that said Door-to-Door. So we kept reinforcing it.

00:51:42

And but look; what it was about really, we may be overdoing the door-to-door thing here but what it was about really was we were in a time of change in Montana and people wanted something different and they wanted to be able to believe in something. We'd had scandal in Washington.

00:52:04

Evan Barrett: Seventy-four big bad stuff with Watergate.

00:52:07

Pat Williams: Terrible; the Nixon scandal was horrible. They wanted to believe in something. Now you know just Pat Williams being out there wasn't going to change a lot in America frankly but Montanans wanted to believe in something. And so here were these supporters, friends and relatives of Pat's who would come and tell you about him to your face, and answer questions about him. It was the same thing we me going to thousands of doors. They could see me and we could see them. And so it wasn't just me or the good effort of you guys and you know another several other hundred people. It was the need to have somebody connect with you and be authentic about it. And then of course as I say, the times were bad. And so reform was in the air.

00:53:04

Evan Barrett: Well if you think about it this was even though this was a Federal race, it was in Montana where the change is taking place. And remember, this was about shedding a copper collar; I think people were very cognizant that they really didn't have much voice before. Tell us about the coalition that--that came together to help implement change during this period and you were a beneficiary of some of that.

00:53:36

Pat Williams: Well let me talk about one piece of the coalition. Workers want their jobs; they want to have a job. And Anaconda was a big employer, and the Montana Power Company, a sister to Anaconda in the beginning, were big employers and not just in Butte, but Great Falls and around the State.

00:54:00

All of their workers and all the workers in Montana wanted a job and a good job. But hey things needed changing. And the one group that could have stood in the way of that change was organized labor. But they didn't. They were for change; they were for reform; they were for a clean environment, right. They were for angering the boss if it meant raising the minimum wage even though the corporations will say we'll have to lay people off. Organized labor knew a scam when they heard it.

00:54:42

And so part of the unifying side of progressive politics in Montana was frankly the AFL-CIO and all their affiliate Local Unions and certainly in the General Election they poured more support toward me than I probably deserved even though I was a member of the--of several Unions during my lifetime and remain a member of the American Federation of Teachers, Teachers Union.

00:55:10

But organized labor was an absolute lynchpin, dead-certain part of that coalition.

00:55:23

Michael Fenenbock: Labor in Montana and correct me if I'm wrong but labor in Montana was also going through that same change that--that now--it felt this great comfort level with this campaign and with Pat. It was--those door hangers didn't get hung by Evan and I--a lot of people from organized labor who went out there and sweated and did all of that.

00:55:49

Evan Barrett: Now labor I think that the Progressive Farm Movement in Montana which was evidenced by the Farmers Union at the time--

00:55:57

Michael Fenenbock: Farmers Union.

00:55:58

Evan Barrett: --evolving with--I remember the first Earth Day was in 1970; evolving Environmental Movement was a big part of it. Students, the younger people looking for change; there was a lot of elements of this coalition that came together and I think that they were looking for candidates that would reflect that. You seemed to be uniquely positioned in that sense in a way but it--it--it kind of took that--this kind of progressive change which did take place is I want to just take a second and say is a challenge to maintain. We're doing a lot of programs about--about how this change took place in Montana and the corporate collar was removed.

00:56:42

There are lots of forces that want to create a-backslide to re-empower large corporations and dominant economic interests and disempower people.

00:56:52

Pat Williams: They seem to be doing pretty well, it not in Montana they are in this country, those retrograde forces.

00:56:59

Evan Barrett: It's a challenge. It's a real challenge that--part of the reason we're telling this story about the progressive change in Montana was to set a context for new generations to look at when they look at our series and say there was change that took place. I didn't know about the copper collar. I didn't know that it had to be taken off. I'm not going to let it be put back on again, symbolically a copper collar put back on again. I think that's part of the message of what we're trying to do because it is easy to slide back.

00:57:29

Power and money are very pervasive and persuasive in the political arena.

00:57:37

Well Michael you're up here for a nice visit. We're so glad you were able to come back and join us with some thoughts about the--the campaign. Pat both of you good friends, and thank you but I--you know I'm being very objective about this stuff in dealing with you; this was--you were part of a critical change in Montana. So thank you for coming and sharing your experiences with us. We're going to talk about a lot more things in future episodes

and but--but your personal participation and your involvement in the '78 campaign are part of the fabric of Montana history right now, the kind of fabric we want to discuss in this wonderful series, so thank you both for coming.

00:58:22

Michael Fenenbock: Thanks to you for doing it.

00:58:24

Pat Williams: Yeah; thanks for doing this series. It's an important series and it's archivable, right; this is great.

00:58:29

[*Music*]

00:59:31

[**End Pat Williams-The Other Side of the Door-Butte & Beyond**]