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Transcript for Episode 31: Past is Prologue: Montana's Historic Women's Movement Re- emerges in Progressive 1970s

Dorothy Bradley

Marilyn Wessel

Jane Jelinski

Evan Barrett

Executive Producer, ebarrett@mtech.edu

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[Begin Past is Prologue-Montana's Historic Women's Movement Re-emerges in the Progressive 1970s]

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[Music]

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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.

00:00:14

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.

00:01:20

Evan Barrett: Welcome back to *In the Crucible of Change*. We've got a very exciting program today. We're going to take a look at the emergence of the Women's Movement in Montana in the 1970s. As you know we're--we're addressing this as a period of progressive change in Montana and nothing more exemplifies the--both the challenge and the change than what happened with the Women's Movement in Montana. Our history is--is very interesting in that regard and we're going to look into that a little bit. If you--if you think about the fact that we in 1914, 100 years

ago, women were given the right to vote in Montana before it was given to--provided legally under the Constitution of the United States. So we were ahead of the curve.

00:02:10

Two years thereafter we elected Jeannette Rankin as the first woman member of Congress. Those signature accomplishments in the early part of the 20th Century were followed by a period where there--economically the copper collar was tightened around Montana but sociologically, progress was not greatly being shown. And so as we reached the '70s there were some really great challenges but great opportunities.

00:02:43

Now we have a wonderful panel that we're going to be working with tonight and I want to introduce them all now and then we'll come--and we'll start the discussion. And I want to mention that of course that we are all friends. We've known each other for many years--many, many, many years. And because of that we're going to have a conversation. And it's a wonderful thing but our panelists here, Jane Jelinski; Jane was a County Commissioner for many years from Gallatin County and then she went to work for the Montana Association of Counties, kind of overlooking all those County Commissioners and ultimately with the Local Government Center at Montana State University. And so she's had her teeth in this stuff on the electoral side and the understanding of things in a broader context for--for many, many years.

00:03:36

Now we also have Dorothy Bradley. Dorothy is I think one of the more well-known women leaders of Montana and was a Legislator for many years, two cycles as Legislator. You know you had your cycle and then you went away and you came back again, and not only that, you were a candidate for Congress and the nominee for Governor. And people know you very well for what you've stood for over the years and we're so happy to have you here as well.

00:04:05

And Marilyn Wessel; Marilyn--I first ran into Marilyn she was a broadcaster.

00:04:09

Marilyn Wessel: That's right.

00:04:10

Evan Barrett: She was a broadcaster down at--which was the station?

00:04:12

Marilyn Wessel: KBMN Radio.

00:04:14

Evan Barrett: KBMN Radio and--and what a great voice you had. We always loved it. And--and Marilyn later left broadcasting and went to Administration at Montana State University and then a long-term running our most prominent and preeminent museums in Montana, the Museum of the Rockies.

00:04:35

And so let's start a little bit with you Marilyn in terms of that context. I mentioned a couple of highlights in the earlier part of the century but tell us when it came to women in Montana and their position in Montana, both legally and sociologically, what was--what was the context we were facing?

00:04:56

Marilyn Wessel: Well it was an exciting time for all of us I think. We are senior feminist panel here, so we've lived through it all; it's been wonderful. But there were some things going on that really helped to create the rebirth of the Feminist Movement in Montana. Great literature; let's don't forget Betty [Furdan] and her wonderful book that came out in that era, The Equal Pay Act passed the United States Congress in the '60s, we had Title IX which equalized money for women in sports, also in the '60s; this was great Federal legislation. And then on the statewide basis we had the Montana Constitution, a brand new Constitution in Montana with a very strong equal rights provision in it. We also had the Federal Equal Rights Amendment that came out of the US Congress in 1970--'71, sorry, and came out to the States for ratification. So there were many things going on to get women involved. But there were also plenty of problems Evan; this was not necessarily a good time for women.

00:05:54

We worry about the pay gap now but then women made 49-cents for every \$1.00, a man made; this is in 1974. There were many jobs that were closed to us. Promotion was closed to women either from tradition or from

legalistic means. Issues of choice were not in our control in any way that we could see. Childcare; there were many, many problems for women in that era. So we along with many other women in the State, we are talking for many people, not just ourselves. Both newcomers and natives to Montana in the 1970s formed various coalitions and groups to do a couple of main things. One was to get more women elected to office which was very important to us. We had only two women serving in the Montana Legislature when we all got started thinking about these things. Dorothy was one of them. And the other issue was to get the Equal Rights Amendment ratified. This was after all Jeannette Rankin's home state; we really wanted to see the Equal Rights Amendment added to the Constitution.

00:06:52

So those were two areas around which we coalesced, along with wanting to change the way people saw women. We looked at that Constitutional Convention Delegation with all those women on it and we thought we deserve a seat at the table. They are leading the way and if we could, we wanted to be at the head of the table. So we really wanted to see change come about, and those were some of the things that lent that.

00:07:17

Evan Barrett: Well you know when you think about the Constitutional Convention, 19 women out of 100 Delegates and that was such a phenomenal advancement and yet if we think about it, that's 19-percent.

00:07:29

Marilyn Wessel: Doesn't seem like much now. I know; I know.

00:07:30

Evan Barrett: You know I mean--

00:07:31

Marilyn Wessel: It's not huge.

00:07:32

Evan Barrett: --and demographically women are more than 50-percent of the population. So reapportionment which required a representation of people in the legislative structure didn't address demographics. And so that had to come a different way. But could you--I'm thinking about back at--in those days, some of the terminology was--was interesting and--and it almost sounds a little bit crude, but I remember people actually saying it and not--and meaning it that you know women needed to be barefoot, pregnant, and changing the stove.

00:08:13

Marilyn Wessel: It was an un-funny joke.

00:08:14

Evan Barrett: It's a sociological thing.

00:08:16

Marilyn Wessel: A very un-funny joke. We did not take kindly to it and one of the things we early feminists did was we stopped laughing at those things. At one point they had perhaps been funny but they weren't funny then. And we not only wanted to see legalistic changes and changes in the way women were represented; we really wanted people to look at women in a much more different and much more serious matter. And those kinds of comments were no longer okay and that was part of our job to say that.

00:08:40

Evan Barrett: You know it seemed to me that they--that those kinds of words became an opportunity to--to look at the--look at them in terms of how ridiculous they might be, although there are some people that still ascribe to those concepts.

00:08:54

Marilyn Wessel: Sadly I'm sure that's true.

00:08:55

Evan Barrett: I think we're--we're still there. The--the kind of--one of the outlooks that flavored, and I think maybe Jane will go into this a little bit, but seemed to flavor things a bit was when you looked at that very pervasive thing of television and television shows and how were women reflected in television and it was like the--watching *Leave it to Beaver*. I mean it was the perfect nuclear household and the mother was home cooking for the kids who came home from school and the husband was the bread winner and--and that was the sociological context of the time, reflected on TV which--which helped intensify it in a sense.

00:09:39

Marilyn Wessel: Yeah; well none of us was June Cleaver nor did we want to be. We didn't denigrate women who wanted to live their lives that way. It was all about being able to choose the sort of lifestyle that you had. But there were economic factors that were changing this country in the 1970s and for the most part the one income household was no longer really possible. Households really needed to have two earners and that was something that I think made it more critical for women to be able to advance themselves and feel okay about being in the workplace. It was not an insult to be a working mother or a working woman at that point.

00:10:14

Evan Barrett: And the world has changed economically so that now the--the percentage of households where--where there are two bread winners is a huge percentage. It's maybe two-thirds now;--

00:10:24

Marilyn Wessel: Much different than it used to be.

00:10:25

Evan Barrett: --I think I saw some numbers on that just the other day. Ironically of course with the diminishment of the buying power of the middle class that two-thirds with--two households--two household checks isn't doing modern American families that much good.

00:10:43

Marilyn Wessel: That also brought up the issue of childcare for us, so that was another one of the things that we all noticed and worked with and dealt with and struggled with when we were young women in the '70s. We needed help in that regard. We were willing to pay for it but there was not quality daycare available in most cases and that was also an important part of the Feminist Movement was to make sure our kids were well-cared for by us and by caregivers that we could hire. So that was an important thing, too that went on.

00:11:07

Evan Barrett: Now you mentioned choice and we're going to jump over and talk to Dorothy here about that, but it's an opportune time since we're moving over to talk to you to say that kind of the role models of--of women leaders that we could look at and say wow; that's really something--that we had some of that in our history again with Jeannette Rankin as an example and--and but--but as we entered the '70s, most of--in the late '60s, most of those role models were--were national level. It was gee what do we think about Shirley Chisholm? We had the--in literature we had Betty--Betty Friedan, we had Bella Abzug, and--and people in Congress who were suddenly emerging, Barbara Jordan, wonderful examples. We didn't have so many here; you were one that people could look up to. When you went to the Legislature in 1971 your freshman term, there were only two women in the Legislature.

00:12:07

Dorothy Bradley: It was a very interesting time and I can't say that being in the Legislature had ever been on my list of things to do. I just came plummeting out of college, happened to be in Bozeman for a period of time, and then suddenly this door opened and I thought--postpone Graduate School; you know do that another day. Finding myself there was absolutely startlingly amazing and I can't think that I was really well-prepared. I wasn't a Political Science major or anything like that.

00:12:35

But I loved the issues and to this day I love the issues. That's a really important point to remember. But when we talk about what generated the Women's Movement and fervor of the '70s, choice was certainly one of the key issues. This is pre-*Roe v. Wade* and one of the things I do vividly remember was our effort to have a hearing in 1971 when nobody wanted to deal with this issue. There was a Bill to legalize abortion and nobody in that 150-body

Legislature would introduce it. Nobody really wanted to see it go to me. But finally these people who wanted their day in Court so to speak came and said this has to be debated. Would you consider introducing it?

00:13:27

I had a great relationship with Toni Roselle, a really astonishing Senator who--a Republican who watched over me. She actually advised me against it and we talked about it many times after that era. And she said there's so many things for you to do in the future. You shouldn't get sidetracked by one thing. I appreciated her giving me that warning but I also thought if I don't give these people their opportunity, I mean why should I even be here? Nobody else is going to do this. So the Bill was introduced. And the upshot is it was one of the most extraordinary, thoughtful, respectful issues ever debated that year. It is such a difficult issue and everybody knew it was a difficult issue and they gave it that respect. And when it came time to get it out of Committee there was only four other votes besides myself and I learned several things from that. One I learned of course is thank goodness for the Supreme Court of the United States which passed *Roe v. Wade* because we still might be back there then considering our vote. The other is if you stand up and speak your mind and it's thoughtful and considerate and respectful, it won't haunt you for the rest of your political life. It is okay. And the third thing is you can't tamp down issues that must be debated. That was an issue of the day; it had to be debated. It was well done; it was--it was as--as good a debate as we heard on any issue. It was a great learning experience for me.

00:15:04

Evan Barrett: Well I'm wondering about your reflections upon the--the 148 men that were in the Legislature at that time in terms of them--some of them obviously were very progressive, but did we not have a situation that exemplified the idea that even really good people could have archaic ideas?

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Dorothy Bradley: I would just have to say the men of that Assembly were wonderful to me and Toni Roselle. I never had a complaint. And what I always remember is that following the passage of the Montana Constitution and the dignity of the person clause that is so extraordinary, when we followed that up in the Legislature with an equality of sexist study to bring Montana laws into compliance with what our constitutional statement was a totally fabulous smart, soft-spoken, self-deprecating lawyer from Livingston, Dan Yardley ran that study to perfection,

bringing these complicated laws, things we had never even thought about into compliance with the Constitution. What it takes is all of us working together and somehow while he brought that study into being and focused everybody on the difficult issues of the day it was--it was very--it was very considered and deliberative and outside this little cocoon was raging the Equal Rights Amendment at the same time. And its shrill and fearmongering approach was so different than the process that Montana went through to create statutes that were fair to everybody.

00:17:05

Evan Barrett: It's interesting then; the--the political world was burning up so to speak and you're saying inside the Legislature people were at least being thoughtful and considerate about the issues even though they were having to vote on some of them that they didn't like.

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Dorothy Bradley: I think that--that study it was almost like we were on a sacred mission, you know. We're implementing the Constitution and it's our sacred document. And we're bringing equality to a huge group of people. There were 12 Bills; some of them were a big surprise like what? This--this inequality exists? I always think of the penalties of prostitution and you think that most prostitutes are women? And therefore if only women are penalized there's a-discrimination on the basis of gender. So it was proposed that we also penalize patrons. It made sense; it passed.

00:18:02

There was a group of Bills that were very expansive and broadening rights to everybody. For example, I thought the best of that was the access to fair credit. Credit was not to go to little details about your marital status, your gender or anything else; it was to be based on collateral, character, and credit ratings. And I had people thank me afterward who were totally unexpected; it just didn't expand rights to women or unmarried women. It expanded rights to everybody. And then there was of course a huge slew of domestic kinds of legislation. However, what I most remember then is that they extended rights and respect to the spouse in the home and that was to be a respected part of a marriage. And when a marriage was to be broken up the property was to be understood to consider the consideration of the work in the household. It brought sort of a new kind of thinking.

00:19:10

Evan Barrett: So the community--

00:19:12

Dorothy Bradley: Marriage and divorce.

00:19:12

Evan Barrett: --the community property laws gave some kind of respect for the--not just the earnings outside the home but--

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Dorothy Bradley: That's correct.

00:19:20

Evan Barrett: Yeah now--

00:19:22

Dorothy Bradley: Not just the bread winner but the person is in the home, whoever it may be, raising the children, making the household work. It was respected as part of the equation.

00:19:32

Evan Barrett: I remember the--when the--the Bill on Prostitution and did Pat **Reagan** carry that Bill?

00:19:40

Dorothy Bradley: She carried the Fair Credit Act.

00:19:41

Female: Excellent; yes. **[Laughs]**

00:19:45

Evan Barrett: I always thought that she might have. I kind of remembered it that way but she was very vociferous about it and I remember the hallway talk among the lobbyists which was kind of both--one sense respectful and there was opportunity for some humor in it, too but effectively the story was the johns could be nailed as well as the prostitutes and that seemed like the epitome of equality you know. **[Laughs]**

00:20:11

Dorothy Bradley: It really brought it to a whole new perspective. And you know one of the other funny ones which is the one I carried because I thought it would be the least controversial was that barbers at that time were allowed to cut women's hair but beauty salons were not allowed to cut men's hair. I thought that was a--a no-brainer. And it didn't pass. And if you think about it, oh yeah; there's--most of the people serving in this--in these two Houses are men and they all have barbers and it gave quite a--a huge amount of strength to the barbers in the community. It was fixed later, but it was the one that didn't pass.

00:20:48

Evan Barrett: Well you know and going back--we had a previous program on *Executive Reorganization*, and one of the things that when I was on that staff and the first study I had to do of governmental structure and I was right out of Graduate School and one year of teaching I ended up doing that was to study the Occupational Licensing Boards. And of course one of those and the most outrageous one was the--was the barbers, who said if you've got to have 20 departments one of them ought to be the Barbers Board because--and with one staff person. But--but it did speak to the issue that they were very protective and when you started saying well who cuts whose hair gee, you're now getting into our bailiwick and a long time ago I discovered that the smaller one's area of authority is the more jealously they guard it.

00:21:37

Dorothy Bradley: Well we all like--

00:21:38

Evan Barrett: And they were guarding it I'll tell you. [*Laughs*]

00:21:40

Dorothy Bradley: We all like franchises. [*Laughs*] But--but what I would remember always about that effort is when you get down into extending equal rights you discover there's all kinds of people besides yourself that face discrimination and when you deal with equal rights you expand it for everybody.

00:21:56

Marilyn Wessel: And it's important to note and we've dealt with this a lot in the early Feminist Movement in the '70s, rights are not finite. Just because women are trying to advance their rights does not mean that men will have fewer rights. It's not like we have 100 rights and if I get 60 then you're going to have fewer; the rights are there to be enjoyed by all. It's just a matter of making sure that socially and legislatively we can actually do what we need to do. And--and we still hear that concern today from young women. If I'm a feminist does that mean that I don't want rights for men or that I want fewer rights for men? So that battle was a big one then and I think it remains an issue for some women today.

00:22:36

Evan Barrett: I think the word *synergy* would work in terms of rights that--that when you put them together they're more than the sum of the parts.

00:22:44

Marilyn Wessel: The sum of the parts that's a very good way to put it.

00:22:46

Evan Barrett: And so I want to ask you about one that got really hot in the Legislature was Unisex Insurance.

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Marilyn Wessel: Yeah; that was huge.

00:22:55

Evan Barrett: Was--that got--that got to be pretty hot and I don't know why. It seemed--not to discriminate against women in terms of getting insurance--

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Dorothy Bradley: Well everybody dragged their actuarial tables out. You know and they can get very complicated. And I would just sum it up to say I think Montana took a very brave step; eventually passed it. You can't in certain circumstances make divisions based on sex. It doesn't work.

00:23:26

Evan Barrett: And that is applied now at the national level with the Affordable Care Act--it has a lot of things in it that are saying we've got to be able to treat women the same as men or everyone the same in the--in the Federal level and it finds its way in. And that of course is controversial, too--for politics. Again the interesting thing is the external political world kind of pushes on the edges on the policy world and all this kind of stuff. And people are looking for political advantage and--and in essence, inflaming people about--using fear to inflame people politically to get votes often gets in the way of rational political or policy discussion. We see it today. And I'm sure it was prevalent at that time as well.

00:24:18

Marilyn Wessel: Very much so yeah; all the time.

00:24:20

Dorothy Bradley: And we shouldn't let the discussion go by without noting how these Constitutional Delegates so totally expanded no discrimination in the State because it wasn't just a matter of who you could not discriminate against, it was a matter of who is not allowed to discriminate against them. And it was so foresighted I think to this day it is a model in the rest of the country because it's not just the State and a public body that may not discriminate;

it is a private person, it is a business, it's an institution. It is a matter of law, of constitutional law that you do not discriminate. It was so expansive; I just think it was remarkable for its day.

00:25:03

Evan Barrett: You know in terms of the legal side of this thing, obviously in the hierarchy of laws, statutes have to, you know be subservient to the constitutional language which is the stronger guiding document. Did you run into in the Legislature folks saying well--not wanting to get that layering of the laws, saying well you know I know you've got this constitutional language but you're just going way too far here with what you're trying to get done? Did you run into that much in--because I see that today like well the hell with the Constitution; this is what we want.

00:25:41

Dorothy Bradley: I don't know how I would answer that Evan. I always felt that I was blessed to be among a group of people whose primary endeavor on these issues was to search them out to the maximum of our ability. I thought it was a really honest assessment and search for what is good.

00:26:01

Evan Barrett: Uh-hm; well you know you bring a-seriousness to the debate and a-sincerity to the debate that probably out-color the response. You know so I think a bit of the credit goes with who the messenger was. The message may have been a little uncomfortable for some of those folks but you as the messenger I think carried the day a lot of the ways.

00:26:26

Dorothy Bradley: I just never would want to take away from the Chairman Dan Yardley because he was remarkable.

00:26:31

Evan Barrett: Yeah; he was a terrific guy wasn't he? Now you know I want to mention this and then we'll bridge off into Local government here, but the--the--the leadership of the--I mean the number of women in the Legislature

and speak to that constitutional thing when we had 19 Constitutional Delegates who were women and then we had only had 2 women you know in the Legislature prior to that with you and Toni Roselle, at least in '71--now by the way in '69 there were three I think it was or '67 so it wasn't always 2 but--but the numbers that we came up with was that in 1965 there were 3 women Legislators. In '67 there were 3. In '69 Toni was the only one; Toni Roselle was the only one. And then you joined and there were 2 in 1971. And then right late in the middle of that was 19 members of the Constitutional Convention and then it exploded and suddenly in '73 there were 9 and in '75 there were 14 and then in '77 there were 14 and in '79 there were 15.

00:27:40

Now those still aren't good enough numbers, but they were a huge improvement on 2 and 3, which were the--where we were.

00:27:47

Dorothy Bradley: Yeah; well that was a big improvement but today we're still sitting at 28-percent of women members of the Montana Legislature.

00:27:54

Evan Barrett: Twenty-eight percent.

00:27:54

Marilyn Wessel: And that's roughly 32 or 33 women, something like that. I don't have the exact number. So while that's much bigger than 2 or sticking around that one-percent level it tells you very clearly that we have a long ways to go to get more women in office. And that was one of the chief issues that we all worked on was to get more women elected not just at the legislative level but also at the Local government levels.

00:28:17

Evan Barrett: So we made progress.

00:28:19

Marilyn Wessel: We made progress.

00:28:19

Evan Barrett: But we haven't gone far enough.

00:28:21

Marilyn Wessel: We're not finished; we are not finished. We still have a lot of work to do. It's still hard for women to run campaigns. It's hard for them to raise money and it's not easy for them to get elected either, so we've made progress but we still have issues ahead of us.

00:28:33

Evan Barrett: I happen to be a believer that--that having this large majority of men in public office has not necessarily solved all the problems in America or Montana.

00:28:43

Marilyn Wessel: Well we'd like our shot. Can we say that? **[Laughs]** Can we say that? We would like our shot.

00:28:46

Evan Barrett: Now from a Local government perspective you were a real pathfinder in a sense. You were elected to the County Commission. Now if I can think of a place where women would be probably totally unwelcome it would be the County Commission in every county. Tell us about your efforts starting there and then where--

00:29:09

Jane Jelinski: All right; well I was appointed by Judge Gary to fill a vacancy on the County Commission in 1984. And there was an uproar when--when we were being considered that a group of leaders in the community, farmers and ranchers mostly were quoted in the newspaper of saying *this is no job for a woman and women don't know anything about heavy equipment* and that *we wanted a farmer and a rancher and a man*. And it was a huge controversy and it went on and on to the point where the District Court Judges who back in those days had the

authority to make the appointment--that's changed since--met with a friend of theirs who was their age, who was a member of their country club, and secretly met with him and decided that they would appoint him until the next General Election. And all hell broke loose and it was women who were furious that this was going on. The secret got out and they burned up the phone lines to the Judges telling them that not only I, but the other potential candidate, Kenny [Bottomly] had received the endorsement of the Central Committee and recommending either of us would be very appropriate--to be appointed. And it went on for weeks.

00:30:46

And finally Judge Gary relented and he said we did it in secret. We didn't follow the open meetings laws. And we were wrong. And he decided that he would appoint me. And Judge Olsen deferred to the Senior Judge. And so I was appointed in 1984 in the spring and had to run in November to win the last two years of that term. And back then women, there were 13 female County Commissioners in the State and 172 male County Commissioners. You're right it was the absolute last bastion of male dominant environment politics. That was--we represented 7-percent. And in '85 now I--I checked of--I mean 2014, of the 131 total County Commissioners, 98 are male and 33 are female, so we've increased our representation to 25-percent.

00:32:03

But when you--you think wow; that's--that's a huge change, that was 29 years and women have increased their representation as County Commissioners one-half of one-percent per year for 29 years. So there's still work to be done.

00:32:21

Evan Barrett: Uh-hm; progress is tough sometimes. But you look at it and think well on pure numbers this is a job that's not done and we really as a society need to you know stay with it. But there are forces that still don't like the idea.

00:32:38

Jane Jelinski: Well my, we had Commissioners in Judith Basin County, very elderly gentleman who swore when Barbara Skelton was running for County Commissioner that if she was elected he would leave; he would not work with a woman. And so the day after the election she just strolled right in and said okay Arnie, I'm here; take it or

leave it. And they became friends and in fact, when we had State Association meetings of County Commissioners all of the few of us 13 women who were County Commissioners always made it a point to sit and have lunch with Arnie. He was surrounded by women. And he loved it; he loved it.

00:33:27

Evan Barrett: Yeah.

00:33:27

Jane Jelinski: Yeah; so but it--it was a very tough environment for us. We started having at our annual meeting Women in MACo Breakfast just so we could get to know each other. We were such a tiny little proportion of the people in the Association. And the men went bonkers. They were furious. They heard us laughing at our breakfast. We were telling our stories and sharing stories. And they thought we were talking about them. And they actually put a--a motion on the Floor of the Convention to end Women in MACo Breakfast. That's how threatened they were by us 7-percent of their Association.

00:34:15

Evan Barrett: Now when we look at this thing, we're--we're looking forward to the current time. And part of the context of this series by the way is that we made a lot of progressive change in the 1970s and one of the challenges is not to slide back. And in the case of--of women in the public arena, we still haven't gotten there. So that's part of the larger context of what we always want to talk about. Would you say that now at the County Commission level, is the problem now with the Commissioners who are male and opposed to female or is it with the electorate?

00:34:59

Jane Jelinski: Um, perhaps both. It has changed. Since that time MACo, the Montana Association of Counties elected the first female President of the Association, the elegant Hill County Commissioner Toni Hagener. She was the first--

00:35:18

Evan Barrett: She was a guest on one our programs by the way.

00:35:19

Jane Jelinski: Yes and she was such a wonderful example of excellence. And she was followed by Anne Mary Dusso was elected President and I was elected President in '94 and subsequently there are a lot more women in leadership in the State Association. So there's been tremendous progress on that--on that and I think in terms of the electorate I think the gender is less a detriment than it was. But the other issue is there are so few women willing to run and I see that as a problem not only in County government but in State and Federal government as well.

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They have not gotten the financial support. There's all sorts of data about reluctance to fund women's campaigns, except for Emily's List. And women are just--see that this is too tough a hill to climb I think in many cases and have difficulty getting people assuming that they should be leaders.

00:36:36

Marilyn Wessel: And yet having a seat at the table is critical.

00:36:38

Jane Jelinski: Right.

00:36:38

Marilyn Wessel: You know that really is one of the most important parts of the Feminist Movement and congratulations to Jane and Dorothy for being willing to do that. But young women coming up have got to be thinking about these things.

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Evan Barrett: I think about that.

00:36:51

Marilyn Wessel: You know and--

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Evan Barrett: I always say that you know the only--people say well why didn't you run for office? I always said the only thing I ever wanted to run for was cover. *[Laughs]* But--but--

00:36:59

Marilyn Wessel: Well there is that.

00:37:00

Evan Barrett: But the reality is it takes--it takes something to have the guts to put yourself out in the public arena, expose yourself to an up or down vote, and then have to go through what you have to go through. And actually the political world is getting almost tougher and harsher.

00:37:16

Marilyn Wessel: Well that's why groups like the Women's Political Caucus exist and that's why groups of that sort are there because they realize that you need extra support in order to run women for office and run them successfully. And one of the things we did in our early feminist efforts in Southwestern Montana was to form a Chapter of the National Women's Political Caucus in Bozeman with the idea that we would be there to help fund-raise, to do literature drops, to have phone trees, to scream and yell when the Judges did the wrong things, so that--that would be our focus. There were wonderful women's groups already working in the State who were working on issues, but to get a group that really got behind women candidates that was the role of the political caucus. So that was one of the things we really wanted to work on.

00:38:00

Dorothy Bradley: But one of the amazing things that Jane did was also help us focus on how we were raising our children and what their attitudes were which has I think a lot to do with how you perceive yourself fitting into the big mix when you're an adult and the--the work--the work that she did in that regard was absolutely startling and eye-opening to most of us.

00:38:26

Marilyn Wessel: This is before she was a County Commissioner, right? *[Laughs]*

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Jane Jelinski: Well before.

00:38:28

Dorothy Bradley: That's when she had little kids at home.

00:38:31

Jane Jelinski: Right; yeah.

00:38:31

Evan Barrett: So we--shall we harken back to some of that?

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Marilyn Wessel: Yeah; it's very interesting.

00:38:35

Jane Jelinski: I think it's important because it--it--I think it's a good--gives a good picture of the cultural environment that were living in, in the '70s. When I moved to Bozeman in 1973 and the Women's Political Caucus was already up and running; they were the movers and shakers and very involved, and I had a brand new baby and a five year-old and I had been a grade school teacher in the past. And they recruited me to conduct a study of sexism in grade school readers of K through 6. And I partnered with Dr. Louise Hale who was a Sociologist. And she designed this study. And the Bozeman School Board was initially interested in cooperating with that. And after the word got out they were going to cooperate they decided that--that was too controversial.

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So we just did it anyway without them and--uppity women that we were.

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Evan Barrett: You know better to beg forgiveness than to ask--

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Jane Jelinski: Exactly; exactly. They did loan us the textbooks, all of the grade school readers, and the results were so shocking that they were headlined all over the State. The headline was in the *Billings Gazette: Your Mother is [Adult or A Dote]*. Here's what we found. The most alarming result was the image of adult women. They were incompetent, they were insensitive, they were belligerent, they were always messing up with the kids' fun; dads were fun-loving and involved and helpful and employed. And if there was a problem to solve the children in these readers--now these are our kids from age 5 to 12, 14--were seeing that their moms couldn't do anything but be an impediment. And there were very not--few instances of them too. The male numbers of characters in those were outnumbered--the girls, 2 to 1. The boys were depicted as stronger and smarter than their mothers and all the other female characters. And of the main characters of children, 75 and a half-percent were males and 24 and a half-percent were females.

00:41:11

Evan Barrett: Three to one, so it's certainly out of proportion.

00:41:13

Jane Jelinski: Yeah and the illustrations were so bizarre too because they--you know that from age 5 to 12 you know that the girls are taller and bigger than you, right?

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Evan Barrett: My--my six and a half year-old granddaughter, I look at her every day and see how she towers over all the boys [*Laughs*]--.

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Jane Jelinski: Exactly; exactly. And but in the illustrations the boys are taller. And so that brings up an issue too that sexism in this kind of false representation of ability and even physical appearance is a detriment to males as well as females that a little boy sees all these powerful, smart, active, big guys and he's a little bitty weeny guy, that--that reflects very badly for them. And here was one of the most astonishing things; aside from--in one of the books there were 352 consecutive pages in which there was not one significant female character. What's that tell our kids?

00:42:21

Another reader contains 172 consecutive pages without a single significant female. And in the entire text of another reader only one story had female children as main characters, for 279 pages there's no female of importance so that's what it was like then. So I wanted to look at what has changed now, right; we've got--

00:42:50

Evan Barrett: So you've updated your analysis a little bit?

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Jane Jelinski: No; I'm not doing anymore studying of this, I'm too busy, but I wish someone else would to look back at grade school readers again and do this parallel study. But the movie star Geena Davis has created an institute study to show the gender gap in TV and film and just last month she put out a report that fewer than 31-percent of all speaking parts in film and TV worldwide go to women. And women make up only 17-percent of roles as background characters. That's like on the show *The Walking Dead*, if you're watching it, look--look at all the zombies coming at you.

00:43:42

Marilyn Wessel: Even women don't get equal time in zombies.

00:43:43

Jane Jelinski: We don't even get to be zombies.

00:43:45

Evan Barrett: You know you might make a case that more male zombies would be appropriate. [*Laughs*] But it is not proportional for sure.

00:43:54

Jane Jelinski: Right.

00:43:55

Marilyn Wessel: But you know the books that Jane was looking at those were not books published in Montana. Those were books from national textbook publishers, so it wasn't a Bozeman problem; it was a national problem.

00:44:04

Jane Jelinski: Right; I suspect--

00:44:05

Evan Barrett: Yeah; I think the--again, the--to make legal changes which is often the place where we go to try to do it because we can control that where--how do you control the sociology? How do you control the--the broader political world? You can go into a legislative body and actually pass a law sometimes over the objections of the broader political world and modern sociological context and yet getting that to catch up with the law is sometimes a challenge.

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Jane Jelinski: Right.

00:44:41

Marilyn Wessel: Yes.

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Evan Barrett: I mean when we get--

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Marilyn Wessel: We used to use the word *consciousness raising*. I don't hear it very much anymore but it was the idea that people would have different views about women and women's role in society and it doesn't come easily. Laws are terribly important but they do not change generations of tradition in the way in which people view one another. So it's a continuing struggle for us and I know that young women today think that feminism is not an issue anymore, that it's all okay, it's fine; we're going to be treated just as we should be treated. But those are fragile gains and not things that should be taken lightly.

00:45:15

Evan Barrett: You know time is flying as we're going forward, so I want to dive back into one of the preeminent issues of law in Montana and have us kind of spend some time and get our teeth into that and that is the Equal Rights Amendment.

00:45:28

Marilyn Wessel: Right; we're ready. *[Laughs]*

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Evan Barrett: We--we obviously had a strong provision in the Montana Constitution but the Federal Constitution, we--we--the people wonder about that but thank you for this--this headline in the *Billings Gazette* that back here in 1974 we became the 32nd State to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment. That was only half the battle because the battle continued well into the late 1970s to rescind that. Let's dive into the ERA here as we--

00:46:11

Marilyn Wessel: Well we'll be glad to because that was the big issue for us--for all of us who were involved in numbers of groups in Montana. There was a State Equal Rights Amendment Ratification Group and then it became

the State ERA Council. We in Southwest Montana and the Women's Political Caucus drew in with that group, worked with them, worked with the League, worked with lots of organizations. This was Jeannette Rankin's home state; how could we not ratify the Equal Rights Amendment? And we did finally get it done; as the headline said we were the 32nd State to ratify and we took a victory lap. You know we thought things were going to be much different and really great.

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We were unprepared I think it's fair to say with the backlash of people who were completely against the Equal Rights Amendment. They tried to rescind it in the 1975 Session, '77, '79, and '81--every opportunity that could be presented. And I'm proud to say thanks to the work of many, many, many people in this State, Montana never did rescind the Equal Rights Amendment so we are among those States that both ratified and maintained the ratification. But the arguments that came up against the ERA were really attempting to make women fearful about what their futures would be, make women fearful about what would be possible for their daughters, you're all going to be using the same restroom, your daughters are going to be sent off to fight in Vietnam, which if you remember was a huge issue at that particular time, you're going to lose your right to be treated in a polite manner, and these were things that conservative groups who saw an opportunity for a wedge issue, one of the early wedge issues I think in the political spectrum to sort of fire up their base, were able to use and they brought those arguments into the Legislature and we had close votes in every single one of those rescission efforts. And Dorothy was there for some of them. We were all there testifying. We were all talking to Legislators. But we were pretty amazed at how much fear was generated around that Amendment.

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And if I could just recite the wording; it just simply says *equality of rights under the law will not be denied or abridged by any State or the United States on account of sex*. That's all that Amendment says. It is a very straightforward addition to the--to the National Constitution. And yet it was a subject of huge debate and a great deal of anger and acrimony.

00:48:35

Evan Barrett: I think the clarity of that language was frightening to some folks because under that--under that umbrella think of the change that could be called upon and then didn't we have a--we had external influences

coming in here as I--I remember when Phyllis Schlafly was her name was headed up an outfit called the Eagle Forum and they came in and they--they played with local Montana conservative family-oriented--family groups and conservative groups to fight back on this thing and try to rescind the thing. That was the--the really the big battle. I remember that Jack McDonald who was a State Senator, who was a Democrat at that time--he later became a Republican later--but Jack was quoted in *Time Magazine* and it was one of the more awkward moments for me as a Montanan to read a quote in *Time Magazine* where a State Senator stood on the Floor of the Montana Senate and said *if Jesus Christ would have wanted women to be equal he would have had six women apostles and six men apostles*. What a thing to have us be noted for--that kind of thinking and yet it was a tough fight.

00:49:45

Dorothy Bradley: Well what I would--one of the things I remember is--and I'm always curious to see what makes an issue erupt in the public the way that one did because in one of the States that was fighting so diligently for the Equal Rights Amendment, they did a poll and went out in the street and--and read the language that Marilyn gave us of the content and nobody had a problem with it.

00:50:09

But when it came down to the ERA, it was--it was volcanic. It was--it just created terrible furor and I always wonder how do you frame things better so people really understand what the nature of the beast is because that one became all out of context? And the second thing I would just say is--and I think we all believe in this--people have to keep guard over their rights that they have. It's amazing; if you become sort of immune or disinterested how things can get chipped away and everything that we have fought for and even the suffrages having fought so hard for the vote, like I think of Elizabeth Katy Stanton who worked 60 years to get the women's vote and never got to vote herself, and yet one of the biggest non-voting groups is young women.

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If we don't stay diligent those rights will get chipped away and I hope we can give people that little warning because they're not necessarily protected forever.

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Evan Barrett: You know the voter suppression of today which has found a voice in the Supreme Court and then in a lot of State Legislatures, you know one of the endangered species for voting is--is women because if you look at for example in the Texas case, what they've done is they've--they've said you--you need a photo ID and you need to--and by the way if it has your married name on it and you were divorced and you changed your name, you can't use it. So they--it is automatically more difficult for women who were--went through name changes to be able to be eligible to vote in Texas--on purpose.

00:51:55

So one of the things we say at the introduction of all these programs is *the battle against the established power structure was not easily won*. And then we also look at it and say we don't want to be sliding back; how do we retain what we have? And that is exactly what you're talking about.

00:52:11

Marilyn Wessel: Right; and the ERA, while we didn't get it added to the Constitution, the time limit even though it was extended ran out, and it is no longer a big debate, it is still an issue. It's still a very important issue. It's introduced every year into the Congress. There are many people who feel that we will ultimately get an Equal Rights Amendment added to the Constitution. There are ways in which that could be done, some more desirable than others. But we still need that constitutional protection. Women I think really do need that constitutional protection because of the backsliding that you're mentioning and we always felt that we had great protections here in Montana because of our Montana Constitution. But we don't all live in Montana and there are many States who have many fewer protections. So a Federal Equal Rights Amendment is still critical and it is a great cause for women to take up once again. And I'm hoping that the fact that Montana never rescinded and did ratify, some day that will be counted and we'll get to 38 States and we will get it added to the Constitution.

00:53:09

Evan Barrett: We are at 35 are we--?

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Marilyn Wessel: We're at 35 which have ratified--that's correct and there's an issue about whether the rescissions can be counted or not. But with three more States we would be there so one thing that could happen is maybe they'll take the time limit off and then we'd have more time to get it done. I still think it's a battle worth fighting and I think for all the reasons Dorothy has just mentioned and the things that Jane has talked about in terms of some progress, but not--you know extraordinary progress. We still need constitutional protections.

00:53:40

Evan Barrett: Well we have good language here in Montana. I guess it's not--if we care about the whole country and--and again there's not enough protection completely in our language either. We have to fight for our language in the Constitution to have the meaning that it has. And there's always efforts to have some retrenchment on that--that happened in every Legislature and it requires a-vigilance without question that we--we can't--we just can't be sliding back on these rights.

00:54:09

Marilyn Wessel: Yeah; and we're still here and we're still active but we want to get the word out that we're not going to be here forever. We're a little tired you know. *[Laughs]* We're not able to put in the days we once did and so we really do want to see young women coming up. And we do see examples of it all the time; it's not that it never happens. If you're in a university community you certainly see it, but we need to see more; we need to see much more.

00:54:32

Evan Barrett: Well there are many issues. The economic glass ceiling, the promotion issues, the pay issues--are still in the forefront, still being fought against; you know I--I'd love to see the diminishment of well you know it really isn't just 79-percent. It's maybe 83-percent. Well okay; well what if it is 83? You know that's not--

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Marilyn Wessel: We're still not there.

00:54:55

Evan Barrett: --even Steven you know and--and having you know I have--I have three daughters and I can assure you that they remind me constantly about the inequalities that exist. And but count me as a firm believer that I think frankly we--we'd be all better off if not only if the economics were even but if the--the political stuff was even.

00:55:19

And you asked the question and I want to make an observation; how does something become a cause-celeb when--when you read it to the real world and--and you know some people would refer to it as well the grassroots are speaking up? Well the grassroots agree with the language. Okay; but there's that astro-turf process rather than grassroots which is that political power in today's age buys a version of the truth that is different than the real truth. It happens every day; money whether it be the Koch Brothers--I'm going to be a little bit political but people who want to--want to have their economic and social and political advantages maintained, spend money to create an alternative reality, a truth that is not the truth.

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Marilyn Wessel: And it's often a fearful reality. I think that's one of the critical issues.

00:56:19

Evan Barrett: Fear is a big thing.

00:56:19

Marilyn Wessel: Fear is usually a big motivating factor to get some base of people upset and excited about things and in the case of the ERA, religion I'm sorry to say was often used. It was suggested that you couldn't be a good Christian if you favored the Equal Rights Amendment because there was not biblical support for equality. And that was a completely undocumented and ridiculous kind of series of statements and yet it made people fearful. I go to church. I try to be a good person. And they're telling me if there's an ERA I can't be a Christian.

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These are very, very heavy charges to make and they are frightening to people. And I have little respect for organizations which use that method of changing people's minds.

00:57:01

Evan Barrett: It is--it is intriguing to watch this whole process, but in looking in summation on this issue as we move forward, obviously we had a great history to start with about Jeannette Rankin, about voting rights in Montana; we had then that--a huge period where there was nothing extraordinary. In fact there was oppression and people were fighting to get equality met with nothing but resistance. We did have a period, a renewed period of progressivity in the 1970s, wonderful progress with the Constitution, with statutes, with the implementation of the Constitution, rights being laid out, the sociology changing somewhat, the whole image changing, but we are still constantly challenged to pull back from that. I mean I think it's fair to say that's kind of where we stand. And well again one of the things about *In the Crucible of Change* is to recognize that we became a State that was better and we have to avoid losing that. We have to avoid the sliding back.

00:58:18

Well thank you. We've reached the end of a fast hour. And this is all such fascinating material and you are extraordinary panelists and extraordinary Montanans. And I want to tell you how much we appreciate having each and every one of you here on *In the Crucible of Change*. We look forward to seeing you on the next program.

00:58:44

[Music]

00:59:43

[End Past is Prologue-Montana's Historic Women's Movement Re-emerges in the Progressive 1970s]