

Lyle Monroe and Sarah Vowell, 2021 September 1

Sarah Vowell [00:00:00] This is Sarah Vowell, and I'm here with Lyle Monroe, who was a delegate to the 1972 Montana Constitutional Convention. We are speaking on September 1st, 2021, on the House floor at the Capitol Building in Helena, Montana. Lyle, where were you living in 1971? What was your occupation and what was your political party?

Lyle Monroe [00:00:27] I was living in Great Falls, Montana, my hometown. I was working for a human service organization, and my particular job within that was to help young people get jobs and work experience. And the third part of that question was...?

Sarah Vowell [00:00:43] Political party.

Lyle Monroe [00:00:44] Well, I was I was a back and forth but before. But I did some research and I thought it would be better for me to become a Democrat.

Sarah Vowell [00:00:53] OK.

Lyle Monroe [00:00:54] I still am.

Sarah Vowell [00:00:55] And you were one of the younger delegates. How how old were you when you ran to be a delegate?

Lyle Monroe [00:01:01] Twenty-three years young.

Sarah Vowell [00:01:04] And as a younger person, what did what did you think you could contribute to writing a new constitution?

Lyle Monroe [00:01:12] Probably in one word: perspective.

Sarah Vowell [00:01:15] Oh, really? Being twenty-three?

Lyle Monroe [00:01:18] Yup. You have a perspective at whatever age you are. But that age I was young, yes, hopeful, thought I could do some things and I did.

Sarah Vowell [00:01:30] Were...And at that time, were, were you aware of the gravity of the task?

Lyle Monroe [00:01:35] Somewhat, because there had been a lot of the studies we learned today, a very good reminder of Marge Brown and people were on the study commissions to get a new constitution. It was eighty- two years old. It was mostly for the extractive industry and the and the and the ultra, ultra.... The, uh, I call them the the One Percenters, income wise and who controlled everything in the state and the newspapers and all the special interests. So I knew of that. And they we had that document had was eighty two years old. I knew it needed some changing. And so I thought it needed some younger blood with a different perspective. And so we went with it and it worked out pretty good.

Sarah Vowell [00:02:19] When you ran to be a delegate, how did you campaign?

Lyle Monroe [00:02:23] Lots of different ways. I developed some nice advertising in the Great Falls Tribune and the Leader.

Sarah Vowell [00:02:28] Do you remember your slogan or...?

Lyle Monroe [00:02:31] Let's see...'Vote Lyle Monroe the man you know,' was one slogan. And I had the Monroe Doctrine and the Monroe Doctrine was 'Montanans must become involved in determining their own future' and not part of that quote, on some campaign literature was, in my estimation, it was, uh, it was in contrast to all the newspapers being controlled by the extractive, the mining industry, the the all the people in power super elites.

Sarah Vowell [00:03:08] And did you do a did you? How else did you campaign?

Lyle Monroe [00:03:12] I had I made a 15 second TV commercial and I went door to door. I went door to door and I also went to meetings of people and and passed out literature.

Sarah Vowell [00:03:25] And when you went door to door, do you remember like who you met or?

Lyle Monroe [00:03:30] Well, I grew up, I lived in the neighborhood that I campaigned in, pretty much. But I also went to a Presbyterian church, and I had done some community

organization to raise some money for for some landless Native Americans in Great Falls. And we had a fundraising thing and we raised some money and they got some money to do some of their cultural things. And now it's built. And then that whole, that whole movement after the sixties, late sixties, et cetera, they that native our group, our senator, our senior senator from Big Sandy. He is a he has...

Sarah Vowell [00:04:14] Are you talking about Senator Tester?

Lyle Monroe [00:04:15] Tester, thank you for reminding me. He he helped them, the Little Shell tribe get some land where they're going to be able to occupy their own space. A couple of...

Sarah Vowell [00:04:27] Oh yeah,.

Lyle Monroe [00:04:28]couple hundred acres.

Sarah Vowell [00:04:28] The Little Shell Tribe has recently received...

Lyle Monroe [00:04:30] I don't know where it's located but but that's so that. So that kind of early exposure to me, to that cultural group and to support them in fundraising and their goals.

Sarah Vowell [00:04:41] So you were working specifically with the Little Shell tribe?

Lyle Monroe [00:04:45] They weren't even called the Little Shell. They may have been called that, but they were the Hill 57 group. They called them Hill 57, so it was a advertising guy, put a Heinz fifty seven on a hill. Over there, the whole of Great Falls could see to advertise his product. And so that group was on land they didn't own. They were landless, but they wanted to become a tribe. I don't know if they call themselves, but they were Chippewa Cree basically was their ethnicity, ethnicity. So getting acquainted with them a name would be Robert Gopher. His son might still be alive. Robert Gopher. And when Robert Gopher saw what was in the education article about, you know, respecting rights and and supporting Indian education in our education, in our school, in the whole state, in terms of educational funding. His dad, when he heard the Constitution passed, he just went outside and he just

jumped for joy. And so and they still continue on a lot of cultural things like powwows that family, if if all those people from Hill 57 that are living now, remember that if they were here 50 or 60 years ago. But the whole evolution of the Little Shell tribe and the Tester influence and them now going to have their home wherever it's located, it doesn't matter. They'll have their own place.

Sarah Vowell [00:06:09] They have federal recognition now. Yeah.

Lyle Monroe [00:06:11] Yeah, it's really important.

Sarah Vowell [00:06:13] Um. But before the convention started, what, what was your learning curve like? How did you prepare to help frame a constitution?

Lyle Monroe [00:06:23] In a sense you can't. But your foundational skills of reading, writing and learning about social concepts when you're getting your education in the lower levels and in the high schools, if you take some history of civics courses. I got I got there was a nice prof, professor in at the College of Great Falls, Doherty, Ellen Doherty. I used to listen to her on the radio. She would be broadcasting the the three different branches of government at the federal level and federalism. And also, I was very interested in that. I would, I would. I had been to a couple of City Council meetings in Great Falls and saw people on new people see how they operated, et cetera. And so I always had an interest in those current local events. And then that gave me the foundational skills to understand concepts, to understand governance and to understand voting and those type of things. So I had a fairly good for a young man. One of my comments, as I have, I'm a young adult with a responsible voice. And I certainly had that and we did a great job in the convention.

Sarah Vowell [00:07:30] The delegates, when they got here to Helena were seated alphabetically instead of according to their political parties, to encourage bipartisanship. How how did that influence the proceedings?

Lyle Monroe [00:07:42] Excellent. Excellent. The best first thing we could've done. I can't remember who who encouraged that so much, but that that made all the difference. We were all intelligent

people. The average age was fifty. So there I was at twenty-four actually when I got sworn into office here. But but being next to people of an older generation and me being next to them, I was next to an FBI agent that sat next door to me, the seat next to me. So all those people together alphabetically, there was no partisanship, no bickering. We certainly argued if we talked about the environmental or article today and there was intense debate on this floor about clean and healthful. And Bob Campbell, we know, was one of the leaders and lots of other people on that effort. Myself, too. So we we had some camaraderie, we had some laughter, but we also had a lot of productivity and we sat by our seats and we pushed those buttons green or red, yay or nay.

Sarah Vowell [00:08:43] And when did you did you vote for certain ideas that that didn't pass?

Lyle Monroe [00:08:51] Probably did, yes.

Sarah Vowell [00:08:53] And when that happened, did everyone just accept it?

Lyle Monroe [00:08:57] When you have a majority, we had a majority of Democrats, so it wasn't too often that we lost. But there was there was a tough fight on the environmental and the and a tough fight on the law, the educational article relative to law school. What should the law school's role be? What and how should it function? It was in the University of Montana Law School and it still is. But the whole, the whole, the the whole--the education article was so powerful about forming what kind of an educational system we have and we have for the lower grades and that sort of stuff, a governing body and for the higher education and trades and stuff like that. The the Larry Pettit was the very first regent. They had a board of regents. And so he was the first person they picked as their person to set up the new university system. And you know how great it is today. You see branches of you, MSU or ACE or University of Montana or whatever all over this state. It wasn't that broad and it certainly wasn't on on any branches word on Native American tribal land. That's all come since the '72 constitution. Education was a prim-, education clearly, was a prime mover of that and people that believed in younger people to get an education so they could know about voting. And so they could be informed

citizens. And so they could participate in the decision making of our state and help guide it grow where they wanted to go.

Sarah Vowell [00:10:39] In terms of partisan shift, even though you you aim to be nonpartisan within within the capital, outside of outside of the capital. What was partisanship like in the early 1970s?

Lyle Monroe [00:10:56] Well, unions. Union unions, unionism and unions of different trades were still very active, and they had paid dues and they wanted certain laws. You know, so many workers compensation laws or hours of the day that they needed to work for health, safety and welfare. So they supported a lot of Democratic candidates that agreed with them. Yeah, they ought to have protection, they ought to have good wages. They ought to have some health insurance, et cetera, et cetera. So they supported Democratic candidates a lot. I was a Democrat. I supported. I got I didn't get any monetary support from the union, but they endorsed me as a candidate that could do a good job, good job for working people in the Constitutional Convention. So I was thankful for that. But but I was I was such a good organizer, myself, a community organizer for the Neighborhood Youth Corps, that I was helping kids learn job skills by and doing the community organization for my own campaign and knowing a lot of people in Great Falls. I was a dynamo in just organizing this all. And that's why I got elected. But hard work. Radio advertising, TV advertising, newspaper advertising and hard work. And glad handing prospective voters

Sarah Vowell [00:12:16] Um, speaking of Great Falls. So the convention president, Leo Graybill, was from Great Falls. How closely did you and the other Great Falls delegates work together?

Lyle Monroe [00:12:26] Well, the some of the prime movers in the whole movement of constitutional reform Harry Mitchell and and another fellow Jack McDonald in the Belt area and other people like that were great supporters of we need.... They had studied it in the Proposition Pass where we could vote for that. Yes, we do need a constitution and they vote that was voted on. And then the fund and then the funding, if we do, if it passes, was in that same proposition, I believe. And so we had we had a we all went to a lot of get common both parties to expose ourselves to who we were, what we stood for, what we want to do. And so we were we were

we weren't. We were tight. We were a pretty tight gathering of delegates from District 13 it was called, Cascade County, basically. And so we work together and most of them, most of us agree. There were two or three mayors that were part of that group. Incidentally, I got more and more I got more votes than Leo Graybill, who became our president. I got more votes than Mayor Erdmann, and I got more votes than Randall Swanberg, who was also a mayor of Great Falls. So I was one I'm bragging on myself, but I'm telling the truth I was you could go to the records of Great Falls Tribune and see how I advertised and see where my vote count. Pat Williams showed me the records he had to remind me twenty five years later. 'Do you know that you got this, this and this?' So I was proud to be among some people who are really smart. Their parents came here as homesteaders, some of them, and they had a crappy time of it, of a with under a bad constitution. And the Federal Reserve was not helping them either through and through some of these Dust Bowl days and through banks closing down and other banks opening up and etc. So they, they and their fathers had experience of help, and mothers and relatives had experienced a very bad time, but they needed something to make that was going to make the document that they could expect that the people in the future, we're going to make some laws that are going to help the common man. I think a lot of that happened.

Sarah Vowell [00:14:45] And Leo Graybill himself, what? What was he like as well?

Lyle Monroe [00:14:48] He was, he was he was a lawyer and his father was a lawyer. So he was Leo Graybill Jr. And and he knew a lot about government by his studies. He went to Yale and he knew a lot about lawmaking through his father and and lawyering with his father. And so when he got elected, he was a very fine, very a very fair minded man. But he was like he could also be tough when he was on a microphone and he wanted you to keep moving. Everybody got to say what they wanted to say, but we can't all say it forever. We got to get something done and we got to move on on this section of the Constitution. So he really cracked the whip and we really focused.

Sarah Vowell [00:15:31] So you were from Great Falls, which is, by Montana standards, a pretty big city. Was was there a divide

between the urban and rural delegates? What did those city versus country issues come up?

Lyle Monroe [00:15:47] Pat Williams again when he did his study and you know who Pat Williams was...

Sarah Vowell [00:15:50] Yes, of course.

Lyle Monroe [00:15:50] ...he was a congressman for eight terms two years at a time, Western District congressman [Ed: Williams served nine terms, seven as Western District and two at-large]. So he did on a study that he did, he and the results of the he really studied the results of who voted for it fairly and narrowly passed, as you know. But it did pass. And so.

Sarah Vowell [00:16:10] Which which...?

Lyle Monroe [00:16:12] The Montana Constitution when it went to the polls where they could vote yes or no.

Sarah Vowell [00:16:17] For ratification?

Lyle Monroe [00:16:19] For ratification, yes. And so so most of the of all of Montana, that the rural draw draw the rural dwellers didn't like the constitution and say it was all fear. 'Jeez, my taxes are going to go up and I was going to take my water rights away' and all that sort of stuff. So there was some. So it was a division, and everybody of the Farm Bureau was one. The farmers union was another. They had different positions. So basically, yes, there was some tension and there was some difference of opinion. And so and there was some not truth telling, too. And so the the Democrats had more votes in the state and they were mostly urban and they won. The Republicans didn't. They were mostly rural. I shouldn't say most of them, but probably a majority of Republicans were rural and somewhere in the urban areas, too. So anyhow, the Constitution did pass. Obviously, you know, it came into effect. And so there wasn't a lot of rancor here in this body.

Sarah Vowell [00:17:24] No.

Lyle Monroe [00:17:24] But but however, advertisers and special interest groups spun it on media might have been quite a different thing. Hmm. So the what I would call what is now the radical right.

Sarah Vowell [00:17:39] You served on the Bill of Rights Committee. Can you tell me about that committee's purpose?

Lyle Monroe [00:17:44] To, uh, in in one sentence to make a constitution that really frees people. It it's a it's a freedom document. It is a one that and I know Gene Harbaugh was using a term which is really good. Socially, it was a social contract. It was a social common sense, social compact. I think he used the word compact. And so that's a good term. People can gather together and to better things in their environment. Governmentally and laws and that sort of stuff. So I think we have helped develop a really good compact in that most of us stayed together.

Sarah Vowell [00:18:31] In the in the Constitution of '72, the the Declaration of Rights article has more than 30 sections, more than the U.S. Constitution. Can you tell me about one of your favorites or one you're especially proud of?

Lyle Monroe [00:18:48] Many of them, but I'm not going to, I'm only going to enumerate one. One is Section Three called inalienable rights. As the United States says we have inalienable rights if we're born here, we have these rights. So in this case, in the state of Montana, we have a specific section called an inalienable rights for just the people who are in this parameters of our borders and human beings. They don't have to vote. They're just human beings, and they're what is covered in this inalienable rights section. All I'm going to read it to, if you don't mind. 'All persons are born free and have certain inalienable rights. They include the right to a clean and healthful, healthful environment. That's one of them. And the rights of pursuing life's basic necessities.' If you like water, if you like food, if you like good health care, if you like comfortable sufficient housing, if you like access to public television, you have you have a lot of rights in this country about how you can conduct your life based on this particular thing alone. Basic necessities comma, 'enjoying and defending their lives, liberties and acquiring and possessing and protecting property and seeking their safety, health and happiness in all lawful ways' and next sentence, 'in enjoying these rights, all

persons recognize corresponding responsibilities.' So this not only has a broad and liberating view of what human beings in this place called Montana, those those the inalienable rights. They also have some corresponding response response responsibilities, corresponding responsibilities.

Sarah Vowell [00:20:46] Do you remember in your committee what what topic was did you have the biggest arguments about?

Lyle Monroe [00:20:55] Hmm. Well, that that one was one. But we remember you heard these words 'clean and healthy environment?'

Sarah Vowell [00:21:02] Yes.

Lyle Monroe [00:21:02] Well that was also part of the.... By the way, Bob Campbell sat right over there and he was a leader on some of the floor work and lots of others that spoke for a clean and healthful environment, which we finally won. But I I sent him a note from my chair down there through a page and I said, 'Please try that provision that... please, please ask.' We'd already been defeated on three different votes that particular morning...

Sarah Vowell [00:21:34] For a clean and helpful environment?

Lyle Monroe [00:21:38] And so I sent him a note through a page. He opened it up thinking it was from Leo Graybill and it was my note. It doesn't matter who it was from, and I don't want to take credit for it. He could, he sent it through. Got it. Got it to vote on again. And it passed. So a lot of people and all of us helped get that provision, not just one guy that sent a page, but we got it. And it's been a great thing for the Big Sky.

Sarah Vowell [00:22:03] Do you remember what he said that convinced people to vote for it?

Lyle Monroe [00:22:07] Well, he talked about it. Just I heard him today when he said compared to North Dakota, they said in their constitution, they were going through a constitutional reform that didn't make it. But their constitution they they wan-, in there's provision about environment. It was. 'We want to have an environment,' didn't have any qualifiers. So so the basic words he

was putting, asking for and fighting for was clean and healthful, that was going to have some teeth. So anyhow, on that third vote, it passed and we all approved it, and it's now part of the Constitution, as you know.

Sarah Vowell [00:22:47] So one of the people you were on the Bill of Rights Committee with was Dorothy Eck.

Lyle Monroe [00:22:52] Wow. Wow. Yes.

Sarah Vowell [00:22:54] And she was a member of the League of Women Voters in the 1960s and one of the leading advocates for a new constitution. What what can you tell me about her? What was it like working with her?

Lyle Monroe [00:23:07] What a dynamo she was in her whole lifetime. From Gallatin Valley, as you know, her husband was an architectural professor at MSU. So Dorothy had a leadership position. We voted for leadership of who's going to be the president, who's going to be this Western District, this and that and who's going to be the speaker of the of the Convention on the Floor, so to speak. There's a guy that had a microphone. We all have microphones, but there's one that has a phone on it. You see that one of the phone.

Sarah Vowell [00:23:34] Yeah.

Lyle Monroe [00:23:35] So I think it's a phone voting machine. And so there was Marshall Murray. I hope he comes to the 2022 gathering, but he was a powerhouse too. So we had leaders that could talk to people on the floor of their party or not their party about certain provisions. Dorothy Eck was everywhere she was on the Bill of Rights Committee. She was on the Education Committee. She specifically, after taking the words that are from my dela-, from a delegate proposal that I put in relata-, relative to Native Americans. It was entitled Free Indian Rights it was titled, and I think it was 151, but I can't remember the number of it. So she took and I asked her at one of our Bill of Rights committee, which is right down the hall over by the Senate by the elevator and after after discussion one day in the Bill of Rights, I said, 'Dorothy, could you take this wording here about the Native Americans, could you...?' It was broader than that because it was something that you

could because I knew she was an educator. 'Dorothy, is there something can you that you can do about Native Americans relative to education?' They need some education, but they also need to learn about their own culture. It was denied them. They were, they couldn't go to, they couldn't speak their own languages and et cetera, and they couldn't go to their own schools, that was BIA, all sorts of stuff like that. So she took that to the education committee and what she put together with people like Rick Champoux and others in that committee was what you see in the education article relative to Native Americans, too.

Sarah Vowell [00:25:08] Are you talking about Indian Education For All?

Lyle Monroe [00:25:10] For All. Yeah. Correct. Developed in that and you know, Juneau, you know, she ran for us, became the superintendent. So things really started to happen.

Sarah Vowell [00:25:20] Then what can you tell me about the day you, you all you've you've you finished the constitution and you had to sign it? I mean. We we all know those photos or the paintings of the Declaration of Independence being signed, was it was it like that or what did it? What was it like to sign your name?

Lyle Monroe [00:25:39] Well, I have a I have a photo of that, that I'm going to give them my kids. But we we didn't have to sign it. We didn't have to sign it. That was our prerogative. We could have not signed it, but every delegate signed it. Why? Because this revolutionized in a positive way what life would be after the 1972 Constitution was passed by the voters. It changed this state forever.

Sarah Vowell [00:26:09] And in terms of, you know, signing your name on the actual...

Lyle Monroe [00:26:13] We all went up near the near the front of that podium. Jean Bowman, our secretary of our group, was there and gave us a pen that we could keep. We signed and while being photographed, we signed the last the though, the last page of the product, we have the proposed document. And and then we got it to the voters.

Sarah Vowell [00:26:36] Did you feel like an historical figure?

Lyle Monroe [00:26:38] No, I felt like a very proud figure. Now I'm a historical figure. I'm an ancient fossil figure.

Sarah Vowell [00:26:46] What can you tell me about their ratification effort and what was your role in that?

Lyle Monroe [00:26:51] Well, we know that it was underfunded and hardly funded at all. First for for Jean to be on that committee and for individuals to try and go get it passed. I mean, they had businesses, their families, they had crops, they had stock. They are in every kind of occupation you you can think of. They had to go back and do their job. They didn't have time to travel around speaking. And we didn't have a lot of advertising money and all that sort of stuff. So it was, I call it a miracle. The miracle that it did pass. It was good, a good document. It was worthy of passing. But spreading the word wasn't so easy.

Sarah Vowell [00:27:25] Do you remember telling your friends and neighbors about it, urging them to vote for it? What did you say?

Lyle Monroe [00:27:31] I put a few bumper stickers on my car and I talked about to people. I didn't do a toastmaster circuit at service clubs and stuff like that.

Sarah Vowell [00:27:40] Do you remember what your bumper sticker said?

Lyle Monroe [00:27:43] Praise the Lord and pass the Constitution.

Sarah Vowell [00:27:47] So...

Lyle Monroe [00:27:47] It wasn't mine. Somebody... In fact, there was another reverend, George Harper was, we are about three reverends in our body and they would be giving a, and when we opened. We'd say the Pledge of Allegiance, there'd be a little prayer time. And so they would rotate on the microphone for a little prayer for the day. But George Harper was a Methodist minister. And so he he got this little bumper sticker and says, Praise the Lord, praise the Lord and pass the Constitution. So it was helpful.

Sarah Vowell [00:28:16] Well, speaking of the Lord, you when you went to high school, you went to a Catholic high school, right in Great Falls.

Lyle Monroe [00:28:23] Yes.

Sarah Vowell [00:28:23] And when the convention barred private, parochial schools from receiving state financial aid, were you in favor of that?

Lyle Monroe [00:28:31] Well, that's what I was hoping I remembered to bring. I had I lost, I misplaced my thing and I had the Constitution are going to read that provision to you. Basically, as I remember it, yes, we supported separation of church and state very strongly. That's a good provision to have in any state constitution, in any nation, in my opinion. But European, you know, with all the church, the from cradle to grave, you're pretty much controlled by birth, by death, by marriage and all the different things because their government and the church were one in the same in many countries. We didn't. We don't have that in this country. We have separation of church. But as I remember, it was a guy by the name of Bill Arks and he was a CPA. And so he for federal monies that were coming to the state of Montana for education in public schools. Hey, that was all right. In parochial schools, the only federal money that could come into a parochial school was money for USDA support for their lunch program. And in those days, you didn't get breakfast free. You didn't get lunch free at school. Every day you go there. But it was just a lunch program. So some commodities, some milk, some butter, different things like that. So I think there was an exception. And I sorry, I didn't have this in my pocket. The where we we at least agreed if it's not in the document itself, where the exception to federal moneys going into a parochial institution would be for if it's for education and it is for nutrition.

Sarah Vowell [00:30:07] So last year, in 2020, the Supreme Court heard the case Espinoza versus Montana and ruled the no aid clause unconstitutional. How do you feel about that?

Lyle Monroe [00:30:23] I'm against it because we're not following what our country was. Our country was founded upon, on religious

freedom. So when a lot of people came here for religious freedom, the the Plymouth Rock folks and different other religious group, they wanted to get away from all the all the problems they had of government controlling their religion in some European state. So they migrated over here. They set up colonies and had compacts and and they were doing and they some of them survived and some didn't. But they wanted separation of state. I think we still have, should have separation of church and state. Good concept. Let's keep it going.

Sarah Vowell [00:31:03] Every every 20 years, the people of Montana decide whether or not to rewrite this. They want the state constitution rewritten or changed. If if there is a new constitutional convention, what parts of the 1972 Constitution would you encourage those future delegates to keep or change?

Lyle Monroe [00:31:26] Remind me about the future, ok? In my estimation, when we every 10 years, there's a census of Americans, so everybody that is of age, everybody who's in a household should be enumerated and counted in the census. And then we do our apportionment for funds for everyone. And we do it for for re-.... Redistricting is a big issue right now in Montana because we're going to be redistricting so that that census will affect that. But the counting the I don't want to get the... So on the in the constitution of the state of Montana, we have every 20 years, every entity of government, cities, towns, counties and this and can can go to the polls and say, Do we want to retain the form of government we have in those entities? Or do we want to reject it and build a new one? So that is true, I believe with the state of Mon-, state of Montana, voters can say, 'Hey do we...' they can call, there's wording in the convention of 'Hey, do you want to call? Do you want to have a new constitutional convention' and and go through the same procedure we did before study committees, voting of the funding for the convention and the actual act as a convention? And we'll see if anything changes or if anything they do is so chaotic that the voters don't approve it. And so we'll see what all that.

Sarah Vowell [00:32:54] But is there anything in the constitution that you helped write that you hope those future delegates would keep?

Lyle Monroe [00:33:01] I would say ninety-nine percent of it, basically originally just the way it was, but I'm biased, obviously. But I think we have a model constitution, and I hope it survives a long time.

Sarah Vowell [00:33:11] And is there one? Is there one section or article or phrase in particular, you hope stays?

Lyle Monroe [00:33:19] Well, there are so many of 'em. Let's see if there's something freedom of freedom of speech. Freedom of expression is freedom of press. Without that and without educated people that can actually understand what the media is saying and and the issues, and they're getting good information. We have little hope of anybody continuing anything good. So, you know, everything, every almost every word in this whole constitution should all be saved. But there's people who have different opinions and people get misinformed and people go to the polls and they throw stuff out that is really good. So I hope that doesn't happen.

Sarah Vowell [00:33:58] If they're...

Lyle Monroe [00:33:58] So, I would say all of it. All of this document is worth keeping. It's been amended, you know, about seven times, which isn't very many over 50 years [Ed: Monroe is incorrect; as of 2022 the number of times it has been amended is higher].

Sarah Vowell [00:34:08] If there is another Constitution Constitutional Convention in the future. What advice do you have for those future delegates?

Lyle Monroe [00:34:16] Believe in democracy. Work with your neighbors, be an informed person. Go to the polls. Know, know what's on the legislative agendas so people don't rob us blind. Don't let too many foreign corporations in here to rip up our, defile our air, rip up our groundwater and make it unhealthful.

Sarah Vowell [00:34:41] What is your most lasting memory of the '72 Constitution?

Lyle Monroe [00:34:47] All of us... The whole thing quite truthfully, this whole event was so beyond. I mean, when you when

you experience democracy happening at that level and you worked hard to get where you're at and you see it, you see it voted affirmatively and you see what has happened. The book Out of the ah the ah, the the.... For a Better Place, For a Better Place. That particular publication has a lot of things that happen in environmentally and public land wise, et cetera, of things that came out of the products that we. And so those people got to work and they went into direct action and they got legislation together and they persuaded. And we have better streams and we have better air. We have still plenty of problems. But we we at least have a foundation that we can count on and we need to keep it that way so we can keep climate change, as you know, is a big issue. We can't. We can't, we can't. But we can do our part to not pollute, but we can't change the way the world turns on its axis. We can't change the heat of the whole globe. We can only do our part for us here in the state of Montana. So I hope we can continue to do that.

Sarah Vowell [00:36:06] Most of your your fellow delegates are no longer with us. Can you tell us about one you you'd just like to remember right now?

Lyle Monroe [00:36:15] Well, there's so many. Mae Nan of course, is good. I mean, just phenomenal work.

Sarah Vowell [00:36:20] She is with us, though.

Lyle Monroe [00:36:21] She's with us....Oh, not with us. Yeah, well, all. **Chad Blaylock** was on Education Committee out of Laurel, Montana. Great educator later on ran for, ran for Governor. Democrat. And he he died in the process down in Deer Lodge, while he was campaigning down near Deer Lodge. Tremendous educator. Tremendous advocate for people's rights and educational things. There are so many people that I could...

Sarah Vowell [00:36:49] I mean, you're looking we're in the we're on the House floor in the Capitol, and today you were here with some of your your old comrades. What what is it like being in here and seeing them again?

Lyle Monroe [00:37:01] Well, lots of memories. I have the I have the picture. You know, they took a picture from that podium of everybody on that last week and they took individual pictures too,

and they took pictures of us signing of the Constitution. So there are so many people in here that I like in so many different wonderful families that I got to meet. But leaders, we know about our Bill of Rights committee member. We know about Rick Champoux, the education committee that we know about the lady from Glendive, who was the natural resources lady and her and some of her supporters who didn't want clean and helpful, they bucked her and they didn't go along with her proposal and didn't support her as a leader. Very sad. There are. There was quite a few attorneys in the group. Bruce...

Sarah Vowell [00:37:48] You're turning your chair around. Are you picturing them in those chairs?

Lyle Monroe [00:37:54] Yeah, I'm trying to look to just remember because I know where some of them sat, sat and where? Miles Romney from Hamilton, newspaperman.

Sarah Vowell [00:38:04] What was he like?

Lyle Monroe [00:38:05] He was. He got an unbelievable voice and he was an intelligent man and he saw a lot of history. Hamilton is where Rocky Mountain there was a place there that did some research. Rocky Mountain Research Lab did a, helped fight and get a vaccine or a cure for Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. So Miles Romney in that county was a newspaper man and a knowledgeable man, and he would stand up, and when he was talking, you would listen. He was back in this area he was good. We know Mae Nan Robbins over there. We know that Mrs. Arlyne Reichert was very near her and she was a ball of fire and probably the most beautiful woman I've ever known.

Sarah Vowell [00:38:49] And she was there today. What was it like seeing her again?

Lyle Monroe [00:38:53] And she, oh, sure I did. I hugged Bob Campbell. Did you take a picture of me hugging Bob Campbell?

Sarah Vowell [00:38:58] I saw you hug Bob Campbell.

Lyle Monroe [00:39:00] Yes. Oh my God, we had some.... Another another.... We had a car dealer by the name of Don Rebel

from the Great, from Great Falls, Montana. Don Rebel Lincoln Mercury. He was really a super guy, Republican, real, real good guy. After he sold his dealership, he went over the University of Montana and got a master's degree in economics. He's deceased now. So he was he wasn't a big speaker, but he was a really good man. There were some attorneys that were lawyers. There were some attorneys that were really intelligent people about county law and about city law, and about state law, and they were just so, so knowledgeable, we all just listened to him and then we could vote appropriately, to help, we can do what we can do with that in the constitution to help those things function better and make everything work better.

Sarah Vowell [00:40:03] I I I guess I'm out of questions, but I mean, you're you're sitting here. I mean, you are we were joking about you being an historical figure, but you are. I mean, what?

Sarah Vowell [00:40:14] I can articulate.

Lyle Monroe [00:40:15] Why? How do you how do you feel about that part of your life about being here?

Sarah Vowell [00:40:20] Well, obviously jeez as a young man to be able to have that opportunity and to be able to do some things. I introduced five or five proposals, delegate proposals and about four of them passed. So for a twenty-four year old to get anything through in any elected body of 100 people, there's... Not that I was the prime mover I had, I had spon-, co-sponsors. My name, I might be the group's lead sponsor, but there's co-sponsors. So even if I did put in one delegate proposal or any of them passed... The event, the event is so profound when you are there, listening to it and fighting for your causes. And it does something good for your state. You feel pretty good for the rest of your life. So that's a high. I've done some other. I've worked in education for 20 years, so I now have my Social Security retirement, my education retirement, I worked in a different state where I live now. But that was that was a phenomenal experience to work in a junior high of seventh, eighth and ninth graders and being a facilities I wasn't a teacher could have been, but I wasn't. But I still influenced young people in a positive way and made their environment more clean and more healthful. And and they moved on because I encouraged them. My last day of work, they had...I also had a job as so, supervising the

lunch area. It was outside. They also had an insider. So I walked around. I would see everybody's face. I might not know everybody's name, but on my last day of work, they say, 'You're not working.' I'd get everything swept in. I'd be cleaning up. And so they were. They said, 'You don't have to work today. You sit down, we're going to go out and help out.' So the Anglos and the Hispanics, we had about 10 percent Hispanic kids and they just swarmed me, swarmed me, wanted to hug me, they wanted to kiss me. We love you. So I mean, that was a that was a profound experience. Education is a profound experience. If you're paying attention and you want to go for somewhere like you've got to get the foundational skills. We were talking about a lot of this. You know about education? You've done it. You see it happen every day of your life. And you know, you know how impactful it is if you can be involved in anything that you can help influence and help society. You have you're doing some big work for this world.

Sarah Vowell [00:42:40] Well, thank you for your service to the state of Montana, Lyle Monroe. Thank you for your time. And it's it's just great being here in this room with you remembering the Constitutional Convention of '72 to thank you.