

Arlyne Reichert and Mara Silvers, 2021 October 15

Mara Silvers [00:00:03] This is Mara Silvers, and I'm here with Arlyne Reichert, who was a delegate to the 1972 Montana Constitutional Convention. We're speaking on October 15, 2021 in Great Falls, Montana. So Arlyne, you had been in Great Falls for nearly three decades in 1971. What was your occupation at that time and what was your political party?

Arlyne Reichert [00:00:27] Well, I've actually been in Great Falls since 1945. That's when I moved here. But in 1971 I ran for the Constitutional Convention. And at that time, I worked at the McLaughlin Research Institute in Immunology and Genetics.

Mara Silvers [00:00:44] And your political party, your political party?

Arlyne Reichert [00:00:49] I was active in the Democratic Party. I had been in the state on the central committee, but I was most active in the League of Women Voters.

Mara Silvers [00:00:59] So tell us about your involvement with the League of Women Voters and what role that group played in convening the Constitutional Convention?

Arlyne Reichert [00:01:08] Well, the League of Women Voters was very, very important to me in many respects. It was my political education really because I moved here as a young bride. But I was always interested in politics. And when I was aware of the League of Women Voters, I joined as one of their members. And I worked my way up through the local board and then ultimately I was on the state board of League. And I work with people like most people, in the state have heard of Marjorie Hunter Brown. She was head of the law school afterwards. And Virginia Griffing, who was our local president of League of Women Voters. And Lucille Speer, who was the head librarian at the University of Montana. They were all very active in the League of Women Voters and they were my teachers. And when I served on the state board, it was a political science education.

Mara Silvers [00:02:04] And what role did the League of Women Voters have in pushing for the Constitutional Convention to take place?

Arlyne Reichert [00:02:09] That was one of their primary purposes in those days because they recognized early on that our State Constitution, which had passed in 1889, left a great deal to be desired. And we lobbied in League of Women Voters, we were among the early lobbyists and we learned early on that there were so many secret votes. So much went on behind closed doors really bothered us of what they called executive session because they'd speak, and then when it came time to vote, everybody would have to leave the room. Even the press, those meetings were not open to the public. A lot was done in secrecy. And so the state was controlled. It was controlled by the main interests and other interests and people. The ordinary person had absolutely no input. And we didn't know what was going on. So the League of Women Voters called it the attention of the public that we need open government. And that was our primary purpose. But we found a lot of shortcomings in the Constitution addition. But that was our primary motivation, and the League was one of the earliest groups to get involved.

Mara Silvers [00:03:28] So in 1970, you ran for a position in the state Legislature and you lost. What were some of the factors that made you decide to run for that seat? And later on, what was different about campaigning to be a delegate?

Arlyne Reichert [00:03:44] Well, first of all, I've been interested in politics since I was a little girl. I was raised in Buffalo, New York. And my mother was always interested in politics. She says people may not be interested in government, but government's interested in them. And people and of course, with so many things happening like the World War, I mean, we had no control. And I was a child of the Depression when the economy was so horrible. We depended on the economy. The economy was just it was really very sad because people were selling apples on the street. People had no money. And oh, it was just horrible and something had to be done. And I was, so I was interested in politics as a little girl, and my mother always voted, she never, ever missed an election, she said that's something you should always do. And so my early motivation was an interest in politics. And then when I moved to Great Falls, I

became interested in just because being a smaller community than Buffalo, is much easier to become involved. And even though I had a large family, ultimately five children and my husband and myself, I always found time to be involved. And so, I wound up being secretary of the Democratic Central Committee, and I was so interested in what was going on statewide and locally. So it was kind of natural for me to run for the Legislature. But at that time I was working at the McLaughlin Research Institute and I had to ask my boss for leave of absence in case I was elected. But I was not elected. I was a loser. And at that time, you know, it's no fun to lose. It's kind of deflating to the ego. And I had spent a lot of time trying to get that seat. And we didn't have a single member districts. At, before the Constitution you ran at large. And so Cascade County had 12 people elected. And when I ran in 1970, I came in 13th and my middle son, he said, 'Mother, you always told us that losing builds character.' So I thought, well, at least I'm building my character. But I was unhappy and I was sad. And one of my best friends was elected Dorothy Bradley. She was elected. Then she was the only woman, a very bright young woman, quite a bit younger than I am. And I thought, oh, Dorothy, so lucky. I was wrong because I wish that Dorothy had not been elected just since I had not been elected, because Dorothy would have been a wonderful Constitution Convention delegate. And she often said, 'You know, if I hadn't been in the legislature,' because the Supreme Court in Montana ruled in its wisdom that legislators, in fact any elected official, no matter what, could not be eligible to be a delegate. That's what really changed the nature of the delegation to the Constitutional Convention. No politicians, some of them had been legislators years before, but no currently elected official could run. So here we were 19 women were elected, five ministers, and it was just it was amazing. It was just amazing. So in retrospect, losing the election was one of the best thing that ever happened to me because I would not have been a delegate otherwise.

Mara Silvers [00:07:15] And what was it like to campaign to be a delegate? How did you tell voters that you were somebody who deserved this position?

Arlyne Reichert [00:07:23] Well, I didn't, it never cost me anything. I really didn't have to do much because right after I was defeated for the Legislature, I proposed to the local television network, a program on upcoming legislative hearings. So I was on

TV every day as a legislative reporter during that session about upcoming hearings. So when I ran for office, I didn't have to advertise or I didn't have to do any political campaigning because people knew me. But I did have one gimmick. I remember that. Well, that was when I ran for the Legislature. My mother helped me. She says, 'You need a gimmick,' when I ran for the legislator, Legislature. She says, 'How about a recipe?' Well, I was not known for my domestic abilities, but I came up with a recipe. And it was it was good. It was very good. It was called, um, it was called chicken delight. So at that time, no computers or anything that was in 1970, I had my committee. I had a nice little legislative committee, write out recipes and the little recipes would say, Vote for Arlyne Reichert, Chicken Delight. And oh my gosh, did that have repercussions. Here I'm a young widow and I'm saying, vote for Arlyne Reichert's chicken delight. That would never do so. We threw away all those recipes and we renamed the recipe rice chicken. And even though I was defeat defeated, for years afterwards people said, 'We loved your recipe, Arlyne!' Rice chicken. So the gimmick would work, but not, not enough. But when I ran for that to get back to your question, Mara, when I ran for the Constitutional Convention, I was known because I had done that legislative report for a couple of years. And so it was just easy. And there were 56 people in our county who ran for the delegation, and I came in second of 56 and it never cost me one cent, so that's the power of television, especially in those days, you know, we didn't have any other networks. And that was a CBS network that I was on.

Mara Silvers [00:09:46] So when you got to the Constitutional Convention, the delegates were seated alphabetically instead of by political parties. How do you think that influenced the proceedings?

Arlyne Reichert [00:09:57] Oh, that was a tremendous influence. It made all the difference in the world. As a League of Women Voters member, I had gone in [to] lobby of the Legislature prior to the convention. And there were the Democrats on one side and the Republicans on the other, and it was an immediate confrontation. You know, some people just stuck to the party, no matter what. And so the issues became secondary. The party came first. So political party politics was very strong. In the Constitutional Convention, there were some independents who were elected, but that wasn't the primary reason for sitting alphabetically. One of our

delegates, whose name is Chet Blaylock, is a teacher. He said 'It would be so much better if we could just forget our parties and just discuss issues and let's sit alphabetically.' Oh, that was a great move. And so we voted overwhelmingly to do that. So my seatmate was Mae Nan. Her name was Ellingson then, Mae Nan. And we were of different parties, I learned later, but we voted virtually the same. I mean, our our concept of issues exactly the same.

Mara Silvers [00:11:09] I was going to ask, what do you remember about the delegates who are seated in your row? So beyond Mae Nan, who do you remember who sat next to you?

Arlyne Reichert [00:11:16] We had, our whole row, our row was wonderful. We had Miles Romney and he was a very well-known person in this area. We had Richard Roeder, who a professor in Bozeman, who wrote a book too about politics. And his whole life was he had come from Philadelphia, but he was one of the brightest delegates, and we had Sterling Rygg, who was kind of an older, ordered, older automobile dealer. I think we had a broad mix in Kalispell. And we had George Rollins. I remember he was up the hill from Billings with a huge family, and he was just an amazing delegate. So our whole room, I think I shouldn't mention names because I probably made errors of omission. But we had, our, our row was tremendous.

Mara Silvers [00:12:10] One of the other prominent delegates from Great Falls was Leo Graybill, who ended up serving as the president of the convention. Tell me about your memories of him.

Arlyne Reichert [00:12:19] Oh, he was a great leader. He just, um, so fair. He said right at the beginning, he's not going to cut off debate and he never did it. Sometimes our sessions would go on and on and on and on, and we had to meet Saturdays and Sundays. He would not cut off debate. But I knew Leo way before that because his folks were very active in the community and his dad was active, Leo Graybill Senior and his mother is one who got me on the library board here. I served on the library board as a young mother, and she said 'You, you should try to be on the library board,' and it was a real joy for me. And Leo's wife, I knew her in Buffalo, New York, because she I didn't really know her. She was a broadcast nationally as Hoagy Carmichael's right hand. And Hoagy Carmichael, I don't know, you may you, young people have

probably never heard of Hoagy Carmichael, but he wrote Stardust and Butters, Buttermilk Sky [Old Buttermilk Sky] and he his helper was Shirley. And so when I moved to Great Falls, I was introduced by Mrs. Graybill to her son, Leo, and his wife, Shirley. I said, 'Shirley, I listened to you in Buffalo, New York.' Yes, she was signed years as Hoagy Carmichael's... So the Graybill family was close, but Leo himself was just so fair. He was strict and quite dogmatic. He was not successful when he ran for office, for Congress. In fact, he didn't get that, I think he got the least amount of votes when the 56 of us ran and he was elected as the 12th. But the point is he was so bright and so fair. I don't... I I think his chairmanship meant a great deal to the entire convention.

Mara Silvers [00:14:12] What were some of the important political issues in Great Falls at the time? And how did those influence your work at the convention?

Arlyne Reichert [00:14:20] Well, at the time, I think open meetings were really important, especially the newspapers and radio and television. I mean, everything was closed before the Constitutional Convention, before we wrote the new constitution opening up. So the right to know was a tremendous result and the right to participate. And there were issues, too, about the environment because in 1970, Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin started that wonderful drive for protecting the Earth. The environmental drive was started by Gaylord Nelson. And so we were worried about pollution. The Missouri River, the Missouri River was polluted as almost all waterways were, so environment was an important issue and, um, crime was an important issue. And there were so many issues that were of primary importance.

Mara Silvers [00:15:18] Out of a hundred delegates, 19 were women, and at the time there were only two women in the state legislature. So did that level of female representation at the convention matter in the day to day work?

Arlyne Reichert [00:15:33] It was just a great influence, I think, on the whole convention. But in the very beginning, when we decided to get rid of political parties and partisanship, just sitting alphabetically was not enough because oftentimes references were made to the political parties. But they we ruled that let's forget political parties. And so at the time, in the beginning, there was a

little difference as far as genders were concerned because when a woman delegate would speak, the other delegate would say, 'Madam Delegate, Madam Delegate, will you yield to this?' And the connotation was not pleasant. And so one of our delegates, a very sweet, naive delegate, Betty Babcock, who was the wife of the governor, when we started discussing political parties and getting rid of the party designation, she made a remark that was the funniest remark of the whole convention because she didn't like this Madame Delegate, Madame Delegate. And her point was well taken. But the way she expressed it, she says, 'Well, we're getting rid of political parties. I think we should all get rid of sex on the floor.' Oh the whole delegation... I remember we have a verbatim transcript of the whole convention. Yes. Leo Graybill, he said, 'I think that's probably a good idea.' So the women delegates, we never were referred to as madame after that, we were treated like the others. Sometimes we could tell that the men thought they had more knowledge, especially the twenty four lawyers. We had 20...We like the lawyers. Leo Graybill was one of them. And there were 24. But at one point during the convention, one of the people who in fact I think he was a lawyer, asked Chairman Graybill. He says, 'Do you think that maybe we could assign a lawyer to explain to us what the other lawyers are saying when they're testifying? So we understand.' And so Leo Graybill says, 'I think that's an impossible task. We can't reduce that,' you know, because they talk in legalese. But it was great working with and we're glad we had that legal background because we needed it. You know?

Mara Silvers [00:18:03] Tell me about the main committee that you served on and what its purpose was.

Arlyne Reichert [00:18:08] I served in the legislative committee because as a League of Women Voter, that's what we covered was the Legislature. That's where I knew the shortcomings were with their close meetings or executive sessions. And you know, they come up with the laws of the state. So I requested the legislative committee and I got the legislator committee. And unlike the Legislature, when I served the Legislature, I was on three different committees. But with the Constitutional Convention, you have one committee so you could concentrate on it. At least I did. I had just the legislative committee.

Mara Silvers [00:18:44] The convention debated so many things, but one of them was whether or not to change the Montana Legislature from being a bicameral body to being a unicameral body. You led on that issue. What was the appeal of a single legislative body?

Arlyne Reichert [00:18:59] Oh, well, when we ran for the Legislature, we were, I mean, after the Constitutional Convention, we were so fortunate because we had a group of young researchers to provide information for us. Our researcher for the legislative committee was respectable and what a bright young man. But what he did is provide material on all of the other states and the state he was most intrigued with, which influenced me was Nebraska. Nebraska was the only state in the country, and to this day, it's still the only state that has a unicameral or one body legislature. And when Rich pointed out all the advantages of having just the one body rather than the two confronting each other, I thought this is a great idea. So when proposals were submitted, I was interested in a lot of proposals, but I decided on a legislative committee, my chief interests would be in maybe getting a unicameral legislature for Montana. Why did we need 150 legislators? Nebraska was much bigger populated, much, much bigger population at forty nine, and they were nonpartisan. They didn't run the political parties. And I thought for our small population why we need so many. And then with the Senate down the hall, I realized early on when I was a League of Women Voter there was something wrong with our bicameral system. And to this day, I hate the conference committee and the free conference committee. At the end of the session, you just have a handful of people dictating to the rest of the Legislature. Take it or leave it, and you're stuck with some really bad legislation and with one house. I thought if we could do what we did with the Constitutional Convention, with the Legislature to this day, I think we'd better off with the Constitution Convention. We had one house. If we had had a Senate down the hall or another body down the hall, I don't think that Constitution would ever have been written. And I know that during the regular legislative session, so I covered both as a League of Women Voter member and subsequently through my legislative report, when you had to go through a whole series of all how a bill becomes law and you get it through, the one House goes to the other House. Well, I know from my experience as a legislator, I had a great bill that Marge Brown helped me write on local government, state

government cooperation for revenue sharing, and it passed the House beautifully. And here is the example of what happens is by Campbell. It got to the Senate. I couldn't even find it. The Senate kept moving it to committees where good bills go to die. It never came. I couldn't find it. I mean, there's something wrong with a system like that, so naturally it died. But the point is that I still feel that they say there's a check and balance with two. You know, I tell them that because what we did at the Constitutional Convention is we reconsidered and reconsidered and reconsidered. We didn't just accept the initial vote. We always vote for reconsideration and to understand what we were doing. That's the way we wrote that constitution. So I still contend that respect was right. He contends, too. Interestingly, the delegates agree the 100 delegates we had up a vote, 60 of the delegates said, You know, Montana ought to really consider going to the unicameral, but we all realize we all realize, including me, in the final analysis, if you put that in the body of the Constitution, we might lose the whole thing because there are so many people who believe that we need the two house system and they would vote against the Constitution because they would fear the unicameral. So I was one of the folks who led the movement to defeat my own bill because I realized you have to be practical and with the Constitution you have everybody got what he or she wanted. But I think we came up with the best answer. So we have those three some options the unicameral, the gambling, which was a big issue and capital punishment. Those three were very controversial, so they were separate options. But in order to pass any one of them, you had to pass the body of the Constitution. So the Constitution passed. If we had had the unicameral, then we might not have. But on the other hand, the gambling issue, I hate to admit it, but that helped pass it because the people in Butte didn't really care if, or some of them, about the Constitution because they wanted gambling. And so in order to get the gambling, it's a sub-option after they had to vote for the Constitution. So some people say, you know, it's a good thing we have that. So I think in our wisdom, we did some wise things. And even though it was contrary to our own personal desires, for example, with me and the unicameral, I was pleased to leave the bicameral, but I really wanted the bicameral to be annual sessions. So that's another story.

Mara Silvers [00:24:16] One of the other topics in the legislative committee was deliberating on single member legislative districts. What was your stance on that?

Arlyne Reichert [00:24:23] Well, I have the personal experience, you know, because when I ran for the Legislature and there were 12 elected, I came in 13th and I remember at that time campaigning was difficult for the whole county. You had to go to the whole county to campaign. You could, and there wasn't one district. And so I really thought that one of our delegates, Carmen Skari, he was on our legislative committee and he was rural, but he thought that single member districts would be a good idea. And I think he was very wise. And so I thought that is much better, I think, for the state.

Mara Silvers [00:25:05] You mentioned this before, but open government and the Movement for Transparency in public policy deliberations was also a very significant part of the Constitutional Convention. What do you remember about those discussions?

Arlyne Reichert [00:25:17] Oh, I think that that was the biggest change because as I said, that was what inspired not just the League of Women Voters, but others who studied the Constitution. Everything was secret, really important issues, and we had no control over anything that went on. So all the evils were kind of inherent in our state government and they favored the mining companies and others. We couldn't do anything. There was no such thing as an environmental protection, no such thing as cultural integrity of the Native Americans, for example, that we put in our Constitution. No equal rights amendment. And even the U.S. Constitution doesn't have a privacy provision. We have all those inalienable rights spelled out. So I'm really pleased with what we did. You know, in retrospect, the Constitution was very good for the state.

Mara Silvers [00:26:11] Of the delegates who were elected, none of them, precisely zero were American Indians. How do you remember feeling about that lapse? And what did you and other delegates do to address it while you were there?

Arlyne Reichert [00:26:25] I didn't really get that question completely.

Mara Silvers [00:26:28] None of the delegates who were elected were American Indians.

Arlyne Reichert [00:26:32] Oh yes. Oh yes, I felt sad about that. And one of our delegates, Rick Champoux, called attention to it. But now in the Legislature, there are a lot of Native Americans. So that's great. I think that the pendulum has swung, and I think the fact that in our education article, we have the recognition of cultural integrity. But it wasn't implemented for years. Dorothy Eck, one of our fellow delegates who worked for a year or so, nothing happened until quite recently when Indian education was set up, and I'm so pleased that finally, they're getting the recognition, our Native American friends that they deserve, but it was very sad. There were no there were no Blacks, there were no Native Americans. It was, you know, typical legislative body. Except there were a lot of women where most legislative bodies did not have a lot of women. So that was our breakthrough. And Jeannette Rankin was our heroine.

Mara Silvers [00:27:31] Give me an example of some of the issues or a delegate or a debate that you remember learning a lot from during the time that you were there. Was there a discussion that sticks in your mind as being particularly enlightening to you?

Arlyne Reichert [00:27:46] I think that the clean and healthful environment probably was the most striking because it was something new and it a lot of the delegates just wanted to just have an environment, you know, which was ridiculous. And so in retrospect, that was one of the most important provisions that we included. And it was included in two places, you know, in our Declaration of Rights and the Natural and Environmental Resources Provision and Louise Cross was our chairwoman. She just was so brave because she fought a difficult battle and upward battle. She was outvoted every step of the way and frustrated at times. But ultimately, the end. We did get that clean and helpful environment. And it's been implemented. You know, a lot of these provisions that we passed have never been implemented. That's kind of sad because we. But it took me a long time. But when the court cases came up in the clean and helpful environment, the Montana Environment, Environmental Information Center had filed suit in several cases. And so we have that, but sometimes some things

have. I know what provisions we have a code of ethics. I don't think it's ever been implemented. When I served in the Legislature afterwards, I was just appalled because the code of ethics would dictate that if you have an interest in a business or something, you would refrain from voting. And when I was there, not only did this individual not refrain from voting, he, who was head of a distillery, led the cause for legislation that favored distilleries. There's something wrong with that picture. There were a few attempts, and I know that one of the women legislators when Dorothy. There were two: Dorothy Bradley and a woman in the Senate, um, her mind....Her name slips my mind. But her hus-... They had stock in it in the distillery. And she said, 'I'm not voting on this issue and would refrain from voting.' And the head of the body said, 'Why are you refraining?' 'Because we have stock in that company.' But here, the man who owned the company was promoting the legislation that would benefit his company. That's not code of ethics. And to this day, the code of ethics has not been implemented.

Mara Silvers [00:30:22] You had mentioned Jeannette Rankin being the hero of so many of the women who were at the convention, and Rankin, the first woman elected to Congress in 1916, came home to Montana to address the convention. And later on held a dinner for all the female delegates. What was that experience like?

Arlyne Reichert [00:30:42] That was one of the highlights. You know, one of the things we did, we invited dignitaries. Charles Lindbergh. John Gardner, who started Common Cause. Jesse Unruh, who was a man in California who promoted unicameral. There were other leaders, but the one who strikes my memory was Jeannette Rankin, because we all admired her. I have some of her campaign buttons, that she gave to us, but she was so brilliant. And the point was that when she was invited, she was 92 years old and some of the male delegates, especially who, who wants to hear a 92 year old woman and they were griping and complaining. And Leo Graybill said, 'I want every one of you to be here when she speaks.' And so we had an evening session and she came and she was brilliant and her voice was still strong at age 92, and she really captured the imagination of everyone. She just was tremendous. And she had a lot of questions, and I'll never forget the question that really struck everyone because this is in the era of Vietnam. And someone asked because she had voted against the war, both

the First World War and the Second. 'What would you do if you were in a position now as far as Vietnam is concerned?' And her bold voice, she said, 'I would take those same planes and ships that brought all those young people over to Vietnam and have them bring them back right away. Don't they, they shouldn't be there. It's wrong.' And so everybody applauded, and we were very pleased because she spoke out. And not only that, she spoke also about the election. She didn't like the Electoral College. What else is new? She hated the Electoral College. And she actually gave us, I have a copy of her from her idea for direct primary where you you'd vote for people and then your top five would run against each other. It was pretty clever, but you know, the Electoral College is still with us. But when it came to being a gifted speaker and capturing imagination, you know Lindbergh was OK, but and Gardner was bright, you know, but actually, Jeannette Rankin, maybe I'm a little bit of prejudiced, but she was great. I'll never forget having the opportunity to meet her, and she took the woman delegates out to dinner. That's not very nice, though, you know the men delegates. I guess, for, you know, how would we feel here we are promoting the Equal Rights Amendment. And she's just favoring the women. But it was a great thing.

Mara Silvers [00:33:34] I guess it would be hard to take out that many men to dinner all at once, but that must have been a special experience. Tell me about the ratification effort. What role did you play and what kind of political fights occurred between the Convention and the election?

Arlyne Reichert [00:33:54] There were a lot of people who didn't like the Constitution because some because of the status quo, some because they were very extreme in their views. And we had some forums here, and I remember, well, I was invited. All of us were invited to one forum and none of the delegates went. They were a lot wiser than I am. I went and boy, did those people attack the Constitution. They thanked me for being there, and it really was very unnerving because they hated the whole Constitution with the passion. They didn't want on any of these equal rights or the right and clean environment. They just wanted the status quo, just leave us alone. But there was opposition and it unlike the area of the election when people voted, whether or not to have a Constitutional Convention that was passed overwhelmingly because people realized that the 1889 constitution, which many states had, uh, was

based on Colorado's. It was horrible, and then we realized that we wanted open meetings and there was a lot that we could do if we had a new constitution. And prior to the Constitution Convention, you could make changes three amendments at a time. But that that was cumbersome, but that's all that some states had. And what we were lucky people really wanted a Constitution Convention. So somehow we were fortunate. But to answer your question as far as ratification and voting for it afterwards, it wasn't easy and it was a very close vote for many reasons, because of some people who wanted the status quo. And a lot of rural people were very worried that the urban centers would get control. And so they felt justified in opposing it. And so it was touch and go. But fortunately, with those three sub-options, the controversial areas removed from the body it passed.

Mara Silvers [00:36:05] Were you surprised by the margin by which it passed?

Arlyne Reichert [00:36:09] Oh, yes, I didn't, I thought it would be passed overwhelmingly because, you know, I am an optimist. But it was at least it passed and it was upheld by the Supreme Court and there was a battle. It wasn't easy, and many of us appeared. I know I appeared on programs all over the state, and many of the delegates flew here, there and everywhere, speaking in support of the right of passage. In fact, our wonderful minister, George Harper, he was one of my favorite delegates. He coined the saying, and we've had bumper stickers made. Um, Praise the Lord and Pass the Constitution. That was our bumper sticker. We did it.

Mara Silvers [00:36:57] What do you remember your Great Falls constituents saying about the final product of the Constitution?

Arlyne Reichert [00:37:04] In Great Falls it passed overwhelmingly. So we had no problem, really. And in Missoula, it passed overwhelmingly. In the cities, the urban centers. And Butte it passed overwhelmingly. It was the rural areas that were negative, most of them.

Mara Silvers [00:37:22] Seven years after drafting the Constitution, you came back to the Montana Legislature as an elected lawmaker. Describe how that was different or similar your experience as a delegate?

Arlyne Reichert [00:37:35] Well, there was no comparison. I think the first problem was the lack of alphabetical seating, an interestingly, a lot of people, including our wonderful Supreme Court justice chief justice. For a while, Karla Gray worked hard to get the Legislature to consider alphabetical seating, but they don't want to do that to themselves. No, the parties are too strong. And to this day, a lot of people say, 'Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could get alphabetical seating for the Legislature?' So you wouldn't have that immediate tug of war and that confrontation, because when I was in the Legislature, I didn't like, I was just on the side with the Democrats or Republicans were. And while my best friends who were thinking much the way I did about issues were on the other side and I had two, especially from Cascade County. One was Toni Bergene, whose husband was a principal at Russ-, at CMR, and she and I, different parties, but we thought alike on many issues, and the other was W. Jay Fabrica, who was from Costa Rica, and he was a really strong moderate. So it's too bad that we couldn't sit alphabetically because I think there were a lot of people on both sides who wanted to discuss issues and not be bogged down with party politics. But that's what happens session after session, and we're having it now with the reapportionment commission. But thank God, we set up the reapportionment commission because before that, I was a legislative reporter when the Legislature had to decide our districts. They'd spend the whole session dividing up the state and which district would go, all the gerrymandering going on. It was horrible. So at least we have the reapportionment commission and I'm hoping that they come to some equitable solution.

Mara Silvers [00:39:29] When you were a lawmaker, did your perspective on the Constitution that you helped draft change or evolve at all? And what about in the years since you were a lawmaker all the way up until today?

Arlyne Reichert [00:39:42] Yes. I get upset sometimes when they change our Constitution, right? I the first change was so traumatic because we only have a year of annual sessions. And they wanted to go back and the people voted to go back to the biennial because they were afraid of what would happen if we had sessions every year. But the way we it set it up was really equitable. We were increasing the time instead of having the one long session in one

year and then no biennial, not nothing. The next year we broke it up into two parts. One year decide on finance and tax issues and the different departments and the other year just vote on legislation that has nothing to do with taxes and it would have worked out. I think it worked out well. We didn't say that, just had to open it up and meet every year and go on and on and on. So no, you know, I think it was really set up very well. And so to ask and answer your question, I was very disappointed in that early rule to go from the annual, which we never really gave a fair chance back to biennial and biennial, as we know it's a mess. And oftentimes we have to have special sessions and it isn't working well. It never will I don't think, because how can you project two years ahead of time and why not do one year with just tax issues and the other with other bills?

Mara Silvers [00:41:16] I don't know. Was there anything that the constitutional delegates did pass that later on as a lawmaker, you thought could have been worked out differently or done better?

Arlyne Reichert [00:41:27] Well, I think, no, I think everything I some of the amendments afterwards didn't support, so you know that we had nothing to do with. But I think that the Constitution itself, we did what had to be done in all of us signed it. We didn't think that would happen. There were 100 delegates because there was one Mr. No and his, alphabetically, we were seated. He was the last one to be called. Everybody was... 'Do you think Archie's [Archie O. Wilson] going to sign it?' And he did everybody signed the document. And so we were very pleased.

Mara Silvers [00:42:02] What did your experience at the Convention teach you about civil service and political involvement? Do you think it influenced your future participation in politics and civic society?

Arlyne Reichert [00:42:14] Well, I think it's very important that people realize that we can get along. People can get along even today with conditions as harsh as they are. If we could just talk to each other, understand each other, reason with each other. I mean, there's so much animosity now. It's it's kind of hard. And I just, my prayer is that this virus situation will leave before I do. And people will be more reasonable and to understand each other. And just because you disagree on an issue doesn't mean you have to just be

so disagreeable. When I was in the Legislature. I had a very, very, really an important issue that could have caused me to be enemies with one of my fellow legislators from Great Falls. And that had to do with a bill I introduced having to do with permission to use the metric system because this guy thought that the metric system was communist. And so he got on the floor and he called me a commie. But his wife was so sweet and he was on the same committee with me in the Legislature, local government and he... My birthday came up, his wife made me a cake he brought to me. And you so but so he he he couldn't stand my feeling about the metric system, which incidentally, my bill would pass. It didn't mandate. But what it did is it saved the Great Harvest Bread Company. I, Great Harvest's all over the country now know it started in Great Falls, and those kids who started it were from Cornell. They had metric pans. Metric system was used. That's how they worked their way through college. That's how they started their business on First Avenue North in Great Falls, and the big bakeries went against them and filed an injunction because there was a law on the books very well-meaning law that had to do with the weight of the bread. And it said the weight had to be one and a half pounds. And even though the metric one was a little heavy with this, they shut the door. It was locked up. There was an injunction because before that, there were long lines of people buying this Great Harvest Bread. And so they were threatened to going out of business because of their metric system. So I introduced a bill that was during the session that said not mandating it. I hate the word mandate. It was just actually permissive. Why not let a business use it temporarily or however, for time? And so it passed overwhelmingly. And my adversaries, as I said he did not become my enemy. He didn't like me because of that, but he liked me otherwise. And we are, he, uh, his wife, baked me a cake. So that shows, you know, you can get along. That's that was one of the striking memories of the Legislature. But you didn't ask me about that.

Mara Silvers [00:45:14] It sounds like that helped influence your your idea of civic participation and involvement in politics.

Arlyne Reichert [00:45:21] I don't think I have any political enemies, even those who disagree with me strongly about many issues.

Mara Silvers [00:45:28] Every 20 years, the people in Montana decide whether or not to rewrite the State Constitution. If that happens, what parts of the 1972 constitution would you encourage them to keep or change?

Arlyne Reichert [00:45:44] Well, I'm hoping they keep the really important ones about open government and right to a clean, healthful environment and the inalienable rights, the rights of equal rights amendment and the right of privacy and all the rights of young people. I mean, there's so many rights are so important. But my hope is that they don't have a Constitutional Convention. If they want to change something, do it, the amendment process one at a time, but not to rewrite the whole Constitution. I really worry about that because it will depend on the nature of politics at the time, and we thought we were being very progressive when we put that provision in. We thought, wouldn't it be nice if people could just very easily have another Convention and updated and upgraded? And we were not and we were stupid because it came up twice since then, though, because it, '72 was when we passed it. So it came up in '92, and the voters in Montana overwhelmingly said, 'We don't need a new Constitution. We like this one.' And then in 2012, it came up and they said, we don't need a new constitution, but it's coming up in '32. We don't know what will happen. So in retrospect, we thought we were being progressive, but we can be regressive.

Mara Silvers [00:47:11] In the future, if a new Constitutional Convention is called, what advice would you have for future delegates?

Arlyne Reichert [00:47:20] Sit alphabetically and think about issues and forget your party politics.

Mara Silvers [00:47:30] And last question what is your most lasting memory of the Constitutional Convention of 1972?

Arlyne Reichert [00:47:38] The camaraderie, you know, people from all walks of life. I mean, oh, we had wonderful, wonderful ranchers and oh, we had wonderful business people and all the people, ministers and everyday people and a lot of women, housewives and former mayor of Great Falls and so many people from all walks of life. We got together and we got 'er done. And I

think that it was just it's a lasting memory. And one of the things that was important to we were told when we wrote that constitution, we were going to have 60 days to write it and we're going to give you so much money. You got to do it 60 days. And we did it in 54 days, and what's unheard of, we gave money back to the state. Have you ever heard of that? No, we didn't need at all. We did it in 54 days. And so this shows it could be done. People say, 'You're never going to be able to write a new one.' And when I think about it, we work late, sometimes till midnight. Sometimes we get up early in the morning, we'd work Saturdays and Sundays. But we didn't have caucuses and we didn't have lobbyists. Lobbyists were a little upset with us because we wouldn't listen to them. We all wanted to talk issues. That's kind of unlike the Legislature, you know?

Mara Silvers [00:49:05] Arlyne, thank you so much for your time, and we really appreciate it.

Arlyne Reichert [00:49:09] Well, it's great. Old people like to live in the past, especially when it includes the Constitution. So thank you for doing it, Mara.