

Transcript of Milward Simpson
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This interview was conducted by John Hinckley, July 18, 1977, Cody, Wyoming.

HINCKLEY: Governor Simpson. Tracy McCracken, Wyoming's preeminent publisher and Democratic National Committee, told the State Democratic National Convention here in Cody in 1956 that within 15 years, organized labor would be a dominant political power in the State. What kind of a prophet was he?

SIMPSON: He was certainly partially right. Tracy was a brilliant fellow and a great political leader. He never sought any office himself. He was always helping his own party and helping his friends. Labor has always been a dominant party -- one of the dominant parties in the State. Ask any Republican that comes out of Sweetwater will tell you that. No question that labor leaders in Wyoming have been a pretty high caliber group because they're been under close scrutiny of the people as the legislature itself is. As a result that our homegrown boys, by and large, are the ones that are in charge. And they know how to converse with the legislators and people. I would say that it's still one of the dominant parties, dominant groups.

HINCKLEY: ??? historically been pretty well-confined to the so-called UP Countenance.

SIMPSON: I think a lot of that's true but that's been dissipated some. I can remember John. I was a just kid when Lander was running for the state capitol. I can remember in 1909 when they had the big red apple on their lapel. A lot of people in Wyoming -- most people in Wyoming don't even remember there ever was an election. I think we won that election up here in the north. As soon as those ballots got counted out along the Union Pacific, we lost out.

HINCKLEY: I think you suggested one time they hauled it to Omaha.

SIMPSON: I think they might have dumped it at some bridge on Crow Creek. But I think that's true -- they came within -- labor came within one vote of putting an end to the right-to-work bill. That probably was a high water levels for the labor unions.

HINCKLEY: That's interesting. Professor Larson in his history of Wyoming revision -- it isn't in the present edition but will probably be in the revised edition he's working on now, suggests that probably was the high peak of their organized influence in the legislature.

SIMPSON: I think both he and Tracy were right.

HINCKLEY: Governor Simpson. When we were talking yesterday. This won't be a very good context of the proliferation of state agencies and the question of a constitutional convention came up. I think you suggested we are probably long overdue for a new

constitution. If you were to write the executive article in a new constitution, would you retain four other elected officers in the executive committee?

SIMPSON: That's a mighty tough question. I believe I would. I rather think that a majority of people maybe would not. But I find a lot of solace in presiding over a group of four elected officials that share with you the responsibility of running state institutions. By golly, I think the state institutions have done fairly well under this system. And if you have any controls, you usually have the solid support of the other four elected officials. And, they do a pretty good job especially since we've started making the rounds. John, when they first made the rounds – this is sort of aside – we started visiting institutions when I was governor, we found a series of occurrences that were distasteful to me and others – but not to some members of the board. The different institutions we were contributing a certain amount of produce -- milk, butter, eggs, vegetables... especially to the state board members. That in my mind was unconscionable and we stopped that right off the bat.

HINCKLEY: Do you think you would have preferred the non-integrated hierarchy that we now have? How about the superintendent of public instruction?

SIMPSON: I'd place him elsewhere.

HINCKLEY: Appoint him?

SIMPSON: Yes.

HINCKLEY: And still elect your auditor and treasurer.

SIMPSON: That's right.

HINCKLEY: Why do you need two of them?

SIMPSON: I think you need two of them. I think you've got a situation there where one becomes a balance to the other. I think the work is so terrific you just couldn't get along on one agency.

HINCKLEY: I've been puzzled by the state examiner. Doesn't he in effect duplicate the role of the auditor?

SIMPSON: No. No. He's got more of a statewide activity than the state auditor. State auditor is a little more permanently situated and the state examiner has many duties he doesn't perform because there is no necessity for them.

HINCKLEY: Well I'm reassured that you agree with me on the constitutional convention.

SIMPSON: I certainly do. The sooner we get it the better.

HINCKLEY: One other question that came up is the suggestion that your proposal to buy the Yellowstone Park Company was not a serious proposal.

SIMPSON: I was never more serious in my life. That was the reason I appointed the magnificent committee of both democrats and republicans who performed a marvelous service and stayed with me throughout...fought that thing right down to the wire. We had...incidentally, something interesting there in the way of legislative work...how a governor can get some of these measures introduced and passed. After my committee made this recommendation that we buy the concessions at the price offered which at the time was nine or twelve million dollars – I forgot. We were going to buy it because I advocated that we buy it because Wyoming's always had the door slammed in its face. Anything within Yellowstone Park – all of the business goes over into Utah and Idaho. The U & I. Not to the east entrance of the Wyoming gate. Ninety-percent of the park was carved into Wyoming, not out of Utah and Idaho. The concessions weren't performing. They were run down and disheveled and just an awful state. There were many thorough investigations then we put the proposition...they were the ones that made the offer to sell. They didn't think we'd take 'em up and I think they wanted to establish a price and maybe they were smarter than we were. Then, I went to the legislature to ask for the money to purchase. That was an interesting thing in itself. This I think any political science student would want to know – after a certain juncture in the legislature, you cannot introduce a bill. There's a deadline there. That deadline – if you do get a bill introduced you've got to get a unanimous consent of both houses. I went before the legislature with what many labeled a socialistic vision and I called a joint session of two houses. I asked for unanimous consent to allow this bill be allowed to take it's course through the legislature. The time for filing bills had passed. After I gave the recommendations of my committee – the “blue ribbon committee” as I called it – a group of very prominent people in Wyoming. Every man in the legislature walked up and signed the bill. It took its course going through the house -- and I think we'd have got it through both houses and I sure would have signed– they whooped the ante on us by about three additional million dollars so that was the end of that enterprise.

HINCKLEY: They called it “Operation '66” I think...

SIMPSON: Operation '66 was a parallel operation. That was forced upon them...an early introduction two or three years sooner than they anticipated. They introduced Operation '66 which was for the improvement of the park and the facilities. And by golly, even the park services admitted through Jaffe, who is now dead – he was the Chief Clerk -- that Governor Simpson started Project '66 about four years in advance of the time they anticipated giving its initial debut.

HINCKLEY: So, whether it was serious or whether it wasn't it did have that effect and was a serious offer.

SIMPSON: It did have that effect.

HINCKLEY: But it was a serious offer. Governor Simpson. In the routine of a legislative session, does the Governor find himself pretty much in control of what's going on in the legislature or does he just let it go its way?

SIMPSON: If he's got a good executive secretary like I had in Bob McManus, to begin with, he's pretty much advised of what's going on and he'd better be. I instructed all of the agents and my appointee like the budget officer to get up there when the bill is introduced that affected their department to get up there and to give all the help he could to it and get all the information he could out of it. That hadn't been done before. You're left alone if you don't take an initiative.

HINCKLEY: Is your instrument the party caucus? Do you use that?

SIMPSON: I never used it.

HINCKLEY: Did you send a representative to the party caucus during the session?

SIMPSON: I never did. I'd call in leaders like Frank Mockler, Bartlin, Barlow and Al Harding, others.

HINCKLEY: It was a personal kind of thing.

SIMPSON: Yeah. I sought information especially in bills that where in the interest the whole state. Personal interest bills didn't interest me if they were worth a darn -- if I didn't like 'em I'd veto 'em.

HINCKLEY: You got a lot of criticism for a veto.

SIMPSON: I think that was a trucking bill. I got a lot of pressure to sign that bill and so help me, it can't have been too important -- I think it had something to do with the wheel base operations of trucks through Wyoming which is a bridge state. I can't remember the exact details but I did veto it and it caused some of my cohorts to sort of castigate for having done it because they thought it was a very good bill. It turned out that in less than a year, the time we vetoed national government changed it anyhow.

HINCKLEY: A thought occurred to me ...the veto. Wyoming's constitution does have another unique feature compared to the federal constitution in that the governor may veto an item of an appropriation bill --the sort of item veto.

SIMPSON: That's your item line veto.

HINCKLEY: Did you ever use that?

SIMPSON: Oh yes. I think that's a pippin of a way to do it. I think the federal government is wrong in that respect. That line item veto is a very helpful tool to a governor.

HINCKLEY: But that only applies to the appropriation.

SIMPSON: That's right but that's pretty important there.

HINCKLEY: But it would be a disaster if it were...I think some said that the Confederate constitution before the Civil War....

SIMPSON: I tell ya John. Suppose a bill came in that would have say appropriate \$50,000 for research and why a youngster falls off his tricycle. That's a good place for a line item veto and it would get it. On the other hand, that's \$50,000 that would help in some schools for an enhancement of the school system of Wyoming, it'd remain in there.

HINCKLEY: Of course, it would add dimension to the line item veto, that would suggest putting it in.

SIMPSON: Yeah, it does and it might happen.

HINCKLEY: I think we have pretty well the procedures...

SIMPSON: I'll tell you an interesting one if I may inject this into conversation at this place. W.R. Coe was a great philanthropist and loved Wyoming. He was a dear friend of mine, a client of mine. And when he made that most magnanimous contribution to the State University in the William Coe Library, he'd originally thought in terms of \$250,000 – I told that that isn't enough – that we needed more and he agreed and we whooped the ante to \$750,000. But he was sick in Miami and he said to me, "Would you introduce the bill and will you guarantee a matching amount?" I said yes. So I went to the legislature with it and they passed it a whooping and he told me it was all right. And it suddenly occurred to me, I was lying in bed the night that I signed the bill "what if something happened to Will -- he's down at a hospital in Miami and what if something happened to him that didn't happen to me. I've got a bill up here with an appropriation already passed and I've signed it?" So I called him and told him the same thing he said, "That's a good idea. I'll have my attorney come down from New York and draw the will and send you the original." He did and within a couple of weeks, William Coe was dead.

HINCKLEY: And you slept better that next night?

SIMPSON: Very much better.

HINCKLEY: One or two final questions Governor Simpson. Now our big concern is water and will continue to be. Did you as governor express any opinion on the question of granting preferred use status for industry in the 1957 legislature?

SIMPSON: I've forgotten the details of that. Was that the time when the iron – er..ataconite plant was being opened in Lander and needed some surety on water supply. We advocated a move up on the industrial water supply for the State of Wyoming which

we thought was important at that time. Under present circumstances, I'd take a second look.

HINCKLEY: That was my question. The haunting suggestion in the extension of that preferred use industry is namely that ranches become valuable only for their industrial water and our livestock turns only into summer pasture rather than a year-round.....

SIMPSON: That's a ticklish question in Wyoming and looms larger now. I think people, if nothing else is gained from this drought, one thing is conservationists are going to have a field day because we'd better learn more than we have. We've allowed our water to go whooping by and not utilized it as we could. I think we've got to face that picture.

HINCKLEY: What about our, in the same general theme of hindsight, which is marvelous of course, our long resistance to a mineral severance tax. Ought we not have considered a mineral severance tax at least insofar as a permanent trust fund as concerned years and years ago?

SIMPSON: John, I wish I'd been smart enough to have advocated that back in my term as governor because I think that's one of the best moves we've made and we should have done it back then. I was always against the severance tax, as you remember.

HINCKLEY: It was an unpopular proposal in Wyoming.

SIMPSON: That's right and I thought the great majority in Wyoming didn't want it either. I like the present law and in fact I'd go further.

HINCKLEY: Your son Alan is

SIMPSON: Yes, my son Alan was instrumental in the passing of that bill.

HINCKLEY: Did I ask you why you turned down President Eisenhower's offer of the Secretary of the Interior?

SIMPSON: No, you didn't. Well, John, it sounds, probably in the light of subsequent political moves and pressures throughout the country, it probably sounds insignificant. I returned to politics in 1952 as a leader of the Eisenhower group as opposed to the Taft group. I got interested and went to see Ike. We became friendly over the intervening years. When I was running for Governor, I said that if I was elected, I would serve out a four-year term according to the constitution which says "thou shalt be a four-year governor." We'd had four two-year and people were getting sick and tired—there was no continuity and too quick of disruption. No philosophy could be established and it was just hit and miss in governmental affairs and that was too bad because we lost some good men to the United States Congress. Of course, you don't lose them if you kick them upstairs but we lost them in the State of Wyoming and sometimes there was always the possibility you might get an inferior product. So, I made the statement I'd be a four-year governor. Well then came the battle between McKay and Norris out in Washington.

McKay resigned as Secretary of the Interior and Ike sent Herb Brownell and Sherm Adams to see me or to call me or contact me – asked me if I’d take the position. I remembered that promise cause I meant it. I made another promise one time I wish I hadn’t made – that’s another story that belongs into another area of history. I told Brownell, the Attorney General to tell the Skipper I couldn’t do it – I’d made that promise to the people of Wyoming. Then they sent Sherm Adam to see if he could persuade me. And Brownell called me here in Cody. I was here for some meeting up here and I said, “You put this proposition squarely to the President.” Tell him what promise I made and what he’d do in these circumstances. The answer came back that probably saved Ike’s bacon too – he said, “I’d do exactly as Milward.”

HINCKLEY: Well, that’s reassuring isn’t it?

SIMPSON: Yeah. You bet. He sure helped me out. You’ll recollect ...the press....nothing appeared in the press about it at all. Well, John, if anyone was going to release it, it wasn’t going to be Milward Simpson saying “look ...stuck in his thumb, pulled out a plumb and what a wise boy am I?” It was up to the President and his group to release it if they wanted to release it and they evidently didn’t want to release that they’d made the offer and that was all right with me. And I went on and never said a word about it and along about my campaign for the United States Senate. Ike insisted on flying in here and he flew in on October 9th down in Cheyenne, a beautiful day, a clear and lovely –it was a good fall day. He gave a talk to about some 8- 10,000 people who had gathered to see him. He told them, he said, “Send this guy to Simpson out there to Washington. I need him.”

HINCKLEY: Did he mention the Interiorship at that time?

SIMPSON: Yes. He said, “I tried to put him in my cabinet but he wouldn’t go for it because he said he’d made a promise to you people that he’d be a four-governor.”

HINCKLEY: Good. That’s the best way to announce then!

SIMPSON: Oh, you couldn’t beat the political significance in a hundred years.

HINCKLEY: So you in effect kicked yourself upstairs into the Senate which suggests another final question. When you were governor, did you have regular relations with our Congressional delegates?

SIMPSON: Pretty well. Especially with Joe O’Mahoney. We were great friends.

HINCKLEY: They’re the protectors of the state’s rights, if they’re representing Wyoming.

SIMPSON: I had Harrison up there who was a good worker. I had Joe O’Omahoney. Then Robertson was there one term. Then Barrett was in there. We had pretty close contact.

HINCKLEY: The lure of Wyoming, and we're not on the governor now, but the lure of the senate to the congressman is simply similar to the lure of the senate to the governor. Like Franklin Dell, had he stayed in the Congress, Wyoming would have had the speaker of the house. Instead, he ran for the senate and got beaten and that was the end of it.

SIMPSON: Yeah, I remember that campaign. We go way back.

HINCKLEY: Well, Governor. It's been splendid talking to you. One final question. In your senior status, what do you consider the most pressing problem facing Wyoming right now?

SIMPSON: I think I would be speaking for anyone in politics and in positions trust, I seek great tolerance between elements which can jeopardize Wyoming's future. And by that I mean there is a certain amount of worthwhile-ness in what the environmentalists and the ecologists are doing and a certain amount of merit to adequate and decent mining of our minerals. I wish these two elements, instead of warring, would get together and come to some compromise that would auger? well for the future of our state and not disrupt the routine. We've got a good state. The greatest state in the Union. I think we're the only state in the Union now without any bond of indebtedness. I hope we can keep it that way. I'd like to see frugality practiced even in these days of great liberal expenditures. I'd like to inject this ...I do appreciate this opportunity to spell out some of the things I was connected with in state government and national government. I loved the experience and I loved the people. Someone said to me, "How can you like that fellow after what he's done and said about you?" I mean this, I never had any room for hate. I loved them all. You go around hating people, you're not going to accomplish an awful lot. You'd better get rid of the mass?...a reason for disliking you. I might add, and I think it's probably apropos of this wonderful job you're doing on this political science set up. Look toward the wives of these people. Behind most of the good men, you'll find a really great woman. A woman like Nellie Tayloe-Ross. A woman like my wife, whom I met in Sheridan years ago who was born in a family that brought them in true Christian principles. Been a wonderful disciplinarian and great lover of her children.

HINCKLEY: The question, of course, of women in politics is endless fascinating, particularly in the context of Wyoming, the so-called Equality State, we really haven't done really well.

SIMPSON: That's the women's fault, John. I really believe that women take too little interest in politics. They'll get out and do a wonderful job, but never for themselves. Always unselfishly for everybody else. They'll sit and take tickets and they'll sell tickets and be at rallies and drum up trade.

HINCKLEY: Do you think we're....

SIMPSON: They're successful if they get out. Witness the ones who run for election right here in Big Horn County in our own part of the Basin. A woman??...she made have

had fortuitous circumstances that sent her up there but she's there and others that have run in other parts of the state –Edness Kimball Wilkins.

HINCKLEY: The inimitable Thyra.

SIMPSON: Yeah. A tough one to beat because she's a good officer. She's outspoken and she tickles me because she's always riling somebody up. Don't you believe yourself that.... Now Nellie Tayloe was serious. She loved the job and would have loved to have been a full-time elected governor for that next four years but she was defeated. But she went on to become the Director of the Mint for twenty-five years. A marvelous woman! Still alive and past her hundredth birthday. You need women like that and we've got 'em. We've got some powerful women in the state and that'd be good officers but they don't seem to...they go so far and they just sort of forget it.

HINCKLEY: Perhaps we will see a woman governor. Well, Governor Simpson. I appreciate the generosity of inviting me into your home. Of course, I wish you increasing well!

SIMPSON: John. You've been a great friend.

HINCKLEY: Thank you. And your very gracious wife. The most poignant memory I have of your wife was indirect from my wife Ann. We were married ...had been married about two years...this would have made it at about 1950. Ann came up to Cody for something and she came back and said, "I met a true lady." I said, "Who's that?" She said, "The most gracious lady I think I've ever seen --Lorna Simpson." She had been hostessing a tea.

SIMPSON: I declare. I've heard that very same expression used so many times – she's a perfect lady. She's the best. We sit here and do our prayers here at this window looking out on the two churches...the three churches that I include -- my two Episcopal churches and a little Baptist Church over there on the corner. I'm a great believer that the future of the world depends upon real Christian leadership and I pray that churches of this caliber be sort of citadels of inspiration and learning to both adults and youth alike. I'd say to any young student in college-- be it now or one hundred years from now. By golly, the old adage that honesty is the best policy works in politics a darn sight as good as it does in private life and to cotton on to that and not become subjected to some role that leads to wrong interest...what am I trying to say?

HINCKLEY: The paths of righteousness are still the safest and best. Duke Humphrey. Once I interviewed him ...he was a good friend of yours, of course. I asked him his philosophy as president of the institution and he said, "Well, John, my philosophy has been ---you can always catch more flies with honey than you can with vinegar."

SIMPSON: Yeah. He was a great fellow. I was through a...as you remember...I went through pretty much of an Armageddon there on this University... I was on the famous book purge and the professor with some 22 of our top men. That was a horrible era!

HINCKLEY: A ghastly experience!

SIMPSON: It certainly was! I'll tell you that men the caliber of Hunt, McCracken, John Reed... men of that caliber are really doing a great job.

HINCKLEY: I guess it's just an illustration of the best of intentions producing a continuing nightmare over there.

Once again, Governor Simpson. Thank you very much. God Bless You and we'll now go back to Laramie.