Montana's Political Culture: An Explanation Of U.S. Senatorial Politics In The Treasure State

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MONTANA'S POLITICAL CULTURE: AN EXPLANATION OF U.S. SENATORIAL POLITICS IN THE TREASURE STATE

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY IN CANDIDACY FOR A DEGREE WITH HONORS

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

BY

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HELENA, MONTANA
APRIL, 1989
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Unlike many other academic disciplines, political science attempts to predict the unknown. In contrast to fields such as history and philosophy that try to examine the world through explanations of past events or observations, political science attempts to chart the future. It relies on the study of history and philosophy (and many other fields) in order to provide a substantive basis for predicting the future.

The study of politics lends itself well to prediction. In the broadest of definitions, political science is the study of “the institutions, processes and powers in society that enable social needs to be achieved through the formation and implementation of public policy; in a word, with all that is concerned with the achievement of the common good of the whole society.”\(^1\) The future implications of political science can be summed up as “what is and what ought to be in the promotion of the general welfare and what might be done to achieve the greatest coincidence between the two in a given social order.”\(^2\) Methodologically, the field, and its respective sub-fields, examine human behavior in ways that can be observed empirically with reasonable objectivity. Thus, the use of statistics and quantification are applicable. Consequently, political scientists can project about the future based on the evidence of the past. Electoral behavior is particularly well suited for this kind of analysis.

However, political behavior can not be entirely rooted to quantitative examination. Any study of human behavior must allow room for variables that either cannot be operationally defined, or that are too numerous or abstract to allow for strict quantitative analysis. To evaluate political
behavior through purely numerical means would leave many questions that statistics cannot answer. Thus, political scientists rely on non-quantitative analysis to explain these concepts.

One tool used by political scientists to project future electoral outcomes is the evaluation of political culture. Political culture is "the configuration of ideas, attitudes, biases, and emotional attachments which characterize a political community."³ Political culture is rooted in the history of a people, with consideration given to their attitudes and demographic makeup as evolved over time. The use of political culture to explain electoral behavior is taken with some reservations because it is rather imprecise. Nevertheless, it is my contention that the study of political culture is a valuable option between pure statistical and pure historical analysis, and is a valuable method by which to study electoral politics.

In 1988, the most widely discussed political phenomenon in the state of Montana was the defeat of United States Senator John Melcher. Much speculation and debate has arisen as to why he, as an incumbent, was unseated by Republican Conrad Burns. This event was even more unusual in light of the fact that it was only the second time that the voters of Montana had elected a Republican to the United States Senate. In 1946, Burton K. Wheeler, a four-term U.S. senator, was defeated in the Democratic primary and was succeeded by Zales Ecton. Why did Wheeler and Melcher lose? Were these chance occurrences? Did they do an ineffective job of campaigning? Do these elections represent watershed events in Montana politics?
In this thesis I intend to show that the defeat of John Melcher in 1988 and Burton K. Wheeler in 1946 are explainable through an examination of Montana's political culture. By evaluating the historical development of Montana's political culture, we can see that these two unusual electoral outcomes are actually phenomena consistent with the state's political makeup, and should be a valuable lesson to future politicians who seek statewide office.
NOTES

1 Dennis Wiedmann and Phil Wittman, "Studying Political Science at Carroll" TMs [photocopy], p. 3, Carroll College, Helena, Montana.

2 Ibid.

CHAPTER ONE
MONTANA'S POLITICAL CULTURE: DEVELOPMENT AND EARLY TRENDS

Montana developed along lines similar to many western states. However, Montana's development is unique in several important respects, and these special conditions have resulted in the state's unusual political culture. Three characteristics of Montana's historical development are particularly helpful in understanding the formation of the state's political culture: 1) immigration into the state set the foundation for Montana's political and ideological nature; 2) settlement patterns based on economic development established its demographic characteristics; and, 3) the very nature of Montana's economic development itself. These three characteristics created some interesting attitudes and values that permeate the state's history in most every way.

Immigration into the Montana Territory was motivated by a number of national forces acting together during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Manifest Destiny was still fresh on the minds of many throughout the country. The desire to investigate and exploit the vast resources of the West generated interest in the Montana Territory.

Initially, Southerners immigrated into the state. Driven by a pursuit of riches and hopes of abandoning the strife of the Civil War South, these early immigrants entered Montana's borders in search of gold. Many of these early settlers found a home near Montana's untapped mineral deposits. With them they brought their political identities which generally meant a strong affiliation for the Democratic Party. As the western half of the territory prospered with one strike after another, the nature of Montana's early
political development began to crystallize. The early territorial government in Montana was a reflection of the Unionist-Republican government in Washington, D.C. A heated antagonism soon evolved between the Democratic-oriented population and the Republican-established territorial government.¹

The western third of the state, with Butte as its center, was the dominant region until about 1910. Mining, originally an activity of individual prospectors, became big business in the 1890s. The Anaconda Copper Mining Company led the way toward massive industrial mining and created a demand for thousands of skilled hard rock miners. This demand was readily filled by an onslaught of Welsh and Irish miners. These "muckers," as they were called, were overwhelmingly Catholic and Democratic. They added to the dominance of the Democratic Party within the western part of the state.²

During the early 1900s, the last great immigration rush into the state occurred. The creation of the railroads across the northern tier of the country, a national post-Civil War population boom, and a trend toward urbanization combined to create a market for agricultural goods, and the West provided the resources and room for a flourishing nation to grow. James J. Hill and his Great Northern Railroad epitomized the railroad industry's attempt at recruiting homesteaders to provide the new rail lines with marketable goods to transport. The period from 1910 to 1920 witnessed a population growth unlike any other in the state's history:

In the first quarter of 1910, the Great Northern moved over a thousand emigrant cars into northern Montana. . . . The flood tide of immigration leveled off somewhat during 1911-12, then rose significantly again during 1913-18. . . . The state's population climbed from 243,329 in 1900 to 376,053 in 1910. . . . By 1920, even after the boom had collapsed, the census found 548,889 Montanans and 57,677 farm and ranches in the
This boom was felt mostly in the east-central portion of the state. The new farmers brought with them a more conservative "activistic-moralistic" view of politics, in many ways reflecting the national sentiment of the time. This new influx of immigrants would have a great bearing on the state's political character. The Democratic Party continued to dominate the western half of the state, while the eastern half became a stronghold for Republicans and Progressives following the ideological example of Theodore Roosevelt.

Economically, Montana has resembled a colony of the United States, rather than a state in itself. The "Treasure State" has always relied on its strong resource base for economic development. This presents unique problems for Montana, given its geographic isolation. "Montana is a storehouse of natural riches. . . . But the state is so remote from the mainstreams of American transportation and capital that it has always had to look to outsiders for the money to develop its resources." This "colonial economy" has had a deep effect on the state's political character since its inception.

The "War of the Copper Kings," the financial and political feuding among Butte's most influential power brokers over control of the state's mineral resources, left a heavy mark on the state's history and political climate. In the end, the Anaconda Company won out over all competitors. The political power of the "Company" was dramatically demonstrated in 1903 when, in response to external pressures, the Company effectively blackmailed the state government into granting it certain legal favors by closing its operations in Butte and threatening to leave the state for good. By the
early 1920s, the power of the Company was without question:

The world's greatest nonferrous metal mining company, mighty Anaconda controlled much more than Butte. In addition to properties beyond Montana, it held mines at Butte, reduction works, smelters and refineries at Anaconda and Great Falls, vast timber acreages and mills in western Montana, and coal properties in Carbon, Cascade and Gallatin counties. 8

For the next twenty years, the political and economic power of the Company continued to grow. Anaconda created another company which would maintain a tight grip on the entire state for many years to come, the Montana Power Company. The Anaconda Company employed more people than any other employer in the state, and it commanded more wealth, resources, and politicians than any ever would: "In short, it was a giant and well integrated corporation, one of America's greatest, which ruled supreme in a remote and thinly populated state." 9

The political "residue" left by the Company on the state was enormous. As indicated in 1903, the Company could send political shockwaves throughout the entire state by laying off large numbers of workers with the stroke of a pen. At the height of its power, the Company could twist the arm of the legislature to gain almost any governmental action it desired. And it controlled the information flow in the state though its ownership of every major daily newspaper except for the Great Falls Tribune. 10

The uncompromising dominance of the Company generated tremendous animosity toward unchecked power as a force within the colonial economy. The Company's "cavalier disregard of public responsibility prompted one writer to label Montana 'The Spanish Main of American industrial history.'" 11 Of course, this attitude was greatest in western Montana, where the effects of the Company were felt the hardest. Labor movements began a violent era
in Butte's history in response to the power of the Company.  

The agricultural interests in the eastern half of the state also harbored antagonism toward the Company. The Progressive easterners demanded that the mining interests take on a heavier share of the tax burden for the state. The Progressives also pushed for governmental reforms that, in the unique context of Montana, resulted in political confrontation with the Company's leaders in Butte, the state's commercial and financial center, rather than in Helena, the capital. Ballot reforms such as the initiative and referendum (1906), the direct primary (1912), the direct election of United States Senators (1911-1913), women's suffrage (1914), and workmen's compensation (1915) all posed problems for the Company and threatened its powerful grip on the state's political structure.

The long-term effect of the tension between the Company and the people of Montana on the state's political culture is a permanent resentment for resource-robbing and capital-removing corporations in the state. There exists a "widespread feeling that the east victimized the west through exploitation of natural resources, . . . creation of monopolistic corporations, and domination of western industry. . . ." The helplessness that government, unions, and people as individuals felt when trying to deal with the Company bred a deep sense of distrust toward corporate power.

Perhaps one of the most interesting phenomenon in Montana's political culture and its effect on electoral history is the Democratic party's dominance of the state's two U.S. Senate seats. The fact that the Democrats have dominated the U.S. Senate elections is undisputable. From 1913 (when Montana began to select senators by popular vote) to 1988 the state had
elected only two Republicans. Even more convincingly, in nearly 150 years of electoral service, a Republican has served for only six. Critics may claim that the Democratic dominance is marginal, because there have been many close elections. However, electoral success is measured not by margin of victory, but by winning. And the Democrats have been overwhelmingly victorious. Certainly no single factor can explain this phenomenon; however, it is my contention that Democratic control of Montana's U.S. Senate delegation is inherently linked to the state's political culture.

I believe that two main factors explain Democratic success, both rooted in Montana's political culture. First, the east-west partisan dichotomy, established early in the state's history, goes far to explain the Democrats' control. In 1978, Ellis Waldron and Paul B. Wilson complied voter records for every statewide election in Montana since 1889. Their evidence leaves little doubt that western Montana, as a single political community, has generally voted Democratic and by more significant margins then the Republicans in the east. However, this explanation, if conclusive in itself, would require that the Democrats control every statewide office. That simply is not the case. The Republicans have always been very competitive at the gubernatorial level. This means that something else must contribute to the equation.

The second, and more significant factor, is the "Anaconda Experience," or the political consequences of the Company on the state's political history. Two particular occurrences are pertinent here. They both stem from the Company's association with the state GOP.
First, the Republican party in Montana has always been more concerned with politics at the state rather than national level. Before the modern erosion of federalism, state regulation of industry and commerce were of greater importance than decisions made on the federal level. Consequently, the Anaconda Company was much more concerned with intrastate politics. It channeled its resources into the elections of state, not national officials. As a result, the Republican Party in Montana was more inclined toward state-level politics.  

Secondly, the vacuum left by the GOP's lack of involvement in Senate elections left the Democrats with an opening to exploit. They could expend their resources more efficiently, because of the greater opportunity to win. Additionally, the Democrat Party has always been able to direct its brightest people to the U.S. Senate. The likes of Thomas J. Walsh, Burton K. Wheeler, James Murray, Lee Metcalfe, and Mike Mansfield have provided Montana with a rich tradition of senatorial effectiveness and leadership. These competent men have not only benefited from the Democrats dominance, but even have solidified it.

Another popular explanation of the Democrats success is the theory that they draw support from the more liberal urban regions than do Republicans. This contributes to a greater opportunity for success in statewide races as opposed to races at the local level.  

These possible reasons for the Democratic Party's dominance are not without refutation, but do provide a viable explanation for the phenomenon. The greatest point of contention is the two elections that deviate from the
norm. However, an examination of those two elections will indicate that they represent a special exception to the rule and not a violation of the rule per se.
NOTES


2 Malone and Dougherty, "Montana's Political Culture," 46.


6 A number of valuable studies exist which provide a comprehensive examination of the war of the Copper Kings. For a solid overview of this stage of Montana history, consult Malone and Roeder, Montana: A History of Two Centuries.


8 Malone and Dougherty, "Montana's Political Culture," 47.

9 Ibid.

10 Thomas Payne, "Politics Under the Copper Dome," in Politics in the American West, ed. Frank H. Jonas (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1969), 203. Payne goes on to qualify this statement, "The company-owned [sic] newspapers, including all dailies published in four of the five largest cities, were the Billings Gazette, the Livingston Enterprise, the Daily Post and the Montana Standard (both published in Butte), the Anaconda Standard, the Helena Independent-Record, the Daily Missoulian and the Missoula Sentinel." Throughout most of Montana's history, the Great Falls Tribune was the only major independent paper in the state.


13 Malone and Dougherty, "Montana's Political Culture," 49.


16 Malone and Roeder, Montana: A History of Two Centuries, 292.

17 Ibid.
CHAPTER TWO
THE CAREER OF SENATOR BURTON K. WHEELER

Joseph Kinsey Howard pointed out in 1947 that "politics in [Montana has] always been more personal than partisan..." And so it was with Burton K. Wheeler: "...he was above all a personal, rather than a partisan, politician." Wheeler's personal style and his politics in general epitomized the political culture of Montana, and endeared him to Montanan voters. Arguably he was the most prominent politician to ever come from Montana, Mike Mansfield notwithstanding.

Wheeler came to Butte as a young man of modest means and strong conviction. Born in Massachusetts, Wheeler attended law school at the University of Michigan. With law degree in hand he headed west and settled in Butte on October 15, 1905. After building a respectable law practice based in part on civil litigation against the Anaconda Company, he took to politics as a Democratic state legislator in 1911.

While in the legislature, he developed many important relationships with prominent Montanans. Among these was his mentor, Thomas J. Walsh. Walsh had a profound influence on Wheeler, and the two began a friendship that would prove to be a strong and dynamic force years later when they both would serve in the U.S. Senate.

Wheeler also generated much antagonism with the Anaconda Company. As Richard T. Ruetten, a prominent scholar of Wheeler, put it, "Given Wheeler's ambition, courage, stubbornness and independence, it was
inevitable that when he entered politics he would clash with the Anaconda Company and its conservative allies." 6 This clash continued as Wheeler served as U.S. Attorney from 1913 to 1918. In 1918 he was forced to resign as U.S. Attorney, and within two years the bitterness between him and the Company erupted into a direct confrontation that would be settled by the voters.

The year 1920 saw the most vicious gubernatorial campaign in Montana history between Wheeler and Joseph M. Dixon. Wheeler's liberalism was attacked as communistic and anarchical. Opposed by the Company more than by Dixon, Wheeler was branded a "Bolshevik" and in favor of "free love." He was prevented from speaking in Miles City, and was almost tarred and feathered in Dillon. But Wheeler fired back. He promised to end company control of state politics by claiming: "We stole the Democratic Party from the Anaconda Copper Mining Company and we will give it back to the people." 7 He vocalized his contempt for corporate control of Montana's people and resources by claiming that he would end the Company's domination and abuse of the state. In fact, he contended, "If I am elected governor I am going to stop the shooting of miners in the back like dogs on Anaconda Road." 8 In the end, however, Wheeler suffered the most decisive defeat of any Montana gubernatorial candidate to that time.

The 1920 election and, in fact, the entire experience of living in Montana was an enormous learning experience for Wheeler. Montana grew on Wheeler, and he developed a strong sense of its people and its interests:

... perhaps more than most politicians, Wheeler was a product of his environment. He did not simply represent his liberal Montana constituents in the sense of obtaining material benefits from Washington, although he did that well enough. More important, he personally
identified with Montana's railroad workers, coal and copper miners, loggers, small farmers, and small businessmen. In 1922, Wheeler chose to run for the U.S. Senate. He ran with little opposition from the Company, and with the help of the farmer-labor coalition he won the election handily, and joined Walsh in Washington. Wheeler then embarked on one of the the most impressive and memorable careers in U.S. Senate history. His personal ambition and conviction quickly propelled him into the national spotlight, but it was his Montana roots that defined the man and the issues that motivated him.

His electoral support was a result of both the effectiveness with which he campaigned and the support he had for his legislative agenda from the liberal and progressive elements in the state. Wheeler was principled and independent; principled to the point of being dogmatic, independent to the chagrin of his party. He drew support from a broad base within the state because he was viewed by his constituents as a fighter in the Progressive movement.

During his first term, he single-handedly forced the resignation of Attorney General Harry M. Daugherty for malfeasance in office. Because of an ugly labor episode in 1922 in which Daugherty caused tragic setbacks to union-management relations across the country, his ousting at the hands of the freshman senator from Montana was received with exuberance at home. Wheeler also went after the railroads. After only seven days in Washington, he shook up the Interstate Commerce Committee and began to leave his populist mark on that important committee. He would work for the rest of his tenure to lower rail rates and engaged in similar measures that would benefit the farmer. Consequently, Wheeler generated much support
from the farmers' alliance in Montana and the West.

He then turned his attention to the Anaconda Company. He heartily supported increased tariff rates which represented a problem for the Anaconda Company. By then the Company had moved a majority of its copper mining operations abroad and these higher tariffs were a sharp blow. 11 Wheeler also acted as one of the most ardent supporters of organized labor. He supported legislation that would protect the rights of unions to organize and establish collective bargaining agreements. 12

Within a couple of years, Wheeler emerged as a force with which to be reckoned. He carried his feisty Montana political character into Washington, and wasted no time in generating controversy. Joseph Kinsey Howard described Wheeler's reputation this way:

The Wheeler record was the more remarkable because no other senator of his generation had been the center of such violent controversy. Few American politicians since the earliest days of the republic had climbed so swiftly to positions of national eminence. . . . 13

In 1924, Wheeler exhibited his partisan independence when he ran as the vice-presidential candidate of the Progressive Party. The party's choice for president was Senator Robert La Follette, a Republican from Wisconsin. Wheeler decided to run with La Follette because of his dissatisfaction with the Democratic presidential candidate, John W. Davis. Davis was an eastern ultra-conservative whom the Democrats nominated on the 103rd ballot, an indication of the disarray within the party. Wheeler, distrustful as always of the eastern establishment, explained:

When the Democratic Party goes to Wall Street for a candidate, I must refuse to go with it. . . . As a result of this nomination the Democratic Party, in my opinion, has forfeited any right it may have had to the support of the progressive Democrats . . . Between Davis and Coolidge [the Republican nominee] there is only a choice for the conservatives to make.
The uncontrolled, liberal, and progressive forces must look elsewhere for leadership.  

Although the Progressives lost the election, Wheeler’s performance as a third-party candidate was impressive. The ticket won in Wisconsin and placed second in eleven western states. It did particularly well in Montana, receiving roughly twice as many votes as did Davis. The election proved to be a blessing for Wheeler. He gained national recognition as a progressive, developed acute campaigning skills, and gained increased legislative power because of his new electoral prestige.

To Montanans, Wheeler became a source of great local pride. He had developed the prototypical relationship with his Montana constituency. From that time on, Wheeler would have their affection, even without their support, and except for the very end of his senatorial career, that would be enough for him. As Richard L. Neuberger described it, Montana was a region [that may] not seem wholly in sympathy with the voting records of its most illustrious Senators, but . . . it [is] downright devoted to them as human beings. Burton Wheeler can deliver a speech in the Senate which offends the economic predilections of the people of Wolf Point, and still get their votes on election day. Let him be thankless, however, to the Wolf Point citizens who have circulated his campaign literature and pushed doorbells for him, and he is on the skids.

The election of 1928 illustrated Wheeler’s powerful position in Montana. The Democratic Party was crumbling around him. The Democrats lost the state legislature and Montana voted for Herbert Hoover over Al Smith for the White House. But Wheeler was now above the ability of the Company, national sentiment, or any other force to unseat him. In 1928, he won a second term handily against Dixon, his 1920 gubernatorial opponent, an indication of how far he had come. While Al Smith won only three of Montana’s fifty-six counties, Wheeler carried thirty-five.
Wheeler's second term was dominated by the Great Depression, the New Deal, and his rising power in Washington, D.C. Wheeler was the first prominent Democrat in the country to endorse Roosevelt for the presidency. Wheeler's relationship with FDR was heated and controversial. He shared Roosevelt's vision of the country, but would quickly and adamantly turn on the policies of the administration if Wheeler's principles or the interests of Montana were jeopardized.

One of the first policy differences that Wheeler had with FDR was over "Free Silver." The remonetization of silver was an economic issue that Wheeler had held to strongly since he was a young boy in Massachusetts, influenced by the Populist movement and William Jennings Bryan. Moreover, "Free Silver" would also stimulate the depressed economy in Butte. Wheeler contended that the addition of silver to the money supply would have the effect of inflating prices, and countering the severe deflation that fueled the Depression. Roosevelt rejected the notion that inflation would benefit the economy. Nevertheless, the Silver Purchase Act of 1934 was enacted. It did have a slight effect on the economy, and Wheeler came away from his first battle with Roosevelt claiming a small victory. 17

Early in March 1933, while en route to Washington, D.C., Thomas J. Walsh suffered a heart attack and died. Walsh's death was an enormous personal blow to Wheeler and elevated him to the status of senior senator, thus making him the most prominent politician in the state. Walsh's eventual replacement was James E. Murray. Murray was a Butte lawyer who came from a background strikingly similar to Wheeler's. Both men were "self-avowed liberals" who grew to despise the corporate power of the Company, and both
supported FDR's efforts to end the Depression. 18

Wheeler continued to support New Deal legislation that meshed with his liberalism and was beneficial to Montana. The Public Utility Holding Company Act, designed to prevent monopolies from developing in the utility industry; the National Labor Relations Act, giving unions more power to engage in collective bargaining; and numerous other pieces of legislation that resulted in a massive influx of federal money to Montana were examples of his agenda. 19 Another Montana issue that Wheeler championed was the cause of Native Americans. 20

As Wheeler embarked on his third term, the tension between him and Roosevelt became more apparent. The Democrats, both nationally and in Montana, scored an overwhelming electoral victory in 1936. But soon after the election the New Deal majority began to fall apart. 21 Montana's senatorial delegation served as a prime example of the desertion within the Democratic Party. As Wheeler became more independent of Roosevelt, Murray became closer to the president and more partisan then ever. 22

The rift between Wheeler and Roosevelt reached a climax in 1937. Roosevelt, in response to a hostile Supreme Court, created a plan to "reform" the Court by adding justices to counter the conservatives. Wheeler agreed that the Constitution gave the modern Court too much power, and he advocated reforms as well. 23 But Wheeler found the president's plan to be "an unsubtle and anti-Constitutional grab for power which would destroy the Court as an institution."24 Wheeler, only intending to do what he felt to be right for the country, led the opposition to the Court-packing plan. The Montanan won, but at great expense. Wheeler had alienated Roosevelt,
Murray, and many liberal factions in Montana. His independence and convictions, so often the qualities that made him endearing to Montanans, were now beginning to bring him into conflict with his pro-FDR, liberal constituency.

The final battle between Wheeler and Roosevelt was waged in the late 1930s and early 1940s. World War II was on the horizon and Roosevelt was moving in that direction. Wheeler was a pacifist, and thus an isolationist when internationalism meant war. As Howard pointed out, "There was nothing inconsistent or unexpected about Wheeler's opposition to involvement in that conflict or any other, no reason to doubt the sincerity of his conviction that all war is futile. Montanans knew his Quaker family tradition. . ."25 His socialization as a pacifist and his experience as U.S. Attorney made isolationism the most practical policy to him. He had been the U.S. Attorney in Montana during the First World War and was forced to resign from that post because of his refusal to prosecute people for sedition on the flimsy grounds that they were not patriotic enough. 26 Wheeler could remember only too well the abusive and often criminal behavior that hyperactive patriotism could create, not to mention the death and destruction of the war itself.

He heartily opposed any and all measures that he thought were directing the nation toward war. First the Neutrality Act of 1939, and then the Lend-Lease Bill in 1941, gave Wheeler an opportunity to harshly attack the president's interventionist policy. Wheeler called Lend-Lease "the New Deal's triple-A foreign policy . . . [designed to] plow under every fourth American boy."27
By 1942, the Democrats felt that Wheeler's independence had antagonized them long enough. Murray, as the ardent partisan, attacked Wheeler at home, while FDR and the press criticized him from Washington. Wheeler was no longer the liberal he claimed to be. He was gradually losing his electoral base in Montana. His opposition to Roosevelt's Court-packing scheme in many ways represented the height of his popularity in Montana; he won reelection in 1940 by a landslide (73.4 per cent of the vote). But the "Wheeler Machine," the powerful bipartisan political organization that Wheeler had created over the past twenty years, was beginning to erode. His opposition to the proposed Missouri Valley Authority (MVA) was the last straw to many who viewed his isolationism as contemptuous. Wheeler was attacked for his position on the MVA by the national press. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor he was sharply criticized by the media for his isolationist sentiment. Wheeler only managed to hold on to the loyalties of traditional Montana supporters—the farm-labor coalition because of his regular work on their behalf.

Many other Montanans, however, thought that he had finally "sold out." This was especially true with blue collar workers in western Montana. To them, his repeated confrontations with Murray and Roosevelt indicated that he was no longer a liberal or even a Democrat. And his opposition to the MVA was seen as an indication that he had abandoned the party completely. His association with Republicans such as Governor Sam C. Ford, land-developer Wellington Rankin, and even the Anaconda Company were evidence of his divided loyalty. Stories praising Wheeler began to appear in the Company's newspapers, a "sure" example that Burt Wheeler had moved to the right.
Howard described the attitude that many people had toward Wheeler and his new conservative coalition:

[Wheeler's] boast in his 1920 campaign for the Montana governorship, was a defiant phrase which he--but not the people of Montana--had almost forgotten: "If you ever see my picture on the front page of the Company press you'll know I've sold out." The picture appeared on page one of Butte newspapers . . . in 1946. 32

Although he did not feel that he had changed, the people of Montana did. In their minds he had become tired and conservative to the point of aligning himself with the Company. The Company may not have been the powerful political entity it had was, and Wheeler's association with it did not necessarily mean he had "sold out." But many people interpreted it that way, and they responded by withdrawing their support for him.

Wheeler's partisan ties began to weaken, primarily because he was giving political favors to both Republicans and Democrats. To him it was an effort to gather support from all sides. To the Democrats it was treasonous. "Conservative Democrats worried about this unorthodox distribution of patronage." 33 The liberals had all but abandoned him.

In 1946, the liberal wing of the Democratic party ran a rising young politician named Leif Erickson against Wheeler. The 40-year-old Erickson had been an associate justice of the Montana Supreme Court from 1939 to 1945. In 1944, he ran for governor and had been defeated by Wheeler's Republican ally, Sam C. Ford. 34 With Wheeler's landslide victory in 1940 in mind, pundits did not consider Erickson much of a threat. In fact, the Company press, now in Wheeler's camp, was virtually ignoring Erickson and thus denying him valuable media coverage, a tactic it had used against Wheeler in previous years. 35
The primary election epitomized the change in Wheeler's power base. The campaign was dominated by mudslinging and smears that challenged the incumbent to the fullest. *The People's Voice,* a liberal state newspaper, tried to counter the Company press by attacking Wheeler at every turn. The liberal coalition in the state accused him of practicing right-wing campaign tactics, being a Company man, and supporting the Fascists during the War. Wheeler sensed his vulnerability and the threat that these measures posed to his Senate seat. He countered by accusing Erickson of obtaining illegal campaign finances. He evenresorted to holding a hearing of the Senate Committee on Campaign Expenditures in Helena to investigate Erickson's campaign funds. However, the Committee found no discrepancies.

Despite Wheeler's attempts, defeat was inevitable. Erickson, aided by Republican infighting which kept Wheeler's bipartisan alliance divided, pressed the MVA issue and Wheeler's refusal to support the war effort. These issues generated much support for Erickson with farmers and labor. On July 16, 1946, the Democratic party elected Erickson as its nominee to the U. S. Senate by a margin of 49,419 to 44,513. Wheeler had been defeated and his political machine dismantled.

Zales Ecton, the first Republican senator ever elected from Montana, was a conservative Gallatin County farmer. His election against Ecton was made possible because of "post-war restlessness, a split in the Montana Democratic Party in 1946 and a possible cross-over vote in the primary." Erickson never garnered sufficient support and thus "opened the door for Ecton." Zales Ecton's term was "brief and unspectacular." He was an unproductive
conservative member of one of the most effective liberal delegations in Washington. He summed up his rather bland approach to politics in a quote in which he explained his reasons for running for the Senate. "If I thought it took extraordinary intelligence to represent the people of Montana in Washington properly, I wouldn't be a candidate. What I think it needs is just ordinary common sense."41

This down-home brand of politics was the base that Ecton used in his 1952 bid for reelection. However, this time he was up against 10-year Congressman Mike Mansfield. Amid a backlash against McCarthyism and an disappointed Montana electorate, Ecton was defeated in a bitter contest that resembled the 1920 gubernatorial election. 42

No one factor led to the defeat of Burton K. Wheeler in the 1946 Democratic primary. He still had the support of a huge block of Montanans. But he had sufficiently cut himself off from both the conservative and liberal wings of his party. His coalition of farmers and workers was gone. He seemed to be turning into a "Washington insider," a much despised position by Montana standards. He had abandoned the favor of Montanans and forgotten Montana's political culture. As Ruetten put it:

Although the defeat of the 64-year-old Montanan stunned political pundits across the country, the surprise is not that he lost. In view of the many enemies he had made over the years, the wonder is that he almost won. 43

By 1946 Burton K. Wheeler had changed. He did not admit it, but Montana knew it. He was no longer the fighter, the liberal, or the progressive he had been. In the minds of Montana voters the time for Wheeler's defeat had come. His defeat was a watershed event in Montana history because it represented a change in the old power structure.
cavalier attitude was a major contributor to his undoing.

His political machine was also an indication of his disregard for partisanship. He formed his electoral coalition around support for his initiatives and, as a result, he appointed both Republicans and Democrats to various positions because often both parties fell into his ideological camp. Early in his career, he would attack the Company, not just because he held it in contempt, but because it was politically advantageous. But later, when his feud with the Company had waned and its support was needed, he allowed it to embrace him and tried to use it to his advantage. Moreover, his allegiance to labor was based on sympathy for its cause, not just its identification with the Democratic Party. However, his lack of party identification would ultimately alienate laborers who voted Democratic.

Wheeler's career also symbolized the animosity most Montana's had toward the establishment. Montana history is full of accounts of the tension between entities like the Anaconda Company or the Montana Power Company and the people of the state. Wheeler played off this conflict better than any other politician ever has. His feud with the Company endeared him to the voters of Montana. It is not coincidental that when he became a friend of the Company, he lost. He had become entrenched in the Washington establishment as well. It was not just that he held powerful seats on important committees, but his animosities were no longer aimed at the power elites. This change of heart was distressing to Montana voters. They began to look elsewhere for a protagonist who would take on the Company and defend the "little guy."
NOTES


2 Ibid.


4 Burton K. Wheeler's background is detailed in Yankee from the West, as well as in Ruetten, "Burton K. Wheeler and the the Montana Connection."

5 Walsh and Wheeler's relationship is outlined in Malone and Roeder, Montana: A History of Two Centuries, as well as Wheeler and Healy, Yankee from the West.


7 Calvert, The Gibraltar, 142-143.

8 Ibid., 143.


10 Ibid., 8.

11 Ibid., 7.

12 Wheeler and Healy, Yankee from the West, 189.


14 Wheeler and Healy, Yankee from the West, 249.


16 Ibid.; Ruetten, "Burton K. Wheeler and the the Montana Connection," 10; and Wheeler and Healy, Yankee from the West, 297.


20 Ibid., 12.
23 Ibid., 22.
24 Wheeler and Healy, A Yankee from the West, 319.
26 See Wheeler and Healy, "The D.A. in Trouble," chap. in Yankee from the West, 135-164.
27 Howard, "The Decline and Fall of Burton K. Wheeler," 232. As Howard points out, FDR responded in kind. Roosevelt claimed, "That is the rottenest thing that has been said in public life in my generation." Their battle over isolationism continued until December 7, 1941. When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, and the United States entered the war, Wheeler had lost. His defeat in this public policy battle was an indication of things to come for Wheeler.
33 Howard, "The Decline and Fall of Burton K. Wheeler," 235.
34 Ibid., 229.
37 Ibid., 274-275.
38 Billings Gazette (Billings, Montana), 11 November 1988, 4.
39 Ibid.


44 Ibid., 18.

CHAPTER THREE
CURRENT TRENDS AND THE CAREER OF JOHN MELCHER

Montana's political culture had experienced a century of development when, in the late 1950's, it began to change. This change was precipitated by a number of economic and social forces in the state. Between the 1959 and 1977, two particular events or phenomenon occurred that resulted in the current political culture. These changes, the decline of the Anaconda Company and urbanization with its political ramifications, reinforced Montana's political culture in many ways, and altered it in others.

In the mid-1950's the Anaconda Company continued to hold a dominant position in Montana. Its relationship with the growing Montana Power Company and its continued economic strength and political clout helped it maintain its powerful grip on the state. The retirement of Cornelius Kelley, the Company's long-time chief, began a series of events that resulted in the complete decline of the Anaconda Company and an end to Montana's "Copper Century."¹

In 1959, the Company sold its newspapers and with them a significant amount of its political power. For over 60 years the Company press affected public perceptions through its control of the media. The papers were a formidable element in the Company's arsenal. Many other western states had powerful corporations that kept an iron grip on their respective state's politics. But Montana was different. The power of the Anaconda Company reached beyond the statehouse. By way of its newspapers, the power of the Company reached all the way to most of the coffee counters, barber shops
and front porches in Montana. Without its media control, the Company was reduced to doing political business just like any other corporation. It "seemed to differ little in its political tactics from other western resource companies."2

Additionally, the relationship between the Anaconda Company and the Montana Power Company began to change. The "Twins," as they were called, were often considered one-in-the-same. However "[b]y 1962 . . . there were reports of a growing estrangement between the two corporate giants."3 The first signs of this strain were seen in the mid-1940's when the two corporations took opposing views on the proposed Missouri Valley Authority. By 1960, numerous differences existed between them. "In developing its aluminum plant at Columbia Falls in the 1950's Anaconda found it advantageous to exploit the available low-cost public power generated at Hungry Horse. Increasingly, its need for public power plus its worldwide orientation ha[d] separated Anaconda from its traditional friendship for Montana Power, a determined foe of public power."4

The strain continued in the 1960's over the issue of a sales tax. Anaconda opposed the tax, while MPC supported it. Although the tax proposal failed, Anaconda continued its decline and MPC continued to grow. In a search for cheaper copper, the Anaconda Company began open pit operations in Butte and closed its underground mining. But even that was not enough, and, as a result of the 1971 loss of its Chilean holdings, the Company neared collapse. In 1976 it became the Anaconda Minerals Division of the Atlantic Richfield Company. The final deathblow came in 1980, when ARCO began to shut down its Montana operations. First it closed the smelters and refineries
in the towns of Anaconda and Great Falls. Finally, in 1983, one hundred years after Marcus Daly created the monolithic giant, the Anaconda Company suspended its Butte operations. 5

The political effects of the Company's one-hundred-year history in the state are still emerging. But a number of factors are clear. First, it generated an uncomfortable, but politically important relationship between agriculture and labor interests. Agricultural interests were motivated by the desire for Progressive reform. Labor wanted to free itself from the grip of the Company. The relationship between them was bred not out of any common objectives, but out of a mutual antagonism toward the Company.

Secondly, this attitude made politics in Montana something of a tool for attack and counter-attack, as well as for reform. The seeds of this characteristic were planted during the Company's blackmail of the state in 1903, and has continued ever since with progressive reforms, taxation fights, and utility-control battles. The players in this war of regulation and reform are frequently different, sometimes public sector verses private, sometimes interest group verses interest group, but the battles are there, not a result of ideological distinctions, as in other states, but a direct result of Montana's unique historical development.

Third, a sense of generic "populism" dominates electoral politics and public policy within the state. The electorate in Montana has always responded to populist themes such as grass-roots campaigning, reform, dislike for professional politicians, and changes in policies without a change in values. Politicians like Burton K. Wheeler, Joseph M. Dixon and Jeannette Rankin would not have been successful had they been viewed as friends of the
establishment. Montana's politicians had to remain true to the nature of the state as a victim of exploitation by external forces, and could not "sell out."

Finally, the Anaconda Company experience cemented the popular antagonism toward corporate and out-of-state exploitation of Montana. As a result of the public attitude toward it with respect to both the political and physical scars it left, not only did the Company create enemies in the Capitol Building, but it generated a strong aversion to environmental degradation. The early 1970's witnessed the passage of some of the most progressive pro-environmental legislation in the country. In many ways this was a response to the environmental mess left by the Company. Michael P. Malone describes the attitudes held by many Montanan's this way:

This view of Montana's past is prevalent today, not only among that minority who actually read the state's history but also among that majority of thinking people who are at least vaguely aware of how their commonwealth has been exploited in bygone years. It underlies the contemporary Montana mindset and goes far to explain why a state that is in so many ways conservative is also very environmentalistic and anti-corporate in its sympathies. 6

Lately, however, there has been a slight return to the notion that Montana is a resource-based economy and that economic prosperity requires the use of those resources. The economic hardships that resulted from the Company's pullout caused a negative reaction to strong corporate power, but also generated the realization that Montana cannot hope to provide its citizens with financial opportunity without offering its natural resources to that end.

Besides the erosion of the Company's power in Montana, the last thirty years have seen an urbanization of the state's population. Despite the absence of a true urban center, Montana has nevertheless seen a substantial migration away from its rural areas and into its cities. As Harry Fritz,
professor of history at the University of Montana noted in 1984: "53 percent of all Montanans currently reside in what the [Census] Bureau defines as cities... More then half of all Montanans live in just six counties." These figures represent a dramatic change from the demographics that existed in Montana until World War II.

The result of urbanization in Montana has been a distinct redistribution of political power. In 1965, Montana's legislature was reapportioned by U.S. District Court on a "one-man, one-vote" basis. Prior to that, the state was grossly malapportioned. The 1889 Constitution contained archaic provisions that required one senator per county. Fritz claims, the result was most Montana counties, ... especially eastern, rural ones, were rotten boroughs, representing land, not people. Petroleum County, with less than 800 residents, boasted that same senatorial representation as Yellowstone, with nearly 80,000. Sixteen percent of the state Senate might represent a majority of the people. Fritz goes on to conclude, "Montana's political structure overrepresented rural, agricultural and traditionally more conservative counties at the expense of the more liberal, progressive and competitive cities."

The reapportionment was quickly followed in 1971-72 by a call for a new constitution. Montana adopted a revolutionary new document that represented urban interests. It reflected the changing tide of public sentiment that existed in the late 1970's.

At the time, the 1972 Constitution seemed quite radical, even "populist." It opened the legislative process to public scrutiny, incorporated the right to privacy and the right to information, gave environmentalism constitutional status, provided for single member districts and liberalized procedures for direct legislation.

The most immediate effect of the new Constitution was the sudden change in the state's legislative makeup. Now the cities were guaranteed to
receive equal representation. The effect of this was a new urban flavor given to Montana politics. In addition to numerous legislative changes in Montana's public policy, the greatest effect of urbanization and its political ramifications was the increased sense of unity that the state took on. Montana is much less a state of diverse political interests. Now it seems to be more in touch with national forces and sentiment. No longer does Montana politics exhibit trends that arise from any heated intrastate rivalries. It is now more susceptible to the ebb and flow of public opinion that pervades the entire country.

Partisanship in Montana reflected the unique political and demographic make up of the state. The Democrats have traditionally been the dominant party in the western section of the state, and the Republicans in control in the east. The political tradition in Montana has placed more emphasis on personality than on parties, which have always been rather fluid and weak. Historically speaking, the parties have tended to divide along broad ideological lines. The history of both parties revolved around coalitions of diverse groups within the state that came together more for convenience than for anything else. The Democrats were rooted in the liberal coalition of organized labor and farming interests. The Republicans were a loosely tied group of business and financial interests, who garnered support from the Company, and have always tended to support conservative measures. 11

Partisanship seems to be a remaining tenet of Montana's old political culture. The east-west dichotomy, although often less distinct, has held up despite the changes of the last thirty years. Perhaps this is because ideology and other characteristics of socialization are passed from generation to
generation, and therefore are less inclined to rapid change. Although party identification is now more susceptible to national forces, it remains geographically divided.

Michael P. Malone and Dianne G. Dougherty summarized Montana's political culture by stating:

So we must conclude that the political culture which had bloomed in its classical flowering by the 1920's has, during the past half century, changed markedly. Montana's classic political culture grew naturally, out of its narrowly based economic order. [However, since the 1960's] Montana shed its older, colorful and combative political culture like a snake molting its skin. The newly evolved culture, although streaked with colorations of heredity, is really more homogeneous, more broadly regional and national in tone, with fewer local particularities. Even as they enter fully into the national mainstream, though, Montanans show many signs of the lingering influence of their past: in their strong emotional attachment, their gut suspicions of corporations and of a distant federal government, their proud individualism and low party regularity. 12

The career of Senator John Melcher is more difficult to chronicle than that of Wheeler, primarily because it has not yet been adequately addressed by historians. Nevertheless, Melcher's rise to political success is also consistent with a new political culture in Montana. He was a progressive Democrat from eastern Montana whose rise to power defied convention and represented the changes in Montana's political scene.

Melcher was born in Sioux City, Iowa, in 1924. After obtaining a degree from Iowa State University in veterinary medicine, he established a practice in Forsyth, Montana in the early 1950's. He immediately became active in local politics, serving as an alderman, mayor, and finally state representative and senator. 13

In 1969, he ran for Congress in a special election to fill the vacancy of James Battin. His election was unusual because it was the first victory by a progressive Democrat in a district that normally went Republican. Melcher
not only won the seat, but held it for three consecutive terms. The main focus of his legislative agenda was "farming, forestry and energy, the issues of Montana's livelihood. . .." To many political observers his success was a bit of an anomaly. His liberalism was uncharacteristic of the region. However, Malone and Roeder claim that forces of Montana's new political direction were contributing factors. His success "revealed both his own voter appeal and the rising weight of the moderate middle class vote in the urban centers of Billings and Great Falls." It was the changing tide of the state's political culture, urban liberalism, and traditional partisan laxness that contributed to his success.

In 1976, Melcher ran for the U.S. Senate seat vacated by retiring Senator Mike Mansfield. Mansfield was a mammoth figure in Montana politics, achieving a level of success and political power unparalleled by any Montanan. Melcher was "regarded as the heir apparent to . . . Mansfield." He had little trouble defeating conservative Republican Stanley Burger. Despite Burger's well-financed campaign, Melcher's hardline stand on agriculture policy drew support in the east, and he enjoyed the help of the powerful AFL-CIO in the west.

His first term was similar in tone to his years in the House of Representatives. More than anything else, the term signified the start of Melcher's tenacious political style. His effectiveness was often underestimated; he almost always surprised his critics. "Melcher's persistence might be merely irritating if it were not backed up by a solid mastery of the handful of issues he cares about. He knows what he wants and how to get it, regardless of the inconvenience he may cause his colleagues."
His seat was challenged in 1982 by Kalispell Republican Larry Williams. Williams was a smart and polished campaigner, having lost to Senator Max Baucus in 1978. Williams had the aid of the National Conservative Political Action Committee (NCPAC). Melcher suffered damage from the right by the sharp attacks of the well-financed group. But he also was fighting against the left. Liberals in Montana were angry about Melcher’s support of President Ronald Reagan’s new economic package and his waffling on the issue of wilderness protection in Montana. He managed to secure his party’s nomination by a 64% victory in the primary. He fought off the vicious conservative attacks by producing countercommericals that played on Montana’s suspicion of out-of-state interference in political matters. In November, he won 55% to 42%. 19

His reelection allowed him to gain seniority on many important committees. It also allowed him to continue to carve out his territory in the U.S. Senate. On the same issues of farming, forestry and energy that were always his forte, he developed a reputation as a ferocious and irritating politician.

In 1988, there seemed to be little opposition to Melcher’s bid for a third term. In typical Republican fashion, the state’s GOP leaders focused their attention on the race for governor. Like the 1982 race, 1988 witnessed a strong insurgency of out-of-state assistance by Republicans. The National Republican Senatorial Committee, headed by Senator Rudy Boschwitz, Republican from Minnesota, led an attempt to find a possible candidate to unseat Melcher. 20 They found Conrad Burns.

Burns was a Yellowstone County commissioner and former television
broadcaster. At the start of the race, Burns did not seem particularly well suited for the job. His only political experience was his two years as a county commissioner. He did not appear to be a stunning campaigner. But his 15 years as a farm and ranch news broadcaster did give him name recognition.

The general election centered around a number of electoral strategies. Melcher tried to create a stir about outside interference, as he did in 1982, but to little avail. Burns tried to show Melcher to be a supporter of ousted Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos, but with little success. In return, Burns continually attacked Melcher's voting record and often made errors regarding it. Melcher tried to rally his farm-labor constituency. But the election came down to an issue, the issue of wilderness policy.

The federal government is the largest land owner in Montana. The decisions it makes about the use of its millions of acres of forest lands are some of the most important policy matters that deeply effect the economy of the state. The conservationist mindset that evolved in the 1970's had long pushed for a strong wilderness bill that would protect a large portion of Montana forest land from development. But recent economic troubles in the state created a need for development of Montana's abundant forest lands.

In August of 1988, after ten years of inactivity, Montana's Congressional delegation drafted a wilderness bill. The bill "designated as wilderness 1.43 million acres of roadless national forest land in Montana and released 4.1 million acres for multiple use." The bill was immediately attacked by Burns as a "sell-out" to wilderness proponents. The bill was passed by Congress on October 20, but was pocket vetoed by President Reagan on
The Reagan Administration allowed Burns to announce the veto, and by doing so elevated his position in the areas of the state that were the most against the bill. Three particular counties are dependent on the timber industry. Flathead, Gallatin, and Ravalli counties, all in western Montana were to be critical to Melcher's reelection. On Election Day, November 8, 1988, Melcher lost all three counties by a total of 12,831 votes. The loss of those three critical counties was a death blow to his reelection bid. He lost the election by a total of 14,072 votes. His alienated eastern agricultural base was not enough to resurrect the campaign for him and he became only the second incumbent Montana senator to ever lose in the general election.

Melcher's loss was symptomatic of Montana's political culture. His alienation of the western half of the state with the wilderness bill was to be an act of political suicide, and he simply could not generate the difference in the east. His traditional Democratic majority in the west was gone, and he had lost his new found support in the east. Thus, John Melcher's lack of attentiveness to the political culture in Montana caused his loss, as it had done to Burton K. Wheeler 42 years earlier.
November 2. 24

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NOTES


2 Malone and Dougherty, "Montana's Political Culture," 56.

3 Payne, "Politics Under the Copper Dome," 211.

4 Ibid.


6 Ibid., 71.


8 Ibid.

9 Ibid., 11.

10 Ibid.

11 Payne, "Politics Under the Copper Dome," 217; and Malone and Dougherty, "Montana's Political Culture," 51-52. Joseph Dixon represents a departure from this generalization. He was a liberal Republican who rose to prominence during the Progressive era.

12 Malone and Dougherty, "Montana's Political Culture," 58.


17 Ibid.

18 Ibid, 875.

19 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 *Independent Record* (Helena, Montana), 7 November 1988, 1A.

23 *Great Falls Tribune* (Great Falls, Montana), 13 November 1988, 1A.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.
CHAPTER FOUR
CONCLUSION

Political culture is a dynamic and ever changing field of political science. It is subject to a social evolution that is dictated by the history of a community. The study of political culture, despite its ambiguity, provides a unique opportunity to examine voting patterns and behavior in an historical light. It provides insight into the process of elections that no other aspect of political science can.

Political culture also is a valuable tool to political candidates. It is a necessary consideration of any successful candidate. In Montana, the nature of the state's political culture requires an adherence to and commitment by any candidate who hopes to achieve electoral victory. The senatorial careers of Burton K. Wheeler and John Melcher indicate this fact. They both benefited from the Montana's political culture. They were Democrats in a state that has historically elected members of the Democratic Party to serve in Washington. However, their demise came when they seemed to cut themselves off from their Montana roots and thus stepped outside of Montana's political culture.

Wheeler's career is marked by some very interesting features that indicate the nature of the state's political culture. The most apparent of these is the fact that he was defeated resoundingly in his race for the governor's office in 1920. However, two years later he managed to win a seat to the United States Senate. It was the same Wheeler, the same voters, and the same political situation within the state. But the political culture
was more conducive to Senator Wheeler than to Governor Wheeler. His defeat is also an example of the manifestation of Montana's culture. His personal style was long thought to be an asset that endeared him to the people of the state, but at some point he became too embroiled in the politics of Washington. Consequently, he passed a threshold of acceptability that alienated his constituents, and resulted in his demise. Additionally, his opposition to various public policy initiatives, like World War II and the Missouri Valley Authority project, was not only contrary to the attitudes of most Montanans, but was basically out of step with the state's political culture.

Melcher also benefited from the political environment that exists in Montana. He represented a headstrong man who defied the conventional wisdom and fought vigorously for the state. His image as a "windbag" made him a hit with Montanans, and despite some criticism, an effective legislator. Electorally, he benefited from the new demographic and partisan makeup in the state. Much like Wheeler, his success was a product of the state's political culture.

Also like Wheeler, Melcher's loss can be attributed to the his lack of adherence to the state's political culture. The wilderness bill itself was not the sole reason for Melcher's defeat. Burns's campaign was well run and attacked Melcher on some vulnerable points. Nevertheless, Melcher effectively alienated himself from his constituency both by his attachment to issues that were unpopular to Montanans and by overstepping his bounds with the voters. He, like Wheeler, was perceived as someone who had lost touch with Montana; it's values and its needs. He was viewed increasingly as
a Washington insider. Perhaps had he explained his motives regarding such issues as the wilderness bill and his association to Ferdinand Marcos, he could have convinced people that he was still on Montana's side. But the fact that he did not concern himself with answering those questions was itself an indication that he had lost touch with his own constituents.

There is a valuable lesson to be learned from the experience of these two men and their years in public service. Republicans and Democrats alike may discover how this state behaves as a political community. The study of Montana's political culture provides future politicians, as well as political scientists, with an interesting and provocative assessment of the attitudes of the state of Montana.
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