



The 1952 Montana elections : politics as usual
by David Dean Everett

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS in
History

Montana State University

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Abstract:

This thesis challenges the traditional view of the 1952 Montana elections, which stated that 1952 was a Republican year in the state. This thesis, while recognizing a shift among Montana voters to conservatism, argues that 1952 was not a Republican year. Instead, the 1952 Montana elections reflected the normal course of Montana politics. Montana voters have shown a tendency through the years to send liberal Democrats to Washington and conservative Republicans to Helena. The year 1952 was no exception. Despite the shift in voter attitudes, Montana remained true to its political tradition.

This thesis is also a narrative of the elections. It describes each of the four major state campaigns of 1952. It examines the personalities and the issues involved. The thesis attempts to analyze why the winning candidates won and the losing candidates lost. It devotes extra attention to the 1952 U.S. Senate campaign, which, in retrospect, was the crossroads of the political career of one of Montana's most famous statesmen, Mike Mansfield.

To study only one election in Montana's colorful political history seems unimportant. This election, however, provides an excellent case study of Montana politics. This election also has special significance to Montana's political history. First, it represented a changing of the political guard. Three of the men elected in the major state races won their respective offices for the first time. Secondly, this election involved personalities which loom large in Montana politics. No study of the state's politics would be complete without Mike Mansfield, Lee Metcalf, Hugo Aronson and Wesley D'Ewart, the four major winners in Montana's 1952 elections.

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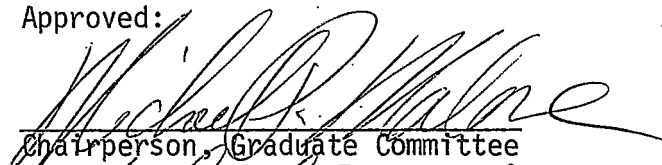
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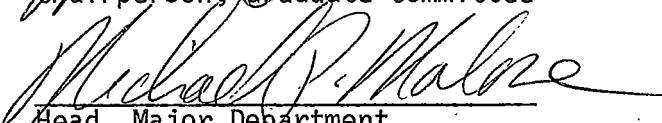
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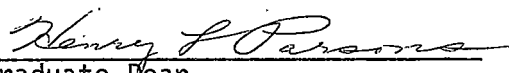
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ABSTRACT

This thesis challenges the traditional view of the 1952 Montana elections, which stated that 1952 was a Republican year in the state. This thesis, while recognizing a shift among Montana voters to conservatism, argues that 1952 was not a Republican year. Instead, the 1952 Montana elections reflected the normal course of Montana politics. Montana voters have shown a tendency through the years to send liberal Democrats to Washington and conservative Republicans to Helena. The year 1952 was no exception. Despite the shift in voter attitudes, Montana remained true to its political tradition.

This thesis is also a narrative of the elections. It describes each of the four major state campaigns of 1952. It examines the personalities and the issues involved. The thesis attempts to analyze why the winning candidates won and the losing candidates lost. It devotes extra attention to the 1952 U.S. Senate campaign, which, in retrospect, was the crossroads of the political career of one of Montana's most famous statesmen, Mike Mansfield.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Political commentators have often referred to 1952 as a Republican year in Montana, a year in which Montanans rushed to the polls to participate in a Republican landslide. To some extent, they have correctly analyzed the elections of that year. The Republican Presidential candidate, Dwight D. Eisenhower, swept the state, taking nearly 60 percent of the vote and losing only four counties in the process. Republican J. Hugo Aronson unseated the Democratic governor, John Bonner. With Aronson came an overwhelmingly Republican state legislature. After the election, the Republicans held a 36-to-20 advantage in the State Senate and an even greater 62-to-28 edge in the House. In addition, Wesley D'Ewart, the incumbent Republican Congressman from the second district, easily retained his seat by swamping his Democratic challenger by an almost two-to-one margin. The Republicans came close in both the U.S. Senate contest and the first Congressional district race, Wellington Rankin losing the latter by only 1,500 votes.¹

¹Jules A. Karlin, "The 1952 Elections in Montana," Western Political Quarterly 6 (March, 1953): 113, 116; Interview with Harry Billings, Bozeman, Montana, 3 May 1976; hereafter cited as Billings interview; Hugh A. Bone, "Western Politics and the 1952 Elections," Western Political Quarterly 6 (March, 1953): 93; Ellis Waldron, An Atlas of Montana Politics Since 1864 (Missoula: Montana State University Press, 1958), pp. 356, 359, 360.

The Republicans, however, did not sweep the 1952 elections. Although the contest was close, Democrat Mike Mansfield defeated incumbent Republican Senator Zales Ecton. As noted above, the Democrats also retained the western Congressional seat. Nor did Aronson's victory indicate a sweeping mandate; he won by roughly 5,000 votes out of 263,792 cast. All of the contests except the Presidential and eastern Congressional district races were close, with a slight edge to the Republicans in the number of contests won. The elections did indicate a shift toward conservatism among Montana voters, but the shift was not big enough to bring about a Republican sweep in 1952. Nor were the Republicans able to build upon the shift in future elections.²

In spite of this voter shift, the 1952 Montana elections reflected the normal course of Montana politics. A study of the state's politics and political culture reveals that one of Montana's most noticeable characteristics is "political schizophrenia" -- the tendency of voters here to send liberal Democrats to Washington and conservatives (usually Republicans) to Helena. In this sense, 1952 was no exception. In fact, that election served to return Montana to its normal pattern, as a Democrat replaced a Republican in Montana's Senatorial delegation. With the Democrats able to hold

²Waldron, pp. 356, 358.

the first Congressional seat, Montana's Washington delegation consisted of three Democrats and one Republican. The lone Republican, Wesley D'Ewart, represented a Congressional district which had consistently elected Republicans, in contrast to an otherwise solidly Democratic representation in the nation's capital. At the same time, Montana voters ousted a liberal Democrat from the governor's mansion and replaced him with a conservative Republican. In addition, the voters elected an overwhelmingly Republican state legislature. The fact that most of the races were close reflected a move among Montana voters to a more conservative stance. While the elections were close, the people who won were those who should have won in any given year, based on the proven political tendencies of Montana citizens.³

The 1952 elections also reflected two other aspects of Montana's political culture, both of them related to the Presidential contest. As usual, Montana supported the winning Presidential

³Michael P. Malone and Richard B. Roeder, Montana: A History of Two Centuries (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976), pp. 292, 294, 295; Thomas Payne, "Montana: Politics Under the Copper Dome," in Frank H. Jonas, ed., Politics in the American West (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1969), p. 222. For more information on Montana's political culture and a general background on Montana politics, see Joseph Kinsey Howard, Montana: High, Wide, and Handsome (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1943); Neal R. Peirce, "Montana: High, Wide, Handsome -- and Remote," reprinted in Michael P. Malone and Richard B. Roeder, eds., Montana's Past: Selected Essays (Missoula: University of Montana Press, 1973); and K. Ross Toole, Montana: An Uncommon Land (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1959).

candidate. Since 1900 Montana has voted for only three losing Presidential candidates: William Jennings Bryan in 1900, Richard M. Nixon in 1960 and Gerald Ford in 1976. Typically, however, there was only a small coattail effect. While Eisenhower swept the state, other Republican candidates faltered. To deny that the general's candidacy brought votes to other Republicans would be incorrect, but in the end his coattails were simply too short to influence the outcome of the elections in Montana.⁴

⁴Payne, pp. 226, 228.

II. THE NATIONAL SCENE IN 1952

The Presidential election year of 1952 found the nation in a restless mood, and Montana was no exception. The American electorate had become disillusioned with the Truman administration. The administration, particularly Truman himself, had come to symbolize the problems facing America. A popularity poll conducted in the spring of 1952 gave President Truman a popularity rating of only 26 percent.¹

The Truman administration faced numerous problems. The Korean War had entered its third year. As casualties mounted and the peace talks at Panmunjon dragged on, the American public became more and more frustrated. Most Americans believed that the United States had never lost a war, but Truman had gotten the country into a war where the official policy called for only a limited effort, not an all-out drive to victory. Few Americans understood this new concept of warfare, and many were bitter and extremely frustrated.²

¹Eric F. Goldman, The Crucial Decade -- and After: America, 1945-1960 (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), p. 218; Billings interview; Cabell Phillips, The Truman Presidency (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966), p. 402. See also Alonzo L. Hamby, Beyond the New Deal: Harry S. Truman and American Liberalism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973); Merle Miller, Plain Speaking (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1973); and Harry S. Truman, Memoirs, vol. 2: Years of Trial and Hope (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1956).

²Goldman, p. 211; Phillips, p. 402.

Truman and the nation confronted other problems. The Republicans, particularly those loyal to Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy, hammered away on the charge of Communists within the government, especially in the State Department. The tensions of the Cold War grew as Korea dragged on, and diatribes about Communist infiltration of the government filled the air. Charges of corruption rocked the Truman administration. In the middle of all of this, the steel workers walked off their jobs. When talks between labor and management failed to show any progress, Truman seized the steel mills on the grounds that their shut-down hampered the war effort in Korea and thus endangered the lives of American soldiers. The U.S. Supreme Court promptly ruled the seizure unconstitutional, and Truman's prestige dropped ever lower as the frustration of the average American rose to new highs.³

As the November elections approached, therefore, America appeared ready for a change. Something, the American voter felt, was missing. He wished, in the words of Eric Goldman, "for something that was not there, for something he was sure had once been there, for an older, simpler America, without juvenile delinquents and genteel young men turning into Alger Hisses and five percenters and

³Phillips, p. 402.

bewildering doctrines of limited warfare." The Republican call for a change struck a chord in both the hearts and minds of Americans everywhere.⁴

When the Republican Convention met at Chicago in early July, optimism abounded. The contest for the Presidential nomination had narrowed to a battle between Senator Robert Taft of Ohio, the early frontrunner, and the popular General Dwight D. Eisenhower. Governors Harold Stassen of Minnesota and Earl Warren of California and General Douglas MacArthur hoped the convention would deadlock between the two leading candidates and then turn to them, but their chances were slim at best. Taft's support came from the right wing of the party, which desired to avoid the "Me-Tooism" of Wendell Wilkie and Thomas Dewey that the Taft people argued had brought the Republican defeats in the past three Presidential elections. Taft and his supporters believed the Republicans would have a better chance of winning if they gave the electorate a definite alternative to New Deal-Fair Deal liberalism. To counter Taft, the left and center of the Republican Party threw its support to Eisenhower, arguing that Taft could not win in November. After a bitter fight, Eisenhower's personality and the "cannot win" charge against Taft brought the general the nomination on the first ballot. Senator Richard Nixon of California, who had

⁴Goldman, p. 218.

built his reputation by looking for Communists in government and convicting Alger Hiss, was nominated for Vice-President.⁵

The Republican platform was vague and served mostly to condemn Democratic policies. It supported the Taft-Hartley Act, but with amendments which were not spelled out. It sidestepped issues and left the questions of education and civil rights to the states. The platform did attack Democratic foreign policy, claiming that victory in World War II had been traded away at Teheran, Yalta, and Potsdam. The Republicans alleged that the Democrats had given China away to the Communists and were handling Korea incorrectly. The platform attacked the Democrats for giving in to Russian advances in Europe. Mostly, the platform criticized without offering constructive alternatives. Time magazine called the platform "as inspiring as an orange crate." As far as the Republicans were concerned, the key issues were the need for a change in the government, Korea, corruption, and Communist subversion at home and abroad.⁶

⁵Barton J. Bernstein, "The 1952 Election," in Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. and Fred L. Israel, eds., History of American Presidential Elections, 1789-1968, 4 vols. (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1971), IV, 3231. See also "National Affairs," Time, July 14, 1952, pp. 17-24.

⁶Bernstein, p. 3232; Austin Ranney, "The Platforms, the Parties, and the Voter," Yale Review 42 (September, 1952): 11, 15, 16; "National Affairs," Time, July 21, 1952, pp. 14, 15. For an analysis of the impact of these issues upon the electorate, see Angus Campbell et al., The American Voter, abridged ed. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1964), pp. 16-26.

In late July the Democratic Convention met, also at Chicago. The race for the Presidential nomination was wide open. Senators Estes Kefauver of Tennessee, Richard Russell of Georgia, Robert Kerr of Oklahoma, Vice-President Alben Barkley of Kentucky, and Averell Harriman of New York all had President aspirations. Each of them also had liabilities impeding his campaign. The apparent choice of most Democrats, including President Truman, was Governor Adlai Stevenson of Illinois. Stevenson claimed he was not interested in the nomination but he did allow his name to be placed before the convention in nomination. The convention nominated him on the third ballot. The Democrats then named Senator John Sparkman of Alabama as his running mate in an effort to placate the southern Democrats who had broken with the party in 1948.⁷

The Democratic platform sought to defend the New Deal-Fair Deal policies. It offered aid to education, rigid farm price supports, and repeal of the Taft-Hartley Act. The civil rights plank, although probably stronger than the famous plank of 1948, was couched in language which made it acceptable to the southern delegates and prevented another Dixiecrat split. For the Democrats, the issue was the record of the Roosevelt and Truman administrations. They pointed out

⁷For more information, see Bernstein, pp. 3234-3240; and "U.S. Affairs," Time, July 28, 1952, pp. 7-12.

that Americans had "never had it so good" and contrasted the existing economic conditions with those under the last Republican President, Herbert Hoover.⁸

⁸Ranney, pp. 11, 19. See also Bernstein, pp. 3267-3281; and "National Affairs," Time, August 4, 1952, pp. 9-18.

III. THE MONTANA PRIMARIES AND STATE CONVENTIONS

The 1952 primaries in Montana were extremely quiet for two reasons. First, the primaries were sandwiched between the two national conventions. As a result, the state's media coverage and the attention of the voters were directed toward Chicago and away from the primaries. Secondly, the races of June 1952 were singularly unexciting. There was no drag-out, knock-down battle such as the 1946 primary contest between Senator Burton Wheeler and Leif Erickson. In fact, of the eight major primary contests -- including each party's contest for the Senate, the governorship, and the two House seats -- only three were even disputed. In the second Congressional district both Republican incumbent Wesley D'Ewart and Democratic challenger Willard Fraser were unopposed. The same was true of the Senate races, where Republican incumbent Zales Ecton and Democratic Congressman Mike Mansfield were both unopposed. Incumbent Democratic Governor John Bonner was also unopposed for renomination.¹

The primary for the Republican gubernatorial nomination generated little excitement. This race pitted J. Hugo Aronson against Leonard Young, a member of the state railroad and public service commission. The amiable Aronson, a big, strong, likeable man, had built a solid conservative reputation in both houses of the state

¹The Cut Bank Pioneer Press, 3 July 1952.

legislature and had the vote-getting nickname of the "Gallop-
ing Swede." Young had run for the Republican nomination for governor
before, being swamped by incumbent Governor Sam Ford in 1948. Young
claimed that his goal in life was to be the governor of Montana.²

On election day Aronson easily defeated Young by 34,487 votes.
Aronson was better known throughout the state and was a more color-
ful campaigner than his opponent. Many Republicans undoubtedly
believed, therefore, that Aronson would have a better chance against
Governor Bonner in November. Aronson also had a better organization
and more money to spend. In a campaign practically devoid of issues
other than opposition to Bonner and his policies, personality counted
for many votes, and in that department Aronson was a clear winner.³

Competition was keen in the first Congressional district, as
the incumbent, Mike Mansfield, had just filed for the U.S. Senate.
This left the field wide open. Wellington D. Rankin, Winfield Page,
and Eldron Myrick all filed for the Republican nomination. The
contest quickly boiled down to a race between Rankin and Page.
Myrick, while running on what should have been a popular platform
of opposing Truman's foreign policy while advocating farm price

²J. Hugo Aronson and L. O. Brockman, The Galloping Swede
(Missoula: Mountain Press Publishing Co., 1970), p. 99; The Helena
People's Voice, 4 July 1952.

³The Helena Independent Record, 31 July 1952; Waldron, p. 348.

supports and better working conditions for labor, was never a factor in the contest.⁴

Rankin ran primarily on his name and past record. He also attacked Democratic policy in Korea and used a "bring the boys home" theme. Page ran on his record of ten years' experience as a state legislator. Since he served as Republican National Committeeman, Rankin was a formidable opponent, but Page gave him all the competition he wanted. On election day Rankin edged Page by 1,071 votes. Myrick finished a distant third.⁵

The most important primary race of 1952 was the contest for the Democratic nomination for the first Congressional district. Paul Cannon, Edward Cook, Lee Metcalf, Bob Noonan, and W. J. Sullivan filed for the nomination. In reality, the race was between Cannon and Metcalf, as the other three candidates were relatively unknown.⁶

The voter had little to choose between Cannon, the lieutenant governor who had previously served in both houses of the state legislature, and Metcalf, a state Supreme Court justice and a former member of the Montana House of Representatives. Cannon had been a popular and outspoken lieutenant governor and had built a political

⁴The Helena People's Voice, 4 July 1952.

⁵The Helena People's Voice, 4 July 1952; The Great Falls Tribune, 4 June 1952; Waldron, p. 346.

⁶The Helena People's Voice, 4 July 1952; Billings interview.

base in Butte, his home town. Metcalf's support came from the state's powerful labor and farm organizations. Most of his labor support was also centered in Butte. The political philosophies of the two candidates were very similar. Both were liberals and favorites of labor and farmers. The final result was one of the closest elections in the history of Montana politics. After fifteen days and a recount of the ballots, Metcalf was declared the winner by fifty-five votes. Cannon had led after the first counting of the ballots. The closest of the other three candidates, Bob Noonan, finished 8,000 votes behind the winner.⁷

Metcalf owed his victory primarily to Cannon's late entry into the race. The lieutenant governor, seeking a more prestigious office, had hesitated in choosing which contest to enter. Some Democrats urged him to run for governor, others for the U.S. Senate, but Cannon finally settled on the first congressional seat and filed for it only a few hours before the deadline. By this time, Metcalf already had the support of organized labor and the farm organizations. Even after Cannon's entry into the race, these groups remained relatively true to Metcalf, although Cannon did carry Butte and Silver Bow county. Cannon's personal following was great enough to make the

⁷The Great Falls Tribune, 7 August 1952; Waldron, p. 346; Billings interview; The Butte Montana Standard, 5 June 1952.

race extremely close; and had he won, labor and farmers undoubtedly would have supported him gladly.⁸

On 25 August, Montana Republicans gathered in Helena to hold their state convention. While the national party had nominated Eisenhower, the Taft wing of the party controlled the Republican organization in Montana. The conservative wing of the party had in fact been in control almost continuously since Joseph Dixon, a progressive Republican and a follower of Theodore Roosevelt, lost his reelection bid for the governorship in 1924. The extent of conservative control was evidenced by the rightist flavor of the speakers at the convention. Senator Zales Ecton, a right-wing isolationist and a follower of both Taft and Joseph McCarthy, gave the keynote address. Wesley D'Ewart and Hugo Aronson, both conservatives, also spoke. Wellington Rankin, a more moderate Republican, was not asked to speak even though he was a national committeeman.⁹

The Republican state platform was based on "honesty, integrity, and economy." It dealt primarily with state issues and said little about the national scene. The platform supported government spending, when done properly. It called for an efficient state highway organization and the repeal of the small trailer tax. Dam development was

⁸Billings interview; Harry Billings to David Everett, 16 April 1976; Waldron, p. 346.

⁹The Helena Independent Record, 25 August 1952.

supported, but the idea of any type of federal valley authority in either the Columbia or Missouri Basins was opposed. Montana Republicans saw the national campaign issues in the same way as did their compatriots nationwide: Korea, corruption, Communism, and the need for a change. Montana Republicans, particularly Ecton and Rankin, were to hit hard at these issues during the upcoming campaign.¹⁰

The Democrats held their state convention at Billings on 21 August. The liberal wing of the party was in control, as it generally had been since the war. While the Republicans in Montana were united, the Democratic party was split by several small squabbles. Some Democrats opposed the state chairman, Hjalmar Landoe, feeling he was too conservative and too close to the big oil interests. Other Democrats had become dissatisfied with Governor Bonner and supported him with only mild enthusiasm. Mike Mansfield delivered the keynote speech. Mansfield was known for avoiding party fights and keeping a foot in both camps, and his selection indicated an attempt to satisfy everybody and avoid any semblance of a split within the party.¹¹

The Democratic state platform lauded Truman's leadership, especially in foreign affairs. It praised the Democratic party for

¹⁰Ibid., 26 August 1952.

¹¹The Billings Gazette, 22 August 1952.

having extended farm price supports and called for continued development of rural electrification. Like the national platform, it demanded the repeal of the Taft-Hartley Act. The nationwide issues of the Democrats were also the issues in Montana; they would run on their record of the past twenty years.¹²

¹²Ibid., 22 August 1952.

IV. THE PRESIDENTIAL CONTEST IN MONTANA

Considering that Montana had only four electoral votes, both parties devoted considerable attention to the state. Both top members of each party's ticket visited Montana. Undoubtedly, they wanted Montana's electoral votes, but they were also interested in the U.S. Senate race in the state. The candidates devoted nearly as much time to praising the Senatorial candidates of their respective parties as they did on their own campaigns. Overall, the Republicans spent more time campaigning in the state than did the Democrats.

General Eisenhower visited Montana in early October, making a whistlestop tour of the southern part of the state. His trip attracted large, enthusiastic crowds, which were matched only by President Truman's. Richard Nixon flew into the state on 24 September, the day after his famous "Checkers" speech. He delivered an address in Missoula, cancelled four other stops and then flew off to meet Eisenhower in Wheeling, West Virginia. Due to its timing, the Nixon visit received extensive press coverage. Nixon returned to Montana in early November, primarily at the urging of Senator Zales Ecton, who was in a close race for reelection. Neither Eisenhower nor Nixon missed a chance to give their support to Ecton.¹

¹The Butte Montana Standard, 24 September 1952; The Great Falls Tribune, 2 November 1952. For examples of Eisenhower's

The Democratic candidates did much less campaigning in Montana. Adlai Stevenson visited only Billings, and even there he gave no political speech, only a brief "off-the-cuff" talk at a breakfast given in his honor. John Sparkman gave only one speech in the state, primarily to aid the cause of Senatorial candidate Mike Mansfield. President Truman did more campaigning in Montana than either member of the Democratic ticket. Truman, whose official purpose for the visit was to dedicate Hungry Horse Dam, spent much more time praising Mansfield than did the party's standard bearers. On election day, Eisenhower captured 59.4 percent of the vote in the state, as compared to a 55.1 percent score nationally.²

While Montana voters consistently back the winning Presidential candidate, they also show a preference for voting a split ticket. Presidential coattails have had little effect throughout Montana's political history. The 1952 election fit this pattern as Montana voters supported Eisenhower without necessarily supporting other Republican candidates. Wesley D'Ewart, the biggest Republican winner in Montana, came close to matching Eisenhower's total in the eastern Congressional district, trailing Eisenhower by a little more than

reception in Montana, see The Bozeman Daily Chronicle, 5 October 1952; 7 October 1952; and The Butte Montana Standard, 6 October 1952.

²The Billings Gazette, 8 September 1952; The Butte Montana Standard, 30 October 1952; The Great Falls Tribune, 1 October 1952; 2 October 1952; Bone, pp. 93, 97.

1,000 votes. The other Republican candidates trailed their standard bearer by anywhere from 11,000 votes to 30,000 votes. This particularly hurt the Republicans in the Montana Senate contest. Although his coattails were short, Eisenhower undoubtedly did draw some votes in Montana to the Republican column. Republican candidates cut deeper than usual into Democratic margins of victory. Although there were other reasons for this shift, Eisenhower's candidacy played a role, too.³

In Montana, personality plays as large a role in politics as does party affiliation. Eisenhower's personality was the primary factor in his victory. Everyone, it seemed, liked Ike. In evaluating Eisenhower's candidacy, former Montana Senator Burton K. Wheeler stated that if the general won it would be "because the majority of the people . . . want a change. It won't be because of any great enthusiasm for Eisenhower." Wheeler was wrong. In Montana, as elsewhere in the nation, Eisenhower's popularity drew countless votes to the general but not to other Republican candidates. In addition, Eisenhower's compromise with Taft, in what Stevenson jeeringly called the "surrender of Morningside Heights," made

³Waldron, pp. 356, 358; Billings interview.

Eisenhower more attractive to Montana Republicans, who had supported Taft to the end at the national convention.⁴

⁴The Great Falls Tribune, 31 August 1952; Eugene H. Roseboom, A History of Presidential Elections (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957), pp. 518, 519; Payne, pp. 226, 228.

V. THE U.S. SENATE CONTEST

Probably the most important race in Montana in 1952 was the U.S. Senate race, which pitted incumbent Republican Zales Ecton against the Democratic challenger, Congressman Mike Mansfield. Both national parties were interested in the contest, as control of the Senate depended upon several key contests, of which Montana was one. At election time, the Democrats held a slim 49-to-47 advantage in the Senate. Both parties went all out to gain victory in this contest. They brought in outside speakers, such as President Truman, who made a twelve-stop tour of Montana. Presidential candidates Eisenhower and Stevenson, Vice-Presidential candidates Nixon and Sparkman, and Senators Robert Taft, Joseph McCarthy, Guy Gordon, Everett Dirksen, Paul Douglas, and Estes Kefauver also stumped the state. The National Republican Senatorial Committee contributed heavily to the Ecton campaign, and Ecton was able to outspend his opponent. All in all, the campaign was hotly contested with Ecton's campaign turning to smear tactics as time wore on. Ecton himself did very little directly to smear Congressman Mansfield. Nonetheless, he was, in all likelihood, aware of what his supporters, most

noticeably his own campaign team, were doing and could have stopped the smear had he wished to do so.¹

Zales N. Ecton seems in retrospect to have been a political exception. Incredibly, he was the first, and so far the only, Republican ever sent to the U.S. Senate by the citizens of Montana since the state began the direct election of Senators in 1911. Ecton was born on 18 April 1898 in Weldon, Iowa. When he was nine, his family migrated to Montana. He became a rancher in the Gallatin Valley and entered politics. He served in the state House of Representatives from 1933 to 1937, then was elected to the state Senate, serving there until 1946. He had been chairman of the state Republican central committee from 1940 to 1944. In 1946, Ecton won the Republican nomination for the U.S. Senate, and in the general election he defeated Leif Erickson, who had upset Senator Burton Wheeler in the Democratic primary. Ecton was an extreme conservative on domestic issues and an isolationist in foreign affairs. He had spent most of his six years in the Senate opposing everything Truman proposed.

¹"Contributions Made to the Ecton for Senator Club," pp. 1-3, Box 5, Zales Ecton Papers, Montana State University Library, Special Collections, Bozeman, Montana; hereafter cited as Ecton Papers; Karlin, p. 116.

The Senator generally followed the lead of Senator Robert Taft and was also a strong backer of Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy.²

Democratic Congressman Mike Mansfield opposed Ecton's bid for reelection. Mansfield, born in New York City in 1903, came to Montana at the early age of three. For most of his earlier years, Mansfield had led a wandering life. At age thirteen, he convinced a Navy recruiter that he was of age and enlisted. After his discharge, he returned to Montana and worked as a ranchhand and a smelterman in the Butte mines. He then joined the Army and upon his discharge enlisted in the Marines. Returning again to Montana, Mansfield completed his education, receiving a high school diploma and a college degree at almost the same time. In the process Mansfield met his future wife, Maureen Hayes. His wife proved a settling influence on Mansfield, and he enrolled at Montana State University (now the University of Montana) at Missoula. He eventually earned an M.A. degree there and stayed on at the university, teaching history and political science. In 1940 Mansfield ran for the Democratic nomination for the first Congressional district, finishing third out of

²Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1971 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971), p. 897; hereafter cited as Biographical Directory; Karlin, pp. 115, 116. For a study of Ecton's 1946 victory over Erickson, see Timothy John Carman, "Senator Zales Ecton: A Product of Reaction" (M.A. Thesis, Montana State University, 1971).

four candidates. The Democratic nominee, Jerry O'Connell, lost to Jeanette Rankin; and when she voted against war after Pearl Harbor, the way was open for Mansfield. He won the seat in 1942 and was reelected four times in succession. Through the years the Congressman had earned a reputation as an extremely efficient "errand boy" for his constituents. He was a moderate New Dealer and enjoyed strong labor support. He decided to give up his safe Congressional seat -- he won 60 percent of the vote in 1950 -- to challenge Ecton. In retrospect, this election appears as the "crossroads" of Mike Mansfield's brilliant career.³

A third candidate, Lawrence L. Price, ran on the Progressive ticket. This party represented the remnants of the one formed by Henry Wallace for the 1948 Presidential election. Price, a Great Falls carpenter, ran on a fourteen-point platform, which was isolationist in foreign policy, liberal in domestic policy, and called for the government to be returned to the people. Some Democrats feared that Price would take votes away from Mansfield, thus assuring Ecton's reelection. This fear proved unfounded, as

³Biographical Directory, p. 1335; Karlin, p. 116; Michael P. Malone and Pierce C. Mullen, "Mansfield of Montana" (ms in author's possession, 1971), pp. 3, 5.

Price polled only 1,826 votes in the general election and was never a major factor in the campaign.⁴

Mansfield's original strategy was simple. He launched an extensive campaign, criss-crossing Montana and visiting every town and person he could meet. By the end of the campaign, he had traveled 39,842 miles and given over 300 speeches. But Mansfield's main concentration was on shaking hands and meeting people. He ignored his opponent, even during most of the smear campaign directed against him.⁵

Mansfield argued that the voters should judge the candidates on their records, and he ran on his record as a Congressman. He used his previously tested slogan of "The Can-do Candidate with the Can-did Record." He played up the four dams (Hungry Horse, Canyon Ferry, Tiber, and Missouri-Souris) which the federal government had built in Montana during his tenure, and he pointed to the \$4.5 million Veteran's Hospital in Miles City and the smokejumper school at Missoula. Said Mansfield: "What has been foremost with me since I have been in Congress has been 'what can I do for the people of Montana?'." Mansfield had turned down President Truman's offer of

⁴The Helena People's Voice, 13 June 1952; 18 July 1952; Waldron, p. 358.

⁵The Great Falls Tribune, 2 November 1952; Ernest Immel, "Montana This Week" in The Harlowton Times, 25 September 1952.

an appointment as Assistant Secretary in the State Department, claiming that his first duty was to the people of Montana and to continue working for their benefit.⁶

The Congressman's crowning achievement was Hungry Horse Dam. The idea for the dam had originated with editor H. J. Kelly of Lewistown. As the dam neared completion, Kelly's son noted, in reply to Ecton's suggestion that the dam be named for Kelly, that "Congressman Mansfield has perhaps done more than anyone I know to assure the building of the dam." Economically, the dam was a boon to Montana. Its construction meant employment for 2,500 men, with a monthly payroll of over \$1.5 million. The dam would also make a large contribution to the power pool of the northwestern United States.⁷

Mansfield's prestige increased further when President Truman came to Montana to dedicate the structure. Montana's senior Senator, James Murray, also played a major role in getting Truman to come to Montana, but the show definitely belonged to Mike Mansfield. Truman lavishly praised Mansfield:

⁶The Billings Gazette, 3 October 1952; Malone and Mullen, pp. 2, 3; Karlin, p. 116; The Great Falls Tribune, 17 September 1952; Current Biography, April 1952, p. 402.

⁷The Great Falls Tribune, 14 August 1952; 23 June 1952; 2 July 1952.

Mike Mansfield led the fight for the legislation which was passed in 1944 to authorize the construction of Hungry Horse Dam. During the Eightieth Congress he fought in the House and before the Senate Appropriations Committee against Republican slashes in the funds needed to build it.

At Havre, the President continued, "Mike Mansfield is a credit to Montana and to the whole United States. He has a record to be proud of."⁸

Truman did not hesitate to point out that such benefits would not be forthcoming if Republicans were elected. At Libby, the President stated: "If the Republican Party gets in I wouldn't be surprised if they turn Hungry Horse Dam over to the Montana Power Company. As for Libby Dam, you might as well forget it." Since Montana Power was widely distrusted in the state, it was doubtful that anyone in the President's audience missed the point.⁹

Ecton did his best to take the spotlight at Hungry Horse away from Mansfield. This proved somewhat difficult as the Senator, despite his membership on the Senate Appropriations Committee, had done little to speed construction on the dam, and at one point had been willing to let one of the appropriation bills for it die in

⁸The New York Times, 2 October 1952; 1 October 1952.

⁹The New York Times, 2 October 1952. For one such plan of selling government built dams to power companies, see "How to End Socialism in U.S.," The U.S. News and World Report, September 25, 1952, p. 35.

committee. Ecton suggested that the name of the dam be changed to Kelly Dam in order to honor the originator of the dam's idea. Kelly's son's reply was a perfect squelch and typical of the reaction to the Senator's suggestion. The suggestion quickly drowned in a sea of public protest.¹⁰

Having failed in that, Ecton tried a different tack. He charged that Mansfield was for Mike Mansfield, not the people of Montana. If he was for Montana, Ecton wondered aloud, why did he get off the House Interior Committee, where he could do much to oversee programs which would benefit the state, in order to join the House Foreign Affairs Committee? The Senator pointed to his own membership on the Senate Interior and Appropriations Committees. He was the first Montanan in forty years to serve on the latter. Said State Republican Chairman George M. Gossman of Ecton's committee assignments: "His committee memberships alone have been worth many thousands of dollars to the voters of his state through the wise decisions he has made affecting Montana and its development."¹¹

¹⁰The Great Falls Tribune, 14 August 1952; 14 October 1952. For an example of the protest to Ecton's suggestion, see Mrs. Ann Sharr to Oscar Chapman, Secretary of the Interior, 12 August 1952, Ecton Papers, Box 6. One anti-Ecton editor noted that the suggestion was the first positive action the Senator had taken in regard to the dam. The Columbia Falls Hungry Horse News, 17 October 1952.

¹¹The Helena Independent Record, 27 October 1952; The Great Falls Tribune, 21 August 1952.

For Ecton, however, the main issue was Communist subversion at home and the threat of Communist expansion abroad. Ecton's choice of Communism as a central campaign issue was not surprising. The McCarthy era had begun, and the Republican national convention had made it a feature issue. To many Republicans, Communism was just that, an issue to win a political battle. Senator Joseph McCarthy, for example, had begun earlier to hammer away at that issue after it was suggested during a dinner in a Washington restaurant as a way for McCarthy to win reelection. To Ecton it was more than a political issue; it was a crusade, a battle in which defeat meant the ultimate defeat of the United States. Ecton had styled his 1946 campaign as a battle against Communist interests, and the 1952 election was no different. There was very little hypocrisy in Ecton; he simply believed in his cause. Unfortunately, as outside speakers entered Montana to speak on his behalf and the campaign grew more intense, the Ecton campaign became a smear against Mansfield.¹²

Smear campaigns were nothing new to Montana politics. They had been fairly common in the first several decades of the century. As a rule, they had been run by the Anaconda Company to keep its opponents out of office. Burton Wheeler, for example, had been the victim of such a campaign in his 1920 bid for the governorship.

¹²Robert Griffith, The Politics of Fear (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1970), pp. 11n, 30.

In the Ecton - Mansfield contest, however, the Anaconda Company remained neutral. The Republicans alone were responsible for the smears of Mansfield.¹³

Ecton's first step was to tie Mansfield to the Truman administration, allowing the Senator to blame his opponent for all of the problems facing America. This proved easy, for Mansfield was widely known as a Truman supporter and he made no effort to disassociate himself from either Truman or New Deal-Fair Deal philosophy. The attitude of the Ecton camp was summed up by J. H. Morrow, Ecton's campaign manager, who wrote: "Mansfield's record has been simply that of a stooge for and on behalf of the Truman-Acheson-State Department policy and he has parroted the line of Henry Wallace" This opened up several avenues of attack for Ecton, and the smear campaign was underway.¹⁴

Ecton attacked what he called the administration's "phony prosperity." Dollar bills, the Senator claimed, were worth only fifty cents. If the present fiscal policies were continued, the government would go bankrupt, Ecton believed. Typically, the Senator

¹³Malone and Roeder, Montana: A History, p. 220; J. H. Morrow, Jr. to H. L. Hunt, 10 October 1952, p. 1, Box 5, Ecton Papers.

¹⁴J. H. Morrow, Jr. to William Colley, 13 September 1952, Box 5, Ecton Papers. See also William D. Miller, "Montana and the Specter of McCarthyism, 1952-1954" (M.A. Thesis, Montana State University, 1969).

blamed the whole problem on the Korean War, arguing that the administration's so-called prosperity was based upon war.¹⁵

The Senator attacked Mansfield for being lax in the fight against Communism at home. Morrow noted that Mansfield had voted against appropriations for the House Un-American Activities Committee and a loyalty check on federal employees. The Ecton campaign staff prepared a pamphlet comparing Mansfield's roll call votes with those of Vito Marcantonio, a noted socialist Congressman from New York City. According to this pamphlet, in two sessions of the Eightieth Congress and two sessions of the Eighty-first Congress, there had been 406 roll call votes. Mansfield and Marcantonio had voted alike 238 times. The pamphlet broke the votes down by sessions. What it did not do was note the content of the bills on which Mansfield and Marcantonio had voted alike. In the second session of the Eighty-first Congress, for example, both had voted with the majority to defeat a bill calling for the direct election of Presidents, and both had voted for providing allowances for the dependents of enlisted men, which passed unanimously. Neither of these votes showed

¹⁵The Billings Gazette, 23 September 1952; The Butte Montana Standard, 15 September 1952; The Livingston Enterprise, 22 September 1952.

Mansfield to be lax on Communism. In this way, the Ecton people distorted the truth.¹⁶

A Republican "Truth Squad" added its attack on Mansfield's laxness in fighting Communism. This "Truth Squad", consisting of Senators Homer Ferguson of Michigan, Francis Case of South Dakota, and Bourke Hickenlooper of Iowa, followed President Truman into the state. They came, they said, to set the record straight. Said Ferguson, "I know of nothing he [Mansfield] has done to rid the U.S. government of Communism." Ecton claimed that the Communist Daily Worker had "headlined" his opponent.¹⁷

Ecton's major attack came on Mansfield's alleged role in the loss of China to the Communists. Ecton tagged his opponent as "China Mike," a label first used by Ralph McGinnis, Mansfield's 1950 Congressional opponent. Mansfield had toured China in 1944 at the request of President Franklin Roosevelt. Ecton attacked Mansfield, though not by name, for his efforts after the tour to pressure Chiang Kai-Shek into allowing Communists into the Chinese government and for his labeling the Chinese Communists as "agrarian reformers."

¹⁶J. H. Morrow, Jr. to William Brolin, 18 September 1952, Box 5; B. Jo Hoppin to Mrs. H. A. Madson, 25 October 1952, Box 5; R. E. Bodley to Mrs. F. L. Hirschy, 11 October 1952, Box 5; "Mansfield Voting Record," Box 9, Ecton Papers.

¹⁷The Great Falls Tribune, 3 October 1952; The Missoula Daily Missoulian, 14 October 1952.

Mansfield, said Ecton, "cannot escape his share of responsibility for Communist domination of China and the fact that the 'agrarian reformers' are now killing American boys."¹⁸

This charge typified the Ecton campaign. The accusation held an element of truth, but was oversimplified and one-sided. Mansfield had indeed referred to the Chinese Communists as agrarian reformers, but in the context of trying to separate them from Moscow domination. Further, this was a commonly held belief in the war years of 1944-45, when the Chinese Communists were doing more to fight the Japanese and thus aid the U.S. war effort than was Chiang. Mansfield, in the same speech, had also staunchly defended Chiang, saying that he was the one man who could unite China and that he was a dictator in name only.¹⁹

From the charges on China, Ecton was only a small step away from blaming Mansfield for Korea, and he easily took that step. Korea was a mess, and Ecton believed that Mansfield deserved a large part of the blame. As noted above, Ecton blamed Mansfield for the

¹⁸Malone and Mullen, p. 8; The Great Falls Tribune, 4 October 1952; The Missoula Daily Missoulian, 5 October 1952; "Issues of the 1950 Congressional Campaign," printed copy of speech given by Ralph McGinnis to Montana State Republican Convention, Helena, Montana, 19 August 1950, Box 9, Ecton Papers.

¹⁹U.S., Congress, House of Representatives, Congressman Mansfield reporting on "China and Her Problems, Military and Political," 79th Cong., 1st sess., 16 January 1945, Congressional Record 91 (Part 1): 279-282.

fact that Chinese soldiers were killing American troops. What he did not note was that the strategy responsible for Chinese intervention in Korea had been concocted primarily by General Douglas MacArthur, a hero to right wing Republicans like Ecton. Most Republicans quickly and easily forgot this as they rallied behind the general's call for an all-out effort to win the war.²⁰

The Republican party provided Ecton with plenty of help by bringing numerous outside speakers into Montana. On 14 October, the king of innuendo, Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy, came to Missoula to speak on Ecton's behalf. After the usual attacks on the State Department and the Truman administration, McCarthy turned to the Senate contest in Montana. The Senator depicted the Daily Worker as praising Mansfield's report on China. Mansfield, said McCarthy, was "either stupid or a dupe." Of Ecton, he said, his "only crime is that he is first and last for America." Senator Robert Taft, "Mr. Republican," also put in an appearance to aid Ecton. He claimed that the Senate needed Ecton and that he wanted to help Ecton in his fight. Taft then turned on Mansfield, attacking his China report.²¹

²⁰J. H. Morrow, Jr. to M. K. Gordon, 25 October 1952, Box 5, Ecton Papers; The Missoula Daily Missoulian, 5 October 1952.

²¹The Missoula Daily Missoulian, 15 October 1952; The Billings Gazette, 27 October 1952.

Many of the speakers avoided attacking Mansfield directly and concentrated, instead, on praising Ecton. Senator Eugene Miliken of Colorado set the tone of these speeches when he stated: "Ecton stands like Gibraltar against Trumanism" and called Ecton "a man fired with patriotic zeal." Eisenhower and Nixon both lent their support to Ecton's cause. They, too, concentrated on praising Ecton and refrained from attacking Mansfield. Considering Nixon's previous record in regard to the issue of Communism, this was something of a surprise. Even when the speakers did not verbally assault Mansfield, the tone was still one of a crusade against Communism.²²

The speaker who created the most controversy in the smear campaign was Harvey Matusow, a protege of Senator Joseph McCarthy. Matusow had joined the Communist Party in America as a young man and then had become an F.B.I. informer. He had made a name for himself by testifying, often falsely, before grand juries and Congressional investigating committees as an expert on Communist subversion in America. Through his testimony, he had become associated with McCarthy. Matusow later claimed he came to Montana at McCarthy's request to campaign, not for Ecton, but against Mansfield. Matusow alleged that McCarthy had told him that if Mansfield was elected,

²²The Missoula Daily Missoulian, 14 October 1952; 25 September 1952; The Billings Gazette, 6 October 1952; 21 October 1952; The Great Falls Tribune, 2 November 1952; The Bozeman Daily Chronicle, 5 October 1952.

"you might just as well have an admitted Communist in the Senate, it's the same difference."²³

While Matusow claimed to have come to Montana at McCarthy's request, in truth Ecton's staff had requested McCarthy to send Matusow. Ecton's staff, however, did not want it to appear that they were sponsoring Matusow's tour of the state. The Ecton people apparently felt Matusow would be more effective if he did not appear to be a partisan speaker. If the tour should backfire, there would be no direct tie to Ecton. Therefore, V. O. Overcash, the Glacier County Republican Chairman and a former commander of the Montana American Legion, formed a front organization, the Montana Citizens for Americanism, to sponsor Matusow.²⁴

Matusow's speeches and style changed little between Great Falls, Billings, and seven other Montana towns. His speeches started with the general theme of Communist subversion in America, and Matusow would make up charges to illustrate his point. Arguing that the media was Communist controlled, Matusow charged that 126 dues-paying Communists worked on the Sunday section of the New York Times.

²³Harvey Matusow, False Witness (New York: Cameron & Kahn, 1955), pp. 23-32, 65-161, 166; Malone and Mullen, p. 10.

²⁴Jerry B. House to J. H. Morrow, Jr., 18 September 1952, p. 2, Box 4; [Jerry B. House?] to J. H. Morrow, Jr., 20 September 1952, Box 5; J. H. Morrow, Jr. to Jerry B. House, 10 October 1952, p. 2, Box 5, Ecton Papers; The Cut Bank Pioneer Press, 7 August 1952; 21 August 1952.

It was later shown that the Sunday section employed fewer than 100 people. After the general talk came the smear of Mansfield, though his name was not mentioned: "You have a Congressman here, I don't know if he's running for office this year" Then came the smear based on the "big lie": "misleading statements from Communist publications, quotations out of context, guilt by association." Matusow offered "documented proof," impossible for his audience to read, let alone verify. He later admitted that the "proof" was a fraud. The whole operation was prepared by members of McCarthy's staff.²⁵

After Matusow's Great Falls speech, his first in the state, some people sent up howls of protest. They attacked the American Legion for sponsoring such an irresponsible speaker. The Legion dodged the issue and then denied any sponsorship of Matusow. A newspaper advertisement for Matusow's Great Falls speech claimed sponsorship by the Legion, and the Legion could not get around that. Overcash tried to save the Legion by stating that the Legion had not given support and that Matusow was sponsored by the Montana Citizens for Americanism. The episode did little except give Matusow more publicity, focus some attention on the Montana Citizens for

²⁵The Great Falls Tribune, 15 October 1952; Matusow, pp. 167-169; Malone and Mullen, p. 10.

Americanism, and, perhaps, remove some of the halo around Harvey Matusow, the expert on Communist subversion.²⁶

The Democrats, as a rule, did little to counteract Matusow, believing that the general public would not be taken in by such obviously irresponsible comments. Matusow reinforced that idea by quickly becoming involved in a controversy with the Farmers Union. In one of his speeches, Matusow accused the Farmers Union of being a Communist organization. The Farmers Union promptly challenged Matusow to speak before the organization and repeat his charges. Matusow accepted the offer. The Farmers Union demanded that someone take responsibility for what Matusow might say or that Matusow post a \$25,000 bond in case he libeled the organization or one of its members. Overcash refused to take responsibility, and Matusow was unable to post the bond. With that, the controversy died, but not before it became clear that no one was willing to take responsibility for Matusow's statements.²⁷

The attacks placed Mansfield on the defensive. He did his best to counter Ecton's charges by pointing to his anti-Communist

²⁶Matusow, p. 166; The Great Falls Tribune, 22 October 1952; advertisement in The Great Falls Tribune, 13 October 1952.

²⁷Interview with Hjalmar Landoe, Bozeman, Montana, 20 October 1976; hereafter cited as Landoe interview; The Great Falls Tribune, 22 October 1952; Matusow, pp. 169, 170; The Cut Bank Pioneer Press, 23 October 1952; 30 October 1952.

record. He had introduced legislation to outlaw the Communist Party in America and had voted for the McCarran Act and the Nixon-Mundt Bill, both designed to control Communism. He had voted to keep America strong militarily. Stated the Congressman: "You cannot be a communist and an American" and he called Communism "the most insidious menace in the world today." What, Mansfield wanted to know, had his opponent done to fight Communism? Each of the candidates apparently was trying to appear more anti-Communist than his opponent.²⁸

Outside speakers helped Mansfield in refuting these charges. Truman, during his tour, pointed to Mansfield's service as a Congressional delegate to the United Nations. Said the President:

Last year I appointed him to the U.S. delegation to the U.N. I never made a better choice. In the debates in Paris he stood right up to the Russian Vishinsky and slugged it out with him and beat down a Russian attack on the foreign policy of the United States. That debate won respect for Mike Mansfield throughout the world.

Mike has always known that Communism was dangerous and we had to take measures to stop it.

²⁸The Great Falls Tribune, 21 October 1952; newspaper clipping (n.d., n.p.), Mansfield Scrapbook, 1952 Election, Mansfield Collection, The University of Montana Library, Archives, Missoula, Montana; hereafter cited as Mansfield Collection; The Butte Montana Standard, 12 October 1952.

Vice-Presidential candidate John Sparkman echoed this theme in his speech in Butte, again pointing to Mansfield's verbal battle with the Russian delegate to the United Nations.²⁹

For most of the campaign, Mansfield had ignored his opponent. Then, less than two weeks before the election, Mansfield, either worried about the effect of the smears on the outcome of the election or simply angered, turned on Ecton. In a speech at Butte, the Congressman delivered a damning ten-point indictment of Ecton's record in the U.S. Senate. He attacked the Senator's votes against REA, Social Security, soil conservation funds, the Japanese peace treaty, the Hoover Commission proposals to streamline the federal government, and appropriations for Hungry Horse Dam. Mansfield also attacked Ecton for failure to initiate legislation to stop Communism, to strengthen America's defenses, and to aid the working man and the farmer. The Congressman said his favorite Montana town was Zero, because it reminded him of his opponent's record as a Senator.³⁰

In condemning Ecton's work in the Senate, Mansfield stood on solid ground. He certainly was not alone in his evaluation of the Senator's record. A poll conducted among political scientists

²⁹The Great Falls Tribune, 1 October 1952; The Butte Montana Standard, 30 October 1952.

³⁰The Butte Montana Standard, 30 October 1952; The Great Falls Tribune, 25 October 1952.

by The New Republic was revealing. The magazine designed the poll to rate the ninety-six U.S. Senators. Ecton was ranked 75. An anti-Ecton editor noted that Redbook had called the Senator "'completely ineffective'" and quoted the Senator as saying: "'If I thought it took extraordinary intelligence to represent the people of Montana, I wouldn't be a candidate.'"³¹

The charges hurt Ecton, particularly the one concerning his votes on REA. He did his best to reply. A mimeographed letter sent to all REA customers stated that no member of Montana's Congressional delegation had ever opposed REA appropriations. During his six years in the Senate there had been six REA appropriation bills and he had supported them all, the Senator stated. Ecton claimed Mansfield's charge was an out-and-out lie, as were the charges concerning his farm record.³²

The reality behind the charges and counter-charges was clouded. During Ecton's six years in the Senate there had been no roll call votes relating exclusively to REA appropriations; all were tied to

³¹Byron L. Johnson and W. E. Butt, "Rating the Senators," The New Republic, March 3, 1952, pp. 10-11. The rating was based on five criteria: attitude on domestic issues, attitude on foreign affairs, legislative ability, intellectual ability, and personal integrity. Paul Douglas (Dem.-Ill.) was ranked first and Joseph McCarthy (Rep.-Wisc.) was ranked last; The Columbia Falls Hungry Horse News, 17 October 1952.

³²Zales Ecton to all REA patrons (mimeographed letter), 31 October 1952, Box 5, Ecton Papers; The Glasgow Courier, 30 October 1952.

other appropriations. Ecton had voted for these. Ecton's administrative assistant, R. E. Bodley, however, admitted that while Ecton had voted for appropriations, the Senator had voted against the use of tax money to build power lines parallel to existing private lines. This stand served to defeat the purpose of REA, and in that sense, Mansfield's charges were true. In reality, the candidates were quibbling over the difference between supporting REA and REA appropriations.³³

Ecton also stepped up his attacks on Mansfield and the Truman administration. He claimed that, if the Democrats were elected, "a high school diploma will continue to be virtually a certification of graduation into the army" and that the "army will be putting a tag on every American boy's cradle." The Senator charged that a vote for his opponent was a vote to send a son into the army. He also claimed that the policies then being pursued would turn the United States into a military state. Throughout the campaign Ecton never directly called Mansfield a Communist, but that is the best that can be said of most of his attacks on the Congressman.³⁴

³³ Jerry B. House to Ray Dockery, 17 October 1952, Box 5; Zales Ecton to all REA patrons (mimeographed letter), 31 October 1952, Box 5; R. E. Bodley to Otto Kiehlbauch, 18 October 1952, p. 1, Box 5, Ecton Papers.

³⁴ The Helena Independent Record, 28 October 1952; The Billings Gazette, 26 October 1952; Miller, p. 17.

Ecton also complained that the administration was out to get him. He charged that Truman had sent government employees to Montana to campaign against him. This activity was supposedly financed by federal money and was concentrated in the Departments of Interior and Agriculture. Before, during and after the campaign, Ecton pictured himself as a martyr, a battle casualty in the crusade to save America. At times Ecton bordered on paranoia. At different times he claimed that the American Federation of Labor, the entire Democratic party, the Truman administration, left wing socialists, New Dealers, and the Butte miners were out to get him. Undoubtedly, these groups wanted to see Ecton defeated and contributed to that end; but in carrying it to the extremes that he did, the Senator was flattering himself.³⁵

On election eve Ecton gave his last campaign speech, by means of a statewide radio hookup. Although Ecton said nothing new in the speech, it may well have cost him the election. Many people in the Senator's audience that night thought he sounded intoxicated. This was not true; Ecton had a slight speech impediment which accounted

³⁵The Glasgow Courier, 30 October 1952; Zales Ecton to Mrs. Maud R. Beller, 8 October 1951, Box 6; Zales Ecton to J. R. Fabrich, 19 November 1952, p. 1, Box 5; J. H. Morrow, Jr. to Ervin D. Hintzpeter, 20 October 1952, Box 5; Zales Ecton to Herman Welker, 13 November 1952, Box 5; Zales Ecton to Joseph H. Hays, 19 November 1952, Box 5; Zales Ecton to the Honorable Bourke B. Hickenlooper, 19 November 1952, Box 5, Ecton Papers.

for his slightly slurred speech. Nonetheless, some damage had been done.³⁶

It was obvious to most observers that the election would be close. Most believed that the outcome would depend on the Presidential race in Montana. They were wrong. On election day Montana voters elected Mike Mansfield to the U.S. Senate by a slim 5,749 votes. Although Ecton won thirty-two counties to Mansfield's twenty-four, Mansfield was able to win 133,109 votes to 127,360 votes for Ecton.³⁷

Mansfield's victory served to return Montana to its normal pattern of two Democratic Senators -- and liberal Democrats at that. The Congressman's victory also reflected Montana's "political schizophrenia." Two explanations have been given for this schizophrenia and both are indicative of why Mansfield won. Political scientist Thomas Payne, in explaining the schizophrenia, suggests that Montanans were simply being smart. They sent conservatives to Helena to keep state taxes from being spent freely. Liberals in Washington, however, worked to get federal money into the state. If this was the case, it was easy to see why Mike Mansfield won. His ability to "fetch",

³⁶Malone and Mullen, p. 11; Karlin, p. 116.

³⁷Waldron, p. 358. For examples of pre-election analysis, see The New York Times, 19 October 1952; "The Senate Contests," Newsweek, 13 October 1952, p. 35; and J. H. Morrow, Jr. to Charles S. Hill, 3 November 1952, Box 5, Ecton Papers.

symbolized by Hungry Horse Dam and President Truman's trip to dedicate the dam, was the overriding factor. Ecton's support of such projects was extremely weak compared to Mansfield's efforts.³⁸

Historians Michael Malone and Richard Roeder have put forth another explanation. They point to the imbalance between rural and urban voters and their representation. This explanation also helps to account for Mansfield's victory. Even though Mansfield won the election, Ecton took eight more counties than did the victor. Assuming these counties would have voted the same way in elections for the state legislature, the Republicans would dominate the legislature. Since all counties are entitled to one state senator, the thinly populated, strongly Republican counties of eastern Montana have traditionally dominated the state senate. This imbalance was overcome somewhat in the state house with increased representation for the more heavily populated urban areas; but each county was guaranteed at least one representative, and because of this, the Republicans have controlled the house more often than not. In a statewide election, however, the normally Democratic urban areas and the "high line" counties have enough voters to overcome the more numerous, but more thinly populated, Republican counties. Such was

³⁸Payne, p. 230.

the case in the 1952 Senate election, as Mansfield drew his support largely from urban labor-oriented areas and the "high line."³⁹

The failure of Eisenhower to draw large numbers of voters to the Republican column also helped Mansfield. Because of Eisenhower, Ecton got a few votes but not very many. The Senator apparently realized early in the campaign that Eisenhower would bring him few votes on election day. Ecton ran some 30,000 votes behind the general in the state. The shortness of Eisenhower's coattails may have saved the election for Mansfield. For Ecton to have counted on Eisenhower, however, would have been to deny the normal pattern of Montana politics.⁴⁰

In spite of all this, Ecton was able to cut into Mansfield's previous percentage of votes in the counties comprising the western Congressional district. An 87 percent voter turnout allowed Mansfield to beat his 1950 total for the western district, but his percentage

³⁹Malone and Roeder, Montana: A History, p. 292; Waldron, p. 358; Karlin, p. 113. Between 1900 and 1950, inclusive, the Republicans have dominated the state Senate nineteen times to five times for the Democrats, while twice Progressives or independents have held the balance of power. During these same years, the Republicans dominated the state House on fourteen occasions, while the Democrats were in a majority twelve times. Most of the years of Democratic control in the House came during the Progressive period and during the 1930's, the decade of the New Deal. Reapportionment in 1965 went a long way in correcting this imbalance in representation. Waldron, pp. 95 passim, 341.

⁴⁰Waldron, pp. 357, 358; Zales Ecton to Ernest Immel, 19 November 1952, Box 5, Ecton Papers.

of votes won dropped 9 percent to only 51 percent. There were several explanations for Ecton's good showing. First, there was the nature of Ecton's campaign. The idea of a crusade to save America drew votes in those restless times. The smear campaign and outside speakers, such as Harvey Matusow, also hurt Mansfield in this era of McCarthyism. Eisenhower did draw some votes to Ecton, and Mansfield's ties with the Truman administration probably cost him a few votes. Ecton's agricultural background appealed to farmers, thus cutting into Mansfield's support. Finally, Ecton's campaign was well financed, particularly by groups from outside the state, and he outspent Mansfield during the campaign. In the end, labor remained true to Mansfield; and Montanans, as a group, apparently preferred government projects, such as Hungry Horse Dam, to a crusade against Communism.⁴¹

⁴¹Waldron, p. 338; Billings interview; Landoe interview: newspaper clipping (n.d., n.p.), Mansfield Scrapbook, 1952 Election; newspaper clipping (n.d., n.p.), Mansfield Scrapbook, 1944-55, Mansfield Collection.

VI. THE RACE IN THE FIRST CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Both Republicans and Democrats held high hopes for winning the seat in Montana's first Congressional district. The fact that the Republican candidate would not have to face incumbent Democrat Mike Mansfield, who was running for the Senate, encouraged the Republicans. The fact that the district had traditionally been Democratic and contained large pro-Democrat labor groups encouraged the Democrats. On election day, Democrat Lee Metcalf narrowly defeated Wellington D. Rankin. This race was even more bitter than the Senate contest, as Metcalf was the victim of vicious smears, one conducted by his opponent and the other waged by the Montana Citizens Council.

Wellington Rankin, born on 16 September 1884 in Missoula, was a well known figure in Montana politics. Best remembered today as the brother of Jeannette Rankin, Montana's pacifist Congresswoman, he was a powerful politician in his own right. Rankin's political career began before World War I, but he had first held elective office during the hysteria filled days after the war. A graduate of Harvard Law School, he served as attorney general from 1921 to 1925. In 1925, he was appointed to fill a vacancy as an associate justice on the Montana State Supreme Court. In December of that year, President Calvin Coolidge appointed him U.S. District Attorney for Montana, and President Hoover renewed that appointment. Since then, Rankin

had run unsuccessfully for the U.S. Senate and the governorship. Despite being out of elective office, he remained active in Montana politics and the Republican party, serving as a national committeeman at the time of this election. Despite his record, Rankin had never been a really strong party man. Originally a liberal, he had turned more and more conservative through the years. By 1952 he could be classified as a conservative, although not as conservative as such Republicans as Zales Ecton or Hugo Aronson. Many Republicans did not like Rankin because of his liberal past and his impervious manner.¹

Lee Metcalf was Rankin's Democratic opponent. Metcalf was born on 28 January 1911 at Stevensville, Montana. He had served as an assistant attorney general, as a state representative, and as an associate justice on the Montana Supreme Court. A liberal, Metcalf favored agricultural and electric co-ops and staunchly opposed private utilities, particularly the Montana Power Company. The youthful Metcalf offered a distinct alternative to Rankin.²

¹Who's Who in the West, 1949 (Chicago: A. N. Marquis Co., 1949), p. 761; Billings interview; Landoe interview.

²Biographical Directory, p. 1403. See also Pete Petkas, Lee Metcalf: Democratic Senator from Montana (Washington, D.C.: Grossman Publishers, 1972). Laverne Hamilton also ran for the first Congressional district seat on the Socialist Party ticket. Hamilton, a perennial candidate in Montana politics, won only 888 votes (Waldron, p. 358) and was never a factor in the campaign.

This campaign was the year's most vicious in Montana. It was characterized by the smears conducted against Metcalf. He was also the victim of "omission and manipulation of space and emphasis" in the press. The fact that the candidates had diametrically opposite political philosophies alone would have made the contest a hard fought one; the smears made it a dirty, vicious contest.³

Of the two smears against Metcalf, the one conducted by Rankin himself was milder. This smear revolved around H.B. 338, a bill introduced by Metcalf during the 1937 session of the state House of Representatives. This bill dealt with educational standards in the public schools and would have made the teaching of co-op economics mandatory. After some debate, the bill died, and it never came up for a vote.⁴

Rankin attacked the bill as being socialistic. Socialism, Rankin believed, was even more dangerous than Communism, because socialism crept up on people without them realizing it. H.B. 338, Rankin charged, smacked of Hitlerism. The bill, he said, was "an Un-American piece of legislation designed to twist the minds of youngsters." Rankin further claimed that the bill was "a thought control bill." The implication that Metcalf, as the sponsor of

³Karlin, p. 114.

⁴The Helena People's Voice, 24 October 1952.

the bill, was also socialist was clear, if never stated directly by Rankin.⁵

Metcalf had little trouble in countering this charge. He pointed out that the bill had been superseded by H.B. 305. This bill eventually passed the state House by a seventy-four-to-nine vote, Metcalf voting for the bill. Perhaps, the Democrat suggested, Rankin should apologize to fellow Republicans Wesley D'Ewart and Zales Ecton, who had also voted for the bill, for implying that they were socialists. While this explanation did not answer Rankin's charge that the original bill introduced by Metcalf was socialist in content, it did serve to satisfy the public that Metcalf was not a socialist. After all, his reply indicated that he had something in common with such conservatives as Wesley D'Ewart and Zales Ecton, even though Metcalf must have hated the idea of appearing to have something in common with them. By walking a semantic tight rope, Metcalf was able to counter his opponent's charge.⁶

The smear conducted by the Montana Citizens Council was far more vicious. This organization had been formed by corporate executives in 1946 in an effort to defeat Leif Erickson's bid for the

⁵The Helena Independent Record, 26 August 1952; 27 October 1952; The Great Falls Tribune, 16 October 1952, The Cut Bank Pioneer Press, 2 October 1952.

⁶The Helena People's Voice, 24 October 1952.

U.S. Senate. In an effort to accomplish that goal, the Council carried out a smear campaign against Erickson. Following that election, it disappeared from the scene. It reappeared in 1952, headed, according to Harry Billings, by various directors of the Montana Power Company, Anaconda's subsidiary Fairmont Publishing Company, and several other large Montana corporations. The council's goal this time was the defeat of Lee Metcalf.⁷

Their strategy was simple. They produced, for mass distribution, a pamphlet on Metcalf. Basically, it attempted to portray Metcalf as an active Communist at the least, and at the most a leader in the Communist movement. The basis for this outrageous accusation was the fact that Metcalf had once introduced Jerry O'Connell, possibly the most radical politician in Montana's history, at a political rally. The pamphlet pronounced Metcalf guilty by association. The pamphlet also attacked Metcalf for serving as chairman of the Montana Progressive Council in 1940.⁸

Rankin had no part in this smear, although he appeared quite willing to reap its benefits. When public opinion slowly began to turn against the Montana Citizens Council, Rankin denounced the pamphlet. Democrats jumped on him for his hesitation, accusing him

⁷Billings interview.

⁸Billings interview; The Columbia Falls Hungry Horse News, 24 October 1952; The Hamilton Western News, 30 October 1952.

of waiting to see which way the political winds were blowing before acting. After the campaign, Rankin was heard to say that he wished the pamphlet had never been printed.⁹

The smear angered Metcalf. He accused Rankin of running nothing but a "smear and fear" campaign and charged that Rankin was avoiding the real issues of the campaign. Metcalf could do little but deny the charges and hope that public opinion would swing his way. The pamphlet did force Metcalf and his supporters to work that much harder in an effort to overcome the effects of the smears. By forcing Metcalf to work harder, the Montana Citizens Council may have done him a favor.¹⁰

Metcalf attacked Rankin on several fronts. He struck at the Republican's stand on REA, the Taft-Hartley Act, and farm parity programs. He challenged Rankin's cry of "bring the boys home," saying Korea was necessary to stop Communism. He accused his opponent of being a "land-grabber," noting that Rankin had run for governor on a platform advocating the reduction of grazing fees on state lands, which would have reduced state revenues earmarked mainly for public schools. The fact that Rankin was a large land owner probably made him more vulnerable to this charge. Ironically, during the campaign

⁹Billings interview.

¹⁰The Butte Montana Standard, 30 October 1952; The Great Falls Tribune, 9 October 1952; Billings interview.

the State Land Board placed a lien on Rankin's wheat crop for his violation of a grazing lease on state owned land. Metcalf pointed to the prosperity achieved under the Democrats and compared it with conditions under the last Republican administration. A vote for the Democrats was a vote for "domestic prosperity, better business than ever before, containment of Communism, renewed hope for peace," claimed Metcalf.¹¹

Rankin played on the standard Republican themes. He attacked the Truman administration's handling of the Korean War and called for lower taxes. He argued that the Democrats had been in power long enough and that it was time for a change. Rankin also played heavily on the personality of Dwight Eisenhower. A Rankin political advertisement pointed out that "Eisenhower has specifically asked Montana voters to support Rankin." In the end that plea was not enough.¹²

Both candidates realized that the key to victory in this contest was the support of labor. Rankin, although a conservative Republican, was able to make a play for this support through the fact that he had represented many unions in legal cases. He used this

¹¹The Great Falls Tribune, 1 October 1952; 30 September 1952; 10 October 1952; 13 September 1952; The Helena Independent Record, 28 October 1952.

¹²The Great Falls Tribune, 4 June 1952; The Butte Montana Standard, 24 September 1952; political advertisement in The Helena Independent Record, 28 October 1952.

relationship to call for labor support. One of his campaign pamphlets was devoted entirely to listing ten legal cases in which he had defended labor unions. Metcalf claimed Rankin had a poor labor record and did not even pay his ranchhands on occasion. Labor, of course, had supported Metcalf since the beginning of his political career. Indeed, he had been labor's choice in the Democratic primary that year. He had the support of such powerful locals as the National Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Engineers, various lumber unions, and the miners' unions. W. A. "Tony" Boyle, prominent in the local United Mine Workers, had campaigned for Metcalf in his 1946 bid for a seat on the state Supreme Court and now worked for him again. In the end, labor stood by Metcalf.¹³

Montana voters gave Metcalf a narrow victory, 55,679 votes to 54,086 for Rankin. Metcalf's victory continued a pattern of Democratic dominance in the western Congressional district. Through the 1976 election, Democrats had won twenty-seven out of thirty-two contests in the district. Again, the results indicated politics as normal in Montana during 1952.¹⁴

¹³Karlin, p. 115; The Great Falls Tribune, 12 June 1952; Petkas, pp. 3, 5, 6; Rankin campaign pamphlet, Campaign Materials Collection, 1952-Republican, University of Montana Library, Archives, Missoula, Montana; The Hamilton Western News, 30 October 1952.

¹⁴Waldron, p. 358; Malone and Roeder, eds., Montana's Past, appendix III, pp. 525-529.

Metcalf won primarily because his labor and farm support remained true. While Metcalf won only five counties to Rankin's twelve, he landed the big ones. He easily won the labor-dominated counties of Silver Bow and Deer Lodge. The fact that he lost Lewis and Clark County, however, indicated that Rankin had also been attractive to labor. Metcalf's margin of victory in the two big labor counties went a long way toward offsetting Rankin's edge in a majority of the other counties. Several other reasons accounted for Metcalf's victory. The Democrat, only forty-one years old, offered the voters a youthful alternative to the sixty-eight-year-old Rankin. Rankin had run for office almost continuously since the 1920s, and voters had tired of him. The smears, in the end, may well have backfired and aided Metcalf. Some people obviously thought that the Montana Citizens Council pamphlet hit below the belt. In addition, the smears forced Metcalf's people to campaign that much harder. In spite of his obvious play to the general's support, Eisenhower could not swing enough votes to Rankin, who ran some 11,000 votes behind him.¹⁵

Rankin did cut deeply into the usually Democratic vote in the district. Partially, this was due to his ability to outspend his opponent. The press' partial blackout of Metcalf's campaign

¹⁵Waldron, p. 359; Landoe interview; Billings interview; Karlin, p. 115; The Columbia Falls Hungry Horse News, 24 October 1952.

also helped the Republican's vote total; and so, no doubt, did Eisenhower's candidacy. Finally, Rankin was well known throughout the district; and, although a perennial candidate, he had a sizeable personal following. Although this campaign was the closest and the dirtiest of the 1952 elections, it did not, in the end, change the normal pattern of Montana politics.¹⁶

¹⁶Newspaper clipping (n.d., n.p.), Mansfield Scrapbook, 1944-55, Mansfield Collection; Billings interview.

VII. THE CONTEST IN THE SECOND CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

If the first Congressional district contest was the dirtiest of the 1952 Montana elections, the second Congressional District race was probably the cleanest. Certainly it was the quietist. Indeed, it was difficult even to tell there was a race. Although the political philosophies of the two candidates offered the voters a definite choice, neither campaign really got off the ground. Voters gave the incumbent, Republican Wesley D'Ewart, a huge victory margin over Democrat Willard Fraser.

D'Ewart, born in Worcester, Massachusetts, on 1 October 1889, had moved to Wilsall, Montana, in 1910 and became a ranger in the U.S. Forest Service. After leaving the Forest Service, he had taken up ranching in the Wilsall area. After serving in both houses of the state legislature, D'Ewart had been elected to Congress in 1945 to fill the vacancy created by the death of James O'Connor. The voters had returned him to Congress in each subsequent election. D'Ewart was an extreme conservative, sharing the same political philosophy as Zales Ecton.¹

Willard Fraser, a Billings businessman, opposed D'Ewart. Fraser, born on 26 January 1907 in Gardener, Kansas, was a liberal

¹Biographical Directory, p. 854.

Democrat, particularly on domestic issues. A graduate of Columbia University, he had married the youngest daughter of poet Robert Frost. Fraser had made a national reputation for himself by playing a major role in breaking the hold of gambling interests on several Amvet posts throughout the country. Fraser had challenged D'Ewart in 1948. Even though Truman had carried the state, Fraser lost by 2,400 votes. In a year when his opponent would get the benefit of the Presidential coattails, no matter how short they might be, Fraser had almost no chance. Most observers, Democrats included, believed Fraser could not win. His previous defeat and his lack on any real base of support insured his defeat in 1952.²

D'Ewart attacked Democratic policy on both the local and national levels. Locally, he condemned the administration's Indian policy. This policy, the Congressman charged, held back Indian development and was prejudiced against the Indians. D'Ewart claimed to have done his best to help the Indians from his position as the ranking Republican on the House Indian Affairs Committee, but claimed his efforts had been rebuffed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Secretary of the Interior. D'Ewart also attacked the administration's

²Who's Who in the West, 1968 (Chicago: A. N. Marquis Co., 1968), p. 318; The Helena People's Voice, 30 May 1952; 4 April 1952; Karlin, p. 115; "Fraser for Congress," pamphlet, Box 10, Folder 2, The People's Voice Collection, No. 40, State Historical Library, Helena, Montana.

wool policies, claiming they were responsible for "near depression conditions in Montana's wool industry." In these attacks, D'Ewart appealed to two of the three biggest constituencies in his district, namely, Indians and ranchers. Farmers, the third major constituency, were attracted by the Congressman's agricultural background.³

On the national level, D'Ewart focused on the administration's foreign policy. He attacked Truman's handling of the Korean War. Peace, said the Congressman, was the main issue of the campaign, and the Democrats had lost the peace after winning World War II. D'Ewart also assailed the corruption in Washington. He pointed to the fact that he was an honest man who had come up the hard way. Senator Taft stated that if Montanans wanted "honest and efficient government" they should vote for D'Ewart.⁴

D'Ewart also played upon the restlessness of the electorate, their feeling that something in American life was amiss. At times, D'Ewart's campaign sounded like a traveling revival show. The

³The Great Falls Tribune, 14 October 1952; 17 October 1952; The Havre Daily News, 13 October 1952; Landoe interview; "D'Ewart Biography," Box 1, Wesley D'Ewart Papers, Montana State University Library, Special Collections, Bozeman, Montana; hereafter cited as D'Ewart Papers.

⁴The Billings Gazette, 28 October 1952; The Great Falls Tribune, 3 October 1952; 4 September 1952; The Glasgow Courier, 16 October 1952; printed copy of speech given by Wesley D'Ewart, delivered over radio station KRJF, Miles City, Montana, 2 November 1952, pp. 3, 4, Box 3, D'Ewart Papers.

Congressman believed America needed a spiritual awakening. The Christian religion, the democratic form of government, and individual initiative had made America the greatest country in the world, D'Ewart believed. What the country needed was a return to these values, particularly to Christian beliefs.⁵

Fraser attacked on three fronts. He campaigned heavily for Yellowtail Dam and accused the incumbent of doing nothing to get the dam started. President Truman noted that "Fraser won't rest until he gets Yellowtail Dam." The challenger attempted to make Yellowtail Dam "the" issue of the campaign, but he failed. In an effort to hold the normally Democratic "high line" counties, Fraser attacked the Republican farm platform, claiming this plan made the farmer the forgotten man of American politics. He blamed the agricultural problems of the 1920s on the Republicans and promised continued Democratic support for the farmer. Fraser's third issue was Eisenhower and the inadvisability of having a military man in the White House. Fraser believed this would be harmful to the country and to its form of government. How could Eisenhower, as a military man, understand about grocery prices, Fraser wondered, when Mamie

⁵The Great Falls Tribune, 4 September 1952.

had never had to buy their groceries in a local market? In choosing this as an issue, Fraser was grasping at straws.⁶

The Democratic challenger also attacked on several other issues. He stated his opposition to the Taft-Hartley Act, calling for its repeal, and accused the Republicans of conducting "witch-hunts" in their search for Communists in government. Fraser was heard to wonder aloud how many Republicans would recognize a Communist if they saw one. He also promised, if elected, to do his best to get lower freight rates for Montana farmers shipping produce out of the state. The high rates, Fraser argued, were preventing the development of Montana's economy. He attacked D'Ewart for voting for the Reed-Bullwinkle Bill which, Fraser stated, "effectively curtailed attacks upon unequal freight rates through anti-trust laws." Fraser took a stand on every issue he could uncover but to little avail.⁷

Despite D'Ewart's several terms in Congress, his record was not a big issue in the campaign. Other than votes concerning Yellowtail Dam and freight rates, Fraser barely touched upon the Congressman's record. D'Ewart stated that he was quite willing to run on his record in the House of Representatives. Campaign

⁶Ibid., 12 October 1952; 1 October 1952; 14 October 1952; 3 September 1952; 16 October 1952; 24 October 1952.

⁷The Helena People's Voice, 26 September 1952; 6 June 1952; The Great Falls Tribune, 18 October 1952.

literature put out by D'Ewart's staff pointed to his chairmanship of the House Indian Affairs Committee, which he would regain if the Republicans won a majority in the House. The literature also noted that D'Ewart had authored numerous bills to encourage research development and that during the Eighty-first Congress thirty-three bills he authored had become law. Undoubtedly, Fraser could find little to attack in D'Ewart's record except the votes concerning Yellowtail Dam and freight rates.⁸

On election day, D'Ewart crushed Fraser, 90,210 to 55,203, as the incumbent won all thirty-nine counties in the district. At first glance, this election seemed to go against Montana's tradition of sending liberal Democrats to Washington. Yet, this district has been, over the years, a Republican stronghold. Through the 1976 election, Republicans had won twenty-one out of thirty-three contests in the district. This race, resulting in a conservative Republican going to Washington, also continued the pattern of normalcy in the 1952 elections.⁹

⁸Printed copy of speech given by Wesley D'Ewart, delivered over radio station KRJF, Miles City, Montana, 2 November 1952, Box 3; "D'Ewart Biography," Box 1, D'Ewart Papers.

⁹Waldron, pp. 358, 359; Malone and Roeder, eds., Montana's Past, appendix III, pp. 525-529. Six of the twelve contests won by Democrats have been since 1956, indicating that in 1952 the district was even more traditionally Republican.

There was little D'Ewart could have done to lose this election. His record and previous experience gave him a strong political base from which to run. He benefitted from the Eisenhower candidacy, although he almost certainly would have won no matter who the Republicans had run for President. Fraser had little chance from the start, and most Democrats knew it. In short, D'Ewart was an experienced Republican candidate in a Republican district. The contest was hardly a race.

VIII. THE GUBERNATORIAL RACE

The 1952 gubernatorial election in Montana was hotly contested between Democratic incumbent John Bonner and Republican challenger J. Hugo Aronson. Again, the political philosophies of the two candidates offered the voter a definite choice. While the contest was bitterly fought, this race provided the only humorous absurdities there were during the 1952 campaign. Bonner suffered from dissension within his own party. Aronson hammered away at the integrity of Bonner's administration and called for a businesslike state government. Primarily on the basis of Bonner's personal conduct, which Aronson never mentioned, the challenger unseated the incumbent by a margin of roughly 5,000 votes.

John Bonner was born on 16 July 1902 at Butte. He had been a teacher and a lawyer before becoming Montana's attorney general in 1941. In 1947, the Veterans of Foreign Wars elected Bonner, a World War II hero, to the position of state commander. Bonner used this position as a springboard to the governorship, defeating incumbent Sam Ford in 1948. A liberal whose philosophy and actions did not always match, Bonner won in 1948 primarily on a campaign promise to clean up the state government.¹

¹Who's Who in the West, 1951 (Chicago: A. N. Marquis Co., 1951), p. 72; Billings interview.

Hugo Aronson was born on 1 September 1891 in Sweden. In 1911, he immigrated to the United States and eventually ended up in Montana. A self-made man, Aronson had built a fortune in the oil and trucking businesses. No stranger to Montana politics, he had served in both branches of the state legislature. With the nickname of the "Galloping Swede," he was a colorful campaigner and a popular vote getter. Aronson was part of the conservative wing of the Republican party.²

Governor Bonner was hampered by opposition within his own party. Many liberals were dissatisfied with the governor and believed he could not win reelection. Some of the dissidents urged Lieutenant Governor Paul Cannon to challenge Bonner in the Democratic primary. Cannon declined, believing his political future lay elsewhere. When the Republicans nominated the conservative Aronson, the dissidents were forced back into the fold. Although they supported Bonner, they did so with little enthusiasm. Thus, the governor was handicapped from the start in his bid for reelection.³

There was one basic issue in this contest, Bonner's record as governor. The candidates traded charges back and forth as to the governor's record, Bonner arguing that he had fulfilled his promise to clean up the government and Aronson charging that Bonner had turned

²Who's Who in the West, 1958 (Chicago: A. N. Marquis Co., 1958), p. 33; Aronson and Brockman, p. 99; Karlin, p. 115.

³Billings interview; Karlin, p. 115.

the government into a mess. The candidates seldom lost sight of the issue, but when they did, the results bordered on the absurd.

The candidates proved early in the campaign that nothing was too small to be discussed. Noticing a Bonner campaign poster on the governor's mansion, Aronson accused the governor of breaking Montana's campaign laws. Bonner apologized to Aronson, stating that his five year old son, who had put up the poster, would take it down and that if Aronson wanted equal time he should send one of his campaign posters to the governor's son, who would tack it up to insure fairness. Aronson promptly accused the governor of Montana of hiding behind a five year old boy. The whole affair had an aura of unreality and unbelievability about it. It would be that kind of campaign; nothing would be too trivial for the candidates to discuss. They fought hard but they generally fought cleanly.⁴

With many Democrats giving him only luke-warm support, Bonner found he needed the support of labor even more than in the past. Consequently, early in his campaign he began a strong play for the continued support of labor and the unions. In a Labor Day speech, Bonner pointed out that the unions had made numerous advances during his administration. Labor, claimed Bonner, had more recognition than ever before. He accused Aronson of being anti-labor and attacked

⁴The Great Falls Tribune, 7 September, 1952; 8 September 1952.

the challenger's voting record as a state legislator on labor issues.⁵

The governor claimed he had delivered on his 1948 campaign promise to clean up state government. He had reorganized the executive department, removed politics from the state liquor administration, improved the state highway system, and improved the state's financial standing. Much progress had been made, and while it might not have been as much as some liberal Democrats may have hoped for, Bonner felt his record showed that he deserved to be reelected.⁶

Bonner concentrated on three areas in defending his record. One of these was the condition of the state institutions. The governor pointed with pride to the improvements in the state hospital at Warm Springs and the state school at Boulder. He also pointed to improvements made at the Miles City School for Boys. The state institutions, Bonner claimed, were now in excellent condition. Another area of considerable improvement was the highway system, said Bonner. Montana's highways had been improved both by repairing older ones and by building new ones. Bonner noted that more roads had been

⁵The Great Falls Tribune, 2 September 1952; 29 September 1952; The Missoula Daily Missoulian, 21 August 1952.

⁶The Great Falls Tribune, 23 September 1952; 6 September 1952. For more information on the state liquor administration, see Larry D. Quinn, Politicians in Business: A History of the Liquor Control System in Montana (Missoula: University of Montana Press, 1970).

built in the three and a half years of his leadership than in eight years under Republican Sam Ford. Finally, the governor pointed to the sound financial standing upon which he had placed the state. Bonner noted that when he took office there had been only \$7 million in the state's general fund. Now, after his first term, there was \$15.5 million in the fund. Bonner had invested state money in banks, so that it was now gaining interest. The handling of public funds had been improved. But best of all, Bonner had done all of this without instituting any new taxes.⁷

The main question in this election, stated the governor, was whether the people of Montana wanted a change. Aronson's election would bring a change, but that change would be a step backwards. Bonner claimed that Aronson would return the state to the do-nothing type of administration which Bonner had ended. Bonner went so far as to accuse Aronson of living in horse and buggy days. The governor noted that the challenger was quick to criticize the present policies, but that Aronson offered no alternative programs of his own.⁸

Aronson believed that what the state needed was less politics and more business in government. It was time to give the government

⁷The Great Falls Tribune, 6 September 1952; 23 September 1952; 15 October 1952; The Butte Montana Standard, 30 October 1952.

⁸The Helena Independent Record, 23 September 1952; The Great Falls Tribune, 23 September 1952; 18 October 1952; 29 October 1952.

back to the people. He promised honest and efficient government, nothing else. Years later, after leaving politics, he wrote of this campaign: "The most important thing I did in the campaign was to make no political promises to anyone." Aronson continually hammered away at the lack of efficiency in Bonner's administration, charging that politics were too involved in the state government, and that it was time to run the government in a businesslike manner. This was such a constant theme in Aronson's speeches that, at times, the challenger sounded like a broken record.⁹

Aronson also attacked specific aspects of Bonner's record as governor. If Bonner could choose highways, state institutions, and finances to focus upon in pointing to his achievements, Aronson could just as well attack Bonner in those same areas. Aronson said the highway department was a mess. He accused the governor of playing a patronage game with appointments in the department. Aronson claimed Bonner had fired well qualified highway personnel after making a campaign promise in 1948 not to play politics with the department. Some of the state institutions may have been improved, but not the state prison at Deer Lodge, charged Aronson. Prisoners were allowed to roam the town, visit the taverns, or go fishing; and the townspeople

⁹The Great Falls Tribune, 6 September 1952; 29 June 1952; 29 October 1952; political advertisement in The Great Falls Tribune, 2 November 1952; Aronson and Brockman, p. 102.

lived in fear, stated Aronson. The boys' school at Miles City, stated the challenger, was nothing but a preparatory school for Deer Lodge. As for state finances, the governor had his figures wrong, charged Aronson. The records, claimed the challenger, showed \$10,343,086 in the state's general fund when Bonner took office and there was now \$7,091,424 in the fund.¹⁰

In the middle of October, Bonner challenged Aronson to a debate, saying that if Aronson had anything to say he should accept the challenge. By this time Bonner apparently believed he was trailing Aronson. It is nearly axiomatic among politicians that an incumbent does not debate a challenger, since the incumbent has much to lose and little to gain. The exception to this is when the incumbent seems sure to be unseated. Bonner apparently believed this to be the case.¹¹

Aronson must have agreed with Bonner's analysis of the campaign, and, believing he had too much to lose, declined the offer. He did take the opportunity to slap again at the governor. Said Aronson: "Governor Bonner has traveled to every corner of Montana to make speeches several times each week during the years he has been

¹⁰The Helena People's Voice, 31 October 1952; The Great Falls Tribune, 26 September 1952; The Missoula Daily Missoulian, 2 October 1952; 15 October 1952; The Helena Independent Record, 19 October 1952; The Billings Gazette, 10 October 1952.

¹¹The Great Falls Tribune, 15 October 1952.

governor. I'm just a hard-working stiff, who has been working at a business and not practicing public speaking." Besides, a debate would be unfair to Bonner, Aronson believed, considering what the governor would have to talk about. What the challenger meant was that the governor would have to talk about the inefficiency Aronson was effectively charging him with.¹²

Aronson attacked on two other fronts. He charged that Bonner took credit for every improvement in the state. "To listen to my opponent," he said, "there was not even a state of Montana until he was elected governor." Aronson argued that the Republican dominated legislatures during Bonner's tenure deserved a large part of the credit on the grounds that "it's easy to sign good legislation after it has been passed." As part of those legislatures, Aronson believed he also deserved some of the credit for the state's progress.¹³

The challenger also attacked the governor for being out of state so frequently. The governor, Aronson argued, should stay home and do his job, not travel all over the United States. Aronson failed to play up the fact that Governor Bonner had been arrested in New Orleans on a drunk and disorderly charge stemming from a New Year's Eve party. Despite the urgings of other Republicans, Aronson refused

¹²Ibid., 15 October 1952.

¹³Ibid., 29 October 1952; 24 September 1952.

to mention the incident or play up the governor's personal conduct in general. Aronson had no need to play up Bonner's personal conduct, since Bonner's drinking problems were well known throughout the state.¹⁴

Bonner did his best to counter Aronson's charges of absenteeism. Bonner argued that no governor could succeed by staying in the capital; he had to get out into the state and bring the government to the people. After all, Bonner noted, a farmer could not succeed by staying in his house all day; he had to get out into the field. The governor also charged Aronson with absenteeism in the state legislature. Bonner, however, could do little about the challenger's references to the governor's numerous out of state trips.¹⁵

The candidates also attacked each other on the question of a state sales tax, always a touchy issue in Montana politics. Bonner stated that he opposed a state sales tax and accused Aronson of supporting the idea. Aronson denied that he favored a sales tax

¹⁴The Missoula Daily Missoulian, 15 October 1952; The Great Falls Tribune, 21 October 1952; [Jerry B. House?] to J. H. Morrow, Jr., 29 October 1952, p. 1, Box 5, Ecton Papers; Billings interview; Dorothy E. Hageman to Marcus P. Rasmussen, 13 October 1952, Aronson Papers, uncataloged, Montana Governors' Papers, Collection No. 35, State Historical Library, Helena, Montana.

¹⁵The Great Falls Tribune, 21 October 1952; The Billings Gazette, 12 October 1952.

or that he had ever voted for one. He did, however, admit to voting for a 1¢ tax on cigarettes, but argued that this did not constitute a sales tax. This comment came several days after Aronson had attacked Bonner for supporting the same cigarette tax. Each candidate tried to picture the other as favoring a sales tax by his support of the cigarette tax, of which both had approved. Neither candidate succeeded in picturing the other as a friend of a sales tax and Montanans relaxed, free again from the threat of such a tax.¹⁶

Two small scandals hampered Bonner's campaign. In September, Billings police arrested a Bonner campaign man for illegally placing Bonner posters on power line poles. Although the man received only a 1¢ fine, the Aronson people had a field day pointing to the incident as typical of the unprincipled Bonner administration. Aronson also used the incident to accuse the governor of using state personnel in his campaign. In early October, a second small scandal broke out, this time in the State Fish and Game Department. Three game wardens were arrested for illegally killing two elk. Aronson immediately accused Bonner's administration of being at fault.

Bonner replied that none of the wardens involved were his appointees;

¹⁶The Great Falls Tribune, 20 July 1952; The Helena Independent Record, 30 September 1952; The Bozeman Daily Chronicle, 5 October 1952; The Malta Phillips County News, 2 October 1952, The Butte Montana Standard, 30 October 1952.

indeed, two were Republican appointees. The governor said they would be fired if found guilty in court, but only then. Several days later it was discovered that Bonner had appointed two of the wardens. When they were found guilty in court, Bonner promptly fired them. Both scandals were small, but they served to underscore what Aronson had been saying throughout the campaign. Such incidents were not typical of Bonner's administration but they came at a time when they were bound to hurt his chances for reelection.¹⁷

The problem of Joe Miller, in the Unemployment Compensation Division, also hampered Bonner's campaign. The exact details of the problem are difficult to ascertain, but some facts are apparent. Bonner had appointed Miller, a used car salesman, primarily because of their friendship. For some reason, opposition to Miller spread quickly through the department. Bonner refused to fire Miller and the bureaucracy turned its opposition on the governor, too. Opposition within the department became particularly evident at the county level. While certainly not one of the major reasons for Bonner's defeat, it most certainly did not help, and it underscored Aronson's charges of politics in government and the inefficiency of Bonner's

¹⁷The Havre Daily News, 17 September 1952; The Great Falls Tribune, 8 October 1952; 11 October 1952; The Lewistown Daily News, 8 October 1952.

administration. One editor called the administration one of the most inept in the history of Montana.¹⁸

During the last week of the campaign, Bonner attempted to bring a new issue, oil, into the campaign. This, asserted the governor, was the "hidden" issue of the campaign. Bonner noted that state lands, which were believed to cover large oil reserves, could provide, through leasing to oil companies, revenue for the state's education system. He contrasted his record of working for education with Aronson's closeness to the oil interests. "The heritage of the schoolchildren of Montana is at stake," overstated the governor. This attempt to introduce oil as an issue was too little, too late and failed miserably.¹⁹

Montana voters gave Aronson a narrow 5,054-vote victory over Bonner -- 134,432 votes for Aronson to 129,369 for the incumbent. In some ways the result could be seen as a vote against Bonner rather than a vote for Aronson. The primary factor in Bonner's defeat was his own personal conduct. Although Aronson never used this as an issue, most Montanans were aware of the governor's inability to hold his alcohol. New Orleans was merely an example. Such escapades cost Bonner dearly at election time. The fact that some Democrats, who

¹⁸Billings interview; The Harlowton Times, 30 October 1952.

¹⁹The Great Falls Tribune, 1 November 1952.

had supported him strongly in 1948, gave him only luke-warm support in this election also hurt the governor. Some of these Democrats believed Bonner's personal conduct made him unelectable. Some liberal Democrats felt Bonner's programs as governor had not been liberal enough. Unable to find an alternative to Bonner, they supported him, but not enthusiastically.²⁰

Aronson garnered votes by exploiting the inefficiency of the Bonner Administration in two areas important to all voters. One was the Highway Department; the other was the condition of Montana's state institutions, particularly the state prison at Deer Lodge. Bonner was not as poor an administrator as Aronson pictured him, but Aronson picked the right places to attack the governor on such a charge. The arrest of a Bonner campaign man in Billings, the scandal in the Fish and Game Department, and the Miller problem underscored the challenger's charges. Finally, Bonner failed to bring to the front such "hidden" issues as oil land income and highway trucking taxes. Both had the potential of being important sources of state income. As a friend of both the oil and the trucking

²⁰Waldron, p. 356; Karlin, p. 115; Billings interview; Landoe interview; R. E. Bodley to Jerry B. House, 10 November 1952, p. 1, Box 6, Ecton Papers.

industries, Aronson would have been vulnerable to attack on how he would handle the problems as governor.²¹

This election pointed to a newly emerging pattern in Montana politics. Instead of continuing an old pattern, this election served primarily to solidify a relatively new one. The prevalence of Republican governors was a relatively new phenomenon in Montana politics. The beginning of this new trend was the election of Sam Ford in 1940. Between the granting of statehood and Ford's election, Democrats had occupied the governor's mansion nine times, to only two times for the Republicans. Ford's election ushered in a new era. Bonner's election in 1948 momentarily reversed the new trend, and his reelection could have returned Montana to its old tradition of Democratic governors. Instead, Aronson's election began sixteen years of Republican control of the governorship. From Ford's first victory in 1940, Republicans controlled the governorship for twenty-eight years, except for Bonner's four-year tenure. Thus, Aronson's election served to solidify and, in a sense, to restore, a pattern of Republican control of the governorship.²²

²¹Landoe interview; Karlin, p. 115.

²²Malone and Roeder, eds., Montana's Past, appendix II, p. 524.

IX. SUMMARY

In retrospect, the 1952 Montana elections were important for the personalities involved. The election represented a changing of the guard in the state's politics. Three of the victors were elected to their respective offices for the first time. Mike Mansfield went on to a brilliant career in the U.S. Senate, during which he served as Senate majority leader longer than any other person in history. Lee Metcalf went to Washington for the first time and proceeded to build a reputation which brought him a Senate seat in 1960. Since then, Metcalf has established himself as a major figure in Montana's tradition of famous liberal Senators. Hugo Aronson went on to serve two terms as one of Montana's most popular governors. Wesley D'Ewart, the one winner not going to a new office, felt strong enough after his big victory to challenge Senator James Murray in 1954. When the Congressman lost, President Eisenhower appointed him to a high position in the U.S. National Park Service.¹

The 1952 election also reflected a shift to conservatism among Montana voters. This shift was not of great enough proportions to break the normal course of Montana politics. Republicans did cut deeply into Democratic votes, and in that sense 1952 could be called a Republican year. Republicans, even when they lost, ran well that

¹Payne, p. 218.

year. They held their eastern Congressional seat and took the governorship away from the Democrats. Republicans dominated the new state legislature.

The shift in voter sentiment was not enough, however, to give the Republicans a sweep. The Democrats held the western Congressional seat and took a U.S. Senate seat away from the Republicans. Nor were the Republicans able to build on this voter shift. In 1954, Democratic Senator James Murray defeated Wesley D'Ewart in a very close race, and in 1956 the Democrats had captured the eastern Congressional seat. With the exception of the gubernatorial election, which solidified a relatively new course in Montana politics, the 1952 elections began no new patterns in Montana's politics, and the voter shift to conservatism was not permanent. In the final results, the 1952 elections reflected the normal patterns in Montana politics.

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