

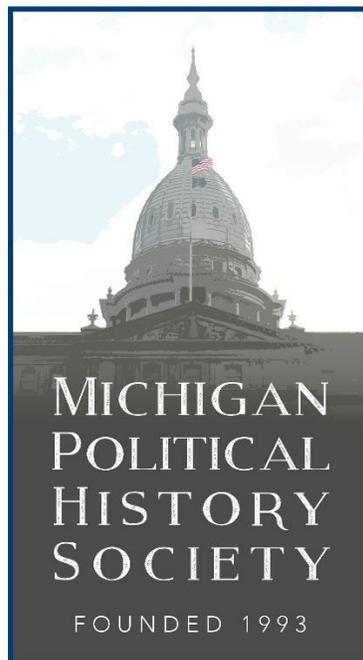
GOVERNOR GEORGE W. ROMNEY
An Interview with Walt De Vries

Interviewed by

Bill Ballenger

July 2, 2018

Sponsored by the
Michigan Political History Society
P.O. Box 4684
East Lansing, MI 48826-4684



Bill Ballenger: This interview is sponsored by the James J. Blanchard Living Library on behalf of the Michigan Political History Society. Walt De Vries, we are so pleased to have tracked you down here to North Carolina where you have achieved a career in politics and government more than equal to what you accomplished in the first half of your life in Michigan, and that's saying a lot.

Walt De Vries: Thanks, Bill. I'm glad you could make it down to North Carolina which is my second home, and I hope you enjoy it while you're here.

Bill Ballenger: I'm loving it so far. Let's go back to the 1950's and Walt De Vries is an up and coming professor at times but didn't you have some experience in the state capitol in Lansing during the 50's? How did that happen?

Walt De Vries: Well that happened because I had a fellowship at Michigan State and it gave me a chance to work for a politician or a governmental official as part of the fellowship. So I was assigned to Speaker of the House George Van Person, because my Dutch name and his Dutch name, and that's the only reason I ended up working part-time as the assistant to the speaker of the house. When I first walked into the speaker's office, he said, "De Vries, I want you to write me a speech on education." Well the only place to write it was in a bathroom in the speaker's office, so I had my first speech writing opportunity in the bathroom of the speaker's office in Lansing.

Bill Ballenger: It must have been a good one because you stuck around. Weren't you there five or six years?

Walt De Vries: Yeah, I was there for about five years through Van Person's speakership and then Don Peters.

Bill Ballenger: Okay. Then you met George Romney at some point either then or slightly later. What happened?

Walt De Vries: George came to Lansing on behalf of Citizens for Michigan. They offered to get a constitutional convention and he was around the legislature and that's when I first met him with the speaker and I thought pretty much that this guy deserves not only support but I think eventually to become a governor which is what of course he did.

Bill Ballenger: Wow. Did he really start Citizens for Michigan or was he just one of a bunch of people who were committed to this idea of having a constitutional convention?

Walt De Vries: Well he and Ed Cushman who was the vice president of American Motors and Bob McNamara who then became defense secretary.

Bill Ballenger: Under President Kennedy.

Walt De Vries: Under Kennedy, yes, they were the three principle people involved in getting it going, and it became a very large citizens group, a volunteer group, much quicker than anybody anticipated.

Bill Ballenger: So Citizens for Michigan, and I think the JCs and the League of Women Voters got this proposal on the ballot for a constitutional convention. It passed and then they had an election to elect delegates and I think you ran for delegate, didn't you?

Walt De Vries: Yeah, I ran in Grand Rapids as a Republican, to be a delegate to the convention and in the course of that primary I beat the mayor of Grand Rapids. I did it because I had a lot of students at Calvin College and I didn't tell them to do this but they went out and worked the neighborhoods for me and I got a pretty good size vote out of it and got elected.

Bill Ballenger: Also, George Romney himself got elected a delegate, and wasn't it really a pretty extraordinary group of men and women who were elected con delegates from all over the state? You had people like John Hannah, president of Michigan State University. A number of people that today you would find it very difficult to imagine that they would want to undertake to be a delegate to a state constitutional convention.

Walt De Vries: Well there are a lot of people in politics. Although the legislators at the time were not allowed to run, which I think was a good idea, but a lot of people from the community, the business community, academics, it was truly a diverse group, and one of the arguments against the constitutional convention was you can never tell who the delegates would be and maybe we'd end up with a bad product. But I don't think it turned out that way. I think it was very representative and you could tell that if you ever look at the convention proceedings.

Bill Ballenger: It was a divided convention delegation in the sense that you had people elected as Democrats and I think there were twice as many Republicans, but the Republicans were kind of split, weren't they? Between what might be considered kind of the old guard establishment Republican Party and then the more progressive newcomers like George Romney. Did that cause problems at the convention? Did you people caucus as parties? Did the Republicans have a caucus together? Did the Democrats caucus by themselves or was that kind of shoved aside?

Walt De Vries: Well at the very beginning it was obvious that there were two factions within the Republican Party. A group of us from the cities and the younger people, I think, were the more progressive Republicans, and the people from the rural areas and the more conservative Republicans pretty much placed their leadership and their confidence in D. Hill Brake and the progressive Republicans put it in George Romney. So what happened was it was a fight and Romney intended, I think, to become the president of the convention, but could not. So we ended up with a compromise with Steve Nesbitt who was the president of

Gerber's, became the president, and Romney and Edward Hutchinson, a conservative, became the vice presidents of the convention.

Bill Ballenger: And I think also Tom Downs, a Democrat. You put him in as a vice president too.

Walt De Vries: Right, that was an effort to make it a truly bipartisan leadership.

Bill Ballenger: So at that point did the president of the convention, Steve Nesbitt, did he pick the committees and who was gonna be chairman of the committees? How did that work?

Walt De Vries: He pretty much, along with a group from the caucus, the Republican caucus, picked the chairman. I became the chairman of the committee of that administration that ran the convention principally because I had designed the staff and the table of organization on how the convention would actually run. So they put me in charge of that. The other Republican chairmen were selected in caucus although I would say Romney and Nesbitt had the most influence or the input into that.

Bill Ballenger: Was Romney a committee chairman himself? How did he participate in the convention proper?

Walt De Vries: No, he was not a chairman. He was a vice president or chairman of the convention but his influence was seen everywhere, mostly because a lot of delegates happened to believe what he believed, but he did not hold a formal position as chairman. There was a caucus of the Republican officers of the convention and the chairman of the committees, and we met on a regular basis and that's pretty much how I got to know George Romney in those leadership meetings.

Bill Ballenger: Did he meet some of the other people who were prominent at the convention other than yourself at the convention, or did he know them otherwise? People like Bill Seidman or others from Western Michigan? Glenn Allen, let's say, from Kalamazoo. Had he had any contact with those people before the convention?

Walt De Vries: I would say it was minimal. I think he had heard of people like Seidman and Glenn Allen who eventually became part of the executive office of the governor. But I think for the most part he met those people and really got to know them for the first time in the convention.

Bill Ballenger: Bob Danhoff was another one who was from Muskegon, I think. Yes.

Walt De Vries: Right.

Bill Ballenger: So during the convention did you and everybody expect George Romney was for sure gonna run for governor in 1962? Because this convention started late '61, spilled over into '62. Then you had the election come up in '62 for governor and

Romney decides he's gonna run. Was that a surprise? Was it a shock when he announced? Or was everybody saying, "Well, what did you expect?"

Walt De Vries: Well it was not a surprise to me because he asked me to write a strategy memo at the end of 1961 on how his campaign would be run in 1962 for governor. I think for most of the progressive Republicans, the younger, they thought he was going to run. I think the older, more rural delegates didn't want him to run, and then of course the days leading up to his decision, the Democrats, particularly those at the Democrats in the convention were poo-pooing the whole idea, particularly when he decided he was gonna fast and decide whether or not and people thought that was phony but it was not phony. He did decide to run. You saw the results of that.

Bill Ballenger: Right. One thing that he became a champion of as far as I'm concerned or I've been told was the idea that there should be a civil rights department, a freestanding, separate, autonomous civil rights department. The first, I think, any state had in the country, in the constitution. It should be written in the constitution. Was that primarily George Romney's idea? And if it was, do you think it's because of his Mormonism and the fact that he was perhaps sensitive that Mormons were viewed as being antipathetic to African Americans? They wouldn't allow them to become priests in the Mormon church and he wanted to show the public, "Look, I'm a different kind of Mormon or I'm a Mormon who has great sympathy for African Americans and I want to help them and I'm for civil rights"? What do you think?

Walt De Vries: Bill, all of the above. You just made the argument that Romney made in the constitutional convention. That was principally his. It was unheard of, as you say. No other state had done it but to make it as part of the constitution, the civil rights commission, and I think since that time, many other states have adopted, and of course the federal government has adopted that position.

Bill Ballenger: Right. Now he had you working already beginning in late 1961 while the convention was going on, on his nascent, not yet born campaign for governor the next year.

Walt De Vries: No, no, let's put it this way.

Bill Ballenger: Yes.

Walt De Vries: I said, "George, do you want me to do a strategy memo on what it would be like to run for governor?" He said, "Okay, well go ahead and do it." It was not as though he came to me.

Bill Ballenger: Well maybe you put the idea in his head. He never would have thought of it.

Walt De Vries: No, no, no, no. He had that idea in his head.

Bill Ballenger: Okay.

Walt De Vries: Some of us had an idea that maybe he'd be president down the line too.

Bill Ballenger: Sure. Well we'll get to that.

Walt De Vries: Okay.

Bill Ballenger: But in any event, at that point, you put this together. By the time you got through putting together your memo and he decided to run, had he already decided on the people at the convention like Seidman and Danhoff and Glenn Allen, that they were the people he wanted to bring with him to Lansing if he became governor? Do you think he kind of had that in mind?

Walt De Vries: I think he had it in mind. He didn't articulate that, but one of the things that the convention did in Michigan is bring new blood into the political system, particularly to the Republican Party, and when he was elected governor, there were five. Five of us delegates who ended up in the executive office of the governor. He also, when he was at American Motors, had a wide span of control. In other words I organized the executive office not along the traditional patterns of a press secretary and a chief of staff, because to me a chief of staff in the White House or in the governor's office means you're, in effect, the president of the governor. Well George knew how to exercise his span of control with four or five different people and he could handle it. So that is the way eventually we organized the office of the governor and he placed people like Danhoff, Dick Van Dusen, Glenn Allen, myself and others in the executive office because he had worked with us in the convention.

Bill Ballenger: Didn't he have kind of a secretary/gatekeeper, Peg Little?

Walt De Vries: Peg Little.

Bill Ballenger: She wasn't the chief of staff in the traditional sense like you say, but if anybody had any control over who actually opened the door into the inner sanctum of the governor's office, it was her, right?

Walt De Vries: It was Peg. I mean, she controlled his lunch. Did he need money to go on a trip? She took care of that. She pretty much ran the thing. In order to get to George, you had to go through Peg.

Bill Ballenger: Right, but the five or six of you who had your various spheres of influence, you would all huddle and have meetings and decide overall what needed to be done, what was the tone, and then one by one if you had to go see him, you'd go through Peg to go see and talk directly to the governor, right?

Walt De Vries: Right.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah.

Walt De Vries: We really had direct access. It wasn't a matter of having to go in through a chief of staff. Really, Peg would just facilitate it, but the decisions were made by a group.

Bill Ballenger: There was a woman named Lucille Kaplinger. Didn't she work for Steve Nesbitt when he was chairman of the convention and it was in the office right next to yours when you were chairman of administration and then she followed the governor to Lansing and she ended up working, I think, in legislation and eventually she took it over.

Walt De Vries: Yeah, she became the legislative assistant.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Walt De Vries: Then eventually was in charge of relationships with the legislature. I mean, a really difficult job.

Bill Ballenger: Very much so. I think Bob Danhoff had that job originally and then he went over to the legal side when Dick Van Dusen left and Lucille took his place. Well okay. So George Romney's governor. You set up his office. The Republicans control the legislature for that first two years of his tenure, 1963 and '64. How did the governor get along with the legislature? A lot of those legislators who couldn't run for con con, as you said, were kind of the old style establishment, rural people that were part of the conservative faction of Republicans in the convention. So did he have a feeling of deja vu all over again? I've seen these people before or these types of people? How did he work with them?

Walt De Vries: Well it wasn't what you'd call a loving relationship. I mean, he knew how to deal with these people and he could, and of course in the first few months that we were in office, we had a vote on the convention result which was a new constitution.

Bill Ballenger: Right. Oh, yeah.

Walt De Vries: This is sort of an aside but George decided that the passage of that constitution was key to his success as governor. So he put it all on the line. For four months he campaigned solidly for that constitution against some of the people in the legislature who were opposed to it, and by getting that constitution, we were able to reorganize the state government. He put me in charge of that. I still get flack from that, as well as the state income tax and some other things, but had we not had that constitution and had he not put his full weight behind it, it would have been an entirely different administration.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah, and by the way, the governor took office in January of 1963 and the vote on con con was in March, wasn't it? I think it was just two months later and he'd

been campaigning ever since he was elected the previous November, like you say, four months, and it only passed by 7,000 votes. Barely passed. I mean, think what it would've been like if it hadn't passed.

Walt De Vries: Well think what it would've been like if he hadn't put his full weight behind it.

Bill Ballenger: Absolutely.

Walt De Vries: He got it passed and almost by himself and against a significant Republican and of course Democratic opposition.

Bill Ballenger: Well let me ask you this. You mentioned that of course you were his executive assistant for administration and the Democrats were not yet in control of the legislature. That came the next year, and the constitution setup outlines, like there could be no more than 20 principle departments, but did you have to come up with the actual legislation that put in place what were the names of these departments?

Walt De Vries: Yes. Well, the constitution required that the legislature do it but they wouldn't do it. Okay?

Bill Ballenger: Okay, okay.

Walt De Vries: So what I did was I called a meeting of the principle staff people like Van Dusen and like Glenn Allen and others and we went to Mackinac Island, and I told them, I said, "No phone calls, no visits, nothing. We're gonna spend three days and decide the principles of reorganization." 20 departments headed by a director reporting to the governor. All of the things, the policy decisions that had to be made. So at the end of the three days when we flew back from Mackinac, we had the bones or elements of the reorganization which eventually passed the legislature.

Bill Ballenger: Okay, but now let me ask you this. You say the Republicans in the legislature in '63, '64, majority in each chamber, they were resistant but then in '64 the Democrats got elected big time. For the first time since before World War II, 1938, the Democrats took control of both the house and senate with huge majorities. Were they the ones that actually ended up passing the executive reorganization bills?

Walt De Vries: It passed in 1965.

Bill Ballenger: Well, that's under the Democrats.

Walt De Vries: I know. Well, but there was no choice because the constitution required it.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Walt De Vries: And if the governor didn't do it, the legislature was supposed to do it and they wouldn't do it, so that was the way we got it through. You're facing a deadline. You have to pass it.

Bill Ballenger: But Romney himself must have been pretty cooperative in this effort.

Walt De Vries: Oh yeah.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah.

Walt De Vries: He had a rule that if any legislator came into the executive office, he would see him or her immediately and Peg Little was instructed to bring the legislator right in to see the governor. He did that as well as something we called the Citizens' Day. Every Thursday morning you could come into the governor's office and you could see him for 10 minutes. It doesn't matter who you were, and when you came in and sat down across from the governor, the state trooper would be sitting there and the engineering department at the University of Michigan fixed the little setup where he would push the button and you could see the 10 minutes go, and when the 10 minutes was up, the bell would ring, the governor would stand up and you would leave.

Walt De Vries: Well, one thing that happened was every state department head was in his office on Thursday morning because the governor, if somebody came in to say something about welfare, he would call up the department.

Bill Ballenger: If the Director wasn't there was not good.

Walt De Vries: If the Director was not there or didn't answer the phone there was hell to pay. But that was the sort of openness that he felt he needed to do with the legislature as well as with citizens.

Bill Ballenger: Well was a fantastic public relations ploy I'd say by the governor. I'm saying I think he was sincere but it had to be really great. Was the news media allowed to sit in on these sessions where the citizen came in or not?

Walt De Vries: I don't remember that they even ever asked.

Bill Ballenger: Big deal.

Walt De Vries: But I think the answer would have been no. I mean this is your 10 minutes with the Governor.

Bill Ballenger: But they wrote about it a lot, a lot. I mean about the fact that this was happening. Right?

Walt De Vries: But a lot of it was personal problems with welfare and social security, people in prison and so on. So I guess we felt I don't remember now exactly how that went. That this identity be private.

Bill Ballenger: Was George Romney himself the person who really came up with this idea or was it a collegial thing between, the five or six of you on his main staff and him or what? Can you remember?

Walt De Vries: It was my idea.

Bill Ballenger: Well don't be bashful, that's okay. But he bought it.

Walt De Vries: He bought it.

Bill Ballenger: And he thought it was a great idea. I think it was inspired. I don't think any governor has done it since. Right?

Walt De Vries: No I don't think so.

Bill Ballenger: Did he keep it going indefinitely? I don't think he did indefinitely.

Walt De Vries: I think it was dropped after a couple of years.

Bill Ballenger: Couple of years.

Walt De Vries: But you see the point was that people knew if they wanted to see the governor, they could. It was the same sort of thing was set up in the campaign. We had him campaigning block by block. He would criss-cross across the block. And so people would say "You never would know when George Romney might show up at your door." And then put it we made commercials about that TV commercials. Now you never can expect when you know that there is the governor maybe out the door. And for many he get a lot of door to door campaigning. But the whole idea was openness.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Walt De Vries: Which was also the case in the convention.

Walt De Vries: I felt because of my experience in the legislature that it was nearly not open enough. So we televised the all of the convention proceedings were televised. All the meetings were open. That was a way I guess of my saying. The legislature really ought to open up more. But the Governor Romney really agreed and push that as well.

Bill Ballenger: Let me ask you one more question about that 1965-66 legislature controlled by the Democrats by huge margins. They passed a lot of legislation that had been pent up in their souls for years and they were out of power hadn't controlled

the legislature at all. A lot of labor and union, oriented type legislation stuff. Like what might be called prevailing wage which was a controversial issue where public institutions have to pay contractors a prevailing wage negotiated through collective bargaining for building projects rather than maybe the lowest bidder and that by the way has now been repealed in Michigan.

Bill Ballenger: But George Romney signed that bill. He signed prevailing wage legislation and some other heavily union heavily Democratic legislation. I know that George Romney was famous for trying to crash union picnics and climbing over fences. He wanted to appeal to the working man. Do you think again this was his attempt to show you know I can work with anybody. I can work with these majority Democrats and these unions and I can show them I'm not going to be some hidebound negative opponent and veto stuff and make them try and override my veto. I'm not going to do that. What do you think about?

Walt De Vries: That's exactly what he said. Now the theory, the argument within the staff was a veto is a defeat. If you have to defeat something that means you couldn't work with the legislature to pass it. So we always took the position. That let's work along with the legislature. Let's get what we can. But let's not veto as much as we can. And I think that that was his philosophy behind his saying some of that legislation.

Bill Ballenger: Let's backtrack a little bit. Let's go back to 1962. Let's go back to the campaign he ran against John Sweeney. Okay. He debated John Sweeney.

Walt De Vries: And lost.

Bill Ballenger: Well I'm now going to ask you about that. How many debates did he have. What happened were you there?

Walt De Vries: Yeah of course there were three debates. We lost two of them. Because we assumed that Romney would just overpower John Swainson and it was wrong. He didn't. Swainson ran all over him. For two debates. The third debate I think we won. But by this time Romney knew what he was doing. But to go into a debate situation and just assume that you have a high powered guy like Romney against John Swainson. We just made a bad tactical error.

Bill Ballenger: Well you say we but I mean obviously Romney himself must have been pretty overconfident. He thought he could just steamroll Swainson.

Walt De Vries: He came out and he said Walt, the best thing about this debate is it's over. And that tells you right there.

Bill Ballenger: Well what was it like on campaign night election general election night. It was a Statler hotel in Detroit, I'm not sure. When you found that Romney in fact did win. I think he won by about 80,000 votes statewide. It was decisive but it certainly wasn't a rout. What was the feeling there and what was the feeling of

those of you knew okay, we're going to have to go do something now in Lansing?

Walt De Vries: Well we did set up a system that we called weather-vane precincts. These are precincts around the state who always went at the way that statewide results were.

Bill Ballenger: Okay.

Walt De Vries: We were polling in those states and getting election results from them. So we knew pretty well that we were going to win or if we thought we were going to win. We used that system throughout three different elections. Although it was hard to believe that we had won that election. And then I guess the next day or two days later. Bob Danhoff and I think Bill Seidman and I drove to Lansing and we got out of the car and stood in front of the state capitol and said okay, now we got it what the hell do we with it?

Bill Ballenger: Well you didn't have much time left before you had to really hit the ground running and make up your mind. But look you mentioned the weather vane precinct. Wasn't this really the beginning and you already put it in place to a certain extent of the ticket-splitter philosophy. Which became a book that you co-authored with another political science named V. Lance Tarrance.

Walt De Vries: All right.

Bill Ballenger: Right? And published a few years later. But you actually use that and you put it into effect in 1962 for the first time. Right?

Walt De Vries: Well the conventional wisdom at that time was, if you tell me that you're an independent. That means you vote independent. What does that mean? We've figured out that a lot of people who call themselves independent aren't really independent at all. They vote straight Republican or straight Democrat. The only way I know if you are truly independent is if you split your ticket between the candidates of the two parties then I know you're exercising independents. So instead of using the old traditional. What you thought of yourself. We used how do you behave. And then we polled those people on the phone. A lot of Democrats who would split off occasionally for Republicans. So we concentrated on people who would make the split. And that's the way we won in '62. And of course in '64 with Goldwater on the ticket. That was the key to that victory.

Bill Ballenger: Explain a little bit more about that because Barry Goldwater was very conservative. At least he was thought to be at the time. You went to the national convention did you, with George Romney in San Francisco's Cow Palace? I believe, where Nelson Rockefeller was shouted down by the delegates.

Walt De Vries: I'll never forget it.

Bill Ballenger: And you knew that if Goldwater the nominee he's going to be running for president in Michigan while your boss George Romney is running for re-election as governor. Were you thinking at the time we are doomed?

Walt De Vries: Yes.

Bill Ballenger: You really thought it was that bad.

Walt De Vries: It was bad. Matter of fact the polling showed us that it was that bad. And the only way we could win was to get people to split their tickets because they were going to vote for Johnson. Which they did. And then get them to vote for Romney. But it was far deeper than that with Romney and go on. It was a civil rights matter. And if you think that people are concerned about Trump today in the Republican Party if you think back to 1964 and Goldwater, while the result was a crushing defeat for Goldwater which after that Romney and Eisenhower and Rockefeller and Scranton and others put together what was called the Republican Coordinating Committee to put the Republican Party back together, which they did. And in 1966 you could see the results of that with the big Republican victories all over the country and especially in Michigan.

Bill Ballenger: You mentioned Eisenhower. And that reminds me I forgot to ask you earlier. When we were talking about the Constitutional Convention. Didn't Eisenhower come and address the Constitutional Convention?

Walt De Vries: Sure.

Bill Ballenger: In Lansing.

Walt De Vries: He came the one on one of the first days of the convention. And his message was. Don't try to amend this constitution with a whole lot of amendments. He says "Write a new constitution. And let people vote on the entire Constitution." Which I think that changed the attitude and the opinion of many of the Republican delegates because that's what eventually we did. And it was at that time I met for the first time my longtime friend David Broder of the Washington Post who came to cover Romney because they thought he might be a presidential candidate.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Walt De Vries: As well as the gubernatorial candidate.

Bill Ballenger: Well the argument was the 1908 constitution, the old constitution the one you were meeting on. Some of these delegates simply wanted to tack on amendments to it and Eisenhower basically said no no just forget about it. Write a new constitution and you're saying his argument really kind of carried the day.

Walt De Vries: No doubt about it.

Bill Ballenger: We get to 1964, you put the ticket-splitter philosophy weather-vane precincts into effect. You try to resist what's happening at the top of the ticket to Barry Goldwater in Michigan who I think lost to Lyndon Johnson by over a million votes. And you were successful and the governor prevailed.

Bill Ballenger: He was re-elected against Neil Staebler who had been a former Democratic state chairman and he was a Congressman at large. So he'd been elected statewide in Michigan right. That's right. And did they debate at all. Was there anything like that in 64?

Walt De Vries: I don't really remember.

Bill Ballenger: And I don't remember.

Walt De Vries: I don't think that they did.

Bill Ballenger: I think they did either. And that's kind of weird. You would have thought that would have happened. I'm not sure Staebler would have been a great debater from everything I knew about him. But I'm a little surprised that didn't happen.

Bill Ballenger: Okay so Romney wins but then he faces this huge Democratic legislature we've already talked about that. So going forward George Romney has to look at. If I am going to be interested possibly in the presidency, I've got to show people that I'm just not lonesome George who can manage to survive myself against some bad things happening elsewhere. Republicans on the ticket. I've got to show I can pull Republicans into office on my coattails, right?

Walt De Vries: That's right.

Bill Ballenger: And so we're leading up to 1966. Which I think many Republicans at that time and even in years since regarded as almost the golden year for the Republican party because as far down. The Republican party was in nineteen sixty five and sixty six based on '64. They came roaring back in '66. What part did the ticket-splitter play in that or was it just kind of overcome by George Romney's coattails?

Walt De Vries: It was a combination. We put together in 1966 what we called the action team, where Romney did not run just as an individual. He ran with Bob Griffin.

Bill Ballenger: U.S. Senate, Bill Milliken as lieutenant governor.

Walt De Vries: For the candidates for the State Administrative Board for the legislature. And at that time the national press was saying, "If Romney can win, those offices as well as congressional seats then he'll be a real possibility for president." Well he not only won that and the Senate and the five congressional districts and the legislature but did far more than what people were anticipating. And I think that in many ways set him up as a possible presidential candidate for that election.

Bill Ballenger: I think absolutely. Some of the comments from the national commentators almost set him up to fail.

Walt De Vries: Right.

Bill Ballenger: Setting the bar so high everyone was like are you kidding. He's not going to be able to do this. But then he did it right?

Walt De Vries: Well he poured all the resources into a team effort. Rather than spending it all on himself.

Bill Ballenger: Do you think he had that strong feeling himself, that you know this is going to help him personally in terms of his presidential ambitions or did he feel honestly like for instance I tried to get along with this Democratic legislature in 1965-66. But I really rather have Republicans controlling things there even though there may be some Republicans I'm not exactly in sync with. What do you think?

Walt De Vries: I don't have an answer for that Bill. I don't know.

Walt De Vries: I suspect there was. We knew that he was going to win. All right. There was no doubt about that. So then the question becomes why do you spend all your resources on him and make it a huge win? Or do you try to pull in other people with you as well. And the decision to pull as many Republicans as we can into this win. And it worked and it worked.

Bill Ballenger: Okay. We get to 1967 now that was a very important year. You probably know. You had the Detroit riot, you had the passage of Michigan's first income tax. You had George Romney going on a TV show in Detroit and claiming he was brainwashed in Vietnam. I mean all these things happened within a couple of months of each other in the summer of 1967. What do you remember? Let's start with the Detroit riot. What do you remember about the Detroit riot that really sticks out in your mind?

Walt De Vries: They were disastrous. And after it was over the governor put me in charge of a task force. Consisting of the state police, the Detroit police, the sheriffs and so on. One of the first things we discovered in looking at it is that they couldn't even communicate with each other because of different frequencies on their radio. So there was no way for the national guard to talk to the police and so on. Which was just really just bad planning.

Walt De Vries: The second point though was the way President Johnson got involved in that thing and wouldn't help us. Know we kept asking for him to send to federalize the national guard and he wouldn't do it.

Bill Ballenger: He wouldn't do it.

Walt De Vries: No he wouldn't do it. But that was because Johnson in the polls against Romney was losing or very close. I was audited three times by the IRS in nineteen sixty five sixty six and sixty seven because I think Johnson ordered the Romney staff to be audited.

Bill Ballenger: You were yourself.

Walt De Vries: There's no reason for me to be audited. How much money can you make in the office of the governor? But it was a tragic situation and we were not prepared for it. Just totally unprepared. Not just at the state level but particularly at the local level.

Bill Ballenger: Did anything come out of the Detroit riot that was in any way shape or form good or resulted in anything positive?

Walt De Vries: It raised the awareness of the people in the state about race relations and how bad they were in the Detroit area as well as of course statewide. But beyond that I'm not certain as to what I could say was really positive.

Bill Ballenger: What about the state income tax now. Did you work on that behind the scenes and what was Romney's attitude at the time you finally got it passed. Because he actually had been a supporter of the idea of what he called fiscal integrity? I remember him giving speeches and saying that Michigan's tax structure was skewed and inequitable and needed to be reformed but that part of any reform should be an income tax. Which of course to some people is an anthem. They just knee jerk reflex saying no way no income tax so how did you deal with that. How did you deal with that?

Walt De Vries: I think it was a unique effort. What we did is invite legislators Republican legislators to come up to Mackinac Island. When we flew them up there. They would stay in they would call the commissioners colleges or even in the governor's residence. When then the governor would take a morning or an afternoon and briefed them on the income tax and what it meant. And of course in the rest of the staff would entertain him at night at the local saloon where we would sing and drink and so on. But the point was that he had invited these legislators up to his own mansion or residence on the island to talk with him. And that was the basis of it. And I think that really worked because by the time they left the governor would ask them how do you feel about the income tax now.

Walt De Vries: And many of them were convinced by this special kind of lobbying effort where you get the legislators by themselves. Get them out of Lansing up there and I think that that was the one of the reasons we got it passed. Not just that but.

Bill Ballenger: Well it was kind of remarkable that it was a Republican majority Legislature that actually passed it with a Republican governor when it was the Republican Party that really mainly was the party resistant to an income tax at all up to that time.

You had G. Mennen Soapy Williams a Democratic governor all during the fifties saying hey let's have an income tax here and the Republican legislature wouldn't listen to.

Bill Ballenger: Finally, Romney, after five years, gets it. It's in effect. Well okay, so Romney at this point, is starting to get organized for a presidential campaign. And he goes on this Lou Gordon TV show in Detroit, and the subject of Vietnam comes up. And Romney had gone on a trip to Vietnam as I understand it. And basically he said on the Gordon show, "Whatever I thought or believed about American policy on Vietnam in the past, I'm changing my mind. I think we were just brainwashed. I was brainwashed."

Bill Ballenger: And of course, I'm not sure the governor understood that brainwash at that time, was really kind of a taboo word. It extends from the Korean war in which I think you participated. The Manchurian Candidate, we remember the movie, and what happened as far as you were concerned with George Romney? Were you surprised? Did you wonder what happened? Why did he say this? What do you think?

Walt De Vries: We were absolutely stunned and shocked, because none of us on the Romney staff had ever heard him use the word or the concept of brainwash. And for those of us who had been in Korea, we knew what that meant.

Walt De Vries: And then for a while, nothing seemed to happen. Charlie Harmon was all upset about it and others. And then probably within a week or two, one of the national reporters picked it up, and pretty soon they had all picked it up.

Walt De Vries: And they kept running with it saying, "Well, this proves that he can't be President if he can be brainwashed by the generals in Vietnam." It was a critical moment in the campaign because from that point on in the polls at least, Romney was starting to lose to Johnson. Where up to that point, he was even or in some cases even stronger than Johnson had been.

Bill Ballenger: Right. Charlie Harmon was the press secretary at that point, right. He succeeded Dick Milliman, so isn't it perhaps true that Romney and maybe other governors, if they weren't brainwashed, President Johnson certainly tried very hard to brainwash them didn't he? He made a supreme effort.

Walt De Vries: Every time the governor has been in the national governor's conference, Johnson would send the secretary of defense or somebody from his administration, or he would come himself to argue that we need to send more troops to Vietnam.

Walt De Vries: And you could almost always tell when the President was thinking about sending more troops, 'cause he'd be lobbying the governors to get a resolution supporting what he had done, and the governors did this for several years. And then all of a sudden, Romney and Governor Hatfield of Oregon said, "Hey, wait a

minute. This doesn't make any sense." So they started the opposition to Johnson.

Walt De Vries: But I can remember the national governor's conference was held on a ship, the S.S. Independence, and we sailed from New York to the Virgin Islands with all the governors, all the national press. And Johnson would send a helicopter to the ship, and they would land, and they'd come out and greet the governors and say, "Now you've got to support what he's doing in Vietnam."

Bill Ballenger: Didn't they have a meeting in Omaha too, the governors?

Walt De Vries: Romney was on the executive committee of the national governor's conference and we were in Omaha. Then in the middle of this conference, they get a call, a telephone call from Johnson. "I want y'all to come down to the ranch." So he sent an Air Force plane, and we all flew from Omaha down to the ranch in Texas.

Bill Ballenger: You went down too?

Walt De Vries: Yeah. And there again, it was another briefing on Vietnam to get them to support it, but a couple of other things happened. We were sitting around this huge round lazy susan kind of a table, and Johnson says, "You know, I've had several paintings made of myself." now he said, "I'd like to show them to you, and you tell me which are the best."

Walt De Vries: Well here sits Governor Rockefeller, Governor Romney, Governor Scranton, all these potential Republican candidates against Johnson, and he's asking them to decide which oil painting was the best, and they're all hemming and hawing.

Walt De Vries: Then he gave them all a big 10 gallon hat. He said, "Now look inside the hat." And if you looked inside the hat, there was a map of Texas, but the Johnson ranch covered three quarters of the thing, and he wanted them to wear these hats.

Walt De Vries: And then the next day, he took them out hunting. Well George Romney, I don't think ever hunted in his life, and they put 'em up here in this tree, sitting there waiting for deer to come by. I don't think the guy would've fired a gun if he'd even seen it. Johnson took Romney around in his white Lincoln, drove around the ranch and you could see all that stuff. That's a digression, but that's how much Johnson lobbied the governors to get their support.

Bill Ballenger: I think there were people in the Romney for President campaign later in the year and in the years following, who said, "You know what? If Romney had just handled this brainwashing comment differently, or followed up on it or embellished on it, he could've actually maybe turned that around and turned it into an asset." Saying, "You know what? We were victims of a potential brainwashing by the President and his administration. We've seen the light, and

what you're encountering here is bunkum, and we're trying to call him on it." Mark Hatfield, me, George Romney, but he didn't do that.

Walt De Vries: But he's George Romney.

Bill Ballenger: Well.

Walt De Vries: Now wait a minute. When you challenge him on the basis of his integrity or his honesty, you've got a fight coming because that's the way he lived his life. And he couldn't understand why people reacted that way, 'cause he thought it was just being briefed. But brainwashing had a totally different connotation in those days and still does today I think.

Bill Ballenger: Wow.

Walt De Vries: But maybe in 20/20 hindsight, we could've done it better, but none of us knew how.

Bill Ballenger: Well nobody anywhere else could figure it out either. You mentioned Nelson Rockefeller. What was the relationship between George Romney and Nelson Rockefeller?

Walt De Vries: I think it was sort of skittish at first, but then I think they became quite close. Because Nelson, when we were on this cruise ship, the national governor's association, sailing from New York to the Virgin Islands, Rockefeller invited Romney into his state room and I was the only other staff person there.

Walt De Vries: And George says to Nelson, "Nelson, do you support me for President?" Rockefeller says, "Yes, George I do." George says, "Rockefeller, do you support me for President?" "Yes George, I do." "Nelson, do you support me for President?" "Yes George, I do."

Walt De Vries: It was like Peter and Jesus, remember?

Bill Ballenger: Yeah.

Walt De Vries: Okay. But Nelson meant it, because when that ended, I went to the Rockefeller headquarters on 55th street in New York. And Governor Rockefeller said, "You could have all the research I've done." And of course, he had his own department of state with Henry Kissinger.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah, you said he had almost better material than they had in the state department.

Walt De Vries: Absolutely, and if you wanted a study on Ecuador, he would commission one, he had that kind of money. So we took just about all the domestic and foreign

research out of Rockefeller's headquarters, and he gave that to Romney. That was a clear indication that he supported not only that, but also with money.

Bill Ballenger: And what about Henry Kissinger? The Rockefeller right-hand man on foreign policy, what was the relationship there? Didn't Henry Kissinger come to Michigan and actually go to Mackinaw Island?

Walt De Vries: Do I have to do Henry Kissinger with a German accent?

Bill Ballenger: I would like to hear that.

Walt De Vries: We have a meeting in the living room of George Romney's home, and George Romney said, "Let me fix you a drink, Henry." So he goes to this sidebar, Romney of course didn't drink. And he takes this glass, and he fills it to the top with scotch, puts in one ice cube and hands it to Henry.

Walt De Vries: Henry looked at it and said, "(clears throat)," and sits it down on the floor. That was the first time, but Henry sounded like the secretary of state 'cause he had contacts all over the world. But also what we would do is invite people like Kissinger to come to Mackinac Island, to the governor's mansion. And one time with Jonathon Moore, my buddy, we were in the governor's, the governor had his own horse carriage.

Bill Ballenger: Right. Jonathon Moore was the son of Charlie Moore, from Ford Motor Company and he was head of the institute of politics for awhile.

Walt De Vries: Yes. So Jonathon and Henry and me. And of course, we take off in this carriage and this horse lets off an enormous fart, and Henry didn't stop for a minute, just kept right on talking until we got up to the governor's residence and I thought, "You know, there is a guy who's dedicated to his craft."

Bill Ballenger: I love it. What about the Romney for President campaign beyond the brainwashing comment and everything else we've talked about, there were some strange things that happened like Leonard Hall.

Walt De Vries: Yeah, you said it.

Bill Ballenger: Well, tell us about Leonard Hall.

Walt De Vries: Well, when they got serious in 1966 about running for President, I left the governor's staff at the end of '66 in December, and setup the Romney associates which was the Romney for President effort, down the street from the capitol.

Walt De Vries: Well what happened was, Leonard Hall, who had run Eisenhower's re-election campaign.

Bill Ballenger: In 1956.

Walt De Vries: Yeah, Mickey Mouse could've done that. Anyway, Leonard Hall and Bill Marriott from the Marriott hotels, who always used to say, "You know, I'm just a hot dog stand operator on 16th street." Whenever he said that, I knew something was coming.

Walt De Vries: And some other people said, "Well you know, we know how to run national campaigns. Your people out there in the provinces, you don't know how to run a national campaign." So they had an idea of how to do it, which was essentially out of Washington. My feeling was we've won three successful gubernatorial elections, we knew something about campaigning, that what we ought to do is go across the lake to Wisconsin.

Walt De Vries: That's the second primary after New Hampshire. I knew from my polling, we were gonna lose in New Hampshire to Nixon. But I knew in Wisconsin, we were 50/50, and that's where American Motors had a factory. So he was well-known there.

Walt De Vries: I lost the argument Bill, because I said, "Look, let's just wipe out New Hampshire, just say we're gonna lose it, and then let's go beat 'em in Wisconsin. Well Len Hall and Bill and Cliff, I can't think of Cliff's last name now. But anyway, they argued that what Romney had to do was to go to New Hampshire, and he had to pick up the state and shake it and make them vote for him.

Walt De Vries: Well if you know New Hampshire voters, they don't do that. So he slugged through that snow and that sleet and all that. And then comes the time when Rockefeller did a poll, which showed they were gonna get beaten.

Bill Ballenger: Was gonna show that Romney was gonna get beaten?

Walt De Vries: Yeah. But I had resigned in December of 1967, because I figured my strategy is not gonna be utilized so I quit. But the point is, that poll showed Nixon was gonna beat Romney by a significant amount. The interesting part of that was, when Romney announced he was pulling out of the race, his wife didn't even know.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah, that's kind of remarkable.

Walt De Vries: No one ever even knew about it.

Bill Ballenger: And she was very intimately involved in most of his decisions.

Walt De Vries: Absolutely.

Bill Ballenger: Why do you think that was? He was ashamed to admit it to her?

Walt De Vries: No, I think it was just a matter of haste, they had to get it done. One of your questions was, was I at the hotel meeting where this was decided, and I was not

because I was out of the campaign by then. But it was just a major strategic decision that the people in Washington knew better how to run the campaign than the people in Lansing.

Bill Ballenger: Well, one of the people who had been very supportive of the governor in terms of fundraising was Max Fisher, who was a Michigan guy, but I think he was more in sync with what these national people were telling Romney. I think he was dead wrong.

Walt De Vries: Absolutely.

Bill Ballenger: And they didn't seem to pay any attention to the concept that you and Lance Tarrance had developed, which was gaining momentum nationally as a way of looking at elections, they just ignored it.

Walt De Vries: That's right.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah, well that is really tragic. Let's flash back well, a little bit. Bill Milliken, Bill Milliken in 1964, was a state senator, most of the year, all of the year. Allison Green was the speaker of the house, George Romney was governor. This is the '64 year of Goldwater/Johnson and Romney/Staebler and Griffin/Soapy Williams and everything else.

Bill Ballenger: But at the Republican state convention that summer, Bill Milliken and Allison Green went head-to-head on who is going to be the first lieutenant governor ever to run in tandem with the governor under the new constitution? Before that, lieutenant governors had always been elected independently since Michigan became a state in 1837.

Bill Ballenger: But your constitution said, "No, you're running together." Now as I understand it, Romney did not take an official position on that race between Green and Milliken.

Walt De Vries: Yeah, but I did.

Bill Ballenger: Publicly, well okay. Tell us in your view what went on and what happened.

Walt De Vries: Well two factions in the governor's office, one led by Bob Danhoff, one led by me.

Bill Ballenger: And Bob Danoff was the legal counsel.

Walt De Vries: Danoff wanted the state treasurer to be the lieutenant governor. We made a deal, a compromise.

Bill Ballenger: Okay.

Walt De Vries: An arrangement.

Bill Ballenger: Okay.

Walt De Vries: Whatever, on the stage of Cobo Hall, in the back of the stage, that Allison would run for treasurer.

Bill Ballenger: Well not run for treasurer, be appointed treasurer.

Walt De Vries: Oh I'm sorry, be appointed as treasurer.

Bill Ballenger: Because the treasurer was no longer gonna be elected.

Walt De Vries: We offered him that, and then Bill would become the lieutenant governor. And it took a lot of arguing and so on, but we finally, I think we finally won and Bill did become the lieutenant governor.

Walt De Vries: But that was a deal made on the stage, way back of the stage in Cobo Hall. I know we don't make deals in politics, but that was a deal.

Bill Ballenger: Nothing to be ashamed of. You were a Bill Milliken backer and there may have been what? Some other people in the governor's office.

Walt De Vries: Yes.

Bill Ballenger: There were, and I think the Romney campaign team, the people out on the grass roots level and in the headquarters, they actually were for Milliken I think. But there were other people in the governor's office beside you, who were for Allison Green.

Bill Ballenger: What made you find Bill Milliken attractive?

Walt De Vries: He was new, he was young, he was progressive and he was a pleasant contrast also to Romney as well as some of the traditional Republicans. I ended up working in the 1970 campaign for Milliken for Governor, and then helped put together a coalition of the Roman Catholics for Milliken.

Bill Ballenger: Parochiaid.

Walt De Vries: Yeah, parochiaid.

Bill Ballenger: Yes. Absolutely. Well let me ask you about this. So Milliken gets elected with George Romney in 1964, was Milliken brought into the inner sanctums of the executive office to work with people like you and Danhoff and Lucille Kaplinger and whoever else was there, or was he isolated as a lieutenant governor like many vice-presidents are forgotten and overlooked by Presidents in the past? What was it like, what happened?

Walt De Vries: It depended on who called the meeting.

Bill Ballenger: Meaning?

Walt De Vries: Was Bill invited or not.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah, but I mean who would call a meeting other than the governor?

Walt De Vries: Well, some of the staff.

Bill Ballenger: You mean staff people would call a meeting, and if you called a meeting, you would include Milliken.

Walt De Vries: But if Bob Danhoff called it, I don't think Milliken would've been there. I shouldn't say that, but that's the case.

Bill Ballenger: Well, in other words, Milliken never really got, he never got on the inside with Romney personally and what do you think Romney's attitude was toward Bill Milliken as a fellow Republican politician, what do you think?

Walt De Vries: I don't know. I never really thought about that. It seems to me that at the time, Romney had so much to do, and it wasn't a matter of delegating anything to Bill Milliken. I think we just let him pretty much go off by himself.

Bill Ballenger: Well let me flash forward six years to 1970 when you said you helped Bill Milliken with the Parochiaid thing. One other thing that happened that year, and you may not have been privy to this, but maybe you've talked to people about it. George Romney is down in Washington as secretary of housing and urban development for Richard Nixon.

Bill Ballenger: Bill Milliken is now his replacement, successor as governor having succeeded to the governorship when Romney resigned a year and a half before to take the cabinet job with Nixon. But all of a sudden, George Romney is sending signals that he wants Lenore Romney, who had never run for public office in her life, herself, to run for the US Senate against incumbent democratic Senator Phil Hart. There were a lot of people in the republican party who were resistant to that. Some of them maybe didn't like the Romneys. There was a state senator named Bob Huber, very conservative, he'd already announced, "I'm running against Phil Hart and I'm not getting out of the race. I don't care whether Lenore Romney runs or not." He didn't get out and Lenore Romney allowed herself to be kind of recruited to run, but she had to face Bob Huber in the primary. Well, she barely beat Bob Huber in a primary for heaven sakes and then she proved to be a pretty disastrous candidate in November against Phil Hart.

Bill Ballenger: Do you have any knowledge about what happened? Why would Romney be pushing to have Lenore Romney run for the US Senate while he's down in Washington as HUD secretary?

Walt De Vries: That was the question I raised. Why? It made no sense and I was opposed to it. So were other people because first of all they didn't think she'd get the resources, the money to do it. I don't know where Max Fisher was on this thing, but it was a recruitment effort by people who thought that the Romney name and legacy would carry her through. But there was no evidence at all, polling or otherwise, they indicate that this would happen. So, there was sort of a feeling of, "Well, why should we do this?" Why waste a nomination? Now, first of all Phil Hart was almost impossible to beat. It just seemed foolish at the time.

Walt De Vries: I don't know what George's role was in that.

Bill Ballenger: Supposedly he was the one who was really pushing it. The Milliken people were saying, "Why are you doing this?" And they wanted to be respectful to George Romney and they didn't want to offend him, but you could tell they were not happy about this. I was there when Lenore Romney made her speech to the assembled republicans in the Jack Tar hotel across from the Capitol and it was uninspiring, but she stayed in the race, anyway.

Walt De Vries: I find that hard to believe that he really pushed her. They had a special relationship. You may know that he tried to give her a flower every day.

Bill Ballenger: Every day.

Walt De Vries: But what they didn't know was, sometimes he forgot, so we'd be at a hotel and he would sneak around and pull a flower out of the display. I shouldn't tell this story, but then put it a long with a note for Lenore.

Bill Ballenger: Didn't he usually put it on her pillow every morning?

Walt De Vries: Yeah.

Bill Ballenger: Wasn't that the story? These were on display. They were plastic flowers?

Walt De Vries: No, these are real flowers.

Bill Ballenger: They were real flowers. Well, at least they were real.

Walt De Vries: But he had a high, really high regard for her.

Bill Ballenger: Oh, absolutely.

Walt De Vries: And she was the last person who ever talked to him every night.

Bill Ballenger: Oh, absolutely. Well, let me ask you this. A year and a half before all this transpired with Lenore possibly running for the senate, Romney, he didn't just preemptively do it like it was a shock. People had heard rumors for weeks, but he resigned as governor half way through his third term which was the first four

year elected term for a governor in Michigan history because of your constitution. And he quit. Why?

Bill Ballenger: Did he feel his job had been done in Michigan? That he'd gotten the income tax through. That there was fiscal integrity restored. Had he grown bored with the job? Did he get Potomac fever from his aborted presidential campaign where he thought, "It might not be so bad being down in Washington."

Bill Ballenger: Was there something about housing, because remember he had pushed open housing as an issue as part of maybe the same kind of thinking.

Walt De Vries: He had gone on that tour of all the major cities, the housing and the poverty and all that. I think it was another feeling which was that the citizens from Michigan idea could be put on the national level and Citizens for America or something like that.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Walt De Vries: And I think that was part of it. I think he felt by that time most of the con-con delegates who were on his staff, he had gone through major staff changes, probably just felt it's time to do something else. But, I suspect it was because of dealing with urban problems, housing problems that maybe he could do something at the national level that he couldn't do at the state level.

Bill Ballenger: So you think it was really a sincere impulse to say, "Maybe I can make a difference, here, in housing and urban development."

Walt De Vries: Sure. He had been in Washington when he was younger.

Bill Ballenger: Yes. Absolutely. He worked for a massive transit company.

Walt De Vries: I don't think he had any aspirations in Nixon's cabinet.

Bill Ballenger: No.

Walt De Vries: They were still, I think like this. I think one of your questions you asked me about Romney being Nixon's vice presidential candidate.

Bill Ballenger: Right. What about that? At the convention in 1968 when Nixon picked Spiro Agnew.

Walt De Vries: I was picked up as a fellow at the institute of politics at Harvard and this is the summer of '68 and I get a call, "Governor Romney wants you to be at the convention in Miami," and I couldn't figure out, because I'd been out of there now for six months. What did he want me to do in Miami? Well, what he had in mind was to talk to the people I knew in the national press corps to find out what they thought of the idea of a Nixon-Romney ticket.

Bill Ballenger: Oh. Well.

Walt De Vries: The first guy I had breakfast with, Dave Bruder, when I asked him the question, he ordered a Bloody Mary. He said, "That's the nuttiest thing I ever heard of." But there was an effort within the staff I think, to see if they couldn't get Romney on the vice presidential ticket, but that was never going to happen of course with Nixon.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Walt De Vries: But there was still a night in the summer of '68, they were still hoping and thinking that Romney might be able to do that.

Bill Ballenger: And Romney himself thought that was a possibility.

Walt De Vries: Oh, sure.

Bill Ballenger: Obviously.

Walt De Vries: Sure.

Bill Ballenger: Okay, let's go back to just Goldwater a minute. I just wanna ask you a really big sweeping question and that is, obviously Goldwater is kind of the archetype of the Cro-Magnon knuckle dragging conservative republican from the 60's. And George Romney was just a dynamo progressive governor in the same stripe as Nelson Rockefeller and Mark Hatfield and John Chafee, of Rhode Island and people like that. Today, times have changed. Social and cultural issues, for instance have become so much more important than they were then. Things like gay rights and flag burning and all sorts of social cultural issues. About which George Romney and you can already start to see this in the late 60's and early 70's, became very uncomfortable with because of his Mormon background, I think and his moral code.

Bill Ballenger: Whereas Barry Goldwater, amazingly enough was a kind of old style western libertarian on social, cultural issues. He didn't really care that much about these issues. In fact the Arizona republican party got so disgusted with Goldwater in later years they tried to take his name off the headquarters. They said, "Goldwater's deserted us and drifted off into left field."

Bill Ballenger: How do we look at George Romney and Barry Goldwater today and the kind of politicians they were and the Republican party as it existed then and the republican party today? What do you think?

Walt De Vries: Well, I would argue George Romney really was a conservative because the way he approached public policy was, "If you have a problem and you identify it, can you solve it privately?" Well, if you can't do that, "Can you solve it with a combination of private and governmental resources?" And then finally, "If you

can't do it with either one of those two, can you solve it by government?" He was not afraid to use government, which I think many republicans are afraid. So, I would have argued that plus the way he felt about civil rights, that today, he would fit in with some, with the republican. He would not fit in with Donald Trump.

Bill Ballenger: No.

Walt De Vries: He would never had endorsed Donald Trump. But I think he could have fit in on that basis but I don't think any people would pay any attention to him. They would just write him off as far too liberal, whatever that meant.

Bill Ballenger: Do you think he still would be viewed as by-in-large a liberal and progressive in the party today?

Walt De Vries: Sure, because of the way he feels about government and the way he would use government. When Mitt first ran against Senator Kennedy and became governor, he was in George Romney's tradition.

Bill Ballenger: Right. In 1994, he ran against Ted Kennedy and then 10 years later, he was elected governor.

Walt De Vries: But if you think what Romney did in Massachusetts.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah. He was progressive on healthcare and so forth.

Walt De Vries: Then he decided to run for president. He decided that he had to switch.

Bill Ballenger: Well, you brought up Mitt Romney, okay? So, let's talk a little bit about Mitt Romney and his brother Scott, for that matter. They're Romney's two sons. Mitt is the one who's really chosen public service, politics. Scott almost got into it big time and he was elected by the way, Statewide, he was elected to Michigan University Board Trustee. But how do you look at Mitt Romney? What you knew about Mitt Romney, if you knew him very much at all and of course he was very young. He was in adolescence when you were working for Governor Romney. And how his career has evolved over time and where he ended up in 2012, and where he is now, in Utah, for heaven sakes, running for the U.S. Senate. What do you think?

Walt De Vries: See, what I would argue with Mitt is, "Look. You had a successful term as governor of Massachusetts by doing things and setting policies like your father did. And using the campaign techniques that your father used." When Mitt decided to run for president, he went with guys who were in marketing and in advertising. Okay? That's fine. But you need somebody with substance in state and local government. So I would argue, "You've already set yourself up against some of the things that Trump already believes. You have the chance to sort of like doing a Romney redux." I think the election in 2018, is going to be a

disastrous one for republicans and I think they're gonna have to rebuild the party much like his father and Rockefeller and Eisenhower did in 1966.

Walt De Vries: And he has the opportunity to take up that mantle of leadership if he's willing to do it. But he can't do it the way he's doing it, now. You don't seem to know where the guy is. Flip flop and all that. But see, that's totally out of character with his father. A matter of fact, one of the criticisms of George Romney was, he was just so hard headed and you knew exactly where he stood. Well, that can also be a real asset and I don't think Mitt has that. At least he's not perceived as that.

Bill Ballenger: Well, you felt pretty good about Mitt, though, through his tenure as governor of Massachusetts?

Walt De Vries: Oh sure.

Bill Ballenger: But after that is where you think he kind of turned his coat ideologically.

Walt De Vries: When he ran for senate, Bill, George would fly to Massachusetts to help him campaign door to door. I don't know if you remember that?

Bill Ballenger: Oh, yeah. Absolutely.

Walt De Vries: For his son.

Bill Ballenger: Well, of course, Mitt Romney will probably have certainly a chance to reinvent himself again, because if he's elected as senator, you may think, "Okay, he's elected from conservative Utah." But once he's on a national stage and he's in the Senate, he'll have a chance to develop his own character and personality and he may change again. He may become the anti-Trump again, like he was two years ago.

Walt De Vries: Well I would argue, he oughta do that. He's got six years. He's certainly gonna be elected from Utah. He's got six years in a Senate that for the most part is devoid of leadership.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Walt De Vries: Under McConnell. So, I would argue, the opportunity's there, go and seize it. It's the end of your political life. Do it.

Bill Ballenger: Well, Walt De Vries, we've covered a lot of territory, a lot of history, but I think what you've just said about George Romney's son is telling.

Walt De Vries: Well, if there are people left in Michigan or nationally who view the legacy of George Romney as something special, which of course, I do. And I always wanna promote it because I thought he's one of the country's best governors. George

and I used to kid him about his sons being part of a new family, like the Rockefellers or the Kennedys and so on. He poo-pooed that idea but I think he believed that Mitt would eventually be in public office and perhaps Mitt's sons.

Bill Ballenger: Didn't he go up and campaign for Mitt when he ran for the Senate against Teddy Kennedy in 1994? When he was in his 80's.

Walt De Vries: He would fly to Massachusetts and then go out and campaign door to door for Mitt and I think was a very important asset in that campaign even though Mitt lost. I think Mitt has the opportunity, when I'm sure he's gonna be elected to the United States Senate for representing Utah, because he has an opportunity to rebuild the republican party which I think if all of the empirical evidence in polling and elections is true, right now, the democrats are gonna win. At least the House. So, he has a chance in the Senate to reshape the leadership of the Senate and make it more in tune with American people. As his father did in 1966 along with President Eisenhower and Governor Rockefeller and others.

Walt De Vries: So I would urge him to continue the family legacy, keep it going, keep it strong, keep it progressive, keep it close to the people and you've got six years to do that in Washington and don't waste it. But it's really been a pleasure to have you here and to recall all these old memories and old stories. I think you and I thank the Michigan Political Society for doing this for me.

Bill Ballenger: Well, listen. Walt De Vries, its been a delight. Thank you very much for all your time. Michigan is gonna love it.

Walt De Vries: My pleasure. Thank you.