

February 20, 1953

Miss Lorena A. Hickok
Moriches, Long Island
New York

Dear Miss Hickok:

Thank you very much for the compliment of including me among women to be mentioned in your and Mrs. Roosevelt's forthcoming book. I gladly answer your questions relative to my public service.

You are correct in your impression that I was first of the only two women who have served as Governors. Mrs. Ferguson of Texas and I were elected on the same day in November, but the laws of Wyoming provide for an earlier inauguration than do those of Texas; hence I was in office and functioning before she took the oath. I have forgotten whether it was ten days or two weeks; something like that. Anyhow, it was that circumstance that made me the first woman Governor.

I have always looked back upon my tenure as Governor with much satisfaction, both from the standpoint of its effect upon the State and from that of the State's treatment of me. Even in the campaign that followed, the Republicans made little attack upon my official acts. Since then I have never read from the pen of any Wyoming person disparagement of the quality of service rendered by my Administration.

My failure to be re-elected was unquestionably due to two factors; chief of which was that the Republicans had a majority of only one in the U. S. Senate and Senator Warren of Wyoming was the oldest member, being 88 at the time. The knowledge that I would appoint a Democrat in event of his death inspired the Republicans to fight with might and main to elect a Republican Governor. Senator Warren himself said that that defeated me. He did die soon after that election.

Another factor was that I was a novice in practical politics. Instead of getting out early in the campaign and rallying my official family to do the same, I stayed at the Capital attending one after another State board meetings, as an ex-officio member, and delayed going out. I thought that course would appeal to the voters. I was defeated by between 1400 and 1500 votes. 750 would have reversed the results. There were enough friends in my own county who failed to get out to vote to have reversed the results.

You ask for some little colorful incidents in my experience. Mention might be made of this: Once going out to a distant part of the state to speak at a convention, I found that through some mistake no reservation had been made for me at the one and only hotel, which was crowded to the limit. A Republican friend, noting my dismay, promptly and graciously offered the hospitality of his near-by country home. I gratefully accepted. It developed that the Democrats had arranged a luncheon for me that day. They were so indignant that I should be staying with a Republican that they scarcely spoke to me during the luncheon. It struck me as so funny that when I would think of it in the night, I would shake the bed with laughter; but discretion forbade my mentioning it to a soul.

Once when I was in a private home in a New England state, my hostess told me that while preparing the guest room for my arrival she admonished her little daughter to be well-behaved during my stay saying, "You know, a Governor is a very big person"; to which the little girl replied, "Do you think this bed will be big enough to hold her?".

Yes, it is true that I have been asked by the new Administration to finish my term as Director of the Mint, which expires the last of April. It has been my lot to serve in a period that has imposed upon the Mint more challenging duties and upon the Director more important, policy-making decisions than in all the previous years put together. Methods of operation have been literally revolutionized. The quantity of coin produced and sent into circulation has totalled 75% of the entire output since the Mint was established in George Washington's time. One of the heavy responsibilities that has been vested in the Director of the Mint is the enforcement of all laws and regulations bearing upon transactions in gold, practically from the time it leaves the mines until it finds its way into the industries and arts; also transactions in newly-mined domestic silver.

Yes, my name was placed in nomination for Vice President at the Houston Convention by Mrs. T. S. Taliaferro (pronounced Toliver). 31 votes, as I recall, were cast for me. Senator Barkley's name was also placed in nomination. I am confident I received more votes than he did, but that would have to be verified. The difference in number I have forgotten.

You ask my appraisal of the present status of women in politics. Insofar as recognition of them in policy-making positions is concerned, I think that they have made great strides in the 20 years of the Roosevelt-Truman regime. President Truman, in less than ~~seven~~^{five} years, undoubtedly placed more women in important posts than did all of his Republican predecessors combined. Women have made surprisingly little progress, I think, in attaining high elective positions, such as Governor, Lieutenant Governor, the United States Senate, and the House. Sometimes I think it is because they shrink from the rough and tumble fight which a political campaign usually entails. A limited number of women, of course, are in a position to leave their homes for Government service. Women are though obviously influencing, if not actually swaying, the results of elections.

As for the cooperation of men and their attitude toward a woman in a high, executive position about which you inquire, I am one woman who has no grievance on that score. I believe that most men with whom I have been officially associated have given me as much credit as I deserved for efficiency and effectiveness. In the Mint, about 85% of the personnel are men, because of the manual and technical character of the work. Not one of them, whether executive or of the rank and file, has made me feel that the fact of my being a woman made any difference in his attitude toward me. I believe the prejudice that once existed among men against woman's participation in affairs outside the home is pretty well broken down.

I would say to a young woman going into politics, in whatever capacity, bring all your capabilities to your responsibility. Everything we do in this life, whether in politics or any other field, helps qualify us for more difficult tasks. It is important also, I feel, that a woman beware of giving any impression by voice or bearing that political activity takes toll of her femininity. A strident, masculine bearing can create for her a handicap. I have in mind a smart Western woman who can get nowhere because of that.

This is vastly more material than you will have any use for. My thought is that you can take from it anything that is acceptable.

With good wishes to you always and with much admiration, I am

Yours sincerely,

NELLIE TAYLOR ROSS

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