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Guest (s): Rep. Randall S. Harmon (D-IN)

Title: States Rights

Note: Questions were paraphrased and/or shortened by the transcriber. For the exact question, please consult the audiotapes.

Morphew: Introduction...you became interested in politics some time ago, could you tell us how that came about?

Harmon: Well, back in the old city of Muncie, along about 1942, I decided I'd run for mayor in the primary election and there were 5 of us and I was not on the bottom of the list when the votes were counted, but I wasn't very far. I placed fourth. I noticed that primary, in the spring of 1942, that they had one candidate on the Republican ticket for Congress and they one on the Democratic ticket, you didn't have a choice, and I didn't think that was a very good thing and I made up my mind then and two years later in 1944 that I would be a candidate for Congress. And as time went on, every two years, I'd run, and in the spring of 1958, I was successful in becoming nominated and successful in December 1958 to be elected to Congress.

Morphew: I understand that your campaign expenditures were low considering the present cost of campaigning.

Harmon: Well, due to the fact that I didn't have money in the spring, I didn't have any expenses. And then in the fall, I dug up 7 or 8 dollars for postage money and went in debt for about a hundred and five dollars gasoline and car expense. So, I had about a hundred and twelve dollars, a hundred and thirteen dollars, total expense, for the whole year.

Morphew: And now a law has been written that allows a congressman to spend \$25,000 for a campaign. It had been 22 years when you were elected since a democrat had been elected from your district.

Harmon: Yes, that is right. The district that I'm in is, of course, has become through the years quite an industrial center in the different cities but we still have the farm communities and the little small country crossroads country stores, small communities, where they are predominantly Republican. The congressman that, last time there was a congressman down here was back in the days when farm folk wanted rural electrification

and this man was in, I believe, for about 3 terms. And they got rural electrification and after they got it, those republican farmers and voters went back to the republican congressman again.

Morphew: I understand that you're name became a household word across the country and even in foreign countries. You've said you're the possessor of the most famous front porch in the world. Tell us about that.

Harmon: Well, I, actually, the news broke in the newspapers along about this time last year, where it was discovered that my lovely wife was on my payroll and the newspaper reporter came into the office looking for Mary Harmon and discovered she was my wife, and incidentally, she went to work the next day after an election, November, there in '58, without pay, and because people come early in the morning and call on the phone and she is a very busy person. I was out in the factory, trying to make a living for my family, but in regards to the rental, everyone said that I rented my own front porch to the government for a hundred dollars. Now, the truth of the matter is, that she does own the house, she and the bank together, and I do have an office on her front porch and like I tell a lot of newspaper folk, reporters, if she's got some kind of deal with the government, whereby she gets a little rental out of it, more power to her. And if there are any questions to ask about it, why don't they talk to her?

Morphew: And the fact is that every congressman is allowed a little money to rent office space back home.

Harmon: Yes, you're allowed a hundred dollars a month. Now, that would take care of one office or a half a dozen. You would still only get one hundred dollars for all of them. If you had two offices, you could make one of them fifty dollars and the other one fifty, or sixty and forty, seventy and thirty, however you wanted to do it.

Morphew: And it's up to you where you wanted to maintain it.

Harmon: Yes, the first, number one, you're supposed to look in the post office or the federal property buildings and I did. I looked, made a very good, close survey of situation and they had a little room down in a basement that was dark, water on the floor and it would cost quite a bit of money to fix it up, which I didn't have and the government would not make any allowance for that. There wasn't any place to park. So then I looked around in the downtown area of Muncie and still no parking facilities and it was around \$200 a month for just a little ole room somewhere and not very good, so I went to a shopping center, and low and behold, just about for a desk space, they wanted three hundred dollars a month, plenty of parking area. So I decided the best place to have it was close to home and I'm very happy that I did have it because I talked to some of the other congressmen and they discovered along through the years that even though they had an office downtown or in an office building or in a federal building, post office, even when they got home then, those that worked in the factory or the farm folk that had worked all day, they'd come in the evenings to see them at their homes, so what better place to have it than where it's handy, accessible, plenty of parking space and it's been a

very busy front porch. For instance, when I go home, from 6 o'clock in the morning to 10 o'clock at night, people come and knock on the door or they call and want to see me and talk to me.

Morphew: And because of the press coverage you have received more than your share of visitors from foreign countries.

Harmon: I have. And I ask them why they don't talk to other congressmen or senators or why they don't talk to the president or the secretary of state or the vice-president and they tell me right away that they don't know those fellas but they know all about me in their newspaper in the foreign country and they heard that I wanted to help everybody and do things for people and naturally, they come to me.

Morphew: One of your strongest beliefs is that state and local governments should do things for themselves, not wait for the federal government to come in and take over.

Harmon: I have always advocated that you shouldn't get too far away from your own city, your own township, county, and your own state, that you should do those things for yourself. And the fact that a lot of communities haven't done that, we now have the call, hue and cry, for federal aid to education, for health insurance for the indigent or the aged, and many things that should have been taken care of on the homefront or the home bases, home community, hasn't been taken care of through the years and now as a last resort they appeal to the federal government for that aid.

Morphew: How do you feel about the general question of states rights?

Harmon: Well, I voted for H.R. 3, which was our so-called states rights bill, there were a lot of other things in it. I had a lot of pressure from my colleagues from Indiana on it, but I stuck to my guns because states rights was an old issue with me, that there's too much federal bureaucracy, there's too much federal domination, and I don't know how we're going to stop it but I think if we don't stop it we're going to be in bad trouble.

Morphew: What advice would you give to the average citizen watching and listening who is interested in his government but doesn't know what to do about it?

Harmon: Well, I think that their opinions and their views should be made known to their newspapers or to their senators especially and to their congressmen and their congresswomen, who will then, I think, go into action on their beliefs and views and opinions. I think it's very important that those of us in Washington, five hundred and thirty-seven of us in both Houses, should about that from the people back home. You can send out questionnaires and a lot of times people don't have time to do that or they can get in groups and have a simple brief statement to the real, have all the facts printed and briefly as can be and show all the signatures and that shows the people in groups are in accord with the thoughts that's put down on that little petition, on a paper.

Morphew: But there's difference between getting people's thoughts than just something on a mimeographed paper.

Harmon: That's true.

Morphew: Do you think your move to congress two years ago can be an inspiration to other people who want to get involved?

Harmon: Well, it seems in my own district there, since I have at the present time 8 opponents and I have also promise of maybe 8 or 9 more, who knows, that someone's taking an interest back home.

Morphew: So it has served to inspire people to do the same thing, at least in your district.

Harmon: It sure has.

Morphew: Maybe you would be happier if it inspired people in other districts as well.

Harmon: Well, I welcome everyone that wants to be an opponent or a candidate for Congress. They say, do you care, Congressman. I say, well, certainly I do not. That's the American way, our free way of doing things. You have the right to do that. Where else could just an ordinary factory worker like me, other than this great country of ours, nowhere in this world, nowhere in history, would it ever have been possible for a person like me, just a common ordinary person, to become a congressman.