# WES UHLMAN

A POLITICIAN OF HIS TIMES

<p>Wes Uhlman, Seattle's youngest mayor of the 20th century, hadn't been in office long enough to grow his sideburns stylishly longer when federal agents demanded a meeting. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco & Firearms wanted the city's help in raiding the Black Panthers' local headquarters. They said President Richard Nixon backed their plan. Uhlman knew similar raids around the country had been bloody. Chicago police shot Fred Hampton, the local Panther leader, in his bed, unarmed. "In bed. That was the one that really got me," Uhlman says. "It looked like they were just going out and killing people."*</p>

Uhlman knew from his own police department that Seattle's Black Panthers were few in number and not physically threatening. They supplied the black community with free breakfasts. The new mayor didn't want to create martyrs in a city already as edgy as the amphetamine-injecting crowd dimming the hippie vibe in the University District. He told the agents they wouldn't get his help. What's more, if shooting erupted the city would investigate who fired first. "They stormed out of my damn office like you can't believe," Uhlman says nearly five decades later, still wearing a crown of silvery hair that gave the square-jawed young mayor a look of steely resolve.

The political legacy of 1968 bloomed at Seattle City Hall when Uhlman, 34, took office. He defeated the establishment candidate, Chamber of Commerce leader Mort Frayn, in the fall of 1969, to become Seattle's first Democratic mayor in nearly three decades. Uhlman proved to be a "politician of his times, and the sweeping political and cultural revolutions of the '60s paved the way for the changes he made," wrote Emily Lieb for HistoryLink. In a few short months, Uhlman named Latino civil rights activist Cesar Chavez "First Citizen" of Seattle, flew flags at half-mast for student protesters killed at Kent State by the National Guard and closed I-5 express lanes so University District protesters spilling onto the freeway could march downtown. That was just prologue to two turbulent terms in which he directed Seattle's transformation from "musty and crusty" to something more modern and tolerant. Uhlman joined a cadre of dashing mayors, such as

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* Hampton was also sedated by a sleeping drug an FBI informant had slipped into his drink before the raid. An investigation by U.S. Department of Justice found that police fired up to 99 shots during the raid, while the Panthers shot only twice.
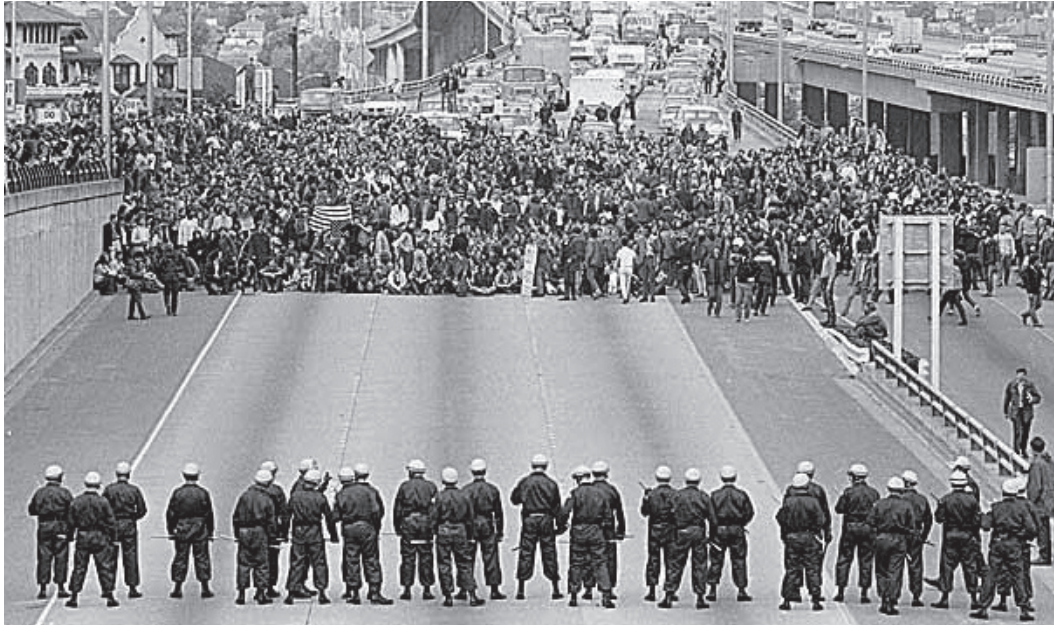
After Kent State students were killed by the National Guard, UW protesters marched toward downtown on Interstate 5 until police diverted them – peacefully – to exits. Two days later Uhlman opened I-5 express lanes to 15,000 protesters. This time police taped daffodils to their nightsticks. *MOHAI*

Boston's Kevin White and New York's John Lindsay, trying to save cities from decay, danger and middle class flight.

"Uhlman was arguably the most powerful, and perhaps successful, mayor in the city's history," wrote Ross Anderson of *The Seattle Times* in a look back at the city's first 50 mayors. Under Uhlman, Seattle saw its first Bumbershoot festival, first mayoral proclamation for Gay Pride Week, first ride-free transit zone, first Women's Commission and Office of Women's Rights and the city's first black department heads. He presided over the opening of the Burke Gilman Trail, restoration of Pioneer Square and the Pike Place Market, construction of the Kingdome, public funding for historic preservation, the arts and more. "No mayor will ever be able to put together that kind of list again," said Paul Schell, Seattle's 50th mayor. "And all this from a mayor that nobody ever liked very much."

It wasn't all Pleasant Valley Sundays for Uhlman. He inherited a police payoff scandal that ran from vice cops to the top brass. Seattle led the nation in bombings. His cops killed a black Vietnam vet who was planting a bomb, inflaming racial tensions in a city deeply segregated by restrictive home loans and covenants barring minorities from most neighborhoods. The Boeing Bust crippled the local economy and psyche. Rattled voters rejected a mountain of federal funds for light-rail because they'd have to pay one-third of the total tab. Pioneer Square and Pike Place Market had dates with wrecking balls. Uhl-

man's aggressive advocacy of affirmative action and other runs around civil service and cronyism provoked a mutiny, with firefighters and City Light workers pushing a recall vote to the ballot. "Our prematurely gray mayor," wrote Teamster editorialist Ed Donohoe, "is also prematurely dumb." If those that weren't challenges enough, the most powerful man in the free world disdained Seattle's mayor.

Uhlman was in a White House basement room, trying to finagle a new radio system for his police just weeks after he effectively raised his middle finger to the president by refusing to help the ATF raid the Panthers. Uhlman's condemnation of "gestapo-like tactics" made national headlines. Norm Dicks, then a young aide to powerful U.S. Senator Warren Magnuson, was sitting next to Uhlman when Nixon's top domestic adviser, John Ehrlichman, burst in.

Dicks, who went on to serve 18 terms in Congress, tells the story with relish:

"We're downstairs in a windowless room around a table, and all of a sudden—Boom!—through the door—*and it was Boom!*—and here is John Ehrlichman on fire!

"And he says, 'Wes, you've embarrassed the president; you've embarrassed me. Why wouldn't you let us do the raid on the Black Panthers?' "

"Uhlman was pretty stunned. I was stunned. Here was one of the most important people in the country jumpin' on ya."

Uhlman said something like, "I had to do what I had to do."

Then, "all of a sudden Ehrlichman spins around and says, 'We won't forget this. We won't forget this!' And walks out of the room. I didn't say anything. I just sat there and listened. Then we were all like 'Oh my God!' "[*]

UHLMAN'S VENTURE into politics was something of an accident. Wesley Carl Uhlman was born in tiny Cashmere (population 1,465 in 1940) in Chelan County. Both of his paternal grandparents were born in Switzerland. His father was a Pentecostal minister. The family moved around, following his pulpit assignments, from Moscow, Idaho, to Aberdeen, Washington. But Uhlman said his parents didn't at all influence his decision to become active in civic life. "They didn't share any of the values I had then and have now," he says. "My mother was very conservative. She was always saying—I'll put it mildly—unkind things about black people." (Uhlman has been married since 1993 to Carolyn Purnell, a former prosecutor and King County deputy executive, who is African-American.)

After getting his undergraduate degree from the University of Washington, he married a classmate, Laila Hammond, and returned to the UW for law school. In 1958, the second-year law student and his friend Jim Wanamaker, visited the 32nd District Democratic headquarters in the Wallingford neighborhood. They wanted advice on how to get

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[*] Dicks says he couldn't help but leak details of Ehrlichman's outburst to Bill Prochnau, a Washington, D.C., reporter for *The Seattle Times*. Prochnau's story said Uhlman "ran into heavy White House flak" from Ehrlichman. "We want to get along," Uhlman said. "We want to make love, not war, with Mr. Ehrlichman."
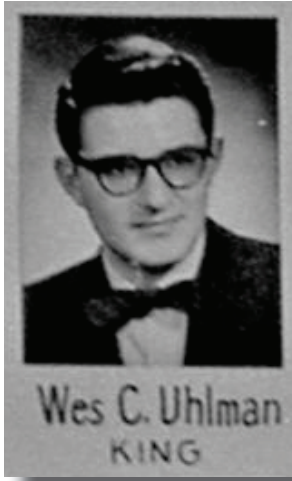
Uhlman first ran for office after losing a coin-flip with a friend. He became a state representative at 23. *Washington State Archives*

more students to join their campus chapter of Young Democrats. "They just dismissed us," Uhlman says. Over coffee in the student union building the next morning, he and Wanamaker plotted ways to expand the Young Democrats. Uhlman urged his friend to run for office. But Wanamaker, whose mother was a former legislator and state superintendent of public instruction, was uncomfortable with the idea. So they flipped a coin.

Uhlman lost. He became a 23-year old candidate for state representative.

"We didn't have any money. We had one piece of literature. So we set out to doorbell the district. We practically lived at Dick's hamburgers," he says. The district had voted for moderate Republicans, like much of Seattle then. In the November election, Uhlman, an unknown, faced incumbent Hartney Oakes. "Hartney was old school," Uhlman says. "He was old, too." Oakes called Uhlman "the boy."

The upstart who campaigned for change and new blood was blessed by a tailwind. Republicans had put a statewide right-to-work initiative on the ballot. Unions hotly opposed Initiative 202, driving up Democratic turnout. Uhlman surprised everyone, including himself, when he and his $600 campaign prevailed, making him one of the youngest lawmakers in state history.[*] "I didn't even own a suit," Uhlman says.

Bespectacled and bow-tied in his first official photo for the Legislature, Uhlman worked hard, was comfortable with budgets and rose in the ranks to become the chief budget writer in the House. One source described Uhlman's focus as so intense that he seemed "stuffy." He only slept five or six hours a night and was usually up before 6 a.m. He sometimes worked seven days a week, sharpening his "passionate but middle-of-the-road brand of liberalism" influenced by John F. Kennedy. His friends tended to be other politicians and attorneys. He was part of a gourmet-dining group and active in the Methodist church.

Having put aside his law practice, Uhlman adopted an "up or out" philosophy about politics. In 1966 he moved up to the state Senate. But as he looked around he saw a lot of white-haired men. "I thought, 'I don't want to grow old sitting in one of these chairs in the Washington State Senate.' "

The Seattle League of Women Voters, led by Phyllis Lamphere, would give Uhlman a path to the mayor's office. A Seattle girl who bootstrapped her way to Barnard College in New York and jobs at Boeing and IBM, Lamphere called herself a "fanatic" about government structure. In Seattle, the City Council wielded much more power than the mayor.

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[*] Chester Biesen was elected to the Washington House of Representatives in 1927 at the age of 22.
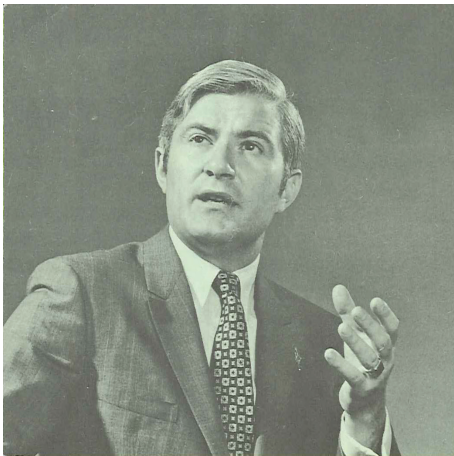
WES UHLMAN

decisive . . . concerned . . . experienced

Leader in State Senate . . . son of a minister . . . successful lawyer . . . eight years in the House, three in the Senate, where he took on some of the Legislature's toughest, most demanding jobs, including chairmanship of the powerful House Ways and Means Committee . . . now Senate Judiciary Committee chairman responsible for much legislation improving law enforcement and crime prevention and control . . . happily married father of two sons . . . active in church and Northend community affairs . . . forcefully effective citizen who will make a great Mayor.

COMMITTEE FOR A NEW MAYOR, 616 UNION STREET, ALLAN MUNRO, COORDINATOR

In a quest to understand the enigmatic Uhlman, one Seattle journalist even wrote about his dance moves and a short story he penned as an undergrad. *Seattle Municipal Archives*

Department heads submitted their budget requests to councilmembers not the mayor. The result, Lamphere argued, was a decentralized, unfocused and inefficient city government not befitting a city of Seattle's size, never mind one with its 21st century ambitions. After a couple years of lobbying, Lamphere and the League got their "strong mayor" law passed in 1967. In any city with more than 300,000 residents, it decreed, the mayor would appoint a budget director. "Money is the oxygen of bureaucracies," says Don Stark, a former Uhlman budget director. The change shifted enormous practical power to the mayor. An amendment to the city charter made it clear that Seattle had a chief executive—not nine of them on the council—and it was the mayor.

HAVING LEARNED the mysteries of political power, Uhlman "concluded that Seattle was handicapped by mayors who had none." He supported Lamphere's legislation and was poised in 1968 to move up to the mayor's office, now that Seattle would have a strong executive for the first time. He announced his campaign in early February 1969. Uhlman was the youngest in a 10-man field that included Secretary of State Lud Kramer, City Councilmember Sam Smith, state Senator Fred Dore and former Republican Party leader Mort Frayn, who ran a printing and publishing company.

Uhlman campaigned on neighborhood preservation and mass transit, but also crime and public safety. The city's chief problem, he said, was citizen "alienation," or "a feeling of people that they simply don't have access to City Hall." All the while, Uhlman's youth positioned him as a fresh alternative to the clique of businessmen who ran city affairs from the posh Rainier Club.

His no-drama campaign didn't slip or stumble. With 29 percent, Uhlman was the top vote getter in the primary. Frayn, the business community's candidate, also advanced

Man In The News

Mayor Stuns Establishment

The establishment ruled on all major city appointments to varied commissions and committees. It personally dictated the direction of Seattle politics; if you were outside or in opposition to the establishment, you were politically dead in Seattle.

The establishment backed Frayn to the hilt, both with money and power. Everyone thought he would win easily.

But Seattle is changing. It has a growing number of urbanized problems without solutions. And its young voters are fed up with the establishment approach to city politics. And so they elected one of their own.

"Being mayor won't be an easy job," says Uhlman, "but then what is today?"

New Approaches Promised

"I'll tell you one thing. I'll be a strong mayor. We'll be taking action, doing things at City Hall in the next four years.

"The vote indicates people are tired of the same old approaches to problems. Sure. We'll make some mistakes. But we won't make the worst mistake of all. We won't sit still and do nothing."

He gestures suddenly with his right hand. "Youth's the story. I'm 34. Many of my supporters are young. I want to bring youth into city government, make it attractive to young people."

Uhlman pointedly notes he has no commitments to anyone. Particularly the down-

GOOD LOOKS and charm of Seattle's new mayor, Wes Uhlman, were key attributes in his victory over older opponent.

By STAN FEDERMAN
Staff Writer, The Oregonian

SEATTLE (Special) — Wes Uhlman sat quietly in the back room of his campaign headquarters attempting to [...] from the previous [...] the vote. Then in the Nov. 3 runoff with Frayn he polled some 64 per cent of the votes.

His critics say he was lucky, that Frayn ran a bad campaign, that the father-son [...]

Uhlman pledged to be an "activist" mayor, willing to try the untried. "Sure, we'll make some mistakes," he said.

to the November ballot with 20 percent of the vote.

Reporters, especially those from out of town, tended to see little difference on issues between Uhlman, a centrist Democrat, and Frayn, a moderate Republican supported by Governor Dan Evans. "Two Liberals Vie for Seattle Mayor's Job," declared a *Los Angeles Times* headline. "Seattle Mayoral Rivals Differ in Age Not Views," agreed *The New York Times*. Notably, both candidates did not campaign on "law and order," then a kind of code for clamping down on hippies, blacks and feminists.

The race for the $26,250-a-year job was about age, appearance and attitude. That spelled trouble for Frayn, 63, a former state legislator and Speaker of the House. "Mort and I debated on television several times," Uhlman says. "Mort was not very eloquent and I could speak a little better. People saw that change, old and new."

Did they ever. It was the Generation Gap coming through their TV antennas. And this time father didn't know best. Uhlman appeared in living color, it seemed, while Frayn was frozen in black-and-white. Uhlman evoked a "Kennedy-like style" with the "matinee idol look" of New York Mayor John Lindsay. Frayn "looked and acted like Mr. Fuddy Duddy," one writer said. The Republican was also compared to Casey Stengel, the baseball manager known for scrambling the English language. Frayn's "struggle with syntax" was satirized by his own staff in a parody entitled "What Did He Say?" Uhlman, by comparison, exuded "an Ivy League appearance—but with a Puget Sound flavor."

While the downtown establishment backed Frayn to the hilt, Uhlman pledged to be an "activist" mayor willing to try the untried. "Sure we'll make some mistakes. But we won't make the worst mistake of all. We won't sit still and do nothing."

Uhlman lived in northeast Seattle in a brick house with a fenced yard. Frayn resided in Broadmoor, a gated community. Uhlman's campaign took a photo of the Broadmoor entrance with a guard standing out front, and then one of Uhlman's modest house on 34th Street Northeast between the Ravenna and View Ridge neighborhoods. Uhlman's TV ad said, "This is where Mort Frayn lives. He wants to be your mayor. This is where Wes Uhlman lives." The ad captured the change people wanted, Uhlman says.

It didn't hurt that labor unions liked Uhlman based on his record in the Legislature. Their endorsements were a major plus. The city's daily newspapers were a different

story. Both the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* and *The Seattle Times* backed Frayn. *Helix*, the city's underground paper, gave Uhlman a limp endorsement, wishing he was less square. On election night, a large crowd of cheery Uhlman supporters gathered at a downtown restaurant. "There were all ages; many were mod-clad persons in their 30s, 20s and teens," observed *The Seattle Times*. Uhlman won in a landslide, with 64 percent of the vote.

On a post-election respite in Hawaii, a photographer caught Uhlman and his wife, Laila, lolling on the beach. *AP photo*

In a post-election profile by *The Oregonian*, Uhlman sounded like a mythic figure who slayed a bygone giant and brought a new order to Camelot. Even as a child, the boy wonder was "always questioning" and "always seeking answers," said his father, the Rev. Werner Uhlman. "Youth's the story," his son said of his victory. Operating out of a dingy office with a tavern and go-go joint nearby, Uhlman's young team "outmaneuvered Frayn at every turn and they broke the back of the downtown business establishment at the same time." Young voters were fed up with the status quo, surmised *The Oregonian*. So they anointed one of their own.[*]

Right on. Except Uhlman was born a decade before the Baby Boom and hardly counterculture. He was a preacher's son and a real estate attorney. He served in the Army National Guard. And he had a matter-of-fact remoteness that some found curt, not magnetic.

AFTER THE ELECTION, the city's business leaders invited the new mayor to the fourth floor of the Rainier Club, the establishment's lair. Uhlman, who had a reputation for being unforgiving to those who crossed him, came through the door and said something he's regretted ever since, because it didn't make his new job any easier. "I looked around and said, 'This looks a lot like Mort Frayn's finance committee.' There was an appalling silence," he recalls, "because they were going to try to compromise me and they knew then it was going to be tough. I shouldn't have done it but I couldn't help it."

Already awaiting Uhlman were the problems of financing a shaky city budget, a failing transit system, awful traffic, morale difficulties in the Police Department and strained relations between blacks and whites. On his way to Hawaii for a post-election respite with

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[*] At 34, Uhlman was Seattle's youngest mayor since Robert Moran, who took office at 31 in 1888.

his wife, Uhlman found himself caught in the midst of a protest by black contractors at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport. In solidarity, he ended up singing a few bars of "We Shall Overcome" with them.

On Maui, news photographers caught Uhlman and his wife lolling on the beach, looking Kennedyesque except for his black socks with white sneakers. Back in Seattle, journalists were looking past the "John Lindsay of the West Coast" narrative for a deeper understanding of the new mayor. Was he a law-and-order liberal? A chameleon-like opportunist? A master of special-interest politics, who compiled a list of all the janitors in his legislative district?

David Brewster, a writer for *Seattle Magazine,* even addressed Uhlman's dancing style ("strenuous arm-pumping and energetic head-bobbing") and a three-page short story the new mayor wrote as an undergrad. The story "portrays a man reluctant to commit himself in any open way, uncertain which side of himself to put forward," Brewster concluded. In the end, Brewster's sharpest insight may have been getting Uhlman to assess JFK and his more passionate younger brother. "You could say that Bobby Kennedy was more attractive than John, because he made very clear his burning convictions," Uhlman said. "But John Kennedy, who was much cooler, had more detachment and kept himself apart and open, got a lot more accomplished. I don't think Bobby could have got much done, or even gotten elected."

SEATTLE ENDED 1969 with a dubious distinction, Uhlman would tell the U.S. Senate Permanent Committee on Investigations. It was the nation's bombing capital. The Emerald City had more bombings per capita than any other city between February 1969 and July 1970. It saw 90 incendiary devices set, mostly by anti-war and racial discrimination protesters. Although "the bombings are most probably being perpetrated by individuals acting on their own initiative," not at the direction of radical groups, Uhlman noted. Most bombs were simple, made with three to five sticks of dynamite. The majority were set in the University District and predominantly black Central Area. Two people had been killed, both bombing suspects. One died when explosives blew up in his hands; the other was fatally shot by a policeman. The situation was so volatile that the Nixon Administration scrapped plans to ship surplus nerve gas through Puget Sound. (There were also lawsuits, protests and legislation aimed at blocking the shipments.)

Just a week before Nixon stopped trains and ships from hauling the poisonous munitions through Washington, a bomb that never detonated pushed Seattle's race relations to a flash point. In the early morning hours of May 15, 1970, ex-convict and police informant Alfie Burnett woke Larry Ward, a 22-year-old decorated veteran, home two months from Vietnam. Burnett wanted Ward's help in planting a bomb at a Central Area real estate office notoriously unfriendly to blacks. But Burnett had first called the FBI, telling them the Black Panthers were going to strike.

While Burnett waited in a car, Ward placed a bomb outside the unoccupied real estate office at 24th Avenue and East Union Street. Alerted by the FBI, Seattle police were staked out in unmarked cars, their shotguns aimed at the doorway. The first blast from Officer John Hannah just missed Ward, who took off running down 24th. An unmarked car followed Ward, who was unarmed. Hannah leaned out and pumped two shells into Ward, the heavy-gauge steel balls ripping through his heart and lungs. He died on the sidewalk.

The incident put Uhlman in a bind. Trying to balance Great Society idealism with public safety, his overarching theme was to bill the city as a safe place. But Seattle's image as dangerous and explosive was making national news. Uhlman told Police Chief Frank Moore he wanted the bombings stopped. Period. "We'll do it, mayor, and I won't tell you any more than that," Moore said. "Fine," Uhlman recalls saying. "In those days they were doing all kinds of things you'd be appalled at. I'd be appalled at, if we knew all the details. They were doing a lot of wiretapping, illegal wiretapping. They didn't tell me to save me from the fallout."

The Rev. Sam McKinney and other community leaders came to City Hall demanding answers about Ward's death and the bloody justice handed out by police. Uhlman had them steered into a conference room on the 12th floor. He told the chief to put photos of Ward's shotgun-riddled body out for McKinney and others to see. "They were horrible pictures. They just blew him to pieces," Uhlman says. He came in and addressed the group. "I have to say a couple words you're not going to be happy about. What has happened to him is going to happen to the next bomber who sets a bomb in Seattle. A bomber is a bomber is a bomber."

"We never had another bombing," Uhlman says. "The word was out. I'm not necessarily proud of it. But I was really frustrated that we had to stop his stuff because I had seen what was happening in other cities. And we weren't going to let that happen in Seattle."

Uhlman told the U.S. Senate that Ward's death may have deterred other bombers. But he quickly retreated from suggesting that police act as judge, jury and executioner. "The application of justice is properly and exclusively the job of the courts,"
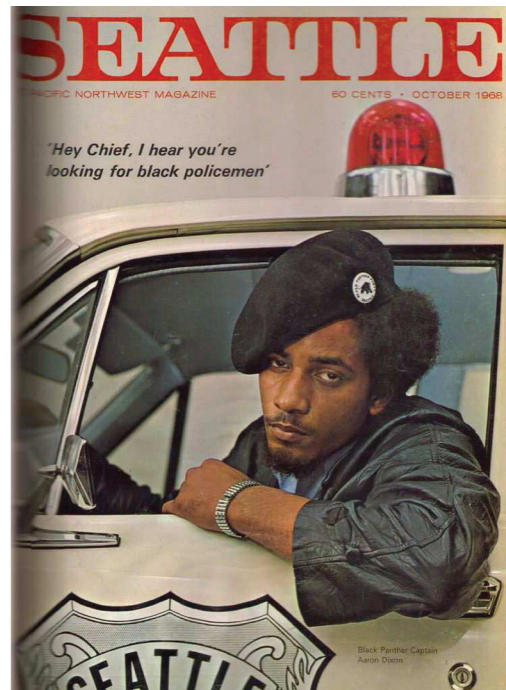
Uhlman made headlines when he refused to help federal agents raid the local Black Panthers, co-founded by Aaron Dixon, above. *Seattle Magazine*

Boeing bet heavily on the new 747 "which proved too big in a market that was suddenly too small," leading to 45,000 layoffs in the Seattle area. *Boeing Images*

he said in a press release issued later on the day of his Senate appearance.

An inquest, held whenever police used lethal force, was filled with protesters and concerned citizens. In a 3-2 vote, the inquest jury found that Officer Hannah's claim of firing in self-defense was not justified. But prosecutors refused to indict Hannah. The jury's verdict was later thrown out because it was not unanimous. A civil suit was filed on behalf of Ward's son seeking $1 million in damages from Hannah. A jury found in favor of Hannah.

Uhlman's "reaction to the murder of Larry Ward was typical of most mayors' reaction to a police shooting of a black man, then and now," says Elmer Dixon, a founder of Seattle's Black Panthers. Today, nearly 50 years later, he is an executive diversity consultant. "The fact is, Larry's death was an assassination. The question is how much was (Uhlman) aware of surrounding his death?"

In his first State of the City speech, Uhlman described Seattle as "uneasy." The first year of the new decade had seen a "bitter outpouring of feelings," he said. "Too many citizens want to take the law into their own hands… All of us regret that a young man, caught in the act of lighting a bomb, refused to obey police orders to stop and was killed by police action in the line of duty."

Meanwhile, another kind of bomb was ticking, one beyond Uhlman's power to control.

SEATTLE IN 1970 was a company town riding high on Boeing, which had bet heavily on developing a supersonic transport, the SST, and the world's first jumbo jetliner, the 747. While the Uhlman administration was figuring how to sequence its grand plans, the

mayor received an unexpected call one morning. It was Boeing CEO T.A. Wilson, a gruff engineer and civic powerhouse. Wilson wouldn't tell the receptionist why he was calling, just that he had to talk with her boss. "Well, disaster happened," Uhlman says. The aerospace industry, it turns out, had vastly inflated forecasts for airline passenger growth. That over-reaching optimism collided with inflated prices, driven by the Vietnam War, Great Society programs and industry complacency. Travel plummeted. Airlines tightened their belts. Boeing had staked the equivalent of

The "Boeing Bust" curtailed Uhlman's grand plans. "We had no other major employers. We had to button everything down." *The Seattle Times*

its net worth on the 747, "which proved too big in a market that was suddenly too small." Boeing's SST crashed when Congress balked at its rising costs and environmental impacts. It was cancelled in March 1971. In a little over a year, Boeing cut 45,000 jobs in the Seattle area alone. Seattle's unemployment rate was double the national average.

Fear and darkness reigned. "We had no Microsoft, no Amazon. We had no other major employers. We had to button everything down. Put away our grand plans and just plan to survive," Uhlman remembers. "That was the main challenge of that year and the following two years really."

In May 1970, Seattleites got a second crack at taxing themselves to build a regional light-rail system. A 1968 vote on the Forward Thrust bond issue received a majority (51 percent) but it needed a 60 percent supermajority. Former U.S. Senator Slade Gorton called that decision the "stupidest 'no' vote the people of Seattle ever cast." The federal government had promised to pay for two-thirds of the project's cost.

On the Sunday before the second vote, Uhlman's staff hustled him to a handful of different churches. At each, Uhlman would dash in and give his pitch, encouraging parishioners to appreciate the opportunity and act selflessly. But when that Tuesday's ballots were tallied, the second Forward Thrust package suffered a resounding rejection. Opposed by the Boeing aeromechanics union and the King County Labor Council, just 46 percent voted to tax themselves $440 million for light rail. "The next day I was down," Uhlman recalls. "But I got to thinking about it." Throughout Seattle, people had suddenly packed up and left for jobs in California or Texas. Every block seemed to have its disappearing neighbors, including Uhlman's. "Right down the street there was a guy who had been a Boeing engineer and they packed up and left town in the middle of the night. My brother was a Boe-

Uhlman joined a cadre of dashing mayors, including John Lindsay, right, of New York, trying to save cities from decay, danger and middle class flight. Seattle lost nearly 64,000 residents between 1960 and 1980. *New York Daily News, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University*

ing engineer and he was laid off. It hit everybody." Middle-class people got water from their neighbors' hoses. Houses sold for less than they had 20 years earlier. People were afraid of the future, Uhlman concluded, and afraid to saddle themselves with a tax increase, even if Uncle Sam was picking up the lion's share of the tab. Things were so bleak that Uhlman recalls being driven to work one morning and not seeing another car on the southbound freeway. On another morning, the mayor told his driver to beep at a car sporting a "Honk If You Love Jesus" bumper sticker. That car's driver replied by giving them the finger. "People were pretty negative then," Uhlman says.

Seattleites couldn't even turn to the national pastime for relief. The city's first major league baseball team, the Pilots, fled to Milwaukee after one season in Sick's Stadium (an adventure immortalized in pitcher Jim Bouton's tell-all 1970 book, *Ball Four)*. The Pilots were the first team in baseball history to last just a single season.

Other wounds were self-inflicted as Uhlman's rookies made mistakes. The most publicized one involved an aide's premature discussion of a potential "third baby tax" aimed at slowing population growth, then a hot topic. Uhlman apologized for unduly alarming people. "I want to make it clear I am not proposing a tax on babies, which of course the city has no legal authority to do," he said.

DON STARK WAS STATIONED at an Air Force base in Oklahoma, getting his MBA on the side, when he saw a newspaper story about a hip young mayor in Seattle with a model of a 747 on his desk. Stark had grown up in Seattle and was hoping to find a job that would bring him home. Here was Uhlman in *The Daily Oklahoman* pitching for urban America. "It just struck a chord with me, reinvesting in our cities," Stark says. It was the fall of 1970.

Home for the Christmas break, he went to a job fair and met a city recruiter talking up "provisional civil service," one of Uhlman's ways to skirt civil service rules and seniority. "They saw I had a MBA. Damned if they didn't hire me. In a couple weeks they take me up to the mayor's office. He's pretty cool. How can I be any happier than that?" In an administration brimming with young people, Stark was quickly introduced to their way of doing things. "We had just given 18-year-olds the right to vote. And the mayor said, 'We have voter registration responsibility. We're going to do something about that.' So we borrowed some vans from City Light and sent them out to city parks to get people registered. This was how Wes operated," says Stark who went on to become Uhlman's budget director at 32.

Barbara Dingfield was another Baby Boom idealist who had come of age admiring JFK. She had a master's degree in urban economics from Columbia University and had worked on minority home ownership and affordable housing in the Boston area before moving West with her husband. She was a feminist determined to have a career and family. Uhlman hired her to work on downtown projects, then promoted her to run his Office of Policy Planning. She became the second woman in his cabinet and its youngest member at 31. "I would say, honestly, I probably did get the position because I was a woman and he wanted to have more women in leadership positions," says Dingfield, who went on become a real-estate development executive and Microsoft's director of philanthropy in the 1990s. "I think a lot of people felt they had an opportunity in City Hall. I made a lot of friends with other women in City Hall who similarly had really responsible jobs."

Dingfield wouldn't go as far as Stark, who says, "Our boss was a star." Presiding over a provincial city in a far corner of the country, he lacked the wattage of New York's Lindsay and Boston's White, she says. But early in his first term Uhlman was a guest on *Meet the Press*, a Sunday morning television institution. And he made a cameo appearance in *Harry in Your Pocket*, a 1973 movie about pickpockets filmed partly in Seattle. Uhlman played a victim.

He was different from most politicians, including other Seattle mayors, Dingfield says she has gotten to know over the years. The laconic Uhlman didn't seem to have the same ego and craving for approval. "I would say there's a certain calm to him," she says. "I never saw him get furiously angry or boisterous. He was sort of, 'I'm here to do my job.' He relied on staff, which I really respect. I mean, he hired good people and he respected those people. And used them appropriately."

He often set up debates among staff before he made a decision. Dingfield recalls sleepless nights when the city was considering investing in nuclear plants proposed by the Washington Public Power Supply System (WPPSS, or "Whoops" as it became known.) "Gordon Vickery, who was at that time head of City Light, was totally gung-ho," Dingfield says. "And Wes asked our office to do an analysis of whether this was a good investment."

Dingfield's analysts concluded that Seattle didn't really need the nuclear plants,

which would've substantially raised electricity rates. The plants would provide power when the city hit peak demand. But the city could manage most of the time with its hydro-power and buy surplus power elsewhere, or reduce demand through conservation. In front of Uhlman, she disagreed with Vickery and argued the nuke plants would just buy a little more leeway at a steep cost.
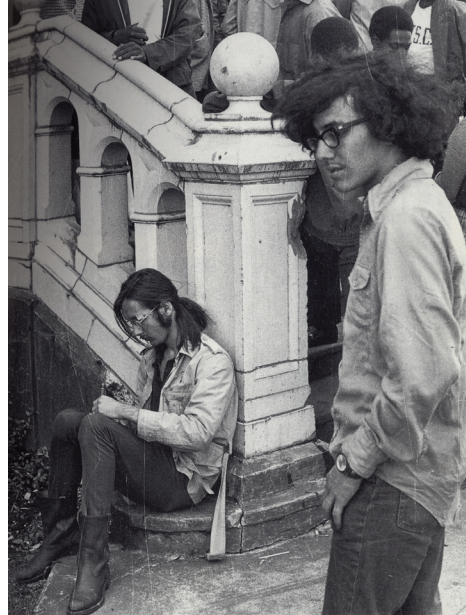
They mayor sided with her.

"He was gutsy and got things done," Dingfield says. "I don't think he worried constantly about the political fallout of what he might say or do. In other words, he sort of led with confidence…He was willing to say, 'We're a new generation. I'm not just beholden to the white establishment. And male establishment. I'm willing to hire different people.' "

One of the people Uhlman hired was the late Walt Crowley, a long-haired radical and journalist who grew disenchanted with the dysfunctional left, their hypocrisies, purity tests and unobtainable utopias. He wanted to help people.

Uhlman had a knack for hiring top-shelf talent without the usual bona fides, including Walt Crowley, a journalist disenchanted with radical politics (above taking notes at Garfield High School during 1969 riots). *Alan Lande photo from Rites of Passage by Walt Crowley*

Crowley became an unofficial mediator in disputes between merchants, police and U-District "street people." He also founded a youth hostel and social service agency. "He was one of my favorite people," Uhlman says. "He led a protest group into my office. My first glimpse of him was to look at his forehead. He had this hat on with a big red star. He was a radical. But he was well-spoken and clearly smart. So I called him up a few days after that and said, 'Walter, I want you to come work for me.' " The city's Model Cities Program— the linchpin of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty— hired Crowley. He went on to run Uhlman's controversial Community Service Centers, or "Little City Halls," which aimed to serve alienated residents, but critics saw as political fiefdoms.

Hiring Crowley illustrated Uhlman's knack for spotting top-shelf talent that didn't have the usual bona fides, says Marie McCaffrey, Crowley's widow and co-founder of HistoryLink.org, an online encyclopedia of Washington history. Uhlman made Bob Gogerty, a charming and pugnacious political operative, a deputy mayor even though Gogerty had dropped out of high school at 16 to join the Marines. Gogerty later formed a consulting firm with Don Stark and came to be regarded as perhaps the sharpest political thinker in Seattle. Uhlman "looked at people not for what their politics were, but how well they

Uhlman's innovations were aided by simpatico City Councilmembers such as Phyllis Lamphere (right, part of a "bed-race" for charity with the mayor). *Phyllis Lamphere collection*

could do the job," McCaffrey says.

WITH BOEING'S NOSEDIVE and a shift in federal priorities from urban Great Society programs to the Vietnam War and space exploration, Uhlman's staff improvised like Jerry Garcia in the spiraling depths of a Grateful Dead jam. ("It appears that our cities must first become either military bastions or areas of outer space exploration in order to receive adequate federal aid," Uhlman quipped in his first State of the City speech.)

"I decided we needed to do something serious about making sure people were in our city and going to stay, to keep our retail core," Uhlman says. (Seattle's population would decline by almost 64,000 between 1960 and 1980.) He proposed a tax on parking to pay for better bus service. The City Council dismissed that idea. An aide, Keith Kirkpatrick, came up with a more radical notion: let people ride the bus in downtown Seattle for free. "No one had ever tried if before in the country," Uhlman says. Buses would move more quickly downtown if passengers boarded through both front and rear doors without fishing and fumbling for exact fare. More swift service would encourage transit as an alternative to driving, reducing congestion and pollution. And it would help tourism as well as feed the economic health of downtown retail and office core. No one knew what such a service would cost Metro. "Uhlman's policy planning director, Don Munro, remembers commenting, 'That's the $64,000 question.' It turned out to be the answer, and Seattle contributed $64,000 to launch the first year of Metro's 'Magic Carpet' zone." The free zone was later expanded north into the area known as the Denny Regrade with financial support from real-estate developer Martin Selig.

"Ridership downtown basically doubled," says Chuck Collins, then King County's chief administrative officer and later its transit director. "Wes, to his credit was a big force in the retention of a vital downtown." The free rides ended in 2012, after 39 years, because a funding squeeze threatened to reduce countywide bus service.[*] It was a short-sighted decision, says Katie Wilson, general secretary of the Transit Riders Union. "It was sort of a concession to suburban Republican councilmembers who saw free rides as a benefit Seattle got that their constituents didn't."

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[*] In a negotiated death, Republicans on the King County Council agreed to raise car tabs $20 to prevent sweeping cuts in bus service if the subsidy for the free rides was eliminated.

Artist John Moehring, known for his psychedelic concert posters, decorated a Seattle bus to promote ridership. *Seattle Municipal Archives*

Uhlman was at a meeting of mayors in New York when he had a brainstorm for lifting Seattle's dismal spirits. John Lindsay took the visiting executives to the Mayor's Arts Festival in Manhattan. "I was terribly impressed," Uhlman recalls. "I called my little staff together and said, 'We're going to have a mayor's arts festival here in Seattle.' " Uhlman said he'd call a few people and round up some donations to get it started.

The city announced a free "people-oriented" 1971 festival that would use nearly all of Seattle Center for the first time since the 1962 World's Fair. Scheduled for August 13-15, the shindig offered light shows, inflatable sculptures, dance, theater, music, visual arts and more, including a Hot Pants contest. The only out-of-town headliner, if you can call him that, was country singer Sheb Wooley, a regular on the TV series *Hee Haw*. With little publicity, Festival '71 attracted more than 100,000 people. Pundits called it a "big box of gift chocolates" and a "populist grab-bag." Festival '72 dropped the country twang, noted Seattle historian Paul Dorpat, and still added 50,000 or so celebrants.

It appeared the annual festival was a success, and Uhlman appointed a committee to chart its future. "And so they came back with recommendations on how to make it bigger and better. And the first thing on the list, I looked at it and said, 'What do you mean change the name? I *like* the mayor's arts festival.'"

Uhlman asked what name they were proposing.

"Bumbershoot,' " said Dave Hughbanks, head of the committee.

"What," Uhlman asked, "is that?"

Hughbanks explained that "bumbershoot" is slang for an umbrella. And the idea was to signal that some moisture wasn't going to stop fun in Seattle. Plus, in the burgeoning world of music and arts festivals there were no others with that name. The 1973 edition covered five days and brought 200,000 visitors. From there, the festival grew in crowd size, stature and ticket prices.

Uhlman showed similar creativity (or was it Swiss pragmatism?) with bicycles. Af-

ter the first Earth Day in 1970 and subsequent gas shortages, bicycling was in vogue. The mayor went on a mass ride during 1971's "Earth Week" and later pedaled at Green Lake with King County Executive John Spellman to promote bike commuting. In 1972 he successfully lobbied state lawmakers to allow gas tax revenues to be used for building bike lanes. Seattle created its first Bike Master Plan that same year. Uhlman was just getting started. The Burlington Northern railroad wanted to abandon an old line that ran from Ballard—once the "shingle capital of the world"—past the UW campus and then north along Lake Washington. One of Uhlman's staffers hipped the mayor to the idea of acquiring the 14-mile stretch of old tracks to use as a multi-purpose trail. Exercise, ecology, scenery. What could be better? But property owners along the route balked, fearing a trail would disturb their privacy, lower their property values and even bring crime. They came up with slogans such as "Hike

Uhlman received a Bumbershoot Founder award in 1974 for the music and arts festival he launched in 1971. *Seattle Municipal Archives*

in the Woods, Not My Backyard." Some of Uhlman's Northeast Seattle acquaintances stopped speaking to him. But the city persevered, bought the property and started tearing up tracks. By 1978, the year Uhlman left the mayor's office, a paved multiuse path was completed from Kenmore to Wallingford's Gas Works Park. It's now a blacktop strand of Seattle's DNA, running all the way to Ballard's Golden Gardens Park on Puget Sound.

Uhlman also aroused anger with his support for gay rights. By 1975, activists were looking to revise the city's Open Housing Ordinance—as they had Seattle's Fair Employment law two years earlier—to make it illegal for landlords to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation. Landlords fought the proposal and City Council debate dragged on for more than a month. Uhlman announced he would sign the anti-discrimination law if it reached his desk. The council then passed it by a single vote.[*]

These legal victories paralleled Seattle's new celebration of an annual Gay Pride Week, started in the summer of 1973. As Pride Week events grew in size and scope, Seattle's first Gay Pride March was scheduled for 1977. Encouraged by activists, Uhlman decided to commemorate the parade with a historic first, declaring June 25 to July 1 to be Gay Pride Week in Seattle. His proclamation urged "all citizens to recognize and support

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[*] The responsibility for enforcing both the Open Housing and Fair Employment ordinances rested with the Office for Women's Rights—created by Uhlman—which would play the role of advocate for gay and lesbian rights within City Hall through the 1970s.

Uhlman promoted bike commuting in 1971 with King County Executive John Spellman. Seattle developed its first Bike Master Plan under Uhlman. *Seattle Municipal Archives*

the efforts of our city to make this community one which truly does treat all its citizens with a fair and equal hand."

Not all citizens agreed. Calls poured into the mayor's office. Uhlman says he'll never forget the day his receptionist was frustrated to tears:

"Mayor, I just can't work here anymore…You won't believe what they're calling you."

"I believe it, Pam," Uhlman remembers saying. 'But you come sit down back here."

He sent Ed Wood, one of his deputy mayors—"a tough guy"—out to be the receptionist.

"Don't take any s*** off those people," the mayor ordered.

Reactions also included letter-writing campaigns and picketing outside City Hall. "I think all of this focus on 'queers' is disgusting," wrote Joyce Lunstroth of Lacey. "I should think that if you own an apartment and you don't want 'queers' living in your building than you should have the right to refuse them." Uhlman replied: "I believe years of misunderstanding and misconceptions have led our society to hold some of the false stereotypes you have mentioned. This in turn has led to a senseless form of discrimination, one based often on ignorance, not fact."

Uhlman describes his politics then as "centrist" but closer to libertarian on social issues. "I didn't want other people to butt into my social regimen and I didn't want to do that to them. I was almost radical, I'd say, on the social issues. I was more than libertarian because I'd push for advancement on some social issues, not just leave your hands off." In response to an angry letter from a Seattle constituent, Uhlman wrote, "I must share with you one of the most important teachings of Christ, from Matthew 7:1, 'Judge not, that ye be not judged.' "

WHEN HE CAME into office Uhlman was appalled at how few minorities worked for the city. Seattle's population in 1970 was 12.6 percent non-white. But only 7.6 percent of the city's full-time jobs were held by minorities. The fire and police departments, along with City Light had the most bleached workforces. More than 98 percent of the Fire Depart-

Uhlman demanded more from city employees, in a productivity program run by Walt Hundley, right. *Seattle Municipal Archives*

ment was white. The Police Department was 97.6 percent white and City Light 95.3 percent. "I just felt it was an issue of fairness that our workforce ought to look like Seattle," Uhlman says. He scheduled meetings with every department head, armed with statistics about their personnel. When he met with the head of the Parks Department he mentioned there was not a minority in a position of authority in the entire department. "He said, 'We've had trouble when we promoted one of them to be a supervisor. People just won't work for them.' I said, 'That doesn't work for me.' " Uhlman made progress in a year, with minorities increasing to 9.7 percent of the city's 10,000-member workforce. By 1973, the percentage of minorities in full-time city jobs stood at 13.6 percent. It would grow to 15 percent by the time Uhlman left office.

"We pretty much turned the bureaucracy upside down," Don Stark says, "down to the fingertips of dogcatchers." Uhlman created new departments, including the offices of Human Resources and Community Development, which "consolidated a number of older city agencies into more efficient and assertive bureaucracies with strong constituencies such as the elderly and neighborhoods." He also hatched the Office of Policy Planning and Office of Management and Budget; the latter kept tabs on other departments' spending, hiring and promotion practices. His personnel director Jack Driscoll "ran roughshod over civil service and unions to pursue an aggressive affirmative-action program." Uhlman appointed the city's first black department heads: Buildings Department director Al Petty, Fire Chief Claude Harris and City Budget director Walt Hundley. An influx of federal money, secured by Senator Magnuson, chairman of the crucial Appropriations Committee, fueled the new departments, their expanded missions and an increase in the number of city jobs. "I practically lived in D.C.," Uhlman recalls. "Senator Magnuson had a table for me put up in his office, I spent so much time back there testifying and begging for money."

Uhlman had campaigned on making citizens feel they had access to City Hall. And he opened up city government like never before. Besides the Little City Halls, he created the Landmarks Preservation Board, the Historic Seattle Preservation and Development Authority, the Women's Commission, the Mayor's Festival Committee, the Seattle 2000 Commission that defined future goals for the city, and more.

Other Seattle mayors have gone in the opposite direction, disempowering neigh-

borhood councils, saying they tended to represent older, affluent obstructionist home-owners. Not Uhlman. "As an elected official one of the lessons I learned early on is that the citizens, particularly the activist citizens are not your enemy. They're your friends. You're going to differ. You're going to say, 'OK, we don't agree on that.' But they're not your enemy. I think they're a threat to some elected officials or at least are perceived to be. I don't really think they're a threat. But if you perceive them to be, then they are."

Uhlman's innovations, shakeups and hiring practices rubbed some the wrong way. He worked well with most of City Council, particularly its younger members who were part of a bipartisan reform-minded group called Choose an Effective City Council (CHECC). But more conservative Councilmember Liem Tuai challenged Uhlman's bid for re-election in 1973. At one debate, Tuai questioned whether an Uhlman backed anti-discrimination ordinance went too far by protecting political radicals and gay people in the city hiring process. "Is he in favor of hiring homosexuals for all jobs in the city?" Tuai asked. He also accused Uhlman of cronyism in hiring. Uhlman finished second to Tuai in the primary. But the challenger's negative attacks were cited as one reason why the November results were reversed, with Uhlman winning a second term by more than 5,000 votes.

Ill will was festering within Uhlman's workforce as he demanded increased productivity in return for pay raises. City Light was the cradle of the revolt. Workers were irate at Superintendent Gordon Vickery, a hard-nosed fire chief until Uhlman moved him to City Light to weed out "nepotism, favoritism, wasted motion, and goofing off." In just a year, Vickery had got rid of hundreds of employees, had others prosecuted for theft and changed staffing policies to hire more women and minorities—and fewer relatives. Vickery was a "mean tough sonuvabitch," Uhlman says. "I said, 'Gordon I want you to take that outfit on. They're a bunch of malcontents and they're anti-black. It's just a club over there… Would you take that on for me? You're the only guy I can think of who can do that.' And he did."

Vickery's employees went on an 11-day wildcat strike in 1974 to protest his management. That didn't lead to Vickery's ouster, so they went after Uhlman. The firefighters' union joined City Light workers in a campaign to recall Uhlman. "It was really about who's running City Hall," Stark says, "the people who were elected, or employees and unions?" Dissident employees aimed their ire at Hundley, the black budget director, claiming he was incompetent in their formal recall charges. "Instead of taking me on directly, they took on Walt Hundley because he was black," Uhlman says. "They picked the wrong guy. He took them on wherever they wanted to go. He just devastated them. Wherever the audience was they thought this guy knows what he's talking about."

The recall initiative received just 37 percent of the July 1975 vote thanks in part to an influential bloc Uhlman had run against four years earlier. The downtown establishment found it easier to support the mayor who had insulted them than his union foes.

KING COUNTY EXECUTIVE John Spellman, a moderate Republican, was expecting the governor's race in 1976 to unfold like *High Noon*. It would be a showdown between him and Uhlman, the top two politicians in the state's largest county, their offices a block apart. Spellman and Uhlman had collaborated on projects such as the Kingdome, which opened in 1976. But Spellman thought Uhlman was overly ambitious and relished a match with the mayor, who had made enemies for his perceived coddling of hippies and blacks, and missteps such as the "baby tax."

It was a rivalry mainly for the public's attention and Spellman was at a disadvantage because county government wasn't sexy, says Chuck Collins, then King County's transit director. Spellman and Uhlman would nod at each other, but there was no backslapping. "The Wes I saw was very matter of fact. If you had a 10-minute meeting it would last five."

The campaign season began as Spellman expected, with Governor Dan Evans declining to seek a fourth term. In the contest for a rare open seat in the governor's office, Spellman's logic of a face-off with Uhlman seemed sound. Driven by his "up or out" credo, Uhlman took a shot at the Governor's Mansion, thinking a Democrat would prevail in the pall and lingering stench of Watergate. Blue-collar patriots with "America, Love It or Leave It" bumper stickers had turned against the president. When Nixon was pardoned by his successor, Gerald Ford, cynicism soared. In this climate of disgust, sprouted the presidential hopes of a Baptist peanut-farmer from Georgia. Spellman and Uhlman had not accounted for the Year of the Outsider. It was that era's version of "drain the swamp." The 1976 governor's race would pit two mavericks against the big city gunslingers.

The first was Dixy Lee Ray, a scientist and former University of Washington professor. Nixon had appointed her to the federal Atomic Energy Commission, although her expertise was marine biology. A Tacoma native and tomboy who climbed Mt. Rainier at age 12, she changed her birth name, Marguerite, in part to honor the leading general of

King County Executive John Spellman (left) thought he'd face Uhlman (right) in the 1976 governor's race. Neither counted on competing against Dixy Lee Ray, everyone's smart eccentric aunt. *Paul Dorpat photo*

Ray, a one-term governor who proved un-popular, effectively ended Uhlman's political career.

the Confederacy. She lived outside Washington, D.C., in a 28-foot trailer and was fond of wearing knee socks and bringing her poodle Jacques to work. When the Atomic Energy Commission was phased out in 1975, Ray became assistant secretary of state. She soon abandoned that post, however, and returned to Washington state, complaining that her boss Henry Kissinger had slighted her. She waded into the governor's race not even sure of her own party preference. She opted for her confidant Lou Guzzo's spur-of-the-moment divining that she was a "conservative Democrat." She was one of those quirky unfiltered personas, like Ross Perot, who periodically beguile American voters. Her "Little lady takes on big boys" campaign slogan had understandable appeal.

On another end of the spectrum stood Marvin Durning, a Rhodes Scholar and environmental lawyer aghast at Ray's adamantly pro-nuclear views. Durning's enthusiastic embrace of an income tax and other progressive planks gave him a stubborn appeal with the Democratic Party's left wing. He was supported by the King County Democrats and the Washington Education Association, the powerful teachers' union with 35,000 members. With Durning siphoning votes from Uhlman's left flank, the mayor's strategists bet on toughening up his image in a play for winning the center. Bob Gogerty took some responsibility for an ad that he later believed backfired. It was a straight-on close-up of Uhlman saying, "If you're a criminal, don't vote for me." But Durning's role as spoiler was the main reason Uhlman did not capture the Democratic primary nomination.

Seattle's mayor won 22 of 39 counties but ended up trailing Ray by fewer than 7,000 votes and less than 1-percentage point in the results. "I lost by less than one vote per precinct statewide," Uhlman says. Durning received 136,290 votes, good for 16 percent. Spellman, who collected fewer votes than Uhlman but won the GOP primary, was left with the challenge of campaigning against everyone's eccentric smart aunt. He lost.

"If Durning (or Wes Uhlman) had won the 1976 Democratic primary, the state would have been spared the tumultuous four years of Washington's last really bad governor, Dixy Lee Ray," wrote Joel Connelly, the longtime *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* political columnist. Four years after winning the governor's office, Ray was denounced at the Dem-

Uhlman's credo about political life was "up or out." After failing in his bid for governor, he turned to a lucra-tive career in real estate. *King County TV*

ocratic State Convention by Senator Magnuson who declared, "This state is not going to be a dumping ground for nuclear waste and there are not going to be any supertankers on Puget Sound!" The incumbent wasn't even her party's preferred candidate for governor. Ray lost the primary to state Senator Jim McDermott.

UHLMAN SPENT the next 13 months finishing out his political career. "I figured, 'OK, up or out,' " he recalls. "It was made easier by the fact I had two boys who were going to be going to college shortly and I needed some money. The mayor's job did not pay very well. I had to give up my practice completely. So I decided to go back to practicing law, making some money. And I was criticized when I was asked a question at a public forum. I said, 'I want to go out and make a lot of money.' Two people at the meeting said, 'Well, that's not a very good goal in life.' I said, 'For me it is.' "

On a sort of farewell tour around the city, Uhlman gave a short talk in the Rainier Valley thanking people for helping him be mayor. A woman approached him. She thanked Uhlman for saving her sons' lives. Uhlman didn't know who the slight black woman was, or what she was talking about. "My sons are Elmer and Aaron Dixon," she said, "and they were in that building at the time they wanted to do that raid. I just want to thank you for their lives."

The Panthers had a different perspective on Uhlman's decision, Elmer Dixon says. The Panthers' headquarters in the Central Area was fortified with sand bags, steel window covers, carbines and shotguns. "Our position was that by not authorizing the raid by the ATF agents he saved their lives not ours. We were tipped off of an impending raid by a

Uhlman visited the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem on a 1971 trip. He was known as a supporter of Israel. *Seattle Municipal Archives*

local TV reporter, Don McGaffin, that the 'pigs' were coming to attack long before Wes intervened so we were fully prepared for their arrival."

There was another sequel to the Black Panther story. After he left the mayor's office, Uhlman served on the board of directors for several businesses. One of those developed nursing homes. He was at their board meeting in Taos, New Mexico, having dinner, when he looked across the room and saw John Ehrlichman, who had gone to prison for his role in Watergate. Uhlman had known Ehrlichman before his White House days, when they were both young Seattle attorneys specializing in real estate law. Uhlman hadn't seen him since that 1970 dust-up in the White House basement. "I waved over at him. He waved back and he came over as fast as he could."

Ehrlichman grabbed a chair next to Uhlman.

"The last time we met wasn't very friendly," Uhlman remembers saying.

"Wes, I've learned *a lot* since then," Ehrlichman said. "I've changed *a lot* since then. I think I'm a different person actually."

UHLMAN'S HOUSE on Seattle's Queen Anne Hill offers a panoramic view from the Space Needle to the UW. During a three-hour interview, the former mayor only asks for two quick breaks. One to visit the restroom, the other to check the closing of the stock market on his smart phone:

"I do a lot of trading," he says. "Hmm. You're not going to believe this. The Dow Jones is down 920 points. My Apple is down. My GE is down. My United Health is down. My Amazon, oh jeez, it's down 64. Amazon is down. Nothing you can do about it. The time when you lose money in the stock market is when you sell."

And then he's back to stories of battling City Light. It might surprise some that Uhlman, the mayor under whom Seattle's politics tilted irretrievably leftward, is an unapologetic capitalist. ("There are those who think he was an unapologetic capitalist before he left," says Ross Anderson, a former reporter for *The Seattle Times*.)

After City Hall, Uhlman focused on his law practice and a lucrative career developing real estate. He owned hundreds of apartments in the Pacific Northwest and Alaska.

"No mayor will ever be able to put together that kind of list again," said former Seattle mayor Paul Schell of Uhlman's accomplishments. Schell is second from left in this City Hall reunion of mayors Greg Nickels (l), Gordon Clinton (center), Uhlman and Norm Rice (right). *Seattle Municipal Archives*

But not in Seattle, he says, wanting to avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest. He still owns commercial buildings in California, Ohio and Texas. He became a leader of the Seattle-King County Apartment Owners Association and the Association of Washington Business. In keeping with what some saw as his socially liberal and economically conservative politics, Uhlman campaigned against repeal of Seattle's civil-rights protections for gays and lesbians and later opposed expanded legal rights for renters.

The former mayor acknowledges that he "couldn't get elected dog catcher in this town" in 2018. His campaign contributions to Republican candidates Rob McKenna and Dino Rossi would alone disqualify him. "I'm way too conservative," he says. But Don Stark doesn't think it's a matter of Uhlman moving to the right so much as it's the Democratic Party's swerve to the left. "That's what really moved here."

Marie McCaffrey, HistoryLink's chief, doesn't see Uhlman as an ideologue of any stripe. "He's a pragmatist," she said, and "when he does something he wants to do it well." That went for hiring City Hall staff, developing real estate, and his hobbies of beekeeping and growing prize dahlias.

Uhlman's reign as mayor begs the question: do the events shape leaders, or do leaders shape the events? "Under different time and circumstances, I don't think Uhlman would've been so successful," says Ross Anderson. "The timing was just perfect." Uhlman was helped by working with simpatico City Councilmembers such as Phyllis Lamphere,

Bruce Chapman and Randy Revelle. And he was able to accomplish key goals such as saving Pioneer Square and Pike Place Market thanks to Senator Magnuson's ability to steer what seemed like unlimited amounts of money to Seattle. There were other advantages. Unlike some blighted, smoldering cities, Seattle was still attractive. And those who did flee to the suburbs were replaced by young professionals abandoning other parts of the country. Even the Boeing bust had its benefits, Anderson noted. Newcomers could buy attractive homes for less than $20,000, helping to preserve neighborhoods.

But Uhlman also had good instincts. He balanced the competing impulses of dispersing power to residents and consolidating authority in the executive branch. His liberal social policies gave Seattle an image as tolerant. That one word, perhaps above all, is the key ingredient to spurring America's post-industrial high-tech hives, says economist Richard Florida, author of *The Rise of the Creative Class*. Cities that demonstrate the most openness to immigrants, gays, artists, eggheads and eccentrics—different types of people and new ideas—rank the highest in Florida's "Tolerance Index." Along with Boston, Portland and San Francisco, Seattle stands near the top of the index.

Uhlman also seemed to understand that too many politicians either don't surround themselves with good staff, or don't listen to the good staff they've hired. "When a decision needed to be made, he would pull key staff into his office and go around the room, listening to every point of view," said former aide Dave Marriot. "Then he would make up his mind and away we go."

Chuck Collins saw two local political talents emerge in the 1970s "with no limits on how far they could go." One was Dan Evans, the three-term governor and U.S. Senator. The other was Wes Uhlman. "The amazing thing is he went gracefully into the night. I don't remember him whining or complaining," Collins says of Uhlman.

"He seemed a politician who didn't need a whole lot," says Anderson. "He was a pretty self-contained guy." Uhlman acknowledged to Anderson that he wasn't as popular as some of his successors. "People who go into politics because they want to be loved quickly find out they can't accomplish much."

Bob Young
Legacy Washington
Office of the Secretary of State

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