

President Elect Madison Thompson's first interview after the election

An excerpt from the novel *Dragonfly* by Sebastian Roberts

"Good morning! This morning we are pleased to have President Elect Madison Thompson with us for the full hour." The screen was filled with the rather pleasant face of Dee Dee Nelson, the anchor for the nationally syndicated morning news show out of Washington. Dee Dee, seated in an easy chair next to a small table, turned to face Madison in his own chair. Extending her hand across the table, she welcomed him to the show.

DD: "Good morning."

DD: "I want to let our viewers know that Mr. Thompson has already broken new ground in the area of relations with the press. Per his instructions, we did not release any of the questions to his staff ahead of time. Furthermore, there were no restrictions placed on the subject matter. In short, I can ask Mr. Thompson any question on any topic. All he has asked in return is that we, the press and the viewers, respect his honesty should he admit that he is not ready to provide an answer. He has promised to follow up on the question and provide something to us later should that happen."

DD: "Are you ready?"

MT: "I hope so!"

DD: "Okay. First question. What do you hope to accomplish in your first term as President of the United States?"

MT: Laughing. "I see you decided to start with the easy questions. I appreciate that."

DD: Laughing. "I presume that you are being facetious."

MT: "Just a little. While I do think that the President should be able to display a sense of humor, I am serious about this. It's an easy one."

DD: "Good. Then let's have it. What are you going to accomplish?"

MT: "Nothing."

DD: Taken aback. "I'm sorry? Did you say nothing?"

MT: "Yes ma'am. I don't intend to accomplish anything. You see, I've not been elected to the position of King. I intend to be sworn in as the President. Now, if you recall your history, the President doesn't actually vote on legislation and doesn't sit on the Supreme Court and make judicial decisions. The job is to carry out the wishes of Congress. The truth is that I can't accomplish much on my own at all."

DD: "I see your point, but for the sake of argument, you do have the power of an executive order, don't you?"

MT: "Yes. That's true. That order, however, must be carried out by dozens of administrators and managers, so I really won't be accomplishing that either. This job of running a government is not a one-man effort. It's a team effort."

DD: “You just made an interesting choice of words. You said running the government, not governing the nation like I’ve heard other presidents say. Was that on purpose?”

MT: “Yes. My job is to run the government in a manner consistent with the wishes of Congress and within the confines of the Constitution.”

DD: “Well, pardon me, sir, but I seem to recall quite a few campaign promises being made. How are you going to translate those promises into action if you can’t do anything?”

MT: “Two points. I didn’t say I couldn’t or wouldn’t *do* anything. I said I could not *accomplish* anything. At least not on my own. Second. If you examine the promises, each and every one of them was a promise to work towards a goal. Achieving that goal will take a cooperative effort by many people, including you.”

DD: “What do you mean?”

MT: “The press has a *responsibility* to present facts. Facts as they happened and unembellished. The press has an *opportunity* to present their personal opinion and analyses of the outcome or wisdom of whatever has transpired. Mixing the responsibility with opportunity has, in the past, created impressions among Americans that are less than precise. One of those promises was to work towards creating a more informed electorate. To do that, we need your help.”

DD: “You mean a smarter voter?”

MT: “No. They’re quite smart. Sometimes, though, they don’t have all the information.”

DD: “I see your point. Let’s get back to that in a minute though. I am still thinking that there are things that you can accomplish using the power of the executive order.”

MT: Holding up his index finger. “I grant that there are things that I can *influence* with an executive order. See – we’re already starting to provide a deeper understanding of government and we’ve only been at it for three minutes.”

DD: “Okay. What might be something you would want to influence?”

MT: “Thank you for your patience.” Smiling. “Let’s look at the budget and the debt as a really good example. It has been common practice in Washington to prepare budgets based on growth. What that means is that if a department has a billion dollar budget in year one, then in year two the budget will be calculated to be a billion dollars times the inflation rate plus a little extra to hire new people and develop new programs. Preparing the budget request is often a matter of multiplying whatever that department had last year by 1.04 or 1.05 and switching out the numbers.”

DD: “So budgets increase automatically? Even if the people in charge don’t do anything?”

MT: “Yes. Add to that the phenomenon known as *mission creep* and you get a real mess.”

DD: “What’s mission creep?”

MT: “That happens when a constituent or Congressman or President has a problem and someone decides that a particular existing agency can handle it rather than to tell someone *no*. The mission of

the agency expands in tiny steps over the course of time: Without intent, without forethought, and often without authorization.”

DD: “Wow.” Dee Dee said rather flatly.

MT: “I’ve simplified it greatly but in essence, that’s what happens. I am already preparing an executive order that will require an annual assessment of the need and effectiveness of the program being funded.”

DD: “They are going to hate you!”

MT: “Perhaps. But the voter should enjoy the reduction in taxes. Look at it this way. Let’s take the EPA endangered species program for example or maybe even the reduced lunch program for school kids. Both of those programs were created to solve a problem. If the EPA needs ten million dollars to protect the Bald Eagle in year one of the program and gets that funding, it would be reasonable to presume that after a while, maybe a couple years, maybe a couple decades, but after a while, the cost of that program should go down. The Eagle should be protected and populations should return to normal levels. Now, I have heard that ongoing management is needed and that may be true, but maintenance still ought to cost less than recovery. It’s intuitively obvious. Having budgets prepared from scratch every year means that the agency has the opportunity to prove that it needs more money. But – the agency should have to prove that and not rely on automatic increases. If the program keeps increasing in cost, then someone, probably me, is going to ask if the program is working or failing. It’s the same with the free lunch program. If we need that as part of the war on poverty, fine. If the cost keeps going up then I am going to presume that we are losing that war and need to revise those strategies so that fewer kids need the free lunch in the first place.”

MT: “Another order I am preparing also happens to relate to the EPA. In 2014 the EPA issued a proposed rule that would have put 82 species of coral on the endangered species list all at once. What the EPA was attempting to do was to protect all reefs, which is good. Where they failed, in my opinion, is in using the Endangered Species Act in a manner unintended by Congress. The consequence was that the public and other agencies had to respond to 82 proposed listings at the same time. The comment period was not extended and the strategy was to get them listed in bulk by overloading the ability of the public to raise questions about each individual species. That tactic will be prohibited. All proposed listings will need to be supported by solid science, not the precautionary principle, and presented in a reasonable manner.”

DD: “What’s the precautionary principle?”

MT: “In short, it means that a decision is made based on the least possible potential for damage. So, in the case of endangered species, an unwarranted listing might be a waste of time, money, and energy, but a needed listing that is delayed or that fails due to flimsy scientific support would result in the loss of the species. That loss would be forever. The precautionary principle leads people to list the species without the scientific data to avoid the potential for the loss. My position is that I would rather put more money in the science budget and get a real assessment of whether the listing is needed than to create a recovery program and a host of new regulations resulting in financial burdens to the economy for a species that doesn’t need the protection. We’re going to fix that.”

DD: "That sounds like an accomplishment."

MT: "It's a nudge." Madison paused for dramatic effect. "I can issue the order for zero-based budget preparations but Congress writes the check. I can require the EPA to adjust their administrative procedures, but would not be able to guide the actual science behind a listing or a water quality problem or a hazardous waste category. That's what science is for. Think about it. If I issued an executive order stating that lead was not hazardous to small children, do you think it would actually reduce the toxicity of lead? I think not. I have a friend who has a poster on his wall – he made it himself. It says *You can't legislate Natural Law.*"

DD: "I see. Would you be willing to talk a little bit about how you intend to address some of the issues you mentioned during your campaign? I think America might still be a little fuzzy on how you are going to deal with these things if you aren't going to accomplish anything."

MT: "Certainly. As I said, I was not elected king. That means that if I think that we need to do something about the economy, I need to go find out what the Speaker of the House thinks. What does the Senate Majority Leader think? What do the rank and file members of Congress think? In many cases, especially considering the trashing of the Tenth Amendment that has taken place over the last 100 years or so, I need to go find out what the Governors think."

DD: "Quite candidly, that doesn't sound either efficient or promising."

MT: "It's not efficient. It's not supposed to be."

DD: "What do you mean?"

MT: "Let me ask you something. Given all the types and styles of governments in the world, which ones are most efficient?"

DD: "I'm not sure I understand."

MT: "No. Come on. You're a smart woman and you've reported from all over the world. Your news program comes out with editorials all the time about political maneuvering and events. This should be easy! What type of government is most efficient?"

DD: "Monarchies? Dictatorships?"

MT: "Right. One guy has all the power. One guy makes all the decisions. Maybe he's a good guy. Maybe he's a bad guy. Either way, he is probably a very efficient guy. He's efficient because he doesn't need to ask anybody else for their opinion. He just issues an edict. Creating and maintaining decentralized power is the intent of the Tenth Amendment. Here in the United States, we have a system where power has been distributed so that we don't have a king and hopefully, never will."

DD: "You mean the three branches of government?"

MT: "Oh, my. No. If you read the Constitution with an eye towards what was written to protect us from the rise of a new king, you can easily find almost 50 different places where power was to be divided. Let me give you one example. Maybe two. All spending bills must arise in the House. The Senate can want to spend money all day long and unless the bill is introduced and passes the House first, it can't happen. The Senate, on the other hand ratifies treaties and appointments. The House can

complain all day long and it won't matter. They don't get a say. Our current President is blamed for the debt and the budget, but the truth is that he can't spend a nickel without Congressional approval. I guess that covered three, didn't it?"

DD: "That would seem to make things difficult. Does it?"

MT: "Uh-huh. Governing America is hard by design. It's inefficient by design."

DD: "Maybe it would be a good idea to explain that."

MT: "Getting things done is supposed to be hard. The design was to widely disperse power and make it very hard for one man or one group of men to acquire too much power."

DD: "I had no idea!"

MT: "Most people don't. As a matter of fact, your reference to the three branches of government reminded me of a poll that was taken in 2013. Respondents were asked to name the three branches of government. Thirty percent said that the three branches were the Democrats, Republicans, and Independents."

DD: "Really?"

MT: "Yes and sadly, there are also some people in elected office who are not very aware of the theory of distributed power and part of my job is going to be to work on that too."

DD: "Is that what you meant when you mentioned that one of your promises was to work towards creating a more informed electorate?"

MT: "Yes. And, as I mentioned, we need your help."

DD: "My help?"

MT: "Well. The help of the media."

DD: "How's that? You know that we need to stay independent and separate from the government. You aren't suggesting a state owned media, are you?"

MT: Laughing. "No. Certainly not. And, no, the media cannot be too close to the government or both the media and government will lose credibility. We saw some good examples of that only a few years ago and the results were not good. The tightrope we hope the media can walk is the one that runs between being a separate media and being a supporter of the Constitution. As a citizen and as a business, supporting the Constitution should be important. Let's make a distinction, though, between the government and the people in government. My challenge to the media is to be distant from those governing and close to the nature of American government and the guarantees of freedom."

DD: "What would you have us do?"

MT: "Be honest and complete with respect to constitutional issues."

DD: "Are you suggesting that the media is dishonest?"

MT: Laughing. "No more so than the government is!"

DD: Laughing.

MT: “Seriously. There are honest and dishonest people both in government and in the media for no other reason than some people are honest and some aren’t. Being in the media or being in government doesn’t make a person dishonest. The truth is that people make decisions based on what they know. Most adults know what they know about government because of what they get from the media. Where the media can help is by making a distinction between an issue and a constitutional provision or restriction.”

DD: “Like what?”

MT: “We already have a good example from just a few minutes ago. The national debt is not the President’s fault – not this one nor the one before that or before that. The President cannot spend money unless Congress approves it. The prohibition was put into the Constitution to distribute power and keep it from being in the hands of one man. Educating the public could be done with simple rewrites of stories so that the responsible people are the ones held accountable. Another example might be that treaty with China from last year. Our current President is blamed or praised for signing the treaty. In truth, he and his team only negotiated it. The Senate ratified it and the President signed *on behalf of the United States as authorized by the Senate*. He had no choice in signing it.”

DD: Looking back over her notes. “Let’s see if I get this right. So far, you’ve mentioned the Tenth Amendment twice. I have to admit that I would be hard pressed to tell you what’s in it and I suppose that relates back to your determination to educate people about government. So, let’s start there. Why is the Tenth Amendment so important?”

MT: “That is an excellent topic to demonstrate my point. The Tenth Amendment is short. It says *Anything not delegated to Congress remains the responsibility of the state or the people*. Since we’re talking about education, let’s talk about education. I’ve read the Constitution several times and can find no reference at all to education being a job delegated to Congress. Given those two statements, the text of the Tenth Amendment and the lack of a reference to education in the Constitution, I have to ask why we have a cabinet level Department of Education. As an aside, everyone should look up that word *delegated* – the states delegated *authority* to Congress, nothing more.”

DD: “I’ll do that. Back on topic, though, doesn’t everyone deserve an education?”

MT: “Sure.”

DD: “Doesn’t the federal government have a responsibility to protect the rights of the citizen?”

MT: “Yes.”

DD: “Okay. I’m confused.”

MT: “The Federal government must protect the right to an education. It is not to provide the education itself. If a state denied a person the right to an education, then Washington should step in, but the intervention should not be from Congress or the Administration. The correction would be an item for the Courts. If Congress or the President felt that the people of a particular state were being denied an education, then Congress or the President should file a court action in the offending state and pursue it

until it is corrected. In the interim, while waiting for the court, Washington could possibly take protective actions. Isn't that what happened in Alabama in 1963?"

DD: "That was when the President called out the National Guard to force Alabama to let black students into the university, wasn't it?"

MT: "Yes! Very good!"

DD: "That sounds messy. In fact, it was messy, if I recall."

MT: "That may be, but taking education away from the states is unconstitutional. Making things less messy needs to be done legally or it only gets even messier. If Washington wants to run the education system, Washington should propose an amendment to the Constitution giving itself the authority."

DD: "That sounds hard."

MT: "It's supposed to be hard."

DD: "You keep going back to the Constitution. Why is that so important to you?"

MT: "Have you ever heard of the phrase *Rule of Law*?"

DD: "Sure. Everyone has."

MT: "Do you know what it means?"

DD: "I think so, but why don't you tell me anyway." Smiling.

MT: "The first word *Rule* is there specifically to refer to the king or monarch. Early Americans were ruled by a man. As it happened, he could and did change his mind on a variety of things making life difficult at times. Sometimes he even made a law and then made it retroactive. People who had followed all the laws might suddenly find out that they had repeatedly broken a new one in years past. The phrase replaces the rather fluid opinions and decisions of a man, a king, with a written rule called the *Law*. It is hard to write and hard to change in order to avoid being the same as the king."

DD: "I see."

MT: "There's more."

DD: "Okay. Go on!"

MT: "The first rule, or law, of America is the Constitution. From it, all others arise. With it, all others must abide. This is why some statutes are thrown out as being unconstitutional. If we ignore the Constitution, especially where the devices to divide power are concerned, we will end up with more and more power being accumulated into fewer and fewer hands until we have an oligarchy. We're almost there now."

DD: "Wait. Oligarchy?"

MT: "That's where a handful of men hold all the power. Not quite like a monarchy, which means *one* king, but still too few to allow for freedom."

DD: "We live in a democracy, right? So that can't happen."

MT: “Well. First of all, it is already happening. Fewer and fewer men hold power. Second, we don’t live in a democracy.”

DD: “What do you mean?”

MT: “We live in something Madison called a Democratic Republic. You see, Madison and the others knew that a democracy is driven by the most common self-interest held by the majority and a republic is very susceptible to special interests of the few. They created a hybrid to defeat both of those threats to freedom but it only works when actual power is distributed among many. As a result, we have a democratic process operating in a republican style framework.”

DD: “I’m still not sure I understand.”

MT: “That means that America has a republican style of representation that operates using a democratic style of voting.”

DD: “Okay.”

MT: “Let me add in a bit more detail, please.”

DD: Nods.

MT: “Pure republicanism leads directly to despotism through centralized power. Pure democracy leads to chaos, then despotism through the need to control the chaos. In America, for a bill to become law, the design, using today’s numbers, was that 536 people would get a say: One President, 100 senators and 435 representatives. That means that 268 people would have to say *yes*. The way things are run now, though, there are essentially three people who get a say: The President, the Speaker of the House, and the Senate Majority Leader. The others still have to say *yes*, but they do so at the behest of their respective leaders. To do otherwise might cost them a committee seat or even a re-election. A friend of mine recently referred to this bastardized system as a *Monarchy of Bureaucracy implemented by the Oligarchy of Bureaucrats*. In my example, the bureaucrats are replaced by the three elected people I mentioned, but it is still a monarchy of bureaucracy. The media would do the nation a service in educating the public by preparing an expose on power brokerage in Congress.”

DD: “Mr. Thompson. It seems as though we’re almost out of time. I do want to get to one more thing though. You were spotted at Arlington yesterday escorted by a lone secret service agent. There are a few questions that come to mind immediately. First, isn’t it dangerous for you to be that exposed? And second, why were you there alone? It seems like paying your respects on Veteran’s Day is a pretty decent photo op, if nothing else.”

MT: “I guess the best answer is that Veteran’s Day isn’t about me. It’s about the veterans and it’s about their sacrifice. The nation pays her respects on Veteran’s day with the formal ceremony and it is the President’s job to preside over that event, which he did. Next year, I will do that, but right now, I am just another citizen. As for my actions being an invitation to danger, I suppose that you may be right. Still, I am just another citizen – at least for now. I don’t expect to be able to get away with that sort of behavior for very long.”

DD: “No, I don’t suppose you will. That’s all we have time for today. Thank you and I hope to do it again soon.”

MT: “How about next weekend? I think we’ve only scratched the surface. Next time, I promise to give you more details and specifics, especially on timing.”

DD: “That’d be great. When we come back; the response from the Minority Leader in the House of Representatives, Representative Naughton Childers (D) and the Senate Majority Leader, Paul Brown (R).”

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