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Alumni Banquet, 5/12/72

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(Continued from 00-00-103)

Don Dafoe talks about the Regents, saying that he wishes more people were able to see the Regents at work. He says the Regents put in fifty to seventy days a year and there is considerable personal sacrifice in terms of time and money. Unlike assemblymen and city councilmen, the Regents serve without any sort of compensation.

They deal with the problems of dealing with the public, communication and university image. It is difficult to glamorize subjects like math, history, or English per se. But, they are able to glamorize them indirectly by calling attention to successful alumni such as legislators, professionals, and good, hard-working people across Alaska.

Alumni are influential in the state. Their influence may be seen in their roles as voting citizens who decide questions about aid to private education, the organization of the university, allocation of resources, as donors who provide funds for unconventional, experimental and innovative programs, and as employers who influence job qualifications, provide apprenticeship and job training.

Alaska has a statewide system of higher education. The speaker believes in the concept and believes it is the best option for Alaska. Alaska is one of few states with a constitutionally established university and board of regents. Alaska has a single board for all public education beyond high school. Other states have separate universities, colleges and community colleges and trying desperately to provide statewide coordination which Alaska already has.

Admittedly, operating a statewide system is complex. The board, the administration, and the staff must believe in the concept and must think and act from a statewide perspective. There must be reasonable decentralization and maximum regional autonomy. There can be diversity within unity. There are sectional differences internally and externally. But breaking up the system is no solution because the resulting political acrimony, cutthroat competition for funds, and duplication of programs and efforts would negatively affect the depth and quality of higher education.

When Dr. William Wood made his inaugural address, he was amazingly prophetic. He talked about the emerging statewide system. At the time he made that speech, the total university budget was about five million dollars whereas this year it is about forty million dollars or about eight times as much. The increase of state funds has not risen eight times as much.

The funds come through restricted grants and outside funding through the initiative for faculty and staff. Of the total expenditures out of that forty million dollar budget, less than half is from direct state appropriation. About fifteen million dollars comes through restricted grants. This is a remarkable story of progress during Dr. Wood's tenure.

The next year, the next five and the next ten will continue to pose serious and complex problems, but with the continued perceptive and conscientious leadership of the Regents, with an administration that is help accountable by the Regents, with appropriate and reasoned involvement of students and staff, and with the understanding and support of alumni and friends, this university will emerge as a great university which is essential for Alaska to become a great state.

Dr. Dafoe says he is an optimist. He tells an anecdote about twin boys to demonstrate the differences between optimism and pessimism. He enjoins the audience to be optimistic, too, as the University of Alaska moves forward.

Another speaker introduces the members of the board of regents who are present; Dr. Wood, Mr Brian Brundin, Mr. A. D. Robertson, Dr. Hugh Fate, Mr. Robert E. McFarland, and Mr. William A. O'Neill.

Mr. William A. O'Neill speaks. He reminisces about how Dr. Bunnell, the first president of the university, when asked to say a few words to the alumni banquet, used to start by saying, "Well, here we are." Mr. O'Neill says he is proud to be an alumnus of the University of Alaska and is grateful that he has the privileged and honor of not only being on the Board of Regents, but of being the president of the Board of Regents. This is how he feels about the university and it, he says, how every regent that he knows who has been affiliated to the university throughout the years has felt.

He says he was perturbed when he learned that the Board of Directors, for the first year for some time, have not selected an individual to receive the Distinguished Alumnus Award. He was so upset he talked very strongly about it to the executive secretary of the alumni. She also was very upset and did not understand why in the devil there was not an alumnus of this university who was worthy of the Distinguished Alumnus Award. She was so upset she said to Mr. O'Neill, "Just don't mention it to me! I'm going right through the ceiling!" It turns out he was kept in the dark and did not know anything about it. He asks Betty Clark step up to receive the Distinguished Alumnus Award. She has been instrumental in organizing alumni associations throughout the United States and even in foreign countries.

Mrs. Betty Clark speaks. She says, "Thank you! And I am very touched. I really do not feel that I am deserving and I take everything back that I said to you about your Board of Directors...and I take back what I was thinking about you, Bill. You know, I thought you were talking too much. And I already told him that once today."

Next, a group of singers from the Fairbanks Light Opera Association present something called, "The Showcase." The first song is "I hear a song" by Richard Hyatt. Next Molly Spooner(?), who works at the registrar's office, sing "Summertime" by George Gershwin and DuBose Heyward. The next song is "It's A Big, Wide, Wonderful World" by John Rox. Next, the announcer introduces the accompanist, Mrs. Libby Benjamin(?) and introduces the singer, his, wife, Mrs. Beverly Davis. "If I Loved You" (?) Last, a song by Cole Porter is sung, "In the Still of the Night."