

Call number: 00-00-176

Dr. Robert Hiatt, President, University of Alaska. Press Conference, 7/2/73.

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Date(s) of creation of summary: 4/5/2013, 4/8/2013

Notes: Originals on 7 inch reels. Master copies on CD.

Series:

Two men, Earl and Gerry, introduce the fifth president of the University of Alaska, Dr. Robert W. Hiatt.

Dr. Hiatt speaks. He speaks about how he has been posted overseas. He is in Alaska only for a brief time. He speaks about his travel plans for the immediate future.

He compares his entering second presidency to the way a widow feel getting married for the second time: if he is no longer entitled to wear white, at least he can bring to the affair some understanding of what is required.

As he is only just recently back, he says he will not limit his comments to the local scene but rather mention some major objectives he thinks would apply to any state higher educational system and indicate how he expects the universities future activates will flow based on these objectives

He says there is a danger of getting so bogged down in the means as to lose sight of the ends. To forestall that today, he will speak of the objectives now and speak of the means later.

This university system has enjoyed explosive growth from the '60s to the '70s. This is due to a number of factors including an increasing affluence in the US, extensive federal aid programs to universities and community colleges, and an appreciation on the part of the citizen that the development of the intellect is a valuable natural resource.

The '70s have brought a change in the national financial picture and a reevaluation of where we are so that the resources available may be used effectively. This process has already started and will be intensified in the years immediately ahead.

Alaska is particularly well served by the great contributions that America has made to higher education: the land grant college system, and people's colleges. The community college system in Alaska is well developed in Anchorage and getting underway in other places. Dr. Hiatt thinks that in Alaska, the especial need over the next few years is to integrate this community college system in order to deliver the proper education at the proper place at the proper price. This is a difficult problem, but surmountable.

There has been much talk about the kinds of education which should be developed within the system. Dr. Hiatt thinks that since a person is a person and citizen before he is a doctor, lawyer, engineer,

teacher or craftsman, then each student should be educated in the liberal sense, first of all. This holds for the community colleges as well as the four year campuses.

There is a responsibility in every state to educate the innovators, that small segment of the population that has ideas and the type intellect to develop those ideas. This is the most advanced education that they are able to provide. This education must be presented in a very flexible environment. Dr. Hiatt warns that the people who are not involved in this particular environment must be very tolerant of this particular need because it really pertains to the few and not the many. The university, of course, has an obligation to educate the applicators: teachers, engineers, medical doctors, etc who apply the ideas of the innovators just mentioned, for the good of society. And then there are the technicians who convert, for society, those things the applicators find useful for society. The community colleges pay special attention to the technicians. The technicians make up probably the largest group of the population educated beyond high school. All of these types of education deserve dignity and are of worth to the total system. No one type is better than the other and all are necessary.

Pertaining to the most advanced education and research, Dr. Hiatt says that the University of Alaska needs to decide what we can do best. No university can do everything. We must recognize our limitations. The University of Alaska's unique location and set of geophysical and biological environments allow us to stand out among the universities of the nation and of the world.

Dr. Hiatt says the next question is. "What criteria would we use to select areas that the university will be able to specialize and excel in?" The criteria used have been geographical location, geophysical environment, and Alaska's extensive marine coastal areas. However, Alaska's geopolitical advantages haven't taken advantage of. He is not just talking about being the hub of the North Pacific Rim, although that is important. He says Alaska's development and educational system can make Alaska the transportation hub of the northern area of the globe. Alaska is on the shortest line between Europe, Japan, Russia and the Eastern United States. Additionally, the development of China could make Alaska very busy. Alaska could be an international meeting place for problems of world trade and political affairs: things which can be done better in a relatively neutral, central location. For example, Hawaii has done well promoting itself for this kind of thing. Dr. Hiatt thinks Alaska is in an even better spot to do this than Hawaii.

Dr. Hiatt says that Alaska has done much work and is widely recognized in the areas of geophysics and northern biology but less so in the development of marine resources and in the development of energy resources in the state. The university has to be more involved. New technologies can make the coal in the state available in areas where it is needed in the form of gasses from coal. These sorts of things should be put into operation and the university should take the lead in this. Another area in which work is already being done is on the preservation and promotion of the human resources of the north, particularly the indigenous population in Alaska. Dr. Hiatt comments that the indigenous people are never going to go back to living a completely indigenous lifestyle, so active effort must be made to help them acclimate to the current mainstream lifestyle.

In summation, Dr. Hiatt says that planning the university's future by taking the aforementioned objectives into account and making use of experts among the faculty will help the university fulfill its potential.

Dr. Hiatt mentions Walter Hickel's article "The Day of the Arctic Has Come". Dr. Hiatt thinks that the day of the Arctic has come and he wants to see the university play the lead role. Dr. Hiatt comments that he does not want to say any more or else he will be delving into issues he has to reflect on a great deal more before he is ready to express his opinions on them but he would be happy to respond to questions from the press.

A woman asks the first question: "You mentioned that you didn't think there was a need to bring in outside faculty to solve these particular problems. What about at the administrative level? Have you met, in your other experiences, people that you would like to bring into the university?"

Dr. Hiatt says not particularly, though he knows many people that would do a good job. He clarifies, saying that he is not saying that Alaska is producing all of the experts it needs- of course people need to be brought in from the outside. Rather he is saying that there is no need to hire an outside consulting firm that knows nothing about Alaska in order to do the academic planning of the university.

A man asks for more clarification that Dr. Hiatt was not implying that the University does not need faculty from the outside. Dr. Hiatt confirms that he was specifically referring to consulting firms; no state fills its campuses with its own faculty.

A man asks a question about "underdeveloped villages in Alaska". Dr. Hiatt responds, saying that the idea of community development is one that the Peace Corps worked on. There isn't any reason that through statewide services, Alaska can't do a great deal in terms of advice, organization, school systems, etc. The university's state services system is very important. Almost every aspect of community development could be given a considerable amount of help through university programs and already are in many cases.

A man asks if Dr. Hiatt anticipates moving the main campus of the university and the administration to Anchorage. Dr. Hiatt says that this will not happen in the six years that he is going to be here. He says, regarding the system, that when it is starting there is some feeling of mutual competition between the units. Some of this competition is very good. The question of where things are to be seems to Dr. Hiatt to be one of rationality: Fairbanks campus was developed long before any of the other campuses were developed, it is a mature university, major programs are in Fairbanks, and dormitories are in Fairbanks. There is little point in reproducing another center just like it. On the other hand, the greater Anchorage area is going to be the place where the major population center is; a full-fledged campus must be developed in Anchorage, building upon the community college. There is the question of what should be moved from the Fairbanks campus to the Anchorage campus. Dr. Hiatt says the answer to that depends on where particular programs can best fit. Dr. Hiatt guesses that most of the business and teacher educational programs should be centered in Anchorage. Not everything needs to be developed on the Fairbanks campus. Some things may develop on the Anchorage campus. While there is no need to

duplicate the Fairbanks campus in Anchorage, the undergraduate program will be duplicated in Anchorage as it will be cost effective as the classes in both locations will be big enough.

There is a similar problem in developing community colleges; should each community college be developed into a comprehensive college with all forms of technical and vocational training? This is not affordable. So each must be tailored to the needs of the community it is in.

A woman asks, "When you were hired, what do you think specifically is in your background or field of expertise that the University of Alaska was looking for?"

Dr. Hiatt says it is hard for him to say as he wasn't on the other end of the hiring chain. He presumes the university was looking for someone with some experience in university administration. The woman says that the point of her question is "Does Dr. Hiatt have any indication what the university wants him to do?" She mentions integrating the system. Dr. Hiatt says that, yes, the things he has mentioned are essentially what they want him to do. They say the first order of business is to come up with a plan of how to do these things.

A man says he understands that as far as supporting higher education goes, Alaska ranks 41st in the United States. Dr. Hiatt asks in what context is 41st. Another man clarifies that he thinks the ranking is based on an effort index. Dr. Hiatt says he is not sure what is wound into the ranking but, of course, they have to raise it. The man says that it seems to him that Dr. Hiatt is going to have to convince the voters that more support is needed in order for the university to make the kind of strides they have been talking about.

Dr. Hiatt says that the ends are what Dr. Hiatt is talking about in the planning mechanism. It is very difficult to sell a product, even educationally, which everyone knows is good when the cost is great is the buyer doesn't really know exactly what he is buying. This is almost the case in every state. Alaska is not unique in this respect. This is why Dr. Hiatt thinks it is important to get a pretty fully developed plan which can be extrapolated in terms of programs, costs, locations of units, etc. so that anybody can sit down and figure out just how much it is going to cost if you want a certain level of education. Then it becomes a matter for those who provide the money to decide what level of education do they really want to provide in this state. Dr. Hiatt says that making a chart of this sort of thing can have a large impact on the legislature. No legislature wants to know that its effort for the state university effort only ranks 41st. Looking at another set of figures may reveal that Alaska ranks higher in per capita or per student terms. This is a problem of how to balance these kinds of figures.

A woman asks about the possibility of student input on the planning process. Dr. Hiatt hopes that students will be represented on the planning committees. He found student input quite good in Hawaii, at times better than many of the faculty. Students can do nothing but help on these kinds of committees.

Another woman says that she has heard that faculty have said in past that the University of Alaska had a bad reputation in academic circles. Dr. Hiatt says he has not heard of this and that you can hear all sorts of things depending on who you talk to. The woman persists, asking what his impression of the

university was. He says that his only impression, scholastically, relates to the Fairbanks campus and the reputation has always been very good. It is difficult to know about a community college reputation outside the state. Sometimes you hear that the community college system is good or something of that sort. The ways of measuring this kind of achievement sort of militates against widespread public knowledge of the achievement of teaching programs. It is difficult to measure and Dr. Hiatt could not say how any state institution ranked in this regard. The ways one gets an impression of the standard of instruction are through things like the kinds of people the school attracts to its faculty and the achievement of the students that go on to another institution. And each year or so there are accreditation teams on the campus from a wide variety of disciplines.

Here the tape cuts out.