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Robert A. F. Frederick, moderator

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The title of this general session is Statehood and the Alaska Constitution. Robert Frederick said they are not there to revise the Alaska Constitution, but rather to revisit. He said he isn't certain that members of the delegation revisited do not have in mind looking at how well the document has withstood these few years of government. He is reminded that it is Tom Jefferson who said laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. He said at the end of the session there will be another restatement of a symbolic code and the fearlessness of revision. He thought they are fortunate to complement the delegates. He talked about Gifford Pinchot who was known to lock up the resources of Alaska.

Frederick said Robert Atwood was chairman of the Alaska Statehood Committee for a decade from 1949-1959. He introduces Robert Atwood. Bob Atwood talks about the struggle for Alaska statehood. He said it is an honor and a privilege to be invited. In the years they were working on statehood any time they called on Tony Dimond or himself or Bob Bartlett they always talked about the struggle for Alaska statehood no matter what the title [of the talk] was. Now when the title is the struggle for statehood he thinks they all have lived through that and it ought to be something different. In approaching this there is a degree of disenchantment. He was at a dinner for General Hill who is transferring out of Alaska and he discovered that he has never been awarded the good conduct medal. He said when it came to electing a vice chairman at the Constitutional Convention there were only two candidates. There was a secret ballot. Buckalew stood up and asked how you spelled Peratrovich.

Atwood said the delegates made a permanent place for themselves when they wrote the constitution. When the convention convened the delegates had no good precedence to follow. As a territory they had not been allowed to provide their own leaders. They had limited duties as citizens. Most of the leaders were censored by Washington. Rarely did they have a chance to develop whatever leadership talents they had in leadership affairs. The delegates did have some good advice from the people. The document they produced had to be good. They had to come up with a document that had a three-fold purpose. It had to be an instrument that would be acceptable to Alaskans including many who were not sold on the idea of statehood. It was adopted without any opposition which was a testimonial to the good work of the delegates. Secondly the delegates had to have a document that could be used as a sales tool in Congress. They had to sell them the idea that Alaska should be a state. There were many members in Congress who were not in favor of statehood for Alaska. It took a lot of sales pitches to them. The Alaska Constitution was a sales tool. The third purpose was to produce a document that would make a good foundation for a workable state government. Every thoughtful Alaskan must realize the extraordinary achievement of the Alaska Constitution. They have lived under it for 17 years and it has only been

amended 12 times. The delegates did their job in 75 days. Their example carried over into the first legislature. They were done in 85 days. They created the superstructure such as laws, the three branches of government, administrative procedures act, etc. It prevailed through the second legislature. The delegates did their job and produced a sound government. Alaskans should be grateful. Since statehood good things have happened. Atwood said our lives have been enriched by the new horizons coming before us. In recent years things have happened. Things have become turbulent. He said we have lost the single purpose and that marked their endeavors 20 years ago. Now there are many issues. It is easy for the leaders to be misled. This clamor puts strain on the government and marks the end of community and consensus. The politics of multiple advocacies representing people who think they are neglected or secluded. Instead of talking about things we sue. He gives many examples. More and more the hands of the administration are tied by the legal issues. Leaders lose some of their leadership qualities. They become managers instead of leaders. He said we find the judiciary and the executive branches badly in need of help in resolving some of the problems. The legislative branch seems to be the only branch able to provide that help. These areas will be discussed over the next few days. He said throughout it all each delegate can look with pride with the document they presented. The Constitution is a firm foundation as it intended. The problems come with what men and women have built on that foundation. He said we can approach the problems with optimism that remedies will be found.

Robert Frederick said George Rogers was supposed to speak at the session, but could not be here. He was in Seattle and grounded because of the airline strike. Frederick said Rogers is the senior scholar of Alaska.

Frederick said we are fortunate that our forbearers had the vision to bring in experts with outside experience. He introduces John Bebout who is considered the top expert on state constitutions. Frederick said Bebout will talk about the Alaska constitution in the American constitutional [?]

John Bebout said it would be impossible to assess the impact of Alaska on John Bebout. He is happy to have been called back. This is his fourth visit. He said every state constitution for better or worse is a part of the extended working constitution of the whole United States. The state constitution is for the better if on the whole it provides the basis for a system of state and local government that is responsible to its people and effective in serving them in such manner that the state plays a positive creative role in the domestic governance of the nation. It is for the worse to the extent that it impedes the role by providing for a weak government, slow or inadequate in responding to emerging needs and problems with which the nation must cope.