

Call number: 01-79-10 PT. 4

Name and place: Foster Diebold, UA President, interviewed by Paul McCarthy.

Date: July 18th, 1979 Rasmuson Library, UAF, Fairbanks, Alaska.

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Notes: Original on ?-inch reel, master copy on CD. Many tapes end abruptly as interview runs all the way to the end of the reel.

Interview with Foster Diebold continues by Paul asking more about Humphrey's views about the relationship between legislature and the University. Diebold says that he and Emil agree that the legislature isn't the only political force but a higher education institution can be a powerful political force too. Diebold maintains that UA [University of Alaska] is probably capable of becoming the most potent political force in Alaska for a variety of regions: It's in many places in the state and it's a major employee. UA just has to get its act together. Legislature plays the University units against each other.

3:50 The first step is to convince the university community to work together and support things that are unique to the university situation, like make the best possible budget and get the legislature to adopt it. These days the board of regents adopts a budget that becomes a policy document, but then individuals run off to Juneau and tell that they don't like the budget and need money distributed in different ways.

It's not a bottomless pit of money and university employee X might be successful in getting more money, but employee Y loses. It hurts the university that legislature is disregarding board of regents' budget and doing what they want.

5:49 the capital project's budget was submitted by the regents "last year." It was well developed and needed, but it was 80% different when it came back from the legislature because they eliminated everything that the regents asked for and added money for projects around the state, out of which many were unjustified.

Once the university becomes a unified body, getting the budget approved will be easier.

6:52 Diebold tells that he made a political activity policy that was seen by a few people as a Heinrich Himmler move, a violation of first amendment, and other nonsense. Board adopted the policy, however. It says that University employees talk to the legislature as citizens, and not as university spokespeople. Diebold wanted it to be a signal to the people that they need to be unified in order to get university's act together.

He wanted to make budget development process a rational one so that people can march to a single drummer. Diebold's budget wasn't successful because individual people argued against the cuts.

9:30 Fairbanks campus is going to relapse \$600,000 dollars "this year." [More talking about budget problems and incompetence.]

12:32 Paul asks if Diebold was surprised for President Humphrey's resignation. Diebold says that he observed a growing sense of professional depression. He didn't, however, think that it would lead to resignation. He had a short advanced notice and the reason for short notice was perhaps that Neil [Humphrey] didn't know it was coming.

Diebold visited Humphrey's family for Thanksgiving and they were just beginning to settle down. Diebold thinks that there were 13 major and minor incidents that happened in 2-week period and zeroed in on Neil. The incidents ranged from being stranded in Anchorage Airport and wasting a couple of days at the airport due to ice fog that settled in Fairbanks that same time, not allowing for flights. There were also issues with treatment by legislators and other problems.

17:18 Neil also said that he had too a clean a record for his age, which was late 40s or early 50s, to tarnish it in the situation he was in. The board was dumbfounded by his decision to leave and they were amazed that there was nothing they could offer for Humphrey that would keep him from resigning.

Diebold told them that they couldn't sway Humphrey because he knew Humphrey to be a stubborn guy who wasn't going to reverse his decision. Once they found that he wouldn't reverse himself, the board members contacted Schwartz who still hadn't been able to find work. Schwartz played the board along for a month or so, saying that he would give some thought to taking the presidency. In reality, he was waiting anxiously to hear from another job and was using the Alaskan offer to better his position.

Diebold tells that he was afraid of Schwartz because he had had a number of jobs in a short period of time and that's not a good sign. Schwartz didn't take the job at UA and Diebold was appointed instead.

20:29 Paul asks what Diebold thought of starting as an administrator and becoming the president. He tells that his response is obvious: There are small number of land-grant state colleges and universities and the likelihood of becoming the president of one from being a University employee are small.

Diebold was having a "colossal ego trip" because the board thought him capable of handling problems of such magnitude. Of course he wanted the job and it never occurred to him that he might not be able to do it, because he had a sense of what needed to be corrected. He was in a better position to see the things because he had been serving the board and the president. Also, his previous jobs had been plenty challenging.

24:00 He had managerial techniques and experience with which to deal with problems. His promotion to assistant superintendency [in his previous job] was because out of 700 hundred people, he was the best to deal with a district in terrifying transition and racial unrest. It was the first high school district where they had an occupation of black students who closed the place down for a week. Then they had other occupations and the institutions were under great unrest.

Diebold recalls that he wasn't intimidated by problems at UA. It didn't occur to him that it might be overwhelming. He also knows what it takes to survive the politics and to serve up to politicians. He's also committed to things like giving the state legislature oversight responsibilities over university's budget, and he thinks it's preposterous that they would have all the answers, education, and expertise to make the budget -- especially since they are spending tax money. They have to justify the appropriate expenditure of tax money.

27:15 Diebold accepted the job with "all of those notions swirling around in my head." He was surprised when the board offered him the job. He was asked to leave the executive session for the first time while they talked over the problem. When they called him in they said that they wanted Diebold to take the presidency with full power for about 2 years.

They didn't have subterranean meetings about the issue, Diebold thinks, and Jeff Cook even left the meeting early to go somewhere. Next morning when he heard about Diebold's presidency, he was surprised too.

Diebold characterizes that as an ultimate compliment to his career that the board named him as the president. They gave him the charge of "go do it" without any warnings to step lightly or anything. They told him to do it until he is replaced, and that is what Diebold did.

29:26 He worked all the way up to time when Dr. [Unclear]. He wants to add that he has accepted a university presidency in Pennsylvania, but he can't announce it before the Governor of Pennsylvania announces it.

He's bringing it up because his experience at UA is to be thanked for being a viable candidate for that. The problems in the college where he is going are mini problems compared to problems of UA.

[End of PT. 4]