

Call number: 01-79-10 PT. 5

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 interviewer runs all the way to the end of the reel.

Paul continues the interview by reminding that they were talking about Diebold's previous work experience and how that relates to experiences in Alaska. He asks about the problems Diebold saw at the UA [University of Alaska] at the time, how he tackled them, and how Earl Brewer managed with budget.

Diebold tells that Earl Brewer started as a vice president for finances when nobody in their right mind would have wanted to do that. Earl worked 7 days a week, 10-12 hours per day and through holidays. Earl did as much as he was capable of doing and resigned at a perfect time. His decision was only his and he wasn't asked to resign.

2:00 His wife absolutely refused to come to Alaska and Brewer was a Southern California type. He was also beginning to get overwhelmed. Earl wasn't a political type and had no interest in staying alert to Alaskan politics.

Most of the work that Earl did was the drudgery of shifting though the garbage that had been accumulating "here" with blunderous mistakes, misinformation, and the kind. He also had the ability to present himself as an honest person. It was important to the legislature to see an honest person in Brewer's position, and in Diebold's too. Diebold thinks that Earl was perfectly suited for that year but might have found himself going over his head, had he continued.

3:54 Diebold thinks that now it will be almost impossible for the university to get into another deficit situation of that magnitude. There are possibilities for pocket deficit spending as long as management reports are delayed even 30 days. The first management reports that Diebold put together in January 1977, estimated that there was 75-50% inaccuracy because the data that was used was inaccurate. Now their reports are around 10% inaccurate.

Possibly next year, or the following year, the "University will probably come in almost on a dime."

5:53 Diebold says that the cash [unclear] will never happen again because their counting system is good enough, so that there will never again be a cash flow problem. Now their accounts receivable are in balance for the university to operate.

Now they have to indicate to the legislature exactly how much money they have spent and how much they need and they also have to justify their drawdowns, but they can do that now.

Fiscal problems are behind them but managerial problems aren't and there are things that could go wrong. Diebold thinks that the new president is a capable and honest person, but he hasn't been an academic officer for his whole career.

8:34 Broad managerial responsibilities in running an institution of the size of UA go beyond that, but it doesn't mean that academic officers can't be good managers. If he's a good manager, the job will get done, but there's a lot more to running the university, like the political side, the fiscal side, and the broad managerial side.

Diebold wishes the new president well, but says he's not completely happy with him. He thinks that board ended up hiring a president that was unlike the parameters they laid down in terms of what kind of a president they were looking for. Diebold thought that they were more concerned with managerial techniques than trappings and Diebold thinks that they have come off from that position.

10:27 Diebold says that the managerial situation isn't as easy as saying that they are decentralized and that chancellors have more power than they used to. It's a much more involved situation and each of their units is distinct. They are in desperate need for reorganization in Juneau, which can end up being the biggest problem with the University "this year" in terms of the relationship with reorganization and collective bargaining process, and what the legislature ends up doing with public employees. That's their smallest unit and it has serious problems.

In Anchorage, they have a unit that doesn't have all the buildings it needs, and its bursting at its seams both literally and figuratively. It wants to become the top campus in the university system but it can't for a long time, no matter how much population they have and how much money the legislature jams into that campus. What makes a first-rate campus is a sense of tradition and history, and having qualified staff. Until they get qualified staff to develop highly qualified programs, and until they get deeply steeped in academic study and research, they aren't going to become a major university center.

The legislature dumps money into Anchorage and think that will make it into a major university.

12:55 Fairbanks has serious problems. Diebold thinks that a lot is to be desired in the management of the campus and says that there's a fear that a ripple or a wave will take faculty and that the faculty will turn against the administration and that that will be the

end of the administration.

Either one makes' waves on "this campus" and gets some faculty upset, or the campus is going to die on its own because the history and tradition isn't going to keep the campus alive. They need bodies. They can't roam around the State of Alaska and talk about enrollment being high because that figure doesn't mean anything. They have the highest rate of inflation and "obviously people go to school when they have nothing else to do and as soon as the economy improves, people are gonna leave school and go back to work." Worst case scenario is that the economy won't improve and people will leave because of that.

Fairbanks has lots of things to work on to keep the enrollment, like trimesters and summer programs that get people to come up. They aren't going to get done unless there are changes in the campus.

14:39 In terms of the community college, the state hasn't even decided if the community college is going to be a part of the UA and so on. There are very complex issues that don't lend themselves to simple views on how to deal with them.

Value of a master plan is to commit publicly to a plan of action, but more importantly, they have to be able to present the master plan to the legislature to get their support. Diebold's goal was to bring forth the first draft of the master plan. That draft is at VP's office now and president [Unclear] is going to turn it into a master plan.

16:28 Paul asks Diebold to talk about the idea of decentralization. Diebold says that the more one decentralizes, the more power is taken onto the unit and those decisions are tough. Once the president gives out the ability to hire or fire his chancellors, then one might as well break the whole system up.

Lindower believed that he had reached the point in Anchorage where he was beyond the control of the central office. Diebold told him to resign or get fired, and Lindower said he couldn't be fired. He was a bit unhinged and Diebold spent 10 days convincing Lindower that he could ask for his resignation, which Lindower found to be true after talking with politicians and lawyers.

Diebold says there has been more talk about decentralization than there has been decentralization. He would like to convince the legislature that what they thought was a good thing in 1976 and 1977 is coming about, but the legislature is pushing harder for centralization right now -- particularly fiscal control -- and so is the board. The two most important bodies who asked for decentralization have reversed their position. Board looks to the president to use power and UA is in transition, but hasn't found the balance between what must and mustn't be decentralized.

20:29 Diebold thinks that they aren't fully developed in their policies regarding things like what are the responsibilities of the chancellor in relation to the president. Once the policy is fully developed, the matters will be resolved. Legislature knows, for example, that the responsibility over spending on the Anchorage campus rests on the chancellor, and that it is only the responsibility of the state-wide office that the policies that govern the spending are adhered to.

Diebold talks about how decentralization has created monsters out of chancellors, like of Chancellor [sp? Sounds like Roark] from the community college who exercises power over his college but has difficulty seeing that the president has power over him. He thinks the president should give him free reign but then be answerable to the board of regents and to the legislature.

Diebold believes that they are well along in developing policies but there's more to be done.

23:28 Paul asks if the chancellors take the prerogatives they enjoy for themselves and pass the dirty decisions back. Diebold says yes, and clarifies that he got requests from chancellor that were given to him so that the chancellor wouldn't have to take the responsibility. Diebold takes a time to respond to those kinds of letters, making chancellors take the responsibility over the power they have. Those situations occur weekly and Diebold thinks they are going to continue.

Diebold says that there are a group of people who owe their futures to Chancellor Lindower, but that's the extent of the support he has. Had Diebold stayed, he would have called the chancellor to resign because they didn't work well together. A handful of people were able to give the impression that the chancellor had much more support than he really has. Lindower had more support in Anchorage campus even with his insane way of management.

28:21 Paul asks about Diebold's experiences with the Board of Regents, and asks whether they have been a strong board. Diebold tells that one measure of how much support a president has from his board is to look at how many of his recommendations are followed by the board. Diebold's every recommendation, except for two, were followed even before he became the president. [Talks about the two recommendations.]

Diebold tells that he can't stand Regent [Mildred] Banfield and he assumes that she can't stand him either. It's a pretty good ratio that he was able to get along with 11 people and to only have problems with 1.

[End of part 5.]