

Call number: 01-79-10 PT. 6

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

Date: July 18th, 1979 Rasmuson Library at 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.

Part 6 of the interview with Foster Diebold starts with Paul reminding Foster that they were talking about his relationship with the regents, legislative tenure, and Scott, who was a "particularly antagonistic one."

Diebold says that he will start by talking about the regents and that he was taking steps beyond what was normally considered appropriate in order to keep the board informed. He did that because the University was in such a disarray that one had to develop a sense in the regents that they knew what was going on. Now Diebold has started to pull back and that is necessary because they are in threat of creating Frankensteinian monsters when the board members start to feel, with all the information, that they are more capable administrators of higher education than the people they hire to do those jobs.

2:05 Diebold thinks that the board must come to realize that their responsibility is to review the policy options that are brought to them by the central office, adopt them, and hire the best possible people. Diebold is sounding an alarm that he hopes the new president and his staff will get the message and back away. It's hard to do but has to be done. Most of the board understand that and welcome the idea that they should have less to do.

Diebold doesn't think everybody have high ego-needs. The new president had a press conference and Regent Cook was sitting next to him and that was totally inappropriate. [?]

Diebold tells that he did well with the legislature and is therefore well suited for other university presidencies around the country. He knows 42 out of 60 legislators well and more not so well, and he has a placement file that probably has 30 letters from the legislators who say that he saved UA [University of Alaska] from the ruins.

4:15 That's not totally true, but Diebold is happy they think that way because he worked hard to overcome university's problems.

4:36 Now the legislature have asking the regents to keep Diebold in residency. Diebold denies ever having fostered that kind of behavior, although a number of legislators urged him to take action [to continue his presidency] but Diebold said that he had made a deal

with the regents and wouldn't "pull Fergusons."

Situation is very good with legislators and their budget [reductions] aren't the result of hostile legislators. That was the same treatment that every agency in the state got. Some legislators are ticked off over the lawsuit. Regent Banfield didn't want to announce the lawsuit until the legislature were out of session, and Diebold thought that would have been a cheap trick and he advised the board to announce that they are going to sue the legislature while they were in session. He also wrote to each individual legislator, explaining that the lawsuit wasn't hostile but it was designed to clarify issues. There were a few who saw it as an attack regardless. Diebold received nothing but complements from financial committee.

7:04 The situation with Scott is one of the strangest kinds Diebold has ever been in. Dave Scott hasn't talked with him since 1977 when he left "here." He refuses to have any kind of a contact. Diebold wasn't in a desperate need of a contact but there was a kind of a wall of between them that neither one wants to penetrate. Some of Scott's actions are painful for the University in terms of him dealing with the legislature and feeding them information. Half the time his observations are good, and sometimes they are not, but in last analysis, legislators in the finance committees are slaves to Dave Scott.

They don't have fiscal experts and so they are totally depended on Dave who does his job well, albeit sometimes a little dishonestly. That makes it painful. Scott is paid by the legislature for being their chief fiscal analyst and a staffer, but if he doesn't keep the legislature honest in terms of the University's affairs, he's out of work. It's easy to say that Scott is taking getting fired from the University out on them, but the situation is more complex than that.

9:21 "The only way to beat Scotts of the world, and they abound, if you get rid of Scott, you're gonna have another one in there. The only way to beat them is to get your house in such a good order that even lies, half-truths, misdirected facts, and what not don't hold water." That makes the Scotts of the world dry up and blow away. Diebold sees that happening already. Scott isn't able to do what he did in the last session and Diebold suspects that, come next session, he is even less able to do that.

Paul asks about evolving approach to the capital budget. They are changing budgets to meet the needs of their regions, and Paul wants to know if Diebold thinks that they sometimes fund projects in municipalities that benefit the municipalities while they only marginally benefit the University. They have an example of a hockey rink that they didn't ask for but that now gets use because it is there, and Diebold says that there are examples that are worse than that, like the library in Nenana.

There is no need for a library in Nenana under University of Alaska, nor building 2 libraries in Barrow. There are some blatant examples of facilities that have no value whatsoever, and they are detriments to the university.

11:21 Diebold says that the legislators won't be able to do those things in the future and that's why they have done it all now. The end of that is coming when they have the reinforcement [?] and the Anchorage caucus, that will be even more powerful than it is now. The bush [rural Alaska?] is going to have problems with their political caucus in power. It's a big transitional year.

Diebold was living in fear all year that the press would ask about their budget. He could have said that everything they asked for was removed, except for a few health and safety items that had to be there. They have been substituted by seven buildings projects that they don't have any need for that total to \$20 million dollars.

12:39 Paul asks how Diebold would characterize his relations with faculty members. Paul knows that some have been critical of Diebold and there are some policies written from a perspective of a staff-attorney rather than one who has a joint responsibility over their rights. Diebold tells that the University Council wasn't created to protect the interest of the faculty but it is a council to the board and to the president. When the president and the board's interests conflict, he is the council to the board and the president has to get council from elsewhere.

Obviously, they are all there to protect the interest of everybody and that's a large part of their responsibility. Council doesn't write policies to the extent the faculty thinks he does. He's the last one to review policy. Faculty is going to fault Diebold when they see something cherished and valuable going down the tube. He says that he's been consistently fair and has done what was best for the university, irrespective of how painful it is.

14:36 One example is the promotion committee that is headed by Professor Roberts. He told Diebold that the previous year was the first when committee's recommendations were followed and that's why the committee stayed together.

Diebold tells that he hired Woody Tromble [sp?] as a VP of academic affairs and the promotion committee denied him the tenure. They were right, and Diebold didn't argue with them. It was hard for him to tell Tromble that he's not going to get a tenure because the committee is against it, but he did it anyway.

Most of the faculty, who could be characterized as detractors, justifiably resent the manner in which Diebold became the president of the University. His response is that the university didn't follow the normal patterns at the time. In a way the detractors are

right since there wasn't a big search and he didn't emerge as a best of the applicants.

16:32 Their arguments about Diebold not having a doctorate are faulty because the last 5 doctorates who were at the head of the university put it into a hole. Diebold says that having a doctorate isn't a bad thing, but that it isn't necessary. He's glad he didn't get a doctorate from University of Alaska, because "there are doctorates and then there are doctorates." Lots of people want to complain about something and Diebold not having a degree is a good one to hang onto.

Secondly, they might have problems seeing Diebold get somewhere without all the hard work that they did in getting their doctorates. Diebold doesn't think that finishing his doctorate will make him a better administrator. He's as good or as bad as he is going to be.

17:55 Diebold never wanted the sabbatical, but he only wanted to not become an unemployed president. He's a doer and took a sabbatical to finish his thesis in case he wouldn't get a job, but he'd much rather work.

The faculty detractors are something they are going to continue having at UA. There will be a honeymoon with the new president for probably three months but the session will open and the real test is going to start. In higher education, the honeymoon phases used to last for a year, but these days that's usually as long as a person lasts.

Diebold tells that when he was appointed a president, he said in an interview with Anchorage Daily News that he isn't going to be insulated but he's going to be very visible and not making friends if he does what needs to be done. That's the reason why the board created a 2-year presidency. They didn't want somebody who would have to be concerned with self-preservation. Diebold doesn't believe them to be right but understands the position.

20:08 Diebold probably had more personnel changes in 20 months than any given university in the country. Diebold hasn't checked the accuracy of the statement but is convinced that it is so. The job had to be done and he needed good people. Diebold doesn't think he did badly.

21:55 Paul asks if Diebold sees lots of the confrontations as a part of the political process of governing a faculty with clashing interests. Diebold thinks there's a sense of balance and that there haven't been lots of problems for him. He has made it clear early on, that if there's a problem, he is going to have a question and answer time until all the questions have been exhausted. He's stepped on some toes, but there has only been about 10% detractors.

24:15 Paul asks if there's anything Diebold would still like to touch on that they haven't talked about already and Diebold says he can't imagine there would be anything that they haven't talked about. Diebold says that he appreciates the interview because it has been a curious 5-6 year period [for UA] and he's happy he has been able to offer some order to the history from his part.

Paul says he can't believe all of that has happened in such a short period of time and thanks Diebold for the interview.

[End of the recording.]