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John Whitehead

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John Whitehead talked about what statehood has meant to Alaska. Alaska now has two senators and a representative in the U.S. congress. Most if not all of the problems in territorial days was due to Alaska not having any power within the Congress to get things done. Our entire economy is based on statehood. The Prudhoe Bay reserve was a part of the lands which the state selected from the statehood entitlement that the federal government gave it in the statehood act. There have been delays in taking the entire amount of lands that was granted to us. One of the first tracts which the state took from that statehood entitlement was what is now the Prudhoe Bay reserve. It was not believed to be as valuable as it turned out to be in the early 1960s. Our entire economy, the entire royalties from Prudhoe Bay come directly from statehood.

John Whitehead said with the territorial legislature, the congress of the United States had the power to overturn or veto anything the territorial legislature enacted. First and foremost the state government now has the power to enact laws can't be turned over unless they violate the constitution of the United States. That gives us the right to tax the oil companies. When Alaska was a territory it didn't even have the legal law making powers that other territories had. We have the rights to pass laws over our natural resources which we didn't have completely during territorial days. He talked about limited entry in fishing. We had the right to establish a limited entry program. One of the principals on which we entered the union was the abolition of the fish traps. He explained fish traps. Ratification of the Alaska constitution was tied with an ordinance to abolish the use of fish traps in Alaska. It was almost the first symbolic act of statehood.

John Whitehead said there hasn't been an economic loss because of statehood. People paid taxes to the federal government before statehood took place. There were a lot of people feared that the people would have to fund the cost of state government. The oil revenues and other revenues went into the state coffers. Because we have congressmen in Washington we have been able to maintain certain things. People in the military are paid wages like they are overseas. This was a holdover from territorial days. There are a lot of the leftovers from territorial days that were kept specifically to benefit the new state. There was a desire in Washington that Alaska would work. When Alaska entered the union the boosters did not envision that Alaska would develop the way it has. It was thought it would develop along the lines as the lower forty-eight states. The road system did not develop as envisioned. The economy has not developed on a diversified pattern. It is based on oil. We are probably less self-sufficient than we were in 1959. He talked about agricultural products that come from Outside.

John Whitehead talked about federal land legislation. He said many people would say that the federal land legislation has hampered Alaska's economic development because it has locked up mineral lands that could be developed. The Prudhoe Bay fields were so rich that all sorts of federal regulations were pushed through to get the Prudhoe Bay field online. The federal legislation which has made it difficult to develop lands has slowed down a normal development of mineral resources. But when the resources are vast no amount of regulation has stood in Alaska's way.

John Whitehead said there had long been an attempt in the congress to block Alaska statehood. The Alaskans voted in their constitution in 1956 and elected a Tennessee plan slate of legislators to go to Washington. Alaskans had clearly opted for statehood two years before the congress passed the legislation. When it went through in 1958 a clause was put in the statehood bill that Alaskans must then hold a referendum and vote in the statehood bill. It was clear that Alaskans were for statehood. He talked about Texas history of statehood. The opposition to Alaska statehood came from southern democrats. The opposition was an anti-civil rights opposition. They feared that the two senators and a representative would likely vote for civil rights legislation. The southern democrats saw Alaska as another liberal state.

John Whitehead said we have to look at Alaska in the future as it has developed in the past. Looking into the future we can say that Alaska will not develop in a way we can predict at the present moment. He doesn't think Alaskans will have control over the pattern of development. He doesn't think we will become a manufacturing or agricultural state. We may be able to develop tourism through our own efforts. He thinks the capital for development will come from the lower forty-eight states and they will determine which resources will be developed. He hopes Alaskans will accept the fact that the pattern of development will come from Outside. He wants politicians to make sure that the prosperity that comes from development remains in Alaska. The pipeline was developed by those from Outside, but Alaska has been able to tax the wealth that has been generated.