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Alaska Federation of Natives 6th Annual Convention

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Notes: Original in 7-inch tape, master copy on CD. Produced by Roger McPherson. THESE TAPES WERE PRODUCED AS A PART OF AN EXPERIMENTAL PROGRAM NOW DEFUNCT AND WERE BROADCAST OVER THE RADIO FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES.

A radio announcer says that an important development in Native politics was the emergence of organized youth groups by Native students in Fairbanks, Bethel and Mount Edgecumbe. The sometimes militant junior delegates demanded a voice for Native political issues, recognition by AFN as viable organizations, and appreciation to difficulties in obtaining high school and university education away from their home communities. Cathy Itta of Mount Edgecumbe Federation of Native Students presented her group to the convention:

A man's voice [later called the master of ceremonies] introduces the "mini-AFN group from Mount Edgecumbe" and their spokesman [Cathy Itta]. Cathy starts speaking on behalf of Mount Edgecumbe Federation of Native Students and thanks the board of directors for giving the students the change to present their report in the historic AFN convention.

Mount Edgecumbe High School has approximately 500 students and many of them travel hundreds of miles to seek high school education. Last year, the Rural Alaska Community Action –program began implementing a program at Mount Edgecumbe in which students were funded for \$6,700 dollars by OEO [what is OEO?] through [unclear]. Gordon Jackson, the executive director of Seacap [?]

met with the students at Mount Edgecumbe to draw a program where the funds could be utilized.

As a result of the meeting, an organization called the Mount Edgecumbe Federation of Native Students was established. If the program is successful, it will be funded again for \$6,700 dollars in January. The structure of Mount Edgecumbe Federation of Native Students is similar to that of AFN, but they are following the 12 region concept. Their main objective is to make the student body more knowledgeable about Native affairs. In the last meeting of Mount Edgecumbe Federation of Native Students board of directors, 3 resolutions were drawn up by the board and [will be] presented to AFN convention.

2:25 Betty Huntington reads the resolutions: Resolution no. 1 says that Mount Edgecumbe educates 500-600 Native students from all regions of State of Alaska and they acknowledge a gap that exists between Native students and the rest of the Native people in their regions and communities regarding Native affairs. Therefore, they want to be a part of the AFN convention in October 8-10th and have their delegate in the board of directors. This was approved by the board on October 5th, 1971.

Second resolution says that board of directors seeks to make the student body more knowledgeable about State affairs, AFN, and other Native organizations. They encourage more student leadership and discourage high levels of students dropping out. They seek to preserve the Native cultural values of the students. They ask the AFN to assist the Mount Edgecumbe Federation of Native Students and support their goals.

Third resolution says that the high school has a new school board and the Native students feel that there should be a person from Mount Edgecumbe school board in the AFN School Board. [Applause.]

Cathy Itta continues by saying that they'd like to invite the AFN board of directors to hold their next meeting at Mount Edgecumbe. [Applause.]

At 6:01 the master of ceremonies thanks the students and says that many of AFN and of the people who are assembled will honor their request and take action. He thanks Mount Edgecumbe Federation of Native Students for participating.

At 6:23 Dana Notti introduces himself and tells that he is the junior delegate of Bethel High. The students would like to have a hand in interviewing, recommending, and hiring teachers. They believe that the students would benefit from having a panel consisting of students sitting in the state Board of Education in hiring teachers. According to his knowledge, teachers are hired without the knowledge of the students who are to be associating with the teachers. They are looking for AFN's support in this.

Dana says that they are 100% behind the land claims and that they at Bethel High have the spirit and the determination to help in whatever way they can in getting a just settlement. If a just settlement isn't possible today, he is sure that their sons and daughters will have it tomorrow. He thanks the audience. [Applause.]

8:12 The master of ceremonies thanks Mr. Notti and delegates from Bethel –area and hopes that other young people will join them the same way and show this kind of enthusiasm.

The radio announcer says that the presentation by convention Sergeant-in-Arms Frank Degnan of Unalakleet was unusual although he and other delegates spoke about Native Land Claims and the need for unity.

Frank starts his speech by saying that they need determination to reach fair and just settlement. People have been writing bills, they have 12 regions, and they have capital. Each region has their own problems and Frank says he wants to problematize the concept of fair and just settlement. He goes on saying that they made a decision in 1946, when the President of the United States made a proclamation that all Indians, Eskimos and Aleuts must shut up, but they are still around and have made a decision that is fair and just.

He asks if people are waiting for somebody to tell them that the bill is fair and just when they know it isn't. AFN was helping some Indians to get a lake. It took 50 years, but they succeeded.

11:45 Frank says that if they want a fair and just settlement they need to ask [opinions from] all regions because they all have their own problems. On his region, they started in 1946 when they figured that they want [unclear].

Frank tells a story: When he was told that God made people, he went and asked his mother where he comes from. She told him he comes from the sea. Then when Frank wondered what he is if he came from the sea, his mother told him he is a crab. [Laughter.] His mother continued that when Frank was in her womb he was a tough crab. He was born in July and his mother told him he was born in a dog barn and that he was so small that nobody thought he would live. That was when the first boat got in and blew a whistle, in 1901.

Frank continues that nowadays things are put on paper. Now people in Congress are putting it [the bill] on paper and telling them what they are going to get and what they are going to do with it. But they are waiting for Native people's answer and the Native people have to be united for the things that they want for future generations. This is an hour of decision and "you" [the audience] are going to make the decision.

15:00 He talks about population explosion. There are 3 billion people today and 20 years from "now" there will be 6 billion. "We want the title to our land [pounding his fist], we want the minerals on the land, on the sea, in the air. There's minerals in air!" [Joking tone. Laughter and applause from the audience.]

The MC thanks Frank and introduces Willie Hensley who says that he thinks they are all composing their speeches as they are given.

15:42 Willie says he doesn't know if they are trying to reach a consensus on what to do about the predicament they are in, in terms of the land settlement in Congress. There are some facts they are faced with and that is that there are two bills that are not acceptable at this point to the Native people. They have attacks from certain lobbying groups that would hinder what the Native people see as a decent settlement. Willie thinks that Mr. Rye [sp?] has outlined some real problems in both versions of the bill.

He doesn't know what the status of one of them is. When he left D.C. about 10 days ago, his understanding was that under the Senate version anybody who opted to have or keep an allotment of 6,000 [acres?] that were filed would relinquish his right to participate in the financial settlement. Willie thinks that that's a provision that's trying to prevent them from acquiring individual lands to be utilized. He says there's also a provision that allows a public right-of-way to any lands that are selected by Native groups and his understanding was that they were trying to obtain fee title lands. If he owns a land and fee titles it, it means he controls it and if one wants to go through that land with a pipeline, airport or a road, one needs to talk with him. There shouldn't be any difference between a fee title for a white man and a fee title for a Native group.

18:19 There are certain reservations that are not given the option for retaining their reservation. And if the reservations would retain more land than they should otherwise get under the land settlement, they should be able to retain them. A key element is their effort to reach regional organizations with powers to control their own destiny and to be able to control lands and funds.

Willie says they are in process of developing viable organizations and after having observed the state and federal agencies that attempt to "do things in a bush", the regions understand their problems and can handle them much better.

He says he hesitated to discuss the suit by Arctic Slope because he represents that region in the Senate and in Northwest Native Association and in the Bering Strait area. He believes it's been overplayed somewhat, but that he has yet to find substantial reason for pressing a legislative settlement. Their consensus has generally been that a suit has been used as a strategic tool to attempt to get a legislative solution of this issue.

They all know that litigation will take a long time. It won't result in any land title granted. They have a situation with the Tlingit-Haida who litigated for years and received a pittance for 20 million acres. They have judicially determined that they are entitled to 2.6 million acres they can't use without going through Congress. They have to do that in order to lease it or to utilize it for any purpose. In terms of

the rest of the region, it seems that their only real hope in terms of obtaining for the regions the land and capital to work with, is the legislative route.

They are not all blessed with the fact that \$9 million dollars is coming out of one region and it seems that it's worthy of some discussion. He says he understands the fears Native people have about losing their birthright, losing the land, but they are all in this battle together and whatever happens with judicial decisions affects all regions of the state and all the regional associations that have made a filing. For this reason, Willie says that their full efforts should be directed towards the most favorable bill that they can get.

Also, he has some thoughts about the conservationist effort: Just as Attorney Clark says, they are fighting for the same objectives. He has just returned from East and can never get back fast enough to enjoy Kotzebue and the air in Alaska. "It's a terrible disaster out there, and we all know that we want to prevent that from happening in Alaska." However, one of the things that Don Wright has tried to point out to the conservationist groups is that they must realize that Native people also have the need to survive, to hunt and fish without fear of losing that right. He doesn't think they should take a position that would be detrimental to the people who have a right to that land.

24:14 While it would seem that Alaska is the last great, open space, it's an excellent target for preserving. They have people with particular kinds of needs "in this state" and it would be great to retain it in that fashion, but Alaska can't survive as they are now. At least they have to have a decent standard of living.

Willie Hensley says he is not advocating unplanned use of their resources because he has seen most of the natural resources in the United States dissipated and granted away. In Alaska and in USA, nothing has been done for the serious dissipation of mineral resources of the country. However, it seems that they either have to sink or swim since the potential for erosion of their position is great if they don't get a settlement.

He doesn't think they should risk the possibility of a serious delay that carries on to presidential elections and the Congress organization. He also feels that the

pressures by the industrialists, financiers, labor unions and by the State of Alaska will be great for developing natural resources and trying to get that pipeline built. Their position is that nothing should take place on so called public lands until they get land claims settlement. Hensley says that nobody would like to see suit after suit filed, money spent on court costs. They [the Native people] are the least of the ones who can afford lengthy court battles. Oil companies and the state have the money to carry on litigations and the Native people don't. While it's expected that they would sometimes act unreasonably, they have moved since 1966 from nothing to the point where they are on the verge of obtaining a billion dollar settlement. 40-60 million acres of land is nothing short of fantastic when they didn't have any to begin with.

28:41 When he recalls back to about 1966 or 1967 when Secretary Udall was recommending about 50,000 acres of trust land, he was recommending that 1967 be the date of taking – that's \$7.5 million dollars – and that they let the Attorney General Boycott [sp? perhaps Boyko?] to go to court for the Natives and see what they can get. Boycott recommended 180 million and Hickel came up with \$500 million dollars and few million acres of land and finally, 40,000 acres and a billion dollars. All that has happened because Natives have taken a straightforward position. He thinks that the Chamber of Commerce –types that they have to deal with can't recognize that it's a poor time of the season to attempt to throttle a piece of legislation that has gotten input from every major source from administration to both houses of Congress, to the state, and to Native groups.

William Hensley thanks the audience. [Applause.]

[End of the recording.]