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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.

The tape begins by the announcer saying that they will now hear from the honorable congressman Nick [Nicholas Joseph] Begich. He says he'll agree with some of the speakers who have preceded him and disagree with some because he is on the firing line. When they work for the future, there is one congressman out of 435 who had to carry the message where it counts and where the votes are counted. When one votes at the U.S. Congress or at the State Senate and House, there is no maybe. Those who want to take the middle road and stand nowhere are the ones who take the walk in the crucial votes.

He has looked at the definition of "Native" to make sure that that definition is explained in the House bill. The one-fourth degree is recognized, but also the other factors are important. It's important to have a definition to include what a Native is. "In absence of proof of minimum blood content, any citizen of the U.S. who is regarded as Alaska Native by Native village or the Native group to which he claims to be a member, and his mother or father is, or if deceased, was, regarded as a Native by the village. That lets the decision be made closer to home. At the Aleutian chain, there was a big concern [over the definition of a Native] and they wanted to correct that.

Begich tells that someone said that they may not get the mineral rights in their area and that's not fair because another area will get the mineral rights. In the bill in the House it says that in order for all natives to be able to benefit equally from any minerals discovered in particular region, each corporation must share its mineral revenues with other corporations on basis of relative number of stock holders in each region.

Adding names of villages who have been left off to the rolls [?] is an excellent idea since they have already found 3 villages that have been left off, not by design but due to an incomplete list from the Federal Field Committee that didn't even know about some of the villages.

2:41 For 6 years that the Native Land Claims bill has been authored, it has never got out of the Subcommittee of the Interior. As of last year, it had one day of full executive sessions, but this year there were 5 full days of public hearings and their [AFN] delegation presented their testimony in an excellent form. In addition to that, they had 9 full meetings of the Subcommittee of the Interior to consider the bill and they were all well attended. Begich says that progress can only be made with compromise and that nobody can have it all their way. The committee has 39 members and Begich is one of those members.

The bill was dead on last week of July and the Anchorage Times reported properly when they said the bill was dead. To get the bill out, Begich had to do some basic concessions that were published on TV and radio. It was a 10-point agreement that he took around the members of the major factions to get it signed by congressmen and then he had to present it or there would not have been a meeting. The bill was dead and Nick had to do it because Mr. Sailor [possibly Saylor?] was in the hospital. Begich doubts they would have a bill if Mr. Sailor had been present because he had put in 67 amendments to kill the bill. After returning from the hospital, he's "come around."

5:12 The agreement was that these points were to be supported in the committees. The fate of the bill in the House, whether Nick himself or the AFN leadership honors the bill, has been made to the chairman. The facts of life remain that Alaska is in real financial trouble and they need to move oil through

that pipeline by 1976. The state has \$80-100 million dollars being used in the reserve over above the taxes that they are getting. Their 2% is also tied to the pipeline and they need that pipeline. America needs the pipeline because there is an energy shortage. They aren't going to let them rampage through the countryside, but are going to develop "this great land" together. They aren't going to lock it up though because the poorest people are the current generation living in this State at this time. Oil has made people in Texas interested in their bill.

6:55 The announcer's voice says that other State and Federal Officials to address the delegation included Governor William Egan, Speaker of the House, Jean Guess, Senator Mike Gravell and former Attorney General, Ramsay Clarke. In contrast to Senator Begich, lawyer William Paul, a Tlingit who now lives in Seattle, offered 3 amendments to the House version in a passionate plead to reconsider the bill.

[In the following speech "you" refers to the audience, and "they" to William Paul's affiliates, the "we" in his speech.] William Paul starts his speech by saying that it's his first appearance in front of AFN. He's been frightened to appear before the AFN before. He's approaching his second childhood and it takes him longer to muster up courage to talk to AFN. On the question of unanimous consent by the board of directors, he has to object because he doubts very much that they don't have approval of the bills that are now before them. They had a good bill in the very first instance and it's titled S2020. Since that time they have been pushed further back until they are in the point where every white statesman comes before them and says they have a good bill.

It reminds William of an Indian and a White man who went hunting in Oklahoma. They came back with one turkey and one turkey buzzard. The white man said to the Indian that he wants to be fair and so he will give the Indian a choice: The Indian will take the turkey buzzard and he will take the turkey, or he will take the turkey and Indian will take the turkey buzzard.

9:38 Listening to the speakers who have talked during the past week, he has noticed that nobody has talked about the quality of land which they claim [?]. Nobody said they claim 275 million acres but all they talked about was 40 million

acres. The very same people have produced bill after bill and every one of them have been unsatisfactory with this explanation they have heard today, that "this is the best bill we could have." [They say that] the Natives should have a bill that is unsatisfactory because these gentlemen say that that's their very best.

[Unclear], one of the previous presenters told them just a couple of days ago to take just a small amount of land, only to say later that he was wrong then, but that this bill is a good bill since it's twice as good as the previous one. In the bill they will find that people who live "on the outside" have no subsistence hunting or fishing. If the bill passes, they will have no aboriginal rights to subsistence. William Paul asks how people in Bethel area are going to live, or in Aleutians, or anywhere else if that is not corrected.

If they look at the bill, they will find their aboriginal rights extinguished. It means all their privileges on which they live would be gone forever. Looking at taxes, one can ask why the Native people shouldn't be free from taxes. Since they are making a bargain, they should make a good one. [Applause.]

12:21 William Paul says he has downgraded "the gentlemen here", but he is also expressing their feelings and they have love for you [the audience]. Nevertheless, William Paul thinks they are misguided since he is not on the board. Freedom from taxes is a property right. There are families in England who have been free from taxes for more than 1,000 years and it's not inconsistent with full citizenship.

William Paul has written them 3 proposed amendments in the absence of the vice chairman. One of the chairmen was one hour late, but William Paul says that he himself was there at 7:30 am and ready to work even though he is 76 years old.

He has an amendment that would allow hunting and fishing in all unoccupied areas. The proceeds could be used in barter, exchange, and gifts in manner of aboriginal mode of life. Another amendment deals with the definition of public lands or lands not adjudged, that are distinguished by the decision of the court of claims in the Tlingit and Haida case.

They [the Tlingit and Haida] have a decision in which they were told they lost their forestry lands. That decision should have been appealed to the Supreme Court, but the only argument that they agreed to [was to] take 7.5 million dollars for 700 million dollars' worth of timber. They would get their money sooner and help the Alaska Federation of Natives to carry on their legislation, but they didn't give AFN any money or help them with their legislation until recently. Through William Paul's motion, they [the AFN?] got \$250,000 dollars. That's the amount of confidence William has "to these gentlemen here." That should have been appealed because executive order doesn't extinguish Indian rights. From the beginning, his family has educated all the lawyers of Alaska and they know more about Aboriginal rights than the whole mess of lawyers in the State of Alaska. Indian rights are primary.

There is one more amendment: No provision of this act will constitute the precedent for renegotiating or legislating upon any settlement involving land claims or other matters with any Native organizations. United States and their representatives want to put an end to aboriginal rights. As far as William Paul is concerned, he wants aboriginal rights and he is only willing to give up what he has to, and is not proposing a bill for less than what he wants. If Congress wants to cut his wages down, let Congress do it but don't go before Congress with poor bill like they have now.

18:48 Their leaders are coming before them as if they were afraid, but they are weak. The Native people own the land. It is theirs and William Paul isn't going before Congress to tell them that he only wants 40 million acres. Instead he wants 275 million acres, not 80 or so. The land is more valuable than ever and William Paul urges people not to be afraid if the bill is killed.

He has been in the land fight longer than anybody else. The mistakes he has made are the mistakes Tlingit and Haida have made and what AFN have made. But they own the land. It's their land. United States bargained [?] with them and it is not in their interest to let the Alyeska pipeline through until the land claims are settled. [Applause.]

21:00 The announcer says that Mr. Paul received a standing ovation as did Councilman Begich, but his counsel was ignored. Instead, a motion was made by Charlie Edwardson Jr., who is the executive director of the Arctic Slope Native Association, to support the board of directors of AFN in their original position of accepting the Senate version of the bill. The motion passed with few nays. Immediately after the vote, Emil Notti moved to recess the convention and go into executive session. Chairman, AFN president Don Wright acted quickly without clarifying the motion or permitting discussion and the motion passed with scanty voice vote. Clearly, not all delegates had understood what was going on. However, Wright recessed the convention after which delegates gave an outburst because they felt that they had been denied to speak their mind and present the resolutions in an open session. Parliamentary proceeding was largely abandoned with the exception of Wright's several repetitions that the convention was in recess until November.

At 22:02 starts a sound clip where Wright cuts someone off and announces that they are in recess and will have no reconsideration. [There is another sound clip of same nature.]

The announcer [Karen McPherson] says that in ensuing verbal altercations Wright walked out of the convention and was succeeded by his vice president, Philip Gai [sp? perhaps Guy?]. Shortly after Gai started as a chairman, the delegates voted to reconsider Notti's motion to recess which had caused all the confusion.

A man in the sound clip asks if their secretary is ready to vote. Voices list who have voted and with how many votes: Tlingit and Haida, ANB 104 votes yes; Southeast 104 [unclear]; Bethel area 114; Bristol Bay 31 votes; Kenai 7 votes no; Copper River no [break in the recording]. When all the votes were counted, it was evident that the people were in favor of reconsidering the motion to recess. Notti withdrew his original motion. Tension was high. The convention was back in business and a motion was passed to exclude all press and non-Natives.

AFN convention parliamentarian and others were asked to comment on the proceedings: He is asked how he feels like things are going and he says he feels like they are on right track now and that there might have been a

misunderstanding of the original motion because it is evident that on the second vote there was a misunderstanding. Technically and legally Don Wright was right to interpret the vote as it was the first time around and that the convention was in recess at that point. It would be a mistake to recognize anybody if the session indeed was at recess. He says that normally hearing people after being in recess is against parliamentary proceedings, but the chairman didn't know what people had in mind so he decided to hear them out which opened up the floor to other persons who wanted to express themselves.

25:44 Roger McPherson asks somebody to comment that Wright left and the vice president took over, and asks if that's a standard proceeding. Convention parliamentarian says that it was his own choosing. He felt that he was right and that convention was in recess so he could leave.

Roger asks Mr. Willin to give him his opinion on the proceedings of the convention. He says that what it all means to him is that people have gained control over the convention. Then Roger asks Mr. [Unclear] to give his opinion on the proceedings. Mr. [Unclear] says that the people in the convention who have come from the outlying villages have expressed their strong desire to be informed and to be involved and to express what is on their hearts and minds concerning the land claims. This land claims is more than a bill. It will not only confirm the extent of the rights the Natives have, but it will forever extinguish some of them and was a misunderstanding about the motion to recess the meeting because of this there. The primary intent of the convention at this point will be to hear the people out and to have them express themselves on what their position is. The speaker is certain that their position will be the AFN position.

At 27:54 the announcer says that AFN president Don Wright regained control of the meeting once the convention went into executive session and he had firm support for his presidency. He comments on the mood of 6th annual Federation of Natives Convention as it recessed on early evening on October 10th: Don's voice says that the AFN re-stated its support for the terms of Senate Bill 835. They are going to work on the lobby effort in Washington to do the best they can in order

to make the content of the bill incorporated in legislation that is pending before the Senate.

Al Ketzler, president of the Tanana Chiefs, and Joe Upicksoun, the president of the Arctic Slope Native Association speak: Al says they may have differences of opinion, but they are much unified in their efforts to achieve a land claims bill that will do justice for all the native people. Roger McPherson thanks Mr. Ketzler and asks Mr. Upicksoun's opinion about ASNA [Arctic Slope Native Association] view to AFN. He says that they totally support Don Wright in his lobbying efforts in Washington D.C. One spends lots of time away from home, under pressure there and when one gets back, what one would like is to have some indication that somebody cares.

[Music is playing.] Announcer's voice says that this has been a special report on 6th annual convention of Alaska Federation of Natives on October 8-10th, 1971 at Traveler's Inn in Fairbanks, Alaska. The program was written and narrated by Karen McPherson and produced by Roger McPherson, using the facilities of KUAC FM. [Music continues.]

[End of the recording.]