

**Call number: 84-42 PT.2**

**Mike Stepovich speaks**

**Summary created by: Varpu Lotvonen**

**Date of summary's creation: 04/22/2014**

**Series:**

The recording begins with a man talking about intelligent Jewish boys in a Chinese restaurant. One said to another that he wonders if there are any Chinese Jews since there are all other kinds of Jews too. They asked for the waiter and asked him if they had Chinese Jews. The waiter said he will ask from the Assistant Manager. There was a ruckus in the Assistant Manager's room for a minute and the waiter came back saying they don't have any Chinese Jews, but they have orange juice, grapefruit juice, tomato juice. [Laughter.]

2:05 Bernard Chartres, a 12<sup>th</sup> Century philosopher, said people are like infants on shoulders of giants. They see to the horizon because of those who labored before them. Stepovich mentions that philosopher because he wants to emphasize the pioneers who came to Alaska and made it easier for new people to live there. Stepovich's father, Mike Senior's, hard work helped to prepare Alaska for [unclear]. He came to the Yukon in 1898 and then North to Fairbanks in 1903. He and Mike's mother worked hard for the family in order to make a home and a living. Mike Sr. was but one of the many pioneers, and many of the people sitting here could say the same thing of their mothers and fathers.

Stepovich says that his name helped him with getting into a public office and he congratulates everyone who made it on their own. His father was nicknamed Wise-Mike and he had a good sense of humor. He was at a gold mine and Mike Jr. worked for him before resuming school. He got paid \$7 dollars a day, and a room and board. That was a lot of money those days and Mike Sr. asked Mike Jr. to work for him the following summer as well, but he declined because he said he wanted to work for the NC-Company instead. They were going to pay Mike Jr. about \$2 dollars per day but he wanted to stay in Fairbanks and not be stuck at the creek. His father then advised him to take care of his feet since he doesn't have the head. [Laughter.] Stepovich says he never forgot that advice.

6:42 Stepovich reminds the audience about some of the things that happened in the world politics 25 years ago, like de Gaulle being elected the president of France, Fidel Castro becoming the premier of Cuba, and so on. 25 years ago in United States, Alaska became a state, they opened segregated schools, and Eisenhower was the president, and so on.

Stepovich was practicing law and in Seattle, and one night he had a dinner at the hotel restaurant. He thought that he would walk a few blocks before going to bed. He started walking down the street when he ran into Judge Gilbert who was a court judge in Fairbanks, Nome, and Ketchikan. He was an assistant district attorney in Fairbanks before he became a judge. He asked Stepovich what he was doing and Stepovich explained that he was just on a little walk. The judge explained that he was in Seattle on a

vacation with Lucille, his wife. An hour later, his wife comes in and explains that she went to see Dr. Zhivago [a movie], to which Gilbert asked what the hell is wrong with her. [Laughter.]

10:27 Just before statehood in Alaska, oil was found from Kenai Peninsula by Standard Oil company. President Eisenhower first asked for Alaska Statehood Legislation in his 1957 budget message. Secretary of the Interior, Fred A Seaton's department administered the territory [unclear] in 1957 and 1958. In speeches in Alaska, and in Washington D. C., Seaton advocated for Statehood and urged Alaska voters to approve the statehood in August 26<sup>th</sup> referendum.

Stepovich asks people to remember some sentiments for and against statehood. Alaska and Hawaii would get two Senators, Hawaii would get two representatives and Alaska would get one.

The opponents [argued that] the Senatorial allotment withdrew representation of more popular states. The proponents [said that] the constitution intentionally provided for equal senate representation for all states regardless of population.

Continuity. Opponents: Alaska is too distant to be integrated to the union. Proponents: Other states, such as California, were admitted to the union while separated from other states by long distance.

Population. Opponents: Alaskan population of 26,000 in an area that was 1/5<sup>th</sup> of the size of the whole USA and more than twice as large as Texas is too small to support statehood. Proponents: 23 states, like Nevada, had smaller populations when they joined the union.

Economy. Opponents: Alaska would be too weak to support statehood and would require vast amount of Federal Aid. Proponents: The Territory of Alaska has great economic potential that could be utilized fully under their administration.

Defense. Opponents: strategic situation of Alaska must be resolved before statehood. Proponents: Strategic area can be set aside for defense use.

Taxes. Opponents: statehood would increase taxes and thus discourage Alaska's economic development. Proponents: Alaska is capable of handling themselves and situations, such as taxes, as well as any other state.

14:49 In spite of all the arguments pro and con, the HR7999 passed by 210-160 roll call votes in May the 28<sup>th</sup>, 1958, and set the bill to Senate. On June 30<sup>th</sup> the Senate passed the bill by 64-20 roll call vote and gave the bill to the president Eisenhower who signed the bill into law on July 7<sup>th</sup> and Alaska became the 49<sup>th</sup> state of the Union. Eisenhower stated that he was pleased with admitting Alaska, but he was disturbed over a report that no action is contemplated by the current congress on pending legislation to admit Hawaii as a state. On the same day, the president notified Mike Stepovich, the Governor, who happens to be the speaker, as required in the bill, that Alaska Statehood had been signed into law. On January 3<sup>rd</sup> in 1959 President Eisenhower signed the official proclamation, making Alaska a state and designating the design of the 49 star flag. On July 4<sup>th</sup> it became Nation's official insignia for one year.

17:04 Stepovich says that he talked himself out of a job when he was a territorial governor working for statehood,. He knows it was worth it. Stepovich was also in the United States Navy and 12 years later, as the governor of the territory, he was asked to review the Navy at Kodiak. They gave him a 19-gun salute. [Laughter.] It only happens in America.

18:04 Being the Governor of Alaska is one of the easiest jobs Stepovich has ever had. He was more or less of a glorified messenger for the Secretary of the Interior. His responsibilities weren't as great as they are for the Governor of Alaska these days, although the fundamental responsibilities don't change. His pay as Governor was \$19,000 dollars per year. In those days it was pretty good money and he was able to afford a car and a chauffeur, cook and a maid. There were no utilities to pay, he lived in a house with just one room, no rent to pay – it was sweet. [Laughter.]

He went all over the country to give talks on why Alaska should be a state. Alaska had the help of many, such as [Ernest] Gruening, [William A.] Egan, [who?] River, [Edward Lewis] Bartlett, [Wally] Hickel, [John] Butrovich, Snodden [sp?], [Unclear]. The newspapers were very helpful, alongside with [Dwight D.] Eisenhower, [possibly Fred Andrew] Seaton, Senator [Henry M.] Jackson, and many more.

20:00 Speaking of the public figures of elected officials reminds Stepovich of the time when he was a governor. About two months after he got elected, he came to Fairbanks. He walked down the street and a guy greets him. Those days people called him Mike or Governor Mike, not Governor Stepovich. The man said that when Stepovich ran for the Territorial House of Representatives in 1952, he voted for him. He also voted for him when he ran to the Territorial Senate in 1954 and he's been a Stepovich supporter for a long time. Stepovich thanked, and the man told him that he would now like to ask a favor. Stepovich said sure, if it was within reason, and the man asked him to help him to become a United States citizen. [Laughter.]

Stepovich tells three shortest books in the world –joke. The third shortest book is the Alaska Social Register.

22:27 Stepovich continues that they shouldn't forget the contributions of the giants who built the State of Alaska. The giants are the pioneers of yesteryear and of today. They developed the timber and fishing and gold mining industries, pioneered building of the defense infrastructure of the WW 2 era, built the Alaska Highway, and pioneered air transportation by the bush pilots and the Pan-American Airways, and the building of the Alaska Pipeline. All of the Pioneers of Alaska have had the privilege to be a part of the living history of Alaska. Each has had a part in making history in some small ways, and preparing Alaska for the generations to come. They can say they were a part of making that history and others will only read about it.

24:58 Stepovich will quote from Robert Frost: "The woods are lonely, dark and deep but we have promises to keep and miles to go before we sleep." Stepovich thanks the audience. [Break in the recording.]

25:31 [Unclear talking.]

[End of the recording.]