

88-49-03 Potlatch Series

Host Jeff Kennedy

Panel Discussion: How agencies designed to serve Alaskan Natives do their jobs.

Music by Malvina Reynolds, Buffy St. Marie, and John Angaiak.

Panel discussion from the Bush Justice Conference held in Minto, Alaska, June 1973; Jim Wilson of Kenai, Bill Tegoseak of Barrow, Bill Barr of Shishmaref, Nick Gregory of the Bristol Bay area, and Jim Austin of Juneau. Jim Wilson discusses how agencies who visit rural Alaska communities will discuss *their* problems, such as budgetary issues, personnel issues, etc., rather than asking what issues the rural communities are dealing with. Wilson explains that the bureaucrats come, listen to the rural community needs, write a report, and then pass that along to their peers. Nothing, however, ever comes out of it. Wilson goes on to explain that even when the bureaucrats visit Minto, Alaska they do not spend any time there. He explains that they stay in nice hotels in Fairbanks and commute back and forth to Minto during the day. Wilson expresses the sentiment that trust between the Alaskan Natives and the bureaucrats can only be established once the bureaucrats are willing to stay in the rural villages in tents or with local families. Bill Tegoseak, the City Administrator of Barrow, agrees with Wilson, but expresses that he feels that many of the bureaucrats who have visited Barrow seem to genuinely listen. The issue is that those bureaucrats have to deal with their own administration, which does not appear to listen. Tegoseak does goes on to explain that the only time the rural communities see these people is when they're going into an election. He feels that they are only concerned with getting the vote, and then once they return to Juneau, they seem to forget about the problems of the rural communities of Alaska. Tegoseak feels that the people of rural Alaskan communities are too patient, and that the voice of the rural regents needs to make a point to be heard in Juneau, where the decisions are made. Bill Barr of Shishmaref, Village Council and Board Member of the Bering Straits region, expresses his agreement. He explains that the bureaucrats visit their region during elections to listen to their needs, but that once they are elected into office, they tell the villages that they don't have the funds to meet the rural communities demands. Barr explains that on the Seward Peninsula the rural villages are dealing with issues of erosion. Federal and State agencies have been contacted regarding these issues, both of which have responded with an explanation of a lack in funds. Barr hopes that during the next elections that the candidates will see just how desperate the situation of erosion is. Tegoseak jumps in again to bring up another issue with the bureaucrats in Juneau. He explains that since the passing of the Land Claims Bill, government agencies seem to think that the money given to the rural communities is for solving issues faced by rural communities; rather this money is supposed to serve as a payment for the land that has always been a part of the life of the people living within the rural areas. Tegoseak explains that this is a serious misconception on the part of many agencies.

Music by Buffy St. Marie.

Jim Austin of Juneau discusses how information from Juneau gets passed down to the Lower 48 by the State of Alaska, and then final decisions are made by an unknown 3<sup>rd</sup> party; often by someone who does not appear to have a clear idea of the issue at hand. Austin provides an example of a situation that the

Juneau area communities are dealing with; salmon fishing in the Juneau area was closed in order to protect the salmon populations, but decision did not include herring fishing for the Juneau area, which is leading to a depletion of the herring population that the Alaskan Natives rely on. Austin goes on to explain that another aspect to this issue that greatly bothers him is that Alaskan Natives way of life is referred to as “subsistence” by the legislators. The legislators feel that, unless they (Alaskan Natives) get paid a monthly salary for their work, than fishing and hunting is not their livelihood. However, Austin explains that to him the word “subsistence” means to barely survive; to Alaskan Natives, fishing and hunting *is* their livelihood. He finds the term “subsistence” to be very discriminatory. Austin explains that he feels they are being legislated into subsistence, and that they no longer hunt and fish in the traditional way that they use to.

Music by John Angaiak.

Nick Gregory, representing the 29 villages of Bristol Bay, explains that what bothers him is that when government officials visit, they will ask a white person what the needs or issues are, and he will provide his opinion on the matter; rather than speaking with the Alaskan Natives. He goes on to explain that the government officials only stay in the villages for a few hours, before going back to their agencies and pass laws that don't help the villages. The conversation on this issue evolves into discussion about how when the legislators visit the rural communities, they don't listen to the problems; rather they begin to tell the Natives what their (the legislators') problems are. Issues of Alaska Native land purchases are briefly discussed.

Music by Malvina Reynolds.

Bill Tegoseak discusses oil impact legislation, and dealings with the oil companies have generated a considerable amount of revenue for the State. He explains that the dealings with the oil companies involve land that the Native peoples have lived on since time in memorial. Tegoseak explains that what really bothers him is that the Alaskan Natives receive very little of these royalties from the oil companies; whereas in other countries, the oil companies pay a great deal of royalties to access the oil for the U.S. While non-U.S. citizens from other countries have become very wealthy, the Native Alaskans have no control over the decisions that are made in regards to Alaska's oil. Jim Austin adds that the Oil Impact Legislation does not protect the native populations which are impacted by the oil companies, but rather it protects the people who work for the oil companies. Jim Wilson jumps in and explains that the legislative representatives of the bush communities have so much going against them that they are fighting a losing battle. Wilson explains that when the Bush Caucus was established a few years ago, it helped this situation a little, though it is still not adequate. The problem can only be solved if the urbanite can understand the rural citizen; then perhaps the people can vote for good legislation. Another panel member explains that the urbanite can only understand the money economy that they come from; he explains that the person living in Anchorage has no natural resources that directly impact their lives; they purchase their food, rather than hunt for it, so they can't really understand the impact the oil companies have on their way of life.