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Interview with Brenda Itta

Jeff Kennedy, moderator

Series: Potlatch series

1977

Brenda Itta said it was an honor to represent the people in the Barrow and Kotzebue areas. She represented about fourteen villages. She chose not to run again because she believed that her life has been planned for her already and she felt it was time for her to resign and go into something else. She said she was replaced by Leo Schaeffer from Kotzebue. She hears good things about him. Jeff Kennedy asked her about the political process and asked her if it works. Itta said she was never interested in politics. It all started when she worked for Senator Gruening. Her main reason for being in government to see if there were ways she could help the people in her area. She said there are state and federal government programs that are helpful to the way of life up north. She said the process has been helpful. There is a lot of bureaucracy and duplication. She said you have to be very patient when you are involved in politics. Jeff Kennedy asked her how you design a program to help those that need the help. Itta said it all starts in the home. She said the government is criticized for not helping the people the way they should. As a legislator she would go to local meetings and establish priorities. She brought these priorities into the state legislature. That is how she was able to see state government be of help in a meaningful way to the people. Jeff Kennedy made comments about welfare and how it is interpreted by conservatives and liberals. He wonders if there is a way to evaluate government services. Itta said she served on the Finance Committee. They looked at reevaluating the system that they had for many years. They were disturbed that people in various departments were not caring about the money they were handing out and if this robs the person of their integrity. She said the people that the government serves should be aware of these problems and contribute somehow to reprioritize some of the programs. Welfare's intent is very good. Every tribe had some way of taking care of those in need. Their government abides under the Constitution and we have gotten away from that. We need to return to some of the basics under which this country was formed. Jeff Kennedy asked if she is able to combine the ideals of the U.S. Constitution with her background. Itta said it has been hard for her to say that America exercises justice for minorities. She said our government has a long way to go for justice for all. She said our rights are good. She can say she is an American without bitterness. She has forgiven America for the wrongs that they have done to her and the people she has served. For example education. The state was very neglectful in serving her citizens, the Eskimos, Indians and Aleuts with high school. All these years the majority of them had to leave their villages to obtain a high school education. It broke up the family unit. She was bitter about this for some time. The BIA has made steps to solve that problem by passing bonds to construct high schools. The government is heading in a good direction to provide education. The problem now is the curriculum. There has been some good steps to better some of the wrongs that the government has done.

Unidentified song

Jeff Kennedy asked how she saw missionaries who brought Christianity up to Barrow. Brenda Itta said she has studied the word of God and has heard things from the missionaries. She said the word of God is love. She thought this should be the main goal of churches. She talked about finding meaning through God. She talked about the reactions of the missionaries in her hometown to her beliefs. She was disappointed by their reaction. She said there are obstacles to overcome to enjoy the love of God.

Jesus Christ Superstar

Brenda Itta talked about racism in religion and learning to feel sorry for those that discriminated against her. She said they are missing the beauty of communication.