

88-49-139

John Borbridge, president of Sealaska

Dennis Harris, interviewer

Jeff Kennedy, moderator

Series: Potlatch series

Song by Johnny Cash

Jeff Kennedy said shortly after the recent elections at Sealaska John Borbridge discussed with Dennis Harris the problems trying to balance social needs for shareholders with the needs to make the corporation profitable. John Borbridge said any corporation when it is functioning consistent with the law and is seeking to be fair and is seeking to explain matters to shareholders is occasionally going to encounter circumstances where it can improve an explanation or its method of presentation. They are constantly for that. When stockholders suggest those things they take it to heart. This year they had an entirely different ballot form and that resulted from stockholder's suggestions. Anyone who pretends that a corporation is a democratic association has an entirely gross misconception of what a corporation is. A corporation has to be concerned with continuity of leadership and effort. It has to ensure that the rights of all of its stockholders are protected. This includes the rights of those that cannot be present. They are occasionally required to use certain hesitation that may not be clearly understood. In their annual report they took several pages to explain and define certain terminology. They had a consolidated report and tried to assist the stockholders in understanding this. He said continuous education is going to be one of the key functions of this corporation with respect to stockholders for some years to come.

Song by Doc and Merle Watson

Jeff Kennedy said that last week Frank Peratrovich expressed concern that Native people did not understand the complicated process for voting for leadership in a profit making corporation. John Borbridge believes that Natives can deal with this complicated process. He said his people are adaptable and can adjust to and learn about new institutions. They are not only going to learn about corporations, but they are also going to leave their own imprint on corporations. He thinks they are going to be the kind of imprint that tends to the sensitivity of human needs, community relationship and purpose. The Alaska corporations will have more of a sense of corporate mission which means to him a combination of the sensitivity to the bottom line need for success combined with a continuing sense of corporate conscience and corporate community purpose. He said he was very pleased with the meetings. He felt stockholders were much more understanding of the process. The more they understand the less fearful and alarmed they are. It tended to reduce the artificial confrontation of the first year.

Song by Mossy Davidson

Jeff Kennedy said John Borbridge looks ahead. John Borbridge said they see the direction of the corporation as an increased focus on the continued desire to accelerate the conveyance of land titles to Sealaska and the protection of their interests during the consideration of the d2 legislation. They have been pleased with the conveyance of land titles. He served for two years on the American Indian Policy Review Commission. He talked about the hearings in Washington D.C. to find the means of acceleration the process of the conveyance of land title to the Native corporations. Their Commission had recommended acceleration of the process. With the purchase of the Alaska Brick Company in Anchorage Sealaska has managed to position itself in the largest market in the state. As a consequence they are involved in the sale of and manufacture of building products, the manufacture and sale of ready mix, and the mining of sand and gravel. They are also the owners of three adjacent lots near the heart of downtown Anchorage itself. It gives them some future development possibilities. They are involved in an ocean-going tug and barge operation. They have an import relationship with Japan which has resulted in the importation of a shipload of building on an annual basis. They anticipate the continuation of their profit position and an aggressive positioning in their marketing in the area which has resulted in an increasing number of customers. They are looking at a hope for success with respect to Alaska Petrofining Corporation and other firms Sealaska has joined with to make a bid for the state's share of royalty oil. They propose in competition with other competitors to build a 250,000 gallon a day refinery.

Song by Helen Redding

Jeff Kennedy said one of the questions facing Native corporation leaders is the whether the role of the corporations is should include getting jobs for the shareholders. John Borbridge said that has been a concern of some of the groups that they are trying to address. He thinks the real concern of stockholders is whether the investments they make will be a successful one. They do not want to replace the employees of a company they acquire. When they acquire a company they have to ensure that a profitable position is maintained and they further expand the market and become even more profitable. It is important that they work in an appropriate fashion so they don't affect the moral and the position of the company in terms of its success. You look for a means of developing a kind of program which will make it possible for shareholders to be worked in, but worked in a carefully so they don't have any moral problems. They hope for road building and harvesting of timber by 1979. They are working on land conveyance. They are working on planning for the kinds of positions they will be needing and the kinds of qualifications they will be needing. They are looking at young people who are currently in college or have recently emerged with certain qualifications. They are looking at stockholders who have acquired a certain work experience that could be applicable in the timber industry and other industries. They recognize that they are existing within a total community and they will not proceed in a discriminatory fashion and not honor certain unions that they are committed to work with. They hope to have as many qualified stockholders ready and prepared to move whenever they are ready to move. He thinks the view of the business community is a mixed bag. He hopes the business community will realize that they are a different corporation. He hopes Sealaska will be assessed only on their track record.