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William "Spud" Williams, president of Tanana Chiefs Conference

Jeff Kennedy, moderator

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Series: Potlatch series

Song by Art Garfunkel

Jeff Kennedy said William Williams was born in Seattle of Alaska Native parents. When he was two years old he moved to Nenana. He is known as Spud. On March 15 he was named president of the Tanana Chiefs Conference.

Spud Williams began as an executive board member of the Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) and was there for about eight years. He worked for the Fairbanks Native Association on the pipeline employment program. When TCC started contracting he was asked to come over as part of the Native Services staff. He worked in the housing program. He moved over to the director position in the Native Services. After six months he was elected president.

Song by Tanana Grass.

Jeff Kennedy said Spud Williams explains how he took over as president of TCC from Al Ketzler. Williams said Ketzler was a full-time paid president of TCC. Ketzler was offered a job from CEDC as director of Community Enterprise Development Corporation. It is a statewide organization that funds and manages minority businesses in rural areas of Alaska. When he did that in essence the management system became a business like system of managing the Tanana Chiefs organization and he was the chairman of the board. Williams said in looking at a good business practice in an organization this size it makes sense to set up a management system of administering programs. It takes the politics out of management. The system they have of full-time president is the ongoing system that TCC had in the past. The full board didn't want to act on a by-lay change that would allow the president to be the chairman of the board. Williams said he decided to run for the office of president of TCC to fill the slot as manager. In Indian governments and politics they want a strong head to run their corporation. They want to have an advocacy form of corporation.

Song by Joan Baez

Spud Williams said the Tanana Chiefs Conference is the traditional form of area wide government of the Indian people of the Interior. It surfaced during major crisis. They used to

have a meeting place in Tanana and it was called the Tanana Chiefs Conference. The leaders from all of the villages would meet once a year or during a crisis such as when the Alaska Railroad was coming into the region. During the land claims you saw the organization of a more formal organization formed that could deal with the issues of land claims. Since the land claims it has become a very formalized as a corporate structure to deal with issues that affect the villages and the Native people in their region. No one really knows how old the organization really is. It is hundreds of years old.

Jeff Kennedy said Williams talked about how the TCC has taken over services which used to be handled by the government.

Williams said through dissatisfaction of the services that were being received by the village people they started looking at providing those services themselves with funds available under present programs. They started requesting the right to contract these services about ten years ago. They started the process of going after contracts through buying Indian agreements. Under government regulations any services given to Indian people are contractible by Indian agreement. This excludes trust responsibility like real estate, forestry, credit and a few services by federal regulations can't be contracted. Social services, employment and housing that the BIA were administering for the people [can be contracted]. They went after the contracts and started contracting directly with the federal government and started delivering their own services to their own people. He hopes they are doing a lot better job reaching the people. Health was one of the first functions they took over. They have a complete health service delivery system now that is set in place. They have people in the field that are called health aides. They deliver the basic health services. Almost all of the villages have this service. They have mental health functions, accident prevention functions, and anything that deals with health. They also have contracts that the BIA used to administer. They contract the village government function. They contract the leg work of the credit and realty programs. They contract some of the agriculture extension programs. They have expanded the old tribal ops office into a village government assistance program. They also go out and do a lot of field work. They have reorganized the BIA contracts into four basic areas: natural resources, village government services, social services and in-house supportive services. Their involvement in housing is a funding source and a technical assistance source. They are only limited by funding. They average half a million dollars in construction a year. Units are \$10-12, 000. This is strictly a material grant for housing and housing repair and does not include labor. This is not a part of the HUD program which is controlled by a separate. They are the Tanana Housing Authority. The HIP program is a grant, self-help program. They supply the funds for buying material, support, etc. The actual construction of the houses is taken upon by the villages themselves through self-help programs and the prices are fairly low through HIP. Once the house is built the villages will determine occupancy. They have set priorities.

Jeff Kennedy said TCC arranges for the building of 35 houses a year and they make the decision about where the houses will be built. Spud Williams said it is based on need and performance. If they give a village a HIP grant one year and they haven't completed their program then they are not eligible for any other HIP grants until that program is completed. There are three to four houses per village based on need and performance. When it is a self-help program there is only so much labor that can be expended in this kind of program. Many houses in one village would

impact a village economically. The actual number of houses is based on the available volunteer labor force. It does limit how many houses can be built in a year.

Spud Williams said their agricultural program is a fairly small program. They are basically a technical assistance and funding source for small community garden projects. They don't get involved in extensive projects. They have advocated for some of the sub-regions where they are looking into large agricultural projects with village corporations lands. They do give some assistance to village corporations, but they are not in the corporation gain because the village corporations are profit corporations and they are a non-profit service driven corporation. It doesn't meet their contract guidelines. They have funding to buy seed, fertilizers, etc. and hopefully in the long range outlook they will develop people that will develop an interest in agriculture. He talked about the subsistence lifestyle dying out. They realize that the game is going to diminish with the encroachment of an increasing population. They are trying to hold the line on the subsistence style of living. They realize that it can't last forever. They hope through the agricultural program people will be able to supplement their subsistence lifestyle with gardening. He said they have had quite a history of gardening. The missionaries tried to make the Indians farmers. The missions were self-sufficient based on agriculture, hunting and fishing. A large part of their food was from agricultural projects. There is some background in farming already out there in the villages.