

88-49-38

Brenda Itta,

Moe Wassillie, moderator

Series: Potlatch series

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Moe Wassillie said he spent time in Barrow on June 21st for the Nalukataq Festival. He will be playing interviews he recorded there as well as at the Nuchalawoyya festival in Tanana.

Brenda Itta, State Representative, said she would like to clarify the fact that as a woman she cherishes herself being a woman. She cherishes the fact that Eskimo people have always had different roles that they live. Traditionally the woman has existed to be a helpmate to the man. The man is the head of the family and the provider. Their family structure has been orderly where the children had a role to live and they received a lot of love and kindness. Children had a lot of respect for their parents. In that role if she had the chance she would respect herself as a woman. She is involved in a different world but she is not out of touch with the woman who she represents. It is important to be in touch with these women and to communicate. As a state representative she didn't get there because of ambitions for herself. She has been involved the last ten years with the people in her area and the Kotzebue area. She has traveled in other parts of the United States and she has been fortunate to be able to compare her way of life with the ways of others in the other parts of the United States and other parts of the world. She said her people although judged to be poor materially are rich inside spiritually. This is a completely different way of evaluating a society. This is what makes their society different from the rest of the United States. She said her people hold these values highly instead of material things. She believes that people in villages are a lot freer to be able to love, share, be kind and to rebuke those that aren't exercising these type of things. Right now there is a tremendous force breaking these precious things down. She said they used to say hi to everyone and now some of the young people do not look at you and say hi. She said they are losing those spiritual values. She doesn't condemn them because it is not their fault. They have been sent away from home in their teens and the family structure has been broken down. They have learned different things in contrast to their own people.

Song by John Angaiak

Brenda Itta said she didn't come to the State House of Representatives to glorify herself. She wants to help her people. She can help the economic and material status of her people. She believes a lot of their problems are in the outside. Her main concern in the legislature as a member of the finance committee is to make sure state funds are being spent right and that programs are funded in the rural areas such as her area in the area of education, health and social services. She is also concerned about airport funds since that is their main mode of transportation. In the cities they are appropriated for different ways of transportation. Next year she plans to be more aggressive to get funds for her area. Throughout her tenure as a state representative her main interest has been federal or state programs. They have not

been responsible in solving problems. A leader has to possess more talents than just bringing bacon home. They need to show the ability to love and cherish and show something to other people other than just money. She said money is not the answer to everything. A leader should possess qualities that eternal in nature. A person can be admired if he or she can bring respect from his or her followers. She talked about having that personal touch that the world has lost.

Moe Wassillie asked Mrs. Itta how she defines leadership. Brenda Itta said our country needs leaders that are strong, stable and able to save a human life. She doesn't believe a leader is a leader when he is existing there just for his own personal gain, selfish reasons or to make his name known. She believes that a leader should be unselfish, giving, sharing and have the ability to love. Usually a leader is put out into a world that is pretty cruel, fast, compromising and a world that hasn't been kind to the majority. A leader can survive by making sure that they receive strength, love, joy, and peace and have all of those qualities within themselves or he isn't a help. She believes that we are a nation that needs to be redefined. She thinks leaders need to step back and reexamine themselves. If they are OK then they are in a position to help other people. She said if a leader uses their talents for self-gain then they are not contributing in a positive way to society. In this day and age we are seeing a lot of bad things. She said it is important to believe that good always overcomes those things that are bad. This concept works when it is practiced. It is necessary to look into your own self to see if you have the strength that is needed. She said all of the needs she has come from God.

Moe Wassillie asked her how she feels after her year in the state government. Brenda Itta said she learned that the money that was gained from the lease at Prudhoe Bay has all been used. They weren't spent the way that they should have been spent. The leadership has ruined the reputation of government. It is hard to give up the bureaucracy in the state. She has always viewed the government as serving the people but she now sees that it isn't helping. She spends a lot of time investigating the validity of state programs and seeing how effective they are. They spend time determining if programs are worth having again. Many times they find that state agencies don't know what is going on in their own agencies. Many time they had to turn people back to their state agencies to find out what is going on. It is a bad situation when the state no longer has control with the way funds are being spent. It was a frustrating experience for her. She said at least they were making people aware that people on the finance committee were concerned about spending the way it has been going on the past few years. She would like to be in a position to offer more positive solutions. They spent a lot of time just learning how state funds are being spent. They hope to come out with some sound policies that relate to human problems in the state. They want to establish state wide priorities and returning government to the people. She senses that people have been unhappy with government.

Moe Wassillie asked her what other things she learned dealing with the high powered legislator. Itta said most of them were her friends and she has known them for years. She kept her hands off of the wheeling and dealing. She observed the attitudes and the actions of the leadership. She doesn't identify herself with some of the wheeling, dealing and compromising. She thinks the political system itself is a monster. She doesn't believe the political system is an answer to her people's problems. It is just part of it. There are ways that she can contribute on behalf of her people in district 21 through the state legislature. She doesn't identify herself as a big time politician.

Moe Wassillie asks her about her plans now that the legislature is over. Brenda Itta said she plans to be in Barrow and in the villages during the summer and fall. She will be spending time talking to individuals and visiting different homes. She wants her time to be freer to spend time with people in their homes where most of the problems are. This fall if all goes well she would like to attend Bible school.

Moe Wassillie asked her about the role of religion in the legislative process. Brenda Itta said she doesn't identify herself with religion because that is a word that ties you down. She said what she has found something completely the opposite as religion. She talked about individuals evaluating themselves.

Moe Wassillie what lies in the future for the Native people? Itta said that is a hard question. When she looks at it right now she is burdened by it. She said although there are many organizations to serve her people they aren't really serving the people. The different organizations are fighting instead of working together for the good. She doesn't see a good future for the people. Many things have happened in the past five years. She said now she knows that things from Western society are things that haven't succeeded in America and they are just now inheriting them. She believes that the answer lies within each individual.