

88-49-54

Morris Thompson, Ted Stevens, Melvin Charlie

Jeff Kennedy, moderator

Series: Potlatch series

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Song by Gordon Lightfoot

Morris Thompson said someone once said all the business of life is to find out what we don't know and what we do. He said he is an Athabaskan Indian who was born and raised along the Yukon River and also the Commissioner of the Bureau Indian Affairs. He said important things are happening in the Indian community which one ought to know about. There are significant developments in Indian Education Programs, what Indians are doing to improve reservation economies and how tribal governments work. He said he will explore our countries policy of promoting Indian self-determination, the Indian's unique relationship with the United States' government and some of the problems Indian communities are trying to cope with and other matters he think will be interesting and useful. He will be talking about the Bureau of Indian Affairs. He talked about different views of the BIA. He said the BIA has been a lot of different things. It was first created in 1824 as part of the War Department. Its purpose was to regulate trade between Indians and non-Indians and to minimize possible conflicts between the two groups. After the BIA became part of the Department of the Interior in 1849 it has generally reflected the thinking and attitudes of Congress and the people of the United States. When the U.S. wanted a custodian for Indians on reservations the BIA served that purpose. Today we are past that sort of thing. The people of the United States recognize that our Indian citizens do not want custodians they want and need opportunities. As Commissioner of Indian Affairs it is his responsibility to work with Indian communities, to help them pursue their own goals and manage their own affairs and to help them in developing the human and natural resources to do this successfully. The BIA is changing from a non-Indian service organization providing education, road maintenance and other programs on reservations to a predominantly Indian agency offering technical assistance to Indian tribes so that they can administer their own programs. Since he has been commissioner in the past two years more than fifty top leadership positions in the BIA have been filled by Indian people chosen after extensive consultation with the communities they would serve. There are now Indian leaders in the BIA working with Indian tribal leaders to solve Indian problems. In recent years Indian tribes have assumed responsibility under contracts with the BIA for the operation of many of the reservation programs and the passage of the Indian Self-Determination Act earlier this year is expected to further this trend. Thompson said he doesn't expect long term problems to suddenly disappear. He does think this involvement is an element in making progress. The United States through the BIA maintains a unique relationship with 480 Indian tribes and Alaska village groups. It is trustee for more than 50 million acres of their land and responsible with the tribes for the prudent development and protection of these valuable resources. It is a relationship built through 220 years of history, numerous treaties, acts of congress and executive orders. He said the BIA is still an imperfect human organization and there is still a big job to be done in Indian

country but he thinks the U.S., the BIA and the Indian people are moving in the right direction. They are working together to get the job done.

Music performed by John Angaiak

Jeff Kennedy said Morris Thompson recently appeared before the Senate Interior Appropriations Committee. Senator Ted Stevens talks about the questions he asked Morris Thompson. Ted Stevens said he had questions whether the regulations in the Indian Financing Act which limits funds to village corporations established under the Alaska Native Land Claims Settlement Act would and should preclude urban Natives in Alaska from the benefits from the BIA programs. Stevens said Thompson said BIA money could be used by urban groups if the funded projects would have a positive impact on the village areas. Stevens said Thompson is doing a good job and is he is now reviewing the area of this whole subject by task force which will be formed by BIA and the state of Alaska in terms of determining what schools will be transferred to the state operated school system. He said there are problems to be worked out at this time. He believes that BIA must modernize their schools before they are transferred to the state operated school system. He thinks that the village programs must be extended into the urban area to be meaningful for those people who are temporarily in the urban areas. He is pleased with the cooperation from Commissioner Thompson. Jeff Kennedy said Senator Stevens recently put a resolution on the floor of the Senate to get one and a half million dollars which was set aside for the Bethel hospital to be used for the purpose for which the money was set aside. Senator Ted Stevens said the full Senate has unanimously approved the resolution that he brought to the floor to disapprove the postponing of the funds to start the hospital. He said this money is within the budget of the Senate.

Music Los Indios Tapajaros

Melvin Charlie, former president of the Tanana Chiefs Conference, said he has been asked to run again and has thought about it. The reasons he will not be running for the presidency again are his beliefs that there are capable leaders that should start getting involved in the operations of the TCC. He feels there are talented people throughout the regions. He wants to do something else in terms of working for his people. He had a great deal of satisfaction signing the BIA contract. They are now administering the BIA agency. They have worked on the project for five years. They are now operating services that the BIA used to operate. He thought they are doing a better job. He talked about the BIA not being able to deal with the Indian Self-Determination Act. He thinks the BIA should change its way to meet the needs of the people. The Act can work being that they have to put their heart and souls in it. They need to understand the rules and regulations. They need to provide a united front in the Tanana Chiefs Conference as well as statewide. They need to show the BIA that they are a unified people to accomplish and work with the Self-Determination Act. The main responsibility of the president of TCC is that of working with the 43 villages in their region and keeping them informed of all activities of the federal, state and local governments. They also need to assure that the central office is well run and administered and they have capable people working in the administration. They need to meet all the needs be it health, education, labor, etc. The president should be involved in all aspects of negotiation and giving technical assistance in any manner that the villages desire. He said it has been a pleasure

working for his people for the past two years. He appreciates the backing of the people. He will continue to work with his people and to support the new president.

Song by John Hartford