

88-49-58

Excerpts from the AFN Youth Conference, Ted Mahla, Elaine Ramos

Moses Wassillie, moderator

Series: Potlatch series

1976

Mo Wassillie said Ted Mahla is the first male Eskimo doctor in Alaska. He spoke at the Alaska Federation of Natives Youth Conference. He spoke about Native leadership, education, and the future. Ted Mahla said he thought their future will come out of the room and learn from examples around them. He talked about a great man in his culture. He found himself in the city and found many problems. He started to drink. He said you have to consider the Native in the city. In Kotzebue they have fewer problems than in Anchorage or Fairbanks. They have no roads in Kotzebue. There are other influences into the community such as television. He said education helps you see through everything. He said one of the problems is a lot of people would like them to fail. There are a lot of fantastic leaders right now. He said he was born at the right time and went to the right school He was surprised to be the first Eskimo doctor. He said success depends on them. The elderly rely on them, too. He described them as the hunters of today. They need to get the education and return and support their people. The new era is survival on a mental level.

Song by Glenn Campbell

Elaine Ramos vice president for Rural Education Affairs at the University of Alaska talked about new directions in education and fight for equality in education. Elaine Ramos talked about better education for their children. She said Natives in the past were up against many odds but didn't give up. They paved the way. She said if it wasn't for the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act they would not have respect. They are now the largest commodity in Alaska. They are worth millions of dollars to the state and the nation. She questions if they will be able to live up to that and be able to survive in those kind of conditions. People in the past had odds against them but they have a bigger one. She talked about new directions in education in 1930, but didn't come into focus until 1968 when the Mt. Edgecumbe School was in question. Many leaders graduated from Mt. Edgecumbe. They had to decide to expand Mt. Edgecumbe or bring education to local areas. Where do you give the best education? Do you remove kids from their homes to send them off to education or is it better to bring education to them? He questions if people in Fairbanks would let their children travel thousands of miles away to continue their education. There are now 21 school districts so they can bring education closer to home. She talked about leadership roles in the villages. She said youth have the dilemma of deciding to stay at home or going elsewhere to continue their education. They strip the life of the community when the young leave. The village is a dead village. The young people are separated from their roots. From your roots comes your identity and wisdom. She said everyone has to sacrifice something. She sacrificed her family and village, but she felt survival was through unity and serving the whole state. She spent eighteen years in the public health service and started as a registered nurse. She talked about her experiences in the

service. She said you are responsible for the future. Mistakes have been made. She has dedicated her life to do her best so that responsibility upon them won't be so heavy.

Song by Lee Hazelwood

Former president Roger Lang spoke about the implementation of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. Roger Lang said the problem said is not with Native organization, but someone forgot to tell the U.S. government that they had to survey 43 million acres of land. The Bureau of Indian Affairs was not told that the Act stops their authority over them. The Alaska State government must be told that they don't have any land so they can't tax prospective land or resources. With the government they are in trouble. They are seen as vulnerable and susceptible to taxes. At one time American Indians owned land by acts of Congress. That land keeps getting smaller and smaller. American Indians and Alaska Natives have been successful in getting land. The hard part is keeping it. He said this isn't a corporation act or finance act. This is a land claims act. It is land that surrounds your villages. They said to the federal and state government redefine our lands so title is clear. That is what the claims act is. Until they get the lands it is an exercise in futility. They are not of a nature that makes them corporate entities. He knows rules about being a corporate board of director, but that is not what he is. Until they get the land title he doesn't know what they are going to do. He said eventually they will own almost every deep water harbor, 90 percent of the Kuskokwim, 60 percent of the Yukon, and almost all the Noatak and Kobuk Rivers. They will control access and egress to a lot of things that happen in this state. The aim of the AFN is to deed to the Natives of Alaska land free from encumbrances such as easements and pipeline corridors. He said they are trying to conserve good lands they can control themselves. He said other things are happening because Natives are organized. They have a little bit of money and muscle. They are doing things themselves in 1976. They have become sophisticated enough to suggest to the state and federal government that they can make changes. They have become good enough that they can write legislation and laws. They used to ask people to do it for them. They used to write letters and pass resolutions. They used to meet in conventions like this and ask people to do things for them. Now they can write laws and that is a long way to come. In 1966 he got a call from Emil Notti. Lang was happy in Sitka. Emil Notti told him there were things to do and things happening. His message in 1976 is there are things to do and things are happening. The pride in being Alaska Native is probably the best thing that has happened in implementing the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. It is a good world for the Alaska Native in 1976.

Mo Wassillie introduced Claude Demientieff's talk. Claude Demientieff said a long time ago when the north bank of the river flowed west and the south bank flowed east people didn't have to paddle upstream. They always went with the current. The animals could talk and man could talk with animals. One of the first chiefs was named Tchalgeesak. He was going through his country and woods and he saw this new person, a strange person come walking through the woods. The person didn't seem to have anything in mind. Tchalgeesak watched this visitor to his land. As this man walked down the animal path two robins flew over him. They started to circle above his head. The robins said hello visitor do you want to play a game. The visitor said I don't know what kind of game. So the robins said just watch. The robins took their eyes out and flew them up in the air and caught them and put them back into their heads. The man tried the same thing. They were having fun doing this game. One time the

visitor threw his eyes up in the air and the robins grabbed the eyes. They flew away. The man didn't know what to do. He was lost and he couldn't see. He started to feel the path. He went for a long ways crawling. He stopped and rested against a tree. As he was resting something poked in the eyes. He grabbed an arm and it was a fox. So the man said now you are going to be his eyes. The fox said he would help him. The man didn't trust the fox. He made a collar out of some roots and made a leash for the collar. He tied that to the fox and they walked for several more days. The fox escaped and started running around the person and laughing. The man tried to run after the fox. While the man was running he got lost. He was running through the woods and didn't know where he was. He bumped into a tree. He stopped at the base of the tree and picked up some pitch and rolled it into balls. He breathed into them and put them in. He could see. They say that is why the white man has blue eyes. It tells us that there is something that there is something lost in that path. Economic and social interdependencies caused that person to be lost. Human resources is the process of raising the potential of each and every one of us to help those who are lost. In that teaching we can develop our potential and because of developing that potential we develop our human resource and that is us.