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An address by the Mescalero Apaches President, Wendell Chino

Jeff Kennedy, moderator

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Music from St. Lawrence Island

Melvin Charlie introduced the guest speaker, Wendell Chino, at the annual Tanana Chiefs Conference in March of this year. Wendell Chino is the president of the Mescalero Apaches. He has been an advocate and strong leader of Indian affairs for the past two decades. Melvin Charlie talked about Wendell Chino's tribe's commercial success.

Wendell Chino said he lives in a reservation thirty miles away from the county seat. He said he would like to talk to them about the Native Alaskan co-operations and new initiatives. He said across the country there is a great deal of concern from the American public about the eventual outcome of the Alaska Native corporations. Many people are looking at whether the Natives of Alaska are going to succeed or fail. In the meantime there are many varied ideas have been advanced to them. This is a tremendous responsibility and challenge. He wants to look back over two hundred years of this country. Down through the years they have seen policy changes regarding the indigenous people of this country. Many policies and programs have been tried on the Indian people. Back in the 1850s they made it possible to give to the Indian people parcels of land. This is known as the Land Allotment Act. He thinks it was designed to dispossess the Native people of their lands which was simply an extermination policy. In the 1950s they had the termination policies. It was decided that the Indian people were costing the country too much money and the services provided to the Indian people would be withdrawn. Some of the tribes became poverty stricken. Some are now returning to their previous status. In the 1960s they had programs where the intent was to get the Indian people out of the rural areas and bring them to urban areas and let the people assimilate. He called this another gimmick. In the 1970s there is the Alaska Native co-operations of the 1970s. He said what you do with these co-operations is here and it will affect you now and in their future. He said as you look at the corporations you find the initiative of the spirit of negativism among the Alaska Natives is disappearing. Into the hands of the leadership of the Native people is entrusted millions of dollars. He thinks it gave to the people of the state new hope, new challenges and new opportunities. He said we can take pride in the fact that with the money in their hands they are no longer at the mercy of the white man. They can no longer take the attitude that he has taken advantage of them. Because they have been taken advantaged of in the past they became anti-white. They were also anti-Bureau of Indian Affairs. They were also anti-progress. He is sure that the Natives of the northern land felt that this land really had nothing to offer. And there are those who wanted to maintain the status quo. Today he is sure that those that are the vital part of this convention have come with a belief and conscience that you can expand your ideas for what is good for your own people and you want to do their own thing to advance their people. He said it is great that they can no

longer be negative and they can be positive. He also wanted to speak about the self-determination spirit among the Alaska Natives. He thinks it is evolving. Millions of dollars have been entrusted to them. Now they have millions of dollars' worth of contracts. He said it is saying that they want to become involved in programs and developments that were unknown to them previously. They are now a vital part of it. They want to make certain that the programs and services which are devised by them are full-fledged and no stone is unturned. They want to provide services where the people are. He talked about building a college and schools so their children no longer have to leave the state for an education. He said they want to design programs that will benefit them. They want local programs to make the villages more productive. He is certain that there will be a day when poverty is a thing of the past and waste is long forgotten and diseases that entrap their people are eradicated. He said this can come by their willingness and his willingness. He said decisions are being made today that will determine their future. Every generation inherits a world that is not of their making and worlds that is not of their choosing, but inherit they do. There is a great deal of poverty, waste, and discontent in this world, but if that is the kind of world they inherit then they become the trustees of the future. He said it is up to him and them as to whether they leave to their descendants a better world than what they inherited. As they exercise self-determination and pursue progress in developments they will make mistakes. They will need to accept these things. There will be times of disagreements and discourse. It is how they overcome these blunders and mistakes and disagreements that is far more importance. Because always and constantly they want to feel the reigns of destiny are in their hands and they can control and direct it. He is certain that in matters of destiny they are aware and working on them. When they are responsible for other people's destiny it is imperative that they take stock of their planning, money, ideas, and reflect on the golden objectives of the Native people. In addition they must assess the capacity of accomplish those objectives. This calls for hard work and hard work they must put forth. He said that is the purpose of every convention to exchange ideas and give and take on issues. He said to always bear in mind that they have in their hands the reigns of the future. He said all that we put into the lives of others comes back to our own. There will be times when we must overcome our disagreements and constantly to work for those things that are for the common good. They also have the initiative of the awareness of the spirit of sovereignty. Over the two hundred years of Indian policy the efforts have always been to give an exposure to the Indian people to the American melting pot theory. He is glad that they have met up against the onslaught of the non-Indian world and have been able to maintain their identity, crafts and language. Cultural pluralism is here to stay whether America likes it or not. They as Indian people provide the impact. Not only do they provide the impact they provide the practice and exercise. They are willing to say to the non-Indian world that they dare to be different. This does not mean they are inferior. They must keep in their minds the spirit of tribal sovereignty. He is happy to see the co-operations that are involved in real estate, the many options they have to exercise and to invest their millions of dollars in their efforts to reach a parity with other groups in this country. He has learned that they as Indian people can never be satisfied or start with a second class level. It should start at first class. When his people decided to invest in the ski area in New Mexico they were competing with five areas in New Mexico. They now make more money than other areas in their part of the country. They have recently completed a fifteen million dollar tourist complex. These are some of the things they must believe in. They must be certain that they have put into their plans and programs the best administration that they can put forth, the best management they can find and staff their programs with

the best personnel and finally that their product is the best and better than the white man's. He said it is on this pioneer premise that he has devoted his life and people that they can beat the competition and be better than they are. Their cultural practices, identity and linguistic differences should not be a handicap or offered as excuses. These things are a positive and integral part of American society. They are here to stay. They have a right to stay and have every right to remain an Indian. They want all of America to admit that racial or cultural diversity is a fact of life and valuable and important to America and they are part of it and intend to make a contribution. These are some of the things that we must believe in as part of Native co-operations in this great state. He is sure that the Indians in the lower forty-eight states are watching the Native corporations. He is certain that they and their corporations will make an impact, make a profit, and give them a lesson that they intend to put their people on the same parity with the rest of the country in terms of income, employment, health and housing. He is happy for all these new initiatives that are evident as they work within the structure of their corporations. In closing he quoted a statement: the future does not belong to those that are content with today, apathetic toward common problems, timid in the face of new ideas and bold projects, rather it will belong to those who can blend passion, reason and courage in a commitment to the ideals of the American society. He thinks he can change the last line of the quote to say to the commitment of the ideals of the Native Alaskan.