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Morris Thompson is interviewed by Toni Jones, Fairbanks musicians

Moses Wassillie, moderator

Series: Potlatch series

Toni Jones asked Morris Thompson what has been happening in the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) in the past year. Morris Thompson said in the last year they have been implementing the Indian Self-Determination and Educational Act, the Indian Financing Act and recruiting of additional talent into the BIA. He said 93-638 is basically to try to strengthen tribal governments and Indian organizations. By allowing tribal organizations or Alaska Native groups to run under contract services normally operated by BIA. They are in the process of getting this implemented. Toni Jones asked if a contracting tribe or Alaska Native groups have optimal flexibility in determining how they will conduct these programs or do they have to operate to BIA manuals or regulations? Thompson said the law gave the authority to Alaska Native groups and tribal groups the opportunity to design and redesign BIA programs, but at the same time until that is done if the contract for the program then they must operate under guidelines set down by Congress and some of the rules and regulations they must operate under. Toni Jones asked if the interpretations are pretty broad. Thompson said the thrust of the legislation was to try to build some flexibility into program delivery of services such as multi-year contracting and making grants to Indian tribes. If you contract today for some of the programs they must be operated the same way as any federal agency. He said the largest contractors are the Tlingit Haida Central Council. Cook Inlet in Anchorage is doing employment assistance and social services. In Fairbanks the Tanana Chiefs are contracting employment assistance and social services. There are other groups in Alaska considering contracting. He said in the lower forty eight there are tribes taking on contracting services. Toni Jones said it is the Native groups or tribes deciding which services they want to contract. Thompson said it is totally voluntary to accept services or contract services. The Indian people have the option to select how they want services delivered.

Music by Chris Anderson, Steve and Marsha Heckman from Fairbanks

Morris Thompson talks about contracting for education services by Native organizations under public law 93-638. He said it is a program susceptible to contracting. There are a lot of young Alaska Natives who are graduating soon or have finished college and they are interested in working with other young Alaska Natives entering college for the first year. Many of these young people are already working for the BIA doing this as federal employees. They have set up two pilot programs in the U.S. to see if it is possible to have a one stop place for educational services. Scholarships are currently available from the BIA's educational branch and employment assistance programs are available through the tribal resource in Washington. They are looking at combining the programs into one office. Toni Jones said that approach makes the most sense. She talked about the programs at the university with two-year programs and the confusion about where the scholarships are coming from. Thompson said they want to eliminate some of the confusion in program delivery or services delivery. Toni Jones asked what it

would take for Tanana Chief to do this. Thompson said if they want to consolidate education services through a contract you just sit down and contract that.

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Toni Jones asked about the Indian Financing Act and the status of those communities not named in the Settlement Act. Thompson said some of the urban communities are not named in the Settlement Act and there has been a ruling that people residing in these communities are not eligible for certain provisions of the act. In Alaska the entire state is considered a reservation. The Native Claims Act defined what a village and Native community is. The Indian Financing Act used that definition in the Claims Act. That created problems with loans in certain communities. If the loan has an impact back to a village community then a loan may be made. The policy is to have an impact on or near rural village communities in Alaska. Toni Jones asked about certain terms such as Fairbanks being near Nenana. Thompson said they are going through an administrative process to determine what near a reservation is. They are having to define that since the court handed down the ruling. They are going to try to implement as many loans and grants if they have that tie back.

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Toni Jones asked about the Omnibus Bill. Thompson said it sailed through fairly quickly. The bill extended the enrollment and solved the Cook Inlet land swap settlement. He is please with it. He knows oversight hearings will be held and there will be needed legislation to implement it. The Native Claims Act is gigantic. No one bill can comprehend all of the problems. As they continue to implement the Claims Bill they will perfect language and amendments further down the road. Toni Jones asked about land allotments. Thompson said down in Bethel and Nome the majority of the allotments are moving through. Only four to five allotments were rejected. He hopes that is the case in the Interior as well. Toni Jones asked about the thirteenth region. Thompson said Judge Gash ruled that a new election will be held in June. Toni Jones asked about things on his agenda. Thompson said they are looking at an extension of the Indian Finance Act, Public Law 280, recognition issue of who is an Indian tribe, continuing with being a positive trustee of Indian lands and resources, and working to get increased budgets for unmet needs in Alaska and the lower forty eight. Congress added 43 million dollars to their budget. They hope that the Senate will expand on that. Toni Jones asked where the increase will go. Thompson said for Alaska the majority of the increases will go to education.

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