

88-49-68

Morris Thompson, Joyce Shales

Jeff Kennedy, moderator

Series: Potlatch series

Walter Carlos plays Bach

Report from the Bureau of Indian Affairs about the Indian Self-Determination Act. Tana Beebee said the Act is still a point of contention in Indian community. It was signed by President Ford last year and permitted Indian tribes to take control of government programs on their reservations and administer federal programs themselves. This is voluntary. The law has been a source of suspicion and fear by some groups. Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Morris Thompson explains how the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) views the Indian Self-Determination Act. Morris Thompson said they need to follow the mandates of Congress in their administrative practice of contracting to give assurances to the Indian community that it is not a disguise for termination of Indian services. He is convinced that Congress nor the administration intends for the law to terminate services to the Indian community. It is to strengthen tribal governments and provide them the opportunity if they wish to run their own programs, hire their own people, set their own policies, and to strengthen tribal governments.

Tana Beebee said recently the BIA was under criticism about how they were spending their budget. Len Ingells the public information officers said it is an Indian bureau, they have Indian hiring preference, and 64 percent of the employees are Indian. He talked about salaries, education on the reservations, social and law enforcement programs. He said six percent of their budget goes to administrative costs.

Tana Beebee said the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act has enrollment open again.

Music of the Alaska Gwich'in

Joyce Shales talked about being sent out of her village to attend high school. She said she likens it to being sent to another country. They are put in a sterile environment. There are many rules to follow. Many of the town's people did not want them there. She said her father always told her to listen to learn. She talked about differences in the culture. She said one of the finest things she does is talk to the elders. Her grandfather could sense where the animals were. She said there is a sense of awe for nature that has been lost in the name of progress. She said the Native believed in a higher power before Christianity was introduced. The Natives already believed in a deity, the idea that we were created by something greater than ourselves. There has been a lot of talk about teaching the younger people about spiritual matters. Alaskans are what they are religiously according to where they were born in the state such as Presbyterian, Catholic or Russian Orthodox. The Native religion should be viewed as just as much of a religion as the other recognized faiths. She said Christianity brought a lot of European ideas. Sharing is a highly valued Native tradition. Older people were taken care of and no one went hungry. She said times have changed and they have to change with it. She talked about extended family in the Native culture. Tlingit culture always respected their elders. She feels it is slowly dying out. In her family

everyone looks out after her grandfather and they want to listen to him. She said the most important things are not even spoken about. You have to look beyond the cultural aspects of Native people. She said it is good to know that what your people know is OK. It needs to be said. She said the shamans told the people what was going to happen. They had a real power. Shales talks about the concept of superstition.

Music from performers from Gambell, Alaska