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Sam Keto talks about education in the Bush and bilingual education at the Cross Cultural education in the Far North on November 9, 1976 in Fairbanks, Alaska

Series: Potlatch series

Jeff Kennedy, moderator

Song by Roger Miller

Sam Keto tells a story about playing on the Vikings basketball team in his town in Petersburg, Alaska. Norwegians founded his town.

Song by Helen Reddy

Sam Keto said education is a continuing learning process. He said in 1973 they were lobbying in Congress. They were going by the capitol building and about twenty steps away were two kids. They were carrying a sign that said we are protesting. They were protesting the war named peace. He said education is a war, too. It is something that people will fight for and strive to find a conclusion. He said the only conclusion that you are ever going to reach is to fight for more. When you are talking about cross-cultural education there are two types of education that you are going to have to be involved with. The first is not educating the children, but rather educating the educators. What specifically are the wants and needs of those who will be educated? He said a definition of Native leadership is a Native that doesn't know if he is being followed or chased. He knows there are people behind him and they are not always in agreement with what the leadership does. The lesson is people should look over their shoulder to find out what it is the people want. He said he wanted to track a short case history in Alaska about how they came into local control with the passage of Senate Bill 35. It gave parents for the first time the ability to control the educational institutions that resided in their villages. In the past they sent their students to Oklahoma, Oregon, and Mt. Edgecumbe. Students were also sent to Wrangell Institute. It was a boarding home for young students grades 1-8. They found their way to local

control for local education. Parents were electing their local school board and making decisions about how a child was going to go to school. They went to the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the leadership said they did not want to send their children across the state for an education. The idea for a regional high school was started. Regional high schools meant that there would be money for the dormitories. Even in the final stages while the dormitories were being built in Bethel and Nome and one proposed for Sitka and Fairbanks there was a look over the shoulder to something that was already happening. In the villages they were already thinking that they wanted to have area schools rather than regional high schools. This meant that there had to be a change in the direction. They stopped the regional high schools from being completed. Local legislators went home to get the pulse of the people living in the villages. Once the area high schools were developed then there was a move to do away with the last two dormitories. They then moved into area high schools. They now have Senate Bill 35 that talks about local control in 21 local school districts. There is an alternative that is going to be necessary in order for all the systems to operate. He said in Anchorage there were a number of people from the local school districts and what they were talking about was the serious problem of developing a curriculum that crossed the wide expanse of learning how to trap in a village or hunting or whaling or whatever they did when they got out of school to the student who wants to become a doctor. He asked what are the flexibilities that have to be developed. You have to develop the flexibilities that this student if he changes his mind to have another alternative to go where there is some academic excellence that will allow him to go on to college. He said the boarding home program that is still in existence would probably still be viable as an alternative, but only after very significant thought by the people in the villages running the school districts find that there is an alternative. Once again that will mean sending their child away for school. There are teachers who are perplexed about developing a curriculum. He said this is not just a problem for the Department of Education it is also for the university system to pull together a curriculum system that utilizes learning centers to provide the opportunities that are going to be necessary for an education that is going to be responsive to what the people say. He said that it is said that leadership for school boards reflect what the people want. He thought they are coming quickly to the crossroads that say yes we will be reflective of what you and the local community has said. He said that curriculum is going to have to reflect the retention of the cultural values that the people hold very dear.

#### Unidentified song

Sam Keto said here we are in Alaska in 1976 and we have moved from what has happened in the past where parents sent their children out of the room when they spoke in their Native tongue. He said this happened when he was growing up. Now he said they are talking about developing a bicultural bilingual system that talks about the Native language as a second language when in fact they should have been looking in the past, present and future at the Native language as the first language. It should have happened a long time ago. He said now they are in the process of making some changes where these cultural values are going to be adhered to. During the times when the bilingual programs were just starting to develop an impetus in the state of Alaska there was a concern by some in Alaska that if the bilingual system were integrated into the educational

systems in Alaska they would develop into too much nationalism. He said an example of what has happened in programs is Quebec. They felt if there was too much emphasis on the Native language there would be a significant separatist movement. He finds it difficult for arguments like that when he was on the school board in Fairbanks. There wasn't a Native language offered but languages like German were taught for four years. He said these were requirements to get into college. He said what happens to educational institutions in high school in the state of Alaska is essentially 80 percent of the programs that exist in the state of Alaska are geared for the twenty percent that attend college. Twenty percent of the programs are geared for the 80 percent that never go to college. He said this goes right back to the parent. He said in this instance the parent is in error. They develop a curriculum and send all of the kids into school with the goal that everyone is going to college. He said as they develop educational institutions on a statewide level with the university system or the local school districts that you should listen to the people out there. They are not interested in the materialistic values with the goal of quality education to send the students to college. They would like to see both developed and it could be developed into an education process that does provide the opportunities for a person to be successful in whatever endeavor he wants to. He said they fight the system every day. They fight the system for teacher certification. He said they have to bend the process just a little bit so the final results retains the cultural educational process, the educational values, and the cultural values of a people. These can be integrated into a whole system, a network of education that culminates with the possibility of a student graduating from college.

Song by Mike Nesmith