

ORAL HISTORY 2001-88-12

Sarah Hannon, student regent on the Board of Regents

Scott Sterling, interviewer

March 1983

Series: Alaska Legislative Review

Scott Sterling said he was surprised to hear over 42,000 Alaskans were taking classes at the University of Alaska (UA). He asked Sarah Hannon how she got to be on the Board of Regents. Hannon said constitutionally the Board of Regents was established to oversee all policy making decisions on the University of Alaska. In the early 1970s the Alaska Legislature dictated one of the members would be a full-time student within the UA System. For the last ten years there has been a student member of the Board. The term is only for two years. The student member is appointed by the governor. The pool of nominees is selected from individual campuses. This means the governor has some direction in the university. He is able to make sure executive wishes are listened to.

Sterling asked Hannon how long she has been on the Board. Hannon said she has been on the Board for one year. Her term will expire in February of 1984. Her replacement process will begin in October.

Sterling asked Hannon about the university and the Land Claims Settlement bill. Hannon said early on the federal government established some land programs that gave land to states or territories for securing income for the future of the university system, the Land Grant College Act. At the time there was no university in Alaska. The university developed, but did not have the means to manage its own land. The state contracted with the university an agreement they would manage the lands for the benefit of the university. Problems arose over time when the state did not manage the lands for the benefit of the university, but managed them just like they were any other state lands. The lands were leased out, available for municipal lands, allocated into the state park system, and otherwise encumbered so the income was not at fair market value or there was no income. In 1972 the university filed suit and wanted the state to come to some kind of agreement. They wanted to control their own land. The current settlement bill transfers 50,000 acres of state land and 4.2 million dollars in cash to the university as settlement. Some questions are arising from some key legislators. Since this is for the land grant mission, they want to know what the university will be doing to fulfill the mission. The land grant college system was established to support renewable resource industries in this country such as agriculture, fisheries and forestry. The University of Alaska does not have exceptional programs in those. The legislators want to guarantee the university has good resource management programs and want to guarantee a certain amount to that purpose. Hannon said this ties the hands of the regents doing their job.

Sterling asked if the Board of Regents will be fulfilling its land grant mission. Hannon said there have been a lot of changes in the last five years about how the university feels about fulfilling its land grant mission. Attitudes are changing, programs are changing and energy is being directed to the land grant mission. They are asking the legislators to trust them enough that they will continue to do so. Sterling asked if the land grant mission is relevant at present. Hannon said yes if they have the support of the public. She thinks the state has spoken and they will be turning back to renewable resources. They need to have expertise locally and need their own engineering and agriculture research. With the state losing

revenues she doesn't see being bound to restrictions on spending a workable solution. She talked about providing a strong basic undergraduate program.

Sterling asked about financing for housing for University of Alaska students. Hannon said part of the mission of the University of Alaska is to reach out to Alaskans and provide education. She talked about the need for student housing in different university communities in Alaska. Governor Sheffield included money in his budget for housing in Juneau. The legislature did appropriate money for housing that seemed to address the request for funding for housing by the Board of Regents. She said she expects more changes to the legislative bill. She talked about the problem of the lack of housing for students. Sterling asked if this is a regional position problem out of the legislature. Hannon said there is definite political influence. They are still looking at alternative financing. Sterling asked about the financing for the dorms already on the Fairbanks campus. Hannon said the last complex was bonded. The University of Alaska Fairbanks has not had new construction in ten years. It hasn't seen a lot of the direct appropriated capital projects. Sterling asked about the governor's view on student housing. Hannon said the governor has been very supportive and changed his budget to include money for student housing in Juneau and supports the bill for housing. Sterling asked about funding for housing at the community college level. Hannon said that is an issue coming in the near future. It is critical when bringing in students from outlying areas for programs such as nursing.