







After graduation, I decided to attend Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. I had never been outside the state of Alaska but Miss Kathy Russell, a teacher I respected, suggested her Alma Mater, Ohio University. What a tremendous change. I took a train across the United States to Ohio. It took three days. After I enrolled at the university, I began to realize a certain cultural shock and became homesick for Alaska. I continued my studies but remained homesick for the next year. I would spend hours researching and reading everything I could about Alaska, its history, geography, and government, etc. From that experience, I slowly began to think about politics, public service, and the political landscape of Alaska.

The next year I attended the University of Alaska in Fairbanks. This was in 1964-65 during which time many Native organizations were created. It was the beginning of the land claims movement. In Fairbanks, the Fairbanks Native Association welcomed into their membership Native college students. Then the Tanana Chiefs Conference scheduled a meeting in Fairbanks to discuss land claim issues. I was curious about their efforts and decided to sk.7(2ed to sk.7(2ed tr

I could not obtain anything of any magnitude for my district. I could not persuade many of my colleagues. I did not understand the banter of politics and found myself frustrated. My shyness and reticence hampered me. Politeness was not a virtue in the blue-collar world of Alaska politics. In time, I considered myself a failure. I told myself that if I could not help my district and the people I represented, I should get out. And so, in 1969, I did not file for re-election. I left the legislature and returned to the University of Alaska in Anchorage to complete my college degree. I was absent from the state capital for two years. During that time, I re-evaluated my objectives, and re-considered what it would take to be effective, keeping in mind that the needs of rural Alaska still existed.

I concluded that there were two extremely important attributes necessary to be effective in the legislature. First, I had to be knowledgeable in my chosen field (and my field was finance because adequate funding could solve many of our rural needs). Second, I had to become a leader in a non-Athabaskan world. I needed to emulate a more western tradition in my leadership style. I had to become politically perceptive, aggressive, loud, smart, and an expert in the state budgeting and financing process. I had to become a new person, one that my political colleagues would seek out and work with. Political power in the state legislature is something that is given or conferred upon you by others. To sustain it, you must be knowledgeable, trustworthy, fair, and honorable. Your word must be your bond. You can have a regional point of view but you must always also have a statewide point of view. You can represent your district but you must also represent the State of Alaska. In the balance are political power, longevity, and success.

By 1972, I was ready. I ran and won the Senate seat for interior Alaska. My district ran from the Bering Sea to the Canadian border. For the next 14 years, I became this new person. I not only won the election but I also won a seat on the Senate Finance Committee. For the first six years, I studied the state budget and finance process until I knew it inside and out. No one could question my ability or knowledge in this area. I became more aggressive, sometimes loud, tenacious like wolverine, and an effective legislator. I remained on the Finance Committee my entire 18 years.

During my years on the Senate Finance Committee, as either a member or Chairman, I was able to appropriate hundreds of millions of dollars toward rural priorities, often to the chagrin of my urban colleagues but with their support and vote. I did not work in a vacuum. I worked closely with both urban and rural legislators like my friend Rep. Nels Anderson, (D) from Dillingham, and, especially my close political friend and ally in the Senate, Sen. Frank Ferguson (D) from Kotzebue. Although, as rural legislators, we were a minority, we worked cooperatively with every majority group on behalf of both rural and statewide priorities. In doing so, we also funded many urban priorities. That is more difficult to do today.

Through our joint efforts, we obtained funding for projects such as airports, telephones, television, health clinics, police protection, fire stations, community halls, roads, schools, sewers, clean water, erosion projects, and many other rural priorities. We tried and succeeded in redressing many basic health and safety needs in rural Alaska while also supporting urban and statewide priorities.

An example of a difficult funding issue was legislative compliance with the Court decision on the Molly Hootch Act. The court decision required the state to build new schools throughout Alaska but mostly in rural areas where the need and neglect was most evident to the court. After resistance by many urban interest groups and legislators, funding was obtained for a

large scale school construction phase throughout Alaska (much to the satisfaction of rural students and the delirium of the urban based, statewide, construction industry).

Of particular significance was the Power Cost Equalization (PCE) project for which I was the prime sponsor. The subsidy reduced energy costs in rural Alaska a

