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PF: 1969 Brookings  
Institute

#113

MEMORANDUM

March 23, 1977

TO: Clark Gruening  
FROM: Shari Gross  
RE: Brookings Institute Seminars, 1969

In 1969 Alaska received a windfall of \$900 million from lease sales of oil-bearing land. The Legislature was looking for guidance from the people of the state as to how the money ought to be spent. Eugene Guess was Speaker of the House and Chairman of the Legislative Council. Under his leadership, the Brookings Institute was contracted with to conduct a series of seminars concerning "The Future of Alaska". Over 100 Alaskans from all areas of the state attended the conference. They represented a cross-section of the State in terms of cultural background, political parties, professions, etc. Legislators were invited to attend the conference as observers; it was felt that their presence would dominate the conference if they were participants, and that since the purpose of the conference was to hear views of Alaskans they should play a more passive role.

The purpose of the conference was to explore some of the major policy issues emerging in the State of Alaska at that time. Attention was focused on determination of a set of goals, rather than on Alaska's problems. The goals were to be those that the conferees believed to be accurate expressions of the tremendous potential of the state. To match those goals, a practical policy plan for local action was to be developed. The experience of the conference was intended to help citizens make better decisions about Alaska and to play a thoughtful role in the future growth and development of the state. For the first time, except perhaps the Constitutional Convention, Alaskans had an opportunity to come together from their various vantage points and consider problems of state-wide import. The participants were serious about their mission, and succeeded, for the most part, in casting aside prejudices and misconceptions and worked diligently at considering problems of a large and, in some cases, hitherto unknown scope.

A series of four three-day seminars were planned. Brookings Institute (James Mitchell, Director, 1775 Massachusetts Avenue N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036) was paid a fee of \$60,000 to conduct those seminars. Terry Brady was paid \$5000 for his technical assistance in handling the mechanics of the conference.

The format for the seminar was essentially the same for each. The conference was entitled: "A Conference On the Future of Alaska". Meetings-of-the-whole were held each morning with guest lecturers speaking to the group. The speeches provided background information and served to stimulate discussion. Persons speaking included such Alaskans as George Rogers and Arlon Tussing. Others from "outside" included urban planning specialists, futurists, and scholars. Afternoon sessions (and some evening) were of a smaller, more intimate, nature. Members were assigned to one of four groups called "Policy Planning Sections"

for the duration of the conference. Reports were prepared summarizing each groups' discussions. Those reports were the work of such "recorders" as: Betzi Woodman, Tim Bradner, Jan Erickson, Terry Brady, Evey Ruskin. The same balanced make-up was sought for the smaller groups as for the conference as a whole.

The seminars were spaced about two weeks apart from one another. Preparatory readings were recommended and encouraged. As is usual for such a conference, some participants were better prepared than others. Four separate topics were covered at each of the seminars. They were:

1. The Financial Foundations for the Future of Alaska
2. Use of Human Resources in Future Alaska
3. The Quality of the Natural Environment in Future Alaska
4. Alternative Futures for the State of Alaska

Although I will summarize the findings of each of the four seminars, certain goals stand out as being of overall concern to those attending the conference. Everyone agreed that it was of paramount importance that the "Alaska way of life" be preserved. This came to be defined, roughly, as a style that affords the conveniences of technological innovation combined with the opportunity and values of living as close to nature as possible. Members wanted Alaska to remain much the way it was in 1969 in terms of quality of life in urban centers. A desire was felt to set up safeguards or programs that would maintain this quality and enhance its value. Long term planning was seen by many to be of great importance. Upgrading the educational system throughout the state, but most particularly, in the bush, was probably the highest priority item. Other overall directions included: upgrading communication and transportation systems, abolition of tax incentives as a government policy, no reduction of taxes, development of a comprehensive land use plan, and development of means to protect the environment through an environmental Bill of Rights, and a Department of the Environment.)

*Most achieved*

It is difficult, if not impossible, to assess the value of such a conference. Most of those matters considered of high priority have indeed taken place during the ensuing seven years. Whether they would have occurred anyway is an unknown. Many of the participants were opinion makers themselves and held influential positions throughout Alaska. Perhaps the directions given the legislators were not new, but legislation probably passed with more understanding and less opposition than would have been the case had the Brookings Seminars not been held. The Institute sought to help Alaskans seek new methods of dealing with problems typical of a burgeoning society; in that respect I don't believe they were successful. We were unable to shake off the old structures and look at problems from new perspectives.

#### SEMINAR ONE: The Financial Foundations for the Future of Alaska

Most did not want to see Alaska's wealth tied up in trust, yet felt that we should make spending decisions with a view toward the future generations. Expenditures should be in accordance with comprehensive long-range planning. Priorities included: upgrading education, upgrading planning, replacement of renewable resources, slow development of industry and only as it upgrades human resources. Improved medical facilities in rural Alaska, a cautious approach to

the reduction of taxes, and revenue sharing were also seen as priorities. Participants were mindful of the scope of Alaska's problems--particularly in the bush--and were willing to pay taxes to alleviate them.

SEMINAR TWO: Use of Human Resources in Future Alaska

A full commitment by the State to the Health and Welfare of all was seen as a highly desired goal by the conferees. Improved housing, water, sanitation and nutrition and education were high priorities for rural Alaska. The need to upgrade education, provide more cultural enrichment, provide improved medical facilities in the bush were also high on priority lists. Long-range planning was stressed throughout, as was a need to reorganize government's structure so as to maximize local involvement in decision-making. Abolition of government tax incentives, and slow industrial growth was mentioned again and again by each of the groups. A need was seen for the development of programs for the aged. Housing programs were needed.

SEMINAR THREE: The Quality of the Natural Environment in Future Alaska

In this area as well, there seemed to be a general consensus on a number of issues. Strong interest was expressed in an environmental Bill of Rights. Also seen as important was the creation of an "Office of Ecology". A national policy for the Arctic was viewed as desirable. Long-range planning was stressed, as was the development of a comprehensive land-use plan for the state. Here, too, emphasis was placed on maintain the "Alaska way of life", and slow careful industrial growth. Expansion of the park system was seen as desirable. The participants wanted the state to develop environmental policies which would encourage industrial development in an orderly manner, yet minimize the effects on the ecology and environment. Increased research and money should be spent on renewable resources.

SEMINAR FOUR: Alternative Futures for the State of Alaska

This seminar was a further refinement of areas already discussed in the previous three seminars. Emphasis was again on long-range planning, improved educational facilities as the highest priority, creation of a Department of Ecology, an environmental Bill of Rights, improved communication and transportation facilities throughout the state, improved medical facilities in the bush, programs for the aged. Development of a land-use plan. Acquisition of parks. Restoration of renewable resources. Development of new industrial opportunities with job training programs, and low-interest, long-term loans were seen as important. Again, a desire to see the state tax incentive program dropped was expressed.

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