



BOROUGH CHAIRMAN — Eben Hopson, the newly elected chairman of the Arctic Slope Borough, is explaining the principals of the borough to the Kaktovik Eskimo audience. The borough was established after the State Supreme

Court Justice Roger Conners refused the oil companies' petition to prevent certification of the borough election.

— Photo by ROGER McPHERSON

Eben Hopson Confident of Job— Borough Chairman Fills Job with Fine Past Experiences

By THOMAS RICHARDS, JR.

BARROW — Following some doubt that the election might not be certified, and after the counting of 140 challenged votes, it is now apparent that the residents of five Eskimo villages overwhelmingly endorsed the creation of a 56 million acre borough on the Arctic Slope.

Eben Hopson was elected the first chairman of the new North

Slope Borough.

When the borough became officially organized, Tuesday, it became the largest municipality in the world. It is also the first of Alaska's rural regions to achieve local control over economic development and education.

None on the slope, including Chairman Hopson, had any doubt that the borough will

soon become a reality. "Primarily, the suit by the oil companies against the Rural Boundary Commission was a tactic to delay organization of the borough," he said.

"Once we organized, we came into control of the area that they are developing. We are the first group of Native people to gain control over oil develop-

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New Arctic Borough Chairman Confident of His Job...

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ment. The oil companies are not dealing with the Native people anywhere.

"I don't think that the oil companies have anything to fear. We have to operate under the law. We are responsible people. I don't believe we intend to tax

excessively. In order to operate this borough effectively, I am going to need some taxes," Hopson stated.

The borough chairman has no difficulty in assuming the role of spokesman for the new government. His long history of involvement in territorial and state government and in Native affairs presents an impressive record.

A veteran of World War II, Hopson has served continuously on the city council of Barrow from the end of that war until 1969. After twenty years in the Alaska National Guard, he resigned his commission with the rank of Captain in 1969.

In 1956, he was elected to a term in the House of Representatives during the last territorial legislature. In 1958, he became a member of the first Alaska State Senate. He was reelected to the Senate in 1960 and again in 1964.

Until he became director of

The Alaska Federation of Natives in 1969, Hopson served as executive director of the Arctic Slope Native Association.

When William Egan was elected Governor in 1970, he asked Hopson to be his Special Assistant for Native Affairs. He resigned this post last May 15 to campaign for the chairmanship of the new borough.

Thirty years ago, Eben Hopson married Rebecca Panigo, daughter of Mrs. Hazel Panigo of Barrow. The Hopsons have twelve children.

"Educationally speaking," explains Hopson, "I have all that the eighth grade offered me in 1939, which leads me to believe that I am one of the few that can say, education is not the most common denominator for intelligence."

Education, however, will be a priority matter for the new borough government. "It will depend upon negotiations with the BIA as to when we take over the Barrow, Point Hope, and Wainwright schools. The law requires that we take over the Barter Island and Anaktuvuk Pass schools as soon as possible. These are state operated schools.

"Knowing the attitude of the newly elected school board, however, I believe that they will attempt to take over the schools as soon as possible."

Hopson indicated that he will be firm, yet just, in dealing with the oil companies operating on the North Slope. He expressed disappointment that oil interests have opposed formation of the new borough.

"They are going to have to work with us. There is no precedent for them coming under the jurisdiction of Natives. We don't have to have an agreement with them, but we will probably have to justify millage rates. After accepting the reality of the borough, they may want us to provide services for them. We are organizing a constitutionally recognized borough and

they are going to have to live with that fact."

Chairman Hopson commented on fears expressed by oil company spokesmen about potentially oppressive taxing situations.

"We are going to have taxing authority, but in no event will we tax the oil companies just for the purpose of taxing them," he said.

Hopson estimated that the millage rate on real property would probably remain within five mills for at least the next five years.

The new chairman noted that organization of the borough may not be without its growing pains. "There are going to be a lot of heads knocking together (state and borough governments, and oil companies) in deciding what services we will be able to provide."

When Eben Hopson was asked

whether he was concerned about the ability of the North Slope Borough to finance operations of new governmental services, he smiled and replied, "No, I am not worried. I am not worried at all."

The veteran legislator and administrator defeated Eskimo Charles Edwardsen, Jr., who ran as a write in candidate for the office of Chairman. Edwardsen was disqualified from appearing on the ballot because of duplication of signatures on his petition for candidacy.

He told the Tundra Times, "I have only one comment: Never let anyone pass around your petition. It was a costly lesson."

Chairman Hopson said that he was eager to settle again in Barrow after a three year absence. Other than his responsibility for operation of the new local government, he has additional plans for his life in Barrow.