

Eben Hopson tells Selawik graduates to learn to negotiate

On Wednesday, May 12, 1976, in the Selawik High School gymnasium, Eben Hopson, North Slope Borough Mayor, told fifteen Selawik graduates that they must learn to negotiate.

In a speech to the graduates Mayor Hopson mentioned the courage and faith of the people of Selawik in establishing their own municipal government and school board. Addressing the audience of over 300 he said, "This graduating class is an example of the proof of the leadership and momentum Selawik has provided to your region. You have set a good example for others to follow."

Mayor Hopson read Howard Rock's last testament to his people as an introduction to the message of his speech which was a plea to the five Arctic nations to unite and form the sixth Arctic nation.

His charge to the 100,000 Inupiat people of Siberia, Alaska, Canada and Greenland who share Arctic stewardship to join all political forces involved to protect the Arctic homeland of the Inupiat.

Hopson pointed out the relationship between Selawik's desire for self-determination and home rule and that of the circumpolar organization.

Hopson further stated: "We Inupiat of Alaska can take justifiable pride in our role in launching the Land Claims Movement. This movement is strong now in Canada and Greenland.

In Canada, our people are negotiating with the Canadian government for the settlement of the Northwest Territorial

Land Claims, and have already reached agreement on their land claims in northern Quebec.

Our people in Northern Labrador are beginning their land claims negotiations. Because the political development of Canada was far different from that of the United States, there is no provision for home rule in the Canadian Arctic.

Home rule, therefore, is being included in the Canadian Eskimo Land Claims settlement negotiations. Across the present northwest territories, for instance, we will have our own territory to be called 'Nunavut' meaning 'our land'.

In Greenland, our people are negotiating with the Danish government for home rule status similar to that of a commonwealth, like America's commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

"There are about 4,000 of our people in Siberia, of which we know very little but all of us in Alaska, Canada and Greenland are hoping to re-establish our traditional relationship with our Siberian people.

Our November Inuit Circumpolar conference will likely lead to the organization of the Inuit Circumpolar Assembly, an international Eskimo

organization charged with the responsibility to speak for all of us in matters involving our Arctic stewardship.

We hope to be able to win a place at the negotiating table to participate as equals in the negotiation of an Arctic Seabed Treaty with the five nations having Arctic sovereignty. Out of this treaty, we hope to develop a single set of rules governing oil and gas exploration and development in the Arctic Ocean.

That, I think is what Frank Degan meant when he said we Inupiat should become the sixth Arctic nation, and that is what Howard Rock meant when he warned us of our difficult assignment, and advised us to rely upon tact and firmness in our negotiations.

Since our gathering in Barrow in late March, the danger to our Arctic homeland has increased, with the recent announcement by the Canadian government that it has given final approval for the deepwater exploratory drilling project by Dome Oil Company in the Beaufort Sea off Tuktoyaktuk.

Our people in Canada are very upset about this development because they agree with us that the oil industry has not yet worked out the difficult

technical problems of taking oil from under the ice safely.

Hopson further elaborated on the necessity of continuing to work closely with the oil companies and his request was sent to Governor Hammond to stop state cooperation with the oil industry with respect to its plan for Beaufort Sea exploration and other offshore oil exploration until such steps can be taken safely.

Minimum standards and rules should be adopted by all Arctic nations. He said, "We Eskimos will participate in these negotiations to insure that safe standards and rules are adopted, and that we have responsibility for administering the Arctic Seabed Treaty. For, we are the experts on the ice, and the

Arctic ice constitutes the biggest hazard to Arctic off-shore oil development".

Mayor Hopson commented on the failure of the Alaskan press to report the Canadian Dome Oil Beaufort Sea controversy. "Public opinion is important to us. We are only 100,000 strong. We have no strength, other than the high regard in which we are universally held.

I think that the people of the world do care about the Arctic, and they care about us and are willing to listen to us and our concerns. I feel that the force of public opinion will enable our people to become completely involved in all aspects of decision and policy-making about how and when the oil industry can take the oil out

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