

QUITE A SURPRISE

Democrat Gruening Urges Ipalook Into Politics; Ipalook Runs and Wins on Republican Ticket

Percy Ipalook of Kotzebue was in Fairbanks recently visiting his son Elmer and his family and to take an examination for a government service position in the Internal Revenue office in Fairbanks.

As he visited in the Tundra Times office, Percy told of the days he served as a legislator in the then Territorial Government in Juneau. He served two years as a representative and four years as a senator.

During his freshman year in 1949, a bill was introduced to establish the National Guard in Alaska.

"Governor Ernest Gruening was instrumental in having the bill introduced," said Ipalook.

A fight for and against the bill developed in the legislature and it was nip and tuck all the way.

"I fought hard for the passage of that bill. It looked pretty hopeless there for a while. One day I made a speech on the floor of the House and my subject was that the Eskimos were an independent lot; that they needed to learn regimentation and needed to learn to obey regulations," Ipalook reminisced.

"After my talk, I was surprised to see some votes switched in favor of the passage and some of the legislators said so right there on the floor.

When the final vote was taken, the bill passed by three votes.

"When I think about it," Percy continued, "I get a lot of satisfaction out of it that I may have helped a little in having the bill passed establishing to the National Guard in Alaska.

"Lot of our boys are taking advantage of it now and they are earning money to help them along in their economy."

Percy Ipalook recalled some of his fellow legislators at the time and many of them are familiar names to Alaskans.

"Bill Egan, who is now our Governor, was in the House at that time and he was a representative from Cordova. Bill and I got elected to the senate the same year.

"Mike Stepovich," Ipalook continued, "and John Butrovich were there, of course, and they have always been my good pals, even today. And there was Warren Taylor, and he was almost as old as he is today. Willie Beltz, Frank G. Johnson from Kake and Frank D. Johnson from Nome and Council.

"We had to use the middle initials of the two Johnsons to keep track who was which. Frank Degnan of Unalakleet was also there as a representative."

"We heard that Governor Gruening had a great deal to do in getting you interested in politics at the time," Percy was reminded. He broke into a loud laughter.

"He certainly did and you know, he never did advise me to which party I should belong when he was doing it. I entered the race then as a Republican and won. I also ran as a Republican and got elected to the Senate," Percy said, grinning.

Months ago, Gruening, who is now United States Senator and a well known Democrat, acknowledged what Percy Ipalook said about running as a Republican:

"I tried hard to get Percy interested in politics. Party affiliations never did enter our conversations. I was surprised when he ran as a Republican."