

A Joyous Banquet and Of Congressmen

Now that the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs land hearings are history in Alaska, we would like to talk about something light and, we hope, interesting to our readers—the 7th anniversary banquet of the Tundra Times in Anchorage on October 4. We do not wish to nudge aside the work of the congressmen because we seem to see in the hearings some promises of breakthrough into the tough judicial consciences of the House members.

The House committee group, we found, are a formidable bunch. The well seasoned ones like Congressman Wayne Aspinall, Jack Haley, John Saylor, E.Y. Berry, Ed Edmondson and others, can test one's equilibrium. The long process of expertise developed through the years by esteemed members was apparent and rather testing on the nerves. Their well aimed questions can be as sharp as darts and their reprimands can be as cutting as those of our mothers when we were small.

We also found that when the congressmen brought out what they wanted to hear, they could become almost tender to those who testified to their liking. This shows that the men, even tough old lawmakers like Aspinall and Haley, have the qualities of being human toward their fellow men. This is indeed satisfying revelation on which a person, especially if he had testified before the group, can treasure in his memories. It is also a revelation that good memories can be gleaned by appearing before a tough and formidable committee. So much for the imposing group of men from the Halls of Congress.

The 7th anniversary banquet of the Tundra Times was an unmistakable heartwarmer to the tiny staff of the newspaper and to the paper's board of directors. The gala feast went so well that it refuses to stay calmly in the background. People are still bubbling over it.

Our longtime friend, Rep. Genie Chance of Anchorage, seemed to have summed it up for everyone else when she wrote, "I was so proud of you at the banquet the other night! Never have I seen such a tremendous turnout." Indeed it was. The big ballroom of the Anchorage-Westward Hotel hummed and reverberated with joyous applause of over 600 people.

It has been the idea of this newspaper's editor that the banquet stresses lightheartedness and fun. At the banquet, however, he didn't realize that the program would erupt into continuous paroxysms of spontaneous humor and fun to the extent it did. Some of it was unplanned, like the editor's flubs that somehow turned into amusing and comical bits. He didn't know either that Jim Thomas of Yakutat, a Tlingit Indian, would be a storehouse of comics and humor which he handled with skill and dispatch. He was an unknown quantity, to the editor at least, right up to the second he took the microphone. His counterpart, Sylvester Ayek, an Eskimo, did his usual excellent job as a co-master of ceremony.

On the more serious side of it, along with humor of course, was the display of great oratorical gifts of the famed actor, Vincent Price, who was the principal speaker. In his speech, he expounded to the full theme of the banquet, "Cultural Contributions of the Native People of Alaska." One Eskimo gentleman summed up Price's speech

in the following manner: "You know, not one person coughed during his speech. That would have to be some kind of tribute." Another one was Ramsey Clark, former Attorney General of the United States, whose speaking ability projected unmistakably, and which brought out his stolid-faced manner of dispensing humor.

The evening was enhanced with charm by the beautiful Eskimo young woman, Laura Bergt, who modeled a \$1,000 qiviut (musk ox) wool gown and captivated the audience. Beautiful, young Marie Irwin, Miss World Eskimo Olympics of 1969, added charm. The feast was charming and great fun for whites, Indians, Aleuts and Eskimos.