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Alaska's Flag at Half-mast: A Commemoration of Ernest Gruening

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Notes: Originals on 7 inch reels. Master copies on CD.

Narrator: Jeff Kennedy

The narrator comments that Gruening's stance on the Vietnam War became an important issue in Gruening's 1968 battle for reelection. His age of 81 also may have become an unspoken issue.

A clip of Sandra Stringer(?) is played. She says that though he looked old, when he spoke, his age seemed to drop away from him and he seemed to be no particular age.

Gruening did not remember the 1968 campaign fondly. The narrator lists some of the alleged untruths and dishonesties committed by Gravel as part of his campaigning strategy against Gruening. Gruening no longer represented Alaska in the Senate.

Though deprived of a voice in the Senate, Gruening continued fighting his battles. He took up one of his old causes, namely, the effective use of knowledge to help deal the explosion of the world population and the growing scarcity of world resources. To do this, Gruening proposed legislation to create two new offices, one in the Department of State, which would deal with programs abroad, and the other in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, which would deal with domestic program. In addition, the legislation called for a Whitehouse conference on population control and population explosion in 1967. Gruening says that these three things are not drastic proposals but are step forward in the coordination and dissemination of information to solve this problem. Gruening elaborates on overpopulation, family size, poverty, and crime. Gruening speaks about recent advances in sciences such as antibiotics and surgery that decrease infant mortality and keep people from dying from diseases and infection which, in turn, allows the rapid increase in human population.

Gruening talks about birth control. He thinks that it is likely that the Catholic Church will change its position on birth control. He says that the idea of living on other planets is fantastic. He fears that the lack of resources caused by overpopulation will cause a great human suffering and savagery. Gruening talks about how we have transitioned from an agricultural society to an urban society.

A clip of Gruening is played in which he, in May, 1973, comments on what he considers to be the most important state and national issues of the day. Gruening speaks reconcile conservation and development. He does not consider them to be mutually exclusive. He speaks about the advantages of the pipeline as well as the dangers and precautions that should be taken. He speaks about the pulp industry in southeastern Alaska. He praises the work that has been and is continued to be done by conservationists, but criticizes how extreme they have become.

Gruening thinks that the biggest problem facing the nation is whether America will continue to uphold the values, upon which it was founded or whether it will become a totalitarian country and a police state. Gruening talks about the values outlined in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, particularly the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, the existence of checks and balances in the legal system and the right to free speech. He says that for the first time in America's history, the federal government has tried to use prior restraint to prevent newspapers from printing the Pentagon Papers. Gruening explains what the Pentagon Papers are and the court cases surrounding the issue. Gruening talks about how, for the first time, journalists have been jailed in America for refusing to reveal their sources.

Gruening talks about how the administration has not only attacked the freedom of the press, but also the freedom of worship. He speaks of an incident involving the Trinity Episcopal Church in Melrose, MA.

Gruening talks about how unprecedented this current situation is but draws parallels to the Civil War.

Gruening says that much money could be saved in the budget by spending less on the defense budget and on foreign assistance programs. He talks about the absurd size of the military establishment; when he was young, the size of the standing army consisted of 25,000. He says that aid money is going to dictatorships as "mutual security". Gruening is in favor of spending more on domestic programs.

The program ends with a quote from Gruening's autobiography: "In the end, I came to realize that you can gain almost as much ground by making and losing a good fight for a good cause as if you had won it."

The program ends.