

Call Number: 02-00-39

A Conference on the Future of Alaska - Higbee

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Cooley is discussing a package of environmental legislation attacking specific problems the way Kentucky has approached environmental problems. Cooley then discusses periodic environmental conferences sponsored by the Executive or Legislative branch or both. Cooley says there is a further alternative that represents a policy of reaction to crisis situations. The underlying premises are a wait and see and to perform an ADHOC environmental group would hit critical proportions. There is clapping and John Olson thanks Cooley. John says he is always impressed with the speakers because the people are versatile in their knowledge. John then says the next speaker is Edward Higbee. At 4:00 into the recording a man in the crowd asks John to turn up the volume on the microphone because the people in the crowd can't hear anything. John says that they will turn off the air conditioner in order for people to hear well. John also says to cut out the pollution and requests people stop smoking. John describes Higbee as an agronomist, anthropologist and a geographer. He has been a consultant to a number of countries. He knows about the agriculture of Japan, Vietnam, Indo-china, the Middle East, the Amazon River Valley. He became a geographer and protégé of the great Isaiah Bowman [Geographer]. He spent years as a professor of land utilization at the University of Rhode Island. He is interested in the impact of land use on the people of the American society. Higbee says he is going to discuss the implications of the shift from a natural to man-made environment.

At 7:15 Ed Higbee steps up to the microphone. Higbee says he arrived in Alaska for the first time two days prior to the conference today. He said he had a great walk down 4th street and up 5th street. He said he also got a high altitude view from the crow's nest. He says he has been interested in land use. The problems of land use changes so drastically with technology and changes in the way people think because of technology. To deal directly with land without considering the context in which land policy is made would be futile. Higbee says technology is one of the fundamental aspects of urbanization. He says there is a worldwide shift in a focus on natural resources, which Alaska has in abundance. He says that the nature of using natural resources depends on technological development. Higbee says there is no such thing as a permanent long range store house of natural resources. He discusses the oil on the North Slope. He says 2/3 of the world is committed to an existence based on the natural resources of the world. The part of the globe that is the developed or urbanized can use relatively unusable natural resources and make them usable. He says the technological changes are accelerating due to the knowledge explosion. We are developing energy from humans and animals to inanimate energy. He says the cost of electricity has increased less than natural resources or the increase in personal income. Higbee says that as a broad national and international trend, the relative cost of inanimate energy is declining relative to the inanimate product. He says to attempt to build landscapes for permanent

arrangements would in the end lock people to the constraints of the present which won't exist 20-30 years from now. The rise in per capita income has to do with the fact that the efficiencies of technology are giving people increasing real dollar income. He says if this trend continues then what will happen is more leisure and more mobility. He says all of this is going to make our attitudes toward resources and landscape obsolete. Higbee says our minds are basically a facility which enables us to accommodate to our environment. As social groups, we come to certain concepts about our environment that are accepted in common. One of the handicaps we have as human beings is the mindset of an agrarian past instead of an urban present. Higbee says urbanization is a total environmental phenomenon. It is in its rawest stage of urban development. The physicist and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead said that ideas which are really significant practically destroy the societies in which they emerge. Higbee says the world is engaged in a transfer of ideas about its environment which all but shatter the nature of societies worldwide.

At 21:20 Higbee begins giving examples of what he feels is obsolete technology because of financial and ideological commitments. Higbee says John Osman referred to the work of Frederick Jackson Turner [From recording 02-00-38] and the emphasis to the frontier. Higbee says the idea that a man should make a living from the exploitation of land with meager capital resources but the great muscular and spiritual resources of his family are completely out of line with reality. He says there is a problem in Appalachia and the Great Plains where farmers can't take advantage of the new technologies of agriculture. He says one could almost look forward to the year 2000 when agriculture as known now, may be on its way out. What would that mean for a frontier region such as Alaska? He says Alaska has made roughly a billion dollars from the resources of the North Slope and if Alaska looks at its budget the people will realize that that money could be spent very quickly. Higbee says supposedly 8.4 billion dollars is being spent by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to prop up an obsolete system of small family farm operations. Higbee then attempts to translate the farming situation with the concept of the city. The concept of the city from the past has been to connect cities with farm to market roads [Higbee seems to be using a diagram of some sort to present to the crowd]. He says that kind of city a landscape is one that anticipates permanence. He says now, specializations make the traditional permanent city obsolete. He says all over rural America small town are dying. Higbee says the problems are investing in permanent environments, having the new technology render them obsolete, and human social problems rising.

At 29:56 Higbee discusses what the modern city function might be. To live in symbiotic association with an immediate hinterland is risky because of the pace of technology. Higbee says the reality is the executive function of a city is managing and interconnecting a worldwide network or system. Higbee mentions the article that John Olson mentioned about the "Coming Age of Tele-Communications." He says the present system of highway transportation is already obsolete. Higbee says one only has to take a look at the highways in Seattle to realize what a predicament one can get in and how much of the public wealth can be spent. Higbee says he would like to ask the crowd if what he is saying has any relevance to people's problems. He said he would like to suggest that mankind has known only three basic ecological situations. One is hunting and gathering. Higbee discusses how at one point it was predicted that the United States would only be able to carry 500,000 people. He discusses how the

tribes would jealously guard the land against other tribes. Higbee says it was almost technologically impossible for small groups to live together because of the sparseness of the natural resources. Higbee says he comes from the Narragansett Bay, Rhode Island. Higbee says since you could only have about 50 people to a group [During tribal times] because of natural resource sharing between the group, society was not complicated. Higbee says it was possible for a group to decide who was the hunter and natural leader, there was no hereditary leadership. He says it was a primitive social organizations and a muscle energy society. Then at about 10,000 years passed, man has been able to modify the environment. He says with so many people in a city you can't have that face to face arrangement and social structure becomes more complex. Higbee begins talking about Indira Gandhi and her problems attempting to bring India into an urban age but was confronted with the political opposition of the futile lords. He says the situation is typical in Latin America and Southeast Asia. Higbee says he would suggest that the urban ecology is now emerging in which a synthetic man made environment that is able to use inanimate energy. Higbee says this is the Einsteinian Age and has been with us for about 25 years which isn't time enough for our minds to adjust to the real character of the environment. The Einsteinian Age means if the man has the technology to release energy there is an unlimited potential for the transmutation of our resources from unusable states to usable states. Higbee says 150 billion dollars is being spent by societies that cannot afford it, including the United States because of support for military spending. He says that status has replaced land as a basis of security, one of the major objectives of our time. Higbee discusses how Alaska could be a location where microbiological fermentation of petroleum protein is produced and sold. As for carbohydrates, the United States could secure all the sugars we need by the proper digestion of newspapers [People laugh]. Higbee says he would like to reemphasize the fact that our old notions that population was exceeding resources has left out calculations of the Einsteinian equation and the capacity of the modern research development process to find means of constantly doing more with less. Higbee says he is amazed that when people found a subarctic environment like Alaskans found Alaska, the same buildings are being built as the ones in Wichita, Kansas. He says the kind of cities being built should not follow the patterns of the past. Higbee says that one reason could be that engineers and contractors know only one technique to building. Recently a presidential commission was appointed to investigate new techniques to build structures. The people appointed were those who are interested in present material supply and present union representatives. The report's conclusion was that the commission thought that they were as efficient now as they thought they could be in the future.

At 47:35 there is clapping and Higbee steps away from the microphone. John Olson thanks Higbee for the provocative presentation. Olson says he had nothing to do with the coffee last evening. Apparently there were complaints about the coffee being 15 cents. He says the Alpha Section meets "here" in the Pioneer Hall all day. The Delta Section meets in Pioneer hall all day including the evening. The Beta Section meets in the Easter Island Room over at the Captain Cook and the Gamma Section meets at the Captain Cook all day. Olson discusses an upcoming presentation by John Eberhard at 1:30 pm in the Pioneer Room. Olson says that several people have said something about descent from policy positions that may be taken by policy planning sections or the conference as a whole. He says people should feel free to record their descent. The crowd is dismissed as Higbee is overheard asking Olson if he wants them to go to any of the sessions and he says "Sure, if you want to."