Donald Mitchell oral histories, Archives and Special Collections, Consortium Library, University of Alaska Anchorage. Red Boucher interview, 1993 October 7. Transcript completed by R. Joy Stancel.
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MR. MITCHELL: Today is October 7th, 1993, and I'm speaking in his office in Anchorage with Mr. Red Boucher, who, for a number of years, was the mayor of Fairbanks when the Native land claims movement was just getting up off the ground, and then from 1971 to 1974, was lieutenant governor of Alaska during the times that the Act was in the final stages of becoming law. And since the (indiscernible) going to go up to the university, and hopefully will be around for kids that have never heard of the two of us. Maybe the best way to get into all of this might be just a quick bit of biology in terms of sort of who you were and how you got to be positioned after the 1970 election, to be involved in all of this.

MR. BOUCHER: Well, first of all, I came to Alaska in 1958, just before the Statehood Act passed in Congress, and I'm an East Coast person, put 20 years in the United States Navy. (Brief interruption)

MR. MITCHELL: We're still talking about how you got to be lieutenant governor in November of '70. You mentioned you had just come up to Alaska right after statehood, I think is where we left off.

MR. BOUCHER: Yes. I had retired from the Navy. I was Chief Petty Officer, chief (indiscernible) mate. My specialties were in the field of communication and meteorology. That ties when I was 36, went into the Navy when I was 16, and served a good deal of the time in the Southwest Pacific. As you'll look around my place here, you'll see that it's a kind of maritime. I served aboard the Aircraft Carrier Enterprise which -- not the new one, but the old one, which was the most decorated ship in -- in naval history. I think if anything I'm the proudest of was that my mother was a chief petty officer in World War I.

MR. MITCHELL: Really?

MR. BOUCHER: Back not only long before the women's movement started or before there were WAVES or women in the service, my mother was what they called a Yeoman (F), which meant "Yeoman female", and she served aboard the USS Constitution in the Boston Navy yard. In fact, you look right up there by that silver plate, there is a piece of the hull of the original Constitution that was given to me by some of the workers in the Navy yard when I was on a national TV program called Name That Tune. And the reason I mention that is because it was through the television program that I ultimately ended up in Alaska. I appeared on there with John Glenn, who was a Major in the Marine Corps, and he's now a United States senator, and he and I got to know each other. Well, he was on the program just before I was. It's the old Name That Tune program where you ran up and --

MR. MITCHELL: Yeah, I remember.

MR. BOUCHER: -- rang the bell -- come on! You don't remember.

MR. MITCHELL: I can remember. I was a kid.

MR. BOUCHER: You had to have been a real kid. This was '56 or so.

MR. MITCHELL: Yeah, I was nine, ten years old. Sure.

MR. BOUCHER: I -- what I did was contribute and talked a lot about my childhood home. There was a period after my father died, he -- he died as a young man from effects of mustard gas in World War I, and so I ended up in an orphanage for about a six-year period of time and this orphanage was in Fall River, Massachusetts. So the orphanage and the Navy became the theme on Name That Tune. You know, they've always got to have some sort of focus, or what have you. And in the process, I became quite popular in the state of Massachusetts. I had the kids from the orphanage down. So John Fitzgerald Kennedy, who was then running for senator, invited me to lunch on one of my trips up there, with he and the archbishop of the Fall River diocese, and Kennedy asked me if I would go up and knock on doors with him, which I did in Fall River. It was evidently a pretty close race for the United States Senate. He was running against a fellow named Saltonstall, who was an old Massachusetts family. But anyhow, he won, and then I visited him on a couple of occasions. And it was becoming retirement time for me, and so he said "Why don't you pick a piece of real estate and get involved," and I said, "What do you mean, Senator?" He said, "Well, one place in mind, Alaska is about to become a state, and I think you'd do great there." He says, "I visited a time or two, mostly on -- on a kind of hunting and fishing, but," he said, "it ought to be an exciting place. It's a place that you could relive America again." I was -- I was very inspired by the man. I think Kennedy was the type that, like Franklin Delano Roosevelt, he could end a sentence and have everybody standing up cheering, and they'd say, "Well, what are you cheering about? Well, I don't know, but it sure sounds good." He was a great motivator. He wasn't a political technician, if you will. So I said, "Well, you know, how do you do this?" And he said, "Just get in an automobile and drive." So I ended up doing that, and I never -- when I came to Alaska, I did not understand the immenseness of the state, and I knew little or nothing about it. Before coming up, I'd taken one trip up here and rented a car and drove back and forth from Anchorage to Fairbanks, but that was a very short trip. So I turned right on the Richardson Highway then, and I says, well, I'll go up to Fairbanks and visit there. What I was going to do is be a manufacturer's representative. I picked up a number of clients, mostly in the sporting goods world, and I was going to sell sporting goods on a commission basis to the military. So I ended up in Fairbanks, and checked into the Traveler's Inn, and when they gave me my bill, I took a look at my checkbook, and I was kind of like Wally Hickel. I mean, I don't have any money to go on down to Anchorage, which is where I planned to start out. So I got a apartment in the Northwood Building, and just started selling my sporting goods. And then, drugs were just beginning to come along at that particular time, so I wanted to start a baseball program, and so I started what today is Alaska Baseball. It was 1959, and I always had a dream in the beginning that, as a philosophy that I followed -- Kennedy once again -- let's send a man to the moon. He didn't sit down and get involved in the technicalities. So I wanted to build the best amateur baseball program any place in the world, so we could attract the finest talent that would be an example to our young people, who at that time hardly knew how to throw a baseball. The fact that baseball has grown by leaps and bounds in every place you look, in Fairbanks or Anchorage, or where there's an acre of ground, kids are playing ball, and I think it's essential that

we create opportunities for young people to participate. We have -- and one of, I think, the problems with this, is that we have become a nation of spectators. We sit and we watch television, and we are waiting for somebody to entertain us. So that started that. Then how I got in politics is I share a lot with Jay Hammond, a dear friend of mine. He talks a lot about serendipity. I wanted some grass seed for the ballpark, and so I went to the Park Recreation and Cemetery Commission, and they said -- in fact, they were more busy burying people, digging graves, than they were creating recreation opportunities, and I told them so. And they said, "Well, if you don't like it, run for office." So I did. I ran for the city council. I think I was just eligible by a few weeks. And I knocked on doors from one end of the city to the other. I mean, I think I knocked on every door. In fact, it was kind of the beginning of door-knocking in Alaska. And I stood on street corners and held up signs, and waved at people, and I ended up beating Ed Merdes, a dear friend of mine, his untimely death here, a while back, and I got on the city council and I managed to get Recreation a part of the city, Alaska land, that 90 acres that's set aside, because I think a community has to enjoy itself. And I think there's more to life than just economic development. So that kind of -- after that, I got out, after I served my term, and then I found out that there were some things that I still wanted to accomplish and that it's kind of difficult to accomplish them. You can't play the game unless you get the bat in your hand, so I ran for mayor in 1966.

MR. MITCHELL: '66; wasn't it?

MR. BOUCHER: Yeah. Ran against a dear, wonderful woman, Silva Ringstead, an 80-some-odd-year-old pioneer. And somebody says, "Well, how do you run against someone like that?" I said, "You praise them and, you know, and just say, well, you're going to be just like them," and just get out and knock on doors and you might win. And I was lucky; I won. And my first year was rather exciting. I was supposed to be taking the baseball club to Wichita, and --

MR. MITCHELL: Was the mayor a full-time position in those days?

MR. BOUCHER: No, it wasn't, but I kind of -- anything that I get into, I tend to make it full-time. I just get involved. I don't know how to do a little bit of something. I'm a leaf polisher. Do you know what I mean? I spend a lot of time on details. I mean, I've got to do stuff just so it's absolutely right. But anyhow, we're talking about the Native land claims.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, I was just going to ask you, in terms of that time in the early '60s and up through --

MR. BOUCHER: I had been following --

MR. MITCHELL: What was the -- what was the situation in Fairbanks? How were Natives treated in Fairbanks? Was there any consciousness about Native lands?

MR. BOUCHER: Well, no. I think Ralph Perdue and the Natives in Fairbanks were a much more of a blend of the community than I felt that they were when I first moved to Anchorage. I mean,

they were fellow Alaskans, and a lot of your people that were up there, Morris -- Morrie Thompson, I mean, he served with Hickel in Hickel's cabinet, Johnny Sackett out of the university. So these were some of your hard drivers, and just about, you know, simultaneously, you had everything going. In other words, one of the early things, you look back beyond the Native land claim, beyond most anything, to the battle of statehood, and -- and the Native Alaska community was constantly encouraged to go to Washington, see Big Brother, the Department of Interior handles your problems, et cetera, et cetera. They became pretty skilled at it. In fact, I'd say probably the Native community, collectively, across the street are one of the most effective Washington lobbying groups that exist. I mean, if you want ANWR or some of the other, you had just best had the Native community with you.

MR. MITCHELL: All right. But of course, that's the situation now. They obviously didn't have -- did they have those skills when the --

MR. BOUCHER: Well, I think that there was a feeling -- I never heard anything anti Native. Maybe a few of the flippant remarks by some of the redheads regarding drinking problems on Two Street, but there were just as many drunk Caucasians as there were -- so early on, I developed friends within the Native community, and I felt that the struggle was not so much to give, quote, Natives some land, but to get on with the total business of the Alaska Statehood Act, and if we could add 40-some-odd million acres to the acreage that we were getting, that was land that was going to come under Alaskans. How the Natives were to develop that land had to be peculiar to their lifestyle. Hey, bear in mind that we in Alaska have the -- the ancestors of the people who discovered the new world.

MR. MITCHELL: Did you know a guy named Nick Gray up there at that time? Do you remember Nick at all?

MR. BOUCHER: No.

MR. MITCHELL: He was a little guy who apparently started the Fairbanks Native Association with Ralph Perdue.

MR. BOUCHER: Yeah, and -- oh, I knew lots of people. I had sporting goods stores, and my Native friends would come in. I dearly love them. I think they're a fantastic, wonderful culture. And as I became lieutenant governor, you know, hey, when I want to get my head screwed on right, and still today, I'd go out to one of the villages and sit and share. So this was -- I wasn't that politically aware of the things that were on the national scene. Then it was, amazingly enough, when I became mayor and the Goldpanners, the baseball program, grew into a fantastic success. I mean, you can look right over there and there's an autographed baseball from my first Hall of Famer, Tom Seaver, who was inducted last year, and a letter from him and Jess Winfield (phonetic). So I feel good. We do have the best program in the world, and other people acknowledge it all over the nation and internationally. Then you get down to -- to this part of my reasoning for running for lieutenant governor was the attitude that the administration at that time had on Native Land Claims Settlement.

MR. MITCHELL: Sort of Keith Miller's not a nickel, not an acre?

MR. BOUCHER: Oh, that type of thing really bothered me. I mean, these are Alaskans, I mean, major contributors to the society, you know. I felt at that time when I heard some of this it was some of the same redneck type of talk that came out of Alabama, you know. "Well, what do you want to do? How come them Natives own this land," and what have you. People are -- people with the pickup truck mentality that still today battle subsistence and the Native -- the Native way of life and their culture. I mean, I've made a number of speeches. The last time I did on the floor of the House about subsistence. But it is as valuable to us to see that this culture lives and continues to thrive. I mean, you can bring all the Walmarts and all the Kmarts you want to town, but they create seven-dollar-an-hour jobs. The Native Land Claims Settlement Act has seen -- sure there's been some failures, but look at Sealaska and some of them that I think moved up into the Fortune 500. That's --

MR. MITCHELL: I don't know if they're up that high, but people -- CIRI and Sealaska, Doyon --

MR. BOUCHER: Right. And an example of how you can get a job done, and the gifts and skill. Roy Huhndorf could be CEO of any corporation in the United States. So this was the perception that I saw. I saw a new opportunity for a more -- more land for the State, I saw a greater opportunity for more leadership from the Native community, and I saw no negatives, none whatsoever. So it was one of the major reasons that I ran for lieutenant governor, because I knew how strongly Governor Egan felt about it.

MR. MITCHELL: That was going to be my next question, as to whether or not you talked to Bill during the campaign about this to determine --

MR. BOUCHER: Well, I don't -- I don't think -- see, bear in mind, when I ran in 1970, I was still pretty much a chechako. I mean, I had -- hadn't even been here for 15 years yet, and I was running against Chuck Sassara, who had been Speaker of the House, and was very well liked in the Democratic Party circles, and certainly, I'd have to say a good friend of Governor Egan's. So here, I'm this baseball character from Fairbanks that's kind of a go, go, go, loudmouth type of person, and Bill Egan is, in every sense of the word, most -- he never could -- it could be just stated he was enthusiastic and a person who loved Alaska, but we're two totally different type of people. But I did talk to him about it after I won the primary. I didn't figure that in any way, shape, or form that I should even approach the governor during the primary. Just get out and hustle and win, and I did very well in rural Alaska.

MR. MITCHELL: Now, was Sassara his man? I mean, did he ostensibly have --

MR. BOUCHER: Hey, Bill Egan never said that. I would -- I would say that he had to be. But he wasn't his man. I mean --

MR. MITCHELL: He didn't go out and campaign for him or --

MR. BOUCHER: No way, no way. In fact, I was kind of lucky in that I got Ernest Gruening to cut a spot for me when we were going over to Sitka. Sassara liked to flip. In fact, I still have that 30-second spot. But -- okay. We need to speed it up here. But we were elected. The first cabinet meeting that we --

MR. MITCHELL: Actually, let me -- one last question before we get to the first cabinet meeting, and that is, did you have a feeling -- I didn't crack the numbers because I thought I had my 1970 returns from the general election in my filing cabinet and they're missing. But obviously, Anchorage and Fairbanks had been going much more Republican in those years and it was always the bush that was really saving the Democratic Party, and I was wondering, do you have a feeling in terms of -- or your attitude about Native claims was very similar to Egan's. Do you think that was a major factor in the general election?

MR. BOUCHER: Well, it was certainly -- whether it was the major factor -- was it a major factor? Absolutely, yes. I mean, you waited for returns. I mean, definitely, they were going Republican, and as you've seen, they have. Meaning "they" by Fairbanks and Anchorage. But I've always done pretty well in Anchorage. The baseball and -- in fact, when I ran in midtown, here, district, and I carried it well against some pretty tough Republican opposition.

MR. MITCHELL: I'm sorry I interrupted you. Tell me the first --

MR. BOUCHER: No, no, no, no. Do it, do it so that --

MR. MITCHELL: Sorry.

MR. BOUCHER: -- whoever's listening to this --

MR. MITCHELL: So just to sum that up, then --

MR. BOUCHER: There's no --

MR. MITCHELL: In terms of this argument between Egan and Keith Miller about whether or not the State should be participating responsibly in a claims settlement, that that really was a factor in that election?

MR. BOUCHER: Well, it was, but Egan never hammered it then. His theme was "let's get Alaska moving again". In other words, it was bogged down by all of the things that we couldn't do, instead of really reaching out for the things that we could do, and Egan didn't waste his time with that kind of nonsense. Let's move ahead. And certainly the settlement of the Native Land Claims wasn't a high priority to him. So we were elected, and he brought people from the Native community. Eben Hopson served, and Roger Lang, a number of -- Byron Mallot, so -- and they did great jobs.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, I interrupted you. You were mentioning something about the first cabinet meeting.

MR. BOUCHER: The first cabinet meeting, I remember Charlie Edwardsen at the end of the table, and when Charlie got wound up, you know, he'd have a nervous stutter, and Egan just says, "Hey, slow down. We're going to work on it. We're going to get this problem solved. It's of a top priority to me, but there are other problems." And so, you know, the non-Native community -- there are other problems and we've got to move ahead together, you know. And so let's drop some of this rhetoric a tone or two, and begin to work to solve the problem. And he was on the phone with the key Democrats in both the House and the Senate, and he played quite a role in statehood. So he had -- Egan, every place Egan went, he had just -- people had lots of respect for him. It was for one reason. When he told you something, you could put it in the bank forever. There was no such a thing with him as all bets are off. Huh-uh.

MR. MITCHELL: Increasingly rare commodity --

MR. BOUCHER: Yes, yes.

MR. MITCHELL: -- in Alaskan political life.

MR. BOUCHER: Well, any political life. Egan thought before he moved. I think if you're ever -- there's a famous television ad that was used when television ads were first coming out, and it was a light in the window, with him working there late in the evening. I'm a late worker, myself, and I could hear him come in, the doors shut, first place he headed was for the old AP teletype to find out what was going on. Then he'd sit down and he was on the phone. Had lots of lights blinking, and he was in touch with Alaska. "Hey, Mary, how's it going out there," to some housewife in Kotzebue. He had the best intelligent network of any politician I've ever seen. And he probably got on the phone for two or three hours every evening, calling people all over Alaska to get the feeling of how they felt. He didn't need any pollster. So it was rare that the man moved in a direction that was not supported by Alaskans. This is a true public servant. Most people are political mechanics, today. He could walk into a room, as Bill Egan did, and when we went out of the room, Bill Egan could tell me how many people would vote for us and how many would vote against us in the room. So he had this antenna, this instinct that was tuned in. The 30-second mentality did not exist in his life. By "the 30-second mentality", I mean that stuff that most politicians have been crowded in today. "How's your media. Saw your media. It looks pretty good." And the whole future of a nation or a state is decided on how you ride a horse up the side of a mountain instead of some of the debate. I mean, Bill Egan was never a media candidate, and probably would not have gotten elected if media had been in the forefront in his first election.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, you can make the argument that that's why he lost to Jay in '74, actually, because Jay was a better media candidate, and that that was coming off --

MR. BOUCHER: No, he didn't, and I'll tell you that. I counted the votes. The votes were the absentee that came in. It was those first 30 days out. In fact, we were ahead until the absentees

were counted, and nobody could believe it. I was the one who counted each one of those votes. The reason we didn't win is because you could not get the man out from behind being governor.

MR. MITCHELL: Didn't get out on a stump?

MR. BOUCHER: Well, he could have. We tried to get him into Fairbanks for one last time, "Bill, come on." "I got work to do here. I'm about the people's business."

MR. MITCHELL: Well, now, speaking of "people's business", the first thing that he had to do when he came in, when you guys came in, was -- I don't know if you remember, but in January and February of '71, you got a resolution out of the legislature that publicly committed sort of the end to this Keith Miller business --

MR. BOUCHER: You're correct.

MR. MITCHELL: -- that the legislature was on board. Were you involved in all of that?

MR. BOUCHER: Yeah, yeah.

MR. MITCHELL: Was that teeth-pulling or was that an Egan operation or (indiscernible) introduced the thing?

MR. BOUCHER: Anything that occurred in Juneau when Bill Egan was governor was an Egan operation. There was only one governor, and the legislature just -- they were staunch and they were independent, but if the governor wanted it, and he always wanted something that didn't embarrass people, the governor got it. So there was no such a thing as about your operation, or this. There was one governor of this state, I'll guarantee you that. And if he wanted it, boom, it went through.

MR. MITCHELL: It did. Took them about three-and-a-half weeks or something?

MR. BOUCHER: You got it. And I remember (indiscernible) first thing to call. I was sent down to find out how the people were going, but only if the governor was too busy to talk to them. He was a hands-on guy.

MR. MITCHELL: Now, did he bring them upstairs, just out of curiosity, or --

MR. BOUCHER: Are you kidding?

MR. MITCHELL: Did he go down the halls, himself?

MR. BOUCHER: Wherever. He did not go down on the second floor very much. He felt very strongly about the separation of power. He didn't want to be perceived by the legislature as

somebody trying to run them, too. Bear in mind that he'd had experience at the other levels of government.

MR. MITCHELL: Right, right.

MR. BOUCHER: But there was somebody down there. It was Wes Coyner or Alex Miller or myself constantly, constantly. I mean, we just -- we didn't lobby them. We just said, "Is there any more information that we can give you," because there was some pretty strong-minded people down there at that time. But he had friends that loved him, like Bill Ray. Bill Ray could get anything through the Senate. And so he was carrying the ball for Egan. You had Sassara -- well, not Sassara, but let me think of some of the people over on the House side. Kerttula, I believe, was over there at that time. People just loved to carry the governor's water.

MR. MITCHELL: Hmm, yeah, he was just sort of leaving as I was getting involved in all of this. I never really had an opportunity to spend much time with him.

MR. BOUCHER: He was just fantastic, understated. You'd think he was around picking vegetables out of his -- the most unassuming person.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, now, other than getting this resolution, the public that commits the legislature to participate --

MR. BOUCHER: All the lines were burning and -- with Congress and, needless to say, our Washington delegation was working hard on the thing. And the key and the main thing is everything else, Scoop Jackson, you know, and the relationship with the senator from Washington was God. They were in relationship with the congressman from Colorado, was good.

MR. MITCHELL: Now, did -- I was going to ask you in a second about your trip back there to meet with Aspinall, but did Egan ever indicate to you what he thought of Aspinall? Did he think that he was sort of irascible, or did he like him personally.

MR. BOUCHER: Oh, he -- yes, he was -- well, I never heard Egan say he didn't like anybody. I never heard Bill Egan badmouth anybody. I mean, I've heard people in his presence start to dump on somebody and it could be somebody from the other party, and Egan cut them off in a hurry. I do not recall Bill Egan ever saying a bad thing about someone. As far as Aspinall is concerned, he didn't go into any detail with me. I didn't know whether he was young, old, or what have you. He just told me to get on the plane and go back.

MR. MITCHELL: I was going to ask you, when do you think that would have been; do you recall? Was the legislature still in session at that point or was it --

MR. BOUCHER: Well, you had the clipping, so it could have been -- it was just as you look back through your history, and the period -- what prompted it was the guy from -- that ran for governor, Wright --

MR. MITCHELL: Don Wright?

MR. BOUCHER: Yeah. Don was getting a little rambunctious back there, if you saw that, and there was some talk about there might be bloodshed or arms. Do you remember that particular thing?

MR. MITCHELL: Right, right.

MR. BOUCHER: And Egan didn't dump on anybody. He didn't call the Native Land people in because, hey, they were feeling their oats. They were battling and they -- hey, they were rising in prominence. So Egan wasn't that type. He just told me to go back and tell Congressman Aspinall, you tell him that Bill Egan's word is good. And evidently, there had been some conversations going on about this, and there was -- Aspinall read some of the goings-on as overreaction, and felt that it did not serve the interests of Alaska well at that particular time to take militant approaches to it, and that he was working to put it all together and that between he and Jackson, it was in good shape, and -- but I remember I told him that and I didn't -- as I said, I don't know if it was an older man, or what have you. In subsequent time, I got to know him. He's a wonderful man, a real solid-rock person like Bill Egan, but I just sat down and looked at him like I'm looking at you, and I said, "Congressman Aspinall, I've got a message from Governor Egan, and he said just tell you that Bill Egan's word is good." "Well, all right, okay, Okay, all right. You tell Bill, no problem." Then he kind of got off. He said, "I wish some of these people that were coming here to represent the state would know that your governor's got it under control. What do you say?"

MR. MITCHELL: Well, that's the right message.

MR. BOUCHER: He felt deeply that the Native community should lead it.

MR. MITCHELL: I'm sorry, "he" Egan or --

MR. BOUCHER: "He", Egan, felt that the visible leadership in the key moments of the Native Land Claims Settlement Act should be being played by the Native community to show that they had an opportunity, that it had a future, that it had a significant place and part in Alaska. Bill Egan did not attempt to sit there and manipulate everybody on the thing. We were along about the business of the State, as usual, the building of the pipeline, the other types of things. The main emphasis out of his office was, say, through John Havelock. John Havelock played quite a role in the dialogue that went back and forth, and I don't know if you've interviewed John.

MR. MITCHELL: John's on the list. I was sort of waiting for that.

MR. BOUCHER: Ah, he probably, more on a day-to-day basis, went with it, and --

MR. MITCHELL: Now, back to this business about communicating to Mr. Aspinall about the governor's word being good, I was trying to -- the reason I asked about when that was is that it -- the dam really broke about midsummer of '71, when Aspinall basically put a deal together and -- and everybody had --

MR. BOUCHER: It was during that legislative session of that year.

MR. MITCHELL: Right. He made everybody, including Don Wright, basically come in and say, "If I let this bill go with the way it is right now, will you agree that you won't fool around with it?" And that would have been in very late July or early August of '71.

MR. BOUCHER: Bear in mind, now, the legislative session was going on in Juneau right up till about May, and I forget when it went out that year, but the chances are, it was more than 120 days. And Egan would not leave the state, especially in the latter part of the legislature. That's why he sent me. Otherwise, he would have gone, himself.

MR. MITCHELL: So it would have been about the end of the state --

MR. BOUCHER: Yeah, it was down to the fish-or-cut-bait time, absolutely, yes.

MR. MITCHELL: Okay. Good enough. What about -- well, let me ask you, did -- was that basically your only trip back to deal with Aspinall on this, or were you involved subsequently in any other --

MR. BOUCHER: Later on, in other areas, a nuclear, and I was a member of the Western Nuclear State Compact, and we had a lot to do with Colorado at that particular time. So it was a number of opportunities that I got to meet Congressman Aspinall. In fact, that time that I was there, he was really gracious. He -- he said, "Where are you staying," and he and his wife picked me up at the hotel that evening and took me out to dinner, and we had a relaxed evening.

MR. MITCHELL: This was on the Land Claims trip or --

MR. BOUCHER: This was on the Land Claims trip, yeah. He took me out that evening and reassured me, "You go back and tell the governor that everything's okay." So the courtesy paid to me, I'm sure not everybody that comes to town -- because Wayne Aspinall and his wife, very private people.

MR. MITCHELL: Right. They didn't socialize in the circuit.

MR. BOUCHER: Correct. They were from the western slope of Colorado.

MR. MITCHELL: Right. Now how about -- so then in terms of the land claims issue as opposed to many Bother projects, that was basically your --

MR. BOUCHER: Yes, that was the only trip that was needed. I mean, after that, it was settled.

MR. MITCHELL: Right. Now, what about another fellow that I missed, unfortunately, because I got up here just after he was lost, was Dick Begich? Did you ever have occasion to talk to Begich about land claims?

MR. BOUCHER: Yes. He was amazing. He worked very close with the governor, and the governor had the highest respect for Begich. Begich did an amazing job on the House side. I mean the individual lobbying with key congressmen, I mean, he played a major role in getting the votes on the House side. Absolutely, yes.

MR. MITCHELL: Did you ever have occasion to talk to him about his general sort of philosophy about it all?

MR. BOUCHER: He felt much as Bill Egan and I did. "Hey, these are fellow Alaskans. If we can add 44 million -- million acres to the state of Alaska, we're for it." And granted, when it began to get to where we exchanged land, and what have you, there were some differences of opinion, but hey, that is true in any instance, I mean, where land is a part of it. I'm talking about State land and Native land claims, but by and large, it's worked out well. Begich, yes, definitely and absolutely played a significant role in it.

MR. MITCHELL: There was -- I'm still trying to figure out -- great. UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Sorry. I totally forgot you. Everybody's forgetting you tonight. Does that really make you feel like a non-person? Red forget you, I forget you.

MR. BOUCHER: We're space cadets around here today. UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I knew that, honey. And I assume anybody who has a meeting with you understands you.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, we've got the tape on, and so this will be for all posterity. People will know what -- even though you were late for this meeting, you're a basically highly regular Joe, and history will prove that. UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: He's retired and he can do whatever he wants.

MR. BOUCHER: What do you mean, "retired"? I'm just -- I'm in a hold mode, like -- UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: You're in a what?

MR. BOUCHER: A hold mode. In fact, today, about five people asked me if I was going to run for mayor. UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: And I hope five people got "no".

MR. MITCHELL: Well, that's another subject that I --

MR. BOUCHER: Actually, I -- you never say never.

MR. MITCHELL: Compared to the present line-up, which certainly so far has not started me atwitter --

MR. BOUCHER: Whoever's mayor has got to have a universal look in Alaska. He's got to -- Tony Knowles understood the importance of rural Alaska. I don't think Anchorage really ever has, to my way of thinking, and there's been none of the people that I've seen there -- I mean, there are not Natives appointed to key positions in this state -- I mean in this city.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, you know, let me --

MR. BOUCHER: But anyhow, that's --

MR. MITCHELL: That leads back into a question I was going to ask you about that, and that is, it is interesting that I've seen memos that Ted Stevens wrote as early as 1959 and '60, when he was still a nobody working in the Interior Department. He basically says exactly what you just said, you know, that giving Natives land is not giving Natives land. It's giving Alaskans land, and it's a way to get an extra however many acres of land added onto the statehood.

MR. BOUCHER: How people could not perceive that is absolutely beyond me.

MR. MITCHELL: Even one day, a couple years ago, much to my amazement, Joe Vogler told me the same thing. He says, "Goddamn it," you know -- you know how Joe -- "I told those people, I said, give them a goddamn hundred million acres, hundred million acres. Get it out of the -- you know, the enemy is the goddamn federal government, get it out of their hands. You know, I couldn't make anybody in -- you know, that I hung out there in Fairbanks --" I guess my question is, assuming that people are as politically diverse as (indiscernible) and Joe Vogler and yourself, who obviously don't see eye to eye on a whole variety of things, all on your own -- you know, it's not rocket science we figured that out. Why do you think that there was so much bitterness through the Anchorage, Fairbanks chambers of commerce about all this, and all the people that really didn't get it at the time?

MR. BOUCHER: I -- first of all, I don't think that it was adequately explained at that time. A lot of people today still don't understand what the Native Land Claims were all about. They'll say, well -- when subsistence comes up, they'll say, well, we thought -- (Break in audio from 47:13 to 47:23) -- with the Native Land Claims Settlement Act. You hear that. I heard it. I got sick and tired of hearing it by the hunters' association, and the -- but I don't like to knock people, but the mentality that creates a "them and us" situation, the -- I think that was part of the problem, and all we're saying, wow, we didn't get this. We had to come up and work our homestead. So there was a lot of redneck-ism, if you will, the looking down on the Native community.

MR. MITCHELL: Basic racism, then?

MR. BOUCHER: Yes, absolute racism. I mean, not basic, absolute. I mean, I heard some people make statements that just made me sick. I mean --

MR. MITCHELL: Back in the Land Claims era?

MR. BOUCHER: Yes, yes.

MR. MITCHELL: How about the Anchorage Times and the News Miner, do you think that they were factors in sort of that kind of (indiscernible) attitude?

MR. BOUCHER: Well, basically, both of those newspapers were pretty well influenced by Stevens, so that was a factor. I don't -- I've known Bob Atwood for a long time, and you're asking the question -- also Bill Snedden, and I don't recall them being anti Native Land Claims. I know that Snedden was very fond of Stevens and Secretary of Interior Seaton. They were certainly opposed to Udall's freeze, and that's one of the things that I think hurt it. Obviously, the only way that the thing was going to get settled was to go through this process, at least Udall thought so then. So its association with the land freeze that Interior was doing that for the Native community, I think hurt it. But by and large, I think that if it was today, it could be handled a lot better, explained to the average Alaskan. I mean, I can envision a spot saying, hey, 44 million acres for Alaskans. It will bring dollars into our economy, et cetera, and --

MR. MITCHELL: And that just wasn't done at the time.

MR. BOUCHER: No, it wasn't done. It was kind of a Washington thing, if you will. People thinking more of getting pipelines started and extracting resources and building roads and getting some of the basic things done.

MR. MITCHELL: Actually, in that regard, I've seen a lot of press clips. I don't know how much of it was political rhetoric, but of Egan saying that basically the State's going to go broke if we don't get the pipeline built, because we're in deep trouble and we got to do this land claims thing in order to get the pipeline built, so it was a two-step --

MR. BOUCHER: They absolutely --

MR. MITCHELL: Did he actually believe that or --

MR. BOUCHER: He not only believed it, it was a fact. I mean, he -- yes, yes, yes, yes, they were hand in glove. I said on the floor of the House as recently as my last term there that nothing of any magnitude that can be accomplished in this state without rural and urban Alaska working together. Over the years, rural Alaska, Native Alaska, if you will, has developed many friends in Washington, D.C., and probably as much or more so as the State, itself, has. And so unless -- ANWR is a prime example. ANWR is a prime example. I mean, you -- nobody has really asked the Native community to sit down. It was primarily an industry and State pushed and promoted thing. We all joined hands together to get that pipeline or there would have been no pipeline.

MR. MITCHELL: The point was, I guess, that made me think of it was, you know, how bad off financially, both to the State government and to sort of the private business community -- well, how much had the freeze, the land freeze really disoriented things by '70, '71? I mean, was the State really in financial trouble, or was that more --

MR. BOUCHER: Oh, that certainly wasn't the land claims that disoriented it. Our biggest problem was moving ahead and developing our resources in an environmentally sound manner. Bear in mind, under Bill Egan, the Department of Environmental Affairs came in. So it was no single thing. If you'll recall, that which was slowing the pipeline down, and I still believe today that -- take the Native Land Claims and set it aside, take the environmental movement and set it aside, that what really slowed the pipeline was that Standard Oil of New Jersey did not have a piece of the action. Some upstart, I'll call it, another called it BP and the underground, they created a lot of red herrings out there. There's no doubt in my mind. In fact I, as much, when I attended a conference when we were trying to get the pipeline going -- and bear in mind, I traveled. That -- that was what I considered my finest hour. I mean, I traveled throughout the country with editorial boards, became great friends with William Randolph Hearst, and as I said, I've got that stuff there. And every place I went in the country, when the Native Land Claims Settlement or the talk came up by people, said, "When are you going to get that thing settled, when are you going to get that thing settled?" So I never heard anything negative at all. But yes, it definitely played a role, because of the Natives lobbying back with the liberal Democrats, saying this thing is going to affect our life, our quality of life. They says, "Well, okay, if you're for it, we will be there," but how close was the vote?

MR. MITCHELL: On the Native Land Claims or the pipeline?

MR. BOUCHER: On the pipeline.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, the pipeline, they had to break a tie.

MR. BOUCHER: That's right.

MR. MITCHELL: Actually, you could --

MR. BOUCHER: So it was an all-out lobbying effort. As far as the State going broke, I have never heard Bill Egan use those words. Maybe he did. There was a feeling that we could not sustain growth in the state to the degree that it was needed without that pipeline moving ahead. Egan was concerned about medical facilities in the smaller communities of the state, things that we had been denied, and done without. That's -- a lot of people said, well, we got $900 million and it was spent right away. You bet it was. It was spent for the needs of the State at that particular time. We sorely needed medical facilities, schools, other types of stuff. So that would be his reference, rather than saying that the State was going --

MR. MITCHELL: Literally drained --

MR. BOUCHER: Yeah, right, right.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, now, the -- the last sort of public involvement in terms of going through the press clippings of your involvement with this before there was a land claims bill, is that after the bill had finally passed both the House and the Senate and was on its -- this would have been like in November of '71. I mean, it was on its way to the Conference Committee, I know that according to the press clippings. At that time, that's when Don Wright and AFN were really sort of mad at Egan over -- over -- first we went for all these years about how many acres, and then all of a sudden, once that got settled, it immediately switched into (indiscernible) and that became the big important thing. And I know that you and Egan went up to -- I guess a big AFN board meeting up in Anchorage and I guess the first question is whether you remember all of that, and apparently Egan calmed them all down.

MR. BOUCHER: Yeah, he did, simply because there was a lot of politics in that. (Indiscernible)'s a fine man, but he has visions, high visions.

MR. MITCHELL: You mean Don Wright.

MR. BOUCHER: I mean Don Wright, yeah.

MR. MITCHELL: Now, did you know Don from the old days in Fairbanks?

MR. BOUCHER: Yeah, I did, yeah, yeah.

MR. MITCHELL: What was your impression of him?

MR. BOUCHER: He's a go-er. He -- he jumped in. I think that the people that had a lot to do with it were under state people like (indiscernible) Roy Huhndorf, Byron Mallott. Don Wright was a different person from them. He was -- how do you say it -- more of a promoter, should I put it? And I think that part of that was attempt -- since everybody wanted to get it settled, was to maybe rally some people to his side. Much the same is applied in the -- in the heated moments with Aspinall, was the same technique that Bill Egan applied to (indiscernible). The Natives knew Bill. He had visited in their homes. He was loved in rural Alaska. So when Egan got up there, and he'd call a few of the old timers in, some of the elders, and says, hey, come on, let's calm this thing down. You know I'm working for you, or what have you. We don't have to declare war on Washington.

MR. MITCHELL: That's actually what (indiscernible) said was he was going to declare war on -- if the State didn't agree to what the AFN position was, that -- and this all lasted about two days, and then there was this big board meeting and you and Egan went in there and got a standing ovation, and there's still a lot of tussle going on behind the scenes, but the whole --

MR. BOUCHER: Well, there was. There were some very emotional people in there. I mean, you saw it. It was in their grasp and they were afraid of some of the rhetoric that was coming out of there. I think I got a book here from Charlie Edwardsen -- yeah, let's see, what did he say, Etok.

MR. MITCHELL: Now, is Charlie's book about -- Hugh Gallagher's book about Charlie?

MR. BOUCHER: Story of Eskimo Power, Etok. Red, this is what I said, what makes good government. "Etok" Charles Edwardsen, Jr., is a young Eskimo radical with a strange authority. So this is -- it's all tied into it. Here you are, AFN meeting, Barry Jackson, Sackett, unidentified fourth person. This unidentified fourth person is John (indiscernible). So it's the traditional Native. The thing that I love about them, understated, steady, many thousands of years. We're not going to solve all of these problems, and I think it -- you know, Don just was -- but Egan went in like the father figure that he was, he calmed them down. I watched. I watched. It was masterful.

MR. MITCHELL: But do you know what Egan personally thought of Don Wright or --

MR. BOUCHER: He respected him. Egan respected anybody that had a -- spoke out. I mean, he didn't agree with him. I never heard him say, well, that so-and-so. Never. Egan knew how to pick his battles.

MR. MITCHELL: Okay. Well, I guess --

MR. BOUCHER: He just -- it's the same -- you ought to see him work the room. You've got to see him go into the National Guard Armory on Governor's Day and go down to Native, Republican, Democrat, "Hey, Mae, how are you? Hey, Don, good to see you. How are you, Jane? And hey, did that kid's leg ever get fixed that was broken?" Amazing.

MR. MITCHELL: Did anyone ever ask him how he could remember all that? I mean, his ability to do that was obviously legendary. I mean --

MR. BOUCHER: And then the story built. Neva tells one time that he was in the room and shook her hand and she says, "I'm Neva, your wife, Bill." Why? Because that's where his mind was all the time. You talk to Bill Egan, he listened to you. He didn't have a million things going on.

MR. MITCHELL: Kind of like Stevens where you got 60 seconds and you could see him --

MR. BOUCHER: That's it, that's it.

MR. MITCHELL: -- thinking about everything else.

MR. BOUCHER: Oh, yeah, right. And that's the mentality that we live in today. I go back to the 60-second mentality.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, I very much appreciate all this. I guess I have two quick questions.

MR. BOUCHER: I hope it makes a contribution.

MR. MITCHELL: Particularly, this -- I wanted to -- it's a real shame that I started -- I started this project, but I've done it sort of in an order, so now I'm to the end. And when I started, Bill was still around, and -- and of course if I'd known he was going to pass on, I would have accelerated having this kind of talk. And of course, by the time I got to -- you know, I never sort of do this until I've sort of done my homework, you know, in terms of what --

MR. BOUCHER: The Havelock work, and Havelock property, you're going to find out a lot from John, a lot of the technical stuff.

MR. MITCHELL: I guess my -- one of my two questions is, do you think, in terms of Egan's and yourself, your participation, your collective participation in all of this, do you think that we've sort of hit the major points, or do you think that there's anything that we haven't talked about that you think might be important to people listening to this in the future about Egan and the land claims?

MR. BOUCHER: Yeah, the problems of 2010 or the problems of 1971 in settling a Native Land Claims Act, Egan felt like Tip O'Neill, all politics is lonely, meaning that the greatest problems that are solved in this world are solved by a few people getting together. And if the focus is on the solution and not on the gamesmanship of egos, that they will -- the problem will get solved. Theodore White, in talking about the history of man, talks about, tell me how they used power. And so the things that Bill Egan did that weren't the good ol' days, they were a time when you had a little bit more time to think about things, when the majority of people were not controlled by what is coming out of the television, you know. Tell the whole world about the problems in Somalia in 30 seconds, so they choose dragging our pilots through the street with a helicopter.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, the (indiscernible) United States Senate, you've only got 20 seconds to communicate your message.

MR. BOUCHER: Right.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, I guess my last question, which is sort of way beyond what I'm trying to put together, but I've asked sort of everyone who was there at the time and has been here since, and that is just in a general way, how do you think it's turned out in the last 20 years?

MR. BOUCHER: I think great.

MR. MITCHELL: Do you think if you could -- if you were the Congress and you could do it over again, do you think there's something that should have been done radically different or do

you think it's worked out pretty much the way people expected at the time, or do you have a feeling for this?

MR. BOUCHER: Oh, I wouldn't change it. There's been some talk, primarily brought up about by the subsistence issue. I think the safeguards that were built into the Act that related to that belong there. No, I don't think there's anything that I would have changed, and it has brought Alaska lots of jobs and created opportunities that otherwise would not have existed. How the different corporations have functioned, the corporations have done a great job, the Native corporations, and other ones that have done not so great. But that's no different than in the -- in government, for example, or other corporations. I think that Alaska's unique in having done something like this, and it is my hope that if anything, that there is more than a growing involvement between the Native community. I'd like to see some of these supermarkets that are moving in being Native owned, for example.

MR. MITCHELL: Now, did you ever have occasion after the Claims Act, you know, in the '80s and beyond, to talk to Egan in terms of how he felt it turned out?

MR. BOUCHER: No. No, he was very pleased, but he was an "on with tomorrow" guy. Hey, we got problems, we got this pipeline being built, and we got these people pouring into the state. Once he got a problem solved, he didn't sit around and crow about it, or what have you. He was a true champion in every sense of the word. And you know what a true champion is? They know they're winning before they go into something. They don't believe otherwise, and that's what Egan was.

MR. MITCHELL: Like the old John Wooden, UCLA basketball teams. 30 seconds left, and you're down by six, but you knew they were going to win, because they always won.

MR. BOUCHER: Well, winning becomes a habit. Thinking about doing things becomes a habit. Egan had that -- and it created that atmosphere with everybody around him. So he just got on with doing more.

MR. MITCHELL: Okay. I think the last question that I just thought up in addition to that is obviously one of the things that did come out of land claims was the whole 17(d)(2) ANILCA deal. Did Egan or you or anyone appreciate at the time when 17(d)(2) was put into the Claims Act what that really was going to mean, or was it just sort of a detail?

MR. BOUCHER: Well, first of all, that was one of those things that were in there, that if you'd have started a battle over that, you might have lost the war; correct?

MR. MITCHELL: Right, that's true.

MR. BOUCHER: So there are lots of things that we had to deal with later. We're still dealing with the Statehood Act; right? And things could have been different.

MR. MITCHELL: I guess my question was whether or not you saw that for the problem it turned out to be or whether or not it was just sort of a detail that no one saw the consequences of until later?

MR. BOUCHER: No, no. I think that you saw that. You're always going to have that concern with the federal presence. And in fact, I was at the (d)(2) lands. Hammond sent me.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, that just reminded me, when you were traveling around the country --

MR. BOUCHER: Right, right, right, saying hey, hey, hey, Alaskans are not irresponsible people. Bear in mind, now, if you will come back to some of the early thinking that you were talking about the pipeline, and some of the more liberal Democrats, because of the Native involvement and the desire to get that issue solved, went over on the side industry and economic development. Later years, that pipeline factor wasn't in there. So there was some of the people that were with us on one issue that weren't with us on the other.

MR. MITCHELL: Okay. Well, I've learned my --

MR. BOUCHER: Did that answer that satisfactorily?

MR. MITCHELL: Sure did, sure did. Well, as I said, I very much appreciate you taking time this evening.

MR. BOUCHER: Glad to do it.

MR. MITCHELL: And I know this was very helpful to me, and I hope someday when somebody else is listening to this tape, they'll find it equally both educational and fun. I've enjoyed myself thoroughly.

MR. BOUCHER: Well, thank you.

MR. MITCHELL: I guess with that, we can probably ... (End of Audio Recording)