

Anchorage Daily News

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OPINION



Uniqueness of Alaskans is apparent in new film

Alaska is not just rich in resources. It's rich in ideas. And one of those ideas was celebrated last week at the premiere of a new film called "You Own Alaska!" The idea was born when we wrote our model constitution and won the fight for statehood 50 years ago.

Most Alaskans know they don't pay state income or sales taxes because our state budget is funded by revenues from our state-owned oil at the North Slope. Most are well aware that they qualify for an annual dividend from the Permanent Fund. But do they know why?

Some months ago, John Hendrickson, who worked with me in the early 1990s, suggested that we create a film to explain our unique "Owner State." He wrote an outline for it and offered to finance it. That film drew a standing-room-only crowd to the Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center auditorium last Wednesday and will be broadcast statewide on GCI Channel 1 and 360 North in the weeks ahead.

The film tells how Alaskans insisted when we became a state that we receive at least 100 million acres of land so we could pay our own way. It recounts how Bob Bartlett, our delegate to Congress in 1955, challenged our constitutional convention to address the responsibilities of owning such natural wealth. As a result, the delegates wrote a remarkable constitution that requires that our resources be developed for "the maximum benefit of our people."

Since then, we have created in Alaska the only democracy worldwide where the people own the land and resources in common. As a result, we have made much progress, and Alaska has become a model for other places that are resource-rich and commonly-owned. Economists in Russia, for example, are looking at our unique economic/political system as a way forward to a better future.



WALLY HICKEL

COMMENT

If you live in Alaska, you are an owner. With ownership comes obligations. Get involved and make a difference.

To make the film, we enlisted the Alaska Channel, which brought in writer/director Marla Williams, a former Alaska journalist. Marla let the people she interviewed guide the story. She began with veteran Alaskans Vic Fischer, one of the authors of our constitution, and Clem Tillion, who helped shape Alaska's outstanding fisheries policies.

She interviewed Byron Mallott, Gloria O'Neill and Harold Napoleon, who spell out the core values of Alaska's Native peoples and their vision for the future, and she interviewed Gov. Sarah Palin, who attended and spoke at last week's premiere.

In the film, three Atheneum high school students show off an electric car they built as their contribution to a better world, and Jon Waterhouse describes how the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council has removed millions of pounds of junk cars and scrap steel from the banks of the Yukon River.

All have a similar message. If you live in Alaska, you are an owner. With ownership comes obligations. Get involved and make a difference. As Waterhouse says, "Put on some gloves and get to work."

Following the premiere, several of those who appear in the film participated in a dialogue with representatives of the Conference of Young Alaskans. In contrast to the gloom and doom over recent political corruption and the economic recession, the mood that evening was charged with optimism.

Each spoke passionately about the need to make a difference. Kokayi Nosakhere challenged the audience to assist the Food Bank in feeding the hungry. Rebecca Prieto, a young psychiatric worker, addressed the challenges in Alaska family life. And longshoreman Scott Heyworth described the urgent need for Alaskans to work together to get Alaska's gas to Alaskans.

A stand-out was Q'orianka Kilcher, 19, a gifted actress and great granddaughter of Yule Kilcher, a delegate to our constitutional convention. She donated her talents to the new film and called on the audience to become "everyday heroes" in the effort to improve our state and the world.

This was just the beginning. Nils Andreassen, the dialogue coordinator for the Institute of the North, announced that the film will be part of a series of dialogues throughout the state in the months ahead. I urge you to get involved. After all, you own Alaska!

Walter J. Hickel served as governor of Alaska from 1966-1968 and from 1990-1994 and as U.S. Secretary of the Interior from 1969-1970. He is the founder of the Institute of the North. For information about "You Own Alaska!" go to www.institutenorth.org.