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McFarland Announces Resignation
By Cynthia Rieben

Robert E. McFarland, a member of the University's Board of Regents since 1963 and its president for the past two and one-half years, announces his retirement from the Board this week at the general board meeting in Sitka.

During a recent interview, McFarland explained that he and his wife, Juanita, are moving to their home on Echo Lake and that he would be unable to give the time and energy the job requires in light of their future plans.

McFarland, a native of Washington, came to Alaska in 1949 with the International Laborers and Hod Carriers Union. He was very active in the labor movement up until 1970 when he retired to set up the Alaska Laborers-Employers Trust. He managed the trust until 1973 when he became Marketing Director and Treasurer of First Federal Savings and Loan Association which position he holds at present although he plans to retire within the next year.

Governor William Egan named McFarland to the Board of Regents in the Spring of 1963. At that time, Dr. William R. Wood was president of the University.

McFarland was interviewed by Cynthia Rieben, Manager of the UAA News Service, and reminisced about his years with the University.

Q. What have been the significant achievements of the University of Alaska while you've been regent?

A. In particular, I believe the greatest achievement has been the development of the community college system. And I'm thinking particularly of the anchorage situation with the community and senior college. This has made it possible for a lot more students to get a college education, students who couldn't afford to go to Fairbanks, pay the tuition, room and travel expenses.

I recall sometime around 1965 a survey was taken in Fairbanks to determine where the students came from Fairbanks with a population of probably 21,000 was the home of 400 of the students. The Anchorage population, however, was 100,000, yet only 100 students were attending college in Fairbanks. This significant finding started the board and administration working on providing higher education in Anchorage.

Q. Are there other achievements that come to mind?

A. Well, I think it's a great University. The research it conducts is impressive. I'm sure that research done by the University was probably instrumental in getting the pipeline off the ground quicker than it would have otherwise.

Seeing the use to which research can be put, I think it's going to be the inclination of the state now to fund more and more research. In that way, the state can get the kind of applied research it needs for its own development. In former years, research was funded by federal agencies and foundations, and work was done on the subjects they wanted, not necessarily tuned to Alaska's economy. With more interest from the State, the trend is toward applied research, research that will be helpful immediately.

Another achievement has been the movement of programs from those areas strictly considered Alaskan – like mining and geology – to a more normal range of subjects including the arts, business, economics. As we take education to the people, there's a really great demand for new skills. And what the people want, that's what we should be taking to them.

Q. Are the Board of Regents taking a greater interest than ever before in rural education?

A. They certainly are. The breakthrough is in educational television – hopefully, it's going to be bringing the University's programs into every village. We're hoping to not just train people in the villages for specific jobs, but give them the impetus if they want to come into the University campus and receive additional education.

Q. Do you foresee more community colleges being established? Editor's note: The tenth one was recently established in the Nome-Kotzebue area.

A. I don't think there's any question about it. I think there has to be a dramatic breakthrough in education to better spend our education dollars, and I think the community colleges are the best example of how we can reach more people with more programs with less dollar cost.

Q. Do you see the greater development of the community college system resulting in a break with the University?

A. No. Such development enhances the larger campus programs. And what can best be taught or offered one place, should be taught there. If a program will be most successfully offered in Fairbanks, then that's where it should be. Likewise with Anchorage and Juneau.

The offspin (sp) from the highly successful community colleges with be dollars that can offset the cost of senior college where students are fewer but the demand for quality just as crucial. And I think the faculties of both systems are sources of manpower for each other.

I think one enhances the other. If there were a split, there would be a political question of funding. And economics tells you you can run one system better than if it's split into eight or ten systems.

To give you an example of how our system compares to other states, in California up to about five years ago, any community coule (sp) start a junior or community college, and then if they decided after they got it running that they couldn't afford to support it, they could turn it over to the state.

Well, in Alaska, we have certain ingrediants (sp) that by law must go into the creation of a community college. There must be the desire of the local people, there must be a request a request from the school district, and then the legislature must give its approval by providing funding. The proof that our system works is that we've never had a community college go under. They're all growing fine.

Q. What do you think the end result of unionization of the community college faculty will be?

A. I think both the union and administration have to grow up, accept each other. The excitement unionization has caused will settle down once enough people take it seriously. I feel the union and the administration are still at each

other's throats, after all, they've just gone through the first bargaining session. There is still needless harassment on both sides.

Q. There is word that the community college administrators (sp) and the professional staff in Anchorage are forming organizations. What is your reaction to this?

A. It depends on whether the administration pays any attention. They should. Because they didn't the community colleges organized. The faculty were low on the totem pole, administration didn't pay much attention to their economic status, and so there was a lot of dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction, it's the greatest breeder of unionization there is. So if the administration doesn't pay attention, others will organize. And it's much less expensive to pay attention before that happens.

Q. Is it practical or possible for the state to attempt to provide two forms of higher education, public and private?

A. Not in the long run it isn't. There's a lot of contradiction in what the state's trying to do. A good example – the legislature tells us as regents to the University that class size should be increased. But a big part of AMU's advertising campaign is based on how small the classes are. The state's funding both, and it doesn't make sense.

I think the state is biding time in the hopes that someone will come and bail them out, perhaps the native corporations.

Q. Does the state have a need for the kind of education AMU is designed to provide?

A. I've always felt a different kind of education should be available from what the public system offers. The thing is, they've promised something different, but they've just taught the same old thing. They've said they were going into special types of programs, para-legal assistance, technical assistance to Natives, special education programs for Natives. There's a need for these things, but I don't think they've provided them to any great degree. No student is going to take basic freshman courses at AMU he could take at UAA when he'd have to pay a lot more money. Of course, now the state has made it possible for the tuition to be the same.

I suspect there'll be great problems with accreditation if they continue offering such a limited programs as they have this fall.

Q. You and the other regents had been optimistic that this past legislature would approve the purchase of AMU in one form or another. What went wrong?

A. I honestly don't know why it didn't happen. Of course, it was a bad year to fund anything, because of the status of the general fund. But they gave AMU funding to stay open, just about the same amount that would have gone toward a down-payment. But I think there's a good possibility that the next legislature will pass a bond proposal to purchase AMU.

Q. What do you foresee taking place within the University's statewide system in the next decade?

A. The greatest development will probably be a new University in Anchorage. In ten years, we'll have about out-grown the present campus and we'll have to establish a new campus somewhere else in Anchorage. Of course, a lot

hinges on what happens to AMU, but the buildable ground around the two universities is limited. And then the area can take only so many people, and then the congestion becomes too great. By the time UAA has 12- 15,000 students, we'll have to establish a new campus elsewhere.

If the capital moves, wherever it moves, that area will develop into a urban center, and it will require a community college unless it's close enough to the Matanuska-Susitna Community College for it to expand. But that college might not be large enough either.

Q. What influences do you see the native corporations having on higher education?

A. They can have a great contribution, and some are already assisting greatly in development of programs and objectives. Some are attempting to run their own programs, but I think that's just a passing fancy.

Politically, they have a lot of influences and will help shape the development of rural higher education. Through their efforts, people will be brought from villages to central learning spots. They'll have a beneficial influence by helping establish learning centers where they are needed.

Q. What reflections do you have on your years as a regent?

A. It's been a great experience, never a dull moment.

Of course, Fairbanks always seemed to think Anchorage was stealing the campus out from under them.

For years I did everything I could to get a community college started in Fairbanks, but with little success. Not even the legislators from up there were much in favor of it. Now Tanana Community College is off and running, huge enrollment, and I think it will help the Fairbanks campus more than anything they could have done on their own to bring greater educational opportunities to that area. As the Anchorage community college grew, I think the Fairbanks legislators felt there must be something to it and began backing one in Fairbanks.

And then there's been all the growth and tremendous capital building projects the last 10, 12 years. And there'll be more demand for buildings before it eases off, in the next 10 to 15 years. Yet I think we've made great strides because we're building buildings now that can be changed without major renovation costs. This is possible through the architectural concept of component sub-systems which makes for compatibility among structures and insures their multi-purpose nature.