ORAL HISTORY 85-231
IRA govt: Stevens and Sheffield

Series: Chinook Radio Programs

Role of Natives and federal government
Indian Reorganization Act of 1934
Tribal sovereignty
Tyonek asserted right to decide who could live in community
Venetie denied State authority to regulate fish and game and declared exemption from taxes on oil development on local lands
Kotzebue passed local Native hire ordinance
37 villages formed United Tribes of Alaska group
IRA villages as sovereign with own powers and special relationship with feds transcends that of State of Alaska.
Relinquishment of Native sovereign rights with passage of ANCSA
IRA councils not acknowledged by State of Alaska as governmental entities for revenue sharing and other activities afforded local govts
Governor Sheffield investigating as did Governor Hammond
Some say not state issue, but fed

June 1983 press conference, Stevens presents his views on IRA question: "I think the problem is that whether or not the Indian Reorganization can continue to be used by Alaska Native organizations to create the IRA villages in Alaska. And on that we have a letter from Governor Hammond asking the congressional delegation to request the Department of the Interior to suspend the action on applications that create IRA villages in Alaska until the matter could be further reviewed by the State. That letter still pends, is still pending. Governor Sheffield has written to us saying that he is reviewing it and wishes more time to review it, but the letter from Governor Hammond still remains the policy of the State."

Stevens perspective on complication of issue related to only recently having gone from territory to state. IRA in territory has different status than IRA in state. Particularly as relates to power of state and local governments and powers of taxation and powers to exclude people or businesses from areas controlled by Natives. No treaty reservations in Alaska, except Metlakatla. Problem to be reviewed by congress after receives State of Alaska recommendation. Determination of sovereignty affects sovereignty given state.

Compares with Lower 48 where have Indian reservations immune from taxation and state does not perform function of government on those reservations. Diff in Alaska. Not denied services to Indian land.

IRA act designed to give local option to local govt where people lived on reservations in south 48 and did not have form of govt. They petitioned the fed govt. Different in Alaska. Have not denied state's delegation of authority to create local self-govt in terms of boroughs or cites or other local govt entities. Some IRA's formed before statehood, so

their resolution is matter for judicial decision. Unless Congress re-write whole IRA act for Alaska which not want to do. Congress pass special Alaska section if general consensus between State, natives and local govts but congress not want to step in and mediate between the groups. State wants period of review.

Programs for Alaska Natives versus reservations. State difficulty to provide services. Want to treat Natives the same in state as were in territory until land claims settled. Conveyances still not completed. Now state has money for services. Day schools responsibility of state of Alaska. Legal justification for providing services to Alaska Natives.

Fight between local govt entities. IRA villages versus villages organized under ANCSA and corps formed under ANCSA. IRA villages could tax land of others.

State needing to review the issue. Should places be allowed to set up their own fish and game laws. Tribal sovereignty issue affects amount of sovereignty people and state of Alaska have over their lands. Checkerboard of ownership. Asking for state to review and give congressional delegation guidance on what they want to do. Not stating his own opinion.

Acute problem that has all ingredients for real internal strive within Alaska if not properly handled.

Sheffield talks about trying to figure out IRA and what problem was. Legal or attitude problem. Gov. Hammond letter to Sec. Watt to see what responsibilities are. Congressional delegation thinks is a state problem, Sheffield thinks is fed problem. Recognition of IRA councils. State's resolution of providing services in other ways. IRA tribal councils will be biggest issue facing his administration in how to settle it and work with it. Dedicate self to make it work and all one people in one world.