

## Walt Parker

Interviewed by Hilary Hilscher

December 15, 2000

### Tape 1, Side A

Hilary I'm talking with Walt Parker and it's December 15<sup>th</sup>. Walt, let's talk about those Federal Field Committee days.

Walt: Okay. In 1970, why, FAA was asked to detail me to the Federal Field Committee as their transportation planning officer and they grudgingly agreed to that. And as I pointed out, we had the North Slope airlift and everything under control pretty much. And so they grudgingly let me go on the assumption they would get me back, which they never did 'cause I transferred in a few months to full time with the field committee. So the pipeline, of course, was the big thing going on then and I was working on the various pipeline route alternatives to make recommendations to the Administration, which was the Nixon Administration by that time, and to the Congress on pipeline routes. And then at the same time, the field committee had... was providing oversight to the sale of the Alaska Communications System, and the Department of Commerce was staffing that in Washington and they'd send people up to see us every once in a while, and to talk to the state administration and talk to the various agencies and what have you.

They didn't have a real feel for, you know, what was out there. And I, at that time, wanted to sell it to the Bell System and get us in the Bell System so we could be integrated into the national rate base and what have you. But for reasons which the Department of Commerce never made really clear to any of us in Alaska (were) why RCA got it. Now, RCA promised to provide telephone service to 143 of the villages and communities which did not have phone service at that time, which were still relying on HF on the school system HF Network and on the Public Health Network, which was very intermittent. So, as the health aides would always say, why, when you needed it most it wasn't there.

So we started the field committee. (It) ended in June of 1971 – and it had been created by Executive Order and was uncreated by Executive Order. And we didn't make any great effort to save it because it had pretty well done its job.

Hilary Which was specifically what?

Walt: Earthquake relief was what they started out with. And then the next big thing was the Native Claims Settlement Act, to provide staff support to the White House and to Scoop Jackson primarily on claims settlement. And those were pretty well taken care of by that one. It took another six months to get the claims settlement signed but there was nothing more really for us to do.

So I was secured early retirement from the federal government as the result of having my agency destroyed.

Hilary I like your word “uncreated”.

Walt: And so at age 44, I was out on the street with a reasonable retirement check and looking for new worlds to conquer and the state contacted me very soon to work on the Applied Technology Satellite number one project, which was distance education and distance health. And the Institute of Communications Research at Stanford (SRI) had Ed Parker and Heather Hudson working on it on the health side and I was supposed to handle the education side.

Hilary For the state?

Walt: For the state. And so we went to work on that and that is what... we had 26 sites that started out on that and finally they got pared down to 17, due to budgetary problems and what have you. But I managed to get to all of them and get a reasonable feel for the problems of both teachers and health aides in communications, and started writing my series of reports: Village Satellite 1, 2, and 3, which (documented) the need for it and that took us up to 1974. Well, Bill Egan did not have the sharpest guy in the world working on this problem. Chuck Buck was a nice man but he was not the guy to grab RCA by the throat and force them into satellite communications in place of microwave. RCA was determined to dump all of its old microwave junk up here.

And so that was pretty much the position when (Gov. Jay) Hammond was elected. Meanwhile I had gone off to view the pipeline and haul road, and was working (the law of the sea), in addition to the ATS-1 project, so I had plenty on my plate. But when Hammond asked me to take over highways and form a Department of Transportation, why, I got him to agree that I could: One, keep control of the tanker problems at Valdez, and work with Chuck Champion on those, since he was heading up the state pipeline office and I would be using his staff mostly in addition to whatever money I could get out of the governor’s contingency fund to hire my own. And then, to head up the telecommunications effort. And Hammond agreed to that.

So I was kind of wearing three hats there and I was able to get real good staff and we put together an advisory committee very quickly of... It was of greatest concern you know. People like Sam Kito, who was still pretty much a statesman then and so forth, and all the Native leadership we could interest, and as many of the local government people as we could buy tickets for. And we had some meetings and proceeded forward.

Well, the ATS reports were coming in very strongly and supporting it – not only was satellite communications better, but it was also going to be cheaper by far.

Hilary Now this was when ATS-6 was up too?

Walt: ATS-6 was just coming on at the same time, yeah. So we had that working with us. The legislature loaned me Glenn Stanley and Bob Merritt, who were their consultants, but they just said, "Take them and use them." And I said, "You bet." So we started flailing away at RCA. The governor was for us. Legislature was really angry with RCA after a while, mainly 'cause they just weren't being responsive at all on the issue. And we had a famous meeting in... you know, where one of their vice presidents a fellow named Bradshaw – Thornton Bradshaw. Thornton was at ARCO but "the other Bradshaw", as I called him, he showed up and had the whole conference table lined with legislators and the governor's people.

Hilary This was the governor's conference room?

Walt: Yeah. So we had the place packed and there were legislators leaning in through the doors and everything. So Bradshaw and the governor opened it up and said... and asked vice president Bradshaw to say a few words. He said, "Well, I was on my way up to Anchorage to do some things so I just thought I would stop off here." And I nudged old – the guy who worked – took over from Bob Arnold at...

Hilary Oh, Marv Weatherly.

Walt: Yeah, Marv. Ol' Marv was kind of my chief-of-staff on this effort. I nudged ol' Marv and said, "Say nothing. God has delivered him into our hands. He has delivered him into our hands." Boy, I looked around that table and this guy had just cashed in his chips. So we chatted some more and (lobbed) a few broadsides. And the governor said little. But a few broadsides (came) from the legislature and what have you, and the meeting was breaking up. "Why, ol' Jay Kerttula leaned back through the door with one of his evilest grins and said, "Next time you're up this way stop in."

Hilary Oh, that's wonderful. So this was when Hammond was first in: '74?

Walt: Yeah, this was the spring of '45.

Hilary '74?

Walt: Well, spring of '45. I mean '75. Yeah, we'll get it right yet. Spring of '75.

Hilary Right. Okay.

Walt: And you know, I... So the legislature went ahead and appropriated the money for the small earth stations, the five million to buy them. And we started cutting a deal with RCA that we would buy the earth stations and they would operate them. Well, they threw in the towel and agreed to that and we went ahead. So we had satellites instead of microwaves. That was the big pushover.

Meanwhile ATS-6 was proven for television from space and, boy, everywhere I went in the Bush, people said, "When is it coming? When is it coming?" Because the little taste

they had from ATS-6 before we moved it to India – why, within a year after the ATS-6 had left – it left in '76 and was moved to India – in '77 the legislature voted the money for the statewide channel, and by that time I talked Bob Walp (in)to being Hammond's telecommunications guy and so Bob got all this dumped on his lap and we started negotiating for a channel on the new SatCom satellite. And ninety days before launch, we finally reached agreement on the engineering changes so the thing could accommodate a TV channel. And they put on the extra pads and what have you and she worked. And by that time, they had learned that while we were a tiny state, why, we had some influence. And we didn't have to involve the Congressional delegation that much in this. In fact, we would have gone to them if we needed them but we were able to work it out at our level.

So starting from scratch in 1970 when Applied Technology Satellite (1) showed up – by '77, we had telephones in all the villages. Not very many...we didn't have *switches* in all of them, but we at least had an earth station for television and for telephone in all of them. And we were kind of the model for the whole world. We had people showing up from all over the place, from Africa and so forth. [Phone rings, tape off.]

Hilary So that seven-year period was pretty remarkable.

Walt: Yeah, we were lucky that, you know... we were lucky that Bob Walp showed up from Hughes. We were lucky that Bob Arnold was at the peak of his powers and we were lucky that Hammond and the legislature agreed with us totally. We'd have never made it with **this** legislature.

Hilary Go back, Walt, to that...to the ATS1, the lead-in to that. The fact that you traveled to the 17 villages. And what were some of the enduring memories that you have of going into some of those villages, people you met, things you saw? What did you hear?

Walt: Well, I was mostly with the teachers, but I'd also talk to the health aides. I made sure I talked to them even while that was Stanford's project. Why, we worked real close together. We traded information every day. And so my main memory was, you know, how happy they were to be able to – the health aides – to talk to the doctors. The teachers were a little more ambivalent. They were a little bit afraid of distance education and interfering with their curriculum and what have you, and, you know, what's it really going to do for us? But the health aides had no doubt whatsoever. Being able to really have the doctor when they needed him was a great relief to those ladies and the few gentlemen that were in it. More men came into it later but the... and where we... I really started learning.

I thought I knew my Alaska after 25 years at that time, but we started doing a lot of conferencing of health aides and teachers, and I was having some distance courses and what have you. So this was just the time in '72 that the Pill was being distributed by the Public Health Service. So I had Arnie Beltz (sp?), you know Arnie? Arnie Beltz and Kay Lamnpara (sp?) were the two people running it for Public Health here, the birth-control program. So I put them on the air. And we had all the health aides at the sites chime in

that were available, which was most of them, and after they made their presentations and what have you, the ladies started talking. And Rose Ambrose, who is probably the most famous health aide in Alaska history at Huslia, and Pauline... I forget Pauline's last name down at Nulato. They got to... came in and Rose said, "Well, I'm not passing out the pill because the priest does not approve of it." I said to Kay and Arnie, I said, "Well, you know there's only about four Catholic families in the village. The rest of them are Episcopal. And you know..." And then Pauline chimes in and says, "The priest doesn't bother me. I'm passing them out to everybody that wants it." And I said, "My God, Nulato is totally Catholic and it is the same priest. The priest lives in Nulato and goes up to Huslia twice a month to say Mass." And you talk about local control: Rose had it.

Hilary That's a wonderful story.

Walt: Yeah, that's one of my favorites. She... but you know, in places – like the really isolated places like Arctic Village was at that time before it became a political center in the great ANWR fights and what have you – the people in Arctic Village was... and they were really a happy bunch there.

One of the other vignettes: I was talking to one of the senior women in Venetie and while I was there waiting for my airplane – I had been up in the parsonage going over the records of when they became, when that area became a reservation and how they voted for it and what have you. So I said, "I noticed in the record you didn't vote for the reservation." And she says, "No, I didn't want to be fenced in like a cow." Funny she should use a cow as a... I don't think she had ever seen a cow. She had been to Fairbanks so she might have seen them at Creamer's Dairy or something. But little vignettes like that were great, and a lot of those are in my reports.

Hilary What was the main desire that you heard expressed from people in villages with regard to communications?

Walt: Just to be able to talk to the world and mainly to talk to their suppliers and whether those were medical suppliers or Northern Commercial or whoever. Just to be able to communicate and (they) got a taste of it with the ATS and they didn't want to lose it.

Hilary And there was a certain amount of that wonderful conferencing that went on.

Walt: Well, that was a big thing. They wanted to talk to each other from village to village. That was probably the biggest thing of all and that came out very early in the game and very strongly because a lot of them had families scattered in several villages. So talking to family was probably number one priority, and after that health, and after that NC Company, and education probably four.

Hilary And probably in that order?

Walt: Yeah.

Hilary When you first came up here... which was in the 50's?

Walt: '46.

Hilary '46. The state of communications was what?

Walt: We had military communications throughout the state. We hadn't built the DEW (Distant Early Warning) Line yet so we didn't have as extensive as we did later, but we had the military communication system. The FAA had a communication system that reached some 48 communities and it was primarily Morse code and radio teletype. You didn't have telephone yet. And then ACS served many of the same sites with telephone – and none of the villages that I'm aware of had ACS contacts. We had ACS in probably fifteen to seventeen (of the) largest communities ranging from Ketchikan to Barrow and that, of course, was pretty much operated like ham radio. So those of us who had access to ham radio used that pretty much as our telephone to the states 'cause on our salaries we couldn't afford to make a regular phone call, you know. A regular phone call in those days – like Tricia was in San Francisco and I was in Fairbanks – why, it would run ten to fifteen bucks. Well, salaries were three hundred or four hundred a month so.

Hilary Were you a ham?

Walt: Yeah, yeah, I was never a real super-enthusiastic one but I did it mainly to meet my Navy Reserve requirements. And I had a big radio set up to do that, so I also used it for ham radio.

Hilary Did you go down to the federal building to make phone calls? Did you ever...

Walt: Yeah. You had to go in to make phone calls. Usually, sometimes, you could make them from the house but communications weren't that great and the phone system in Fairbanks worked pretty good and in Anchorage it worked pretty good but the main thing was the terrible expense and we just couldn't afford long distance calls.

The other thing: the Bush had nothing except VHF operated by BIA and the Indian Health Service and that wasn't much at that time. There were very few places that had it because the health aide program, of course, didn't get going until the 60s and the schools were primarily dependent on how good a radio operator the teacher was, whether they had any real communications or not. So the sad thing was that FAA on the government circuits that were there in the community in some cases were not available to the community, and the same with the military. That was an illegal use of taxpayer dollars to allow an Alaska Native living in a small community to make phone calls so they were only available for...

(Phone ringing. Walt aside, "Answer the phone.")

So they were only available for the...

Hilary Official use?

Walt: Official use. Even if you worked for them, why, you'd be taking a chance if you fudged a little bit. You'd get fired for that. Emergencies only.

Hilary Yeah, yeah. Did you ever learn Morse code?

Walt: Oh, yeah. I was very good. That is what got me to Alaska. I had to pass thirty-thirty to...

Hilary Is that right?

Walt: To get the job.

Hilary Is that thirty-send/thirty-receive?

Walt: Yeah.

Hilary Uh-huh. And did you have a Vibroplex bug? What did you use?

Walt: Yeah I just used a bug.

Hilary With a thumb paddle and –

Walt: Yeah. Dot, dit, dot, etc.

Hilary Can you still understand it when you hear it?

Walt: Oh, yeah.

Hilary Yeah.

Walt: You never forget it. I can't read it as fast as I once could but I keep up pretty well. Don't hear it much any more.

Hilary You know that there is that whole network still...

Walt: Yeah.

Hilary ...of guys who do that?

Walt: Yeah.

Hilary And they talk that way.

Walt: You want to hear a great one about the hams?

Hilary Yeah.



Walt: I went to the (North) Pole in May with Ron Sheardown, my next door neighbor, and four other guys. Why, we had ham contact all the way to Svalbard. Lee was talking to his buddies in the Mat Valley on final approach into Longyear and Svalbard. A mile out he was still jabbering away to him, and we had it all the way back. And we had the little incident coming back, why...

Hilary And went through the ice?

Walt: Lee had him on before we left the ice. We had them notified, and Juneau, and they were talking with the RCC (radio common carrier) in Juneau before we left the ice. So remarkable.

Hilary Isn't that amazing?

Walt: I think we had the conditions, but still...

Hilary But still, that is just remarkable.

Walt: Yeah, never shoot the old HF down.

Hilary Yeah, yeah. When it works, it's great stuff, yeah, yeah. As you look back on your involvement in telecommunications, which was certainly... there at critical times, what are you... what do you count among the biggest successes that happened, biggest transitions that took place?

Walt: I think probably what we were just talking about: the transition from microwave to satellite. Microwave, I was part of that. That was a government operation pretty much and FAA went from HF to microwave in the early 50s and Phillips and (inaudible) had the contract for that. And that was nice because we were able to finally have something that wasn't totally dependent on the HF conditions. So, you know, we made the switch to modern communications during that period and that was interesting. It was really only a government thing, and they had ACS (which) was part of it. They were microwaving their locations, but doing nothing for the Bush. So that's why the satellite thing was far more interesting.

And the other interesting thing, though was, when Augie (Hiebert) and Al (Bramstedt) and the boys started up the TV. Why, those of us living in the Bush had some great ideas. My neighbor at Minchumina was Dick Collins, who still lives a good part of the year in Minchumina, and he is even older than I am. Dick is in his 80s now. But Dick was a real experimenter. So we put up these enormous Yagi antennas on top of our houses and we were getting Anchorage in good shape, bounced off Mt. Foraker. And we knew we could do this because we had the previous microwave experiments with Phillips and all of that so. And we could get Fairbanks. But we could Fairbanks picture but no voice. Those were interesting years. We had television for two of our remaining years at Minchumina. So I would have somebody like Carl Sesui, the village chief of Talida. And Talida at that



time had a population of about six: Carl and his wife's daughter and son-in-law and their two children. So Carl would hike in for his mail if I didn't fly it out to him soon enough. It was only 40 miles. He was a tough old bird. And Carl, you know, experienced... was one of those with his father who found the (Lt. Joseph) Herron Expedition (of 1899) and rescued them when they got lost on their way to... from Cook Inlet to Tanana and took them on in to Tanana by dog team after freeze-up. He saw his first horse tracks when they were rescuing them. The Army used horses then. So Carl had a lot of history.

So I bring Carl in and plunk him down in front of the television and say, "What do you think, Carl?" And he was bored out of his mind in five minutes. It just didn't have interest for him whatsoever.

Hilary His world was much bigger and richer than that.

Walt: Yeah.

Hilary So go back with... to your own history for me. When you first came up here in '46, where did you go then?

Walt: Fairbanks.

Hilary Uh-huh. And how long were you there?

Walt: Until January of '49. We went out to Minchumina until September of '57. Then we moved right here and Tricia didn't particularly want to leave Minchumina for Anchorage. She loved the Bush as soon as the day she arrived. She loved it. She never stopped and, you know, she liked friends and having all that freedom. She wasn't happy about moving back here to town. The main reason we came back to town was to continue our own education, get the kids exposed to some classroom-type schooling. They had been doing very well with her teaching them there. She'd bring in the local kids and teach them when they were available. And Alfred Starr...did you ever know Alfred?

Hilary No, I don't think.

Walt: Alfred Starr's son, Paul, who is still very active in Doyon politics, why she taught Paul English and to read and write and so on. He was ten then and had had no school whatsoever and that was kind of...

Hilary Sure, there was nothing out there.

Walt: No.

Hilary Did you know my folks in Fairbanks, Herb and Miriam?

Walt: Well, I knew Herb and Miriam, and we went to the same big parties and that was, you know, how we socialized. Fairbanks was very social then.

Hilary That's right, yeah.

Walt: We had the annual parties, yeah, but I didn't know them real well because I was going to the University and working 48 hours a week or 56 sometimes, for the CAA and that... and the family, why, except for the occasional big party, I didn't get out that much.

Hilary Yeah, that took your time.

Walt: I worked for the *News-Miner* for a while.

Hilary Oh, you did!

Walt: I knew Cap (Lathrop) pretty well when it was still his newspaper... grumpy old soul, he was.

Hilary I have some great pictures that my father took of Cap for publicity shots and that sort of thing and I have given all that stuff to the museum archives here, yeah. And so then, since '57, you have been in Anchorage?

Walt: Yeah, except for a short tour in Washington, DC.

Hilary Right, right. When you headed up highways for Hammond, were you here?

Walt: No, I was living in Juneau, but I was here most of the time. Tricia went to Juneau for a year and she says, "I have a nice house in Anchorage and this house is okay but it is nothing like my Anchorage house and you're in Anchorage all the time anyway so I'm moving back."

Hilary Yeah. What else about Alaska's telecommunications past? If you were describing this as the sea-change that you have seen here, what would you say has been one of the more remarkable things that has taken place and why?

Walt: The remarkable thing was how a very new state government with somewhat minimal support by the federal government was able to take advantage of the NASA programs both in communications and remote sensing and things. I shouldn't say "minimal support" from the feds because it was in their best interest, too, but it was the state that was out in front on all this. And this carried on right through to after the right... well, it carried through very strongly from 1970 to 1984 and the state of Alaska was largely... Because of state efforts on the education side – and federal efforts on the health delivery side – was the leader in distance health and distance education. And so after I shut down the Land-Use Planning Commission in '79, why, the university and the state both immediately hired me to pull together the Learn Alaska Network. And that was the top of the state-of-the-art in distance ed at that time.

(Dr.) Martha Wilson's imprint was still strong in Indian health and they were kind of leading the country, so we had visitors from all over the world coming to see how we did

it. And that all collapsed totally with the crash of oil prices in the mid-80s and the legislature – including some of the liberal Democrat and Native legislators’ side of it – started shutting down all state involvement in this. And I had been busy working a lot overseas in the last couple of years of that, because of the kind of exporting that we were doing, and a lot of the other staff had left to do that – and figured we had this one under way. And we didn’t appreciate how fast the crash (came) but mostly it was the difference in the legislature.

From ’80 to ’84, the Alaska legislature (went) from being one concerned with social and economic advance in Alaska... went to one sole concern was how they could save money so they wouldn’t irritate the oil companies, threaten them with more taxes or something. That was the big difference. And we’ve got remnants of what we did then still around, but resurrecting it – despite Fran Ulmer’s strong interest and what have you – why, it’s still not resurrecting itself to the same degree. And through forty million – thirty million in four years – into distance (inaudible) is exploring new frontiers now in the Bush and getting T-1 lines into remote communities and so forth – so that’s going on, but that is the first big step forward.

And I’m doing stuff with the Arctic Council on Circumpolar Telecommunications but you know Mark Badger, who was one of my old gang at ATS-6 days, and my former son-in-law Moses Wassilie, who did that village series and Mark was the cameraman and Moses was the narrator. I forget who did the writing. Moses and Mark did it together. Anyway, Mark went down to Juneau for several years with (Gov. Tony) Knowles but now he is down working in Seattle for Cisco (Systems), I think, yeah. And a lot of people left just because the state lost interest. And you know, that was a highly exportable commodity. We could have – with what was going on worldwide – we could have supported a cadre of a couple hundred people here, both within the University and within the private sector, in just doing the sort of things that right now Veco and others do for the oil (industry). We could have been doing the same thing in distance ed and distance health, but we... and other institutions took that over.

Hilary You have thrown out a number of names through this conversation. If you were to say who were the people who really made a difference for Alaska’s telecommunication picture, who would they be?

Walt: Oh, Bob Walp would be right at the top.

Hilary And why is that?

Walt: Because he brought the knowledge of what satellites could do to us and for us, along with Bob Merritt and Glenn Stanley. The three of them kind of supplied all the information on what could be done and Bob had just got his doctorate under Bruce Lusignan at the institute at Stanford. So, you know, that was the top – between Bob with Hughes and the Institute at Stanford – why, we had the benefit of the top of the state-of-the-art in satellite engineering and the... and we’re talking communications now, not media. The...

Hilary Well, media put broadcast, you know...

Walt: Right with Bob, you'd have to have Al (Bramstedt) and Augie (Hiebert). And they were always there pushing the limits, either with radio or TV, far beyond what any of the telephone people were doing in the same era. The...and I think plain old telephone people who were instrumental and they pretty well rode on the back of the satellite types. I don't remember at Alascom (who) stands out and what's his name... but he was never the head. He was the guy you worked with the most. George...

Hilary Shaginaw.

Walt: Shaginaw was real important. George never lost his enthusiasm for getting things done.

Hilary I saw him in February and I communicate with him on e-net.

Walt: Where is George living now?

Hilary DC.

Walt: No kidding.

Hilary He is the head of the Cellular Telephone Association (CTIA) – Cellular Telephone International Association, Interconnect Association, yeah. I have e-mail.

Walt: I'll be darned.

Hilary We communicate by e-mail all the time.

Walt: Yeah.

Hilary He is just as enthusiastic now as he ever was. Got good energy for things.

Walt: Uh-huh. (I'm) kind of filtering things through here. My old attorney friend up in Fairbanks, oh, he has hung in there. I'll think of his name in a little bit. Johnny Sackett was a good supporter. He, besides Bob Merritt and Glenn Stanley in the university... I'm trying to think. There was a whole host of people who did a lot of things. Frank Darnell (?) when he ran the Center for Circumpolar Education.

Hilary You mentioned Dr. Martha.

Walt: Dr. Martha, how could I forget Dr. Martha? Yeah. Heather Hudson and Ed Parker worked on it for years. They were always there when I need them and called them back. Heather is at USF (University of San Francisco) now. Yeah, Martha and Heather pretty much (have) been there for the long-term and Tom was in there for the long-term and Tom was always so busy just running the thing after Martha died that it was hard to tell how his big interest was in the telecom site and what have you. And the legislature... I

don't believe anyone (in particular) there; they were all real supportive. (Rep.) Fred Brown, I think, is the name I was trying to think of. Fred was the brains in the legislature who knew more about it than anybody and tried to convince the rest of them. So I made sure Fred knew everything that I knew and he just –

Hilary Is he still around?

Walt: Oh, yeah.

Hilary Is he? Yeah.

Walt: Yeah, he would be a good one to talk to get a -

Hilary Yeah, he would.

Walt: Yeah, Sackett and Kerttula on the Senate side I could always count on to push it. And the miracle of that most particular legislature – if you want to do something like this and the money was there. You didn't have any outstanding enemies, you know, 'cause "Colonel" John Butrovich was the enemy of the Republicans. Well, John, was not going to do anything evil or anti-Alaska so we didn't have any real spoilers around – good thing.

(Aside: I'll wait Carl on that... he has the telephone.

(Lady: Want me to grab that Walter?

Walt: No, let Carl get it.

Lady: Okay.)

Hilary And have you been connected with this whole business still of... I know that Red (Boucher) had wanted to get some money to do some things and there had been interest by Fran (Ulmer). Have you jumped back into this area at all?

Walt: Not as much as I would have liked. I have been busy pulling the telecommunications thing for the Arctic Council together and...

Hilary When did that start?

Walt: Oh it started a couple of years ago. And what happened was that, when Clinton signed us up to the Arctic Council in '96 – this was an agreement so it has needed congressional approval – and the result of which it has been difficult, more difficult than it should be – getting funding for some of this stuff – but we had the Arctic environmental protection strategy for working groups going on, which I was a part of. And in '96 he signed up the Arctic, just out of the blue, signed us up for the Arctic Council, which was a Canadian venture that they sold to the rest of the Arctic, including ourselves. Well, Alaska wasn't really asked. The other side of that was sustainable development. When I heard

“sustainable development”, all hell started going off in my head that: Ye Gods! If this goes the wrong way, it will be another subsistence fight. So I moved in on that real...

## End of Tape 1, Side A

## Tape 1, Side B

Walt: ... for two years at the Arctic Council and that two years was spent in (wrangling) about state (membership-) type rules of procedure and what have you, and every time we would show up to start talking nuts and bolts about sustainable development, why, it would all fall apart. So there were the two groups in the Arctic Council: Those who wanted to talk about grand philosophies of sustainable development – and people like myself who wanted to talk about how we are going to do better, have better schools, and what have you, and how we are going to do them. (It) has fallen back on what we did in the past and (how to) export some of that. The main target, of course, is the virgin North. Scandinavia doesn't need any help on sustainable development. I haven't noticed that Iceland is a poor country. So it's mainly, you know, continuing to do in North America (and) Greenland what we already have under way, and exporting that to Russia. So we have been pulling the groups together on that. And when the U.S. took over two years ago, why, the governor's people and I got together and we agreed that we'd push telemedicine as the number one U.S. priority in sustainable development 'cause we knew we had the team in place to back that up and Carl Hild was put under contract to the state to coordinate the telemedicine effort. It went extremely well. So we've... and when the U.S. signed off in Barrow in October (2000) and turned over the chairmanship to Finland, why, telemedicine had strong working group in each country and Carl had done a marvelous job of pulling them together. So that's probably going to be continued with things like we were doing.

Meanwhile, here in Anchorage, the Northern Forum which is headed by the Wally Hickel – founded back in 1990, well actually it was there before that but Wally got it going again in 1990. The Northern Forum – which is headed by John Doyle right now, executive director.

Hilary Which is what right now?

Walt: The Northern Forum is made up of some 21, 22...

Hilary Oh, I'm sorry, I know what the Northern Forum is.

Walt: Okay.

Hilary You said it is something right now, it's headed up by?



Walt: John Doyle.

Hilary Oh, thank you, okay. Uh-huh.

Walt: And (Mead) Treadwell heads up the Institute for the North at APU (Alaska Pacific University). So the three of us got together and decided to do an infrastructure working group within sustainable development that would include all of telecom, basic telecom structure and give the distance ed people and the distance health people that we had already got going, the telemed people some help on basic structure. Because right now, well, like right now Providence (Hospital) has been trying to work with people in Novosibirsk and places like that for years, and they have real problems even faxing, not to mention linking PCs together and so forth. So... and getting over some of those kinds of basic problems and establishing a net, a circumpolar net that works. And hotel communications and then small aviation. We just had some Russians here on that this past week and they left yesterday and small aviation is getting a lot of support from FAA and DOT generally. So this whole effort is being financed by a DOT appropriation in the U.S. and we will see how much we can talk the Finns and Norwegians and others into putting in. The main thing is just information-trading and agreeing on what common systems you got going out, and finding the money to do them.

It is... The big thing that got me into it was back when (the Russian) Meridian (satellite) hadn't gone broke yet and Microsoft stopped that. You stop that baby. And Microsoft and Telediscic, and Boeing were talking about their big thing sure, why, I figured let's make sure there's a strong Arctic presence here if we're going to talk low-earth orbits (low-earth orbiting satellites), why, we'll see what they can do for us in the next twenty years. And they are pulling a planning group together to work with these guys, and hopefully one of these days that effort will get going. They are talking about DOD (Dept. of Defense) buying Meridian, in which case I'd be in pretty good shape to horn in on that one.

Hilary Well, gosh, this is so exciting. It goes on.

Walt: The lower earth orbits are one of the big targets. We want to maintain a group that can at least be aware of what is going on. Telemedicine did get us into that. Carl very quickly found a group in D.C. that was working primarily DOD... that was working – National Institutes of Health and Institutes of Education and what have you – that was getting together there talking about low-earth orbit applications but they weren't talking to any of the rest of us until Carl found them, and now they are, so.

Hilary That's great. Boy, talk about a whole quantum leap from the early days where you were using Morse code to now.

Walt: Yeah.

Hilary Yeah.

Walt: Oh, yeah. Well, the same with aviation you know. Aviation hadn't existed very long before I took off in my first airplane and I was – let's see, from Wright Brothers to '46: forty-two years.

Hilary Yeah.

Walt: '46 to now is 54 years, so...

Hilary That's a huge jump there, too. You know, when my dad died he... (tape recorder turned off then restarted.) What haven't we talked about with telecommunications with you and your connections with it?

Walt: Oh, I think we've covered a good deal of it. I...we've covered all the way up to the present. You know, my big disappointment was the collapse of Learn Alaska because that was really just getting going. We had such a good team. Francine Taylor doing video and Marjorie Benning doing the audio conferencing and that bright young man who was with us for a while went off to head a similar effort in Idaho cause he wasn't getting support at the university here. The name will come to me in a minute. It gets harder as you get older, you know, to pull the generator.

Hilary Was Jennifer Wilkie still there?

Walt: Jennifer had pulled out before it collapsed, kind of. She was doing her own thing in Juneau and then went down... She was still heavily involved and then she went down to LA to go to school and get her degree. Jennifer and I haven't got back together if she has returned yet. I'm not sure if she has returned yet. She may be off doing great things. I lost my old program director at KAKM to that same program. She went down to get her degree and never came back, Carol. We got to you know (that) brain drain is still a big problem in Alaska.

Hilary It is huge.

Walt: If they're good, why, you got to offer them the opportunity.

Hilary Yeah, yeah. If there are other anecdotes that come to mind, stories especially Bush travel or communications that made a difference, will you rattle those off to me on email?

Walt: Sure.

Hilary And send those off and I will make copies for you of what I have that has your name on them.

Walt: Okay.

Hilary And get those up to you and oftentimes you know when you start thinking about these time periods a day or two later things start popping into your mind.

Walt: Yeah, those names come up. But I'm really hoping that out of this whole Arctic Council effort, and out of the efforts of (Sen.) Ted's (Stevens) appropriation launched, why, we will really be able to take the next step in affordable networking of the Bush. And you know one thing we didn't put in there – Richard Dowling's been out in the (industry) a long time. Richard was there at the very beginning. Richard and (wife) Luann both, and they are key players in this and will continue to be for a long time.

**End of Tape 1, Side B – End of Interview**