

2010 Alaska Dialogue Final Report

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For three days, captains of industry, elected representatives, educators and leaders from around Alaska met to discuss the future of the state in the 10th annual Alaska Dialogue. This year's focus of *Confronting Entitlement: Fearlessness, Investment, and Entrepreneurism in Alaska* meant tackling issues that Alaskans face as collective owners of Alaska's Commons. Alaska claims a wealth of resources, both natural and human, yet despite this, many speak of Alaska as an "entitlement state," where ownership equals expectation rather than responsibility. This year's participants were asked how to cultivate a culture of giving, leadership, and innovation, while still recognizing the corresponding obligations Alaskans have to each other and to our state.

Alaska's early political environment was described in terms of one family, with representation often shifting between political parties with each election, each candidate stressing a collective enthusiasm for the new state rather than an individual party. This is something that has changed over the years.

"We cannot count on Alaska being saved from itself," one presenter stated. Along with the theme of entitlement, a reoccurring subject was our growing vulnerability. Declining oil production, our aging fiscal strategy, and the high cost of living and energy in rural Alaska, are impacting the potential of our state. Accordingly, "it is time for daring, innovative social invention," another presenter noted. "We are at the cusp of an extraordinary opportunity that will require honor, duty, and sacrifice."

The Alaska Dialogue was constructed in the spirit of discourse, leaving one's professional and political affiliations behind. This dialogue, like many before it, has aimed to push the boundaries of our individual comfort, in support for the constructive critique and analysis of our Alaskan way of life. As Nils Andreassen, Managing Director of the Institute of the North reminded us at the onset of the conference, "We must engage in critical thinking, without being critical." -A difficult, yet important goal to strive for.

Panel discussions and individual lectures highlighted the impact of federal colonization on Native culture, and the need for increased tribal recognition and autonomy in everything from projects, to development and livelihood initiatives. "Subsistence is anti-entitlement" a presenter suggested in support of infusing Alaska Native Corporations with stronger Alaska Native values.

At times the discussion turned to the toxicity of Alaska's media and political environment, leaving participants wondering how they could make a difference in broadening their awareness to create the 'big picture' resolutions needed to foster a more sustainable and resilient State. It was decided that as collective owners, we are responsible for both understanding the issues that affect the state and sharing that understanding with others.

The later half of the dialogue was devoted primarily to breakout group discussions around key issues of entitlement and Alaska's future. While some groups struggled to find commonality and balance between Alaska's constitutional ideals, others developed strategies, and brainstormed future endeavors. After significant discussion, groups presented their recommendations to the group at large.

It has always been a challenge for Alaskans to find equilibrium between one's right to "enjoy the rewards of their own industry," and the sustainable development of Alaska's natural resources for the "maximum benefit of [all] people," as it is described in the constitution. Though there are still questions to be answered, it was in the spirit of the late Governor Wally Hickel, and in Vic Fischer's introductory presentation, that a sentiment of boundless opportunity and common purpose was present. "After all, these ideas are not partisan, they are Alaskan."