

Joe Vogler: A 'Fit' Alaskan

On October 21, 1994 at Fairbanks Sacred Heart Cathedral, 400 people gathered to pay their last respects to Joseph E. Vogler, founder of the Alaska Independence Party and three-time Alaskan gubernatorial candidate. His body was found eight days before in a shallow grave a few hundred feet from Chena Hot Springs Road, nearly 28 miles northeast of Fairbanks. He had been reported missing by his long-time friend and AIP member, Al Rowe nearly seventeen months before on May 31, 1993. The search for Vogler brought out the entire Fairbanks community and culminated with the arrest of Manfred West on May 27, 1994. During a standoff West admitted to Investigator Jim McCann that he had shot and killed Vogler following an argument. Vogler's casket draped with an oversized Alaskan flag, Father Jim Kolb eulogized him, and "it would be an understatement to say that Joe loved Alaska. Joe was truly possessed by this great land."¹ Vogler was not only possessed but also possessive about Alaska and its millions of acres of land.

Joe Vogler believed that he had a natural right to develop and exploit Alaska for all its riches that lay above and below the surface. Once Alaska became a state through a referendum in 1958, he felt bombarded with federal regulations for mining, timber, and homesteading. Bitter and resentful, Vogler turned to his training as a lawyer to seek a way out for Alaska so he could continue his lifestyle as a miner on federal lands. His desire was to have Alaska secede from the United States and form an independent nation in which Alaskans could economically benefit from the land. To accomplish this monumental task Vogler looked to the only entity that, he believed, held sovereignty over

¹ Natalie Phillips *Anchorage Daily News*, October 22, 1994.

America – the United Nations. Article 73, Chapter XI of the UN Charter, the Declaration Regarding Non-Self Governing Territories became the cornerstone of his peaceful secessionist movement. At no time did he advocate violence, instead he asked for another statehood referendum for Alaska's residents, except in this second one a choice for independence would be included.

This search for freedom from boundaries and government regulations is a direct extension of the American frontier development. By using democracy as a tool for the independence of the frontier, Vogler attempted to carry on the American tradition of democracy that historian Frederick Jackson Turner discussed in his *Frontier Thesis*. Except in Vogler's case, the frontier Turner wrote about was no longer there; it had disappeared along with the antiquated ideals of land ownership and political power. Vogler was not a western American pioneer in the tradition of Davey Crockett, he was too late and America had moved on already.

Joe Vogler was born on April 24, 1913, in Barnes, Kansas, one of three boys and two girls. He was raised not only to work hard but also to work and think for himself, which he obviously did. Growing up on a Kansas farm in the 1920's Vogler spent his summers and evenings plowing corn for his family farm. In an interview with *Alaska Magazine* he complimented his work ethic by saying, "I was the one that mothers said, 'Why don't you do like that little Vogler boy does?'"² At age 16 Vogler earned a scholarship to the University of Kansas and his hard-driving father forced him to accept. Vogler jumped at his new found freedom from the farm, but still his father didn't allow him to study his first love, geology. Instead he studied law, graduated five years later and passed the bar exam, but never once in his life did he practice law. He found menial work

in Kansas City as an insurance claims adjuster, but the Depression economy destroyed his work and also his family's farm. The three-year drought of the Dust Bowl blew away the soil and dried up the wells; the federal government bought up the starving cattle and pigs and then slaughtered them. It wasn't until early 1941 that he headed down to Houston, Texas for work and possible Army enlistment. "Something I said made him mad," Vogler recalled in 1987. "He said, 'You go back home and wait until you're drafted,' and he got a little bit nasty. So I thought the hell with you and out I went."³ Vogler continued his ill luck with the government when he criticized American involvement in World War Two after the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor. "Roosevelt wanted to go to war in Europe... When he pulled that deal at Pearl Harbor, I knew what had happened. He'd betrayed those people. I called him a dirty rotten son of a bitch communist traitor, see? And that didn't make me very popular in Houston, Texas, I'll tell you."⁴

According to a tale told by Joe, in early 1942 he showed up for his first day on the job at Dow Chemical Co. in Freeport, Texas, where he was met by a Federal Bureau of Investigation agent. The agent confirmed who Vogler was and told him, "Get off and stay off. You're not a fit American to work here."⁵ Following the less-than-subtle hints of the FBI, Vogler quickly set off looking for work as far away from Texas as possible, and came up with Alaska. He gathered up one of his brother and they set off to Kodiak Island in the Gulf of Alaska. By mid-June Vogler and his brother had moved on again, this time to Northway to build the airfield needed by the US Army. After three months of work in

² Tricia Brown *Alaska Magazine* "An Unfit American," October 1987.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.* Vogler's comments on the Holocaust later in life also infuriated people when he claimed that the 'Jews made great capital out of it. Instead of six million dead its probably 60,000. I've read some figures on it from the Jewish encyclopedias.'

⁵ *Ibid.*

clearing the spruce forest so the Alaska-Canadian Military Highway could receive supplies and the brothers were off to Fairbanks.

Arriving in Fairbanks during the early weeks of the Interior Alaskan winter the Voglers got work on another airfield, Ladd Army Airfield. In spring of 1943, with his brother drafted into the navy, Vogler was drafted, much to the Army's mistake. Retelling his story to *Alaska Magazine*, Vogler demanded to see the Manual of Arms to determine if he had taken an oath of allegiance to President Roosevelt. His superior told him that he would take the oath for him. "Yes and you do," Vogler remembers saying, "and the going gets tough, I'll do as I see best. They couldn't get me out of there fast enough."⁶ Once back into civilian life Vogler continued to work at Ladd Field, and staked out a 310-acre homestead off of Farmer's Loop Road north of Fairbanks. By 1951 he saved enough money to buy a 230-acre mining claim at Homestake Creek; quitting his Ladd Field construction job and he never worked for anyone but himself again.

For more than twenty years Vogler built up his mining into a very financially profitable enterprise. He had married a woman before arriving in Alaska and the couple had two children but they did not arrive in Fairbanks until the mid-1940's. Only a few years later, in 1948 his wife filed for divorce, took the children and moved Outside.⁷ He never saw his children again. It wasn't until 1964 that Vogler remarried, this time to Doris, a statewide school photographer and yearbook coordinator. Already well acquainted with life in the Bush, Doris immediately began to accompany Joe out into his placer mines on Homestead Creek.⁸ "She can cook over a damn campfire better than

⁶ Kate Ripley *Alaska Magazine* "The Search for Joe Vogler Drags On," March 1994.

⁷ The Outside is a proper noun used to describe any U.S. location not within the state of Alaska.

⁸ The Bush, a loose term, is villages and wilderness areas not connected to the Alaskan road system.

anyone,” Vogler said in 1987.⁹ By the early 1970’s Vogler and his fellow miners were upset over the various regulations placed upon them by the federal government.

According to Frenchy DeRushe, Joe’s friend and fellow Alaska Independence Party member, Vogler, Fred Wilkerson, and Bobby Miller were discussing their mining problems when one of them piped up, “. . . we ought to get Alaska out of the United States.”¹⁰ Wilkerson and Miller were not only Vogler’s friends but also fellow miners who had worked with him on the various mining claims around Homestake and Woodchopper Creek. These were the types of men who spoke only short terse sentences and held most of their anger within, expect when it came to the federal government. DeRushe continues to write that in 1973 most Alaskans were fed-up with federal laws and bureaucrats and their “eastern U.S. allies” controlling Alaska’s resources.¹¹ The three miners agreed that the federal government was doing only one thing: restricting development in Alaska. The development restrictions were based, Vogler believed, on the federal government’s unwillingness to have a stable population in Alaska. A stable population would lead to more independently thinking citizens realizing that the federal government was restricting development of Alaska. “Are they afraid of too many Joe Voglers?” he asked Margaret Van Cleve in 1991. “What would they do with a thousand people here that said, ‘Uncle Sam take your flag and get out?’”¹²

With a stable population Alaskans would see the wrongs that the federal government had done to the state. “The people will look around and see the 375 million acres of land and all of its possibilities,” he told Margaret Van Cleve in a 1991 oral

⁹ Tricia Brown *Alaska Magazine* “An Unfit American,” October 1987.

¹⁰ Frenchy DeRushe *To Hell with the 48!* 1993, p. 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹² Margaret Van Cleve *On the Road Recording Old Timers (Joe Vogler)*, audio tape 1991.

recording, “and ask themselves: ‘Why can’t Alaska make jobs for 500,000 people and their kids?’”¹³ The answer, according to the Alaska Independence Party, was that the relationship between the state and the federal government lacked the two foundations of statehood: equal admission and equal treatment under the law. What I think the AIP means is that unlike the contiguous 48 states, Alaska has no neighboring states to help it in congress. For example, in the cattle states of Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Montana, and the Dakotas their congressional delegates form a voting block when a bill threatens their constituents’ livelihood. Not only is Alaska geographically removed from other states, but also the oil industry is inherently different here than in Texas, Louisiana, and Oklahoma. In those neighboring states, small independent oil producers tap their private land for oil and sell it to independent refiners. In Alaska, where the largest amount of oil is located on state-owned land, privately held oil is non-existent. Only trans-national corporations have the capital to lease mineral rights from the state and to pay the enormous taxes on the oil. The above mentioned oil states have no interest in forming congressional voting blocks with Alaska because of the differences in the economic interests.¹⁴

This lack of national political power led to what Vogler thought was one of the ultimate betrayals of Alaska, namely, the inability to sell Alaskan oil directly to foreign countries. The Jones Act of 1923 does not allow foreign-flagged or foreign-manned vessels to transport goods to or from Alaskan ports. All ocean-going vessels traveling to and from Alaska must go first to a mainland American port before heading off to a foreign destination. This act of mercantilism, according to Vogler, is an attempt to

¹³ *Ibid.*

criminalize a stable population in Alaska. “Why must our oil be shipped to the 48 states, to be refined, and to promote jobs for their residents, while Alaskans suffer the effects of no industry or development?” Vogler wrote in *Alaska and Statehood: A Factual Primer*. “Do we exist solely to provide raw materials for their factories and refineries? That is the purpose and intent of colonialism!”¹⁵

In order to protect Alaska’s interests, Vogler filed a brief with the state for the creation of the Alaska Independence Party in late 1973. A party “dedicated to the peaceful and lawful separation of Alaska from the United States.” Early in 1974, Vogler filed with the State Election Commission for a spot on the gubernatorial ballot for the November election and was denied. Vogler contended that the two predominant political parties, the Republicans and the Democrats, had no legal right to monopolize the ballot and took his case all the way to the Alaska State Supreme Court. The court ruled in *Vogler v. State of Alaska* that there was no constitutional means to keep a political party off the ballot, but that 10% of voters must be won by the AIP in order to keep it on future ballots. Losing the governor’s race and failing to gain the required percentage, Vogler reorganized his platform and began to attack the federal government directly.

The new direction taken by Vogler was a very interesting but misguided path full of misconceptions and misplaced faith. Using the United Nations Charter and specifically Article 73, the Declaration Regarding Non-Self Governing Territories,¹⁶ Vogler hoped to gain another referendum for Alaska. The referendum to settle the disagreements between the people of Alaska and the federal government designed by Vogler was to be one in

¹⁴ The above is the economic realities of Alaskan oil, the AIP, to my knowledge, has never specifically used the example.

¹⁵ Joe Vogler *Alaska and Statehood: A Factual Primer*, 1990, p. 9.

¹⁶ The United Nations defines a non-self-governing territory as one under the control of a colonial power.

which the statehood of Alaska would be decided for a second time. One major difference in his new plan was to replace the original 1958 question, “Should Alaska become a state? Yes or No” with a choice of three alternatives. “Should Alaska: a) remain a state b) become a commonwealth or c) become an independent nation?” With this vote would also come certain limits on suffrage. “We ask that military personnel be not allowed to vote... that the United Nations set the conditions for voting status as Alaska has an undue number of Federal employees who may or may not be permanent residents. Far too many carpetbaggers come to Alaska for to work...”¹⁷ The original limited choice of statehood or continued imperialism was not only anti-democratic to Vogler but it misrepresented the human rights ideals of the UN Charter.

Commonwealth as a choice for Alaska was first voiced in 1952 by Senator Monroney of Oklahoma but only as a status that the federal government could force on Alaska, not as a ballot issue. Commonwealth, using Puerto Rico as the example, offers a territory exemptions from federal corporate and personal income taxes but adds nothing else positive to the economic interests of a territory. Residents cannot vote during national elections nor is their congressional delegation voting members, the same restrictions that were in force during Alaskan territorial days. Commonwealth was finally laid to rest by Oregon Senator Cordon in his 1954 congressional report. He wrote that no incorporated American territory had ever been exempt from all federal taxes, nor were the exempt from federal regulations.¹⁸

The Declaration Regarding Non-Self Governing Territories held that the administrator of the non-self governing territories must “develop self-government, to take

¹⁷ Joe Vogler *Alaska and Statehood: A Factual Primer*, 1990, p. 14.

¹⁸ Claus Naske, Herman Slotnick *Alaska: A History of the 49th State*, 1987, p. 153.

due account of the political aspirations of the peoples, and to assist them in the progressive development of their free political institutions.”¹⁹ According to Vogler’s research, on December 14, 1946 the “government of the United States (had reported) concerning conditions in Alaska, American Samoa, Guam, Hawaii, Panama Canal-Zone, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.”²⁰ This report detailed to the United Nations the possessions of the United States that would be listed as non-self-governing territories under Article 73 of the UN Charter. In the 1950 International Covenant on Human Rights, member states were to promote the civil and political freedoms in non-self-governing territories including the right of self-determination. Because, Vogler argued, the United States failed to ‘take due account’ of the political aspirations of Alaskans prior to the 1958 statehood vote, the vote should be null and void. “Instead of promoting the realization of our rights to political self-determination, [the federal government] concealed it and limited us to ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to statehood!... America knew what it was doing to Alaska! Its actions were deliberate.”²¹

In 1912, thirty-four years prior to the signing of the UN Charter by the United States, an Alaskan territorial legislature was authorized by the president. Not only did this provide for self-governing but also for limited self-determination. The December 14, 1946 list of possessions by the U.S. government was simply a blanket listing of every populated territory that the United States had a long-term strategic need for. It included possessions, like Hawaii, Alaska, and Puerto Rico that possessed legislatures, and possessions that were directly controlled by Washington D.C. The promotion of political

¹⁹ UN Charter Article 73, Chapter XI section b, quoted in Joe Vogler *Alaska and Statehood: A Factual Primer*, 1990, p. 1.

²⁰ Joe Vogler *Alaska and Statehood: A Factual Primer*, 1990, p. 4.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

self-determination for Alaskans was not necessary before statehood. Alaskans wanted statehood because they would then be allowed to vote in national elections, elect a governor, and assume their right to political membership in America. Simply by looking into the statehood process during the 1950's, one can see that no independence movement in Alaska existed.

According to international law, a territory's right to independence must be expressed on an international scale prior to any vote of continued non-self-governing status, commonwealth, or statehood. In the case of *Guinea-Bissau v. Senegal* (1989), the International Arbitration Council ruled that self-determination does not begin when a political movement is formed but when the movement gains international impact.

“In this process of national liberation movement, the legal problem is not that of identifying the precise moment in which the movement as such is born. The important point to be determined is the moment from which its activity acquired an international impact.”²²

By this internationally accepted definition of self-determination, Alaskans had no desire for independence before the 1958 statehood referendum. In fact, the international impact of the Alaska Independence Party did not occur until 1990 when Walter Hickel was elected governor on the AIP ticket, thirty-two years after the statehood vote.

The famous American historian of the development of the American West, Frederick Jackson Turner, wrote that, “American development has exhibited not merely advance along a single line, but a return to primitive conditions on a continually advancing frontier line.”²³ Turner's frontier thesis and its implications became part of Joe Vogler's life and belief system. Turner, in his thesis, also stated that “a system of

²² *International Law Reports*, vol. 83, p. 1.

²³ F.J. Turner *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, 1966, p. 221.

administration was not what the West demanded, it wanted land.”²⁴ It was land that could be given to individuals along the frontier, land that came from the manager of the land – the federal government. If the latter continued with unlimited homesteading and the opening of public lands for development, as Vogler advocated, economic power would supposedly reward those developing the land, and with economic power came political power.

Vogler and the Alaska Independence Party believed that the negative economic changes in Alaska since statehood had been a coordinated effort by various federal agencies, such as the Department of the Interior and the Bureau of Land Management. He stated that “America has regarded Alaska as sort of a warehouse where in things are to be preserved. To be kept back, to be held back for development at a future date.”²⁵ Vogler’s ideas about land use in Alaska were rooted in the American experience, one that Turner interpreted as more land development results in faster economic growth and stronger political clout. Throughout the American West’s history pioneers had moved in and seized control of the land and then, by hard work and political dedication, created states. Vogler and the Alaska Independence Party wanted to throw the federal government out because of its anti-land development policies. These policies simply did not exist to the extent that Vogler believed. The strong conservation and environmentalist movements after statehood were a development of an American society that no longer wished simply to exploit the natural and scenic beauty of the land for commercial purposes. The federal government owed its own growth as an entity, according to the frontier thesis, to the

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 219.

²⁵ Margaret Van Cleve *On the Road Recording Old Timers (Joe Vogler)*, audio tape 1991.

development on the American frontier against the will of the more developed eastern United States.

Turner wrote that, “the East has always feared the result of an unregulated advance of the frontier, and has tried to check it and guide it.”²⁶ This quote is over one hundred years old, and the federal government no longer just comprises the East coast and the South. The America of Joe Vogler was the culmination of the frontier, with power resting equally amongst all regions of America. Using Turner’s definition of the frontier, it is arguable that Alaska is not a frontier: “the geographic area adjacent to the unsettled portions of the continent in which a low man-land ration and abundant natural resources provide and unusual opportunity to better himself economically and socially without external aid.”²⁷ Alaska was once a frontier society in many aspects. External aid, the crutch that holds all individuals back, however, is required by the nature of the Alaskan frontier. The geographic size, the weather, the lack of agricultural grounds, all of these factors force individuals to look to the government for help. As mentioned before, it was the government that paid Vogler a high salary for engineering work at Ladd Field. Work that allowed him to purchase not only federal land to mine and exploit but also expensive mining equipment and employees.

The isolation of Alaska from the contiguous United States keeps its population insulated and in need of external economic and social influence. At the time of Alaskan statehood in 1958, 99.8% of the land was federally managed. Federal management brought federal bureaucracy and, what appeared to Joe Vogler, all of its evil and none of

²⁶ F.J. Turner *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, 1966, p. 210.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

its good.²⁸ The bureaucratic good was federal dollars being spent in a region that had no other permanent economic base. Federal dollars gave people jobs and what people need most is a permanent economy that provides them with goods and services like real estate development, banking, and other commercial opportunities such as restaurants and liquor stores. To Vogler, the only possible outcome of government expenditures in the private sector was a nation of welfare recipients. “Everyone wants something that someone else paid for. No self-reliance. Very little pride. Lots of places with very little opportunity, that’s America.”²⁹ To the Alaska Independence Party and more specifically, to Vogler, the reliance on the Outside, particularly the federal government, was a hindrance to Alaska because everyone Outside had had its own priorities and agendas.

These priorities and agendas came before Alaskans, and they exploited and exported Alaska’s natural resources without Alaska benefiting. A favorite subject of Vogler’s wrath was the Alaska2000 seminar held in New York City during the 1983 summer. In *Alaska Statehood: A Factual Primer*, he wrote,

“We [AIP] believe that [Alaska’s] stage of development makes it a target for exploitation of its raw materials for the benefits of America’s factories... It was openly suggested [at Alaska2000] that the development of Alaska’s resources would create a great many jobs in other states, where these raw materials would be taken for manufacture and distribution.”³⁰

Vogler desperately wanted to prove to Alaskans that the land could provide for every conceivable want. It was the federal government and Outside commercial interests that kept the land from giving and restricted the growth of value-added jobs in Alaska. The

²⁸ Margaret Van Cleve *On the Road Recording Old Timers (Joe Vogler)*, audio tape 1991

²⁹ *Ibid.* Also to blame for growing government was, to Vogler, ‘darker skinned people’ from ‘warmer climates’ that had sapped some of ‘America’s drive’.

³⁰ Joe Vogler *Alaska and Statehood: A Factual Primer*, 1990, p. 24.

federal government would continue to exploit Alaska as both a colony for manufactured goods and as a carefully managed natural museum if Alaskans didn't throw them out.

It is very independently minded of Vogler that Outside influences should not be ruling Alaskan economic interests but his personal stance on the development of Alaska's resources was not at all dissimilar. The AIP was and continues to be a pro-development political party that's only distinction is that its platform includes a desire for a statewide plebiscite on Alaskan statehood.³¹ Vogler's original desire for Alaskan independence was so that he could mine his claims without worrying about federal regulations on environmental impact. By 1980, every one of his patented mining acres were within the newly created 2.5 million acre Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve. In 1980, outgoing president, Jimmy Carter signed into law the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). ANILCA added 104.3 million acres to federal wildlife conservation areas in Alaska, bringing the total acreage to 150.8 million acres or 41% of the total land.

Despite ANILCA, Vogler continued to mine his claims within Yukon-Charley Rivers for several years until the National Park Service told him he needed a permit to do so. Once learning that the permit would be valid only during the long winter, Vogler told them to "go to hell with your permits."³² In June 1984, Vogler with two other miners attempted to circumvent the National Park Service regulations by operating his Caterpillar D-9 heavy equipment on the old mining road that the Park Service had closed. "They'll build a road down to Birch Creek to put a canoe in it but they won't let me use a

³¹ The Alaska Independence Party's unofficial moniker was and continues to be "The Bulldozer Party".

³² Tricia Brown *Alaska Magazine* "An Unfit American," October 1987.

road to my mine that's been there for a hundred years."³³ Vogler was supposedly stopped on the trail to Woodchopper Creek by six men in a helicopter brandishing not only a court injunction closing his access to the mine but also automatic rifles. Afraid for his life and those of his companions, Vogler stepped down from his bulldozer and approached the Park Service rangers. "They could have sent a 10-year-old kid to deliver that order. I'm still an officer of the court. I'll respect any order signed by a judge," Vogler told the *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*. "No, they planned on killing us."³⁴ Despite never leaving home without his .32 caliber belly gun, Vogler claimed that his crew had no weapons save for mining tools, and were about to be executed by the federal government. If it hadn't been for an overhead appearance of Circle Hot Springs resident, pilot Dick Hutchinson in his Piper Cub plane, Vogler believed his crew would have been killed. Instead, the Park Service took him back to Fairbanks while his equipment rusted inside the National Reserve. The Department of the Interior took him to court for violating federal regulations, where he was fined and forfeited his equipment.³⁵ It wasn't until the 1990 gubernatorial election that Vogler appeared in the Alaskan spotlight again.

Walter "Wally" Hickel, an Anchorage millionaire land developer, had run for Alaskan governor several times during his long political career. In 1966 he won election as Republican governor and served three years before becoming President Richard M. Nixon's Interior Secretary. In 1990 Hickel and Jack Coghill, a long-time state house Republican leader, were elected as Governor and Lt. Governor of Alaska, respectively, under the Alaska Independence Party banner. The 1990 election was a turnaround for the AIP which since the 1986 election, had been sagging in popularity at the voting booth.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Kate Ripley *Alaska Magazine* "The Search for Joe Vogler Drags On," March 1994.

Six weeks prior to the November 6 election, at the last possible moment to register as candidates, Hickel and Coghill replaced the AIP primary winners, John Lindauer and Jerry Ward.³⁶ Lindauer, Ward and Hickel all agreed that Hickel's name recognition and well-known development stance would give the AIP a better shot at winning the election. Alaskan Statutes, Chapter 15, allowed for primary winners to vacate their ballot positions for candidates selected by the party's central committee. Since the AIP did not have a central committee not to mention any bylaws, Joe Vogler, as party chairman, gave the ballot positions to Hickel and Coghill.

According to Jack Alleman, a long-time AIP member and one-time gubernatorial candidate, Hickel was allowed to run because Vogler "felt that, once in office, Wally would go after the US government... for renegeing on the Statehood Compact."³⁷ The voters had three choices in the 1990 gubernatorial election: Democratic Mayor of Anchorage Tony Knowles, Republican State Senator Arliss Sturgilewski and Wally Hickel.³⁸ Winning with 39% of the vote, Hickel started off his term with a scathing State of the State address in January 1991, "... would the United States of America rather have us follow the lead of the AIP Chairman and remove our star from the flag?"³⁹ After this apparently promising start for the independence movement, Hickel ran afoul of a very vocal AIP minority who claimed that he was doing absolutely nothing about Alaskan independence. On April 3, 1991 several AIP members, against Vogler's wishes, initiated recall procedures against Hickel and Coghill. However, as Lt. Governor, Coghill was in

³⁵ The Department of the Interior is the cabinet-level agency overseeing the National Park Service.

³⁶ Lindauer and Ward were also not AIP members themselves, they too had co-opted the banner following their failures in the Republican primaries.

³⁷ Joe Alleman *Where is Joe Vogler?* 1993, p. 8.

³⁸ Following the 1994 election, Knowles became governor and was re-elected in 1998, beating Lindauer by a 35% margin.

charge of the state's election board and subsequently delayed and squashed the proceedings.

Following the recall procedures, Vogler became disinterested with Hickel and withdrew from the public spotlight to care for his wife of twenty-eight years, Doris, bedridden with cancer. After Doris's January, 1992 death, she was buried in Dawson City, Yukon Territory, Canada because of the Voglers' hatred of the federal government. Prior to her death, in late 1991, Joe spoke with Margaret Van Cleve about Doris and himself being buried in the United States:

“She'll never be able to go back to the creek with me. And if you ever think I'll forget that, the fires of hell are frozen glaciers compared to my hatred of the American government. I won't be buried under their damn flag.”⁴⁰

Several months following her death, Joe started to make public appearances again, still screaming for a plebiscite and haranguing the federal government about regulations. In December 1992, at the Wolf Summit, Vogler stood up on his soapbox once again, “Unless you live in Alaska, you have absolutely no right to make any input into our fish and game rules.”⁴¹ In March 1992, Vogler sent off a fifteen-page complaint to the United Nations Human Rights Committee detailing federal abuses in Alaska. Yet, at the same time Joe was not getting any younger and worried about his health.

Joe's 1986 gubernatorial running mate, Al Rowe said that, “Joe was lonely. Sometimes he'd sit at the table and cry. He missed Doris. He'd been sort of down.”⁴² This still did not explain the sudden May 30, 1993 disappearance of Joe. That evening,

³⁹ Also occupying voters' attentions in the 1990 elections was the criminalization of marijuana which passed 51-49%, prompting a flurry of bumper stickers proclaiming “Pot beat Hickel”.

⁴⁰ Margaret Van Cleve *On the Road Recording Old Timers (Joe Vogler)*, audio tape 1991.

⁴¹ Frenchy DeRushe *To Hell with the 48!* 1993, p. 6.

⁴² David Hullen *Anchorage Daily News* “Searchers Widen Hunt for Vogler,” June 5, 1993.

Rowe and Vogler were talking on the telephone when Joe cut the conversation short to answer his door, that was the last anyone heard from him. Theories sprang up ranging from one woman's report of "a blue object floating over Joe's house up there, and then him rising up through the air waving at her," to federal agents silencing their loudest Alaskan critic.⁴³ Twenty volunteers scoured the woods around Vogler's cabin on Farmer's Loop Road and several volunteers traveled to Dawson City to see if he went to visit Doris's grave. For several days there was hope but it diminished with each passing day, finally the searches were called off.

Vogler's disappearance brought out the worst within the AIP. There was no formal party succession and with no party member willing to admit that Vogler could be dead, party vice-chairman Edgar Paul Boyko appointed Lynette Clark acting party chairperson. Boyko was in Austria for the months preceding and following the disappearance but he did act alone in appointing the party secretary, Clark. Al Rowe, furious at this move wrote the *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, "Both Joe and Doris Vogler had intended for me, Al Rowe, to succeed as chairman of the party. I am a Vogler appointee."⁴⁴ Such infighting didn't hurt the search for Joe, as the party raised thousands of dollars to hire an Anchorage private investigator, Frank Feichtinger. Following several leads for the next six months, Feichtinger continued to come across the name Manfred West.

Manfred West, an itinerant criminal, first came to Alaska in 1980 and for the next fourteen years traveled between New York and Alaska yearly. His nickname was 'Cartoon Freddy' because he often taught kids on an informal basis at L.V. News Café in

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Kate Ripley *Alaska Magazine* "The Search for Joe Vogler Drags On," March 1994.

Fairbanks in 1989 and 1990. His illustrations centered on people's daily frustrations and struggles. Said café owner Dae Miles, "it was all struggles of people getting their own home or business. He had a Grapes of Wrath cartoon of a bulldozer coming and flattening a guy's house."⁴⁵ While he taught kids he was on a work-release program and later continued the program at Alaskaland on the Riverboat Nenana restoration project. Andrea Robb, the project's assistant supervisor said that West wasn't one to be trusted and "we learned that you couldn't really believe everything he said."⁴⁶ Authorities suddenly became interested in West's words on May 27, 1994 during a three-and-a-half hour standoff with police in a cabin at 1.5 mile Farmer's Loop Road.

West had been a suspect for months in Vogler's disappearance and during the standoff State Trooper Jim McCann listened as West described shooting and then burying Vogler's body in a shallow grave.

"So, I get in my truck and he says something about 'for further reference' ... and then he shot the truck... And it pissed me off. I grabbed my little brat .22... he turned once, he looked like he was getting ready to reload and I pulled out the .22, aimed it at him, fired, missed, fired again, and he turned around and ran for the house and I hit him again."⁴⁷

This confession during the second hour of the standoff was the key to the arrest of West. After three-and-a-half hours, West ignited the cabin and crawled underneath it into a cinderblock tunnel. Forty-five minutes later as police and fire officials combed the ruins, West was found suffering from hypothermia and transported to Fairbanks' Memorial Hospital and then on to Fairbanks' Correctional Facility. The troopers had West, a confession, but no body.

⁴⁵ Kate Ripley *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner* "A Talent for Art and Crime," May 29, 1994.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner* "Transcript between McCann and West," May 29, 1994.

During the standoff Nenana was mentioned several times as a dumping ground by West. Spots in Nenana, a small town sixty miles south of Fairbanks on the Parks Highway, were searched thoroughly in June but nothing new came up. Later in June 1994, West sent the *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner* a cartoon depicting himself chained to a prison wall with a map containing unmarked roads, landmarks and two X's drawn under his right hand. West also commented to the paper that the cartoon contained everything required to find Vogler's body. Following this new lead, troopers using trained-dogs and rods, found the body in the Two Rivers area at 25 mile Chena Hot Springs Road. The grave, located near land owned by West's half-brother Dave Sweet, was three feet deep and the body was covered in a blue tarp.⁴⁸ West's description during the standoff of the grave matched the actual site, point for point. For troopers, like Sgt. Lantz Dahlke, the discovery brought the case to a conclusion, "Finally it's over. It's like checkmate. The game is over. We do this for the victims, and if we didn't who will?"⁴⁹ For Vogler's friends, like Al Rowe, the inevitable solution brought tears, "Now I've got to bring myself to accept that Joe's dead, and to get on with my life. I'm grieving very much."⁵⁰

The funeral, nine days later in Fairbanks, was not attended by many AIP notables including Governor Hickel, AIP Chairman Boyko, and Al Rowe. "He said, 'Put me on a pickup truck in a box casket and put me in the ground over there by Doris,'"⁵¹ Rowe told the *Anchorage Daily News*. Father Jim Kolb, officiating the memorial service offered his own thoughts, "whether we liked it or not, he forced us to think. If there was one thing

⁴⁸ At the time of Vogler's disappearance Sweet, known as 'Dumpster Dave', was serving an 8-year prison term for sexually assaulting his 15-year-old foster daughter who gave birth to his son in 1991.

⁴⁹ Patricia Jones and Kristan Kelly *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner* "Troopers Find Body," October 13, 1994.

⁵⁰ Kate Ripley *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner* "His Friends Seek More Answers," October 13, 1994.

Joe could not stand, it was people with cobwebs in their head.”⁵² Perhaps that was the legacy of Joe Vogler, his never dying ideals of the hard-working, independently minded frontiersman.

In 1911, thirty-one years before Joe Vogler arrived in Alaska, Frederick Jackson Turner wrote that the frontiersman must “sacrifice his ideal of individualism and free competition in order to maintain his ideal of democracy.”⁵³ In order to achieve and regulate the democracy, the idealist must readily sacrifice the two bulwarks of frontier democracy – unfettered competition for natural resources and laissez-faire government. Vogler could not see nor understand the social forces of government and the democratic ideal upon Alaska. It was too simple a problem to him – the government restricts development. The only solution available to Vogler was to cast off the offending government so that public lands could be freed for development and prosperity would then arrive.

In the end, Joe Vogler believed in development and exploitation of Alaska’s land resources. The federal government’s regulations represented a clear threat to Vogler’s dreams of mining in Alaska and the only way out for his way of life was independence from America. Hidden from him was the fact that Alaska is an integral part of America socially, customarily, and historically. Independence was a hopeless dream for Vogler but he pursued it relentlessly, dying without ever realizing it. His dream was the culmination of the American frontier – complete individual independence from external influences and aid. Unfortunately, Vogler lived at a time and in a place where frontier idealism no longer existed and he never got over it.

⁵¹ Natalie Phillips *Anchorage Daily News*, October 22, 1994.

⁵² Lin Gale *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner* “Saying Goodbye to Joe,” October 22, 1994.

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⁵³ Robert Billington *The American Frontier* 1958, p. 30.

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