

Alaska Historical Society

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GRAVEL ASKS ALASKA SHARE CANADIAN TELESAT

U.S. Senator Mike Gravel (D-Alaska) took the Senate floor Monday to praise Canada's passage of the Telesat Act and urge the Canadians to share their satellite communications system

with Alaska.

He also announced what appears to be a major shift in U.S. policy which would permit Alaska to take advantage of the Canadian satellite system.

The Canadian parliament Friday adopted the Telesat Canada Act, which will provide satellite television and telephone communications to its remote Northwest sections.

"The fundamental significance of Telesat," Gravel said, "is that the Canadians are the first to do what others have been preaching:

"They will provide telephone and television service to remote

areas which by ordinary terrestrial means would wait a score of years for similar progress."

Gravel publicly congratulated the Canadian government in its

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Telesat . .

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bid "to harness modern space technology to cure a series of geographically-rooted disadvantages of its northern citizens," he said.

"In a few years," he said, "the most modern audio-visual education and cultural aids will reach its citizens between three oceans, the Atlantic, Pacific and Arctic."

In a response to a query to William W. Scranton, chairman of the U.S. delegation to the Intelsat Conference, Gravel said Scranton advised him that the United States would not object to Alaska's sharing in the benefits of the Canadian Satellite.

"I believe," Gravel told the Senate, "this represents the new Administration's first policy statement on the subject of international use of regional satellites."

Scranton wrote Gravel: "We are asking that member countries be free to establish satellites outside the Intelsat system to carry domestic traffic, with no qualifications except technical coordination with Intelsat."

"Under this concept of the definite arrangements," Scranton said, "there would be no obstacle to transmission of domestic traffic between Alaska and the rest of the United States via the Canadian satellite assuming this was arranged with the approval of the authorities of both countries."

"This new departure by the Administration is much more realistic, and accepts the diversity of opportunity offered by satellite communications," Gravel said.

Gravel said that with a communications system similar to that proposed in Canada, "we could leap a generation in the education and acculturation of the tens of thousands of Eskimo and Indian people who live in remote villages—and for that remoteness pay a huge and unnecessary penalty in having fourth-rate educational opportunities."