

Senator Miller Irked—

Opportunities Lost

JUNEAU — Irked by "opportunities lost" in the entire communications experience of Alaska, Senate President Terry Miller appointed a special senate committee on communications to upgrade the status of Alaskan communications.

"The state must take the lead rather than relegate itself to a passive role," Miller said. In a message to the Senators February 14.

"An imaginative state communications policy, dealing with the specialized needs of Alaska — must be formulated. It should be a priority of the Highest order for the state to encourage, and perhaps even participate in, new facilities construction which will increase our overall communications capabilities," the Fairbanks Republican said.

The four-member committee, chaired by Sen. John C. Sackett, R-Galena, with Sen. Willie Hensley, D-Kotzebue, Jalmar Kerttula, D-Palmer and Miller as members was directed to investigate the status of present communications systems throughout the state, with emphasis on the areas of health care, education and services provided by the state to residents.

The committee was also directed to implement legislation and funding for communications services to all Alaskans.

What has emerged are two significant pieces of legislation — one providing for \$6 million in general obligation bonds for telecommunications equipment and the other creating the public communications commission.

State Senators in a near unanimous vote last week opted for the sorely needed telecommunication equipment purchase, along with the ~~commission~~

expected to direct more funds and communications opportunities the way of Alaska public. Both bills are now before the House.

After the vote on these two important communications measures, Sackett rose, asked for the privilege of the floor and expressed his gratitude to the senators for their action.

"Living in a village of 150 to 200 people," the Galena Republican said, "I've known of too many cases where people have died because they couldn't get to a hospital or necessary means of communications". (For medical attention)

Kerttula commended the leadership of the senate president on the communications

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legislation, which he cited as one of the major pieces of legislation enacted during the current session.

Among the key responsibilities of the public communications commission are those respective of educational broadcasting. The commission would

be directed to provide a system of subsidies and grants-in-aid to commercial broadcast stations or companies operating or licensed in the state for the broadcast of not more than 200 hours by each station in a fiscal year of network news, reports or public affairs programming.

The commission is also empowered to lease, purchase, construct, own, operate, manage and be the licensee of educational broadcasting stations, production centers, and all other related equipment and facilities necessary to provide fully effective educational broadcasting to the state.