

WU-AT & T Oppose RCA Satellite for AK

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Today we are publishing materials from Gov. Hammond's Office of Telecommunications and from the Alaska Legislative Council's Subcommittee on Telecommunications. These materials have been specially prepared for the Tundra Times. Although it appears that the governor and the legislature are not far apart on the issues relating to RCA's satellite applications before the FCC, those matters are at issue, and the Tundra Times will publish other views from responsible spokesmen for other positions.)

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The Tundra Times has learned that both Western Union and American Telephone & Telegraph have filed documents for satellite authorization to serve Alaska and the Lower 48. The matter is now before the Federal Communications Commission.

Additionally, the State of Alaska will be filing replies to these documents by presstime that will urge that RCA's planned communications satellite launch for Dec. 11 not be delayed, but will also ask that the arguments of the other two companies be seriously considered in the details of final licensing and in consideration of future launches.

Two companies controlled by the giant RCA Corporation, RCA Global Communications, Inc. ("Globcom") and RCA Alaska Communications, Inc.

("Alascom") are waiting for FCC decisions on their applications to serve Alaska and the Lower 48 with a new communications satellite, intended as the first of many. RCA does not now have any satellite authority.

Since late 1974, both the Egan and Hammond administrations have raised questions about the quality and level of service to be provided Alaska through RCA's plan, and the Ninth Legislature has addressed a resolution to the FCC on RCA's applications that parallels objections raised by the Governor's Office of Telecommunications.

In the past months, many differences on technical and

hardware questions have been resolved, but policy and financial questions still remain in dispute.

In early September, the state presented to RCA a series of proposals which, if accepted, would have caused the state to withdraw objections to the RCA application, according to Robert Walp, director of the Governor's Office of Telecommunications.

These proposals had been developed by Walp's office and the state's FCC lawyer, in

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consultation with Rep. Fred Brown (D-Fairbanks), chairman of the Legislative Council's Subcommittee on Telecommunications.

The RCA response to the state's proposals was "not satisfactory" according to Walp. On Oct. 24, the state filed a "petition to deny" in the FCC case, asking that only RCA Globcom own the satellite, leasing channels, if necessary, to RCA Alascom.

Walp and Brown explained to the Tundra Times that allowing Alascom to own part of the satellite could cause Alaskan telephone users to subsidize the other RCA company, unless the state's proposals were agreed to.

Most of the requests in the state's September proposals had related to the tracing of costs between the two RCA companies, to prevent accidental subsidizing of RCA Globcom by Alaskan consumers.

In the Western Union document, the FCC was asked to condition any grant to RCA on a requirement that the Westar satellite be a "backup" for the RCA system. Western Union owns the Westar communications satellite.

AT&T argued that it can better serve Alaska than can RCA, citing previous decisions by the FCC that appeared to authorize AT&T to serve Alaska. The AT&T petition criticized the planned positioning of RCA's satellite.

This week, the State of Alaska

is expected to further reply to recent filings by RCA, Western Union, and AT&T, urging that the planned launch date for the RCA satellite not be delayed, even if some of the issues are still yet to be decided.

"We want the FCC to consider the arguments of Western Union and AT&T, but we don't want to delay service, particularly to rural Alaska," Walp explained. "The FCC, if it wants to, can give RCA conditional authority now and decide issues of ownership and competitive service later. This is already happening in the dispute between the state and RCA over ownership of the small earth stations."