

Senator: U.S. may OK flights to Provideniya

by A.J. McClanahan

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Prospects actually look good for direct flights between Nome and Provideniya, Siberia, Sen. Frank Murkowski, R-Alaska, said Monday at a press conference in his Anchorage office.

"We're very excited about it," he said. He pointed out that the main difficulty appears to be that the Soviets are somewhat sensitive about the way the Eskimos there live. Alaska Natives fare much better under the American system, Murkowski said.

Nome officials raised the possibility of the flights in a recent press release from the Nome Chamber of Commerce.

According to the release, a group of Nome residents believe that the time has come to visit Soviet neighbors, and they are pushing for flights to Provideniya. It is directly across from Nome, 220 miles, about 26 minutes by a 737 jet.

The Arctic community has 4,500 people, including Eskimos and non-Natives, Murkowski said. Provideniya is very similar in the way it looks to Valdez.

Earlier this year, a federal research vessel, the *Surveyor*, visited the Port of Provideniya from Nome. The captain brought back a proclamation of friendship from the mayor and the people of Provideniya.

"We must learn more about one another and meet more often; become more friendly and develop commercial ties," said the Provideniya mayor, O. Kulinkin. "Let us work together and trade together."

The senator also addressed a number of other topics, including 1991 legislation now pending in Congress to amend the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.

"It's our priority to get it passed," Murkowski said. "I anticipate it being done almost any time."

Murkowski said he was also very pleased that conditions appear favorable for plans to proceed with a fiber optic cable between Japan, Alaska and Washington state. The total cost of the cable, to provide the latest in communications abilities, would be \$500 million, he said.

The senator explained the cable would be undertaken by a partnership

• Murkowski

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including Pacific Telecom, the parent of Alascom; Cable and Wireless, a British firm and the world's largest undersea cable layer; as well as a number of Japanese partners, including Toyota and C. Itoh. The partnership is known as International Digital Communications.

Murkowski said the cable would provide superior communications, even better than via satellite.

He also discussed the national deficit and said that he favors an across-the-board freeze, which would represent a savings of about \$40 billion.

"The system is clearly in jeopardy," he said. "There will definitely be some tax increases."

The recent crash on Wall Street is a sign that the market is looking to government to solve the problem, he said. Murkowski also said that if Congress does not bite the bullet and find a way to reduce the budget by at least \$40 million this year and another \$60 billion in the following two years that programs will be drastically cut, not frozen.