

\$6 Million, 3-yr. Electrification For Rural Alaska

Senator Ernest Gruening announced this week in Anchorage the approval of a program in which four federal agencies will cooperate with the State of Alaska to bring the benefits of electric power to 20,000 residents of 67 small villages throughout Alaska.

The Senator said he had been informed by Sargent Shriver, Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity, of the approval in Washington Wednesday, of a \$229,220 Community Action Program research and pilot

(Continued on page 6)

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(Continued from page 1)

project grant to the Alaska Village Electric Cooperative, Incorporated, of Anchorage.

This is the first phase of a proposed three-year \$750,000 program. Senator Gruening quoted Shriver as saying that the grant launches the project which is expected to revolutionize life in villages throughout the state and to bring residents in remote areas—Eskimos, Aleuts and Indians—abreast of their contemporaries living in the larger centers where electric power is more readily available.

The independent cooperative, developed through the unique partnership of OEO, the Rural Electrification Administration of the Department of Agriculture, the U. S. Department of Labor, the Bureau of Indian Affairs of the Department of the Interior and the State of Alaska, will have a membership consisting entirely of people in the villages receiving the services.

Its board of directors will be made up of representatives of the recipient villages.

REA Administrator Norman M. Clapp said that the work of the Alaska Village Electric Cooperative will be statewide in scope and "directed primarily to bringing electricity to isolated Native villages where the need is great. Experience shows that where rural

electric lines go, progress follows."

The project will cost approximately \$6 million and the breakdown is as follows: \$750,000 CAP pilot project money to be given over a three-year period. This will be used for central administration, special technical assistance, program development and village organization and education.

CAP money is the catalyst and makes possible the participation of the other agencies who can come in with their special resources.

Financing actual construction of the electric systems is proposed under the Rural Electrification Loan Program. Approximately \$3 million to \$4 million will be required for the installation of the plant facilities, engineering, and all other expenses connected with the installation and operation of the electric system.

For a number of years now REA has been eager to get electricity to isolated rural

Alaskans. However, they are limited by law to approving loans only where repayment could be reasonably assured. With OEO and the other agencies assisting in closing the gaps the project has become a feasible one.

It is anticipated that the Department of Labor's Manpower Development and Training Act will provide \$660,000 for an institutional six-month training program of the village electric system operators. By the end of the year 40 generator operators will have been selected by their respective villages and trained.

The state government of Alaska and the Bureau of Indian Affairs will supply the supplementary services needed to complete the project.

An estimated ten villages, each having its own generator, will be served by electrical power by Dec. 1968; an additional 30 by the end of 1969, and the remainder during 1970.

During March of this year

the first training program for the first 20 generator operators will begin while simultaneously an additional program for co-op members will be undertaken in the villages.

The 67 villages will be chosen by the board of AVEC with the approval of OEO and will be selected on the basis of adequate population size, human and natural resources for economic development and assurance that the cooperative will have the support from the villagers with in-kind contributions.

Control of the organization will be in the hands of Native Alaskans. The president of the cooperative is William F. Hensley of Kotzebue, vice president Diane S. Carpenter of Stony River, wife of a dentist, and the secretary-treasurer is Morris Thompson, Juneau.

Directors are James Hoffman of Anchorage and David L. Peterson of Auke Bay.