

BUSH COMMUNICATIONS EYED

Telecommunications Director Asks Natives Back Upcoming Job

By DONN LISTON

Alaska Native Foundation

Alaska Natives have more to gain or lose than any group of persons in the state when it comes to communications development, according to Marvin Weatherly, newly-appointed director of the governor's Office of Telecommunications.

An estimated 70 to 80 Native villages need basic audio communications and virtually all smaller communities will eventually need audio, video and data communications capabilities. To that end, Weatherly's office is preparing for a meeting with RCA Alaska Communications, Jan. 13-14, to consider basic and secondary needs.

"This is a time for activists in the State of Alaska to get these things accomplished," Weatherly said. "I'm interested in having the Native corporations become involved in this and work side-by-side with us to make it happen."

Weatherly proposed that a person or persons be provided by Native organizations willing to assist in developing a system. If such a Native representative were provided on an in-kind

basis, whereas the Native organization being represented pays that person's salary, Native participation would be more direct, he explained. In addition, it would provide a Native power base for forcing implementation of a statewide communications plan.

"We have been experimented to death in this state without having the concurrent systems developed," Weatherly said. "If we can get cooperation from all those in the state and in other states who need good communications, I think we can force development of a good system."

Alaska may become a national leader in telecommunications development if an organization recently organized by potential consumer groups throughout the country who want telecommunications is successful, according to Weatherly who was recently in Denver during a meeting of representatives of leading communications companies and the consumer groups.

The consumers formed a coalition which they hope will force companies developing telecommunications systems to listen to their needs internationally. Alaska, because of its potential as a communications consumer,

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stands to gain much from such a united effort, according to Matherly.

RCA has offered to provide a replacement system to cover the same area now being taken care of by the ATS-6 satellite when it is changed to service India. Weatherly said his office is concerned with extending service to more villages needing basic medical care as soon as possible.

Groups represented at the Denver meeting included the National Aeronautics and Space

Administration (NASA) Office of Telecommunications Policy, Appalachian Regional Commission, Federation of Rocky Mountain States, Public Broadcasting Service, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and National Public Radio.

Communications companies in attendance included Hughes, Fairchild, RCA, Western Union, General Electric, Philco, Westinghouse, the National Cable Television Association and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)