

RCA Bush Phone Probe Continues

The Alaska Public Utilities Commission convened a public hearing concerning the manner in which RCA Com., Inc. has been implementing its bush telephone program for 142 Alaskan villages.

This hearing is part of an investigation which the Commission instituted after reviewing a report submitted by RCA which indicated that cost projections for the program had escalated from 4.5 million to 8.5 million dollars.

After opening statements, Commissioner John M. Stern,

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Jr., informed RCA Alaska that the outcome of these proceedings could be the cancellation of RCA's authority to provide this service and to alternately grant authority to serve rural Alaskan communities to a local carrier or a special long lines carrier.

Chairman Stern also instructed the representative of the U.S. Air Force to inform his superiors that they are requested to participate voluntarily or, if necessary, the Commission will subpoena the Air Force.

Further, the Commission staff has also been requested to prepare a case in this matter or to take a position, and to obtain, if necessary, additional expert advice and to retain counsel to represent it in this proceeding.

The public interest is being represented by the Attorney General's office and Dr. Edgar C. Heyden, Gov. Egan's telecommunication advisor.

The hearing has been continued until 9:30 a.m., Monday, May 8, in order that RCA and other participants may compile the information which the Commission has requested.

RCA preferred not to make a statement while the hearings were in progress, but Louis Custrini of RCA did say that RCA is "very optimistic about the results of the hearing".

As to whether RCA planned to make any suggestions for developing new technology to deal with the problem, or to make any additions to their system as planned, Mr. Custrini said: "When you're talking about additions, you're talking about more costs, aren't you?"

"We're hopeful that the wisdom of RCA's original program will be proved. We're presenting a plan that we think is technically feasible and economically feasible."

Mr. Custrini went on to outline RCA's plans for immediate hookup of four more villages on the system, and was generally very optimistic about RCA's progress.