

First Step: Gravel—

Beginning of Communications

U.S. Senator Mike Gravel (D-Alaska) said this week the proposed sale of the Alaska Communications System (ACS) to Radio Corporation of America (RCA) is only a first step in solving Alaska's critical communications problem.

"The sale of ACS will not in itself solve the pressing overall needs of communications in Alaska," Gravel said.

"Even under the best of circumstances, and even with the rather generous program offered by RCA," Gravel said, "most communities in Alaska will not receive direct television or adequate communications."

"And there is no provision for bringing educational television or other public television to many Alaska communities," Gravel said.

"The technical capability is available to provide complete communications to every community in Alaska," Gravel said. "I do not intend to rest until that is accomplished."

Gravel reemphasized the point he made last February when he opposed the sale of the Department of Defense owned communications system. He said the Air Force, which administers ACS, is selling a franchise for an antiquated, inadequate communications system, at a cost higher than necessary.

"Alaska has never benefited from a total communications plan

while the government has administered the system," Gravel said. "Private industry is welcome," he said, "I am certain RCA will find "a cooperative atmosphere in its first efforts in civilian telephone system management."

Gravel promised his full cooperation with RCA management, and said he would seek a meeting with its leaders at which he would urge that they work with Alaska "not only to resolve the immediate communications crisis but to provide Alaska the very best communications system technology can make available."

"I am confident it can be done within the framework of present day costs," Gravel said.

Gravel said he intends to introduce legislation soon which would pave the way for reductions in the existing "punitive telephone rates," and pave the way for educational

television and commercial live television to "be made available to every city, town and village in Alaska."