

Negotiations underway to put Alaska traffic on RCA satcom

Negotiations are under way in Washington, D.C. between RCA Americom and Western Union which could put Alaska traffic on RCA Satcom I within a matter of days.

Western Union tentatively agreed to withdraw its opposition to RCA's petition to use Satcom I to serve Alaska.

The agreement, if sanctioned by the Federal Communications Commission, would allow RCA Alascom to utilize a satellite which is technically superior for service to Alaska at half the cost now being paid in lease charges to Western Union.

ALASCOM currently is paying \$120,000 per month per transponder on Westar II, while lease charges on Satcom I would be about \$60,000 per transponder per month.

RCA Alascom President Ben W. Agee emphasized that support from state leaders was a significant factor in Western Union's decision to withdraw its opposition to switching Alaska traffic to Satcom I.

Gov. Jay Hammond had urged the FCC to approve RCA's petition to provide interim satellite service to Alaska pending a final decision on which common carrier should

serve the state.

Both houses of the Alaska legislature passed a resolution supporting the governor's request. The Alaska Public Utilities Commission, the governor's Office of Telecommunications and Sen. Ted Stevens also urged the FCC to approve the interim switch to Satcom I, saying that this system would provide Alaskans with the best available satellite service at the lowest cost.

"Alascom is grateful for the support shown by Alaska's leaders in our efforts to obtain the best satellite service for the

state," Agee said. "There is no question that Satcom provides better coverage of Alaska at a

much lower cost. I am extremely pleased by the decision."

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