DENVER — A team of Denver intellectual property lawyers has lobbied for years to get the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office to open a satellite office here, and their efforts may be close to bearing fruit.

The U.S. Senate in March passed a bill freeing up millions of dollars for the patent office and authorizing it to open three to four satellite offices. The House is expected to act on the bill this summer. Denver is on the short list to get one of those potential offices, which could generate hundreds of jobs.

That Denver is in the running for the office is due largely to the persuasive powers of attorneys Michael Drapkin of Holland & Hart, Tom Franklin of Kilpatrick Townsend & Stockton and John Posthumus of Sheridan Ross.

The lawyers have marshaled the state’s Congressional delegation and met frequently with key government officials in Washington, D.C., to make their dream a reality. But there’s still a long way to go before Denver gets a satellite office.

“We can see the goal line, but the last 10 yards are the hardest,” Posthumus said. “It’s going to take a community effort to make it happen.”

Though the city is close, it’s too soon to guarantee anything. Denver had hoped to land the very first satellite office, but that ended up going to Detroit in December. It’s been a big effort, with the three Denver lawyers spending hundreds of hours over the last few years on the campaign to win a satellite office. Posthumus guesses he’s spent as much as a thousand hours.

“It’s been larger than I anticipated,” he said.

A win-win

The concept of satellite offices is designed to fix a host of problems that arise from having the office in a single location in Alexandria, Va., Franklin said. Problems range from sloppy patents to a huge backlog in processing them.

The patent office should skim the top talent from candidate pools across the country, but instead it draws deep from candidate pools across the nation, he said.

The office also has a hard time retaining examiners. Washington is a high cost-of-living city, and examiners make about two-thirds what they could in the private sector. The capital also tends to have a more transient population.

Sloppy patents hit on all cylinders, “Franklin said. “The average patent examiner stays 30 and hitting on all cylinders, “ Franklin said. “We need to be trained, productive, transient population.

The capital also tends to have a more technologically-oriented workforce, “ and that the satellite office system might work.

“ Practically everyone was in complete agreement that they needed a nationwide workforce,” and that the satellite office system was a good way to go, Franklin said. The only pushback happened at a meeting with the union that represents examiners.

“It was something that started as just an idea,” he said. “We had all tears in our eyes: now it’s really happening.”

— Matt Masich, MMNews@ColoradoMedia.com