

(Statement of former FCC Commissioner-Chairman James H. Quello  
receiving the NATPE Chairman's Award)

NATPE National Convention  
New Orleans, January 21, 1998

Wow!

I've said that one of the joys of being a public speaker is hearing yourself introduced -- particularly by regulated industries.

But this introduction beats everything I ever heard -- and I'm no longer a regulator!

I should just say thanks and sit down -- quit while I'm a way ahead and not spoil the impressive effect by my speechmaking.

Mickey Gardner, your expert NATPE lawyer and my long-time valued adviser tipped me off about the upcoming tributes from important communications leaders. I said "Mick, that's great -- the only thing that could top worldwide leaders Murdoch and Turner would be for NATPE to use its vast programming influence to see if the Pope could possibly invoke some kind of laudatory message from the Great Communicator in the sky, the Lord himself!

Mick acknowledges it was an attractive, creative (irreverent) idea, but then exerted his personal First Amendment rights by saying "Jim, you were great as a commissioner and FCC chairman, but somehow we got an indirect message or maybe an eerie feeling that in other respects, you might have trouble qualifying for even Catholic purgatory" -- well so much for wise-guy lawyers as longtime, intimate friends.

As a former ordinary working stiff manager, I'm really honored by all the gracious remarks and I especially appreciate the generous tributes by famous world-leaders like Rupert Murdoch and Ted Turner.

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I like both their styles -- open, direct, no hidden agenda. You genuinely get what you see in both gentlemen. Of course you also get what you hear -- unusually colorful strong unvarnished bottomline opinions and without, if I may quote a Ted Turnerism, any bullshit.

I appreciate their plugging a non-voting former commissioner who after 23 FCC years is weathering the transition from governmental kissee to kissor.

Anyway, I agonized over what to say this morning.

So now it's your turn.

I sought advice. Mickey and your president, Bruce, a class act who is a great NATPE representative, suggested "Why not give them a review of your colorful quotes or exciting experiences like some of the big TV programmers. Give them the best of Quello. You have 10-15 minutes to fill."

Unfortunately, me at my very best would be 10-15 minutes of silence -- at least that's what my super bright, loyal, smart ass FCC legal assistants always told me. Would this crowd appreciate the relief my silence, this zero based approach to rhetoric, would represent without rushing towards the exit sign?

So let's start with the fact that I am glad to be here and really appreciate the pre-posthumous eulogies and award.

Of course, as a fugitive from the actuarial table of averages, I'm glad to be anywhere.

I have lived ten years beyond the average life expectancy -- a source of annoyance to some.

But I'm particularly glad to have lived long enough to witness NATPE's phenomenal growth and progress. I remember attending an early NATPE meeting at the Fountainbleu in Miami, Florida with a total attendance of 46 station program directors. It's great to be here today

with your impressive program exhibits and over eighteen thousand top TV and program production executives. What a gratifying experience this must be for my valued, long-time friend and tennis partner, Lew Klein, the NATPE founder and a great broadcast pioneer.

As for me, I'm a happy camper, particularly after this prestigious award and generous remarks this morning.

Some of you may remember two years ago when contemplating the end of my term (my regular term ended June 30, 1996 -- I served through November 3, 1997 -- by either popular demand (wishful thinking) or more likely, congressional forbearance"). Anyway, I warned at that time "Don't lame duck me too soon. I have ambitions to be reappointed as the first active wheelchair commissioner!" That was after I actually witnessed competitive two-bounce wheelchair tennis matches at a NATPE convention. Some of you, and particularly my perennial (now tolerant) tennis partner, Dick Wiley, know that I now use psychology in tennis. When missing a tough shot, I now shout "Hell when I was only 79, I would have killed that shot."

I relinquished that wheelchair ambition for an opportunity to cap my career in the fascinating but less hectic environment of lecturer at Michigan State University, the alma mater for wife, Mary, and me. I announced my intention of leaving by stating: "I'll serve until someone is confirmed in my place or until I reach my mental pause."

I am particularly pleased that there has been some interest expressed in funding an endowed chair or communications center in my name.

It will mark quite a change of pace from the hectic, contentious FCC regulatory battles. I like to gloat that I haven't missed an official FCC meeting or an award in 23½ years.

My longtime friend and communications Hall of Famer, Dick Wiley, has provided office facilities for the academic fundraising and as an independent base for my written forays into the foibles and tribulations of my 23½ years at the FCC.

As to memorable quotes or achievement, my most important official achievement was being appointed by a president five different times and confirmed by the senate. Naturally, without appointment and confirmation, you are not in a voting position to accomplish anything.

My first confirmation hearing lasted eight days and was the longest on record for all regulatory agencies. My last (4th) confirmation hearing of 12½ minutes was heralded as probably the shortest.

One bit of homely advice I give new commissioners: "Add your oversight senators and congressmen to the Fourth Commandment. It is a good idea to honor them."

The pros, cons and subtleties of confirmation and oversight hearings and FCC regulatory tribulations are subjects of a book I'm writing -- if I ever get it completed.

One of my more memorable laugh lines came in preparing for my second hearing about 14 years ago. It has become a raunchy speech standard.

At that time several nominees for cabinet posts, including a prominent senator, were being grilled at confirmation hearings about possible inappropriate sexual proclivities. In advising me on the upcoming senatorial hearing, my legal assistants asked, jokingly maybe, "Commissioner, could you be accused of being a womanizer?"

I replied "Hell no! At my age I'm not a womanizer, I'm now a fantasizer. I even play X-rated films backwards because now I like to see people get dressed and go home." Naturally it wasn't used for the official confirmation hearing, but it was handy as a speech laugh line for 14 years.

As a speaker at the FCBA (Federal Communications Bar Association) luncheon last year, I regaled the audience with my latest sexual disclaimer -- I said "With the involuntary celibacy of the golden years, I now read Playboy for the same reason I read National Geographic -- to see fascinating places I don't get to visit."

Wife Mary threatened to turn me in for two 40s if I ever used that raunchy story again. Her threat was well timed. It came after I made a statement that "I feel great but anyone who says he can do at 80 what he did at 40 wasn't living too exciting a life at 40."

As to my biggest personal accomplishment, it is being married to the same wonderful woman for 60 years! It is a rousing testimonial to her sense of humor and tolerance. Totally Irish Mary has been a major factor in my maintaining a becoming sense of self unimportance. As I have mentioned several times, I believe in marriage. If it weren't for marriage, many men would go through life thinking they had no faults at all.

Incidentally, Mary never believed in women's equality -- she refused to step down. Also her hot flashes were merely power surges.

I wish my two sons would stop validating her family leadership by continually stating, "We know who was the boss of the family -- it surer than hell wasn't you, Dad." Mary was very good at letting me have her way and I hope she continues for years to come.

There is a lot of truth in the lines of legendary Nat King Cole singing an old standard song -- Nature Boy -- "The greatest thing in all the world is to love and be loved in return."

Another highlight in my life was last spring when Tom Murphy, a truly great communications exec, and I think the best negotiator in communications history, personally presented me with the IRTS lifetime achievement award at the annual luncheon in New York.

He stated that if Commissioner Jim Quello had kept his Capital Cities stock, he would now have 23½ million dollars, so every year he served on the FCC cost him a million dollars.”

I thanked Murph for making a big man out of me and said “The Lord did not want me to be a wealthy man, he wanted me to be a besieged, beleaguered SOB and that’s what I am in this job.”

Another memorable event was the first Capital Cities Alumni dinner in New York in early December where I visited with all my former working stiff VPs and managers who are now multi-millionaires due to the brilliant and beneficent management skills of the Tom Murphy-Dan Burke Capital Cities-ABC team.

Tom and Dan also got Warren Buffet to speak at the Capitol Cities alumni meeting. I expected a quiet genius recluse type, but found a delightful outgoing person. I had the pleasure of visiting with him for 20 minutes. I was able to inform him that I always had been very successful at eluding wealth whenever it got too close to me.

This month I received three great photos of Mr. Buffet and I exchanging viewpoints. I proudly showed them to my staff with my own original caption “Multi-billionaire Warren Buffet receiving financial advice from hundrednaire Jim Quello.”

Wealth or no wealth, I have been truly blessed.

NATPE, too, is truly blessed because programming product will continue to be the most needed ingredient for the growing multi-channel, multi transmission communications world of today and tomorrow.

Personally, I’m cheerfully confronting the dismal prospect that I have lived 4/5 of my life. I have no regrets. I really had a great run in life with three exciting careers -- Army,

broadcasting and FCC. My late in life (age 59 through 83), FCC career was the most important, exciting and gratifying.

At this advance stage in life what really counts are good health, reasonable economic sufficiency and the affection of family and friends.

Heartfelt thanks for being such thoughtful friends and making this one of the most memorable events in my lifetime career.

Best wishes for continued growth and achievement in the exciting communications world of tomorrow -- and may the Lord be with you, but not too soon.

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