

## RESPONSE TO 'FORMER FCC CHIEF TOUTS "BIG BROADBAND"'

By former FCC Commissioner/Chairman Jim Quello

There he goes again!

It is hard to believe that someone like Reed Hundt, who reputedly is technically bright, served 5-1/2 years as FCC Chairman and serves on the board of several large publicly traded corporations would seriously advance such an impractical, impolitic proposal as his "Big Broadband" super fast conversions.

Reed's proposal would ostensibly require the closing down of all commercial and public TV stations to make the reclaimed spectrum available for auctions and then replaced by "Big Broadband" conversion. This is certain to incur the enmity of all now newly re-unified broadcasters as well as the wrath of the general public who rely on TV for news, information, entertainment and emergency bulletins.

The former chairman is a longtime Gore loyalist, and reportedly, now aligned with the Dean presidential campaign. It seems unfathomable that Reed is practically serving as a Bush or even a Gephardt undercover agent to torpedo Dean's candidacy with his proposal to vacate all free over the air TV to develop a government mandated and financed "Big Broadband" network. I cannot imagine any office holder or common sense commissioner who would support closing down all TV stations to initiate a complex government mandated "Big Broadband" network.

Over the air broadcasting in this country is a valued service, not a burden, and has never been a government subsidy. Both radio and TV utilized previously fallow spectrum to initiate broadcast service financed by private enterprise capital, not government. It was economic risk capital with both radio and later television losing money during the first several developmental years.

Cable and satellite are very desirable services, which improves and in some cases insures quality reception. However, broadcasters originate most news and many of the most popular programs.

Interestingly, the broadcast business in this country is already building a “broadband digital highway” like the FCC’s program to foster advanced digital broadcasting. High definition TV is more than just a prettier video picture. *Broadcasting & Cable* recently reported that more than 190 television stations in this country are “multicasting” several digital signals – both TV and in some cases, straight data communications!

Communications policymaking is a complex serious activity. It affects hundreds of billions of dollars in investment and lots of jobs and stockholders. All the services are also highly valued, warts and all, by the public. For the most part, they are “retail” services because they touch the consumer directly . . . And they affect office holders and regulators directly too.

Perhaps this is Reed Hundt’s first draft designed to elicit comment. It has. His ideas may be stimulating but are they really serious? The serious complications, geographic obstacles, expenses and risks seem brushed aside or completely ignored as in his American Foundation treatise on Big Broadband convergence.

Someone as technically adept and imaginative as Reed should stop proposing fanciful theoretical ideas designed to irritate his many erstwhile industrial and regulatory opponents. Instead, let’s see what the FCC and congress can realistically propose and realistically accomplish with a more practical and timely approach.