

SPEECH BY COMMISSIONER JAMES H. QUELLO

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA BROADCASTERS ASSOCIATION

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First, I want to applaud this effort by the Southern California Broadcasters Association to, in the words of your brochure, keep your member stations "in closer touch with the interests and concerns of the communities they serve." That is a laudable goal for a number of important reasons, among them good, sound business reasons. It also provides some input to help your licensees carry out their responsibilities consistent with the terms of their licenses - which, I suppose, is one of the good, sound business reasons. But, the fact that these seminars have been successful for the past fourteen years also suggests that you are interested in expanding your understanding of the communities you are licensed to serve and that you are seeking innovative ways to serve your communities.

Community service is, after all, the foundation of our system of broadcasting. After all, the technology exists to permit nationwide programming from a single source and, with the advent of satellite technology, it will soon be possible to transmit nationwide from a single source. There will, no doubt, be those who see this relatively new capability as a means to efficiently blanket the nation with a centrally operated system of radio and television. But, whatever the technical methods used to distribute programming of interest nationwide, it is local programming in response to local community needs and interests which justifies our system of broadcasting.

The theme of this meeting, "America, the Next 100 Years," is also to be applauded as a desire, on your part, to anticipate the challenges and opportunities which lie ahead for broadcasters and for the public at large. I wish you great success in your efforts to foresee the social, economic and political issues which lie ahead. I would like to contribute to your understanding of the regulatory climate in Washington in the next 100 years but, given the rapid changes in the issues and personalities which influence that climate over just the past couple of years, I hesitate to project a year ahead. What I propose to do, instead, is try to isolate those things which are likely to remain more or less constant.

I think it's clear - more so today than perhaps ever before - that the American public is interested in and concerned about its broadcasting system. I believe that the public expects more from broadcasting than ever before. I further believe that the public has a right to expect a great deal from broadcasting. And, I firmly believe that the broadcasting industry has the resources, the talent and the will to meet that challenge.

59

Broadcasting is, of course, a business. And a broadcasting station must be operated as a business if it is to be commercially successful. And, if a commercial broadcasting station is not successful, it is to some degree impaired in carrying out its responsibility to serve its community. Therefore, it can be argued that your financial success is consistent with the public interest, convenience and necessity. Unfortunately, there are those who don't clearly understand that relationship - and, I suspect, those who don't want to understand.

Unfortunately, this lack of understanding is sometimes aided and abetted by some broadcasters who forget that broadcasting is not just a business. Those few broadcasters whose tunnel vision views only the bottom line contribute significantly to stereotyping of all broadcasters, many of whom play active, effective roles in their communities. In my view, industry associations such as this one can and do influence their membership - and those who choose to remain outside their membership - toward a serious approach to real public service broadcasting.

There are many opportunities for public service in the broadcasting industry. My own experience has been that daily involvement with community affairs can only lead to greater understanding of the community's needs and interests. It can also lead to a greater community appreciation of what the broadcaster is trying to do as a good citizen. And, not so incidentally, it also leads to many worthwhile associations with other business men and women who are also demonstrating their corporate and private good citizenship. I can't think of a better way for a broadcaster to become an accepted and appreciated member of the community which he serves than to willingly serve on the various boards and committees which promote charitable and civic causes. The broadcaster's expertise in communicating with the general public is extremely helpful to these organizations. And, the time and effort spent in providing this service is often repaid many times over in both tangible and intangible ways.

This is the era of "corporate good citizenship" in the sense that many businesses are seeing the need to actively project an image of community awareness. In many cases, these are businesses which seek such an image with the realization that community acceptance is simply good business. This approach makes even more sense in an industry regulated by the government which must, by definition in our society, be responsive to public concerns.

I have often expressed my concern that our broadcasting system is threatened by professional nay-sayers who abuse the Commission's rules for their own, private ends. I continue to be wary of those individuals and groups who seek to impose upon the public and the Commission their private versions of the public interest at license renewal time. And, I am dismayed at the inordinate amount of time and effort consumed at the Commission in responding to unfounded, undocumented and ill-considered petitions to deny license renewals.

Lest I be misunderstood, however, I want to make it clear that I am in favor of public participation in the licensing process. The members of the public who

genuinely feel aggrieved by a broadcaster's lack of interest and concern have every legal and moral right to protest. Again, public service is the name of the game in broadcasting. And, in this imperfect world, broadcasters are subject to lapses in judgment even as ordinary mortals. In addition to efforts such as today's seminar, I would urge broadcasters to maintain an open mind and a willing ear insofar as citizen comments and complaints are concerned. As you know, the Commission has recently moved in the direction of making ascertainment a continuous process designed to respond to changing community needs, instead of the static triennial review it has been. You must also be willing and able to respond to changing needs and interests within your communities by, first knowing what those changing needs and interests are.

I would like to quote from a speech delivered some sixteen years ago by a broadcaster to a group of his colleagues. In pointing out some of the virtues of public service programming, he concluded:

"From all I have said, it is apparent that public service is 'a many-aspect thing.' It can include service to listeners (and consumers) by scrupulously policing your advertising; service to your clients through conscientious and skilled counsel on the use of our media; establishing a personality as a good neighbor with a highly developed civic consciousness - supporting civic and welfare campaigns; performing many vital information services every day; impartially educating the public on current social and economic problems; promoting better human relations.

"All this is not only worthwhile, but essential. There is no doubt that public service pays in increased community and audience acceptance, in prestige and stature. Remember, that civic leaders active in service projects are invariably your business and industrial leaders, too. We don't think it is mere coincidence that the commercial stations known for outstanding public service are invariably successful operations that rack up the largest volume of business dollars, too.

"So good public service is good business. Even more important, it brings the inward satisfaction of fulfilling a worthwhile purpose in life - and the gratifying experience of being proud of your industry - of your company and the part you play in it."

And, I believe what I told that Grand Rapids, Michigan audience back in 1960 is just as applicable today - if not more so. The needs, opportunities and rewards are even greater today than they were then.

One way of performing genuine public service which can be virtually overlooked in the crush of day-to-day activities is, strangely enough, the public service announcement, or PSA. I urge each of you to review your PSA policies and practices and then ask yourselves whether you're placing too much emphasis upon FCC number credit and not enough upon the real opportunities for aiding your

community which are inherent in these announcements.

I am aware of the practice by some broadcasters of refining the form of the public service announcement to the point where the least possible amount of air time is consumed and the greatest possible amount of commercial availability time is preserved. I could cite some innovative PSA's which I have heard which impose hardly any burden upon the station or the listener. In fact, the burden is so slight that it is questionable that anything of significance is accomplished except perhaps a log entry attesting to the licensee's public service commitment.

We all know of broadcasters who are very successful financially who are also very committed to community service. And, we all know of some who are, unfortunately, not so committed. The latter will require all of our attention and assistance if the broadcasting services are to realize their great potential.

It seems to me that the public is entitled to expect a substantial return on its investment in broadcasting. That public which provides the audience figures to the ratings services - and thus revenues to the stations - should expect that these revenues contribute in some reasonable proportion to genuine public service broadcasting.

I would also like to see the FCC formally recognize superiority in public service not only at license renewal time but throughout the license period. Such recognition, in my opinion, should include those community efforts made by licensees who serve in the various quasi-official and unofficial capacities.

I recognize that the FCC - like other regulatory and judicial bodies - cannot, in the long run, mandate ethical, moral or socially uplifting attitudes on the part of all licensees. The best we can do is to attempt to establish rules which encourage such attitudes and to enforce those rules to encourage minimally-acceptable behavior.

Ultimately, of course, it is the membership of the industry, individually and collectively, which must develop and encourage its own standards in response to the demands of the public. The public is aware of its stake in broadcasting and more and more is expressing itself about the quality of service it expects to receive. This is an age of heightened awareness--an age of concern--an age of relative sophistication. Broadcasting has made a major contribution toward that awareness, concern and sophistication. Broadcasters now face greater challenges than ever before. As a former member of the industry, I know that it will more than meet these challenges and continue to improve its service to the American people.

In closing, I'd like to repeat the final paragraph of my Grand Rapids speech 16 years ago:

"...good public service is good business. Even more important, it brings the inward satisfaction of fulfilling a worthwhile purpose in life---and the gratifying experience of being proud of your industry--of your company--and the part you play in it."