

Remarks by Commissioner James H. Quello
for his Fourth FCC Term Swearing-in Ceremony
Federal Communications Commission

July 12, 1991

Thank you Damon for those kind words -- but special thanks for your stellar friendship through the years. You honor me with your presence today -- this is the fourth time you were kind enough to be available for my swearing-in -- I called Damon and before I could say anything but hello, he immediately said "Have Bible, Will Travel."

Most of you have read or heard about the famous classical friendship of Greek mythology, Damon and Pythias. Well, what you see today is the classical friendship of Damon and Jim of American reality rather than Greek mythology.

Because Damon is such a good friend, I was delighted early this week when Professor Derrick Bell, distinguished black law professor of Harvard University, on ABC's Nightline program said that Judge Damon Keith of the Sixth Circuit is exceptionally well qualified to fill the Supreme Court vacancy. I thought to myself great -- that's my friend Damon -- he is going to swear me in for the 4th time. You didn't make the Supreme Court nomination, but but I'm grateful that you're making my swearing-in a "supreme" occasion.

And a heartfelt thanks to all of you for being here today and making this the most memorable of my "swearings-in."

I think we are breaking some records today. I believe I'm by far the most "senior" (polite for oldest) FCC commissioner ever officially sworn in to office. I'm glad President Bush flunked me in retirement and kept me working and in class.

I remember last time when Chuck Adams, author and former president of a large thriving advertising agency sent a congratulatory wire urging "Hang in there until they name the building after you." I appreciated his attitude but I repeat what I said then, that kind of honor has been pre-empted by distinguished Chairman Bob Lee or Rosel Hyde.

However, I might challenge them when I achieve a dramatic first all my own in 1996, when backed by the Grey Panthers and AARP, I am reappointed as the very first active wheelchair FCC commissioner!

There are some advantages to being old, but not so many that any of you should rush to get there. Growing old can be a bad habit that a busy person doesn't have time to cultivate.

Now, I'll admit I'm fairly old but I wasn't born in a log cabin. However, my immigrant parents did move into one as soon as they could afford it. At least I am not claiming I was born in a log cabin I built with my own hands!

I don't want to belabor all aspects of aging but physically-- anyone who says he can still do at 75 what he was doing at 25, couldn't have been doing much at 25! But so far life has been very good to me -- even during the delicate pre-confirmation period, Kitty Kelley didn't call me to ask how's the family. Speaking of family reminds me of the Fourth Commandment which directs us to "honor thy father and mother" --I've done fairly well at the FCC by adding "and thy oversight Senators and Congressmen" to that commandment.

On a little more serious side, I like to quote the great German philosopher author, Goethe, who expressed one of the positive aspects of aging "It is only necessary to grow old to become more charitable and even indulgent -- I see no fault committed by others that I have not committed myself." That saying certainly applies to me.

With a little maturity you realize that proponents of strong viewpoints different from your own aren't inherently your enemies or unqualified oafs. And you smile to yourself as you realize it is just a matter of viewpoint whether you are perceived as having the courage of your convictions or being just damn stubborn. And you even get to the point of rejecting the popular Washington motto of "Don't get mad, get even." Except for squaring the record for gross inequities or distortions, getting even is petty and not worth the inner turmoil.

After my 17 years at the FCC, most of you understand that my general approach to communications policy is pro-free enterprise and pro-competitive but with practical guidelines. (I once said I do "deregulation, but I don't do anarchy.") I believe government regulation is best conducted in a spirit of mutual cooperation with regulated industries. I believe progress can best be achieved with a constructive government attitude that provides incentives for innovation, growth and improvement in service and products for the public. We should reserve adversary proceedings for major disagreements or egregious violations. In return, we should expect that telecommunications companies, because of their great impact on the American way of life, maintain a strong sense of social consciousness.

Broadcast licensees, and for that matter all businesses and corporations, have inherent responsibilities to the public. In America, all corporations exist by the will of the people. It behooves all corporations, acting in their own self-interest, to conduct themselves with a keen sense of social purpose, not only economic purpose. I believe the free enterprise or corporate system really works in America, but I keep reminding myself that it was not ordained by God . . . In a democracy, any economic or social system can be legally altered by the people at the polls. So, the people -- the public the FCC represents, have a right to expect reasonable benefits, enlightened management, fair treatment and equitable distribution of wealth for the public good. The great majority of American telecommunications and broadcasting corporations have reasonably fulfilled most of these expectations by providing the American people with the best communications services in the world and their employees with a high standard of living. One of our highest government priorities must be to preserve America's markets and our preeminent position in world communications to assure healthy progressive industries with gainfully employed Americans.

Overall, it is a challenging time to be at the FCC. The FCC has offered me the most exciting and productive period of my lifetime career. This is a period of revolutionary growth, contentious developments and technological advancements in all fields of communications -- and the best is still to come! The FCC's challenge will be the orderly practical implementation of advanced technology services of telecomputers, fiber optics, DBS, DAB and HDTV. We must deal, too, with the great potential of communications globalization.

In summary, industry and government must work together to maintain and increase our communications leadership so that Americans remain the best informed, most gainfully employed and best served people in the world.

I'd like to close with an inspirational excerpt from author Samuel Ullman regarding youth and age. He wrote

"Nobody grows old merely by a number of years. We grow old by deserting our ideals. Years may wrinkle the skin, but to give up enthusiasm wrinkles the soul. Worry, fear, self-distrust bows the heart and turns the spirit back to dust. Whether 60 or 16, there is in every human being's heart the lure of wonder, the unfailing child-like appetite of what's next, and the joy of the game of living. In the center of your heart and my heart there is a wireless station; so long as it receives messages of beauty, hope, cheer, courage and power from people and from the Infinite, so long are you young. When the aerials are down, and your spirit is covered with snows of cynicism and the ice of pessimism, then you are grown old, even at 20, but as long as your aerials are up, to catch waves of optimism, there is hope you may die young at an advanced age."

As for me, I'm going to live until I'm 100 -- or die trying!

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So thanks again for your friendship and presence and best wishes to all of you for personal fulfillment in the great years ahead!

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