

Remarks by Commissioner James H. Quello

MSTV EIGHTH ATV UPDATE MEETING

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My thanks to MSTV, its Board and members, for honoring me with the Jack Harris Founders Award. This recognition is all the more meaningful to me because this is only the second time it has been awarded, with the first award presented to Jack Harris himself. Of all my recent "pre-posthumous" awards, the Jack Harris Award is especially appreciated by this long-time broadcast pioneer who has watched the development of HDTV with great interest.

I knew and admired Jack Harris as a most effective broadcast industry leader and pioneer. He was, as Fred Paxton put it, "a beacon for broadcasters throughout his career." His vision led to the creation of MSTV. As Broadcasting & Cable editorialized last week upon his death, Jack Harris worked ceaselessly to safeguard the TV spectrum and kept "pushing the technological envelope."

That of course, is what MSTV continues to do -- preserving interference free spectrum and broadcaster access to new technologies. There is no better example than the topic of today's program -- Advanced Television.

I remember well that time back in 1987 when the Commission was about to share the UHF spectrum with land mobile and MSTV rallied broadcasters to ask the FCC to table UHF-sharing and launch the ATV proceeding. I realized -- as did MSTV -- that this spectrum was crucial to broadcasters if our system of free and universal service were to upgrade to the next generation of technical quality. It is a good time to remind you that Margita White, a great former Commissioner and your very effective president did, and is doing, an outstanding job of representing HDTV interests.

You have come a long way since that fateful vote. With digital breakthroughs, the opportunities for television broadcasters and the public they serve have vastly broadened. This is a tribute to the many companies, organizations, industries and to the FCC staff who have worked together effectively under the umbrella of the FCC's Advisory Committee on Advanced Television Service led by its able Chairman, Dick Wiley. As you may realize, Dick Wiley was probably the most consensus-building and productive chairman in FCC history, except for an 11-month interim period in 1993. (smile)

I congratulate all of you for your accomplishments and wish you well as you participate in another consensus-building MSTV conference. There still are important issues ahead and the Commission looks to you for guidance. New technology is bringing us to the

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threshold of a new television era. But "pushing the technological envelope" is only part of the challenge -- as Jack Harris recognized. The most important challenge is to take care that our policies do not erode one of our nation's most valuable assets: universal free television available to all the public. It is essential that the most pervasive and influential of all media be available to everyone in a democracy that relies on an informed citizenry to maintain representative government.

In our democracy, broadcasters occasionally are reminded by government officials that they have a public interest obligation -- a sort of social compact with the public they serve. As you know, I personally convey public interest reminders from time-to-time. However, many responsible government officials appreciate the fact that the largest, most advanced phone service in the world and by far, the most informative, comprehensive and advanced TV service in the world were developed by private investment and free enterprise entrepreneurship, not by government financing or government regulation. And that progress is maximized by industry and government working together in a constructive spirit of mutual cooperation. Nevertheless, under the present system I remind everyone that FCC Commissioners are paid by public funds and appointed to represent the public. If private interests conflict with the public interest, the public interest must prevail. I have also been compelled to occasionally remind some telecommunications leaders that no industry should consider itself more important or more powerful than the government acting in the public interest.

Fortunately, the great majority of broadcasters take pride in supporting the public interest standard. They consider public service requirements as a natural opportunity for civic integration rather than a regulatory burden. Thus they remain worthy of Congressional and FCC support for universal free service and for spectrum authorization for HDTV and for advanced ancillary services.

Broadcasting is destined to remain the most informative, vital and most sought-after service in the oncoming multi-channel and multi-faceted world of tomorrow. Visionary telecommunication executives are beginning to realize that with convergence of TV, phone, computer, data processing, interactive, etc. in a competitive marketplace that TV programming will be the major factor in the public's selection of one multi-media phone service over another. People are attracted to programs not competing equal transmission facilities. That may explain recent phone company fascination with program producers and program distributors.

Overall, it is a challenging time to be at the FCC for the oncoming exciting competitive communications advances for the 21st century.

Eventually most regulation will be replaced by a fully competitive multi-channel marketplace of video, voice, data, interactive, etc. with no telecommunications monopolies and no scarcities in program diversification. There only will be a continuing need for an engineering traffic cop and a spectrum coordinating agency. However, deregulation will be

an evolutionary process.

It is doubtful I'll still be around as an earth person when the millennium is achieved of vigorous communication competitions replacing regulation.

I hope in some form, I'll be looking down from cool, blue skies rather than from a super-heated environment (maybe Catholic purgatory?) and see five or more multi-faceted communication superhighways -- electronic, wireless, direct satellite, etc. with "TV" programming as the essential ingredient providing Americans the most informative, comprehensive diversified communication in the world.

Thank you for honoring me with the Jack Harris Award and adding to my pleasant lifetime memories. Best wishes for another successful conference and keep up your good work to assure that TV station programming remains the most essential information ingredient of the multi-channel future.

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