

Remarks By Commissioner James H. Quello
Before the
West Virginia Broadcasters Association's 51st Annual Convention
The Greenbrier - August 15, 1997

One of the joys of being a speaker is hearing yourself being introduced.

Thanks for the pre-posthumous eulogy. As the old saying goes, my father would have liked it, my mother would have believed it.

The West Virginia Broadcasters Association always receives special consideration from me. I have enjoyed your conventions and friendly interaction with your members. Your Executive Director, Marilyn Fletcher, is a valued friend and a most effective representative for your organization. It is hard to say "no" to personable Marilyn. I was sorry to hear of her retirement. It seems so premature. From my own experience with her, I know everyone will miss her cheerful approach to life and efficient organizational ability.

Another reason for my special affinity for West Virginia is your Senator Jay Rockefeller, a highly respected, knowledgeable member of the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee with a major responsibility overseeing communications.

In a communications survey about eight years ago, I predicted Senator Jay Rockefeller would be in the White House in 1998 as Vice President or President. If that prediction comes true, West Virginians and all Americans would be exceedingly well served.

The dictionary could appropriately list and define the word "Decency" by simply stating "Decency" -- a quality Senator Jay Rockefeller personifies.

Many speaking topics have been suggested for me. One frequently asked is: What was my most trying challenge in 23-1/2 years at the FCC? What do you consider your greatest accomplishments?

There were numerous intriguing challenges throughout the years. But the one most indelibly imprinted in my mind was my all-time record-breaking 8-day initial confirmation hearing in 1974. It broke the record for all regulatory agencies.

When undergoing this unprecedented confirmation inquisition, I remembered the warning of my Congressional Godfather, John Dingell, who said, "Jim, Why do you want the damn job -- you are going to get beat up by Congress and overruled by the Courts."

There's some truth in Big John's statement, but being an FCC Commissioner is still the most important and intriguing job I ever had and we do, or are expected to, exercise independent judgment. Also, it is not all bad being a regulatory "kissee" rather than a higher paid "kissor," for 23 years. Also, I served during fascinating years of innovative developments.

Just look at what happened to the communications media since April 30, 1974, the date I started as an FCC Commissioner.

Personal computers were just introduced and there was no thought then that they would become a dazzling new communications device. The Internet was unheard of. The cable industry was in its infancy in 1974. Mobile phones were also in their infancy. There were no superstations, no HBO, CNN or Showtime. VCRs had not yet been introduced. Congress had no idea of granting FCC auction authority. And no one ever contemplated a government agency would raise over 20 billion dollars for the U.S. Treasury.

All of these things have become commonplace today and they have transformed the world of communications in just 23 years. The communication multichannel, multi-faceted, interactive capabilities are mind-boggling and deserve a full text treatment in some future speech.

Also, the FCC influence far exceeds its relatively diminutive size. An agency numbering fewer than 2500 people is responsible for regulating telephone, television, cable, radio, satellite and wireless industries that account for approximately 10 percent of the Gross National Product!

Official accomplishments? I guess my greatest official accomplishment was being appointed and confirmed to the FCC four different times. Of those, the longest and shortest hearings were most memorable. Naturally, the shortest was the most gratifying.

Looking back, I reported for my fourth confirmation to Senate Communications Subcommittee Chairman, Dan Inouye, a wounded WW II hero who served in the distinguished Japanese-American 442nd combat team in Italy. I was in Italy the same time he was and I considered Japanese-American soldiers to be the best troops in the Army -- like having a regiment of paratroop rangers in line.

I stood at attention when reporting to Senator Inouye and did everything but salute. I said, "Sir, reporting for duty."

The good Senator opened with, "Jim, how long do you want this one to last? I understand you broke all records for length of regulatory hearings in 1974 -- 8 hearings!"

I replied, "Longer than that, Senator, eight days! -- And I really appreciate your attitude."

He said, "How would you like to try for one of the shortest? How about fifteen minutes or less? We know all about your FCC record and we have your written replies to our list of questions."

Senator Inouye opened with some gracious comments about my 17 years of service and I believe the hearing lasted 12-1/2 minutes, possibly the shortest on record -- the type of record I prefer.

As for my present position, I'm a happy camper, particularly after the generous comments tonight. It is comforting to be in the position of really not seeking reappointment during these contentious times. And, I like to gloat that I haven't missed an official meeting or an award in over 23 years. I have announced plans to remain on the job until someone is confirmed in my place or until I reach mental pause. Estimates are that the new Commission will be in place by or before November 1st.

As you know or have heard by now, I hope to cap my career in the fascinating but less hectic environment of lecturing at Michigan State University, the alma mater for wife Mary, and me. I'm particularly pleased there has been some interest expressed in eventually funding an endowed chair in my name.

Personal accomplishment? My greatest personal accomplishment was and is being married to the same wonderful woman for almost 60 years. We are observing our 60th wedding anniversary September 14 of this year -- a rousing testimonial to her sense of humor and tolerance.

I am reminded of the tender lyrics of "Nature Boy," a great song years ago by Nat King Cole. I heartily endorse the heart-warming lyrics expressed in the song, "the greatest thing in all the world is to love and be loved in return." In my opinion, that's the ultimate, personal achievement in life.

So, I believe Mary deserves some kind of a distinguished lifetime achievement -- or maybe a humane understanding award.

We met at MSU where she was the good looking, likeable daughter of a popular, or I should say beloved, rival coach, M. H. "Dad" Butler.

My friends in college, or rather I should say acquaintances, would tell me, "I don't understand what she sees in you." I said, "Neither do I, but I'm not knocking it." At my wedding ceremony, some of these same acquaintances said, "Q, you married way above yourself." Another wise guy cracked, "That's probably the only major upward mobility he will ever experience in his entire career."

I'm glad Mary and I met before the current trend that many women want a man in their life, but not in their house. We also got married way back in the old-fashioned days when you said, "I do" rather than "I did."

But now after 59 plus years, I'm still lucky -- in all those years, she never filed a petition to deny license renewal.

She admits she entertained justifiable murder several times but never divorce because it was against her Irish Catholic upbringing.

As I mentioned in a previous speech, she has been a major factor in my maintaining a becoming sense of self unimportance.

So, I believe in marriage -- If it weren't for marriage, many men would go through life thinking they had no faults at all.

Once in awhile, Mary threatens me with an unbecoming ethnic slur, "Hey, whopperoo -- One more goof like that and you will never make our 60th -- In fact, I'm going to swap you in for two forties!" She is taking advantage of a statement in my speech last year when I admitted that, "Anyone who says he can do at 80 what he could at 40, wasn't leading too active a life at 40."

And, finally she is very good at letting me have her way -- and I hope she will continue to let me have her way for many more years.

Now a word about the future of the FCC. It is the first time in my 23+ years, I have witnessed three lame ducks (I must admit rather active lame ducks!) and one unfilled vacancy. That means four new Commissioners. I have met three nominees and believe the future FCC will be in responsible, dedicated hands.

My press statement on the designation of General Counsel Bill Kennard may be of interest to you. It reads:

"I'm pleased with President Clinton's timely designation of William E. Kennard for FCC Chairman.

The President made a painstaking decision in selecting Bill Kennard over other eminently well-qualified candidates like Ralph Everett, Kathy Wallman and Susan Ness.

They, like Bill, possess the communications expertise, independent judicial temperament and sterling leadership qualities to be excellent FCC Chairmen.

Bill is highly regarded by the legal profession, industry executives and consumer groups.

His intelligence and familiarity with ongoing Commission issues and current FCC personnel will help assure a smooth transition for the newly-appointed Commission.

He has my best wishes for continued achievement in the exciting years ahead."

The new commissioners will have the formidable task of resolving many contentious issues affecting broadcasters.

For example:

1. Finalizing broadcast multiple ownership, cross-ownership and attribution rules.
2. Fine-tuning final rules for implementation of digital broadcasting.
3. Personal attack and political editorializing rules.
4. Liquor advertising.
5. Deciding whether or not to impose additional quantifiable public interest requirements after receiving the Gore special Commission report.
6. First amendment issues similar to proposed hearings on broadcast news.
7. Adequate funding for public broadcasting.

I only have time here to volunteer a strong bottom line opinion on one of the issues -- digital broadcasting, etc.

For me, a career working stiff broadcast manager, it was a rewarding second career. Now, at my senior age status, I would not have traded my FCC experiences for the millions I missed by selling my Capital Cities stock in 1974 when I was nominated for the job. I have no regrets. I have had a great exciting run.

Thanks for your friendship and I'd like to be remembered by, "He never forgot where he came from!"

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