

BCFM Avatar Award
Sheraton Centre Hotel
May 21, 2001 -- Toronto, Canada

Thank you for the prestigious BCFM Avatar Award and especially for adding such a pleasant event to my cherished lifetime memories.

As some of you may be aware, I characterize my awards as “pre-posthumous” and appreciate receiving this while I’m still here on earth to enjoy your company. I have also credited receiving some honors solely to advanced age. With greatly advanced seniority you become venerable – and with venerability, you get credit for virtues you never possessed. I’m grateful, but that explains how I became by far the oldest and one of the most awarded SOBs that ever graduated from the FCC.

My reaction to my 87th birthday last month was “I can’t be that ancient.” The number must have been mistakenly transposed from 78 – but even 78 is hard for me to accept. So many people even at 78 are over the hill or under the turf. I aspire to neither.

You know, everyone wants to live a long time but no one wants to grow old. So I’m doing my best to bridge that awkward gap. I have enthusiastic friends who keep greeting me at conventions and meetings with “you look great!” In fact, one attractive lady, a prominent communications attorney, said “you not only look great, but you have the vital spirit of a 25 year old.” I replied, “Thanks, I only wish I had the other attributes of a 25 year old.” Years ago, I regaled the Federal Communications Bar Association with the story of involuntary celibacy of advanced seniority etc.

Anyway, after intensive contemplation, I have reached the conclusion that one can’t get out of life alive so why not enjoy it to the fullest? You can die as a spectator in the bleachers or

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you can die actively on the field. So you might as well get out on the field of life and have a good time. Enjoy the great adventure. Make it the most positively charged experience possible. I want to flash out, not rust out. But not for dramatic effect, here in front of you.

I heard an entertaining story on aging that I want to share with you. A senior citizen was taking a walk in the park and was amazed when he came upon a talking frog. The frog looked up and said “Sir, I am under an evil spell. If you will only kiss me, I will turn into a beautiful young woman. I would be so grateful I would do anything for you – please, my gratitude would know no bounds – we would have a great time.”

The senior citizen put the frog in his pocket and kept walking. The talking frog again pleaded with him --“What are you waiting for? Remember, I would be grateful and I would do anything for you – as a pretty young woman we could have a lot of fun.” The old-timer said “I appreciate that, but at my age, I could have a lot more fun just having a talking frog.”

As for me, personally, I’m confronting the prospect that I have already lived most of my life. However, I have no regrets and I’m grateful for whatever generic vigor that remains.

I appreciate the opportunity of speaking before this prestigious financial group but in all candor, I have to admit I have been a time honored “flunkee” in finances.

In my communications career, I received decent passing grades in programming, sales and public relations, but would have received an unsatisfactory “D” in personal finance.

As I have previously emphasized, I have been very successful in my own unique way – very successful at eluding wealth whenever it came too close to me.

Exhibit A is Tom Murphy who presented me with an IRTS lifetime achievement award in New York stating “If Chairman Quello had kept his Capital Cities stock, he would now have 23-½ million dollars, so every year he served at the FCC cost him over a million dollars.” I thanked

Murph – saying “The Lord did not ordain me to be a wealthy man, he wanted me to be a besieged, beleaguered SOB and that is what I have been in this FCC job.”

Last month, there was an even more disturbing sequel to this story. I was on a panel for the forum of the prestigious Precursor Financial Group in Washington, D.C. which incidentally was moderated by my bright, former senior legal advisor, Rudy Baca. Bill Pitts, a fellow panelist opened the discussion by announcing he had a message to Commissioner Quello from former Capital Cities ABC - Disney Chairman Tom Murphy. “Tell Commissioner Quello if he had held on to his Capital Cities stock he would now have 70 - 80 million dollars!” I said “Thanks for NOT making my day!” The next day I mentioned this to my son, Dick, who lives in Florida. He said “Dad, losing that first 23½ million was a pain in the rear” (As an ex-marine, he didn’t use rear) but 70-80 million? That’s just pure stark tragedy.”

So now that I have taken proper care to verify my financial credentials, I have to admit that I relied completely on our treasurer, controller, accounting manager or whatever term applied. They were all so knowledgeable in the financial aspect of our business that I gave all of them an expert rating and deference. Of course, my respect for the vital services of financial experts is validated by the large number of financial experts who became presidents and chairman of major corporations.

Incidentally, I once rubbed shoulders with as important financier and it was a fun experience. (Tell the Warren Buffet story)

As you well know, government action, legislation and regulation, can play a vital role in the financial well being of telecommunications and all industries.

However, sometimes powerful industries themselves take actions not to the benefit of their long term interests.

Now for a brief word about a few communications issues, including one where a powerful industry is divided and in my opinion, taking actions detrimental to their long term interests. From time to time, I have been requested by publications to expound on what I would do if I were FCC chairman again.

Recently, I have been able to say I would do exactly what Chairman Powell is doing and saying only probably not as well. He is a superb chairman and an esteemed personal friend.

However, there is a very controversial issue that may require some FCC finessing – the networks are aggressively seeking to raise the 35% cap limit with intense opposition from network affiliates and independent stations. Some key members of congress are asking the FCC to decide the issue. I believe I would allow the courts to decide this political hot potato. The Courts would have a complete legal record on which to base its decision. Also the courts would not be subject to intense lobbying by all parties. The controversy has already caused a major rift between the network and their affiliates. All networks except ABC have resigned from the NAB - an unwise move considering the many other important issues confronting broadcasters. With a united front, the NAB under the seasoned capable leadership of Eddie Fritts is the most powerful lobby in Washington. In my opinion, it would have been more statesmanlike for all NAB parties to consider this a separate intramural fight with stations and networks individually disagreeing on this issue without fracturing and diminishing the power of a unified NAB.

On another controversial issue as Chairman, I would tend to support the Tauzin-Dingell bill. In the multi-channel, multi-faceted, competitive converging telecommunications world, it is past time to allow the Bell companies to provide competitive broad band long distance service. My statement on this controversial issue comes under the heading of “Fools rush in where angels fear to tread and everyone knows I’m not an angel.” However, the Bells have the technical

expertise and financing to provide and expand broad band high speed Internet access to the public. As a commissioner who once opposed allowing Bell companies into long distance, the advances in technology, competition and the oncoming convergence require a fresh look.

Anyway, monetary wealth or no wealth, I have been truly blessed. I really had a pretty good run in life with three exciting careers – army, broadcasting and the FCC. The FCC career was the most important, exciting and gratifying.

And now my final message as you face the tribulations, disappointments and triumphs of life – I like to remind everyone that in the final stages of life what really counts are some sense of accomplishment, good health, reasonable economic sufficiency and the affection and respect of family and friends. That's all the wealth I ever aspired to.

Thanks again for the memorable BCFM honor and may the Lord be with you, but not too soon.