

Powell for a day

We asked a number of broadcasting professionals to write a brief, 150-word essay telling in a nutshell what they would do as FCC Chairman for a day, and further, if they were a Chairman unfettered by minor annoyances like other commissioners, members of Congress, judges, the press, the White House, public opinion, etc. Here are some responses.



Jim Quello,
former FCC Chairman and Commissioner

As Chairman or FCC Commissioner, I would have expressed initial concern about the seemingly undue radio consolidation of the past three years. However, faced with today's competitive realities of multi-media, radio satellite and Internet, further criticism would be unwarranted and counter-productive. In fact, consolidation was the salvation of numerous stations. In addition, many of the acquired radio stations were marginal financial operations or facing bankruptcy, thus necessitating drastically reduced expenditures for programming, news and community services in individual station operation.

Considering all factors, consolidations today continue to produce a financially stronger, more diverse radio industry.

But a redefinition of a marketplace may be in order. Briefly and perhaps over simplified, it would eliminate problems caused by multiple ownership in relatively small markets if the licenses were issued to the city of license and only larger markets and not include an entire area covered by a 50,000 watt AM station.

However, everyone must remember that current station acquisitions were acquired and approved legally and ethically under existing congressional rules and regulatory policies.

Thus, all current multiple stations must be grandfathered and transferable. Forced divestiture and restricted transfers would be legally challenged and, undoubtedly, defeated in court.



Erwin Krasnow,
Attorney, Shook, Hardy & Bacon

(Mr. Krasnow wishes to stipulate that the views expressed here are his own and are not necessarily shared by his law firm.)

Free Free Speech and Dump the Dinosaurs.

The mission of my one day reign in the Portals would be to emancipate broadcasters from second-class citizenship. "Let Freedom Ring" would be the byword on the 8th floor. Under a Krasnow FCC, broadcasters would be freed from a 1940s regulatory regime that caused one former chairman to describe that agency as "the last of the New Deal dinosaurs." My prescription for what ails the FCC: a free speech regimen and an end to bulky bureaucratic bloat. Second-guessing of programming judgments would be passe after my regime change. Ownership and concentration issues would be referred to the Antitrust Division. Questions of obscene or indecent speech would be handled by the courts. In sum, if I were chairman, a faster, sleeker and more focused FCC would go back to being the traffic cop of the airwaves, not the vice squad. It would be a consummation devoutly to be wished.



Rich Wood,
President, Rich Wood Multimedia

It was the worst day of my life. I'm already blamed for destroying civilized radio. I'm now asked to do the same for television and newspapers. I've made my decision and I'm going to keep things as they are for the time being.

I spend a lot of time talking to ordinary people. They're angry and suspicious of large corporations. Enron and other companies have put stock value above their obligation to tell the truth.

Young people no longer rely on corporate media for their news. They feel it's either hiding something or trying to shove some political agenda down their throats. The timing is bad. I'm going to wait until confidence in our institutions returns.

To allow the control of news and informatoin to fall into the hands of a few powerful companies, I believe, will further destroy the public's ability to make informed decisions or care.



Arthur Belendiuk,
Attorney, Smithwick & Belendiuk

If I were FCC Chairman for a day I would reallocate the radio, television, cellular and MMDS spectrum into a new Internet Broadband Service. Individuals then could access any form of desired information, whether it be personal communications such as telephone or video conferencing or news and entertainment.

By sharing the spectrum with multiple users high quality, on demand, digital audio and video programming would be available to all. This would eliminate the need for the FCC's multiple ownership and cross ownership rules. Competition would no longer be among those that hold finite pieces of the spectrum. Rather, competition would be in the unlimited realm of ideas. Content providers would compete to provide useful information and entertaining programming.

After my one day as Chairman, I would retire, write a book, and go to work for a company that provides news and entertainment programming especially designed for the newly formed Internet Broadband Service.



Julian Breen,
President, Breen Broadcasting

Using the wisdom of "two's company, three's a crowd," I recommend the objective of a minimum of three ownerships controlling the radio, television and newspaper media in each market to provide for a minimum number of financially healthy unrelated "voices" in competition. While the rules proposed below will result in many more "voices" competing in most cases, the worst case scenario is three.

Market Definitions

Radio Market Definition: Arbitron Metro. If no Arbitron metro, the county containing the station's city of license plus all contiguous counties. If the latter results in illogical results as it would for stations with limited or highly directionalized coverage, prove it to the FCC and ask for a waiver.

Television Market Definition: Nielsen Designated Market Area. If no DMA, same as radio.

Newspaper Market Definition: Every county in which the newspaper offers home delivery.

For combinations, all counties included in any individual