

The 50-Year Telecommunications Explosion  
College of Communications Arts and Sciences at Michigan State University  
50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

James H. Quello  
Former Federal Communications Commissioner/Chairman

I'm delighted to be invited to the golden 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the college of Communications Arts and Sciences. It is especially gratifying to me because as a 1935 liberal-arts journalism graduate, I'm probably the most senior (euphemism for oldest has-been) to participate. It is mind boggling to contemplate that this year I could be attending the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my 1935 class. It could be a lonesome experience.

Of course, just about everyone wants to live a long time, but no one wants to grow old. I'm doing my best to bridge that debilitating gap. In the process, I served as an active federal communications commissioner for a record 23½ years from age 60 through 83 during the most dynamic communication growth in recent history.

The preface to my book, "My Wars" by former Broadcasting-Cable magazine editor Don West provides a gracious lead-in and some authenticity for this condensed 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary treatise.

"The extraordinarily human story of a "greatest generation" survivor who came through six amphibious landings during World War II before serving six U.S. Presidents during 23½ embattled years at the FCC – and in the process helped jump start the information age."

Anyway, for 23½ years of the 50 anniversary years, I served as an FCC Commissioner and privileged to participate in the cataclysmic advancement of communications during that period.

Just look what happened since April 1974, my initiation as a Federal Communications Commissioner. Incidentally, the FCC was exceptionally well led at that time by consensus building forward oriented Chairman Dick Wiley, now acclaimed for his advanced communications expertise.

In 1974, there was only one long distance company, AT&T, and now there are dramatically more and many new phone options for the consumer. There were only three commercial networks ABC, CBS and NBC providing 96% of the nation's prime time programming. There are now nine commercial networks, Fox, WB, WPN, Pax and Hispanic networks. They compete with the quality programming of the PBS network. Even more significantly, they compete with hundreds of channels from cable and satellite. On top of that, the Internet has become the most significant and explosive telecommunications development of all and is a growing important program and advertising carrier. With digitalization, compression, Internet and convergence, even more universal communications competition is now on stream.

Back in 1974, cable provided only a supplementary service with the primary mission of extending TV signals to unserved or underserved markets. No one dreamed it would become the highly prized, multi-faceted broadband wonder of today. HDTV and digital broadcasting had not been introduced and direct broadcast from satellite had not yet developed. Digital TV is becoming a superior TV and audio service with more sets or box top converters required to complete the transition. Digitalization will impact all communications well beyond improving video and audio for television. Also, there is digital radio.

Personal computers were just introduced and few realized they would become the super all-purpose communications devices of today. Fax was not in practical use and e-mail didn't

exist. E-mail and computers today have dramatically changed and expedited the way people communicate, live and work.

The Internet was unheard of in 1974 and it has become the most important development of this decade. It follows that the much sought after broadband high-speed access was also unknown. The vital importance of the Internet has been highlighted by its description as the ultimate microcosm of humanity!

Back again to 1974. There were no superstations, no CNN, ESPN, CNBC, Fox News, Nickelodeon, Showtime, A&E, Discovery, History or Weather channels. What has become giant HBO was only two years old. Satellite had not developed as a competitor to cable. VCRs and DVDs were non-existent. Direct broadcast satellite was mostly in the planning stage – it became a major development, thanks to the early pioneering of Stanley S. Hubbard, a distinguished broadcasting legend.

Mobile phones along with cable were in their infancy. Cellular lotteries had not started and cellular phones had not developed. Today we have wireless portable phones equipped with small screens with Internet and photo capabilities. Internet access through tiny screens on cellular phones is a hot technology trend.

Other currently advanced growing services are computer-internet long distance phone calls and video exchanges in your home.

Also, video recorders like TiVo may outdated the concept of a “family viewing hour” since viewers can record and watch programs whenever they want. Making program choices should become an individual right for everyone and a responsibility for adults with children.

FCC Chairman William Kennard gave an intriguing version of advance developments when addressing the Quello Center at Michigan State in 2000. The Chairman said “The digital

transition will transform television sets into super-charged personal computers. No longer will television be exclusively a passive one-way medium. TV sets will have the agility of computers with the display quality of a movie.”

At this writing, it seems that advanced communications technology may be again outstripping many consumer’s affordability, need or understanding. In this regard, I can’t resist repeating one of my more visionary congressional responses. The very first question asked by my confirming Chairman, the heroic veteran Senator Dan Inouye in June 1991, was “What should be the Commission’s highest priority for the next five years?” The record shows my response: “I believe the commission’s highest priority in the next five years will be the orderly, compatible implementation of the advanced technological services of telecomputing, fiber optic, direct-broadcast satellite TV and radio, digital TV; cellular and personal communications services Advanced technology often outstrips society’s ability to integrate it into our already complex, sometimes expensive communications system. The rate and extent of technological development will be impacted by consumer acceptance and affordability, commercial practicalities, legislative and regulatory actions and by the services beneficial contribution to the universal public interest. The orderly, compatible implementation of advanced telecommunications services is a major FCC undertaking and will require the best of the dedicated staff’s expertise and the commissioners’ judgment.” That still applies today.

But even with my allocated time for this essay already on overload, I’m impelled to summarize one more advance viewpoint. With the convergence of cable, satellite and high speed broadband, television within 10 years will be viewed through the Internet by fiber or wirelessly. At that time, or perhaps before, the public interest mandates imposed only on over the air television will become outdated relics of a bygone era. I suspect that in the past the very obtuse

nature and over-broad application of the public interest standard was often misused by some activist groups as a subterfuge for government control of the media.

Overall, with the ongoing communications advancements, industry and government including Congress, FCC and the Administration must work together in a progressive spirit of mutual co-operation to maintain and expand our communications leadership so that Americans remain the best informed, the most gainfully employed and best served people on the planet.

**MICHIGAN STATE  
U N I V E R S I T Y**



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PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

July 14, 2005

The Honorable Senator Ted Stevens  
United States Senate  
522 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Ted,

Again, pardon the intrusion, but I'm interested in your MSTV invitation for luncheon or 9 a.m. keynote speaker Wednesday, October 5 at the Reagan Building. I'm honored that I have been selected to introduce you – a World War II hero and fellow member of the fast vanishing "greatest generation." MSTV president, Dave Donovan, is my former super-bright loyal FCC legal assistant. I plan to mention that with your loaded schedule, there will be no time for questions and answers. If you like, your very able Chris Kurth could be available to field questions after you have returned to your urgent Senate meetings. (I would be glad to help as a back-stop).



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In my opinion, MSTV today has the most prestigious unified board of any broadcast organization, all of whom are very grateful for your and Co-Chairman Dan's committee leadership. Praise the Lord! I was hoping a few CEOs could stop by your office for coffee or a brief visit. More on this the next time we briefly talk.

I'm also utilizing this interruption to inform you that your bi-partisan brother and co-chairman Dan Inouye has graciously accepted my advance invitation to address the Quello Telecommunications Center Symposium luncheon some time next March, 2006. I hope you accept and we can arrange some mutually convenient date next year so you can introduce co-chairman Dan this time.

The Honorable Ted Stevens  
July 14, 2005  
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Regardless of outcome, count on the unconditional support and friendship from this fellow World War II survivor who is planning on saluting you and World War II hero Dan Inouye at my 100<sup>th</sup> birthday party April 21, 2014, Army-Navy Country Club. Patriot Dick Wiley has promised to stay alive so he can emcee.

With respect and affection,

  
James H. Quello

P.S. Chairman Ted, your 2009 DTV transition deadline makes sense. The 2006 date would have been an impracticable political disaster. Cautionary note: Be sure your committee directs the FCC to make certain some 500 translators are operable for January 1, 2009 so rural areas including Alaska will be able to receive Super Bowl games. This responsibility can be properly delegated to the FCC, an Arm of Congress formed for such purposes.

Blind copies:

Richard E. Wiley, Esq.  
Mr. Stanley Hubbard  
Dr. Steve Wildman, The Quello Center  
Mr. Dave Donovan  
Mr. Ward Quaal  
Mr. Lowry Mays  
Mr. Mark Mays

(on copies, individual bccs, of course)