

# NEWS

Federal Communications Commission  
1919 M Street, NW.  
Washington, D.C. 20554



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Reaction of FCC Commissioner James H. Quello  
To a Common Cause Study of  
Industry and Consumer Representation  
Before Federal Regulatory Commissions

I must take issue, too, with the over-simplistic conclusions contained in a Common Cause study released this week of industry and consumer representation before all federal regulatory commissions. (Incidentally, Common Cause is an organization I respect and I value most of their well-considered opinions.)

However, in this latest report Common Cause concludes "the study does document a disturbing fact about the meeting practices of regulatory commissioners as a whole---the regulatory commissioners surveyed met with representatives of industry ten times more often than they did with consumer representatives."

First, the commissioners and most others I know have an open door policy. I, for one, have been willing to see or meet with consumer advocate representatives or groups. There are many in Washington offices---I'm as available as the nearest phone.

More important, I must reject the presumption that commissioners are unduly influenced by an appointment or meeting. The mere logging or reporting of a meeting doesn't reflect the debate, disagreements and rejections of proposals.

Commissioners who (1) have been sponsored by responsible civic, educational or government leaders, (2) thoroughly checked by the FBI for character and honesty, (3) appointed by the President, (4) confirmed by Senate, are not likely to be misled or unduly influenced by executives or industry committees. I frankly tell industry representatives they are presenting viewpoints to further or protect their own economic and private interests---just like I would if I were on the other side of the desk or conference table---however, Commission decisions must be determined by what's best in the overall, long-term public interest.

(over)

Most of the industry appointments were the result of industry competition---one industry presenting its viewpoints in disagreement with another industry. (cable vs broadcasting; cable vs phone or utility companies; educational TV vs commercial; land mobile vs UHF interests; private line opposition to AT&T or Consumer Reform Bill; varied interests in WARC, etc.) These presentations were made pending notices of inquiry or rulemaking and not in any adjudicatory process.

Also, industry representatives are not all self-seeking ogres bent on undermining the public interest. Most are responsible, educated, civic-conscious, successful citizens who realize their proposals must serve overall public interest in

order to best serve their own economic interests. Then too, there is considerable disagreement among many intelligent individuals and organizations of sincere intentions and worthy purposes as to what does constitute public interest on any given issue.

In its critique of agency practices, Common Cause is--among other things--seeking to require the logging of all meetings and phone calls by agency officials. This, it is claimed, will help to restore public confidence in government. I would like to suggest, however, that it would have just the opposite effect. Such a requirement carries with it the implication that agency officials must be watched very closely lest they give in to their baser instincts---or, at least, lest they subconsciously succumb to industry blandishments. Such scrutiny, I submit, is usually reserved for those in society regarded as least capable of responsible behavior or least deserving of public trust.