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Opening Remarks by FCC Commissioner James H. Quello
at the
NAEB Convention - Education Commissioner's Forum
November 13, 1979

I'M DELIGHTED TO WELCOME YOU TO THE FIRST
OF THE EDUCATION COMMISSIONER'S FORUMS. I HOPE
IT IS THE FIRST OF A LONG, LONG SERIES OF SUCH
MEETINGS. DR. HILLIARD SUGGESTED TO ME SOME
TIME AGO THAT IT MIGHT BE A GOOD IDEA TO DIRECTLY
PARTICIPATE ALONG WITH ALL OF YOU IN AN EFFORT TO
FURTHER MY UNDERSTANDING OF YOUR NEEDS AND
INTERESTS AND, PERHAPS, TO PROVIDE YOU WITH SOME
INSIGHT AS TO THE WORKINGS OF THE COMMISSION.

IN DESCRIBING THE FUNCTIONS OF THE COMMISSION,
I THINK YOU MIGHT EQUATE THEM WITH THE THREE
BRANCHES OF GOVERNMENT. FIRST, THE FCC HAS
CERTAIN QUASI-LEGISLATIVE POWERS UNDER THE BROAD
CONGRESSIONAL MANDATE AND THE PUBLIC INTEREST
STANDARD. SECOND, WE PLAY AN EXECUTIVE ROLE IN
THAT WE ATTEMPT TO MAKE POLICY AIMED AT

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EXPANDING AND ENHANCING THE USE OF COMMUNICATIONS FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL AMERICANS. AND, THIRD, WE HAVE A QUASI-JUDICIAL ROLE IN DECIDING CONFLICTING CLAIMS AND IN ENFORCING OUR RULES AND REGULATIONS. IT SHOULD ALSO BE SAID, OF COURSE, THAT OUR POSITION IS NOT PARAMOUNT IN ANY OF THESE ROLES. OUR LEGISLATIVE POWERS ARE SUBJECT TO SCRUTINY BY THE COURTS, OUR EXECUTIVE POWERS ARE SUBJECT TO OVERSIGHT BY THE CONGRESS AND ARE CONSTRAINED BY THE COMMUNICATIONS ACT OF 1934 AND OUR JUDICIAL ROLE ALSO IS SUBJECT TO REVIEW BY THE COURTS.

IN ADDITION TO PARTICIPATING ACTIVELY IN ALL REGULAR COMMISSION FUNCTIONS, I HAVE BEEN HAPPY TO ASSUME THE ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL COMMISSIONER. NOW, THAT TITLE CONFERS NO SPECIAL POWERS. BUT IT DOES CONFER A SENSE OF HEIGHTENED RESPONSIBILITY TO SEE TO IT THAT THE NEEDS OF EDUCATIONAL BROADCASTING ARE NOT LOST IN THE SHUFFLE AND THAT

EDUCATIONAL BROADCASTING ITFS AND OTHER MEANS OF DELIVERY OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING ARE GIVEN FULL CONSIDERATION. MY EFFORTS ARE NOT ALWAYS CROWNED WITH SUCCESS. I RECENTLY ATTEMPTED TO PERSUADE MY COLLEAGUES THAT THE REORGANIZATION OF THE BROADCAST BUREAU SHOULD NOT INCLUDE A DOWNGRADING OF EDUCATIONAL BROADCASTING. UNFORTUNATELY, THE EDUCATIONAL BROADCASTING BRANCH WAS ABOLISHED AND DR. HILLIARD IS NOW OPERATING FROM WITHIN THE POLICY AND RULES DIVISION. BOTH DR. HILLIARD AND I HOPE THAT YOU WILL CONTINUE TO FEEL THAT THE COMMISSION WANTS TO BE RESPONSIVE TO YOUR NEEDS AND WANTS TO BENEFIT FROM YOUR EXPERIENCE AND THAT YOU WILL CONTINUE TO CALL UPON HIM JUST AS YOU HAVE IN THE PAST. BECAUSE HIS RESOURCES ARE EVEN FEWER THAN IN THE PAST, HOWEVER, HE MAY HAVE TO TAKE SOME DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO SOLVING YOUR PROBLEMS.

MANY PEOPLE READING THE PRESS THESE DAYS DON'T KNOW ANY LONGER WHAT PUBLIC BROADCASTING REALLY IS.

MANY OF YOU, JUDGING FROM YOUR FORMAL AND INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS AT THIS CONVENTION, DON'T SEEM TO BE TOO SURE, EITHER.

AT THE FCC WE STILL USE THE TERM "NON-COMMERCIAL EDUCATIONAL BROADCASTING" IN OUR RULES AND REGULATIONS WHEN WE ARE REFERRING TO PUBLIC BROADCASTING. AT LEAST, I THINK WE ARE REFERRING TO PUBLIC BROADCASTING.

ARE "EDUCATIONAL BROADCASTING" AND "PUBLIC BROADCASTING" THE SAME? DO WE MEAN SOLELY "INSTRUCTIONAL BROADCASTING" WHEN WE USE THE TERM "EDUCATIONAL?"

IS THE PROBLEM ONLY ONE OF SEMANTICS?

I BELIEVE THAT WE CAN, BY AND LARGE, AGREE THAT THE USE OF THE TERM "PUBLIC BROADCASTING"

ENCOMPASSES WHAT WE INITIALLY CALLED "EDUCATIONAL BROADCASTING," AND THAT THOSE STATIONS OR PROGRAMS THAT PREDOMINATELY PROVIDE CLEARLY DEFINED FORMAL LEARNING CAN BE CALLED "INSTRUCTIONAL."

THE PROBLEM IS WITH THE ANIMAL ITSELF: IS IT THE PROVERBIAL ELEPHANT BEING EXAMINED BY THE BLIND MEN?

SOME PEOPLE THINK OF PUBLIC BROADCASTING AS PRINCIPALLY OR ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY CULTURAL AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS PROGRAMMING. OTHER PEOPLE BELIEVE IT SHOULD PRINCIPALLY, OR AT LEAST IN PART, INCLUDE INFORMAL IF NOT FORMAL INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS. SOME BELIEVE IT SHOULD HAVE A LARGE MEASURE OF ENTERTAINMENT PROGRAMS. STILL OTHERS POINT TO THE FCC LICENSING REQUIREMENT THAT "NON-COMMERCIAL EDUCATIONAL BROADCAST STATIONS WILL BE LICENSED ONLY TO NONPROFIT

EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS UPON A SHOWING THAT
THE PROPOSED STATIONS WILL BE USED PRIMARILY TO
SERVE THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY:
FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS:
AND TO FURNISH A NONPROFIT AND NONCOMMERCIAL
BROADCAST SERVICE."

NOTE THAT WORD "AND" IN THE LAST SENTENCE.
IT DOES NOT READ "OR."

IN OTHER WORDS, THE WORDING OF THE RULES AS
WELL AS THE INTENTION OF THE FCC WHEN IT RESERVED
NONCOMMERCIAL BROADCASTING FREQUENCIES SUGGESTS
THAT IT ENVISIONED WHAT IS NOW CALLED PUBLIC
BROADCASTING AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO WHAT WAS
ALREADY AVAILABLE TO THE PUBLIC THROUGH COM-
MERCIAL TELEVISION AND RADIO.

PUBLIC BROADCASTING JUST DOES NOT HAVE THE KIND OF MONEY AND OTHER RESOURCES NECESSARY TO SUCCESSFULLY COMPETE ON THEIR GROUNDS WITH COMMERCIAL STATIONS. THERE IS NO WAY OF WINNING THE BATTLE OF THE RATINGS, ALTHOUGH I AM AWARE THAT OVER THE YEARS AN OCCASIONAL PROGRAM OVER THE PBS NETWORK HAS COME CLOSE IN THE RATINGS TO SOME RELATIVELY POPULAR COMMERCIAL PROGRAMS.

NOW, UNDERSTAND, I AM NOT KNOCKING THE RATINGS. AS A COMMERCIAL BROADCASTER OF MANY YEARS STANDING, I UNDERSTAND THE PURPOSE AND USE OF RATINGS. ALTHOUGH I HAVE PROGRAMMED INDEPENDENTLY OF THE RATINGS WHEN I HAD A PROGRAM THAT I THOUGHT WAS IMPORTANT TO THE PUBLIC

INTEREST REGARDLESS OF WHAT RATING IT WOULD GET, I ALSO KNOW THAT OUR PRESENT COMMERCIAL SYSTEM NEEDS THE ADVERTISING SUPPORT WHICH IS PREDICATED ON RATINGS TO SURVIVE--AND, INCIDENTALLY, TO HAVE THE RESOURCES TO DO THE KINDS OF SPECIAL PROGRAMS ASIDE FROM THE RATINGS CRITERIA THAT I USED TO FEEL A SENSE OF PRIDE IN DOING.

WHAT I AM CONCERNED WITH IS THE TENDENCY ON THE PART OF SOME PUBLIC BROADCASTERS TO MAKE A LARGE AUDIENCE THE CRITERIA FOR CHOOSING PROGRAMS. THAT APPROACH CAN ONLY LEAD TO A DUPLICATION OF THE KINDS OF PROGRAMS THAT ARE ALREADY AVAILABLE WITH GREAT BUDGET BACKING ON COMMERCIAL STATIONS.

I DO NOT BELIEVE THAT NONCOMMERCIAL BROADCASTING SHOULD BE OR NEEDS TO BE DIRECTLY COMPETITIVE WITH COMMERCIAL BROADCASTING AS FAR AS PROGRAMMING IS CONCERNED. I BELIEVE THAT YOU SHOULD CHOOSE AND DEVELOP THE BEST KIND OF PROGRAMMING YOU CAN IN TERMS OF, FIRST, YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO PROVIDE ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMMING NOT AVAILABLE TO THE AUDIENCE ON COMMERCIAL STATIONS AND, SECOND, THE OVERRIDING PUBLIC INTEREST OF YOUR NATIONAL AUDIENCE AS A WHOLE AND YOUR INDIVIDUAL LOCAL AUDIENCES.

THEN, GO OUT AND GET THE LARGEST AUDIENCE, THE BEST RATING YOU CAN FOR THOSE PARTICULAR PROGRAMS.

AND EVEN AS I SAY THIS I AM AWARE THAT THE ENTIRE CONCEPT OF PUBLIC BROADCASTING IS

CHANGING AND MAY REQUIRE AN ENTIRELY NEW
DIMENSION IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS.

PUBLIC BROADCASTING IS BECOMING MORE
AND MORE PUBLIC TELECOMMUNICATIONS. FOR
EXAMPLE, THE NAEB'S PUBLIC BROADCASTING REVIEW
HAS BECOME THE PUBLIC TELECOMMUNICATIONS
REVIEW. THE PUBLIC BROADCASTING ACT OF 1967
EVOLVED INTO THE PUBLIC TELECOMMUNICATIONS
FINANCING ACT OF 1978. AS FAR BACK AS 1965 THE
FCC'S NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE FULL DEVELOP-
MENT OF THE INSTRUCTIONAL TELEVISION FIXED SER-
VICE, AND THE CHIEF OF THE EDUCATIONAL BROAD-
CASTING BRANCH IN PUBLIC SPEECHES, BEGAN TO
URGE PUBLIC TELEVISION STATIONS TO THINK TO
THE FUTURE; WHEN THEIR MOST EFFECTIVE SERVICE

WOULD BE AS CENTERS OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS SERVICES IN THEIR COMMUNITIES. WITH THE GROWTH OF NEW TECHNOLOGY, AND THE EFFICIENCY-FACTOR INVOLVED IN MULTI-MEDIA SYSTEMS, WE ARE NOW BEGINNING TO SEE THAT KIND OF DEVELOPMENT. THE KIND OF MULTI-SERVICES PROVIDED THROUGH THE PUBLIC SERVICE SATELLITE CONSORTIUM IS AN EXAMPLE. THIS WILL MAKE YOUR PUBLIC BROADCASTING STATIONS TO AN EVEN GREATER DEGREE THE SOURCE OF ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATIONS TO WHAT IS AVAILABLE IN THE COMMERCIAL SECTOR.

IN CLOSING, I WANT TO REMIND YOU--JUST AS I DO COMMERCIAL BROADCASTERS--THAT LOCAL SERVICE CONTINUES TO BE VITALLY IMPORTANT IN PRESERVING AND ENHANCING EDUCATIONAL BROADCASTING. PROGRAMMING WHICH IS PRODUCED

LOCALLY, UTILIZING LOCAL TALENT AND DIRECTED TOWARD LOCAL NEEDS AND INTERESTS IS ESSENTIAL IF THE PRESENT SYSTEM OF BROADCASTING, BOTH EDUCATIONAL AND COMMERCIAL, IS TO BE MAINTAINED. THE PUBLIC HAS, TIME AFTER TIME, EXPRESSED A NEED AND DESIRE FOR PROGRAMMING THAT REFLECTS ITS IMMEDIATE NEEDS AND INTERESTS. OUR PRESENT SYSTEM OF BROADCASTING IS UNIQUE IN THAT IT, ALONE, CAN PROVIDE LOCAL SERVICE TO ALL REGARDLESS OF ABILITY TO PAY, LOCATION, MOBILITY OR CIRCUMSTANCE. I URGE YOU TO CONSIDER YOUR UNIQUE ROLE IN THE COMMUNITY AND TO MAKE THE MOST OF IT.