

STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER JAMES H. QUELLO
in which Commissioner Robinson joins
Re: Section 315

The action taken by the majority was, I believe, consistent with Congressional intent, common sense and the public interest. There can be no doubt that the prior interpretation of Section 315(a)(4) was acting as a restraint on broadcast coverage of political candidates to the detriment of an informed populace. I refuse to accept the cynical view that incumbent congressmen preferred this limited coverage in their own self-interest.

I do not view this issue as a partisan political one in which one party or one candidate stands to gain or lose by our decision. Political debates--in the limited context in which they will now be exempt from equal time requirements--can only benefit the American people by making us all more aware of the candidates for political office and their stated views. The news conference, too, can serve to inform and educate without the artificial restraints imposed by government.

The direct coverage of an event--such as debates and news conferences--can present to those who will take the time to watch and listen, many of the subtleties and nuances which often escape the paraphrased reports we hear and read. Direct coverage--to my mind--is one of the unique qualities broadcasting brings to public service. It permits each of us to participate directly in the process of selecting our representatives by what they have to say and how they say it, based upon our own analysis. It helps us to better weigh a candidate's qualifications for office according to our own criteria. Journalistic analysis and commentary, too, are important to our understanding. But, such analysis takes on added value when it is compared with the actual event. Therefore, I believe that a better informed American public is an inevitable consequence of our action.

An added benefit to the listening and viewing public is that our action today has removed the restraints from coverage of all political contests, state and local, as well as Federal. For those who believe that broadcast coverage of political events will hereafter be limited to only major party candidates, I hasten to point out that the Fairness Doctrine remains unaffected. Consistent with the Doctrine, I fully expect that all candidates for political office will be accorded a reasonable opportunity to present their views. I do not see our decision as limiting access to political candidates in any way. On the contrary, it is my hope--and my expectation--that broadcasting will now be better able to fulfill its public interest responsibility in covering political events.