

Separate Statement of Commissioner James H. Quello

In re: Amendment of the Commission's Rules With Regard to the Establishment and Regulation of New Digital Audio Radio Services

It is with a heavy heart, but an eager hand, that I vote today to allocate 50 Mhz of spectrum for a satellite Digital Audio Radio Service (DARS). My heart is heavy because I know only too well, as a an ex-broadcaster and an avid supporter of free, over-the-air broadcasting, of the trepidation with which broadcasters face the allocation of spectrum for a service that will compete with them for listeners. However, my hand is eager because I know, after twenty years as a Commissioner watching the explosion of the communications industry, of the promise of this new digital technology for consumers, satellite providers, and terrestrial broadcasters. Despite the challenge radio broadcasters will face from satellite DARS, I am confident that radio broadcasters will not only survive, but they will thrive. This belief is based not just on hope, but on history.

Over and over, radio broadcasters have faced new challenges that have threatened their viability. AM radio, the first broadcast service, survived the challenge of FM radio. Radio survived the introduction of television, or "radio with pictures." Radio survived (not without some pain) the allocation of more than 2,600 new FM radio stations in Docket 80-90. Radio survived the recession of the late 1980s and is now stronger than ever. Why has radio survived? Because it has distinguished itself, over and over, from the new competitors it has faced over the years. Radio's most recent success? Talk radio: though controversial, a new brand of radio characterized by its outrageousness, its personalities, its politics, its audience participation, its ratings. Moreover, this success has taken place in a marketplace bursting with a plethora of audio and video entertainment, including 12,000 radio stations, 1,520 television stations, 62.5% nationwide, over 80% VCR penetration, a rapidly growing direct broadcast satellite service (with estimated sales of 1,000,000 dishes before the summer of 1995), just to mention a few. Even more important than talk radio, the hallmark of radio that has carried it through the years is arguably the best local news and public affairs programming of any communications medium. Radio is the most immediate and universally available medium for emergency reports and warnings. Local radio stations have become vital and integral members of the communities in which they reside.

Faced with this history, I am confident that radio will stand up to satellite DARS with ingenuity and aplomb. Satellite DARS, while promising to provide CD quality sound, niche music programming, and programming to special interest groups, nonetheless will not, because of the national nature of the service, be able to provide local news and public affairs programming. Thus, satellite DARS will never be embraced by local communities (including local advertisers) in the same way as terrestrial radio.

Moreover, if radio broadcasters step up to the plate and implement their own terrestrial DARS system, they can improve promise of a digital audio system for free over-the-air radio is tremendous; its possibilities limited only by the remarkable ingenuity of broadcasters. I therefore pledge to work with broadcasters to implement, as expeditiously as possible, a terrestrial DARS system. I will then sit back during my golden years (if they ever arrive) and watch the industry that is a part of me thrive as never before.

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