

Remarks by Commissioner James H. Quello
Before the
MSTV NINTH ATV UPDATE
The Final Countdown
November 9, 1995

It is a pleasure to be back with you for MSTV's Ninth Annual ATV UPDATE. Last year's UPDATE was a special one for me as you presented me with the Jack Harris Founders Award -- and I thank you again for that honor. But this year's conference is a most momentous one for all of us as we -- the government, our industries and the American public are poised on the threshold of embracing a new digital television broadcast standard for the new century.

Many individuals and organizations have been involved in this process. I believe it is especially timely at this conference that I recognize my one-time FCC colleague, long-time friend and tennis partner Dick Wiley for his tremendous contributions as this effort's chief volunteer -- Chairman for eight years of the FCC's Advisory Committee on Advanced Television Service which on the 28th of this month will meet to recommend the new standard to the FCC. It also is appropriate that I recognize the leadership throughout this time of MSTV, headed by another former FCC colleague and long-time friend, Margita White. I always wish, almost fantasize, that Margita was still on the Commission, but she went on to bigger and better things -- and you should be grateful. It was MSTV that first rallied broadcasters back in 1987 to petition the FCC to table an imminent decision to share UHF spectrum with land mobile and to launch the ATV proceeding which now is in its "final countdown."

I was, as you know, the strongest supporter of that petition -- recognizing that the UHF spectrum and FCC action were crucial to broadcasters if our system of free and universal service were to upgrade to the next generation of technical quality. I have supported that goal throughout this long proceeding and as digital breakthroughs have vastly broadened the opportunities for television broadcasters and the public they serve.

As we approach the Advisory Commission's recommendation and the FCC's final decisions, there are those who all at once are campaigning to have Congress deny television broadcasters the opportunity to transition to digital service by demanding the channels to which they would move their programming be auctioned -- even though their current channels are to be returned to the government as the transition is made.

Auctioning the ATV channels would undermine the tremendous achievements during the span of the FCC's eight-year process -- the results of the Commission's policy guidance, thousands of hours of voluntary efforts under the auspices of the Advisory Committee, and millions of dollars of investment by equipment manufacturers and broadcasters to develop and test the new system. That, in turn, would erode one of our nation's most valuable institutions: universal free television available to all the public. Auctioning all ATV channels would be a travesty. For, as I have said before, it is essential that the most pervasive and influential of all media be available to everyone in a democracy that relies on an informed citizenry to maintain representative government.

That is the challenge before us. I salute all of you for your accomplishments and contributions to these goals and MSTV for sponsoring these important and informative programs. I wish you another productive and successful conference.

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