

Statement of Commissioner James H. Quello

May 9, 1996

RE: In the Matter of Advanced Television Systems and Their Impact Upon the Existing Television Broadcast Service

One of the advantages of my twenty-two year tenure at the Commission has been the opportunity to be an integral part of the development of new and exciting technology. However, because of my fundamental belief in the vital importance of our **only** universal, free, over-the-air broadcast system, seeing the development, and now the reality, of digital television has been perhaps the most rewarding. I enthusiastically applaud the efforts of ACATS, the Grand Alliance and the Advanced Television Test Center for the time and effort they have devoted over the last eight years to developing a digital television system.

Highlighting my optimism on HDTV, just two days ago noncommercial educational station WETA, the PBS flagship station in the Washington, D.C. area, filed an application for authority to operate an experimental ATV station. This experimental application proposes to make available to the public a wide variety of ATV services, will allow WETA to ascertain how best to respond to public needs and perceptions, and promises to enhance the station's ability to bring public interest programming to the public. Should this application be granted, we will all be able to see, firsthand, the development of a digital television system on one of the premier public television stations in the country.

Why is the development of digital television so important? It promises more than dramatically improved picture quality; it promises to provide "television plus" the ability to provide multiple channels of video programming on one 6 MHz channel, the ability to become interoperable with computers, and a wide array of other new services that we cannot even foresee at this time. The key to the strength of the proposed digital standard before us today is that it is flexible enough to allow applications of the technology that are both predictable and unpredictable.

For these reasons, I strongly support the Notice of Proposed Rule Making before us today and express my strong inclination at this point to adopt the digital standard proposed. Mandating a standard that has been developed and embraced by industry is necessary to ensure that manufacturers, broadcasters, and the public do not waste valuable resources in pursuing technology that does not ultimately prevail in the marketplace. I understand that there is concern in some quarters about mandating a standard; however, under the circumstances, anything short of such a requirement could threaten the future of digital television, America's international place as the leader of this technological movement, and the public interest. While I am a supporter of minimizing regulatory burdens, our past experience with AM stereo shows that, in matters like this one, "minimal regulation where necessary" is a more sound governmental approach than blanket deregulation.