

Washington Report

The National Association of Educational Broadcasters

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THE WASHINGTON CLIMATE

There's a lot in the wind in Washington nowadays and it isn't just the odor of cherry blossoms. There is evidence that the Kennedy administration and the FCC under its vigorous new chairman, Newton N. Minow, intend to stiffen regulatory activity concerning broadcasting, make major shifts in national radio-television policy, have greater concern for educational broadcasting services, and, in general take a strong progressive posture in its approach to what constitutes utilization of the air waves in the public interest.

There is apparent determination on the part of a majority of the commissioners to vigorously enforce the provisions of the Communications Act. This attitude is expected to be reflected in an increased number of renewal hearings, fines, and other sanctions; intensified concern about promise vs. performance, misleading and fraudulent contests and promotions, over-commercialization, and technical violations. Many more renewal hearings are to be held in the home localities of stations, and Mr. Minow has said that the FCC would be derelict in its duty if it does not place strong emphasis in such hearings on whether the actual programming is substantially the same as that promised in the original or renewal application.

The Commission has expressed concern over the sale prices of TV and radio stations. It has observed that "millions are being made by private interests in the sale of public property - the stations franchise to operate over the airwaves." It may be that in the future, assignors wishing to transfer a frequency will be called upon to explain why the station should command such a high price above the cost of physical assets and how the transfer would be in the public interest.

The White House is studying the spectrum with the intention of providing more frequencies for civilian use. It has asked interested agencies to work out (1) reallocation of the radio-tv spectrum between government and non-government users (2) supervision over how government agencies use frequencies allotted to them and (3) what role the government and private corporations should play in space satellite communications.

Currently a large portion of the radio-tv spectrum is assigned to the military for "top secret" national defense purposes. Both the FCC and Senator Magnuson have made repeated, but unsuccessful, efforts to find out how these frequencies are being used. The President made an oblique reference to this matter in his message on regulatory agencies by observing that a "co-ordinated effort" is underway to improve allocation of the radio spectrum and regulation of its use. He made no reference, however, to the rumored appointment of a "czar," responsible directly to the President for allocation of air space for governmental and private use.

Chairman Minow has noted that "90-plus per cent" of the problems of television stem from scarcity of channels. This situation would be greatly ameliorated if the military services could be "persuaded" to give up a few VHF and UHF channels now reserved for their experimentation.

AT&T is pushing for early decision on its plans to put its own communications satellite in orbit. The government has allotted the company frequencies but has not yet decided to make its launching pads and rockets available for "private" satellites. The Administration is said to be torn between its desire to maintain the U.S. lead in space communications and its fear of giving a private concern monopoly over this revolutionary system of radio-telephonic communications.

In numerous interviews Mr. Minow has expressed his interest in educational broadcasting and in both the Senate and House committee hearings on ETV legislation made strong statements of support. Commended by President Harley for his testimony he replied, "We have to make a start on the New Frontier somewhere!"

HOUSE HEARINGS

Hearings before the Subcommittee on Communications and Power of the House Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee were held March 20-23. Witnesses included NAEB members: Martha Gable, Armand Hunter, Raymond Hurlbert, Vernon Bronson and John Crabbe. Although no commercial industry representative appeared a supporting letter from LeRoy Collins, President of NAB, was entered in the record.

Two witnesses appeared to request that the legislation be amended to provide that the funds be used for leasing lines: Robert Landry, Vice President for Marketing, AT&T, N.Y.; and Francis E. Almstead, TV Consultant, N.Y. State Department of Education. John White, President of NETRC, and William Harley, President of NAEB, both interpolated into their testimony strong objection to such a provision, pointing out the importance of maintaining the distinction between federal support for capital equipment as opposed to operating funds. Congressman Moss (D.-Cal.) agreed and stated that such a proposal went far beyond the original concept of the legislation, whose central purpose, he believed, was to get stations on the air so as to take up the reserved channels. In his opinion, a provision that permitted leasing of facilities, would ensure that the legislation would not be approved by the Congress.

President Harley again read into the record the letters from President Kennedy and former Vice President Nixon (originally presented at the NAEB convention in October) and submitted, that as statements from the spokesmen of both major political parties, they indicated bi-partisan support for Federal assistance in fostering educational television.

Responding to questions raised previously by Chairman Oren Harris as to how ready the several states are to use federal funds for ETV, Harley indicated that in the process of conducting a state-by-state survey of the needs of education for television spectrum space, NAEB had acquired considerable data on the "status of the art" in each state. He then introduced Vernon Bronson, director of the survey, who presented a "roll-call" of the states, which provided a partial answer to Harris' question.

Earlier, Dr. Edgar Fuller, testifying for JCEB, offered the services of this agency in compiling a full report on the readiness of each state. JCEB-NETRC-NAEB are now working on this survey for inclusion in the record.

Meanwhile, Oren Harris has written to state governors to ascertain the degree of readiness within each state to use federal funds for educational television facilities. Both Harris and Ribicoff are said to place a great importance upon the results of this survey. So far, the returns have been slow to come in.

NAEB has informed people in each state concerning the Harris letter so that they might cooperate with their governor in supplying information relevant to the formulation of his response.

Pending the results of this survey and a statement from HEW, the hearings have been adjourned and the record remains open for filing of statements by interested parties.

Hearings are not expected to resume until early in May, at which time it is presumed that the HEW position will be presented by the Commissioner of Education, Dr. Sterling McMurrin. He was scheduled to appear as the lead-off witness on March 22, but that morning it was announced that a postponement had been requested. Coming on the heels of the Senate vote and discussion of the Ribicoff letter, there has been speculation on a possible relationship. There is also a feeling that the HEW position may be altered somewhat for the House hearings. HEW may make recommendations of its own for what it considers suitable ETV legislation, taking into account some of the questions raised by Ribicoff in his letter to Magnuson, and moving the Department into an affirmative posture.

A late development has been the reassignment from the Subcommittee on Communications to the Rules Committee of Rep. William H. Avery (R.-Kan.). Avery has been an outspoken critic of the ETV proposals and at the last session made a personal appearance before the Rules Committee to argue against reporting out H.R. 10609.

Persons interested in giving emphasis to the need for passage of the proposed legislation, may write to any member of the House Committee and duplicate copies for the Chairman and Counsel may be addressed to Room 1334, New House Office Building, Washington 25, D. C.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON INTERSTATE AND FOREIGN COMMERCE

Oren Harris, Ark., Chr.; John Bell Williams, Miss.; Peter F. Mack, Jr., Ill.; Kenneth A. Roberts, Ala.; Morgan M. Moulder, Mo. * 1/; Harley O. Staggers, W. Va.; Walter Rogers, Tex.*; Samuel N. Friedel, Md.; John J. Flynt, Jr., Ga.*; Torbert H. Macdonald, Mass.; George M. Rhodes, Pa.; John Jarman, Okla.; Leo W. O'Brien, N.Y.; John E. Moss, Calif.*; John D. Dingell, Mich.; Joe M. Kilgore, Tex.; Paul G. Rogers, Fla.; Robert W. Hemphill, S.C.; Dan Rostenkowski, Ill.*; James C. Healey, N.Y.; John B. Bennett, Mich.; William L. Springer, Ill.; Paul F. Schenck, Ohio; J. Arthur Younger, Calif.*; Harold R. Collier, Illinois; Milton W. Glenn, N.J.; Samuel L. Devine, Ohio; Ancher Nelsen, Minn.; Hastings Keith, Mass.; Willard S. Curtin, Pa.; Abner W. Sibal, Conn.*; Vernon W. Thomson, Wisc.; and W. E. Williamson, Clerk.

* Subcommittee on Communications and Power

1/ Chairman of Subcommittee

FCC ACTIONS

Inquiry. - The Federal Communications Commission (March 29) inaugurated a formal inquiry into the methods by which one of the seven commercial VHF television channels at New York City and at Los Angeles could be made available for non-commercial educational broadcasting. Interested persons may file comments on or before May 1, 1961.

In taking this step the Commission noted that, despite the achievements of educational groups in placing 54 educational TV stations on the air, the vast populations of the New York City and Los Angeles areas -- over 13% of the total population of the country -- are still not served by non-commercial educational TV stations. In these circumstances, and recognizing the abundance of resources for educational programming in those cities, the Commission stated it is urgently desirable in the public interest to inquire into available means by which it could enhance the opportunities for providing such services. NAEB plans to file comments.

Applications Accepted for Filing. - WYES-TV, Greater New Orleans Educational Television Foundation; Renewal of license. KISE, State Department of Education, State of Louisiana, Monroe, La.: Renewal of license. The School of the Ozarks, Point Lookout, Mo.: CP for a new non-commercial FM Station to be operated at 88.1 mc., ch. 201, with transmitter power of 10 watts.

Actions on Motions. - The Commission (March 27) granted petition by the Committee on Education of The Legislative Council of the State of Kansas and extended from March 27 to May 25 time to file reply comments in TV rule-making proceeding involving Superior, Kearney, Albion, Nebraska, and others (Docket 13860).

By Memorandum Opinion and Order, the Commission denied a petition by Rankin Fite and Robert H. Thomas for rule making to allocate Channel 2 for commercial use in Hamilton, Ala., by deleting that channel now reserved for educational use in State College, Miss., and Nashville, Tenn., and reserving Channel 30 (now commercial) for educational use in Nashville.

By Report and Order, the Commission finalized rule making in Docket 13945 and amended the TV table of assignments by substituting Channel 52 for Channel 44 in Vincennes, Ind., Channel 44 for Channel 52 in Princeton, Ind., and Channel 81 for Channel 60 in Washington, Ind. Purdue University in its comments requested that the assignment of Channel 81 rather than Channel 76, as originally proposed, in Washington so as to eliminate any future interference should a station commence operating from that city, to the operation of its experimental station on Channel 76 (KS2XGD) aboard a plane over Montpelier, Ind.

N.Y. UHF Project. - The Commission (April 17) issued a "Request for Quotations" for establishing a system for the collection, processing and analysis of data obtained from observations and measurements taken in the New York City UHF-TV Project. This project is being organized for a study of the technical and economic feasibility of using UHF channels to provide satisfactory broadcast coverage in a large metropolitan area.

The data will be obtained from observations and measurements made at about 5,000 locations in the New York City area during 10 months of operation, starting about August 1, 1961.

The NAEB Survey of the Needs of Education for Television Spectrum Space is now on the home stretch and the material is being evaluated for the final report which will be due sometime in September. A progress report just released to the U.S. Office of Education stated that the present indications spell out a three-way pattern of need for educational television channels:

1. A basic ETV service for the entire country, compatible with the general receiving potential of the community, which means VHF channels in most areas;
2. A supporting service of multiple channels for instructional services on the various levels which will provide for indicated needs in the localities;
3. A group of contiguous channels in the higher frequencies of the UHF band to provide for future extra-terrestrial broadcasting for educational purposes.

Network Programs. - The Washington office is presently originating two programs, WASHINGTON REPORT and a majority of the weekly half-hour segments known as SPECIAL OF THE WEEK. The latter includes coverage of events, such as cabinet news conferences, and major talks, such as those at the National Press Club. In the past two weeks these have included: Conrad Adenauer, the Prime Minister of Greece, Secretaries Freeman and Udall, and Walter Heller, Chairman of the President's Economic Advisory Council. The unedited tapes, many of which are provided by Voice of America, are shipped to WUOM, where Ed Burrows sees to selection and editing of the final program.

WASHINGTON REPORT, now four weeks old, alternates two commentators at present. Mark F. Ferber is Director of the Congressional Fellowship Program and Assistant Director of the American Political Science Association. John F. Lewis, until recently was special press assistant to former Secretary of Agriculture Benson and is a former documentary writer and producer for WBAL and WBAL-TV, Baltimore.

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