

Hollywood group wants Congress to rein in networks

Caucus asks Waxman, Hollings to work for tight program restrictions

The next Communications Act rewrite should closely regulate the television networks, loosening their control of program production and encouraging new networks, the Caucus for Producers, Writers and Directors has recommended.

In a letter to House Communications Subcommittee member Henry Waxman (D-Calif.), whose district takes in part of Hollywood, and Senate Communications Subcommittee Chairman Ernest Hollings (D-S.C.), who has announced plans to draft omnibus amendments to the Communications Act, the caucus says that problems of networks operations should not be left for government agencies and the courts to solve. They should be dealt with directly by Congress. The group would have legislation severely reduce the networks' control over the "type, diversity, and quality" of TV programs in the following ways:

□ Prohibit the networks from producing any entertainment shows.

□ Order a study into how to create additional TV networks, "using all the technology available in the broadcasting field today."

□ Limit the number of entertainment programs that can be licensed by each network.

□ Add more time to the prime-access period and prohibit the networks from extending programs, such as sports runovers, into that period without adjusting the entire evening schedule;

□ Address the proliferation of daily strip programs, which the caucus says is making it harder to gain access for programs that "provide the balance that should exist in broadcasting."

□ Curtail the "excessive number" of repeats on TV.

□ Give consideration to limiting the number and placement of program promotions and short commercials;

□ Order a study into the economics of the relationships between networks and program suppliers.

□ Maintain regulation of cable television and study how it affects the networks and local broadcasters.

□ Give greater consideration than the first rewrite draft to the amount of news and public affairs programs on television. The networks shouldn't be permitted to bar independent news productions, the caucus says.

These proposals supplement the

caucus's testimony before the House subcommittee's rewrite hearings in August, when it argued also for the retention of the current Communications Act's "public interest standard" and of the three-year license term for broadcast stations.

Methods should be created, the caucus argues in its new proposals, to make television programming responsive to the informational and cultural needs of this country. "The caucus recommends that in the national interest, all programming, day and night, be more responsive to elevating program quality and less responsible to all rating systems," it says.

Up in the air in more ways than one

Program distributors are unsure of what's ahead in dealing with the new breed of TV outlet—satellite-delivered superstations; but all are watching closely

With two TV "superstations" already transmitted by satellite to cable systems, another expected to be on the air shortly and an FCC policy endorsing "open entry" to the skies, program distributors are keeping close watch.

But it is difficult to get a consensus on the superstation situation from those who syndicate programs to local stations, then see their fare travel farther on cable.

Some, like Sandy Frank of Sandy Frank Film Syndication, say it has been a business policy not to sell to WTCG(TV) Atlanta, the first superstation. With cable extension of a program beyond a given market, Mr. Frank explained, it would "hurt the chances of selling it in other markets." He summed up: "Why would I cut my own throat?"

Last month, WTCG, which is revising its rate card to reflect its cable audience, was joined in superstation status by WGN-TV Chicago. KTVU(TV) San Francisco was to go on satellite last Saturday (Dec. 16), under a new FCC policy easing up restrictions on resale carriers that feed local signals to CATV systems nationally (BROADCASTING, Oct. 30).

There's no blockade around superstations, however. WTCG is among those stations that have picked up Viacom-distributed *All in the Family* within the past couple of months. Bill Andrews, Viacom's senior vice president, domestic syndication, explained that, in effect, it's business as usual in Atlanta. "It depends on how badly any particular station wants the show," he said. The top bid gets it, whether the station is a superstation or not.

Columbia Pictures Television also is selling regardless of superstation status. But CPT's Norman Horowitz, president, distribution, isn't alone when he says "I don't know" what the implications are to the distribution business.

In the best of all possible worlds, he



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