

Off-year elections right on for television

A \$100 million advertising year seems sure, and eventual total could be twice that; spot side of medium is the big winner

Political advertising continues to be a growth industry. The Television Bureau of Advertising, taking a long look backward at increases in political advertising on television over the years, predicts that if the trend continues, the \$100 million mark will be broken this election year. A Democratic National Committee official, using a bit of Kentucky windage, says the total advertising costs for both major parties, at all levels, could be twice that amount.

TVB noted last week that local spot TV advertising by candidates has increased steadily over the past decade, from \$18.1 million in 1972 to \$69.9 million in 1980. With the \$20.7 million spent on network television during that presidential election year, TVB said, the total approached \$91 million.

The prediction of a \$100 million mark being reached this year is based on the assumption that candidates will spend \$95 million on spot television and the parties would spend another \$3 million to \$5 million on network television.

TVB based its projections on figures supplied by Broadcast Advertisers Reports. The bureau said that in the first quarter of 1982, can-

didates spent \$5.1 million for spot TV, while in 1978, the last off-year election, the comparable figure was \$1.4 million. And the heavy spending by the candidates, the bureau noted, will come in the third and fourth quarters. The \$200 million estimate, admittedly a rough one, came from Robert Neuman, director of communications for the Democratic National Committee. He said estimates of total costs for all candidates—down to dog catcher—in 1982 have been as high as \$400 million, with advertising costs accounting for half of that figure.

Of course, the Democratic National Committee and its allies will be responsible for only a small piece of that action. With luck, the DNC and the Democratic congressional committee will spend between \$2 million and \$3 million on advertising. The Democrats also will contribute about \$1 million to candidates for the House and some \$1.2 million to candidates for the Senate. Much of that money will probably end up in individual advertising budgets.

The Republicans are another story. Their national committees will spend about \$10 million on advertising this year, and will contribute about \$11 million to House candidates and \$10 million to Senate candidates. Again, the candidates will probably use much of that money to augment their advertising budgets.

With those figures, it's evident that the losers in November won't include those in the advertising media, particularly television.

had been with ABC in top executive posts, including general manager of ABC-TV, vice president of the broadcast division, president of the ABC Leisure Group, assistant to the president of ABC Inc. and a member of the corporation's board of directors. □

Close to home: What the FCC thinks about being cut to five

Consensus is against it; only Jones is enthusiastic, and Quello thinks that Hill would have to establish legislative veto to protect public interest on critical issues; Washburn calls idea 'disaster'; vendetta against Steve Sharp appointment seen

The Senate Commerce Committee's proposal to cut the FCC back from seven commissioners to five drew mostly cautious, but mixed, reviews from the commissioners themselves last week.

Other commission officials, who requested anonymity, said the most troubling aspect of the proposal is that it appears to be an attempt to solve a political problem: the dispute between a senator and the White House over the appointment of Stephen Sharp, FCC general counsel, to a seven-year term at the FCC.

The proposal, which was attached to a budget reconciliation bill (BROADCASTING, July 19), would eliminate next June the slots of Commissioner Joseph Fogarty, a Democrat whose term will expire then anyway, and the Republican seat for which President Reagan has nominated Sharp.

The bill is expected to be considered by the Senate this week and is said to have the support of key members of the House.

Sharp, who was nominated more than two months ago, still hasn't received a hearing, reportedly because of a deal struck between Senate Commerce Committee Chairman Bob Packwood (R-Ore.) and Senator Ted Stevens (R-Alaska), who also serves on the committee. Packwood agreed to support a Stevens candidate in exchange for Stevens's support of Packwood's former aide, Mimi Weyforth Dawson, for an earlier Republican appointment. After Stevens's candidate was passed over by the White House, Packwood left the matter of what to do next in Stevens's court.

FCC Chairman Mark Fowler, who has backed Sharp's nomination from the beginning, said he had no comment on the proposal except: "I support President Reagan's nomination."

Commissioner James Quello said that although he would have had no problems with the proposal several years ago, things had changed. According to Quello, "some very important" communications issues were coming up before the commission. With only five members, a quorum could be had with only three commissioners present, meaning that two votes could be a majority, he said. "If they go to five, Congress ought to give itself a legislative veto," Quello said. "They shouldn't take a chance that such important communications matters could be settled by two out of three commissioners," he said.

Commissioner Abbott Washburn, who has been occupying the seat Sharp was nominated for since Washburn's own term expired June 30, said he thought the proposal "a disaster."

While most other commissions make do with no more than five commissioners, the FCC needs seven, he said. The FCC makes decisions that affect every house-

hold in the country, and some of those decisions involve "billions of dollars" or deal with "very sensitive First Amendment issues," Washburn said. "Given all that, and the fact that we have an immense amount of material to deal with, a four-vote majority is very important," Washburn said.

Commissioner Henry Rivera said "the growth of the industry" the FCC is called upon to oversee would "argue against" the proposal. "But it's very hard to argue against cutting the budget," he said. Nonetheless, "it's a bad way to resolve a political problem, if that's what's going on," he said.

Commissioner Anne Jones, however, said she thought the proposal a "terrific idea." Jones said there were only five commissioners at the Securities and Exchange Commission, where she worked for eight years and the SEC got along fine, she said. While a three-member commission would be too small, five could be more efficient than seven, she said. "People who argue that we have more work are simply missing the point," she said. "I've been on the record supporting that idea for years."

Commissioner Mimi Dawson said she really hadn't thought the matter through. "I haven't been at the commission long enough to decide whether it's better with seven or five," she said. "But I'm sure there are pluses and minuses to both sides."

Commissioner Joseph Fogarty was traveling in Europe last week.

A sampling of other FCC officials produced other reactions. "It came as a surprise to those of us who thought the Republicans in the administration were supposed to work hand in hand with the Republicans on the Hill," one official said.

Said another: "If it was a serious discussion about the size of an agency, I might want to address it, but that's not what's involved here, I don't think." □