

## Turner keen on DBS

Ted Turner is suddenly bullish on prospects for direct broadcast satellites. In the past, the cable programmer has questioned the viability of DBS, but last week, in a speech before the Media Institute in Washington, he sounded like a believer and indicated that he would be a part of the new medium.

With some 400,000 backyard earth stations intercepting cable programming, he said, DBS, in one sense, is already a reality. And DBS in the other sense—a scrambled package of services offered to paying subscribers—is "coming and coming very quickly." As HBO and Showtime have done, Turner pointed out that the Galaxy I satellite, on which they all own transponders, is a suitable broadcast satellite. The C-band satellite is capable of delivering "perfect" pictures to earth stations with four-foot dishes, he said.

DBS "will be good for us," he said, providing an alternative means of distribution for his three services: Cable News Network, CNN Headline News and superstation WTBS(TV) Atlanta. Turner is still bitter toward many cable operators, who, he said, used the fierce competition between CNN and Group W/SNC Satellite News Channel to force him to reduce the monthly per-subscriber charge for CNN and, in some cases, pay for carriage. Turner bought out SNC last month for \$25 million and shut it down. "The cable operators were sorry to see the little game end," he said. Commenting on the buy-out, Turner said if ABC and Group W "had hung on, they would have bankrupted us in 24 months."

Although CNN and CNN Headline News are losing money at a rate of \$1.5 million a month, he said, Turner Broadcasting System is in the black and the news services will "break even someday," perhaps in 1984. Regardless, he said, the losses should be "tolerable" next year and "we will hang on."

In response to his a question from his audience of journalists and public relations executives, Turner said he doesn't interfere with the editorial content of his news services, but that he would have liked to be a television newsmen. "I would love to be over in Lebanon dodging those bullets with a camera in one hand and a hand grenade in the other."

## Hobbled

William Bresnan, chairman and chief executive officer, Group W Cable, denounced FCC rules on must-carries, fairness and equal time as unfair restrictions on cable's First Amendment freedoms. While the intent of those rules, said Bresnan, is reasonable—to provide access to broadcast and cable channels—the result often is not. As examples, he cited cases where cable systems are required to carry two or three stations from each network as well as several PBS stations. Those rules, he said, inhibit the cable industry from providing subscribers with

the most diverse service possible at the lowest cost. The fairness and equal time rules, he said, "discourage rather than encourage" public debate on crucial issues by mandating access to everyone with a supposedly different point of view or political affiliation. Bresnan's remarks were made to a luncheon meeting of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences in New York.

Bresnan also contended that cities that attempt to impose programming controls on cable operators are no more entitled to do so than they would be to put controls on newspaper content. "Freedom of the media is our insurance against tyranny," he said.

## CAB campaign

The Cable Television Advertising Bureau is to launch a \$500,000 advertising campaign today (Nov. 14) to persuade companies to advertise on cable television. The campaign, the first in CAB's history, includes a print effort in advertising and business publications and a video version on cable TV



networks as well as individual systems, which are contributing their time. The agency for the campaign is LPG/PON, New York, a subsidiary of Lois Pitts Gershon. The campaign continues until March 1984, when it will be evaluated.

The campaign stresses that "in 1905, Albert Einstein discovered the perfect media formula for 1984:  $E=mc^2$ , Effectiveness equals more cable." Robert Alter, CAB president, said the copy will include information attesting to the continuing growth of advertiser-supported cable television. Mention will be made of cable penetration (it's in almost 40% of all TV households); of a 40 share by cable programming in cable homes, and of the upscale audience that watches cable.

Contributing underwriting support for the advertising campaign are the following: ARTS, Business Times, CBN Cable Net-

work, ESPN, Group W Satellite Communications, Hearst/ABC/Viacom Enterprises MSN The Information Network, Nashville Network, Satellite Program Network, Spanish International Network, Turner Broadcasting System, The Weather Channel, US/Cable Network and Warner Amex Satellite Entertainment.

The campaign also will include sales calls to agencies and advertisers by CAB staffers; and promotional materials which can be adapted for use by cable systems and interconnects.

## Z Channel Looks Ahead

The Z Channel, a pay television program service providing primarily sports to Los Angeles area cable viewers exclusively, is considering national distribution, according to company executives. The 24-hour service hosted an exhibit at the Over-the-Air Pay Television Exhibition in Los Angeles, making its first booth presence at an industry trade show. Jerry Harvey, affiliate relations director, acknowledged that The Z Channel is testing the waters for a possible satellite launch. The purpose of the presentation was to gauge reaction for relay to Group W Cable headquarters in New York. The service which has about 100,000 subscribers, was launched in 1974.

## All in the Family

Silver Screen Partners, the limited partnership which raised \$83 million earlier this year for financing of motion pictures to be shown on Home Box Office, has selected another HBO affiliate—Tri-Star Pictures—to distribute its films domestically. Tri-Star is Hollywood-based studio formed last year by Time Inc. (which owns HBO), CBS Inc. and Columbia Pictures. Tri-Star and Thorn-EMI Screen Entertainment are discussing the possibility of London-based Thorn-EMI handling foreign distribution of Silver Screen films. Terms were not disclosed.

## More pre-emption on way?

The FCC let it be known last week that it states may not regulate the rates of tiered cable services (see page 60). James McKinney, FCC Mass Media Bureau chief, has hinted that further pre-emption may be on the way. McKinney said the bureau was planning to "dust off" a notice of inquiry exploring whether localities should be able to regulate any cable rates—including those for basic services.

## Another walks plank

A federal judge has given cable operator additional ammunition to defeat cable television pirates. Judge George W. White, in enjoining a Cleveland firm from distributing pirating equipment, ruled that section 601 of the Communications Act, which prohibits its unauthorized reception of radio signals