

CBS News last week became **first network to announce plans for debate among presidential hopefuls** since court judgment on March 8 affirming FCC ruling that broadcasters may sponsor as well as cover such debates without incurring equal-time obligations (see page 69). CBS News on Friday said it had invited four major active candidates for Democratic presidential nomination to participate in live, one-hour debate, starting at 8 p.m., to be moderated by Dan Rather. CBS News President Edward M. Joyce sent identical invitations to Senator John Glenn (D-Ohio), Senator Gary Hart (D-Colo.), Rev. Jesse Jackson and former Vice President Walter Mondale. Glenn, however, ended his candidacy last week.

NBC-TV announced last Thursday (March 15) it is **canceling First Camera**, network's Sunday evening news magazine, which has consistently been lowest-rated program since its premiere last Sept 18. The 7 p.m.-8 p.m. **NYT slot will be filled beginning April 8** by original and repeat episodes of previously canceled family drama, **Father Murphy**. In prepared statement, NBC Chairman Grant Tinker said NBC's "commitment to a news series in prime time is undiminished and NBC News is under way with development of a new and competitive weekly program. We will schedule it when it is ready." It is anticipated that new prime time NBC News series will be announced with rest of NBC's new fall lineup on May 10. **First Camera** host Lloyd Dobyns and other program staff members will be reassigned within NBC News.

Mutual Broadcasting System President Martin Rubenstein and Representative Timothy Wirth (D-Colo.) last week clashed in **television debate** over issue of **networks' broadcast of projections of election results before polls close**. And Rubenstein—in reference to hearing Wirth's Subcommittee on Telecommunications held on issue last month—said, "It's an infringement on the rights of people when you haul [broadcast journalists] down here" for hearing. Wirth, who has urged broadcasters to exercise "restraint" while stating that First Amendment would appear to bar legislation, shot back, "Are you suggesting the U.S. Congress can't hold a hearing on this?" "Yes," said Rubenstein, it can hold a hearing. "But it has a chilling effect on the people's right to know." Wirth's position is that projections of results before polls close discourage people from voting. "There is nothing more sacred than an individual's vote," he said. "We question the right of the networks to interfere in the democratic process." Rubenstein, who heads National Association of Broadcasters' First Amendment Committee, said, "The networks are being asked to restrain themselves from doing what the politicians do—ask the voters what they're doing." Politicians, he said, want to reserve that activity for themselves, not American people. Confrontation was taped in Washington as part of *American Debate* series, funded by Roosevelt Center for American Policy

Studies for presentation on 40 public television stations served by Southern Education Communication Association.

There may be life in "CATA loophole" after all. At request of Copyright Office, **Copyright Royalty Tribunal** last week received **comments on validity of loophole in copyright law that would allow all cable systems to carry dozens of distant signals without paying 3.75% copyright rate** for any of them. Cable operators have insisted that 3.75% rate is onerous. Loophole is named after Community Antenna Television Association, which first published it in its newsletter in February 1983 and which asked Copyright Office for ruling on it. Among those endorsing loophole was National Cable Television Association. NCTA said 3.75% rate should not apply to imported signals of "specialty stations" or of independent stations substituted for specialty stations. (FCC classifies at least 33 mostly foreign and religious stations as specialty stations.)

Gross Telecasting Inc., licensee of WJIM-AM-FM-TV Lansing, and WKBT-TV La Crosse, both Michigan, last week **announced settlement with Lansing branch of American Civil Liberties Union** under which latter has agreed to drop its challenges of Gross licenses in court of appeals—and agreed not to challenge sale of Gross's two TV stations for \$48 million to Universal Communications Corp. which is being headed by John Backe, former CBS president. According to Andrew Schwartzman, attorney for ACLU, agreement calls for Gross to contribute \$600,000—and for Backe to contribute another \$200,000—to trust fund. Fund, Schwartzman said, will be permitted, through interest, to accumulate to \$1 million. Then 75% of interest from fund will be funneled to "constitutional rights fund" set up by Lansing branch of ACLU; remaining 25% will go to variety of Lansing public service projects.

House bill (H.R. 5120), introduced last week by Representative Thomas Bliley (R-Va.), is identical to Senate measure that would **permit broadcasters to refuse to air pornographic political advertisements** despite no-censorship provision of Section 315, equal-time law. Senate bill was introduced by Senator Jeremiah Denton (R-Ala.).

Thomas Burchill, president and chief executive officer of **RKO Radio networks**, is **leaving that post on April 1 to become president and chief executive officer of Lifetime**, and cable network's operating company, Hearst/ABC-Viacom Entertainment Services. Burchill has headed RKO Radio Networks since 1979.

Senator Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.) is expected to introduce authorization legislation this week, which will include **appropriation of \$238 million to Corporation for Public Broadcasting** for fiscal

HBO signs pact with Universal

Home Box Office announced last week the signing of its longest term licensing agreement yet—a six-year (covering the years 1983-1988) nonexclusive pact with MCA Inc.'s Universal Pictures.

Sources also confirm that HBO and 20th Century-Fox are nearing completion of a nonexclusive deal that may extend four years and perhaps longer.

It's difficult to put an exact price on the HBO-Universal deal because of future box office performance and cable subscriber counts. But sources indicate the total value of the deal will run into the hundreds of millions of dollars.

The latest agreement is known in the trade as an "output deal." That is, HBO will have an option on almost all of the films distributed by Universal, with a few big exceptions. Box office hits, for example, of the magnitude of Steven Spielberg's "E.T." may not be included in the pay-cable package.

In addition to Fox, HBO is also said to be talking with MGM-UA about a nonexclusive pact. Showtime/The Movie Channel Inc. is in discussion with Universal concerning a licensing agreement, a

spokesman acknowledged, "as well as with every other major studio in Hollywood."

As to the significance of that agreement and of the one expected soon with Fox, entertainment analyst John Reidy of Drexel Burnham Lambert offered that "the battling between the pay services and Hollywood seems to have eased somewhat." And the pay services, added Reidy, seem to be indicating that while some exclusivity may be desirable, total exclusivity adds to margin pressures (because of the higher costs of exclusivity) "and doesn't prove anything. You won't see a large portion of subscribers paying for two broadbased services."

HBO and Showtime both have exclusive deals with major studios—HBO with Columbia Pictures and Orion, and Showtime/TMC with Paramount. HBO also has exclusive deals with Tri-Star, the CBS/Columbia joint venture studio that will start producing films this year; with Silver Screen Partners, the limited partnership studio that will also start production this year, and with a number of smaller filmmaking entities.