

insulate public broadcasters from extraneous interference and control," and that Congress would be watching "a little more now than in other times" to make sure that CPB is maintaining its independence.

In his keynote address, PBS President Bruce Christensen told the group that if public broadcasting is to continue as "broadcasting in the public interest," it must continue to air potentially controversial programs and "do a better job of explaining ourselves and our intentions." Christensen said that PBS does not "broadcast controversy for controversy's sake. We broadcast programs that will broaden and deepen discussion of issues." □

'Captain Midnight' strikes; preempts HBO with message decrying scrambling

Video vigilante interrupts satellite feed with warning to pay services

The nightmare became reality for Home Box Office shortly after midnight on April 27. At about 12:32 a.m. NYT, HBO's showing of "Falcon and the Snowman" was interrupted for about four minutes by a simple message against a background of standard color bars. The message: "Goodevening HBO from Captain Midnight. \$12.95? No Way! (Showtime/The Movie Channel Beware!)"

What had happened soon became clear. Someone—the mysterious Captain Midnight—had beamed his message to HBO's transponder with a signal so powerful it overwhelmed HBO's.

The incident, which has yet to be repeated, was clearly a protest against the scrambling of cable programming and its sale to the 1.5 million owners of backyard earth stations. HBO began scrambling HBO and its companion service, Cinemax, full-time on Jan. 15 and charging dish owners \$12.95 a month for each or \$19.95 a month for the pair. Showtime/TMC plans to scramble its two services May 27 and charge \$10.95 a month for each and \$16.95 a month for both.

The incident was also a vivid demonstration of the vulnerability of satellite communications. It showed that with an earth station big enough and powerful enough, a "video terrorist," as Captain Midnight has been called, can not only interfere with a signal to the point of making it unwatchable, but also replace it—at least for a short period—with a message or program of his own.

Whatever else Captain Midnight is, he is a criminal. By intentionally beaming a signal over a transponder belonging to someone else, said FCC's chief spokesman Bill Russell, he violated Section 501 of the Communications Act, risking a fine of up to \$10,000 and a year in jail. Lawyers were searching the criminal code for other violations that could be charged against Captain Midnight, Russell said. That the captain threatened Showtime/The Movie Channel, Russell said, may be cause for action.

According to Russell, the FCC, the criminal division of the Justice Department and

the Federal Bureau of Investigation are investigating the incident, hoping to track down and unmask Captain Midnight. The FCC's analysis of the tapes of the incident has yielded some information on the kind of earth station facility and character generator Captain Midnight had at his command, he said. Investigators have also received several "tips," one of which has led them to the "Dallas area," he said.

HBO and other cable programmers have been half expecting to see their satellite feeds hit with some harmful interference from dish owners upset from the programmers' decision to scramble. Such interference could be generated by almost anyone from almost anywhere with a large dish equipped with a transmitter instead of a receiver. Last fall, Eastern Microwave Inc. complained to the FCC that its satellite feed of superstation WOR-TV New York was disrupted by a mysterious interfering signal and suggested that the interference was intentional.

But none of the programmers were prepared to cope with the signal put on the bird by Captain Midnight. "This wasn't simply a backyard dish hooked up to a small transmitter," said Russell. "This was a large commercial broadcast-quality earth station."

Last Monday and Tuesday, satellite engineers were in Washington to discuss recommendations to the FCC for limiting unintentional interference with satellite signals, and one of the unofficial topics of the gathering was Captain Midnight. They agreed that to override the HBO signal, Captain Midnight

had to be at the helm of a large and powerful earth station. Jay Ramasastry, chief scientist, satellite technology, CBS/Broadcast Group, said the interferer had to have at least a 10-meter dish and 2,000 watts of RF power—enough to deliver a signal two or three decibels greater than HBO's.

"Whoever did it was working with some very professional equipment," said Robert Wold, chairman and chief executive officer of Wold Communications, who has been coping with unintentional interference for many years. "They had color bars and a character generator and a commercial uplink facility. It wasn't somebody transmitting off something he rigged together from Radio Shack gear." Wold said there are between 100 and 120 uplinks in the country capable of overriding the HBO signal.

HBO transmits two feeds (eastern and western) of HBO and Cinemax from the Shepley Communications Center in Hauppauge, N.Y., which has four 11-meter dishes. Captain Midnight disrupted the eastern feed of HBO on transponder 23 of Hughes Communications' Galaxy I.

The unprecedented incident has already had some political repercussions. Russell believes it will give new life to legislation that would "make it easier for the FCC to go after people for malicious interference." The legislation was introduced in the Senate by Communications Subcommittee Chairman Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.) and in the House by Telecommunications Subcommittee member John Bryant (D-Tex.).

"This video terrorism not only under-

This announcement appears as a matter of record only.



PRICE BROADCASTING COMPANY

Salt Lake City, Utah

\$40,000,000
Revolving Credit Facilities

Provided by

Bank of America NT&SA
Entertainment/Media Group

 **Bank of America**

Bank of America NT&SA