

FCC chairman spells out broadcast agenda

By Kim McAvoy
and Christopher Stern

FCC Chairman Reed Hundt told broadcasters last week that he will not tie broadcast deregulation to tighter children's TV rules or to a new public interest standard.

There would be "no mega-deal, no holy bargain," Hundt told **BROADCASTING & CABLE** after meeting with top network executives and affiliates.

Hundt also shared his broadcast agenda with the executives. That agenda, which he hopes to complete during the next six to nine months, includes: a review of the TV ownership restrictions, repeal of the off-network prohibition of the prime time access rule and adoption of new children's TV rules.

Hundt also said he is determined to move quickly: "I'm against gridlock, and that's my starting point."

Just six weeks ago, Hundt proposed to revisit the "social compact" between broadcasters and the public, linking relaxation of broadcast deregulation to a commitment to women, minorities, children and localism.

"The time has come to reexamine, redefine, restate and renew the social compact between the public and the broadcasting industry," Hundt said at the time.

Hundt avoided talk of the social compact in his remarks last week to

the United Church of Christ. And according to sources, Hundt steered clear of the issue during his discussions with broadcasters. "It never came up," said one participant.

"He never mentioned a quid pro quo" for broadcast deregulation, said one network source. Hundt was "very clear that he wants to do something on children's TV," but that broadcast deregulation and children's TV are "not tied together," said the source. "He's not going to hold up one for the other."

But FCC General Counsel Bill Kennard said last week that TV violence and minority ownership and employment are important issues to Hundt and will be included in the FCC's broadcast agenda.

During the past two weeks, Hundt has discussed his broadcast agenda with NBC President Robert Wright, CBS Chairman Larry Tisch, and ABC/Capital Cities Chairman Tom Murphy. Also last week, Hundt met with the National Affiliated Stations Association (NASA), which includes representatives of the Big Three broadcast networks.



Hundt speaking to the UCC last week in New York.

NASA's Ben Tucker of Retlaw Broadcasting said last week Hundt expressed interest in children's TV, EEO and PTAR.

FCC sources have said the commission is considering launching a rule-making on Oct. 20 to end the prohibition against off-network programming during prime time.

One participant who met with the chairman felt Hundt had backed away from reviewing the social

compact because he "does not want to get bogged down by divisive issues."

According to one source, Hundt may have a notice of proposed rule-making on the local broadcast ownership caps for radio ready for the October meeting. New rules went into effect last week that increased national radio ownership limits to 20 AM stations and 20 FM stations. The ownership rules for TV, however, may not be addressed until November or later.

Hundt also said he would have additional proposed rules on children's TV by December or January.

Commissioner Jim Quello said he would support raising the station cap by four or five stations and the coverage cap to 30%. ■

Gaylord gets CBS affiliates in Seattle and Dallas

Despite ongoing litigation between Gaylord Broadcasting and the Warner Bros. Network, Gaylord has signed an affiliation agreement with CBS for its stations in Dallas and Seattle.

CBS manages to stay on a VHF in Dallas by moving to Gaylord's independent KTVT-TV. The Fox-New World deal had bumped CBS from KDFW-TV. In return, Gaylord wants the CBS affiliation for KSTW-TV, its independent station in Seattle.

CBS has been on Bonneville's KIRO-TV Seattle for 36 years. But before the CBS-Gaylord alliance became fact, Bonneville International Corp. decided to sell KIRO-TV to A.H. Belo Corp. for \$160 million cash.

Belo says in a press release that based on CBS's then-rumored intention to move the affiliation to KSTW-TV, Belo "initially plans to operate KIRO as an independent with a full local news service." But Belo Chief Financial Officer Michael Perry says the company "wouldn't rule out" another network's offer.

CBS distribution President Tony Malara says the affiliation

switches in both markets will happen simultaneously, probably around April 1 of next year. The timing is tied to New World's expected completion of its purchase of Argyle Broadcasting's KDFW-TV Dallas, the current CBS affiliate, as well as to CBS's six-month cancellation notice to KIRO-TV.

"It's not a surprise, but it's certainly disappointing after 36 years as a loyal CBS affiliate," said Glenn Wright, general manager of KIRO-TV Seattle, the outgoing CBS affiliate. Bonneville also owns a CBS affiliate in Salt Lake City, KSL-TV.

"With over 40 hours a week of local programming, including 32 hours of news, we see an opportunity to build on that foundation and become a powerful independent station," Wright said.

Malara said the parting with KIRO Seattle was "bittersweet," but also a reflection of the new era in network affiliate relations.

"More and more I think you're seeing group owners looking to put their properties with one network," he says.

But it's not a hard-and-fast rule, either, he said, citing Gannett's alliance with three networks.

—SM,JZ