

**The FCC last week approved New World's plans to transfer WGHP-TV Greensboro, N.C., and WBRC-TV Birmingham, Ala., into a trust for eventual sale to Fox.** The trust will hold the stations until Fox resolves its foreign ownership troubles at the FCC. New World needs to sell the stations to make room for the four Argyle stations it plans to acquire later this year. If New World had not been able to move the stations into a trust, it would have bumped up against the FCC's ownership cap of 12 stations. Once the stations are transferred, Fox will give New World a promissory note worth \$130 million. The stations will be managed by an independent party until Fox clears up its troubles at the FCC. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People effectively has blocked Fox's ability to acquire any broadcast properties. The civil rights group claims Fox did not reveal that 99% of the money of it used to purchase Metromedia in 1985 came from Australia-based News Corp. A decision in the case is expected this month.



# Washington Watch

**What this country really needs is a "radical overhaul" of the FCC,** says a new paper by Adam Thierer, fellow, The Heritage Foundation.

"If [Congress] fails to scale back the size and power of the Federal Communications Commission, it is the American taxpayer and consumer that will pay a heavy price," Thierer's paper says. The FCC's bureaucracy tends to inhibit competition and innovation in broadcasting, cable and telephony, it says. "Like all such federal agencies, the FCC will regulate more heavily when given the money and people with which to do so." Congress should order the agency to downsize or simply eliminate it, the paper says. In the latter case, some of the FCC's vital regulatory functions could be turned over to the states. Standardization chores could be assumed by the industry and enforced by the courts and the Justice Department. The FCC wouldn't even be needed as a spectrum manager if Congress auctioned spectrum and gave the high bidders property rights, the paper says. A spectrum board then could be set up to enforce these rights and manage government spectrum.

**Baffled senators may have provided the best testimony in favor of federal funding for educational technology.** As teachers in Boston last Tuesday waited at the other end of an online link to demonstrate PBS Mathline, members of the Senate Labor Subcommittee in Washington, equipped with laptop computers, called for help so they could convene the "virtual hearing." "I know so little of the technology. I'm going to rely on some of the staff here," said Senator Mark Hatfield (R-Ore.), chairman of the parent Appropriations Committee. Senator Dale Bumpers (D-Ark.) gave up in apparent frustration, asking to drop in on a classroom to see how the technology works. "I just have to do a hands-on operation to really understand this," he grumbled. Public broadcasting officials who were present testified against

eliminated federal funding for technology in classrooms, as recommended by the House. Such technology is the "only cost-effective way to accomplish" the planned retraining of the nation's 1.6 million math teachers, said Beryl Jackson, a Washington, D.C., middle school teacher who represented Mathline.

**One public TV station official got an unpleasant taste of lobbying last week.** The official had an appointment to speak with one of his senators about continued federal funding for public broadcasting, but the senator kept him waiting—and waiting.

Turns out the senator was on the Senate floor, making clear his opposition to that funding.

The official, from a station in the Midwest, was furious. He had to meet with an aide to the senator who, he says, wouldn't be pinned down on the issue.

Public TV officials from around the country were in Washington last week trying to shore up support for public broadcasting.

Edited By Kim McAvoy

**Who says broadcasters don't care about children?** Cap-

cities/ABC is putting an extra emphasis on kids. The network invited members of Congress to preview highlights of an ABC News special, *Putting Children First: How to Save Our Future*. The program, which airs April 20, examines what various communities across the nation are doing to help children. ABC executives Tom Murphy and Roone Arledge, and anchor Peter Jennings were to be on hand for the program's debut at a Capitol Hill reception. ABC also invited lawmakers' families to screen the program as well as "make your own ice cream sundae."

**Add the U.S. Conference of Mayors to the growing list of groups that are unhappy with the telecommunications-reform bill** adopted by the Senate Commerce Committee. The mayors say the measure contains some "troubling" provisions. Foremost among their complaints is that the measure gives the FCC broad authority to preempt local franchise agreements. Furthermore, the measure will "create unnecessary conflicts between local governments and cable operators" because it could be "interpreted to imply that a cable company can offer telecommunications services simply by authority of [its] cable franchise." And the mayors think the bill will cause unnecessary disputes between local telephone companies and local governments. Under the measure, telcos offering video on a common carrier basis would not be required to obtain a franchise.

**There is life after Congress.** Former House Telecommunications Subcommittee member Jim Slattery has joined Wiley, Rein & Fielding. The Kansas Democrat, who served six terms in the House, is now a member of the law firm's government affairs, communications and environmental practices.