

Benjamin L. Hooks



One of the last important tasks -- among several -- I performed before leaving the Federal Communications Commission, was to set in motion an effort to change the Small Business Administration's policy against making direct loans to minorities to purchase broadcast properties.

The securing of adequate financing, next to receiving proper notification of proposed sales of broadcast properties, was cited by a summer conclave of minority broadcast owners as being among their most vexing problems.

I shall be forever grateful to FCC chairman Richard E. Wiley for making the commitment to fight and then carrying through with it after I left the FCC. Wiley and I went to visit Vernon Weaver, SBA administrator, on May 20.

At that meeting we outlined the problem confronting potential minority broadcast property buyers and suggested that since the SBA's position against making such direct loans (the Office of Minority Business Enterprise makes SBA funds available to private firms which in turn make such loans. This roundabout procedure, however, is costly both in terms of time and wear and tear on nerves) was only a policy not a rule, how about simply declaring that policy at end?

Mr. Weaver was very cordial and said he would certainly consider our proposal. A few weeks ago, Wiley revealed that Weaver is now leaning toward instituting a proposed notification of rulemaking into the subject. That is an important first step and I believe it will be just a matter of time before the SBA jettisons its policy for one that favors making direct loans to minorities seeking to purchase broadcast properties.

In a letter to Weaver, signed by Wiley, and concurred in by me, we attempted to lay to rest SBA fears of violating the First Amendment by making such loans. A section of the SBA rules and regulations presently provides that "financial assistance will not be granted by SBA . . . if the applicant is, among other communications media, a . . . radio broadcast company or a television broadcast company." The reason for this prohibition rests in belief that enterprises engaged in the propagation of ideas and values should be free to exercise their First Amendment rights uninfluenced by the prospect of governmental hindrance of financial assistance. But this policy, however, was amended in June, 1976 to exempt certain media which are not engaged in an editorial function.

Senate and Congress have been long active in the field of communications. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting created under the 1967 Public Broadcasting Act, receives grants and federal funds for production of national and local programming as well as for research, demonstration and minority training programs.

Through the Newspaper Preservation Act, Congress provides an anti-trust exemption for failing newspapers. The executive branch has a large number of agencies and offices involved in broadcasting including: the Office of Telecommunications Policy in the White House (now being moved to the Commerce Dept.); the OMBE which has the power through its private lending units, MESBICS, to stimulate minority purchase of broadcast and cable cast facilities.

Department of Health, Education and Welfare's office of telecommunications provides facilities grants to public TV and radio stations and funds programs such as "Sesame Street." Additionally, HEW's office of civil rights, along with the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, is involved in the regulation of employment practices of broadcasters.

The Department of Housing and Urban

Development supports public services, including the possibility of developing a rural Internal Revenue Service and the Office of Revenue Sharing. It can also determine the propriety for development of state and local cable systems. And the Department of Justice's anti-trust division is presently involved in the whole question of newspaper-broadcast cross-ownership.

And, of course, the licensing process of the FCC is a significant example of federal regulation of the broadcast industry. It should also be noted, finally, that broadcast licenses have been granted directly to state and local governments of their agencies.

As was stated in that letter, "despite all this involvement on the part of government in broadcast operations and programming, we feel that there have been very few examples of abuse. In any event, there are countervailing protections that can be readily brought to bear against any such isolated or potential abuses.

By opening opportunities to more prospective minority broadcast property buyers, we would be adding additional voices to the market place, thus enriching programming services and serving the public interest.


EOB

The EOB announced it has obtained a federal grant to help support the Community Food Bank.

Dr. Claude Perkins Chariman of EOB, said "We have long recognized the worthiness of the Food Bank and the dedication of the people who have worked tirelessly to maintain this service in our community. It has been more than a year ago since we first went to bat for the Food Bank but funds were initially unavailable, noted Perkins. However, staff and board concern for the program did not diminish, and our most recent effort was successful. This new program funding, obtained through the diligence of EOB, serves as further evidence of EOB's commitment to assisting all other groups in the county, whether they are formally a part of EOB or whether they are outside agencies needing assistance."

The \$37,732 Community Services Administration grant which EOB will direct into the Food Bank operation is subject to only one-years duration.


We recognize that the problems of malnutrition in Southern Nevada will not be cured within this time, observed Perkins, but we expect that EOB's assistance will have a significant impact on continuing the Community Food Bank program.




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WALK-A-THON

The Walk-A-Thon is Oct. 15, but thousands of local young people have already hit the streets for the March of Dimes.

They're collecting signatures now from the local residents who'll be sponsoring the 20-mile hike they'll be taking through the city next week to fight birth defects in Southern Nevada.

"These next couple of weeks are the critical period in the success of our Walk-A-Thon," stated Bob Krause, local office supply store owner who has volunteered to serve as Walk-A-Thon chairman for the 3rd consecutive year.

"Last week, we had kids from every school in the country shouting their enthusiasm at our annual kick-off luncheon at the Stardust. Now, we hope to see the same kind of spirit from the people of Las Vegas."

Walk-A-Thon sponsor sheets were distributed throughout the Clark County School District this week as well as to nearly all area convenience markets. Several schools have scheduled assemblies so students can meet representatives of the Southern Nevada chapter of the March of Dimes to learn what Walk-A-Thon is all about.

Goal of the fund-drive this year is \$100,000, Krause said. Research sponsored by the March of Dimes found a preventative cure for polio in the 1950's. Today, the health organization is fighting a number of birth defects through research and public education.

"A few years ago, Southern Nevada had one of the highest infant mortality rates in the country, but that's changed since we started the neo-natal center at Sunrise," said March of Dimes chapter president Ron Lurie.

He said that premature or critically ill babies born throughout the state can be rushed now to the special clinic where trained neo-natologists do their rescue work.

The local chapter maintains a Mother's Milk Bank which provides breast milk for the newborn youngsters.

The organization also sponsors programs of genetic counseling for families with birth-defected children, training sessions in infant care for pediatricians and nurses, inoculation programs through the District Health Department, and direct assistance to people who suffer birth-related handicaps.

March of Dimes officials said there are more than 25,000 babies born every year in this country with a birth defect. Some of the diseases the health organization is fighting include sickle cell anemia, Down's Syndrome, tay sacks, muscular dystrophy, cystic fibrosis, hemophilia, spina bifida, mental retardation and the crippling effects of rubella or German measles when contracted by a pregnant woman.

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