

# FCC urges creation of low-power FM stations

WASHINGTON (AP)— A proposal to create thousands of new low-power FM radio stations nationwide would give voice to a greater diversity of views and need not compromise the quality of existing stations, the nation's top airwaves regulator said last week.

The Federal Communications Commission has proposed allowing low-power, low-cost radio stations, and its chairman, Bill Kennard, defended the idea before one of its most vocal



BILL KENNARD

opponents — the National Association of Broadcasters — at the group's meeting in Orlando, Fla.

The FCC plan is meant to help churches, schools, city governments and community groups get on the air by licensing them to operate radio stations with low power levels from 1 watt to 1,000 watts.

Commercial broadcasters argue that adding new low-power stations would cause significant interference with existing stations and degrade service to listeners. The NAB has commissioned studies that support this assertion. Rep. Billy Tauzin, R-La.,

chairman of the House Commerce telecommunications subcommittee, also has urged the FCC to halt efforts for low-power stations.

But Kennard said studies by FCC engineers using a wide range of inexpensive radios hold promise. They indicate that current interference standards can be used to develop an engineering solution for low-power radio, he said.

"We don't need to create a whole new set of interference standards, especially not just

for the purpose of thwarting low-power radio," Kennard said in prepared remarks.

The FCC stopped licensing low-powered FM radio stations around 1978 to help solidify regular FM stations. But the proposal offered earlier this year has sparked interest among hundreds of individuals and grass-roots groups.

Kennard urged broadcasters to work with the agency on the technical components of the plan.

"We need cooperation, not

confrontation," he said.

Commercial broadcasters also say regulators are getting ahead of themselves by trying to introduce low-power stations without knowing how they will affect digital radio when that service is introduced.

But Kennard insisted that the FCC is committed to making digital radio a reality and that both objectives can be achieved. The commission plans to launch a formal proceeding into digital radio this fall, he said.

## Trial nearing for supremacist in immigrant's death

DENVER (AP)— About 200 prospective jurors filed into Denver District Court last week as the death penalty trial began for a self-proclaimed white supremacist charged in the slaying of a West African immigrant.

The jurors began filling out paperwork and were to watch a video about the jury service fundamentals before the selection process got under way.

Nathan Thill, 21, is accused of murdering Oumar Dia because he was black and of paralyzing Jeannie VanVelkinburgh, who tried to come to Dia's aid in the late-night attack at a downtown bus stop.

VanVelkinburgh's testimony helped convict Thill's companion, Jeremiah Barnum. But Barnum was later granted a new trial because a judge ruled VanVelkinburgh's

emotional behavior — which included screaming and crying — jeopardized Barnum's right to a fair trial.

Prosecutors refused to comment on whether they plan to call Ms. VanVelkinburgh during Thill's trial.

Legal analyst Andrew Cohen of Denver said prosecutors must decide whether VanVelkinburgh's testimony is crucial to their case.

"She is a witness who brings a lot to the prosecution ... but her credibility is in doubt and she might bring in a big risk," he said.

Thill, 21, is charged with ethnic intimidation, first-degree murder and attempted murder.

The jury selection process is expected to be arduous because of publicity in a crime

that outraged residents and prompted anti-hate rallies and prayer vigils.

A native of Diourbivoul, Senegal, the slightly statured Dia was a hotel bellhop, sending his earnings home to support his family and fellow villagers.

Both Thill and Barnum, who worked at a service station, allegedly had ties to the skinhead movement.

On Nov. 19, 1997, Dia, just off work, and VanVelkinburgh were waiting at the bus stop when Thill and Barnum approached.

Thill knocked a baseball cap from Dia's head, called him a racial epithet and asked him whether he was prepared to die, police said.

VanVelkinburgh has testified that Barnum put Dia in a headlock while Thill pulled out a

gun and shot Dia several times.

When she tried to intervene, VanVelkinburgh said Thill shot her in the spine, pointed the gun at her head and pulled the trigger twice.

The weapon was empty.

After his arrest, Thill told several media outlets, police and prosecutors that he shot Dia because he was black.

Thill acknowledged in news interviews that he was a white supremacist and Dia was "in the enemy's uniform."

In a subsequent ruling, a court ruled Thill's statements to police could not be used during the trial because he was not properly advised of his constitutional rights, but the statements to the media may be used because Thill sought out reporters voluntarily.

## Baptist convention seeking new leader

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — One of the nation's largest black church groups tries to begin restoring its image this week when it replaces a former leader now in prison for using his position to steal money and finance a lavish lifestyle.

Eleven candidates are vying for the presidency of the National Baptist Convention USA during the group's annual meeting which started Tuesday in Tampa.

Members will vote to replace the Rev. Henry Lyons, who is serving 5 1/2 years in state prison on racketeering and grand theft convictions. He also pleaded guilty to federal charges of tax evasion and fraud, and was sentenced to a concurrent 4 1/4-year term.

Group leaders hope this year's meeting will help unite members of the 119-year-old organization, which has experienced contentious battles for power.

A minister died after falling from a stage during a fight at the annual meeting in 1961.

"There's going to be some politicking, a lot of campaigning," said the Rev. Stewart Cureton, of Greenville, S.C., the group's acting president, who is not a

contender.

But, "we cannot be divided now," Cureton said. "I am in deep prayer ... that they will combine their efforts to support the person who does win."

Convention leaders expect the meeting to draw about 60,000 people to the Ice Palace Arena — many of whom will be attracted by today's scheduled election. While the group has claimed 8.5 million members, prosecutors at Lyons' trial said the actual number is closer to 1 million.

Its next leader will face some challenges.

Attendance at the convention-operated American Baptist College in Nashville, Tenn., is down. Loans to settle lawsuits are due. And nearly \$3 million still is owed on the group's headquarters in Nashville, the Baptist World Center.

Lyons, who was paid \$100,000 a year as president, was convicted in February of swindling \$4 million from businesses and failing to distribute nearly \$250,000 contributed by the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith to help rebuild burned black churches in the South.

In the wake of the scandal, some convention members want to restrict the president's

power and make the officer more accountable for money raised and spent on the group's behalf.

Historically, an heir apparent has been obvious among a small group of contenders. But the succession is unclear with Lyons in prison.

"The doors are kind of wide open," said the Rev. Edward V. Hill of Los Angeles, asked by the group's board to run for the seat. "And there are plenty of people who believe they are the Messiah."

Other candidates include ministers W. Franklyn Richardson of Mount Vernon, N.Y., and William J. Shaw, of Philadelphia, who finished second and third, respectively, to Lyons in 1994.

Richardson and Shaw were among a group of convention members who tried to oust Lyons in 1997 as investigators probed whether he misused the group's funds to support a lifestyle that included a mistress, expensive jewelry, and a waterfront home.

Other church leaders seeking the post are from Richmond, Va.; Louisville, Ky.; Atlanta; Detroit; Indianapolis, Ind.; Greensboro, N.C.; and Homer, La.

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