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Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

14 Feb. 1991

Hugh Turnbull, W3ABC
Director, Atlantic Division
American Radio Relay League

Dear Hugh:

Having just read on the PVRC DX Spotting BBS as well as in W5YI Report about the controversy surrounding the passing of an anti-war message containing a 900 number, thereby making it a money-making enterprise, I was quite surprised to learn that ARRL has been asking the FCC to exempt packet node or BBS operators from the provisions making licensees responsible for material transmitted over their stations. I personally would always have opposed such an action on the part of the League had I known about it.

The controversy at hand provides a useful example of the inherent dangers were the FCC to adopt such a position. The amateur packet system might quickly become a vehicle for use by activists of all persuasions, and the purely amateur radio aspects of the service would be pushed into the background. In emergencies, emergency messages might have to compete with such blather, hampering the effectiveness of the system in handling such traffic.

The challenge to those who are developing this extremely useful part of the amateur radio service is to make it effective under the current rules rather than seeking exceptions. W3IWI has already suggested one potential solution in the comments of his which were cited in the W5YI report. In my opinion, this is not censorship. No one has ever had the right to use the amateur radio traffic handling system in a completely unrestricted way. The FCC is correct in enforcing the rules so that, whatever the technical advances that may be made, the average amateur is assured that the amateur radio service continues to be used by amateurs for amateur purposes, and does not become simply another vehicle to be used by commercial interests for their benefit.

The ARRL's position on packet, therefore, is strangely at odds with the principled position the League has taken in opposing the request by the television networks to liberalize the rules so that correspondents can file their reports via amateur radio. I would hope this incident would wake you and the other Directors up to the broader issues involved, so that ARRL does not simply become an unthinking conduit for passing the positions of the packet radio leadership along to the Commission without pausing to think what