



DOCKET FILE COPY ORIGINAL

Susan Chapek
766 Shady Drive East
Pittsburgh PA 15228

Magalie Roman Salas
Office of the Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

10 January 2002

Re: MM Docket No. 01-276

Dear Commission Members:

I write to oppose the proposed sale of WQEX to any private and/or profit-making entity. Such disposal of the station would violate the intent of its original charter.

As a National Officer of the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, and as a Board Member of that organization's Pittsburgh branch, I am aware of the range of broadcast and cable television product currently available to Pittsburgh.

I am also keenly aware that Pittsburgh lacks meaningful outlets for alternative and local non-commercial television programming. Providing such an outlet was the original intent of the Government in awarding WQEX to its current owners.

To determine the fate of WQEX, we need to look carefully at this original intent.

Television Then

The Public Broadcasting System was created back when broadcasting was dominated by three commercial networks. Advertising revenue (therefore mass audiences) determined the programming on the networks. PBS was created to provide a means for non-commercial, minority, alternative--in short, *unprofitable*--programs to air.

That did happen, but only in a skewed way. PBS did serve *certain* minorities: those who craved high culture ("Great Performances," "Masterpiece Theater," etc.) or elite educational programming ("MacNeil Lehrer," "National Geographic")--in short, those minorities who had money.

In addition, some programming developed ("Mister Rogers' Neighborhood," for example) that actually achieved mass audience appeal.

As time went on, only token amounts of time (not prime time, we note) were left for broadcasting local news, current affairs, ethnic programming, local politics, community outreach, or local arts.

No. of Copies rec'd 0
List ABCDE

Television Now

The invention of Cable transformed television. Now, smaller "niche" audiences are served by dozens of specialty commercial cable channels.

Most importantly, *all* of the types of PBS national programming now aired by WQED and WQEX in Pittsburgh are duplicated by commercial cable channels such as A&E, Discovery, Nick, The History Channel, Food TV. With the exception of a few hours actually devoted to local programming, every single program aired on WQED-WQEX could *profitably* be aired to the same audience on an existing *commercial* cable channel.

Meanwhile, local educational, minority, and alternative programming is still not adequately provided by *any* Pittsburgh channel. It will never be profitable to provide it. Surely now is the time for WQED to embrace its original mission by providing such programming in abundance.

Of course, WQED prefers to continue airing its long-established and popular PBS programming. It needs that programming to attract private and corporate donations.

I am not, therefore, suggesting that WQED be forced to change its focus or its means of attracting donations. I *am* suggesting that WQED needs to expand programming that educates, that provides a forum for the minority, the unknown, the unpopular.

WQEX provides the time and the means.

But if WQEX is sold to a commercial enterprise, Pittsburgh loses its only opportunity to fulfill the original mission of public television.

Perhaps WQED does not want to do this public service work. Or perhaps WQED is not equipped to do it. Then award the WQEX license to another non-profit entity that is willing to fulfill the mission of WQEX as originally chartered.

A Final Question

Are there perhaps certain loopholes in the language of the original license that could be construed to permit WQED to sell WQEX for profit? Such loopholes may exist. But is it correct to manipulate a government contract to commercial advantage? Or ought we to adhere to the original intent of the American people when we created the Public Broadcasting System, and when we licensed WQEX?

I appeal to you to consider the intent, the principle, the mission--and not the loopholes—when making a decision about the disposal of WQEX.

Preserve public service television in Pittsburgh and across the nation.

Sincerely,



Susan Chapek