

## Looking for help

Unless he's luckier than he has been so far in drumming up support for his proposal to support noncommercial broadcasting with fees raised from commercial system, Lionel Van Deerlin may drop that notion in his rewrite of rewrite of Communications Act. He's still promoting idea, as in his message last week to convention of educational broadcasters (see page 47). And Harry M. (Chip) Shooshan, chief counsel of House Communications Subcommittee, which Mr. Van Deerlin heads, is vowing that fees for noncommercial support will be in new bill. But privately Mr. Van Deerlin deplores lukewarm response from public broadcasting interests and opposition of others and says: "I'm not going to be out there tilting with windmills."

To try to improve prospects, staff rewriters are considering, among other courses, making public broadcasting *only* beneficiary of fees to be collected from commercial licenses. That would leave other beneficiaries originally included in first fee draft—funds for minority ownership, rural telecommunications and operations of new Communications Regulatory Commission—to be supported by conventional appropriations. Staff says now, though point was never made before, that CRC was never intended to be fully funded from fee money—only its license processing costs.

## Angels

Some of money made in conventional television by producers Norman Lear and Bud Yorkin (*All in the Family*, *Sanford and Son*, etc.) looks likely to be reinvested—but in over-the-air subscription TV futures. As Chartwell Communications Group gears up for major-market STV expansion pegged at \$38 million (see page 58), major financier is expected to be Lear/Yorkin's Tandem Productions. Two producers already have minority interest in Chartwell.

## Budding bureaucracy

FCC staff is beginning to draft plans to implement Chairman Charles Ferris's proposed creation of Office of Public Affairs, to include as divisions present Public Information Office, Consumer Assistance Office and industry equal employment opportunity unit. Plans are to name high-ranking civil servant, with supergrade status, as head of new office and fill present vacancy in PIO office with someone else. Belle O'Brien, who has gotten high marks for her role as head of Consumer Assistance Office and who has

been rumored to be in line for new Public Affairs post, will stay in her present job, though probably with enhanced responsibility.

## Public office

Communications Act rewriters, apparently spurred by citizen groups' criticism, are considering stronger alternatives to bill's proposed Office of Consumer Assistance within future communications commission. That office, charged with promoting consumers' interests in all regulatory matters, might be replaced by Office of Public Counsel that would actually represent consumers in proceedings. Rewriters are considering additional provision for reimbursement of outside attorney fees for citizen groups. They've sought and gotten FCC Chairman Charles Ferris's comments on last, but find them too tentative to be of much help.

## On the line

NBC-TV last week announced special scheduling of three episodes of innovative real-life medical series, *Lifeline*, on three nights next week, but didn't add that this was life-or-death experiment. Show's producer, Thomas Moore of Tomorrow Entertainment, expects NBC to decide immediately after test whether to order more episodes than 15 already completed. If verdict is against extension, NBC can claim to have given "reality" programing decent chance.

## Renewal relief

FCC's draft of petition for appellate-court rehearing in WESH case was said last week to be undergoing evolutionary process, as commission lawyers sought to make strongest possible case for presentation to full bench of U.S. Court of Appeals in Washington. Word is that tone and emphasis of draft have undergone changes, but not basic strategy. Commission is said to be determined to win reversal of what it feels is court's pre-emption of agency's authority to assign weights, in comparative renewal proceedings, to such matters as diversification of ownership of media and past programing, Commission, which was to file petition today (Nov. 6), has obtained delay until Nov. 9.

Commission, in related matter, is expected soon to announce creation of committee that will begin drafting new comparative renewal policy. Announcement will contain invitation for comments and ideas from industry and public.

## Calling uncle

FCC's Complaints and Compliance Division has been flooded with calls from candidates and broadcasters in political campaign now ending. In fact, volume of calls—broadcasters' requests for help in interpreting law and regulations and candidates' complaints about broadcasters—set records. Previous October high for such calls was 600 in 1976. Total last month reached 1,800, up from 1,010 in September. Nor does number of calls tell whole story. In October 1976, division received some 500 complaints and queries by mail. Mail totals this year are not yet available.

## White's first offer

When Margita White relinquishes her FCC commissionership in mid-January, she won't have to wait long for at least one assignment her experience will fit. She will be asked to sit on board of U.S. government-supported Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, which broadcast to eastern Europe and Soviet Union. Chairman of RFE/RL is John S. Hayes, former ambassador to Switzerland and broadcaster (Post-Newsweek Stations),

## Spreading the product

FCC's "open entry" policy on superstations like WTCG(TV) Atlanta (BROADCASTING: Oct. 30) is being met with mixed reactions among program distributors—from anger to passive acceptance. Major concern among critics is that cross-country satellite-distributed signals will take dollar toll when time comes to sell to broadcasters in smaller markets that have cable importation.

One syndicator says he has refused to sell product to WTCG; another says he would expect to get prices commensurate with superstation audience. National Association of Independent Television Producers and Distributors, also worried on copyright front, has assigned Washington counsel to investigate. But from one major syndicator comes word that in Atlanta market, it's business as usual: "Superstation doesn't play a part."

## Clears pre-empted

FCC Chairman Charles Ferris and Commissioners Robert E. Lee and Joseph Fogarty travel to Hague, the Netherlands, week of Dec. 11 to discuss trans-Atlantic communications with representatives of European countries' ministries of post and telegraph. One consequence is that special FCC meeting on clear channels, now set for Dec. 14, will be rescheduled.