

**Guiding hands.** The National Association of Broadcasters has appointed a futures committee to plot the course of the association's immediate future. Named co-chairmen were radio board Chairman Cullie M. Tarleton, senior vice president, radio, at Jefferson-Pilot Broadcasting Co., and TV board Chairman Mark Smith, vice president, general manager, KLAS-TV Las Vegas. Radio members are Dean Sorenson, president, KCCR(AM)-KNEY(FM) Pierre, S.D.; Martin F. Beck, president, Beck-Ross Communications Inc., Rockville Center, N.Y., and Walter Rubens, KOBE(AM)-KOPE(FM) Las Cruces, N.M. TV members are William M. Dunaway, general manager, wxEX-TV Richmond, Va., and Don Curran, president, Field Communications, San Francisco. The committee is expected to meet for the first time at NAB's annual convention in Dallas, April 4-7.

message to affiliates last Thursday, ABC also said that putting the plan into effect in three stages—the only modification of the original plan—would allow the marketplace to adjust to it more smoothly.

ABC also reiterated that the plan would not violate either its own commercial-time standards or those imposed by the National Association of Broadcasters code (before the code was suspended earlier this month). Most of the new commercial time, ABC officials said, will come out of time now devoted to program promos.

Stations have opposed the plan for essentially the same reasons that station reps do—a fear that it will cut seriously into their more lucrative spot sales.

Ward Huey of WFAA-TV Dallas, chairman of the ABC-TV affiliates board, was vacationing last week and could not be reached immediately for comment. Well-placed sources within the affiliates board have indicated, however, that a poll of ABC affiliates found 90% or more against the plan.

The American Association of Advertising Agencies' committee on networks and programming also has been concerned about it, particularly its potential effect on viewers' perception of "clutter." Jack Otter of SSC&B, chairman of the committee, said late last week he planned to confer with other members about ABC's decision. But he seemed fatalistic. "If they've decided to do it," he said, "I guess they'll do it." □

## Unusual cable proposal in Sacramento

**Cablevision offers basic system with HBO and interactive videotext capability; other bidders: Warner Amex, United-Tribune and Maclean-Hunter**

Once again Chuck Dolan has reached into his bag of cable franchising tricks to come up with what he hopes will prove to be the most attractive bid to the powers that be in Sacramento, Calif.

Four cable companies met the March 15 deadline for proposals to wire Sacramento, including Cablevision, Warner Amex, Toronto-based Maclean-Hunter Cable and United-Tribune, a joint venture between United Cable and Tribune Company Cable.

But Cablevision's was by far the most unusual—if not controversial—bid. It proposed a no-option basic service package comprising HBO and an alphanumeric keyboard for accessing pages of videotext that could also interact with any other keyboard on line within the system. The proposed cost of the basic package is \$19.50 and the basic subscriber could decline neither the HBO service nor the keyboard, currently being developed by Jerrold Electronics, to reduce the cost of the package. The Jerrold keyboards are expected to be on line by November 1983.

Cablevision also is offering one less-than-basic package, with a \$4.50 price tag and comprising 34 retransmitted and local television channels. To qualify, a subscriber would have to be receiving some form of public assistance such as welfare, according to a Cablevision spokesman. A Sacramento county official said there are approximately 82,000 recipients of public assistance in the county. The proposed franchise area has more than 300,000 homes and applicants were required to project a growth of 10,000 homes per year in preparing their bids.

Dolan has predicted that should his company succeed in winning the 15-year franchise, it would achieve 50% basic penetration by the fifth year when, he said, the Sacramento system would become the largest interconnected system in the world.

Dolan defended the costly, no-option basic package by saying: "Given the explosive growth of computer technology, we feel that the inclusion of computer services as part of the basic cable service is inevitable."

Reaction to the bid from the competition was skeptical, with some questioning Dolan's ability to successfully market the basic package, and the ability or desire of potential subscribers to pay such a steep price for it. One source suggested that Dolan may have misread the viewing and service wants of the county because the 73 local investors in the Cablevision venture are among the wealthiest residents of Sacramento.

A spokesman for the Maclean-Hunter-backed group said that its proposal, and perhaps the other two as well, offered all of the services being offered by Cablevision in its basic package, but as options, not must-takes.

The Cablevision system would cost about \$224 million to build. The New York-based investment banking firm of Drexel Burnham Lambert is putting up

\$80 million of that, \$40 million in equity interest and \$40 million in subordinated long-term debt. Various banks would put up \$60 million in senior bank debt.

Both the Cablevision and Maclean-Hunter systems would have a total capacity of 240 video channels, 120 each for residential and institutional use.

The Maclean-Hunter company, known as Greater Sacramento County Cable Inc., has proposed a three-tiered basic service: tier one would cost \$2.75 per month; and provide 42 channels; tier two would cost \$5.50 and have an additional 22 channels, and tier three, priced at \$6.95 would provide 32 more channels. Eleven pay options would be offered at \$6.95 per month each.

Warner Amex has proposed a dual 440-mhz residential system with a capacity of 118 channels, 24 of which would be held for future use as required by the request for proposal. The company has also proposed an institutional cable with a capacity of about 60 channels. The basic package would provide 36 channels for \$2.50 per month. An enhanced-basic package comprising 80 channels would be available for \$4.95. For an additional \$5.95 per month, a subscriber could obtain 14 Qube channels (two-way interactive). Warner would offer 13 pay services, ranging in price from \$4.95 per month to \$8.95 per month.

Consultants for the city will review the four bids for about three months, after which joint hearings will be held before the Sacramento city council and the Sacramento county board of supervisors. Indications are that a final decision will come by August or September of this year. And, while the county and city governing bodies will review the proposals together, they will vote separately, meaning that the county could select one company and the city another. Estimates are that the city of Sacramento accounts for between 35% and 40% of the population of the county. □

## \$2-billion NFL contract expected this week

**Five-year pact with three networks to be unveiled at owners meeting in Phoenix**

Official word is expected to come this week on the most expensive contract in sports history, calling for the payment by the three television networks of about \$2 billion over five years for the telecasting of National Football League games, starting next fall.

Neither the three television networks nor the NFL would say officially that an agreement has been reached, but several network sources said the pact is in place and they expect the NFL to announce the transaction during the annual meeting of club owners in Phoenix, starting today (March 22).

The first word that an NFL agreement