

A New President . . . But No New Sheriff

By the time you read this, we will (presumably) have elected a new President of the United States. As I write this, though, the election is still a couple of weeks away, so the outcome is unknown to me. Personal political preferences aside, our main interest from a ham radio perspective is how the attitude of the new President will trickle down to the FCC. The commissioners, of course, come from both political parties and serve for set terms. They are not subject to replacement at the beginning of a new administration, as are the heads of most other government departments. But they are subject to “peer pressure” ranging from the approaches of other regulatory agencies to the attitudes at the White House.

From that perspective, we are hopeful for some positive changes regardless of who becomes our next President. Both Senator McCain and Senator Obama have spoken frequently of the need for greater transparency and greater accountability in government decision-making. Hopefully, both are serious about it and hopefully, it will result in an FCC that is more focused on providing an even playing field for all “players” in a market than in promoting one specific approach to communications issues. I am thinking, of course, of Broadband over Power Lines, or BPL, which several FCC commissioners shamelessly promoted over and above other equally viable (often more viable) options for bringing broadband internet access to underserved areas. This rhetoric has cooled somewhat under the leadership of Chairman Kevin Martin, but the issue has not gone away and the Commission still has to come up with revised BPL rules in accordance with the appeals court ruling handed down earlier this year, agreeing with the ARRL that the FCC had acted improperly in the way it enacted the original BPL rules.

In addition, responding to the mess the economy is in right now, both candidates called for a return to tighter regulation of the financial industry, and for stricter enforcement of rules already on the books. We hope that this attitude will carry over to the FCC as well, particularly with regard to amateur radio.

Despite assurances that the Commission’s dedication to enhanced enforcement in the Amateur Service remains strong even after the retirement this past July of Riley Hollingsworth, K4ZDH, as Special Counsel in charge of amateur enforcement, no successor has yet been named and not a single amateur enforcement action has been announced since “Sheriff” Riley packed up his office. This is deeply disturbing and of grave concern.

Our economy is suffering right now from the excesses of a “regulate yourselves” approach to the financial industry, but we hams learned a long time ago about the risks of that approach when it was applied to our service. For 15 years from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s, the FCC basically told hams to “regulate yourselves” and the bands got progressively worse places to be, mostly due to the actions of a very few who continually got away with bad on-air behavior. When “the new sheriff came to town” about ten years ago, we were promised that the overall attitude of the Commission on enforcement had changed, and that we would never again be left on our own to sort out problems whose solutions really required the authority of the federal government behind them. Indeed, over the past decade, with strong support from the amateur community, “Sheriff” Riley successfully cleaned up our bands. We are grateful for his work, but now worry it may all have been for naught. The ham bands are a much nicer neighborhood now than they were ten years ago, mostly

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Spanning the world of ham radio at one table. Paolo (center) with Saul, K2XA, and Champ, E21EIC, at the Visalia banquet in 2007.

Paolo Cortese, I2UIY, SK

We say goodbye this month—far too soon—to another member of the CQ family. Paolo Cortese, I2UIY, was co-director of the CQ RTTY DX and WPX Contests, as well as being a longtime member of the CQ World-Wide Contest Committee. He also held a variety of volunteer positions at Italy’s national ham radio organization and was a good friend to all of us here at CQ and throughout the DXing and contesting communities. Paolo passed away in October at age 48 from a brain aneurysm (see K1AR’s tribute to Paolo in his “Contesting” column on page 98). I first met Paolo in person at Visalia in 2007, and immediately felt like we were old friends, a feeling that was reinforced when we met again this past May in Dayton. 73, my friend. We will miss your big smile and your infectious laugh.

because the biggest bullies on the block have been silenced. But they’ll stay silent only if they know they’ll be accountable for their actions to more than the local Official Observer.

The FCC often points to our long tradition of self-enforcement, and we hams do indeed have an enviable record in that regard. But self-enforcement is effective only for the 98% or so of us who need only broad guidance and/or peer pressure to follow the rules. It’s the other 2%, though, who can make life in the neighborhood difficult. And it is for them that we continue to need the FCC’s help. It would be a tragedy, and a travesty, if the FCC were to go back on its promise to be there for us and allowed amateur enforcement to once again drop off the radar. We call on Enforcement Bureau Chief Kris Monteith to name a successor to Riley Hollingsworth, to do so promptly, and to put the FCC back in the business of enforcing Amateur Service rules. It would be a nice Christmas present for us all, or at least for 98% of us.

’Tis the Season

Speaking of which, we hope that the tough economy isn’t putting too much of a crimp in your holiday gift budgets. Our advertisers certainly need your business to make sure their holiday seasons are happy as well. All of us here at CQ wish all of you a Merry Christmas, a Happy Hanukkah, or whatever other holiday you may observe at this time of year. May the light of your holiday observances shine brightly for the coming year.

73, W2VU

P.S. Be sure to check out our new “Kids’ Korner” column, debuting this month on page 80.