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The Newest, and Toughest, Policy Toward Programming

By John Carmody

Washington

AFTER TWO DAYS as chief of the nation's public broadcasting industry, Henry Loomis has announced a tough new policy toward programming, including the controversial area of public affairs.

The new president of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting recently told top industry officials that the CPB has in the past "tried to duck its responsibility and it wasn't successful."

In a separate session before the PBS board of directors meeting here and in a half-hour, nationwide closed-circuit broadcast with the network's 225 station managers, Loomis said:

- The CPB, formerly only a management "umbrella" for public broadcasting, will take a strong role in determining daily program content over the nationwide PBS network.

- "Instant analysis" and other public affairs programming techniques that mimic commercial TV practices probably will be dropped.

- Long-range financing for public broadcasting will not be pushed for at least several years.

- While it eventually should be "much more," funding is currently at a satisfactory level.

- "The cultural field" and programs directed at a "specialized" audience, rather than mass audiences, should be stressed.

Loomis' views are virtually identical to those of the Nixon administration and congressional opponents of public TV over the last year. His appointment as CPB president has been expected by industry sources following the takeover of the 15-member CPB board this summer by an administration majority. Former Rep. Tom Curtis of Missouri, a longtime Republican, was named board chairman last month.

Public television programming, particularly in the area of public affairs, has brought criticism in the last year from the administration, Congress and some local station managers. CPB management has previously maintained a hands-off policy on programming decisions.

Loomis said the corporation would at present not actively seek long-range financing, which had been called essential to proper programming by its supporters in the industry and in Congress, where backers

were mostly Democrats.

"We'll be trying for that one a couple of years from now," he told the station managers. President Nixon vetoed a two-year funding plan in June.

As Loomis sees it, the corporation founded in 1968 should be pleased with its present 30 per cent annual growth. Current funding is 45 million dollars. "It's possible to get too much too soon," while staff excellence and expertise lags, he told the PBS board.

Following Loomis' appearances, industry sources took a wait-and-see attitude. They suggested he had not had time to be properly briefed since accepting the 42,500-dollar-a-year job, which he starts officially on Oct. 1.

Taking a stronger role in determining daily program content on PBS

Loomis told a reporter later that when approached about the job following the resignation of John Macy Jr. as CPB president in August, he had asked, "What the hell is it?"

An independently wealthy man, Loomis said he had long regarded his previous service in important posts in the Departments of Defense, Health, Education and Welfare, United States Information Agency and at the White House during the last 20 years as "nonpartisan."

"I always considered myself what the British call a 'permanent undersecretary,'" he said.

"But four years ago (when Mr. Nixon appointed him to the USIA, where he is currently deputy director), I changed. Mr. Nixon was my guy in 1968 and I feel very strongly about it this election year."

In hinting that the "instant analysis" of major political events will be dropped, he said public affairs programming should only "supplement and enrich" what is offered by commercial networks. He later told a reporter that he was "concerned about the propriety of using public funds to be competitive with commercial networks" in any area of broadcasting.

Loomis asked PBS station managers to do "much more in the cultural field." The role of public broadcasting is to direct programming to a specialized, not a mass, audience, he said. An exam-

ple would be "a program of an excellent cultural nature that is too expensive for the commercial networks to do."

Loomis' remarks Wednesday were in line with Nixon administration criticism of public television beginning last October with an attack by Dr. Clay T. Whitehead, director of the Office of Telecommunications Policy.

The CPB was formed in 1963, a year after President Lyndon Johnson successfully backed a public broadcasting bill. Under Macy, the new corporation took over what had been the loose-knit educational TV network and, as PBS, with Federal equipment and programming money, grew to the present 225 TV stations

and hundreds of public radio outlets.

Last fall, the political roof fell in on Macy. PBS (and the Ford Foundation) pushed through a public affairs outlet in Washington. The National Public Affairs Center for Television promptly hired liberal correspondents Sander Vanocur and Robert MacNeil at high salaries, which drew even Democratic criticism in Congress.

A series of controversial network shows, as well as a marked increase in the PBS national audience, attracted further notice for the public network. In June, Mr. Nixon vetoed a two-year 65 million dollar authorization for CPB. Macy, in ill health, subsequently resigned, along with other top CPB aides.

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