

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN ALFRED C. SIKES
TO THE
ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR ADVANCED TELEVISION

MARCH 21, 1990

With upcoming issuance of the Third Interim Report of the Advisory Committee for Advanced Television, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Advisory Committee Chairman Richard Wiley and the Advisory Committee members for their efforts to date. Additionally, I want to share with the Advisory Committee the Commission's thoughts on the direction and timing of the selection of advanced television systems.

First and foremost, let me congratulate the Advisory Committee on what it has already accomplished. During the three years since NTIA and the Commission introduced high-definition television to the public policy arena, the Advisory Committee's efforts have resulted in substantial progress toward the selection of advanced television systems. We are now at a fortunate point in time. The Advisory Committee, working with industry, has enhanced significantly our ability to measure the quality of competing advanced television systems. At the same time, true progress has been made on both enhancing the current NTSC standard and on delivering a high-definition television signal using existing terrestrial facilities.

This fortunate combination of circumstances makes it both appropriate and timely for the Commission to enunciate its goals for the selection of advanced television systems.

Because of the benefits advanced television can bring to the public, the Commission's initial objective is to be in a position to select a standard for advanced television systems as promptly as possible. We believe that it should be possible to make this selection during the second quarter of 1993. In order to meet this schedule, the Commission requests that the Advisory Committee prepare its Final Report containing its data, analyses, findings, and recommendations for submission to the Commission by September 30, 1992.

The Commission's primary goal in these proceedings is to assure the development of a technically excellent advanced television service that will most efficiently meet the needs and desires of broadcast stations, cable providers and consumers. Consistent with this goal, the Commission's intent is to select a simulcast high-definition television standard, that is, compatible with the current 6 MHz channelization plan but employing new design principles independent of NTSC technology. In making this determination we are aware of the fact that

augmentation-type systems could also provide a quality high-definition television service. However, we find that the substantial spectrum availability and utilization problems that selection of an augmentation-type system would entail indicates that further testing of such systems is not warranted. Because augmentation and simulcast systems each offer a technically excellent high definition television service, in our judgment the interests of the public will be better served by selecting a simulcast system.

Although we aspire to establish a simulcast HDTV system the Commission believes it advisable to be fully apprised of all aspects of an enhanced definition television system (EDTV), including its technical attributes, its consumer acceptance and its cost effectiveness. We do not envision, however, that the Commission would adopt an EDTV standard, if at all, prior to reaching a final decision on an HDTV standard, which, as I indicated above, will be made in the second quarter of 1993.

The Commission understands that implementation of these goals within the timetable we have established is an ambitious undertaking and will necessitate that the advanced television testing program proceed expeditiously. To assist in this effort, I have directed Commission staff to work closely with the Advisory Committee's testing laboratories, including actually participating in the testing process. Commission staff have also been instructed to investigate the possibility of performing some tests at the Commission's laboratory. To facilitate this collaborative testing effort, the Commission requests that the Advisory Committee make any test data it generates available to Commission staff as soon as it is produced. It is the Commission's expectation that the collective efforts of the Advisory Committee and the Commission staff will facilitate the production of a complete Final Report by autumn 1992.

As a final matter we would note that it is important that the Advisory Committee have the flexibility to include in the testing program any new advanced television developments that offer important new benefits to the American public and which are in a sufficiently concrete state of development to be considered with the existing systems. Accordingly, with the assistance of the Advisory Committee, the Commission wishes to review carefully but quickly in early 1992 any such new advanced television developments. If in the course of that examination the Commission finds that a new advanced television technology is sufficiently concrete and developed to the point that it can be tested, the Commission will supplement the testing procedures and timetable to accommodate it.

Thanks in no small part to the efforts of the Advisory Committee the outlines of a new generation of advanced television service have begun to emerge. The Commission believes that the policy directions we have set forth above will help bring this new generation of television into being and in so doing will place the United States in a position to exercise international leadership in this important new area of commerce. I look forward to working with the Advisory Committee to achieve this result.