

FCCC CHAIRMAN TALKS TOUGH - ACCUSES BROADCASTERS OF BEING AGAINST TRANSPARENCY



Federal Communications Commission Chairman Julius Genachowski spoke tough during his speech before the National Association of Broadcasters in Las Vegas. In a no holds barred speech he charged them with being “against technology, against transparency, and against journalism.” One writer called the Chairman’s speech as ‘teeth-gnashing’ and ‘fire-breathing.’ Naturally, the speech did not go down well with the audience, leaving them further incensed when he left immediately after completion of his speech, disinclined to take questions from the audience. One broadcaster in the audience, unwilling to disclose his name, said, “he took out his sword and left, I was expecting a little question-and-answer or something.” Genachowski minced no words in making it clear that he wanted their spectrum and publication of their political files online. This, the broadcasters have refused to accept time and again. They apprehend that it would put the stations at a disadvantage, in this hugely competitive area, and would give the upper hand to other media outlets like cable and radio, who also contend for political advertising. Gordon Smith, president and CEO of the National Association of Broadcasters, reacting to Genachowski’s speech said, “[The FCC] has the authority to do what they’re going to do, “We’re working with them in good faith. We’ve made it clear [to the FCC] that we’re happy to put online who bought commercial time and how much. What we’re concerned about is putting the rate on the Internet because that has collateral commercial damage.” Moreover, information regarding rates charged from political candidates was available on paper at the TV stations, NAB argued. Putting it online could adversely impact the rates it charged other advertisers. Smith said, “We’re happy to tell people who bought what and how much but were concerned about collateral commercial damage. It’s a fundamentally different thing when you keep it at your station and you put it online.” Genachowski informing that the FCC is getting ready for conducting spectrum auctions, agreeing that it was a lengthy and intricate process, he urged the broadcasters saying, “Broadcasters will benefit from robust mobile broadband. Don’t be afraid to be interested in incentive auctions. You’ll receive a considerable cash infusion. Don’t miss the boat on an opportunity you might regret passing up.” Genachowski’s claim that he had received many enquiries from broadcasters showing interests, sounded hollow, given that there weren’t too many broadcasters, of their own accord relinquishing spectrum. Another broadcaster, who also preferred to remain anonymous said, “That’s all fine, but what’s the deal?” Suggesting that there would be no takers and there wouldn’t be much of an auction if this ambiguity continued to prevail. What has really incensed and maddened the broadcasters is Genachowski’s rigid and unbending stance that the April 27 order, requiring TV broadcasters to move their political files online will stand. The Chairman stonewalled all broadcaster’s appeals and proposals, terming some of them as “preposterous.” “Broadcast news organizations depend on, and consistently call for, robust open-record regimes for the institutions they cover,” he said. “It seems hypocritical for broadcasters to oppose applying the same principles to themselves.” One broadcaster said, “Genachowski sounds like a guy who has made up his mind.”

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