

# CABLE PLANS 'PROACTIVE' PHONE STANCE

*Industry ready to aggressively pursue telecommunications agenda, NCTA's Mooney says*

By Harry A. Jessell

**W**ith cable systems rapidly turning into "platforms" for telephone and other telecommunications services, says National Cable Television Association President James Mooney, it is time for the industry to push a "proactive telecommunications position" on Capitol Hill.

"For too many years the political sensitivities associated with cable re-regulation have inhibited us from aggressively pursuing our own agenda in the House and Senate," Mooney said in his keynote address at the Western Cable Show last week. "Now, for better or worse, these political conditions no longer exist, and there's no reason not to press our own affirmative causes."

Mooney did not say what the industry position would be, but he hinted it may be aimed at knocking down legal and regulatory barriers to cable offering telephone services.

A decade ago, cable's chief worry was keeping telephone companies



*Mooney: '...No reason not to press our own affirmative causes.'*

out of the cable business, he said. "[B]ut today many of our companies, especially those involved in local access and [personal communications services] ventures, spend much more time considering the obstacles to their own telecommunications ventures."

Mooney said cable must also "take care that the Clinton administration does not fall prey to the same propaganda trap as did the Bush White House by concluding that telcos

should be the chosen vehicles to achieve 21st-century telecommunications goals."

Although cable should continue to worry about competition from telcos, Mooney said, it should not become consumed by "fear of the future and loathing of competitors" as broadcasters have.

"When threatened by competition, the broadcasters have tended to huddle around their historical core business, and to seek to use the regulatory system to maintain the market status quo or even to restore what used to be the market status quo," Mooney said. It is a doomed strategy because broadcasters do not have a regulatory problem, he said. "They've got a market problem."

Broadcasting "is a mass-market advertising medium" in a "rapidly segmenting consumer marketplace," he said. The networks can compete with each other, he said, "but not also with 20 very efficiently run cable networks. Put a slightly different way, we've taken their margin, and they don't know what to do about it." ■

## COX NEGOTIATES FOR RYSHER ENTERTAINMENT

*Hopes to merge syndication company with TPE, and line up Samples to succeed Masini*

By Steve McClellan

**C**ox Enterprises is negotiating to buy Rysher Entertainment, a syndication company formed last year by former Warner Bros. Domestic Television Distribution executive Keith Samples.

According to sources familiar with the talks, Cox hopes to acquire Rysher and merge it with Television Program Enterprises, its existing program distribution arm. The plan is to set Samples up as successor to Al Masini, who founded and currently manages TPE, sources said.

Masini is now in the second year of a five-year contract to manage TPE and Telerep, one of the largest rep firms in the country. Cox officials refused to comment on the report last week, and Masini could not be

reached at deadline. Sources said he has talked of retiring at some point and of the need to set up a line of succession. "He definitely doesn't want to be doing this forever," said the source.

Earlier this year, Rysher entered negotiations to be acquired by Kushner-Locke Co., Los Angeles, but the deal fell through less than two months after the plan was announced last June.

Negotiations between Cox and Rysher have been going on for several months. Sources said Cox loaned Rysher several million dollars in operating capital this year and, in exchange, obtained first rights to acquire the company. "Both sides definitely want to do this deal," said one source with knowledge of the talks.

One sticking point: Before the deal can go through, Samples must obtain a release from Warner Bros., where Samples served as executive vice president in charge of off-network and movie-package sales before forming his own company in April 1991. According to one source, WBDTD President Dick Robertson is said to be inclined to give the release, although the issue is not resolved. Robertson declined to comment last week.

Rysher's first project, launched last year, was *Saved by the Bell*. This year it launched two weekly shows—*Highlander* and *Prime Suspect*—and a movie package, and acquired the rights to *Uptown Comedy Club*. For next season, the company has announced plans to launch a new talk-variety show aimed at younger viewers, called *Wavelength*. ■