

third dimension | public radio, t.v.

NETV commissioner: Nebraska public radio would provide variety

By Gail Smith

Radio needs more variety, according to Philip Heckman, chairman of the Nebraska Educational Television (NETV) Commission, and he said that is one reason why he supports public radio.

He sent a letter about a year and a half ago to fellow commission members suggesting they study the possibility of public radio in Nebraska.

The members agreed to do the study, he said, and a grant of \$25,000 from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting was given the commission to be used for the study. The money was used to hire Robertson Associates, Inc., a Florida-based consulting firm, to study the feasibility of public radio in Nebraska, Heckman said.

The NETV commission also formed a committee to make further studies, he said. The committee has three commission members: Edwin Nelson of Chadron, chairman; James Johnson of Kearney; and Alvin Gilmore of Omaha. Heckman said the committee is studying public radio in other states, including Wisconsin, Iowa and Minnesota.

The committee will report to the commission by September, Heckman said.

Nebraska public radio would not necessarily be a part of NETV, he said, but he added he thinks the NETV Commission has a responsibility as a public broadcasting commission to consider public radio.

At a Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) meeting in Washington, D.C., (before he sent the letter to commission members), Heckman said he became aware of public radio. Heckman is a member of the PBS national board.

Listens while traveling

At the meeting, he said, he got a list of public radio frequencies. Heckman travels about 40,000 miles a year for his job as president of Doane College in Crete, and said he began listening to public radio stations while traveling.

Heckman said he thinks public radio programs are "stimulating, instructional and humorous." In Nebraska, he said, public radio would carry state programs along with programs from National Public Radio (NPR) in Washington, D. C., which he said is comparable to television's PBS.

The public radio programs Heckman said he hears while traveling include classical music, discussions and in-

depth news. In Iowa, one station carries the state Legislature from "gavel to gavel," he said.

Some public stations carry "literary dramas," he said, which allows listeners to use their imaginations. Heckman also said he heard one NPR program which featured a man reading for about half an hour each day from the best-selling novel *Watership Down*.

Public radio programs in other states include classical music, discussions, in-depth news and the state legislature proceedings from "gavel to gavel". One program features a man reading for about half an hour each day from the best-selling novel *Watership Down*.

He said he would prefer it if commercial radio stations carried this type of program because he said he considers himself a "free enterprise person." But he added he thinks people are denied this type of program now, and should have it.

Heckman said he has received letters from Nebraskans supporting public radio in the state. He said he thinks that when people learn about public radio, they support it.

Many options are available for the organization of Nebraska public radio if it becomes a reality, Heckman said. The Robertson Associates report and current studies by the commission's committee will help determine the best possibilities, he added.

The Robertson report, released in October, 1975, outlined a nine-phase plan for development of public radio in Nebraska. According to the report, "In order to capitalize on Nebraska's previous investment in television sites, buildings, and towers, the plan envisions eventual establishment of a high-power FM transmitter and antenna at nine of the 10 existing ETV sites (all sites except Omaha, because a station at Mead can broadcast to both Lincoln and Omaha.)"

Initial cost, 24 cents each

If all nine phases of the proposed system were activated today, the report said, the total state population could be reached at an initial cost of about 24 cents per Nebraskan. That figure assumes 75 per cent matching funds from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW), the report said. Without HEW assistance, the capital cost for the entire system, if activated now, would be about 85 cents per Nebraskan, based on the 1970 population of approximately 1.5 million, according to the report.

It estimated the cost of operating the state-wide system at less than one cent per week per Nebraskan.

But the report also stated that "with all of the justifiable places to spend public funds in these times, the decision may be made to develop public radio in phases—hence the plan proposed, which can be implemented as slowly or as rapidly as desired."

Phase 1, the report said, would create KUON-FM public radio station, Lincoln, using the existing transmitter site, building and tower at Mead. The coverage area would include 62 per cent of the state's total population, the report said.

The other eight phases would include stations at Hastings, Norfolk, Lexington, North Platte, Alliance, Pawnee City, Bassett and Merriman.



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