

# Bob Hope Wins FCC License Fight

By Jack Anderson

Choosing new owners for radio station KRLA in Pasadena, Calif., was a problem that perplexed the Federal Communications Commission for more than a decade.

Last month the FCC, dominated now by President Nixon's appointees, solved the problem by awarding the \$15 million permit to a group of the President's friends. The majority stockholder and corporate chairman is the famed comedian and presidential pal Bob Hope.

The KRLA license is worth a fortune to the Hope consortium whose selection was fraught with peculiarities. The struggle for the station began in 1962 when the FCC refused to re-license the former owners because of "management neglect and efforts to mislead the commission."

The 50,000-watt station was turned over to a nonprofit corporation while the FCC decided who should run it. A score of applications were filed.

It took more than a decade of hearings before the FCC on Dec. 5 awarded the golden pie to Bob Hope and his partners. All four Nixon appointees voted in Hope's favor.

The official decision was prepared by Chairman Dean Burch. The case, he wrote, was "ex-

tremely close and troublesome." The "legal, factual, technical and policy questions" were "frequently conflicting." The FCC was forced to choose, said Burch, "among applicants with a variety of shortcomings."

Hope's group was picked on technical and engineering grounds. Yet we interviewed nearly a dozen lawyers and engineers familiar with the case. To a man, they felt that awarding the station to Hope, et al, on engineering grounds was absurd. Said one expert: "It looks like an excuse to give them the license."

Indeed, the FCC's own review board denied Hope's application in 1971 "on technical engineering grounds." Yet precisely the same engineering proposal was cited as the basis for awarding the license to the Hope syndicate in 1973.

The official FCC press release, announcing the decision, nowhere mentioned Bob Hope. The announcement stated simply that the license had been awarded to the "Western Broadcasting Corporation."

It took a thorough search of the voluminous file to find out who was behind Western Broadcasting. The principal stockholder is Hope who, incidentally, contributed \$50,000 to Nixon's 1972 campaign.

The second biggest stock-

holder, until he came to the White House in 1971, was Richard A. Moore, whom the public may remember best as the gentle, absent-minded, Watergate witness. He reportedly was sent to Washington by Hope in 1970 to help Attorney General John N. Mitchell with his image.

Moore divested his 20 per cent share of Western Broadcasting when he moved to the White House a year later.

Another major stockholder, with 15 per cent interest, is Ed Pauley, president of Pauley Petroleum, Inc. Although he is a nominal Democrat, Pauley forked over \$35,000 to the Nixon campaign.

Another entertainer-entrepreneur, Art Linkletter, also owns 5 per cent of the company.

Four of the unsuccessful applicants were given black marks because their proposed site was too near "certain land reclamation and dredging projects" where "earth moving cranes" would interfere with the station's signal. This "reclamation" project, we learned, was the construction of the Pomona Freeway, which was completed in 1965.

The FCC's precedents, furthermore, hold that owners and operators of a radio station live in the "community of license." Only one minor stockholder of Western Broadcasting, G. Syd-

ney Barton, lives in Pasadena.

Footnote: We spoke with Bob Hope, who laughed off the suggestion that the White House was granting him a favor. Western's case, he said, was "won with our engineering." Burch never returned our repeated calls. Other commissioners refused to comment for the record.

Fly In—Despite the worsening energy crisis, Veterans' Administrator Donald Johnson has called more than 260 field officials to Washington next week for a massive fly-in conference. Many will bring their wives. They could save both fuel and money by using the VA's sophisticated "hotline" system, which makes it possible for dozens of officials around the country to participate in conference calls.

Proud Enemy—Each year, the Civil Service Commission invites former government bigwigs to update their biographies. "We are particularly interested," writes the commission, "in information about new positions, new college degrees, major awards, etc." Dr. Herbert Ley, the former Food and Drug commissioner, wrote back that he had indeed received a "major award" this year. He had been included, he said, "among those listed as White House 'enemies.'"

© 1974 United Feature Syndicated