

FCC chief Hundt urges anti-alcohol PSA push

By Ira Telnowitz

Federal Communications Commission Chairman Reed Hundt is for the first time saying his concern about alcohol ads extends beyond liquor and suggesting TV stations airing beer and wine ads could be forced to carry anti-alcohol messages.

Conceding that the \$700 million spent annually on beer and wine advertising has created a "reliance" on the money that makes eliminating the ads unlikely, Mr. Hundt floated a trial balloon he called a "PSA antidote."

From 1968 to '70, the FCC used its Fairness Doctrine to require broadcasters to air one anti-tobacco ad for every four paid tobacco ads they ran. Under that pressure, tobacco marketers in 1970 volun-

tarily stopped all broadcast ads, an action then passed into law by Congress. The FCC abandoned the Fairness Doctrine a decade ago.

Mr. Hundt, unveiling his new proposal during a youth summit sponsored by Mothers Against Drunk Driving, never mentioned any specific ratio and indicated that broadcasters would be required to provide the time for the ads.

1-FOR-1 TRADEOFF

In a prepared text of the speech, however, he suggested a one-for-one tradeoff for any distilled spirits ads, and suggested that spirits marketers buy the time for the spots.

Mr. Hundt had been urging a ban on spirits ads. He mentioned the ban in his speech even while bringing up other alternatives. Less than 36 hours after Mr.

Hundt's speech, the National Council on Alcoholism & Drug Dependence, MADD and 21 other groups petitioned the FCC to act on the proposal.

The petition quickly drew attacks from broadcasters, alcohol marketers and ad groups.

The council said it had been planning the petition, which asked for a "significant" number of anti-alcohol spots, for two months. "NCADD has never supported

a ban," said Sarah Kayson, director of public policy. "We believe the more information out there, the better. Broadcasters are required to broadcast in the public interest, and we would argue that because they take money to advertise alcohol in the public interest, they should be required to provide advertising that counters it."

The petition quickly drew attacks from broadcasters, alcohol marketers and ad groups—and praise from Mr. Hundt.

"Yet more concerned citizens have asked the FCC to take a hard look at the issues raised by the introduction of hard-liquor advertisements on television," said Mr.

Hundt, who has so far been unsuccessful in getting fellow commissioners to launch an inquiry into broadcast alcohol ads.

'TREMENDOUS EFFECT'

"The approach had a tremendous effect when it was applied to cigarette advertising in the late 1960s, and should be considered here," he added.

The Beer Institute and Anheuser-Busch were among those quick to blast the idea.

"We applaud and support efforts to help continue the progress against drunk driving, teen drinking and alcohol abuse . . . but beer advertising has nothing to do with these problems," said A-B VP Stephen Lambright, in a statement. "Study after study has shown that advertising does not cause teens to start drinking or current drinkers to drink abusively. There is simply no reason for beer ads to be 'coun-tered.'" □

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