The cable battle

Head of black owned cable company submits 'alternative' franchising plan to mayor

By Sue Williams
AFRO Staff WRiter

The president of a black-owned cable television company here has submitted a franchising plan to Mayor Schaefer that could allow for an eventual multiple franchise system in Baltimore despite the city's apparent preference for a single-ownership system.

Lester Green, president of Community Communications System, Inc., said his plan would allow for a joint venture, as proposed by the city, between a majority company and a minority firm at the outset of the development of the cable system here.

He said that under his plan, franchises would be awarded according to the defined areas of business responsibility in a city-wide joint venture.

Each franchise would be totally responsible for its area of expertise, Green said.

After, however the cable system was installed and was operating in accordance with specifications set forth by the initial Request for Proposal RFP), which would be submitted by the majority firm at the outset, the joint venture would be dissolved, with control and ownership of the franchise for each individual area going to the company which had that area of responsibility under the joint venture.

In that way, Green said, the "minority involvement" would be assured of being real in terms of actual ownership and profit-making, as opposed to a more token-type of participation.

"My plan," he continued, "would allow for the uniformity of technology, rates and services that the mayor says would come with a single franchise under the joint venture, and at the same time allow for black ownership of a franchise."

Green said that his company had attempted to sway the minds of Commission members by presenting to them copies of a report issued in 1975 by Johns Hopkins University that said that even within a single-franchise system, four separate distribution centers, or "hubs," would have to be set up in Baltimore City.

It was on the basis of that report, Green said, coupled with his company's own research on requirements for cable here, that prompted him to press for multiple franchise system with a black owned firm owning at least one quadrant of the city.

Green said that figures released by the U.S. Census Bureau for 1980 showed that at least two areas of the city are predominantly black.

He said that the only way to insure that the needs of the citizens in those areas would be met would be to own a franchise within a multiple franchise system. His recommendations, however, were rejected by the Commission, which voted for a single franchise.

Green said that his biggest objection to the single franchise notion is that any multipe system operator, or MSO, could find a way to get around the required "minority participation" clause.

"Theoretically, a minority company could come in and lay a carpet and the MSO's responsibility to include 25 percent participation would have been met," he said.

Green said that the mayor's office had called his company to acknowledge of receipt of the plan, but at AFRO presstime, no meeting between the mayor and Green had been set up to discuss it.

"I would think," Green said, "that unless people are out and out racists, they would find it very hard not to accept this plan."

A spokesman for Cox Cable Company in Atlanta said that he "did not feel it would be appropriate" for him to comment on Green's plan.

Bruce Burnham, vice president of franchising for the giant communications firm, said he was in favor of a single awardee in Baltimore.

"I don't know if his 'Green's) plan would work or not," he said, "but I don't think it would be appropriate for me to comment on it.

"But I do think the idea of having one awardee would be good for making sure a uniformed system was built."

(AFRO photo by Mark Gail)

LESTER GREEN says plan submitted to mayor by his company should cause some serious consideration on the part of the city.

Burnham would not answer for Cox when it was suggested to him that Green's plan would allow for uniformity.

A member of the CATV Commission, Lowell Whitehurst, said that he felt the plan could work but that it would take a lot of planning and time.

Whitehurst, the only member of the Commission to vote against adoption of the preliminary report recommending a single franchise, said that "with enough background information and expertise to back up the plan, the mayor would be forced to listen."

But Whitehurst expressed pessimism that the plan would be approved or that the present situation here would change, and he accused some of the city's politicians who raised cries of protest against the CATV report of being more rhetorical than useful.

This has been my first venture into the political spectrum," Whitehurst said, "and frankly, I'm disgusted.

"A lot of things said in City Council chambers that Monday were nothing but a lot of rhetoric. Those blacks who have given the outcry...are basically useless," he said.

Whitehurst, while maintaining his pessimistic outlook for the success of Green's plan, said that he wished he had seen it earlier.

He also said that the current recommendation by the Commission, unless they are spelled out specifically, could mean doom for blacks in cable here.

"If you don't spell it out (minority involvement) word for word, the majority company is going to find a way to get around it," he said. Whitehurst, as well as Green and several City Council members have already pressed the Commission to delete the word "minority" and replace it with the word "black" in defining minority participation.

Bruce Burnham of Cox said that the issue of minority ownership is so hot here that he doubts any company will be awarded a franchise without solid and legally binding specifications for minority involvement.

He said that Cox, in Oklahoma City, addressed a similar problem by making sure a black firm, Pan-Oklahoma, fully owns 25 percent of the single franchise there. That city was also set up under a joint venture plan.

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Young says blacks on forces make difference

NOBLE CONVENTION — Lee P. Brown, public safety commissioner in Atlanta, (L) is shown talking with Atkins Warren, a member of the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement-Executives at a luncheon held this week at the Convention Center. "Violent Crime in America A Call for Action," is the theme.

AFRO Photo by Roman Hankewycz

By Sue Williams
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Former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Andrew Young said this week that integrated police forces throughout the country will "create the difference between the 60s and the 80s."

Young, speaking at the Convention Center for the 5th Annual Conference of the National Oeganization of Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE), cited the importance of having blacks on the law forces and said that blacks at the top levels are making a difference now.

"There's no way we could have gone through the ordeal of Atlanta," he said, "without the presence of P. Lee Brown." Brown is Atlanta's public safety commissioner who has been in charge of the investigation into the Atlanta child-murders.

"We're in a period where we will see more poverty, more unemployment, more problems. The only possible reassurance that things won't explode will be good police-community relations."

Young said that blacks on the forces and in top ranks have been sources of "assurance" to city residents, many of whom, in large metropolitan areas, happen to be black.

He cited the success of police work in Detroit, considered one of the nation's worst crime-ridden cities, saying that "unemployment there didn't necessarily mean high crime."

Young blasted the Reagan administration for its insentivity to the poor and disadvantaged, saying that the leadership for the masses will have to come from local forces.

But he said that the job of strict law enforcement cannot be left to the "uniformed officer," saying that the burden on officers today is almost intolerable."

"Any additional support the police get," he said, "will not come from Reagan."

Despite the basically bleak economic outlook for many of the country's blacks, Young said he had too much confidence in black people to believe they will let the Reagan administration get them down.

He also said that he doubted unemployment in the country will bring about civil disturbances, as had been predicted.

Because black leaders are taking on more responsibilities toward enforcing the law, and because he perceives a grass-roots organization among citizens to combat crime, Young feels the outlook for the country is basically good.

Where there have not been blacks on the police force in substantial numbers, he said, or where the citizen support and organization has been minimal, there have the most serious problems erupted.

He cited Miami, where blacks rioted recently following the acquittal of a policeman accused of fatally beating a black youth.

"The glaring omission in all the press accounts of what happened in Miami," he said, "is that there were almost no black officers on the Miami force."

Young also spoke briefly on the racial disturbances in England, saying that part of the reason racial problems are so severe in that country is that England never wanted to admit it has a race problem.

He said the violence there is a "derivative violence," growing from the economic policies of Prime Minister Margaret Thaicher, low wages, poor living conditions, and no respect, as well as the country's refusal to face its race problem.

Young was in Baltimore to address participants of the NOBLE convention, being held at the Convention Center, before returning to Atlanta.

The conference, which began Monday, is scheduled through Saturday evening, with guest speakers, workshops, and a ball to raise funds for the Major McNeil Brockington Scholarship Fund. The scholarship is awarded annually to students of criminal justice.

POLICE LAUNCH RECRUITMENT DRIVE — Officer Charles M. Markiewicz, supervisor in charge of the recruiting administrative operations, Major Donald E. Woods, director of personnel and Police Agent Harlow Fullwood Jr., supervisor in ch charge of the recruiting field force operations, reviews plans to attract 203 police entrance level officers. I f you would like to become a police officer call 396-2340.

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COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM (CDBG)
IN THE AUDITORIUM (UPPER LEVEL) OF THE
WAR MEMORIAL BUILDING
LOCATED ON N. GAY STREET BETWEEN FAYETTE AND LEXINGTON STREETS
7:00 P.M., WEDNESDAY, JULY 29, 1981

The purpose of this hearing, in accordance with CDBG procedures, is to give citizens the opportunity to participate in the development of Baltimore City's CDBG Application for the eighth year of funding and to discuss a revision to the CDBG Citizen Participation Plan.

For further information, telephone 396-4234, or visit our office at 222 E. Saratoga Street, Room 510, where copies of the above are available for public review.

M. J. Brodie, Commissioner
Dept. of Housing & Community Development

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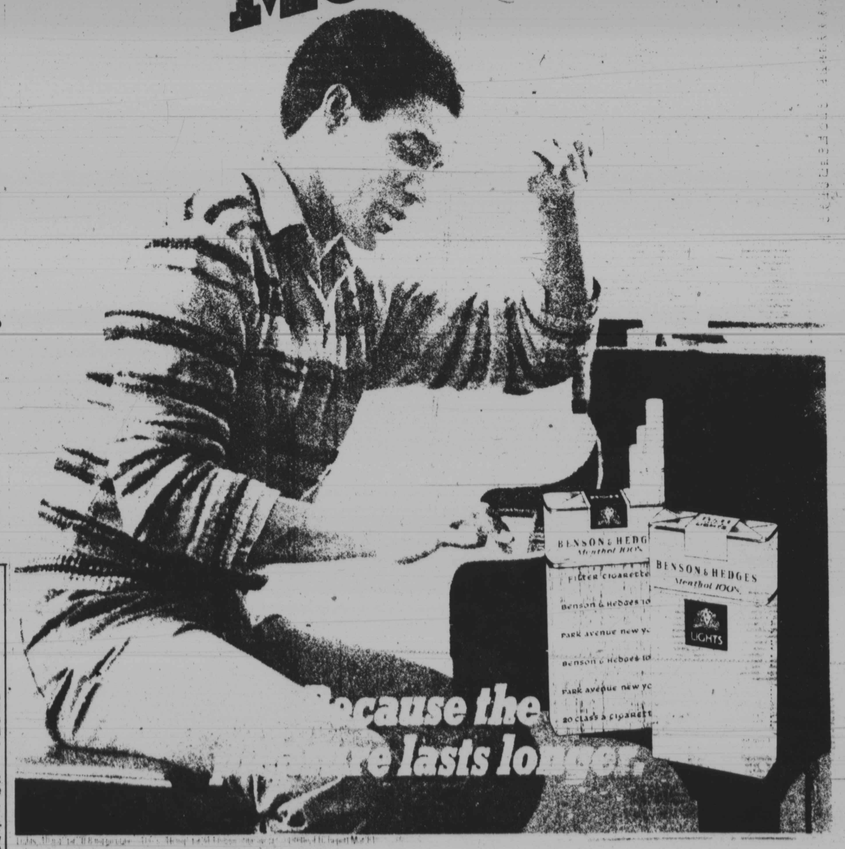

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