

TESTIMONY OF JOHN W. BRYANT

The Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats
and International Relations, Committee on Government Reform,
U.S. House of Representatives

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I wish to thank Chairman Shays and the members of the subcommittee for the invitation to offer my observations regarding the U.S. role in World Radio Conferences.

I served as WRC Ambassador in 1997, immediately after completing 14 years service in the House of Representatives as a member of the Subcommittee on Telecommunications of the Committee on Energy and Commerce.

I was chosen for this post in February of 1997 in part, no doubt, due to the presumption that my long tenure on the Telecommunications Subcommittee indicated familiarity with the subject matter of the World Radio Conference.

In fact, I was to be another in a long line of WRC Ambassadors with a background in telecommunications, who, while perhaps possessing enthusiasm and talent for many parts of the assignment, had little knowledge of the technical substance of international spectrum allocation and no knowledge of the institutional history or the dominant personalities in the WRC process.

As a result, in 1997, as in so many previous years, the newly-designated WRC Ambassador, leader of the U.S. delegation to the World Radio Conference, in charge of the process of forming the U.S. agenda for the conference, and responsible to see that the final treaty protects and advances the interests of the United States, knew less about the process than perhaps any other participant. And, with the treaty-writing conference only months away, there was little time to learn.

Like previous WRC Ambassadors, I believe I rose to the occasion and am proud of the accomplishments of the 1997 delegation. But I also strongly believe our critical national interests are placed at risk by a process that

begins late in the WRC treaty-writing cycle, lacks year-around management for long-term objectives, and is underfunded.

I offer the following four recommendations:

1. **The responsibility for the WRC and the rank of ambassador should be given to a presidential appointee or career foreign service professional who works year-around in the International Telecommunications Union process.** Our tradition of on-the-job training in this post should be discontinued in favor of the same type of professional management of spectrum allocation employed by other nations, including our most important rivals.

There are many conferences, decisions, and allied activities of the ITU which occur between World Radio Conferences which have a direct bearing on the relations between participating nations, their individual representatives, and their long-term policy decisions. Unless the leader of our nation's WRC efforts is able to actively participate in this process, it will not be managed with an eye to maximizing the ability of the U.S. to fulfill its objectives at the subsequent World Radio Conference.

2. **If the WRC Ambassador is to continue to be a political appointee, that person should be appointed to full-time duty no less than two years before the next scheduled WRC.** Preparation for this process is critical, as the substantive work of the WRC is quite complicated. Knowledge of the international participants is also critical. Like every diplomatic effort, the mix of international interests, personalities, and, in this case, technical issues, is extremely complex. Without this knowledge, the WRC Ambassador is at a major disadvantage in planning and executing a successful WRC strategy.

It is disconcerting to think that, with our current process, the newly appointed head of the U.S. delegation begins his tenure presiding over meetings of U.S. stakeholders in which he knows less than any other participant. He then progresses to international meetings in which almost all other participants, including, most importantly, the heads of the delegations of our most important international rivals, have known each other personally and professionally for many years.

- 3. Funding for the WRC process should match its critical importance to our economy and national security.** It must include an office and staff for the WRC Ambassador and an adequate travel budget.

The staff need not be large, as the technical support provided by the career experts at the State Department, FCC, NTIA, and other agencies is excellent. But functioning with no personal staff, as previous WRC Ambassador's have had to do, is an unacceptable hindrance for such an important task. (Note that delegation of the WRC portfolio to a full-time professional, rather than a part-time temporary appointee, would resolve the staff issue, as a staff would already be in place).

The WRC Ambassador's primary objective is to convince foreign governments to support the U.S. position on issues of critical importance. This requires the ability to travel extensively in order to be able to inform other nations of the merits of the U.S. position, to fully understand the needs and objectives of the other nations, and to build personal relationships necessary for success in the negotiations. Previous WRC Ambassadors have been too limited in their ability to travel, due to budget constraints.

- 4. The State Department should continue to have principal responsibility for the WRC process and delegation.** The complex technical issues considered in the WRC process should not obscure the fact that these issues are ultimately geopolitical in nature: they bear directly on critical national economic and security interests and cannot be considered separately from other critical foreign policy objectives and concerns.

There will continue to be instances in which government leaders who outrank the WRC Ambassador in the diplomatic process will need to be called upon to reach out to their counterparts in foreign governments to protect or advance a national priority in the WRC process. In 1997, certain governments aggressively advanced numerous proposals which were a threat to the national security of the United States and its allies. One such proposal would have compromised the operation of our global positioning system, for example. These matters were not only addressed in the WRC process, they were also addressed expeditiously at higher diplomatic levels, a process that would have been more difficult if responsibility for the WRC process resided in an agency other than State.

