

CABLE TV TESTIMONY - 4/28/87

My name is George Pruitt and I am President of Thomas A. Edison State College, New Jersey's statewide nonresident public institution of higher learning for adult students.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the use of cable television for adult learning throughout New Jersey. Since cable television is part of the telecommunications revolution which has wrought dramatic changes in our society and in our economy, and continues to change our lives with ever-increasing speed, it is only fitting that we ensure that it be used effectively and pervasively to make educational opportunities available to all citizens. Because the Cable Television Network can deliver education to adults in their homes, on their jobs, and in their community centers, it could enable all motivated and capable adults to earn college degrees; teachers and other professionals to keep up-to-date in their specialties; workers to learn to be more productive in their current jobs or to retrain for entirely different jobs as our economy increasingly requires; and every New Jerseyian to be at least functionally literate. Thus, it could make lifelong, continuous education a reality.

Thomas A. Edison State College was founded in 1972 as an innovative approach to serving the New Jersey adult learner's needs for higher education. It became a national model, emulated and praised for its unique approach and ability to maintain academic quality. In 1982, another innovation took place in New Jersey: the

founding of the Cable Television Network. This was an innovative approach to providing public service programming to New Jersey residents. It combined public and private efforts. Unfortunately, the private sector commitment is under serious question, whereas the public sector has provided the CTN with quality programming in public service to our citizens.

While not putting all of its educational eggs in one delivery basket, Edison State College's plans and expenditure of funds rely in part on statewide cable access. Because of our statewide mission, a statewide access system is an absolute necessity for the College and its students.

Edison State College has committed tens of thousands of dollars to the purchase of programming, and several thousands of dollars to the purchase of new equipment in the anticipation that air time would be available over CTN. For those students who live in areas of the state where the broadcast transmission of New Jersey Network cannot be received, CTN is their only way to view programming. Further, CTN access figures in Edison's strategic planning to interface video and data transmission. Linking students through personal computers and cable would allow the College to offer New Jersey adult learners an easy-to-access, state-of-the-art telecommunications system of higher education. Such a system is now in development and partially implemented. A number of New Jersey Fortune 500 companies are committed to participating. Additionally, the College is poised to participate, in cooperation with the community college sector, with a large number of businesses and industries in South Jersey.

It is tragic that New Jersey -- who has led the nation in statewide cable interconnection -- should retreat from the crossroads at the moment when other states are moving rapidly ahead with this technology. A statewide interconnect is unique. Its existence positions New Jersey at the cutting edge of the accelerating telecommunications revolution, where the interfacing of computers, video, and interactive voice transmission is imminent.

Who uses this technology? Study after study paints the same picture. Students enrolled in television courses are largely over the age of 25. Most of these students are workers. Some sixty percent hold down **full-time** jobs outside their homes; some thirty percent work part-time outside their homes. Most of the rest are housewives, whom we all know work full-time inside their homes. Somewhat over one-half of these students are women. Almost all of them, men and women, have family responsibilities to fulfill, along with their jobs. Indeed, these students are hard-working and ambitious adults, looking to cable television and its educational programming to help them get a promotion or a raise, to keep up-to-date in their fields, to retrain for new careers. Some sixty percent of these students say they would not have enrolled in a course if it had not been available by television.

Can we afford to deny this educational opportunity to our citizens? Can we afford to pull back from the challenge of the telecommunications revolution? Can we afford **not** to use this technology to keep New Jersey on the competitive edge? We can no more afford to say yes to these questions than we can afford to

replace all the libraries with shopping malls. While the right to earn a profit is part of our democratic society, without guaranteed open access to information and education, there would be no democratic society.

The important point is that only by guaranteeing a statewide cable access system can we build for the future. Let us not waste the expenditures of time, money, energy, and creativity which went into the creation of CTN. We need to consider the expansion of statewide access, not a retreat from it. Such a commitment would show dividends in the state's most valuable resource -- human capital. Such a commitment will yield a handsome payoff in excellent, cost-effective education, a more productive state economy, and a more vital New Jersey.

It is my hope that cable television and the cable television operators of this state prosper. I hope they produce a fair return to their investors, and I hope they have capital available to expand and improve their services, but all of us in business and education and in government have a fundamental and underlying responsibility to the public welfare. The concept of social responsibility in a free-market society is well established and well understood. The current proposals to reduce access for educational public service programming offends the public interest. We ask your assistance this evening in joining us in protecting the public trust.

Thank you for your attention, and I am available for your questions.