

To the NAB Board of Directors:

Tomorrow, a press release will be sent to reporters announcing my retirement as EVP of NAB Communications effective July 1. This decision has been a long time coming. More than a year ago, I told Gordon I would be retiring on or near my 24th anniversary at NAB, and we settled on July 1. Gordon asked me to continue as a consultant with NAB, and I've accepted his offer.

Ann Marie Cumming – senior VP of Communications and my number 2 in the department for the last 10 years – will become the primary spokesperson for NAB under a merger of the Communications and Marketing departments that will be headed by executive vice president Michelle Lehman.

This is a bittersweet moment for me; serving as chief NAB spokesman since 1996 has been the privilege of my professional life. I've been in the catbird seat for countless moments in broadcast history: a spectrum auction that ushered in HDTV, and endless performance royalty fights with record labels. Titanic fights with pay TV giants to preserve an essential retransmission consent revenue stream that sustains localism and investigative journalism. SHVA, SHVIA, SHVERA, STELA, STELAR and STCPA satellite TV bills. Low power FM accommodation (while preventing interference to full power stations) and battles against pirate radio. "Indecency" complaints and wardrobe malfunctions. An AEREO Supreme Court win. A second spectrum auction and "TV repack". Apple stiff-arming FM chips on mobile devices. NextGen TV and "white space" fights. And always the media consolidation wars.

I'm most proud of the unparalleled public service of our stations: Amber Alerts – started by broadcasters after a brutal kidnapping and murder of a 3-year Texas girl – that have rescued hundreds of children; heroic 9/11 reporting by networks and local stations; lifesaving Hurricane Katrina and Superstorm Sandy coverage and relief efforts; an OK2Talk NAB PSA campaign that prodded thousands of people to seek mental health help; an NAB anti-opioid PSA campaign that helped countless Americans avoid addiction and overdose; and NAB's hand-delivery of 10,000 radios to Puerto Ricans desperate for lifeline information after Hurricane Maria.

Today, amid the COVID-19 crisis, broadcasters are again stepping up. While suffering the worst advertising collapse in decades, our stations remain the go-to source for credible, lifeline information. And we're raising tens of millions for hunger relief, spotlighting the work of hospital workers and first responders, and doing our best to keep local businesses afloat. I've spent a career highlighting broadcast localism and public service, because that's what sets our business apart from all of our competitors. And I'll never apologize for defending local broadcasting as a free-of-charge, indispensable and ubiquitous news and entertainment source for every hometown in America.

Allow me to acknowledge some of those who've helped me along the way:

- **NAB Board members**, past and present, who are so critical to the success of our organization. Our staff takes guidance from you, and the record is clear that when our Board and membership are united, we can achieve great things in Washington for the American people and our members;
- **Longtime NAB President Eddie Fritts**, who hired me from my reporting job as DC bureau chief for *Variety*. I loved being a reporter and never planned to be a "PR guy" until Eddie came calling. I can't thank him enough. Eddie was my mentor, golfing pal, and one of the shrewdest political minds Washington DC has ever seen;

- **Gordon Smith**, whose wins for NAB members on Capitol Hill speak for themselves. Gordon's calming presence and political savvy are matched only by an uncommon generosity of spirit. We are so fortunate to have Gordon at the helm of NAB at a time of toxic Beltway partisanship, and I value his daily life lessons on decency and kindness;
- **NAB member stations and NASBA/State Association Executives**. Every victory that NAB has achieved has been a direct result of the horsepower that comes from rank-and-file grass-roots membership in coordination with the SAEs;
- **NAB staff**. I'm proud of what we've accomplished – from our first-rate government advocacy to technology advancement to our world-class trade shows. "Team NAB" has never been more talented than the current staff put together by Gordon, former COO Chris Ornelas and current COO Curtis LeGeyt;
- **Members of the NAB Communications team**, past and present, which includes NAB Research and NAB Public Service. If I did anything well in 24 years, it was to hire good people. Many Comms team members went on to high profile jobs at places like Cisco, Akamai, FOX and Nielsen. I'm happy to now pass the torch to those who are younger, smarter and more tech-savvy than me, and I'm especially pleased that Ann Marie Cumming will become NAB's chief spokesperson. Ann Marie and I have worked together – off and on – for nearly a quarter century; she's the definition of "grace under pressure", and will do a superb job under the guidance of Michelle Lehman.

Finally, I'd like to thank the hundreds of print, on-air and web journalists who covered NAB during my tenure. With rare exception, these reporters were fair, professional, and committed to unbiased, factual reporting.

It's fashionable today for politicians of both parties to attack "the media" and to even label reporters as "the enemy". I hope that type of incendiary rhetoric will soon stop. I sat in the front row at the 2015 church service honoring the lives of Alison Parker and Adam Ward, a reporter and cameraman for WDBJ-TV Roanoke, who were murdered on air by a former co-worker while on a routine assignment. It was one of the most heart-wrenching scenes I've ever witnessed. I worry that unless our political leaders dial back the hostility towards reporters, there will be more of these senseless acts in the future.

Yes, reporters' work should be questioned, scrutinized and criticized. Shoddy or slanted journalism needs to be exposed. But it should also be acknowledged that journalism is a noble and honorable profession worthy of our collective respect and appreciation.

With that, I wish all of you well. Godspeed to you, your families and your employees in this difficult period. We'll survive the COVID-19 crisis, and I'm certain that it will be broadcasting that will help lead America out of the recovery. Thank you for the lifelong friendships and the opportunity to work these many years on behalf of broadcasters. I look forward to staying in touch during my transition to NAB consultant and beyond.

Regards,

Dennis Wharton