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STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT INFORMATION, JUSTICE, AND
AGRICULTURE OF THE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT
OPERATIONS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ON

UNITED STATES PREPARATIONS FOR THE 1983
REGIONAL ADMINISTRATIVE RADIO CONFERENCE

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee:

We welcome your invitation to discuss our review of U. S. preparations for the 1983 Regional Administrative Radio Conference (RARC-83). The Conference--a function of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU)--will plan for the Western Hemisphere Nations' implementation of broadcast satellite service and will determine the technical rules under which the service will operate.

Many Government and private sector sources predict that broadcast satellite service could develop into a multibillion dollar industry in the United States by the end of the decade. Decisions made at the Conference will affect the development of this service. Two of the many issues that the Conference is likely to deal with include

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--deciding on whether to approve a specific and detailed frequency allocation plan favored by some Western Hemisphere countries or a flexible allocation system favored by the United States, and

--addressing the problems of sharing the designated broadcasting satellite service radio frequencies with existing communications satellites.

At the request of this Subcommittee, we reviewed the preparatory activities of the principal Federal agencies involved in the Conference--the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), and the Department of State. Our work concentrated on the technical, diplomatic, and policy preparations by the agencies. Our report on the preparations--done for this Subcommittee--was released on March 4, 1983 (GAO/RCED-83-121). We looked at the following areas:

--Interagency coordination of Conference preparation.

--Delegation composition, selection, and support.

--Budget planning for the Conference.

--Computer support for the Conference.

Overall, Mr. Chairman, while the various agencies involved have been diligent in preparing for technical issues to be addressed at the Conference, managerial problems have hampered preparations somewhat. These include delays in delegate confirmation, concerns over budgeting restraints, and delays in developing Conference computer support.

The managerial problems are now being addressed. But one remaining issue needs attention--the extent to which U.S. participation in bilateral/multilateral meetings and seminars will take place before the Conference opens. Representatives to earlier conferences believe these sessions offer the United States an opportunity to establish rapport with other delegations and a chance to demonstrate the merits of the U.S. favored flexible frequency allocation system.

COORDINATION OF PREPARATIONS
FOR CONFERENCE

As you are aware, the Congress has been concerned that the Federal agencies responsible for representing the United States at past regional or world conferences have not devoted sufficient effort to coordinating and preparing for them. However, in the case of RARC-83, we found that interagency committees have helped to coordinate both policy and technical preparations for the Conference.

State Department committees are concerned primarily with policy issues involved in conferences. In June 1980, the State Department established a Coordinating Committee for Future Radio Conferences which included representatives from the State Department, NTIA, and FCC. According to a statement of its purpose, the coordinating committee works on U.S. preparations for upcoming ITU conferences by providing overall coordination, defining U.S. objectives, developing strategies and assuring the timely preparation of positions for various radio conferences. In September 1982, individual committee participants became extremely involved in work on the ITU plenipotentiary conference. State plans to reconvene the committee this month to continue coordination for future radio conferences.

In addition, the State Department has a senior-level committee, the Interagency Group on International Communications and Information Policy, which coordinates and approves administration policy. Although no RARC-83 preparatory issues have been brought to this committee for action, the committee is expected to consider the final U.S. conference proposals and positions before the delegation leaves in June for Geneva.

During the Conference, delegates will maintain contact with a "home team" situated in the State Department for any modifications of their instructions on U.S. positions. The "home team," an expert group of advisors, will be chaired by the coordinator-designate for International Communications and Information Policy, a new position at the State Department, which is to be given ambassadorial rank.

Technical issues were coordinated by several other agencies. For example, NTIA chaired the Ad Hoc Group 177 of the Interdepartmental Radio Advisory Committee which included participants from the Army, FCC, NASA, NTIA, the National Security Agency, and the State Department. This group met 26 times through July 1982 to discuss technical issues to be addressed at the Conference. It formed a computer user group to help facilitate computer use at the Conference and also coordinated Conference preparations among the agencies.

Several other groups, including international committees of the International Telecommunications Union helped prepare technical positions. Many agency officials, as well as members of the private sector, served on preparatory committees as well as having participated in earlier ITU conferences. Working together, they serve as an informal coordinating network for the current preparations.

FCC PREPARATIONS

FCC is the agency primarily responsible for regulating domestic broadcast satellite service and for preparing initial U.S. conference proposals. It initiated two separate proceedings relating to broadcast satellite service as the basis for coordinating with NTIA and the State Department in formulating U.S. conference proposals.

The first FCC proceeding proposed policies and conditions to govern the authorization of domestic broadcast satellite service. FCC has granted construction permits to eight companies for broadcast satellite service. So that domestic service will conform to international standards, the permits are conditioned on the Conference's outcome.

The second proceeding relates directly to RARC-83 preparations. The Final Report and Order from this docket is expected to set the underlying principles for final U.S. positions at the Conference. When the Report and Order is issued this month, the Conference delegation will begin working on the final position papers. The Delegation Chairman said that approval of the Report and Order will also facilitate communications between the United States and other countries at remaining bilateral and multilateral meetings.

In addition to these proceedings, FCC established an advisory committee which helped integrate private sector views on broadcast satellite service preparations. More than 100 persons participated in the preparatory work of the advisory committee.

DELEGATION SELECTION, COMPOSITION
AND SUPPORT

Former FCC Commissioner Abbott Washburn was nominated by the State Department to be Delegation Chairman. His nomination was approved by the White House on September 17, 1982, and he received the "personal rank" of ambassador on March 2, 1983. Personal rank of ambassador is granted by the President for a 6-month period without Senate confirmation.

On October 27, 1982, the Chairman transmitted his list recommending conference delegation members to the State Department. The State Department transmitted the nomination list to the White House last January. White House approval of the delegation list has not been received but is expected soon. According to the Delegation Chairman, the White House questioned the need for four vice-chairmen rather than a lesser number.

Another unsettled matter involving delegate selection is how the recently amended conflict of interest laws will be applied for this delegation. Two of the four proposed conference vice-chairmen are from the private sector. The new law provides that conflict of interest laws do not apply to a private sector delegate to an international telecommunications conference if the Secretary of State or his designee certifies that no Government employee in the delegation is as well qualified to represent the United States. A State Department delegate said that since that provision was new, its application was still being worked out.

An agreement between the State Department and FCC has provided for the Delegation Chairman's continued employment by FCC from October 1, 1982, through August 31, 1983. Compensation and benefits for the Chairman and his two staff members plus travel, office space, and telephone for the period was estimated

at \$156,973. The State Department has transferred \$100,000 to FCC toward these expenses.

Although private-sector delegates fund themselves, the State Department partially funds delegates from U.S. Government agencies. A February 23 agreement between the State Department and FCC resulted in the State Department funding expenses of FCC delegates to the Conference. The Department will also fund several other Government delegates. In return, FCC will cover the conference-related computer hardware expenses--both in Washington and Geneva.

BUDGET PLANNING

Each Federal agency, for the most part, funded conference activities important to its own responsibilities. Although the State Department and FCC agreed to jointly fund the Delegation Chairman and his staff, funding for other preparatory activities was not formally coordinated in advance among the agencies. A NASA official involved in the RARC-83 preparations said that this made overall planning difficult because no one was ever sure of what agency, if any, was responsible for a given activity.

Officials from State and FCC told us that they experience difficulties in planning budgets for future conferences because the necessary preparatory activities were generally uncertain, and the budget constraints favored more "concrete" activities.

We found that the international conference budget was particularly "tight" at FCC. FCC's fiscal year 1983 international travel budget stood at \$165,000 when \$50,000 was reallocated from the domestic to the international travel budget. According to FCC's Associate Managing Director, an Office of Management and Budget proposed reduction-in-force of 300 employees in the fiscal year 1983 budget has not encouraged members to ask for additional funds. In addition, international

conference preparations were difficult to plan because it was impossible to predict the many contingencies which might arise. For instance, after the fiscal year 1983 budget had been submitted, an ITU committee established a multinational panel of experts which met four times in Geneva to discuss technical problems that had to be resolved at RARC-83. Although ITU pays for one FCC delegate to these meetings, FCC must fund the other delegates--an expense not originally budgeted by the Commission.

At the Department of State, the Office of the Under Secretary and the Office of International Conferences both maintain that their role in funding is for the actual conferences and delegations only and not for the preparatory work. The Director of the Office of International Conferences said that in the fiscal year 1983 appropriation for International Conferences and Contingencies, a total of \$489,000 is for conferences under the auspices of ITU. However, he could not provide us with any further breakdown for individual conferences. He noted that the budget planning for conferences is inexact because many of them are scheduled on shorter notice than RARC-83.

BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL PREPARATORY MEETINGS

Since many U.S. Government and private sector officials agree that much of the necessary negotiation should take place before the Conference begins, emphasis has been placed on bilateral and multilateral sessions. Such meetings are particularly important with Canada, whose broadcast satellite system will most affect ours, primarily because of geographical location.

The Director, Spectrum Planning Staff, NTIA, said that he had noticed at the 1977 World Administrative Radio Conference that there had not been sufficient rapport between the United

States delegation and foreign delegations. He felt that, in the past, this had worked against U.S. interests. He said that for this Conference, it would be helpful for the United States to emphasize bilateral meetings and to attach importance to its presentations at two upcoming meetings because much depends on establishing good personal relationships. Presently, FCC is uncertain as to how many agency representatives it can send to one of the upcoming multilateral meetings, and it has no plans to attend the other meeting.

COMPUTER SUPPORT FOR CONFERENCE

The last topic deals with the accessibility of U.S. computer software to individual delegates at the Conference. NASA and NTIA have spent almost a million dollars to develop and modify a computer program which will demonstrate alternative broadcasting satellite scenarios. An NTIA spokesperson told us that allowing delegates, particularly from other countries, hands-on experience with the computer program should help convince them that flexible approaches are possible to meet the needs of all Western Hemisphere countries.

Although the computer program itself is almost completed, an operating manual has yet to be developed for users. Many officials agree that delegates will have difficulty accessing the present program. Regarding this point, a computer seminar has been planned before the Conference to introduce delegates from other Western Hemisphere countries to the computer software. This seminar is in doubt, however, because of funding and scheduling difficulties. The Delegation Chairman said he is working with the State Department and FCC to determine the best time and place for this.

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That is the end of my prepared statement. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.