

Clay's Corner

Providing news and views from a broadcast engineers perspective since September 1986

Here I set, near the end of May, and time to write this column. Six months ago, would you have ever dreamed we would be living in a world like this? Back then, the worst thing going on in our area was the 737 Max mess. Seems like not long after the first of the year we were hearing about this new virus in China. Not long after that – WHAM! It was here in our midst, with Kirkland being put on the national map for something other than the Costco house-brand. Then we were told that this new 'bug' was easily spread from person to person, with the bad news being there was no Vaccine and very little that could be done to treat it. Fear started creeping in and before we knew it our world was turned upside down with, seemingly, no end of restrictions as government entities, at all levels, raced to do something about a situation that they, largely, knew nothing about.

As time went by, everything that we have known involving any kind of social action was stopped or closed. Schools (of every level) businesses, public gatherings, churches, sporting events, etc. We were hearing that this would stop the spread of the disease. The curve would be flattened and soon, we would be back to the way it was.

Complicating this process was the fact that we were receiving a flood of mixed messages from leaders at all levels. And the process dragged on. It's pretty easy to get compliance when fear is the primary driver. However, it's much harder to keep going when there are disagreements on how to deal with it and how the restrictions are being implemented. Add to that the fact that with businesses closing, huge quantities find themselves out of work. Our society has largely grown out of the mindset etched in our relatives from their experiences with the great depression. Rainy day funds, emergency food supplies etc. are things of the past. This all meant a new and different fear – no income and bills stacking up and orders to stay home.

As May wore on, we were starting to see an increase in 'pushback', perhaps fueled by the politicization of the matter. Rejection of being told what to do was striking many nerves, to the point there were marches on capitals across the land.

To some extent a lot of behavior reminds me of when I would have arguments with my teen-aged children. They were quick to ignore advice that was good for them when it was viewed that the advice restricted their ability to do what they wanted. Another example is dealing with smokers. The more you try and tell a smoker they should quit, the more angry they become. Defending your right to do what may well hurt or kill you is part of our social fabric.

The other factor involved here are the statistics. Only a small portion of those who contract COVID-19 die from it....and most who do have an underlying condition or are older. To someone under 30 or so, this means, to many, they are being punished for something that may well not impact them. Those that are willing to 'play the odds' are likely to defy authority and 'stick their neck out' to see what happens.

Another factor is where the person lives. Some areas have had very few if any deaths. Those that live there may well feel that they are being wrongly punished.

This reminds me of an email discussion I was having a few years ago with some folks about Climate Change. For a while this group was embracing the science behind the matter. That is until a certain Democrat politician (you all know his name) jumped into the forefront. From that point forward, those that were of the opposing political party were quick to state that it was all wrong, apparently following a well known radio talk show host (you know his name too) who was doing the same thing. Suddenly I found that these folks were letting politics override science.

Adding to the problem is the matter of sorting out fact from fiction, or, perhaps, science from politics. I was very hopeful, when this all started, that we would be able to bury our political agendas and come together as we battle this common enemy. Unfortunately, we have not been able to completely do this, with many falling back to their old ways of 'politicizing' this issue as well.

Then there is the fact that many do not understand, nor like, mathematical or scientific ways of dealing with much of anything. I'm sure you know the type. You mention either or those two words and, rather quickly, you are getting the classic 'deer in the headlights' response. Many are aware of this short-coming in our society, many have been promoting greater emphasis on STEM in our educational system as a result.

If you want to see an example of the anti-science crowd, take a close look at

those that are ignoring science and good medical advice and are chanting how they don't want to be told what to do. Evidently, their 'rights' are more important?

It will be interesting to see what kind of politicians run for office and, more importantly, those that get elected –

The good news is we are not sitting in the Governors chair! Can you image the amount of pressure they are feeling? Scientists and medical experts on one side, businesses on the other. The goal is to strike a balance between doing what will minimize cases and deaths, and, on the other side, minimize the disaster that is our economic situation. Perhaps a classic case of 'damned if you do and damned if you don't'? Unfortunately, many political leaders are unable to wage a good argument with those that see economics as being more important than health. The bottom line is, until we have a treatment and/or vaccine for this virus, we will be caught in the middle of this battle.

It will be interesting to see what kind of politicians run for office and, more importantly, those that get elected.

- Those that are anti-science, and don't listen to anyone who knows better.
- Those that will listen and heed the advice of those who do know better.

Then again, you can't put all the blame on the politicians for the simple reason they are not appointed but rather are elected! Voters clearly have a lot in common with those they elect and follow similar patterns of behavior.

Chances are good that voters will opt for those that promise the most. After all, what politician has been elected because he has experience managing a pandemic?

Perhaps some of them are learning more about this topic, thanks to the media's efforts at separating fact from fiction? Then there is the political divide in the news media. Many of them seem to have been drinking the same 'Kool-Aid'. I long for the days when news in the print and electronic-media meant objectivity.

The scary part is how many obtain their information from misguided politicians or wackos on the Internet?

This coming 'political season' will be very interesting as this issue gets 'hashed out' in the form of sound-bites and 30 second spots. Unfortunately history has shown that people are very likely to 'Vote with their Wallet', meaning, if things have been good for them, they are likely to vote for the incumbent, if they have been bad, they are more likely to vote for 'the other candidate'. Perhaps this will be a silver lining for the broadcast industry and will result in an infusion of income that has been missing during this process?

For those of us that live in King County, we have perhaps known someone who has passed from the coronavirus. In my case, it was VERY close to home. My next-door neighbor died from it. Let me put this in context. My neighbor's wife (the one who passed) was looking after her elderly parents in Seattle and living with them five days a week. She came down with Ovarian Cancer. When additional post-surgery treatment was indicated, she went to the hospital (where they test all who are admitted) and found out she was COVID-19 positive. It was fast and she was gone within a week.

The very industry that employs us has been a contributor, due to our drive to make 'bad news' the lead story. The more that are impacted, the more stories are aired. This is not unlike newspapers that have historically run the worst of bad news on the front page. The more bad news, the more pages devoted to the matter. All of this has created what has been called COVID-19 overload. In general, people want to know what's happening with the virus, but at the same time it contributes to other issues, emotionally, etc. A vicious circle.

So now we in the process of what's called 'opening up our economy'. (Another new term for those of you keeping track) With all of this, things are already looking very different everywhere you look. We are being told that this is the new normal and we'd better get used to it, at least until there are more effective means for dealing with those who become seriously ill from the virus or until we have a vaccine.

One way to look at the Covid-19 issue is to look at the totals. (These are round numbers based on May 27th)

LOCATION/REGION	# OF CASES	# OF DEATHS
World-Wide	5.6 + Million	~ 356,000
USA	1.7 +Million	~ 102,000
Washington State	~20,000	~ 1100
Oregon	~ 4,000	~ 150
King County	~7900	~ 560

From these numbers some things jump out at me:

- The percentage of cases and deaths that are in the U.S. This is changing daily due to increases in Brazil and Russia.
- How much better things are in Oregon (Granted they have a lower population than Washington State and we had a 'head start')
- Half of the deaths in Washington State are in King County.

Looking at this another way....Deaths per 100,000:

Washington - - 13.3

Idaho - - - - - 4.2

Oregon - - - - - 3.3

Looks to me that Oregon is, perhaps, doing something we are not.

With all disasters there are business winners and losers.

A few of the winners –

- Those that invested in on-line business – Costco, Walmart, Amazon. I see an Amazon truck drive by my place several times a day.
- The makers of Plexiglass. Everywhere you go today you find barriers made of the stuff.
- Consultants that will be hired by all manner of businesses to help insure worker safety.
- The makers of PPE equipment...masks in particular.
- Fast food already geared to 'drive-up'.
- Investors with cash that are looking for bargains. Historically, downturns spell doom for some and opportunities for others.
- Those whose jobs have been declared 'Essential'.
- Consumers of Gasoline who have seen prices fall.

The losers –

- Local Governments. Already cities and towns are laying off employees as their source of revenue, local sales taxes etc, have dried up.
- Those whose jobs were not declared essential.
- Restaurants...Sure, some of them switched to take-out or delivery. The majority are barely hanging on and some will be gone forever.
- Movie Theatres. There are those who are saying we may see a rebound of the 'Drive-In'.
- Hotels and Motels...Know anyone that's been traveling to a place where you can't find an open restaurant?
- Airlines...Face it, no-one wants to fly based on the fear that this is 'The Place' to become infected.
- Education...Years from now there will likely be a big 'Notch' in the abilities of those who have been involved with the educational process during this time.

- Taxpayers...Not much talked about, however, we need to understand that State and Local Governments cannot print money and/or borrow from future generations. Granted we will need to expect less from Government when this is over, but the bills will be coming due and this means higher taxes. Already the residents of Oregon appear to understand this by approving higher taxes. Fasten your seat belt!
- Radio and TV Broadcasters...Already we have seen significant staff reductions, with some stations going off the air (some for good). Look at the type of local spots that stations are able to run. Only for those businesses that have been deemed 'essential', HVAC firms, vehicle repair facilities, etc. None of the conventional sources of advertising are going to do so for a business that's forced so close. Even after they are allowed to open, they will all be having to deal with a huge economic hole to fill. There will be some that will see this as an opportunity to jump ahead of their, less financially well off, competitors.
- Office Buildings...One has to wonder just how many businesses that have been able to continue to function via remote computer access will opt to continue to do so creating a net reduction in the need for conventional office space.
- The Homeless problem...Just as politicians were trying to get a handle on this issue, along came COVID-19 whose economic fallout only made things worse.

One, unfortunate, byproduct of the 'shut-down' has been the number of people that feel the need to speed. I'm not sure if this is due to less traffic, or general frustration with the situation.

Law Enforcement has been pulling over many doing in excess of 100 mph and the number of accidents and deaths due to excessive speed has increased.

As we near the end of May, one can certainly see that the pace of re-opening is increasing, using the measure of traffic on our highways. Recently I drove from Auburn to Tacoma and discovered that the southbound lanes of I-5 in what's known as the 'Fife-Curve' were once again slowing down to a creep.

Perhaps I should mention the 'bottleneck' created by the failure of the West Seattle high-rise bridge? Talk about a big dose of bad-timing?

The COVID-19 Situation has meant opportunity to many who prey on situations like this. Perhaps the worst is how a fraud ring got into the Washington State Employment Security Department to the tune of millions of lost taxpayers dollars. This Department was quickly overwhelmed with requests and demands from citizens who were frustrated by the pace of things and who, in the process, let their normal guard down.

Then there are the snake oil peddlers who prey on those that are looking for non-standard and untested cure or preventative measures. Some political leaders have not helped with this one.

And, of course, there are the conspiracy promoters.....

Those that have been burning down 5G Cell Towers based on the notion that, somehow, 5G signals exacerbate the impacts of COVID.

Probably one of the classic ones is the idea that Bill Gates is plotting to use mass COVID-19 vaccinations as a pretext to implant microchips in billions of people so he can monitor their movements. (You can't make this stuff up.)

The whole coronavirus situation is unique in that it is so poorly understood. Everyday there is a new discovery about this critter. The good news is there are a lot of very smart people, the world over, working on getting a handle on it, and a lot of people hoping and praying they will succeed.

You hear and read about how ill-prepared our country was in dealing with this issue. While it's easy to be critical of our governmental entities, perhaps there is some comfort that we are not alone! Many nations have been caught tragically unprepared in this battle. Interestingly, there are exceptions, Iceland and New Zealand come to mind. Will we learn from those? Probably not!

An old friend, Nels Harvey, submitted this item -

So you think stay at home is getting to you? During the "Great Plague of London" 1665 to 1666, Sir Isaac Newton invented Calculus. How bored do you have to be to invent Calculus?

Another friend contributed this item -

As it stands today, you can't get a haircut, but buying marijuana at the

local “Pot-Shop’ is legal. What does this prove? Fifty years later, the Hippies finally won.

This new normal is going to have to be without things we had expected. Here’s a short list:

- Seafair
- Hamfests
- Summertime Sports
- That planned fly-away vacation

I recently learned that my 60th High School reunion has been cancelled to 2021. At this stage of life, this will, unfortunately, mean less attendees 😞

You may be askingWhat does this all have to do with Broadcasting? Well, life is full of parallels.

This is not unlike my experiences with many years in broadcast engineering where Management is focused on the bottom line (because this is what they are hired to do). Buying equipment and stocking supplies for an unforeseen emergency is rarely approved. The rationale is simple – We will cross that bridge when (and if) we come to it (sound familiar?)

As we move forward in a world that must balance the need to protect ourselves from getting the Virus and being able to have a life somewhat like we used to have. Until we have a vaccine, that’s clearly not going to happen. The changes that this will mean will take some getting used to.

For example: Consider the way modern offices are constructed. I recall the stations where I worked back in the 60’s. Back then, we had not heard the term ‘cubical’ and everyone had a separate office. Granted, there were a few instances, where a larger room would have more than one desk. Somewhere along the way things began to change and the cubical started catching on.

There was a lot going for it – much of it economic. For a given amount of people, offices could be smaller. This was a big plus for those that leased space in commercial buildings. The cubical meant traditional walls did not need to be constructed. Cubicals were ‘factory made’ and permitted a wide number of variations, etc. Then there were those who promoted their use, saying their use would allow employees to collaborate more easily. In later years, they became S.O.P for station sales and news departments. In fact, in one instance, the height of the cubical partitions was lowered based on the notion that the collaborative aspect could be improved.

Then along came the Coronavirus and Social Distancing! A few things have happened that may have the effect of changing things:

1 - How do cubicals, especially low ones, fit into this picture? Hmmmm. Do they install taller ones? Will they have to use every other one?

2 - What about all those folks that have been working from home? Will that become more common, thereby reducing the need for some of the cubes?

3 - With many businesses likely being negatively impacted by the resulting business downturn, will they need as many?

4 - Will a vaccine be developed so that the office will return to the way it was?

5 - Will the ‘Open Office’ become obsolete?

What about the Radio and TV studios where multiple people were all working in close proximity? Separate booths or more Plexiglass?

If you think that planning for the ‘new normal’ is mind bending, consider what the Airline Industry is going through. I recall the changes after 9/11. Shoe removal, liquids in plastic-bags, the TSA etc. Looking back, we objected to many of those changes as minor compared to what may be coming. At least it appears that you will be able to bring a liquid on board, provided it’s a hand sanitizer. I wonder if TSA will have a check to make sure that it’s real?

If passengers are required to wear masks while in the aircraft, will this mean no beverage service? No booze for sale? No bags of nameless salty crunch stuff? What are they going to do in the event someone elects to take off their mask in the middle of a flight, divert to the nearest airport, arrest on landing?

Here is what some think we may be faced with -

In a new report, "The Rise of Sanitised Travel," Simpliflying anticipates dozens of ways air travel might change in the coming months and years. Some examples:

- 1. Online check-in: Besides choosing their seat or paying for checked bags, passengers might also need to upload a document to confirm the presence of COVID-19 antibodies before they fly.**
- 2. Airport curbside: Passengers could be required to arrive at least four hours ahead of their flight, and pass through a "disinfection tunnel" or thermal scanner to check their temperature before being allowed to enter the airport.**
- 3. Check-in and bag drop: New touchless kiosks would allow passengers to check in by scanning a barcode, or using gestures or voice commands. Agents would be behind plexiglass shields, and bags would be disinfected and then "sanitaged."**
- 4. Health check: Passengers would undergo a health screening, and potentially even have their blood tested. In April, Emirates became the first airline to conduct rapid on-site COVID-19 testing of passengers before boarding.**
- 5. Security: Each carry-on bag and security bin would be disinfected when entering the X-ray machine, using fogging or UV-ray techniques, then "sanitaged."**
- 6. Boarding: Passengers would need to be present an hour before departure, maintain social distancing in the gate area and board only when they receive individual notifications on their smartphones to prevent crowding in the jet bridge.**
- 7. On the plane: The preflight safety video might include sanitation procedures, as passengers wipe down their seats and tray tables. In-flight magazines will be removed, seatback pockets emptied, and**

passengers will likely use their own devices to watch videos. An in-flight janitor might keep lavatories and other high-touch areas disinfected after passenger use.

I found it interesting recently with the announcement in some of the areas that Indian Casinos were opening with the requirement that everyone wear a mask. At the same time they said that smoking would be allowed!! Wonder how that works? I also spotted a picture of how restaurants would be structured. In this shot, they had caution tape blocking access to every other booth. In some booths (obviously a staged picture) sat 'pretend-patrons' with food on the table and wearing masks....Hmmm?

Some are having positive predictions for the Seattle area –

According to Moody's Analytics –

Seattle is likely to have one of the quickest and strongest recoveries in the nation as the coronavirus scare winds down.

Time will tell.

Ah yes....There is some broadcast news to report (in the event you were wondering if I'd ever get to it).

On May 19th the CBS Evening News experienced some type of 'technical glitch' in the WDC bureau where it originates, leaving affiliates scrambling.

In Chicago, record breaking high water in the Chicago River overflowed its banks and into the basement of many buildings including the Willis (Sears) Tower electrical systems, knocking off several Radio and TV operations whose transmitters and antennas are located there. Thankfully, in the Seattle area, this is not likely to happen.

The impact of COVID-19 continues to alter the Radio Ratings landscape with NewsTalk formats enjoying higher numbers. Perhaps underscoring the fact that, despite suffering from 'Virus News Overload'... many want to stay in the

know. As expected, stations airing SportsTalk were down. Frankly, I have a hard time listening to a game whose outcome is already known.

I wonder how many Radio and TV operations will be informing their on-air talent that they are to stop using those home studios and come back to the station? Also wonder what changes will be made to the physical plant that will assure those returning will be safe? (More Plexiglass?) I understand those that are represented by Unions are insisting on safety standards.

Efforts are proceeding on the rebuilding of the tower and FM antenna system at West Tiger.

This all as a result of the Antenna Fire of a couple of years ago. This will involve the replacement of the top of the tower and installation of a new master antenna. All of this will mean that those stations will, once again, be operating from Auxiliary facilities. Impacted will be Hubbard's 92.5 and 98.9, iHeartMedia's 96.5 and 102.5 and Entercom's 94.1.

American Tower Recently repainted their Multiple Station Building on Cougar Mountain.

Hard to believe that it's been 20 years. Here you can see the building back to it's original green. The 'Blue-Gizmo' in the foreground was used to permit painters to access the higher portions of the 2-story building.



Many stations have opted to simply turn off everything (transmitter included), ask the FCC for an STA, and lock the door. The following from InsideRadio:

A group of 45 stations have signed off the air since March 11, the date the World Health Organization declared the coronavirus a global pandemic. Of those, 17, or 38%, specifically listed financial conditions due to the Coronavirus pandemic in their Special Temporary Authority (STA) application filing with the FCC.

The remainder referenced a variety of unrelated reasons including technical problems, pending station sales and not being able to reach an agreement with a tower company.

The spike in stations that temporarily went dark is vividly apparent in April when a record number of radio stations signed off, new data from PrecisionTrak/InsideRadio shows. A group of 35 radio stations went dark in April, bringing the total number of stations off the air to 369, up from 334 in March. The April number is the highest amount of stations off the air during the previous 12 months. Most are AM outlets and many are located in small markets.

Not all stations said it was the financial pressure of the economic shutdown that was their breaking point. In some cases broadcasters

have told the FCC their stations need repairs but because of the lockdown they haven't been able to get crews onsite to perform the work.

The number of licensed radio stations that are currently silent rises and falls from month to month. During the past 12 months, the number has increased or decreased by as much as 18 and by as little as two. An increase of 35 stations in one month is highly unusual.

Anadal Enterprises, which took two stations silent on March 20 – news/talkers WPNS (1140) Ft. Walton Beach-Destin, FL and WNWF (1470) Evergreen, AL – said in a filing that the stations were “forced to go off the air due to the COVID-19 outbreak temporarily. We will resume operations as soon as business reopens after this shutdown.”

Other STA applications filed with the FCC were less specific. “The stations have ceased operations due to financial reasons,” Batesville Broadcasting said in taking two FMs and one AM in Mississippi off the air. Country WBLE (100.5) Batesville, MS and the classic country simulcast of WJBI (1290) Batesville, MS and WHKL-FM (106.9) Crenshaw, MS went silent April 11.

Bustos Media took regional Mexican KMIA (1210) Seattle-Tacoma and ethnic KXET (1130) Portland, OR off the air March 23. “Due to health considerations and economic conditions in the Portland metropolitan area, in light of the coronavirus emergency, we have decided to temporarily cease broadcasting,” it said of KXET's situation.

East Carolina Radio – which silenced the classic country simulcast of WCNC (1240) Elizabeth City, NC and WZBO (1260) Edenton, NC on April 1 – said the stations “have experienced “multiple advertisement cancellations, resulting in significant reductions in revenue in a relatively short period of time.”

Saul Levine's Mount Wilson FM Broadcasters took two stations in the Monterey-Salinas-Santa Cruz, CA market silent in April, saying operations are “not sustainable financially because of greatly diminished advertising during the COVID-19 pandemic.” Levine was already in the process of donating classical “K-Mozart” KIDD (630) and oldies “1240 K-Surf” KNRV to The Balanced Radio Foundation.

After operating major market stations for a staggering 62 years, Levine says the current economic conditions are the worst he's ever seen. "It is small and standalone AM stations [that] are feeling the impact," he told Inside Radio. He says his company donated the two Bay Area AM stations after it was unable to find a buyer. But after the FCC approved the license transfer, the attorney for Balanced Radio, the non-profit run by Richard Jenkins, the former President and CEO of Educational Media Foundation, indicated they were not going to close the transaction.

"The Monterey radio market is challenged," Levine said. "Rather than sustain the Monterey operation we decided to go silent, and devote our efforts to our major markets. There are difficult times ahead for radio. Major market radio will survive. Small markets will have problems."

FCC Chair Ajit Pai said last week he is open to hearing any ideas that broadcasters may have to help keep as many stations afloat as possible. "One thing that comes to mind is to allow AM broadcasters to reduce power to save money on power bills," Pai told Inside Radio. "That's one of the things that may seem relatively small, but it's an important step in helping some of the AM broadcasters to continue operations." While there are limits on what the agency can do to help operators struggling with the country's economic standstill, Pai believes the modernization steps taken by the FCC during the past several years will help.

Unfortunately, a lot of crime is up during this period. Here is an example from SBE Chapter 74:

**SOCIETY OF BROADCAST ENGINEERS
CHAPTER 74 - MIDLANDS ALERT
Eastern Nebraska and Western Iowa
www.sbe74.org**

The Nebraska Broadcasters Association has asked SBE 74 to distribute the following information below regarding recent copper thefts in Omaha and Nebraska City. If you have cameras or security systems at your transmitter sites, please take a moment to be sure all equipment is working properly and keep an eye out for suspicious activity at your sites:

On April 26th television station KPTM/KXVO had vandals break into the outside patio area of both TV stations and break into the main

distribution center and cut out all the grounding cabling leaving no electrical ground. When the copper thieves had finished with KPTM and KXVO they headed over to the KGBI/KOOO transmitter site. Once the copper thieves cut the gate lock they began cutting away all the tower grounding. Next the copper thieves started removing the Halo grounding around the building, the generators and the A/C units. They also cut away the ground cables going to the disconnect boxes. Next the copper thieves pried the front door open and did damage to the door. Once inside the transmitter building the copper thieves started removing the Harmonic Filter off the 20KW standby transmitter used for KOOO 101.9. They also removed a 20 foot section of 4 inch rigid transmission line plus two 20 foot sections in inter bay plus tools and two vacuum cleaners. All this was removed from the KOOO transmitter room with considerable damage left behind. We could not believe the copper thieves did not remove anything from the KGBI auxiliary transmitter room. In the case of both the KPTM/KXVO and KOOO/KGBI transmitter sites, this break-in was reported to the Sarpy County Sheriff and an officer did show up to investigate.

The Chief Engineer for KOOO, John Nielsen installed a Ring camera and had a guard watching the transmitter site from 6PM to 12 midnight and a second guard watched the site from 12 midnight till 6 AM. On Friday around 11:30pm what looked like a blue Dodge Ram truck drove up the driveway of the KOOO/KGBI transmitter site with its lights off. As soon as the Dodge truck got close to the guard on duty the guard turned on his vehicle lights and the Dodge truck immediately turned around and the chase was on. The guard did get the license plate information and a good look at the vehicle.

On another note it has been reported that someone broke into the transmitter building of KBBX, Radio Lobo, 97.7 which is licensed to Nebraska City just recently, could be yesterday or the day before, not sure about the exact time or date.

John Nielsen and I are trying to get the word out to all engineers in the area to be aware of what is going on with the copper theft that has taken place around the Gretna, Springfield, Sarpy County area. If you do not have security and have not been to your transmitter sites lately it is suggested that you check your sites for and damage or theft.

Jim Leedham, Engineer/Site manager

Salem Radio Properties

Any questions call 402-680- 2424

The state of the Economy is contributing to a large increase in commercial burglaries across the country. Considering the price of copper is running under \$2 per pound, these folks were trying to make a big-haul to make up for the difference. Frankly, it still amazes me so few broadcast transmission facilities have sophisticated alarm systems. Usually, these 'low-lifes' will 'test' a facility beforehand to determine whether there is a system that could lead them to be caught. If they find none, it's free game. This is like leaving your keys in your car and wondering why it was stolen.

Congrats to the Seattle Times on the winning of their 11th Pulitzer Prize. The latest for their work related to the Boeing 737 Max.

In last month's Column I showed a picture of a building with an antenna.....Here's a new one for you to ponder. Give you a hint. It's in the Tacoma area.



So what do I do when asked to stay home? Well, my wife and I play an extensive amount of Scrabble. Here she is across the table from me:



The negative economic impact of COVID-19 is not just hitting commercial broadcasters but non-commercial as well. The following from Bloomberg regarding NPR:

The public broadcaster is cutting pay and benefits, hoping to “save jobs and support the future of NPR.” The report says NPR is facing projected losses of up to \$53 million in the next two years.

Last month it was reported that NPR was cutting executive pay by 10% to 25%. A memo to staffers from CEO John Lansing said at the time that NPR faced a budget shortfall of \$30 million to \$45 million through its 2021 fiscal year.

That calculation included an estimated sponsorship shortfall of \$12 million to \$15 million in sponsorship revenue. NPR had budgeted a total

of \$115 million for 2020, according to Lansing's memo.

NPR now anticipates a loss of \$40 million to \$53 million in fiscal 2020 and 2021.

In the latest round of austerity, the base pay of NPR's employees will be reduced on a sliding scale of up to 9% through the end of September. Workers will also be offered furloughs, according to a new memo from Lansing to staff.

The public broadcaster will also halt employer contributions to its retirement plan. Workers who make less than \$80,000 annually will not see a reduction in pay.

There's financial suffering across the U.S. media landscape from COVID-19, which has resulted in a massive shortage of advertising revenues. But NPR's situation is unique: It's a non-profit that relies heavily on contributions to remain viable.

"We do not have a profit motive or shareholders to serve like commercial media, so all of our resources go toward public service," NPR said in a statement. "We will continue to manage our budgets closely across the organization — our main priority is to preserve jobs so we can continue providing an essential public service to audiences across platforms."

Whereas I work for WSU's NW Public Broadcasting, I too am left to be concerned whether or not I will still have a job after all is said and done, knowing well that reductions are coming.

In what is reported to be the largest ever civil penalty, the FCC has informed Sinclair Broadcasting Group to pay \$48,000,000. This is related to Sinclair's effort to acquire Tribune Media's stations. Locally, Sinclair owns KOMO and KUNS-TV and radio stations KOMO, KPLZ and KVI. At the core of this was their failure to follow sponsorship identification rules.

Once again, Dwight Small (who is very likely basking in the knowledge that he retired at the right time) submits this picture from what is his backyard (a lake).

Here we are looking SE toward White Horse Mountain, elevation 6840ft, with

Glacier Peak on the far left. Just wondering, I looked at what it would take to climb this peak and quickly learned it is a significant challenge.



The Radio industry could soon get an indication as to which the way the Federal Communications Commission is leaning on a proposal to allow digital-only AM stations. Fort Wayne, IN owner Brian Walsh has petitioned the FCC to allow him to power down his analog transmitter and operate WIOE (1450) using only a digital signal for the next year.

There are a number of attractive features with this.

AM Stations would gain parity on the Vehicle Dashboard.

- They could, for the first time, have the graphical display of their FM cousins, Song Title and Artist, etc.
- Would be able to run stereo (assuming that the analog AM Stereo is dead).
- Have much higher fidelity.
- Would be running digital, largely eliminating the buzzes and noises faced by AM's today.

- Perhaps one of the most attractive aspects, be able to multicast a second audio channel (This feature may have to await a newer 'chip-set' as today's HD Radio receivers would be unable to decode it).

The FCC has been collecting comments in a proceeding (MB Docket No. 19-311) that would give AM stations the option of digital-only operations. In light of today's economic mess, its probably unlikely we will see many more stations request authority to go all-digital in the near term.

And the headline read -

"FCC, Pentagon Go to War Over 5G Spectrum"

Not often do you see a couple of Federal Agencies going up against each other. Breakout the popcorn and peanuts as this is going to be interesting. Apparently, this has to do with the FCC's approval of an application by Ligado (formally known as LightSquared) for use of spectrum adjacent to frequencies used by GPS. Will be interesting to see of the DOD 'caves' under pressure this time.

Recently Lowell Kiesow (KNKX) experienced some new interference to their satellite receiving equipment. Lowell rightfully noted that this occurred just before the Memorial Holiday weekend. This caused me to recall the following -

As for the timing of failures - I recall 'Murphy Sign' somewhere, long ago.

Something like this:

- **The incidence of failures is inversely proportional to the availability of parts and people.**
- **Multiply X2 - If it's in the middle of the night.**
- **Multiply X 3 - If it's a weekend.**
- **Multiply X4 - if it's a holiday weekend.**
- **Multiply X5 - If it's one of the above and the person that normally deals with it is on vacation and you have the call.**

There are variations - All proving that Murphy Reign's!

Another, timely, contribution from a reader -

**I never thought the
comment
"I wouldn't touch him/her
with a 6 foot pole" would
become a national policy,
but here we are**



That's about it for this month, my friends – Lord willing, I will be back, next month to most of the usual locations.

Until then – Stay safe as you carefully explore the new world out there.

Clay, K7CR, CPBE

SBE Member #714 since February 5th, 1968