

February 2021 - Clay's Corner

Providing News and Views from a broadcast engineer's prospective since September 1986

The big news item of this past month was likely the events in WDC. The amount of air-time given to this was huge.

The word of the month was 'STORM'...

- Storming the Capital in WDC on Jan. 6th
- Rain and wind Storms in WA State on Jan. 12th

On the night of the 12th our Atmospheric River induced heavy rain was aided by a pretty intense windstorm that knocked out power to, reportedly, over 500,000 customers of PSE, Seattle City Light, Clallum County PUD, Tacoma Power and Lewis County PUD (I'm sure there were others).

Many likely did not receive much warning about the windstorm, giving them time to be able to avoid flying patio furniture. Lowell Kiesow (KNKX) submitted this excellent item about the sudden storm:

<https://theconvergencezone.com/2021/01/13/5-reasons-why-a-significant-puget-sound-windstorm-occurred-with-almost-no-warning/>

Sinclair's Tim Moore submitted these pictures of the power lines feeding the Cougar Mt. broadcast transmitters, at this point, laying on the ground. This was one of the longer power outages at Cougar Mt., with power being restored about 10 p.m. on the 16th, making it about a five day outage.



Look closely at this tree that was snapped off by the wind.



I received a note from Paul Carvalho at KIRO Radio that was an interesting twist. Due to Covid, many of their on-air personnel were working from home, as opposed to coming into the downtown studios. Then, along comes a big windstorm, with many of those home studios being without power. Time to find isolated places within the studio for them to work from, causing quite a scramble.

Arthur Willits was on his way to West Tiger to check on the Day-Star TV transmitter when he discovered that access was going to require a big chainsaw.

Doug Fisher reported that South Mountain got hit very hard with flooding and landslides taking out the powerline and generator failures. That site, finally got its power back from Mason County PUD at 11 a.m. on Sunday.

Many of the AM's on Vashon were impacted by power outages, as well indicated on the PSE Outage Map on the morning of the 13th. Thankfully, all of them have generators.

Thankfully, the evening of the 14th we were treated with a wonderful sunset. This taken from my back deck:



On the Covid front -

Did you ever think we would see 'Drive-Thru' vaccinations?

Some good news for us seniors. We will be able to get it earlier than once thought. I received my first dose on January 21st. My second one is already scheduled for February 24th.

The good news is now it appears that our Governor and President are on the same page with this pandemic. Perhaps even better news is that our President is NOT anti-science!

Meanwhile, as of the 24th of January, the totals are still grim!

- Total worldwide cases – Approaching 100 Million
- Total worldwide deaths – Approaching 2.2 Million
- Total U.S. Cases – Over 25 Million
- Total U.S. Deaths – Over 423,000
- Total Washington cases – Over 300,000
- Total Washington deaths – Over 4,100

Even if you have been vaccinated we will continue to have restrictions until a sufficient number of us have been poked. Bottom line – We have a way to go. Don't throw away those masks!

On the good news front (yes there is some), Salem Media Group just announced that they are restoring employee compensation to 2019 levels. Like many firms, salaries were cut due to the Covid-related economic downturn.

And on the 'not so good news front', Alpha Media has filed for Chapter 11. The firm that owns 200 radio stations, based in PDX (Portland, OR) said the action was due to 'Covid-19 Headwinds. The firm owns stations in Wenatchee and Grays Harbor as well as Portland.

The list of events being cancelled continues –

- The Mike and Key Club Flea Market in Puyallup
- The Sea-Pac Convention in Seaside
- NAB in Las Vegas
- The summer Olympics in Tokyo

Certain to make headlines will be the announcement that an annual event will be held!

NAB is planning on having enough of us vaccinated by this fall to have a show in Las Vegas. Along with this will be the fall SBE Meeting. We shall see.

For some time, some of the larger Radio companies have been taking advantage of the talents of some of their on-air personalities and syndicating

them. Thanks to the fact that you can send a high quality audio signal across the continent these days with minimal expense. Here in our area, Hubbard has decided to do this with one of their morning shows. Recently Entercom announced one of their stations would be switching to 100% syndicated operation. This means there will not be any live/local announcer/DJ's. Come to think of it, has not KJAQ/96.5 been in this mode for a long time? The changes caused by the Pandemic have accelerated this process in many cases. New radio studio facilities may well look a lot different in the future as a result. It will be interesting to see if a 'Live and Local' time segment, within the same format, will be more successful. Perhaps hearing a DJ talk about local things, weather etc. will prove to not be that important? Look at TV. At one time, many stations had live/local programming. Now, other than newscasts, this is rare. Remember when there were four stations in this area that had live programming for children every afternoon? (Stan, Captain, JP and Brakeman)

Now that Pai is gone, and we have a new administration, it's time for a shake-up in leadership at the FCC. Accordingly, President Biden has appointed Jessica Rosenworcel as the acting head of the Commission. This follows a natural process, as she was the senior Democrat on the FCC for some time. Time will tell if her new job will become permanent.

At the Inauguration, someone snapped a picture of Bernie Sanders seated with mittens. Boy did that attract attention, with his picture showing up all over social media. People are showing Bernie in all kinds of various locations. It did not take long before someone had him sitting in a broadcast setting, like the following in front of a huge old RCA Transmitter.



A thank you to the Seattle SBE Chapter for inviting me to be their 'program' at their January Meeting. I showed, via Zoom, my collection of 75 pictures of the West Tiger-2 Antenna Fire and re-construction. While reflecting on who was in the meeting when I joined SBE, if I recall correctly, only one person. Good to see you Walt! There are not many of us around with 3-digit membership numbers that remember those days at the Dog House and the W7 Room.

The FCC is making it clear to owners of C-Band stations they have to move to make room for more wireless operations...and have set a deadline for doing so. The following link provides more details: [FCC gives earth station operators final warning](#) Earth Stations that don't appear to be operating or that haven't notified the Federal Communications Commission of their operational status will be shut down as of April 19. The FCC says most stations are accounted for and will make the transition to the upper part of the band, but some have not responded to multiple communications and are at risk of being terminated.

And now, a bit of technical humor –



Now, if I may, I'd like to share some personal thoughts regarding something else – Truth.

I recall the days when I got into this business, we had several sources for news and information –

- AP and UPI wire services - Every station, Radio or TV, had one or both.
- Radio Networks – ABC, CBS, NBC and MBS
- All but the smallest stations were affiliated with one of them.
- TV Networks – ABC, CBS and NBC
- Just like Radio, the major stations were affiliated with a major network.

Back in those days, just about every radio station aired 3-5 minutes of news every hour. TV ran a combination of local and network news, much as they do

now. In those days news, pretty much, meant factual reporting.

Over the years – Radio and TV started changing.

- Radio Stations stopped trying to be what was called ‘Full Service’, opting for specialization, usually adopting a specific music type, or, in some cases, just news and/or talk. The number of stations that aired news or had a wire service, or network affiliation, was reduced to just a few. As the number of stations grew, so did the number of formats without any news.
- As the number of TV stations increased, only a few hung onto their long-standing formats that featured news. Many of the new ones, became...news-less.

Looking back at radio, one is hard pressed to come up with names and programs that were delivering anything but good, old fashioned, objective news. There were some exceptions, many of whom were newspaper columnists that adapted to broadcasting. Walter Winchell, Drew Person, Gabriel Heatter, and of course, Paul Harvey come to mind (yes, I do recall my family listening to them). We knew that these were newspaper columnists and a lot of what they were airing was opinion. Back in those days, Broadcasting was much like newspapers. There was a clear line between fact and opinion.

Fast forward to today –

We have had an explosion in the number of delivery systems – Cable and Satellite Radio and TV and program providers, and, of course the Internet that has become the biggest distributor of all. Perhaps one of the biggest changes was the introduction of 24/7 news outlets on Cable and Satellite.

With the resulting multiplication of choices has come the need to do whatever it takes to attract attention to your brand so as to be able to survive, or increase profits.

Somewhere along the way, the philosophy of the ‘Supermarket Tabloid’ was adopted by many sources looking for a niche. Many discovered that you did not have to tell the truth. What you needed to do is appeal to the subconscious to the point that they would make a purchase based on very different criteria. These folks learned, long ago, that truth did not matter. They were in the business to sell their paper and, thereby, make money. Sadly, some broadcasters followed suit.

Add to all of this the increasingly polarized political climate in our country, coupled with the desire to see and hear what you want to see and hear, you have the recipe for a lot of what we have today where, in some cases, truth has become optional. Or, putting it another way, one man's truth has become the other man's lies. In order to maximize your potential audience (and thereby maximize your profits), many have learned that you can appeal to a specific segment that believes a certain way and turn that into money. Who would have thought that we'd have, to this extent, polarized media?

In the past, I'm sure, some politicians stretched the truth...or, perhaps, outright lied. What's new here is that now we have broadcasters (using the term loosely) that have moved away from objective, honest and factual reporting, apparently catering to those that like to hear news that fits their point of view. A lot of what bills itself as news today is not based on facts or objectivity, but rather on a bias that is designed to appeal to a target audience who wants to hear what they have come to believe. The owners of these outlets know well what they are doing. In some cases, the size of the bottom line overshadows the desire to be truthful, something the 'Snake-Oil' salesman of yesteryear knew very well, and in some cases, political leaders.

Those that are not willing to 'drink the Kool-Aid' and are willing to sort out the fact from fiction are likely OK as they are not as gullible. However, I am concerned that their numbers are declining.

When I was 20 (way back in the last century) I was, pretty much, provided information that was not only factual but could be verified. I have to wonder about those that are 20 now, with fewer reading newspapers and magazines, and more getting their information via social media etc. How are they choosing what's fake or factual? Do the 20-somethings take the time to determine whether a Left or Right leaning information source is telling the truth? Do they bother to compare the broadcast or even cable offerings that bill themselves as news?

I'm not the only one that has noticed this issue.

Recently journalist Megyn Kelly said this, **"...because there has been a complete lack of trust, a destruction of trust in the media, and people don't know where to turn for true information."**

As we look back at the previous four years where truth telling from the ‘top’ has been optional, have we, as a society, learned something? Perhaps, most importantly, how can a broadcaster convey that what they air is true and can be believed? Seems to me our industry has a lot of work to do – lest it be as credible as those tabloids. I should mention, at least one, of our local TV stations is running clips featuring various anchors, stating how they stand for truth. This just underscores what I have been saying here.

One of the major problems for mainline broadcasters is the fact that many no longer tune in, preferring to get their information from Social Media, where there are little, if any, checks and balances and where facts are often replaced with falsehoods, rumors and, propaganda. Some politicians have seized on the opportunity to push their agenda using these platforms knowing well that there is a huge audience out there ready to adopt rumors and outright fiction. Look as what’s happened with 5G. Social media nuts have pushed the idea that it causes Covid, to the point that many cell sites have been vandalized in an attempt to stop the ‘death rays’. When it comes to conspiracy theories, the Internet has become the wild wild west. And, in the minds of many – a source of truth! (P.T. Barnum perhaps foresaw the Internet.)

Perhaps the most frightening thing is the statistics that show how many, firmly, believe things that are not true. Those numbers are huge!

Broadcasters have a huge challenge – how to attract an audience with the truth. This goes back to the supermarket checkout. Chances are a fiction filled tabloid will outsell the local daily newspaper.

Hats off to Tegna who recently announced they are expanding their ‘Verify’ program, whose goal is to combat disinformation (or is it misinformation?) You have likely seen this feature on Tegna stations in your area.

Were things better in this regard 50 years ago? I really think so. Does anyone else see it this way?

(Soap box off.)

There are a number of firms now with a portfolio of a large number of towers, many of which used to belong to cellular, land-mobile or broadcasters. Crown Castle, Vertical Bridge and American Tower quickly come to mind. Most of these firms continue to grow. Recently American Tower, who owns a number

of major sites in the Seattle area, has expanded with their, reportedly \$9 billion acquisition of Telxius and has gained a large foothold by adding some 31,000 sites in Europe and South America.

Another great picture from one of the NWBP Engineers, Jason Royals.

This time the transmitter location of KNWV, a Class A licensed to Clarkston, WA on 90.5.



Working on this side of the Cascades, we rarely get to see open country like this, thanks to our forests.

As far as I can tell, there has not been a great rush by owners of AM stations to jump on the 'All-Digital' bandwagon now that the FCC has given the mode the 'Green-Light'. However, the number of stations running this mode, apparently, recently doubled with WMGG in Tampa, Florida joining the 'club'.

Much like the station in the WDC area that started the process, WMGG has a companion FM band translator affording those that don't have an HD Radio the ability to continue to hear the station on their analog receivers.

WMGG operates on 1470 using a shared directional antenna running 2800 watts daytime and 800 watts at night.

There was a recent editorial in Radio World that describes what I've been

saying for years. To a significant degree, Broadcast Engineering has become full of Gray Haired folks, or, if you are like me – no hair. The author makes a number of good points.

- He sees trouble ahead due to a shortage of qualified broadcast engineers who know how to read schematics and troubleshoot problems to the component level.
- We are seeing newbies whose troubleshooting abilities are limited to calling the factory, describing the problem and waiting until a loaner gizmo arrives.
- Not helping the situation is the fact that a lot of equipment in use today is made overseas and is so cheap, that tossing it in the trash and buying another has become a viable option.
- Today, stations have become full of computers that employ those that maintain them, but we should not forget we also have a lot of other things that enable a station to 'Radiate'.
- Quoting now the author who wrote, "sending an IT guy into that is like sending a 90 year old woman into the Indy 500 with her Buick LeSabre. She ain't gonna win and she will probably die trying."
- His recommendation, "We all, especially big conglomerates who own most of the broadcast stations, have to make a concerted effort to get high school and college kids interested in broadcast engineering as a career. Get them interested, get them educated, best by shadowing an old goat who can show them the tricks of the trade".

On the personal side, as of the first of the year, I am no longer receiving a regular check from Entercom. I started with ETM when they swapped an FM station in NYC for 97.3, 100.7 and 1210 AM back in about 1995. When I left being a full timer, I became a contractor with a retainer and a steady paycheck. Now that too is in the past. I may still do some 'task-specific' work for them. This is TBD. 25+ years with the same company, in one capacity or the other, is a long time. This means that Phil Van Liew will now pick up the slack and be taking care of the transmitters for all five of the local Entercom stations. 'Tis time that I cut back anyway. I still make routine visits to Cougar and West Tiger for my other clients.

Not often I look at the obits in the Sunday Times. On the 3rd there were three former area broadcasters that passed.

Dick Curtis, formerly with KJR, KOL and other related businesses. He, like many, attended Bates (then known as Tacoma Vocational School) and went on to a successful career in radio.

Alan Houston was with KING 5 for almost 40 years.

Mark Simonson, formerly with KOMO-TV for over 30 years.

Another passing I want to mention is that of Mike McCarthy. Likely few of you in the Seattle area knew him. I first met Mike, waaay back when I was working for Viacom at a meeting we had in Chicago where he was the assistant Chief at WLAK. We hit it off and remained friends for many years. A couple of years ago he and his family came out here for a look at the PNW. Unfortunately, we were in the middle of a heavy layer of smoke and forest fires. At least we did get to all have lunch together. Mike was very active on several national engineering remailers and was known to all as a very knowledgeable engineer.



August 31, 1962 – December 30, 2020

Michael McCarthy, of Downers Grove, IL died peacefully after a long battle with lymphoma, a stem cell transplant, and GVHD. He is survived by his wife, Jennifer Adelman-McCarthy, daughters Kelly and Colleen McCarthy, and his therapy dog, Koehl; sister Christine (Albert) Goetz of Roselle; niece Alison (Goetz) Martin; and brother Thomas (Laura) McCarthy of Leander, TX.

Mike was a longtime member of the Society of Broadcast Engineers and served on both the National and Local Boards of Directors. Mike attained certifications CSRE and CEA. Serving as the Chicago Frequency Coordinator

was perhaps his favorite “side job”, as it allowed him behind-the-scenes access to Bears, Cubs, White Sox, and Blackhawks playoff games. For the past two decades he has been the Chief Engineer for Newsweb Radio. Mike took great pride in making everyone sound their best on the air. Owner of McCarthy Radio Engineering, he was happiest when messing with transmitters and towers.

He was a ham radio operator and spent time and talent giving back to the community in emergency communications. He and his friends built a huge network of repeaters allowing Chicago area ham operators to communicate with the weather service. They spent many a stormy day and night at the weather office relaying messages. He contributed technically, with Jen and a local group of hams, to rescue efforts on 9/11. He was always ready to step up and help.

I've recently been doing some 'house cleaning' and came across a number of things to share with you –

This item was on a box that was, apparently, used to ship a Vox Pro (Audio Editor) from Audion Labs to Cal Vandegrift in Federal Way. Do you remember when Harris (now GatesAir) and Allied were one? Anyone care to guess the year?

Audion Laboratories
23172 S. Bluhm Road
Beavercreek OR 97004

Ship to:

Harris-Allied
Attn: Cal Vandegrift
33729 32nd Ave. S.W.
Federal Way WA 98023

How about this gem? This nice metallic label was once attached to an ATC Cartridge Tape unit.



I have no-clue how I ended up with this item. I found it in a pile of 'stuff' at my shop. Apparently it was used by KTAC (now known at KHHO) in Tacoma. The Wall-Wart power supply was smashed. I scrounged another and it leaped to life with a very scratchy volume control. Don't know about the tape player. All my cassettes are long-gone.



Last fall I stopped by KELA in Centralia where John Mackey showed me the old KELA Transmitter. It had been moved to a second story room to keep out of the site's frequent flood waters. He said it did not work, and wanted to know if I knew how to get it going. I said 'sure' but not sure they'd be willing to pay for the parts. Incidentally, this is the same model transmitter used by KTW

when I worked there in the late 60's.



The following picture adorned my office when I worked with KNBQ in Tacoma. It was a full page from the station owner's newspaper, the Tacoma News Tribune, announcing the birth of their new radio station using a mode of modulation that was new back then...called FM. The Studio, Offices and Transmitter were all located at what they called 'The Top of the Town' at 11th and Grant Streets in Tacoma. The Tribune was not done with broadcasting, later adding an AM Station (the FM became KTNT-FM) and, a couple years later, KTNT-TV Channel 11, all operating from the same location. (They did add onto the building). Later on, the FM's call letters were changed to KNBQ. Today they are KIRO-FM. This picture now resides in the technical area of Bonneville-Seattle.



The following is an enlargement of the tower showing on the top the stations first FM Antenna. There are very few of us that recall the name of that antenna (That's another story) As time went by they mounted that antenna on a platform on the roof of an adjacent house for a while, eventually giving it to Clover Park in the late 50's for use with their FM on 90.9 (Then called KPEC) there It was mounted inside the tower at what is now Clover Park Technical College that was used to support their UHF/Channel 56 TV Antenna. Last I know, it was cut up for scrap.



On another front, some FM's that are operating 'Multicast Channels' (sometimes call Side-Channels) are starting to attract attention. We've seen a few instances in the Seattle area where one of the HD-2s will show up in the Nielsen Ratings...but nothing substantial.

For some time I have been told that HD Radio is fine for large markets where revenues are higher and pockets are deeper, but not in smaller markets. This theory is pretty evident when you travel east of the Cascades and discover a lot of FM signals, but few running HD.

Then along comes Nielsen with their recently publicized ratings of radio stations in markets, large in small. Most of the time I scroll through these lists just looking for call letters that used to reside in the Seattle area. Earlier in

January, something caught my eye that I want to share.

Lincoln, Nebraska, market #163 with a total population over 12, of 273,000. The 8th ranked station is KBBK-HD2, with a 3.2 share running CHR.

How about Canton, Ohio, market #142 with a 12+ population of 342,700, where WHOF-HD2 is #5 in that market with a Country format.

Or, Hagerstown-Chambersburg- Waynesboro, MD-PA, market #165 with a 12+ population of 263,000. They have TWO HD Channels generating ratings, both of them owned by the same company. WWEG-HD2 is #6 and WWEG-HD3 is #8.

This time looking at Reading, PA...

WLEV-HD2 is #2 with Urban AC owned by Cumulus

WRFY-HD2 is #5 airing Spanish CHR - iHM

WAEB-HD3 is #8 running CHR- IHM

There are a couple of questions that come to mind.

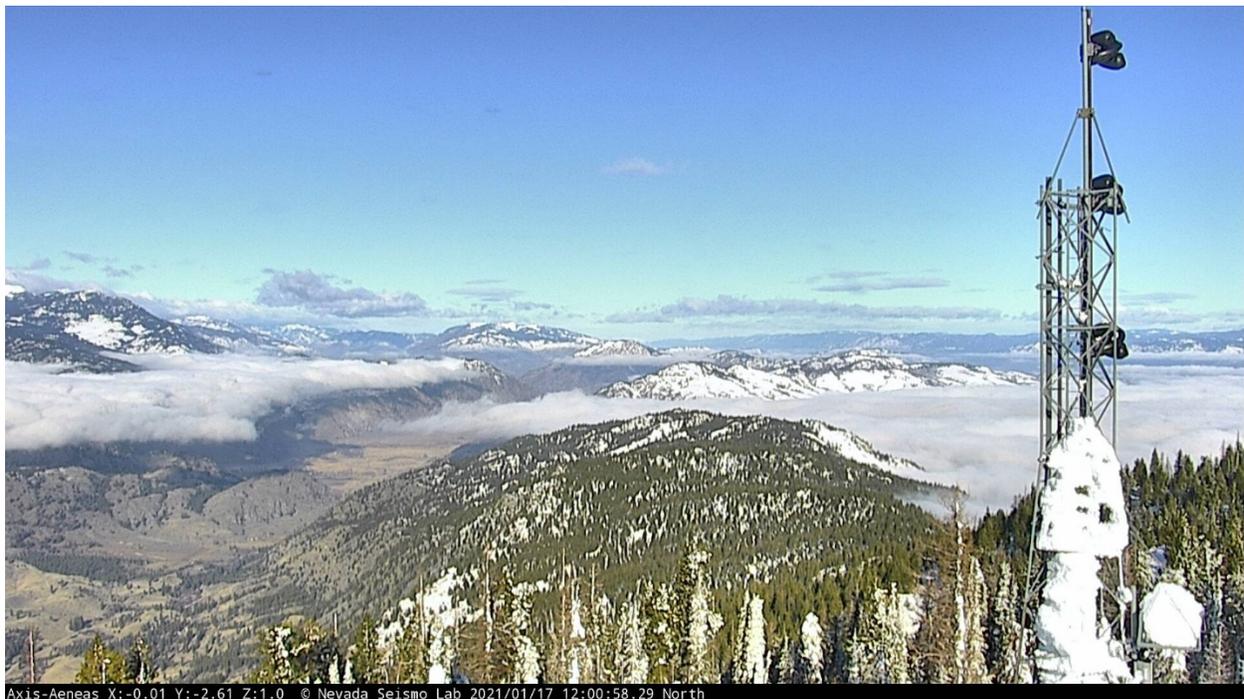
Why do certain markets have very successful HD Channels while others do not?

Could it be because, in these markets, the stations are trying harder to gain ratings?

So Channel 9 wants to change channels? This has been an interesting process to watch, when the big channel shuffle took place and the shift to Digital. The low channels, in the case of Seattle, Channel 4, 5 and 7 opted to stay on UHF (granted there was some shuffling as part of RePack). From all of this we got 'Virtual Channels', so the historic channel numbers would still work for those who would be confused with new numbers. During all of this,

the higher VHF Channels in our area, channels 9, 11 and 13, opted to stay where they were. Now Channel 9 is saying that their coverage is not what they thought it would be, and are asking the FCC for permission to move to Channel 17. I assume, if this comes to pass, they will still be known as Channel 9. I have not heard of Channel 11 or 13 having the same issues and are planning to move upward in frequency. Apparently they are happy with being Channel 11 and 13 that are actually on those historic RF Channels.

Another picture from the East-Side. On the far right you can see the antenna (the 3 black things) for KQWS, located on a 5200+ foot mountain in the Okanogan. KQWS is licensed to Omak and is operated by WSU's NWPB.



I was informed recently by Kent Randles (retired from Entercom in PDX) that KYCH has purchased a new 35 kW GatesAir liquid-cooled transmitter for their station in Portland. Apparently having a lot to do with space and lack of room for ducting an air-cooled model. This may well be the first liquid-cooled FM transmitter in the area. These days, most TV Transmitters are liquid cooled. Speaking of new Entercom transmitters, reportedly they have ordered a new 'air-cooled' model for their 107.7/KNDD in Seattle. I understand it will be installed in the latter half of February, weather permitting.

In the wake of the storming of the U.S capital, the FCC came out with a

warning about the use of Ham or CB frequencies for coordinating illegal activity.

Frankly, I find this a bit amusing. There are a large number of people who are of the opinion that if you have a law or rule prohibiting an activity that this will solve the problem.

Seattle is, finally coming to grips with a similar issue and is discovering that you have to 'enforce' a rule and punish the violators if you expect those that are intent in doing what they want to have second thoughts. In many ways the FCC and Seattle have become what's known as 'Paper Tigers'. If you are not familiar with this term, here are some definitions I found:

- "Paper Tiger" is a literal English translation of the Chinese phrase zhilaohu. The term refers to something or someone that claims or appears to be powerful, or threatening, but is actually ineffectual and unable to withstand challenge.
- Something, such as an enemy or foreign country, that seems very strong and dangerous but is really weak and not harmful.
- A paper tiger is someone who at first glance seems to be in charge but who, on closer examination, is completely powerless.
- A person or organization seeming powerful but really weak.

Interesting to note that this term is used by many languages.

Before I end this, a collection of images that many can relate to.

EVOLUTION



2019

2020

2021

**So in retrospect, in 2015,
not a single person got
the answer right to "Where
do you see yourself 5
years from now?"**

A flag for all countries!





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

Until then, stay safe and continue to wear your mask....and that means cover your nose too. The 'All-Clear' is still a long way off.

Clay, K7CR, CPBE
A SBE Fellow
SBE Member # 714
Since March of 1968