

Atlanta
Public Radio
Initiative

Status Report

**Competitive Issues Report
NPR Iowa Candidates' Debate
Citizens' Advisory Group**

Prepared for February 5, 2004
AETC Board Meeting

About Atlanta Public Radio Initiative

The Atlanta Public Radio Initiative (APRI) is an organization of Atlanta area residents who are strong supporters of public radio but believe the programming schedule of WABE suffers from a lack of shows devoted to intelligent dialogue about national and international issues.

APRI is not urging WABE to eliminate its music programming and switch to an all-news/discussion format. However, we do believe the station would achieve a better programming balance if it were to add more NPR shows which feature informed discussion of matters such as education, the economy, the environment, technology, taxes, terrorism, and foreign policy.

APRI currently has approximately 500 members who have signed a petition agreeing with our goals.

Status Report for February 2004

This report consists of three sections:

- 1) Our preliminary thoughts on the WABE 2002 Competitive Issues Report we received as a result of an Open Records Act request
- 2) The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* article on WABE's decision not to air the NPR-sponsored Democratic presidential debate live from Iowa
- 3) A statement regarding the formation of the Citizens' Advisory Group promised by the Board on October 28, 2003

WABE 2002 Competitive Issues Report: **APRI Preliminary Thoughts**

In September 2002 the AETC Board was presented a report that it had commissioned concerning the competitive situation faced by the station in the current and foreseeable media market. The "WABE Competitive Issues Report," put together by Public Radio Capital, had been available only to Board members.

But APRI presented the Board with a request for the document under Georgia's Open Records Act. The Board met our request, and we now have a copy of the document. Among the important points made in the document are:

- There has been a clear trend among public radio stations away from a dual music-news/discussion format to a single format (either all music or all news/discussion).
- Shifts to a single format have produced increased audience and revenues.
- Some public radio stations have purchased additional frequencies (including ones on the AM dial) and have run all-news/discussion on one frequency and all-music (or mixed music-news) on the other.
- It is financially feasible for WABE to support "the addition of new stations/operations with limited incremental expenses and the potential to add additional revenues." (p. 7)

We are especially interested in hearing the Board address the last two points. The Report refers to "the limited ability [of WABE] to increase audience and revenues with the current format that is split between news and information and classical." (p. 2) Purchasing additional frequencies and running different formats on each would seem to be an ideal response. We will inquire as to whether such response has been examined by the Board.

WABE's Decision Not to Air the NPR-Sponsored Iowa Democratic Presidential Debate

APRI members, and surely thousands of other WABE members, were eagerly looking forward to hearing the first radio-only presidential candidate debate in over 50 years on Tuesday, January 6 from 2-4 p.m. Even more impressive was that the forum was sponsored by NPR, so we expected to be treated to an intelligent, lively, commercial-free exchange of current political ideas -- exactly the kind of informative discussion programming APRI members want WABE to provide more frequently.

Instead -- with no pre-announcement, no explanation -- WABE simply didn't carry this historic and timely program. If you tuned into 90.1 FM at 2 p.m. on January 6, what did you hear? The same classical music that's on every week day between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m.

The brief side bar below appeared the next day in *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* as part of a major article on the Iowa caucus process and how the Democratic candidates were being perceived.

Tuned out in Atlanta ...

WABE-FM (90.1), Atlanta's public radio station, was the only one of the top 25 markets not to broadcast an NPR-sponsored Democratic presidential debate live from Iowa on Tuesday afternoon, NPR communications spokesman Laura Gross said. Efforts to reach someone at WABE for comment were unsuccessful. (*The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, January 7, 2004)

Being the only one of the nation's top 25 markets not to air the debate is an indication of how out of step WABE's programming is -- and a public relations black eye for the station that was seen by thousands of AJC readers.

Formation of the AETC Citizens' Advisory Group

APRI was heartened at the October 2003 meeting when the Board voted to establish a Citizens' Advisory Group to give input regarding the programming on WABE. Chuck Taylor was given the responsibility for establishing the group.

APRI quickly followed up with Mr. Taylor, who first indicated that our organization could have two representatives. On December 8, Mr. Taylor contacted APRI and informed us that, in more seriously considering the make-up of the group, it was determined that no organization would have more than one representative, with one alternate member. APRI understands the need to keep the group at a reasonable size and is fine with that decision. Andy Altman was elected to be APRI's member; Perry Mitchell was selected to be the alternate.

However, since that initial contact in early December, we have heard nothing more. Hopefully, Mr. Taylor will relate his progress at today's Board meeting, including a definite time line for the group's formation and its inaugural meeting.

This is an initiative APRI is keenly interested in, and we would like to have the Citizens' Advisory Group begin its vital work as soon as possible.