

Ham Radio's Minority Status

AD0WU

“I AM THE .2% I'M A LICENSED HAM RADIO OPERATOR” This quote is part of an Extra Class Florida ham's on-line icon. Why? While I do not know Barry's mind, I know what this said to me. First, I felt proud. I too tested into Barry's elite club. Yet, I soon realized my reaction was probably self-indulgent. For me now, Barry's icon lays bare this disquieting idea; our clerisy is less the result of our technocratic mastery than our cultural relevance. In other words, most people may not care enough about Amateur Radio to even bother trying to join us.

Meanwhile, radio spectrum is in high demand. Few things tempt telecom tycoons more than vacant spectrum. You see where this goes. Already, they look at our vacant spectrum. At some point, they will argue their cultural relevance trumps ours and they want yet another piece. Worse, they may be right. Now, is the best time left for change.

When I was first licensed as WB8IIY, FM repeaters were leading edge. My town had one. It was the Great Lakes repeater on Henry Ford Hospital. Soon, my club, the Down River Control Group (DRCG), installed Detroit's first 70cm repeater. This beauty was full-duplex. Each of our five members (K8AQC, K8ZOA, K8ICZ, WA8SDC & me) had an input frequency. Everybody could talk at once. We each had duplexers, built our own controllers and re-purposed G.E. Progress Lines. Disdainfully, we called people using off-the-shelf rigs – *appliance-operators*. Using our standards, they failed to measure up... not real hams.

Such elitism is old. Before I could shave, I remember hearing a ham using his plate-modulated home-brew “full-gallon”. His infamous lyric: “CQ, CQ, CQ... this is, W2OY calling CQ... no lids, no kids, no *space-cadets*, class A only.” Mike had his own view of Amateur Radio standards too. Space-cadets used phonetics and even single sideband. Class A hams built rigs with quality audio not needing phonetics.

On August 14, 2017, I petitioned the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) to start a rule-making process changing Part 97 of its rules. Among several things, it would add a new entry level license to Amateur Radio... the Tyro License. [Tyro is a Latin derivative meaning “new recruit.”] For only the Tyro license, the Petition suggests simple on-line testing of radio etiquette and FCC rules... but, no technical questions beyond safety. It would set aside a virtually unused slice of our 70cm band for narrow-band analog FM. This would be the only spectrum available to Tyro Licensees.

Recently, I erected a solar powered GMRS repeater overlooking the Mississippi River Valley and listed it with an on-line GMRS registry. I soon had a request from a ham to use that repeater. Why, when there are excellent ham repeaters in the area? You know

why. Unlicensed family members cannot use ham repeaters. The permissible communication on this Tyro sub band would be quite like the Family Radio Service (FRS) or General Mobile Radio Service (GMRS). Anyone eleven years of age can likely get a Tyro License. Importantly, Amateur Radio's cultural relevance is at the Petition's core

Late in August, using an on-line forum, I publicized the Petition. Barry and many others read the Petition's synopsis at: www.2HTI.com. The negatives were quick. Moreover, because I have read ARRL Document #25, "*Entry Level License Committee Report*," I know most of you do not completely agree with my solution. Yet, most do agree; there is a problem.

I wrote this article because I want you to change your mind. I want you and the ARRL to support moving the Tyro Petition to a Notice of Proposed Rule Making (NPRM).

Surely, the Petition is imperfect. But, the Commission's process is the path toward perfecting it. While slow and arduous, their process allows everyone opportunity to seriously consider the starting ideas and offer omissions, corrections and improvements. In the end, this becomes our plan... Amateur Radio's idea.

The most common gripe is that ham radio is not CB radio and, "dumbing-down" the entry requirements would degrade the hobby. I doubt that. Fifty years ago I was wrong-headed in thinking *appliance-operators* would degrade the hobby... just as Mike was wrong about *space-cadets*, years before. Like most humans, part of me resists change. That part often fails to see bigger issues. Cultural relevance is a big issue.

It is true, I want you to accept lower class licensees. It is also true that my proposed on-line Tyro test will not weed out less erudite recruits. We who are already in the "club" can view this as a threat to our collective self-esteem... or, we can see this as an opportunity to mentor. With Amateur Radio's long successful mentoring history, why doubt ourselves now? "Rubbing elbows" with Tyros brings little risk of demeaning you. Moreover, the Petition puts upper-class local hams in charge of over-the-air conduct; thus, restricting the ability to demean Amateur Radio.

Incorporating the Tyro Petition into Part 97 offers a new vision for Amateur Radio. It can quickly double, even quadruple, the number of hams in the country. The new vision allows Congress to promote building ham microwave linked repeater networks in the medians of all forty-three thousand miles of Interstate Highway... to allow Amateur Radio reasonable access for constructing repeaters and microwave links on Forest Service, BLM and other public lands... to force public land managers to have sound transparent reasons for a "NO"... and, establish "public-good" rules for our access.

What could that mean? It means, thousands of over-the-road truckers, vacation travelers and just ordinary drivers become ham radio connected first responders... seconds and yards away from trouble. This, while the cell-phone connected first responders are many minutes and miles away. Then, millions of people evacuating before the hurricane can talk to each other to find: gasoline, water, food, toilets or a lug-wrench. Phone numbers are not mandatory. Ham repeaters are one-to-many communication systems, party lines. All can hear. Any can help.

In 1993 the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) embraced an existing Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program. Today, there are almost as many CERT volunteers as hams. Some CERT proponents have expressed a need for their own spectrum. Others try services like GMRS. While actualizing CERT's vision for the United States would be vexing without radio, they need more than just our spectrum. They need us.

We have the proficient practiced Technician, General and Extras Class radio operators. Just as it is, our license hierarchy promotes personal growth. Adding a new entry level class opens us to many new recruits like: CERT volunteers, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, your spouse, your church, etc. Some of these new Tyros may only add value using a communication appliance. But they add value. Rather than demoting Technicians, adding the Tyro license elevates their importance. Likewise, including a broader spectrum of our population elevates the importance of Amateur Radio.

With the Tyro Petition, CERT quickly gets systems to use and communication mentors. Upper class hams will build, manage and maintain their radio systems. The bargain does not end with volunteer labor. Radios are cheaper. Today, reliable 70cm hand-held radios sell for \$35. Money providing radios, repeaters, towers and related equipment for ARES/CERT volunteers to install would hardly be noticed in FEMA's fourteen billion dollar budget. Just think about what could happen in the next decade.

As we have in the past, we can build parallel emergency systems augmenting conventional systems. When disaster strikes, causing peak demand and sometimes failure, ham systems are there. During less exigent times, hams get to use them for fun and more mundane pursuits. This vision will always need advanced skills. It will always leave us with more to do. There will always be more new recruits to nurture.

For us, it means our friends and family can use ham radio. Many will discover a ham radio interest they did not expect. Auto makers might include 70cm ham radios on their option list next to satellite radios and CD players. Virtually everyone would see value in Amateur Radio because it would touch their lives. That is cultural relevance. The Tyro Petition proffers a vision replete with societal benefit while preserving our hobby for our grandchildren. Amateur Radio will always have purpose.

Gary A. Hampton
1305 South Grant Street
Longmont, Colorado 80501-6505
303-678-7935
AD0WU
gh@2HTI.com