

To: ARRL Board of Directors

From: James Pace, K7CEX

Subject: QST Delivery Suspension

Greetings to my former colleagues and new members of the Board. I would pray that whatever your family traditions are for this time of year, that you find peace, joy and love.

During my time in the Board Room and since then, there have been decisions made, by the Board that I may not have agreed with, but accepted because they were decided via the established protocol of the Bylaws. However, the decision to suspend the delivery of a *promised membership benefit* to current members, especially those with unexpired term memberships, has caused quite an uproar in the Ham Radio community at large. For the first time in my memory, I am truly disappointed with a decision made by the Board of Directors, that I and others have trusted to honor the advertised benefits.

Issue

The most recent Bylaw change, regarding QST, has become quite the talking point throughout the Country. The concept that a promised membership benefit has been removed during a membership term... is not just a shocking move, it is not right! Previous advertisements detailing the benefits of an ARRL membership did include QST. While we can argue that the advertisement did not specifically express a *print* version of the magazine, years of printed copies being sent to members indicate that it *was the intention of the League to provide a printed and mailed copy of QST as a benefit for membership*. I have a friend who paid for a 3-year membership in February, believing that he would receive a mailed copy of QST each month, but now he has been informed that his already purchased membership no longer has printed and mailed QST as a benefit – he still has a little over 2 years left in the term of membership. Those of us who are *Life Members*, while still receiving printed QST, wonder when the Board will deem it not a benefit for us and levy an additional fee. The question becomes – was this Bylaw change beneficial to the overall business health of the ARRL?

Rationale

I understand the costs of everything are going up, including the production and distribution of QST. I also understand that moving from print to digital is not unheard of in the business world; print is becoming a thing of the past. However, there is much more here that should be considered with the abrupt ending of a promised benefit for financial reasons.

As I consider the economic conditions of our society, ARRL Annual Reports and IRS 990 filings as well as 10 years of membership statistics, I conclude that some cost cutting measures are paramount. The task at hand is to balance cost cutting with *timing*, in order to minimize a membership downturn that would further compromise the revenue stream.

Analysis

I do not believe that statistics are absolute, but they can project a potential trend. In 2013 total membership was 161,148. Although I do not have the final count for 2023, my latest information shows 149,921, a drop of 11,227 or just below 7% over almost 10 years. It is clear that membership retention is

a factor in the revenue stream, but there is a potential further impact to revenue by the loss of memberships because of the Bylaw change. Often in a businesses cost cutting discussions, the human factor – the impact on members or customers – is not considered a part of the discussion. ARRL Members who have been denied a promised membership benefit, especially when removed during a term of membership, may have a bigger impact on membership retention and revenue than previously expected.

Conclusion

I am just one voice among the membership and I realize that I am being a bit of an *armchair quarterback* in this matter. I also know that all the trendlines for membership retention, revenue and expenses do not paint a very encouraging picture for the immediate future. Can things rally? Oh, I expect they can...but not for a while.

I would conclude that the Bylaw change that removed an *advertised benefit* for membership was ill advised. There is no shame in reversing a decision, in fact in this case, I believe it would be an honorable action to take.

I recognize that such a reversal would mean that more financial backfilling would have to take place, but just until the end of the various membership terms. Upon renewal a member would understand the increase in dues and fees.

As you prepare for the January Board meeting, I want you to know that regardless of my disappointment in the Bylaw change, I always have and always will support the ARRL and the Board. I will grouch once in a while but will always be an advocate for ARRL and Ham Radio. I encourage you all to reconsider your earlier action and consider reversing the decision. Your political capital with the members will be worth it.

73 and good Hamming

Jim