

April 16, 1982

Statement of Commissioner Patricia P. Bailey concerning  
Closing of the Federal Trade Commission's Regional Offices

I have not looked forward to this meeting. When it became obvious last fall that the budget reduction was going to necessitate a reduction in personnel and programming, I voted reluctantly to close four of our ten regional offices. It is no secret, because I have said it often, that in my opinion and from my observation, our regional offices are a vital and valuable component of the Commission's work. It is not only that they have brought important antitrust and consumer protection cases--I could name them, so could you --significant cases handled by each office during my time here.

It is not only that, but also that the regional offices handle thousands of business and consumer complaints and inquiries every year which we are otherwise ill equipped to deal with. A reduction in our regional presence will limit our vision, our perspective, and our ability to respond to the real needs of business and consumers.

Anyone who has ever spoken with me on this subject--including those in the regional offices--knows that it has been my opinion from the beginning that once having made the decision, however difficult and however reluctantly, to close four offices, the Commission should have moved swiftly to the next step - that is, to designate those that would have to close. Our failure to do so has had predictable, unfortunate results: all ten of our offices, uncertain of their future have suffered varying degrees of anxiety, low morale, malaise, and a loss of good personnel.

Much as I hate to make this decision, I prefer making it to continued uncertainty. It seems to me - even from the point of view of the regional offices - that it is better to know the worst, than to continue indefinitely slowly twisting in the wind.

The Commission's task, right now, is first to define a new national regional office structure; and to identify and delineate six regions, instead of ten and to designate which will take responsibility for each of the regions we establish. Second, we need to discuss the actual mechanics of accomplishing the closing of the four remaining offices. There are, perhaps, options, where personnel decisions are concerned. We should discuss them all. I care only that those who have served us well are treated well - they deserve every consideration we can offer them and every bit of assistance we can provide. I gather from the agenda that the chairman intends to raise these questions.

I am prepared to deal with the first decision - new regions and office closings. I doubt whether I am prepared, for lack of information, to make firm decisions on the second. I do not believe that the decisions about how to carry out these closings is only an administrative decision in which the Commission itself need not be consulted. The Commission need not be relieved of those difficult decisions. They involve peoples' lives and careers and if I am going to participate in abolishing their jobs, I intend to participate in the decisions about how they are treated.