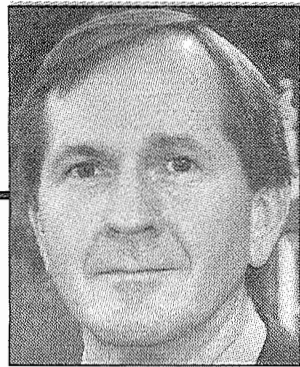


Conversations with the FTC



Dr Mark Jamison is director of the Public Utilities Research Centre at the University of Florida.

Utilities regulation an intricate system

Conversations: How long have you been involved in the area of utility regulation and what sparked your interest in this field?

Jamison: I began my career in regulation in 1984 when the United States broke up AT&T. The break-up created many issues about network interconnection; opened markets to competition, redesigned pricing systems and the like. This meant that telecommunications regulators needed economists to help answer such questions.

I was always a fan of using competition to improve service for customers, so naturally I found the opportunity to work on this quite attractive. I was fortunate that the regulator in the State of Kansas – the state where I lived – began hiring people to work on these issues at just the time that I was looking for such a job.

Conversations: As director of the Public Utility Research Centre (PURC) at the University of Florida, could you tell us a bit about this role?

Jamison: It is my responsibility as director to ensure that the centre is ready to provide the best training and research that can be found on utility regulation.

This means that I oversee the centre's strategic direction, ensure that we have the right people and that they are properly trained, and make certain that our standards for quality exceed the expectations of government and industry officials who look to us for training and research.

Beyond my leadership role, I personally provide courses and research for PURC's clients. In recent years I have provided courses in Europe, the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia.

My research agenda has looked into how regulatory agencies work and are organised, how agencies can adapt to constantly changing circumstances, how broadband is developing and its impacts on economies, and how well telecommunications competition is working.

This is actually quite dangerous work in a professional sense because when the regulator is successful, the group gains but each stakeholder suffers some loss.

The regulator can find him- or herself under attack even though he or she contributed greatly to the country's infrastructure successes.

Conversations: I learnt that you previously worked with the Iowa Utilities Board; what were some of your experiences?

Jamison: I worked largely at the national level, helping the state regulators work together and with the Federal Communications Commissions on policies so that the entire system of regulation fit together in a way that best served customers. I had many memorable experiences, but two stand out.

One was helping the United States regulators to begin working with regulators from other countries. Our view had always been that what we did in the United States had no impact on other countries.

We learnt otherwise when a group from the European Union contacted me to launch a discussion about how the break-up of AT&T had disrupted European markets and helped start the liberalisation process there. We had several exchange visits and I personally learned a great deal about the diversity of policies around the world.

Conversations: Could you tell us about some of the places you've worked outside the United States?

Jamison: There have been a number of places. One of my first experiences was in Uganda, where I participated in a study of telecommunications reform and eventually conducted a course for the Uganda Communications Commission.

Working there taught me how intertwined government and industry can be and how the relationship can often stall important reforms that would benefit consumers and the economy.

I have also done a lot of work with the National Telecommunications Commission (NTC) of Thailand. I have been impressed with how focused this commission is on developing its staff. The coursework that PURC provided helped the NTC determine its priorities and strategic direction.

PURC then advised the staff on research projects and ways to further develop their expertise. The NTC established a goal of ensuring that its staff became more expert than the industry and the international consultants. I think they have made great progress and are certainly recognised as leaders in telecommunications policy.

I have also enjoyed a close relationship with regulators in the Caribbean. Many Caribbean regulatory agencies send their staff to PURC courses. We at PURC always make it a point to participate in conferences in the Caribbean and to collaborate in the development of advanced courses.

My colleagues and I have been impressed with the level of sophistication of the regulatory analyses and debates in the region. Many of my former colleagues in United States regulation would do well to see the quality of work done in the Caribbean.

Conversations: The title of the

lecture you will be delivering on March 12 is *Functions, Formulas And Fiction: Regulation In The Next 10 Years*. Could you give us a bit of a preview of what you will be speaking about?

Jamison: Regulation is highly technical work, requiring the efforts of well-educated economists, accountants, engineers and attorneys, along with people from other professions.

Sometimes we who are involved in regulation are tempted to limit ourselves to ensuring that we fully understand and can accurately perform this technical work.

Said another way, we are sometimes tempted to view regulation as the application of mathematical functions and formulas. But succumbing to that temptation would be a serious mistake. Regulation is, at the end of the day, the work of humans working in a very complex system of economic and political interests, points of view, loyalties and the like.

To be successful, a utility regulator must be able to navigate that intricate system, informally orchestrate the work that is done by the many stakeholders and players, and help the system evolve as times, needs, and circumstances change.

This is actually quite dangerous work in a professional sense because when the regulator is successful, the group gains but each stakeholder suffers some loss. The regulator can find him- or herself under attack even though he or she contributed greatly to the country's infrastructure successes.

Conversations: On a lighter note – will this be your first time in Barbados and/or the Caribbean? Outside of the lecture, what are you looking forward to most?

Jamison: This will be my first time in Barbados, but not in the Caribbean. I am excited about visiting the country for the first time. But mostly I am excited about reconnecting with people whom I have known for some time and for whom I have great respect and admiration.