

Rocky's TV Talk On 'Hope'

By John Horn

The fifth program of Gov. Nelson A. Rockefeller's "Executive Chamber" monthly TV series, titled "Not Without Hope" and dealing with mental retardation, was telecast on some 20 New York stations over the weekend, including Channels 2, 4 and 5 here. Channel 13 is showing it to-night at 10:30.

Except on two upstate stations, and tonight's prime-time exposure, the program was given free exposure in the sparse-audience, advertiser-bittled time of television's "intellectual ghetto" of Saturday and Sunday afternoons.

The series costs the taxpayer nothing, but is \$20,000 per show out of the pocket of Gov. Rockefeller.

As a program, "Not Without Hope" was slickly produced and written by Gene Wyckoff and directed by Dennis Kane.

A little too slickly. An excess of TV gimmickry—key inserts, the Governor moving from here to there apparently for the sake of movement, and a fanciful zooming helicopter shot—made a viewer over-conscious of technique to the detriment from the subject.

The Governor suffered somewhat. This observer was more aware of Mr. Rockefeller's skills in responding to TV direction when his mind should have been on what the Governor was saying.

The program was a substantial review of institutions and rehabilitation efforts, with many moving and compassionate sequences of afflicted children and their loving, dedicated parents.

An aim of the program was to increase public understanding. It is doubtful that a stir will be made. Or that an appreciable number of the state's citizens watched, let alone cared.

That's the way all the programs have gone and the way the series will go unless Gov. Rockefeller's "Executive Chamber" is recognized for the scandal it is—a testimonial to the shameful fact that TV stations are covering Albany and the state with woeful inadequacy—and forms the basis of industry and public re-evaluation of television's responsibility to the community.

Should a Governor personally pay for a non-political public-service series? What do non-Rockefellers do?

Is it not the duty of television stations, which hold public franchises, to report on municipal, state and Federal problems and efforts to solve them?

Must our elected officials—Mayor, Governor, President—go hat in hand to TV stations for reasonable time from singing commercials to outline, explain, argue the vital business of government?

Can a station, as Channel 7 does here in New York City, justify not running the Governor's or Mayor's programs because it insists on the journalistic privilege of producing its own? Is not the obligation of stations, limitedly licensed as public and not private enterprises, to telecast activities and public statements of high officials, quite apart from broadcasting's journalistic role?

These questions will have to be debated and answered satisfactorily, not merely swept under the rug, before the viewing public will get more than the tokenism of "Executive Chamber" on Saturday and Sunday afternoons.

New York Health Tribune

3/1/65