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Chris Forrester,

Clay 'Tom' Whitehead, a true pioneer of satellite and pay-TV broadcasting died a few days ago (July 23) in Washington DC aged 69. He had been suffering from prostate cancer. Dr Whitehead was one of the founders of Luxembourg satellite operator Astra.

Dr Whitehead had an illustrious engineering career and for four years from 1970 was the White House's director of Telecommunications Policy. He was a far-thinking pioneer, and said his chief concern was to try and get the (then) Nixon administration to become "more anticipatory" in addressing rapid technological change.

His far-thinking very much extended to the role satellites could, and would, play in the future. Dr Whitehead is credited with demolishing the Comsat and Intelsat monopoly over transmission, and his encouragement allowed rival systems to come to the fore and thus help the emerging cable industry bypass AT&T's costly leased lines.

Q U I C K In 1979 he joined Hughes Communications as president, and was instrumental in backing the launch of the Galaxy program of commercial satellites. He left Hughes in 1983 in order to put together a \$180m consortium that evolved into Astra.

Unfortunately he spent some 10 years of his life in a legal squabble with SES Astra (and the Luxembourg government) claiming a total of \$1.8bn and receiving some €30m as dividend payments in a Court-ordered settlement in June 2002.

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