

Revive FCC's Fairness Doctrine



SUPPORT

Rep. Dennis J. Kucinich, D-Ohio

■ Kucinich chairs the Domestic Policy Subcommittee of the House Government Reform Committee.



OPPOSE

Rep. Mike Pence, R-Ind.

■ A member of the Judiciary Committee, Pence is a former TV and radio host.

It may be hard to believe, but the true owners of the airwaves are not the media. They are the American people, who lease the airwaves to owners of the broadcast corporations.

Yet, we seem to have no rights. At one time, the Fairness Doctrine protected the public's right to a diversity of views about the issues of the day by imposing a responsibility on broadcasting corporations. It was part of the lease.

Since the repeal of the Fairness Doctrine in 1987, the public has steadily lost its right to that diversity of views because broadcasting companies are not accountable to the public.

Only six companies own the vast majority of all media sources. Six CEOs determine most of what you and I see and hear on the public airwaves. One is Rupert Murdoch, who just added *The Wall Street Journal* and *Dow Jones* to his empire of opinion-influencing media outlets. The result is that news coverage and editorial decisions must first be good for profit. Perhaps that explains why coverage of veterans issues is so inadequate: it doesn't add to the CEO's bottom line. Indeed, a whole raft of significant issues gets short shrift. Health care, pensions, the fact that wages are not keeping up with profits – the list goes on and on. Meanwhile, Paris Hilton's legal troubles get nightly coverage.

It does not have to be this way. The public only has to demand what any owner receives: the rights of ownership. If your government officials prove unable or unwilling to protect your ownership rights, vote them out and get someone who will. But don't believe the lie that your ownership rights are better protected by your renters, the media broadcasting corporations – unless, that is, you enjoy reading exclusively about Paris, gossip and other profitable distractions.

In 1949, the Federal Communications Commission began to develop and enforce the so-called Fairness Doctrine, which required broadcasters to present controversial issues in a fair and balanced manner. But there's nothing fair about the Fairness

Doctrine. To avoid administrative costs and hours of paperwork and legal fees, broadcasters opted to offer noncontroversial programming. As a result, talk radio, as we know it today, simply did not exist.

Recognizing the chilling effect that the regulation was having on broadcast freedom, the FCC began to overturn its own ruling on the Fairness Doctrine in 1985. Following that change in policy and President Reagan's veto of attempts to reinstate it, the lifting of the Fairness Doctrine opened the public airwaves to a free and vigorous discussion of controversial issues. When Rush Limbaugh began his career, there were 125 talk-radio stations in the United States. Today there are 2,000. While Limbaugh, Sean Hannity and other conservative giants dominate the national syndicated market, many moderate and liberal programs succeed admirably at the local level.

Unfortunately, in the name of fairness, there is talk about restoring this archaic regulation of radio and television. Bringing back the Fairness Doctrine would amount to government control over political views expressed on the public airwaves.

I have introduced the Broadcaster Freedom Act, which would prohibit the FCC from prescribing rules, regulations or policies that would reinstate the requirement that broadcasters present opposing viewpoints on controversial issues of public importance. The Broadcaster Freedom Act will prevent the FCC or any future president from reinstating the Fairness Doctrine.

THE HEART OF THE ISSUE

Supporters say the Fairness Doctrine would protect the public's right to a diversity of views. Opponents say it amounts to government control over political views expressed on the public airwaves.

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