

# This Just In: Fed Govt says Real Journalism in Decline

✘ The head of the Federal Communications Commission, Michael Copps, says “The news is suffering from a bad case of substance abuse.” He says “real journalism” is in decline. He says, “What you and I are getting these days is too much opinion based on opinion and too little news based on fact.”

So what does Mr. Copps, a liberal Democrat, want to do about this affront to all right-thinking Americans? He wants the federal government to step in and use its considerable power to make things right.

Copps never said he wants to resurrect the long dead Fairness Doctrine. Not in so many words, anyway. But that’s what he was talking about – new rules that would allow the FCC to, at absolute least, influence journalism and political content that comes to us over the airwaves.

Copps made his comment in a speech to the Federal Communications Bar Associations in Washington – and oh yeah, he mentioned two media villains by name: Bill O’Reilly and me. According to the Hill newspaper, Copps said O’Reilly and I are “examples of the problem with today’s media landscape,” alleging that we have “taken his own words out of context.”

What I have said in the past is that liberal Democrats want to bring back the Fairness Doctrine in order to silence conservative voices. That simple, I’ve said. They have no interest in tamping down on liberal bias on the airwaves. It’s only conservatives who are in their crosshairs.

I have also said they’re smart enough not to call it the Fairness Doctrine, which was repealed when Ronald Reagan was president. The Fairness Doctrine pretty much called for equal time on the air: if you put on conservative shows, you need

to set aside time for liberal voices.

In *A Slobbering Love Affair*, in a chapter titled “The Unfairness Doctrine, I wrote that, “If the Fairness Doctrine were resurrected now, any radio station that ran, say, Rush Limbaugh or Sean Hannity or Glenn Beck or Laura Ingraham – or any other big, profitable conservative talk show – would have to make time for liberal shows. These almost certainly would get crummy ratings and bring in lousy revenues. So we can expect, with a new Fairness Doctrine, that stations will jettison a lot of conservative talk shows, especially the smaller ones ....”

So you can see how the very term “Fairness Doctrine” has taken on a stench. And I said they won’t use the word “Fairness” when they try to shut down conservatives. Instead, they’ll talk about the need for “localism,” whereby the federal government would require radio stations around the country to put on local voices if they want their licenses renewed.

According to the Hill, Copps – apparently in an unintended effort to make me look smart – told his audience, the key going forward is “making sure there is media about, and originating from, the local communities a station serves.”

And don’t think for a nanosecond that those local voices will simply be Ms. Smith from the library or Mr. Jones from the sewer department. They’ll mainly be local left-wing political voices. Frankly, I don’t care how many left-wingers radio stations put on the air. But when the federal government says you better put them on the air, presumably to balance things out, or lose your license to broadcast and go out of business – that’s when things get dangerous.

In their book about the Fairness Doctrine, *A Manifesto for Media Freedom*, Brian C. Anderson and Adam Thierer wrote this:

“And make no mistake, liberals want to snuff out this exciting, democratic world of analysis and debate and return

to the good old days, when you got up in the morning with the New York Times and had dinner with Dan rather – and basically kept quiet while your elite betters told you what to think.”

They also wrote that if the Fairness Doctrine or something like it under a different name ever came back to life, “The effects would be seismic – nothing less than wiping out most political talk radio.”

Liberals in the U.S. media are hardly in a tizzy over Copps’ scary remarks, but his shot across the bow made its way up to Canada, where a conservative Web site, Canada Free Press, pulled back the curtain to see what the wizard was really up to.

“The only reason that Copps is even discussing this is because of the success of Fox News. ... Does anyone actually think that the Democrats would be calling for these measures if MSNBC and not Fox was the top rated cable news network?

And the Canadian paper acknowledged what the New York Times and other liberal news organizations will never admit:

“This isn’t about ... what Copps considers the decline of ‘real journalism’ whatever that means but about the liberals lack of success in the new world order of journalism that has given conservatives more of a voice.

“As a liberal Democrat Copps should be front and center in defending free speech but any government intervention in journalism will do exactly the opposite and stifle opinion.”

True enough, but it misses a fundamental point: Too many liberals have forgotten how to be liberal.

