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ABC, CBS and NBC Provide Zero Coverage of Effort to Control Media Content and Extinguish Talk Radio

Blackout of Left's "Fairness" Doctrine Push

Barack Obama's transition team has tapped former FCC Commissioner Henry Rivera, a longtime proponent of the so-called "Fairness Doctrine," to head the team looking for the man or woman who will soon give Democrats a 3-to-2 advantage on the Federal Communications Commission.

It's another troubling sign that Democrats are serious about trying to reinstate the long-defunct FCC regulation, which can more aptly be described as the "Censorship Doctrine" because of its chilling effect on free speech. In effect from 1949 to 1987, the Fairness Doctrine was an obstacle to open discussion of public policy issues on the radio; its removal in the Reagan years spawned the robust talk radio marketplace of ideas now enjoyed by millions.

While talk radio hosts often warned during the campaign that free speech could be trampled by an all-Democratic majority, the broadcast networks have failed to react to this dangerous threat to the First Amendment. A review shows the broadcast networks — whose affiliates could also be regulated — have failed to run even a single story mentioning the push for a new Fairness Doctrine. The most recent mention of the Fairness Doctrine was on May 30, 2007, when in an interview on CBS's *The Early Show*, Al Gore bizarrely called it a "protection" that was removed during the Reagan years.

But there has been news to report, as Democrats have been more than candid about their plans. On Election Day, for example, New York Senator Charles Schumer justified regulating political speech. "The very same people who don't want the Fairness Doctrine want the FCC to limit pornography on the air," Schumer told the Fox News Channel. "You can't say, 'government hands off in one area' to a commercial enterprise, but you're allowed to intervene in another. That's not consistent."

In late October, Democratic Senator Jeff Bingaman told

a New Mexico radio station how he "hopes" the Fairness Doctrine returns so radio will be more to his liking: "For many, many years, we operated under a Fairness Doctrine in this country. I think the country was well-served. I think the public discussion was at a higher level and more intelligent in those days than it has become since."

In '87, Journalists Backed Free Speech

"The truth is...that there is no 'fairness' whatever in the 'fairness' doctrine. On the contrary, it is a chilling federal attempt to compel some undefined 'balance' of what ideas radio and television news programs are to include....The 'fairness doctrine' undercuts free, independent, sound and responsive journalism — substituting governmental dictates. That is deceptive, dangerous and, in a democracy, repulsive."

— *Washington Post* editorial, June 24, 1987.

Democrats have launched various attempts to control of broadcast content since the Fairness Doctrine's demise in 1987, but the push has become more insistent in the past couple of years. After the failure of a liberal immigration bill in 2007, Senator Dianne Feinstein told *Fox News Sunday* that she was "looking at" a new Fairness Doctrine because "talk radio tends to be one-sided....It's explosive. It pushes people to, I

think, extreme views without a lot of information." As with Schumer and Bingaman recently, none of the broadcast networks thought Feinstein's threats worth reporting.

Journalists aren't known for turning a blind eye to free speech issues. In 2003, ABC, CBS and NBC ran 33 stories on criticism of the Dixie Chicks for speaking out against President Bush and the Iraq war. ABC's Jim Wooten darkly warned: "All this has reminded some of the McCarthy Era's blacklists that barred those even accused of communist sympathies for working in films or on television."

When Democrats first pushed to reinstate the Fairness Doctrine in 1987-88, both the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* (see box) came down strongly on the side of free speech. Now that the Left is gearing up to suffocate talk radio, the media's First Amendment solidarity seems to have been eclipsed by their loyalty to the would-be censors of the Democratic Party. — *Rich Noyes*

L. Brent Bozell III, Publisher; **Brent Baker, Rich Noyes, Tim Graham**, Editors; **Geoffrey Dickens, Brad Wilmoth, Scott Whitlock, Matthew Balan, Kyle Drennen** and **Justin McCarthy**, Media Analysts; **Michelle Humphrey**, Research Associate; **Seton Motley**, Communications Director. Sign up for daily *CyberAlerts* at www.mrc.org.