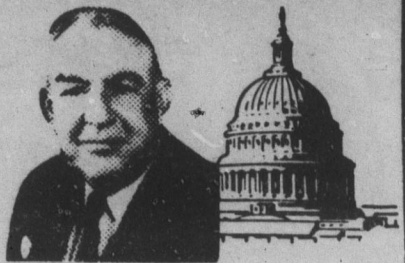


SENATOR SAM ERVIN SAYS



WASHINGTON — The Federal Communications Commission has ruled that under its so-called "fairness doctrine" the broadcast industry must grant free time to those who oppose cigarette smoking when a station broadcasts commercial cigarette advertising.

The latest ruling in the Federal crusade against cigarette smoking comes at a time when the proof about such alleged health hazards is about where it was several years ago when the Surgeon General selected the tobacco industry for anti-smoking campaign. Nothing much more definite about the alleged relationship between smoking and lung cancer has been established to date.

The FCC interpretation of the beguilingly phrased "fairness doctrine" goes into an area much beyond the propriety of tobacco commercials. It raises serious questions of government policy over the economic welfare of the broadcast industry and how far the Federal Government proposes to go in giving its point of view about commercials presented to the viewing and listening public.

The euphoria which surrounds a fine sounding phrase like the "fairness doctrine" sometimes causes the agency to lose sight of a fundamental fact that broadcasting is, after all, a commercial enterprise which is supported by advertising revenues. It is on this "public interest" point that many question the latest ruling.

One can envision television and radio broadcasts degenerating into a debate between paid-for commercials, on the one hand, and free-time rebuttal, on the other hand, under this ruling. Imagine what could happen if every time a commercial were presented, several points of view about that commercial had to be presented by the station under the "free time" ruling. The result could be economically disastrous for the sta-

tion. Viewers and listeners who already have their own way of censoring unwanted commercials might be subjected to an indigestible fare of listening to conflicting points of view over the relative merits of soap, toothpaste, or tobacco.

Or, consider the fact that under this regulation Federal agencies could vie with each other to answer commercials. The National Highway Safety Agency's views might follow each auto commercial, the Food and Drug Administration's views might follow food and beverage ads, and the Federal Trade Commission's views might "clean up" any other ad.

Nor does the matter end there. Religious broadcasts are subject to the "fairness doctrine." Recently, a conservative evangelist who purchased air time on a Pennsylvania station brought the station into a dispute over the "fairness doctrine." The outcome was that the station was required to give free air time to those who disagreed with the evangelist's views.

So the question remains. In this ruling in the public interest? To my mind, it is not. If it is carried out, it will damage both the broadcast industry by gravely weakening its economic base and the American public's freedom of thought. To date, Congress and the people have jealously guarded against Federal brainwashing of what we think, what we buy, and what is "good" and what is "bad" for us. To reject this policy, and to permit the Federal agencies to indoctrinate us on the relative merits of broadcast commercials opens the door wide to Federal controls of a dangerous nature over this media.

For this reason, I would hope that the Commission would take a second look at its ruling. To my mind, it constitutes a dangerous interference with freedom of thought and with private enterprise in this country.

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