Government regulation syndrome

by Cal_Thomas

Liberals want to resurrect the Federal Communications Commissionâ€™s Fairness Doctrine, a tenet created to ensure fair and balanced coverage of controversial issues, so that they can regulate talk radio and require â€œequal timeâ€• be given to opposing political views. Liberals donâ€™t like talk radioâ€™s mostly conservative content.

Some conservatives, aided by the FCC, want to regulate violence on broadcast television and, for the first time, cable television and the FCC will soon recommend that Congress enact legislation that would sanitize entertainment programming by controlling violent content. News content, which shows actual blood and gore, the result of real violence, would not be affected. Apparently, real violence is thought not to pose as great a threat to children and to public morality as the simulated kind.

According to The Washington Post, TV industry and government sources say the FCC report, which Congress commissioned in 2004, fails to adequately define violence, leaving that to federal legislators. Anyone familiar with laws governing how much skin a woman can legally expose at a strip joint without risking a raid is going to enjoy watching Congress try to define acceptable and unacceptable violence.

Apparently the V-Chip, which was touted by Al Gore in 1996 as the ultimate parental weapon against unwanted programming, has been a failure. Too many parents donâ€™t use the technology now built into every new TV set. According to watchdog groups like the Parents Television Council, TV ratings are not uniform, which makes it difficult for parents to use the V-Chip to block programs they donâ€™t want their children to see. Ratings reform is something on which everyone should be able to agree.

The FCC report, which is due to be released soon, reportedly concludes that Congress has the authority to regulate â€œexcessive violence,â€• but how will that be defined? When Jack Bauer on Foxâ€™s â€œ24,â€• tortures a terrorist to get information that will stave off a nuclear attack, is that excessive? If he fails and the bomb goes off, would that violence be considered excessive?

For 50 years social science has shown that prolonged exposure to TV violence can have a negative affect on children, but what about commercials and their link to human behavior? Do beer commercials cause kids to become alcoholics, or drunk drivers? If that could be proved, should commercials be regulated? Does prolonged exposure to tabloid stories, the grist of cable TV, turn viewers into bottom-feeding dunces who donâ€™t care about news that really matters? And, if that could be proved, is it the governmentâ€™s responsibility to insulate people from the guilty pleasures derived from such tripe?

Anyone concerned about the preservation of the First Amendment and the rights it guarantees to free speech and free expression should be worried about this latest assault on the Constitution. Conservatives who oppose regulation of talk radio, which most of them like, must be consistent and oppose the over-regulation of TV

content they donâ€™t like.

Increasingly, I meet parents of young children who have decided not to have a TV in the house. Having grown up with TV, they say they experience a period of â€œwithdrawal,â€• similar to that of breaking free of nicotine or other addictions. Soon, however, they are communicating more with their children, reading books to them and enjoying time together. Their lives are better without TV.

A conservative would call that a market decision. People decide not to consume a product that is bad for them. As the recent scare over bad pet food demonstrates, when consumers refuse to buy a tainted product and demand it be cleaned up, industry responds. When people have had their fill of really bad television, it will no longer be â€œMust See TV,â€• but â€œMust Leave TVâ€• and Iâ€™ll bet the industry will clean up its act in response, or face additional losses in ratings and revenue.

Thatâ€™s better than the government trying to define violence and police program content and it will give conservatives more leverage, should a Democrat win the White House next year, to oppose any regulation of talk radio.

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