



Censorship: The Threat to Silence Talk Radio

By Brian Jennings

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"Talk radio is the American voter." -- Rush Limbaugh

Freedom of speech. It is our most cherished privilege as Americans, guaranteed by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution since 1791. But at the dawn of a new presidential administration, an epic battle is looming -- a battle for our airwaves that could sharply curtail or silence altogether the freedom of expression that distinguishes America from the average dictatorship. The target of this battle is conservative talk radio.

If key Democrats have their way, the principles of the Federal Communications Commission's Fairness Doctrine will once again be enforced and allow government to control the content heard on free radio, a mandate that will have far-reaching implications for all media.

During the Reagan administration the FCC voted to stop enforcing the Fairness Doctrine, which required all licensed broadcasters to present "balanced" viewpoints on controversial issues.

Conservative talk radio burgeoned, giving rise to the father of conservative talk, Rush Limbaugh, and such hosts as Sean Hannity, Mark Levin, Michael Medved, Neal Boortz, Laura Ingraham, and others. The format was a smash hit -- resonating with listeners from coast to coast and giving a powerful voice to the conservative movement. Soon such programming, attracting an estimated 50 million listeners weekly, dominated the airwaves where liberal talk radio failed. Popular, profitable, outspoken, powerful, influential -- it's what the American people wanted, and its success was the Democrats' worst nightmare.

Now, the principles of the Fairness Doctrine threaten to be reinstated -- if not directly, then through back-door tactics involving ownership of stations. Under cover of being "fair," they will prove to be anything but: They will be used as a means of censorship by those with contempt for conservative talk radio. With our current Congress firmly under Democratic control, the future of talk radio -- indeed, freedom of speech for all Americans -- is under direct attack.

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Editorial Review

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Conservative talk-show programmer Jennings laments efforts by Democratic politicians to revive the Fairness Doctrine. The doctrine, enacted in 1979 and repealed by the Reagan administration in 1987, requires airing opposing viewpoints on television and radio. The huge popularity of conservative talk-radio programs and the consolidation of ownership of broadcasters has raised concerns about the need for more balanced voices. But Jennings argues that regular media, including NPR, and the Internet offer multiple channels for liberal views. He talked to conservative talk-show hosts Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, Michael Savage, Laura Ingraham, and others (as well as liberals Alan Colmes and Ed Schultz) for perspectives on the Fairness Doctrine. After 40 years in radio, he offers historical perspective on the growth of conservative talk radio. It grew out of the pent-up frustration of conservative listeners and has maintained popularity because the shows have developed talent and listener loyalty over the years. In the name of free speech, Jennings invites liberals to do the same rather than make back-door efforts to re-regulate the airwaves. --Vanessa Bush

Review

"Brian Jennings eloquently explains how whatever you consume, in whatever medium, is none of Big Brother's business. Although the government may stay away from this book, you should not." -- Alan Colmes

"Brian Jennings' book correctly chronicles how my father, President Reagan, felt about the Fairness Doctrine. The book is a testament to free speech and if the President were here today, he would read and endorse this book." -- Michael Reagan

"Brian Jennings' long and fruitful career in radio gives him an excellent vantage point on what can really happen to free speech on the radio if we're not careful. "Censorship" is his call to action!" -- Rush Limbaugh

"A must read for everyone who values the First Amendment." -- Mark R. Levin, nationally syndicated radio host and "New York Times" bestselling author of "Liberty and Tyranny"

"Brian Jennings knows what the badly named Fairness Doctrine would do to stop the flow of information and the free exchange of opinions talk radio offers as the most successful and prolific format on radio in America. "Censorship" exposes the real danger that our representative form of government faces if selfish members of that same government succeed in effectively outlawing talk radio as we know it today." -- Lars Larson, "The Lars Larson Show", KXL Radio, Portland, Oregon

"Brian Jennings' excellent book shines a contemporary light via his frontline experience in talk radio on yet the latest assault on our society's most valuable treasure -- freedom of speech." -- Michael Harrison, publisher, "Talkers" magazine

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Sophia Hardee:

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