

July 11, 2007

The Honorable Norm Coleman
United States Senate
320 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Coleman:

I write today to express our strong opposition to a reinstatement of the so-called "Fairness Doctrine."

This discredited regulation, which stemmed from the 1940s and was eliminated two decades ago, required television and radio broadcasters to present contrasting points of view when covering controversial issues of public importance. In the Federal Communications Commission's 1985 Fairness Report, the FCC asserted that the doctrine no longer produced its desired effect and instead caused a "chilling effect" on news coverage that may also be in violation of the First Amendment.

I write to you today urging you to oppose any attempt to resurrect this long-discarded regulation. Free speech must be just that – free from government influence, interference and censorship.

The so-called Fairness Doctrine would stifle the growth of diverse views and, in effect, make free speech less free. Newsgathers, media outlets and reporters will be less willing to present ideas that might be controversial. In fact, FCC officials found that the doctrine "had the net effect of reducing, rather than enhancing, the discussion of controversial issues of public importance," and therefore was in violation of constitutional principles. ("FCC Ends Enforcement of Fairness Doctrine," Federal Communications Commission News, Report No. MM-263, August 4, 1987.)

In the 20 years since elimination of the Fairness Doctrine, there has been a veritable explosion in alternative media outlets. Today, there are over 13,000 radio stations, more than 1,700 TV stations, nine broadcast TV networks, hundreds of cable and satellite channels, scores of mobile media devices and an infinite number of Internet sites that cater to every political persuasion and ideology. The Internet now enables consumers to obtain, and communicate to the world, virtually unlimited content.

Bringing back the Fairness Doctrine is unnecessary, unwarranted, and unconstitutional.

Sincerely,



David K. Rehr