

'Government Control of News' – book outlines chilling reality

By Kathryn Reed

Should the federal government be in the business of regulating news?



An emphatic exclamation point filled “no” would be my answer. But it has been and could be again.

Broadcasters until 1987 were subjected to the Fairness Doctrine. This in many ways a direct slap across the face to the Founding Fathers who in the First Amendment protected a free press.

Network television is different than cable stations because the latter are not licensed by the FCC, so they were never subjected to the Fairness Doctrine.

Corydon B. Dunham, who was NBC-TV’s legal counsel for 25 years, warns in his book, “Government Control of News: A Constitutional Challenge,” that media censorship rules have not disappeared because of the Localism, Balance, and Diversity Doctrine that could impact the Internet.

Both doctrines come under the Federal Communications Commission.

The FCC contends it wants oversight to make sure there is fair

and balanced coverage. Others say the Fairness Doctrine achieved the opposite and anything like it again would be just as detrimental.

In the book Dunham quotes the circuit court that upheld the FCC revocation of the Fairness Doctrine: "The Fairness Doctrine in operation disserves both the public's right to diverse sources of information and the broadcasters' interest in free expression. Its chilling effect thwarts its intended purpose ..."

Dunham does a good job of making the case why the government should not be in the news business. Admittedly, in my case, he was preaching to the choir.

While the book is important to read, to know the history of the Fairness Doctrine and what could be on the horizon, it is not an exciting read. But is an important book for anyone who cares about an independent media – be it print, broadcast or Internet.