

## 'Government Control of News' Reveals U.S. Censorship Threats

Written by Ginny Grimsley  
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In his book, "Government Control of News: A Constitutional Challenge," former NBC-TV legal counsel Corydon B. Dunham chronicles the government's censorship of broadcast news. He warns of a pending proposal that could renew television and radio news censorship and increase official control of local news content.

A new Localism, Balance and Diversity Doctrine would authorize the FCC to revise local news to meet government administration views, Dunham says. Since the FCC is now transferring the broadcast spectrum to the internet, it could potentially control internet local news as well.

"Government Control," which includes pages of carefully cited references, began as a study at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars at the Smithsonian Institute. Dunham did extensive research of records and witnesses to document the effects of the Fairness Doctrine and other television news censorship.

"The government justified the doctrine as a way to investigate and ensure stations aired opposing viewpoints on issues," he says. "But if a complaint was made about a view that had been broadcast, the FCC could order that the view be changed or other views presented."

Failure to comply could result in no license renewal.

In 1987, the FCC revoked the doctrine after the agency and courts found that it deterred news coverage of important issues, imposed censorship, chilled speech and prevented criticism of the administration.

But in 2008, the FCC released a proposed Localism Doctrine to force local TV news to satisfy government's views on localism, balance and diversity. "It has many of the same characteristics of the old Fairness Doctrine," Dunham says.

The new rule would have three presidentially-appointed federal commissioners authorized to change news reports and impose penalties, and an official local board for each station that

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could override the news judgment of local journalists. These boards would recommend loss of broadcast license for violations.

A special 2011 FCC report concluded the new doctrine would violate the public interest, but it remains pending.

### **About Corydon B. Dunham**

Corydon B. Dunham is a Harvard Law School graduate. His "Government Control of News" study was started at the Smithsonian Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and expanded and developed for the Corydon B. Dunham Fellowship for the First Amendment at Harvard Law School. As an NBC executive from 1965 to 1990, Dunham oversaw legal and government matters and Broadcast Standards. "Government Control of News: A Constitutional Challenge" is available on Amazon.com.