

More government control over television endangers conservatives

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Imagine yourself transported into the near future: say, the year 2011. A few well-organized liberal crusaders, incensed by the reduced influence of the liberal media and the emergence of Fox News and Rush Limbaugh, successfully lobby a Democratic president's FCC to harass conservative political shows off the airwaves by levying fines against them for using "inappropriate" language and harboring "adversarial" opinions. Limbaugh finds himself dropped by broadcasters slapped with federal fines for his "indecent" commentary and Fox News is continually battling a hostile FCC. If this nightmare scenario were to occur, we conservatives would have only ourselves to blame.

The idea that Big Government should determine what each of us can watch is certainly not born of conservative thinking, but unfortunately some are all too tempted to use Government to regulate television. Out of a rightful concern for family values and a well-placed faith in the wisdom of current FCC Chairman Kevin Martin, some conservatives may not be considering the power increased regulation would bestow on a liberal FCC bent on returning control of the media to liberal elites. What will happen if power in Washington shifts, and the Rush-haters and Fox News-bashers are in control?

While we conservatives may object to some, or much, of the programming that comes into our homes, these are decisions for individuals, and not the government, to make. The government and the television industry have rightly done much to help parents identify which shows are appropriate for their family. But if parents decide not to use existing tools like TV ratings, the V-chip, and cable and satellite locks to control what their kids watch, then it is hardly the place of government to impose on them yet another set of standards.

The good news is that new technologies, from digital video recording technology to video iPods to cell phones, may make government efforts to control content obsolete. It doesn't make sense to rely on an FCC process that is antiquated, cumbersome and often results in sanctions years after a program has aired. One company has already recognized the market advantage of developing a search feature that helps parents find programs specifically designed for children. While that program isn't markedly different from existing technologies, it's a promising example of the new market-driven solutions that empower parents, not the government.

The campaign for government control has long-term implications beyond just the debate over the proper role of government in regulating TV content. The pressure on the FCC to dictate standards comes from a small group of individuals who claim to speak for millions of Americans. That's exactly the kind of outsized influence and big-government thinking that conservatives have been fighting all along. Diminishing the power of Washington bureaucrats to determine entertainment content is an integral part of that same conservative vision – but it's also much more.

To support increased government control of what's on TV would be to fail to recognize that American moms and dads are the best arbiters of American family values. By returning the power to decide what to watch on TV, we are in fact insulating American families from the fickle nature of Washington politics. Bureaucrats and politicians, whether they lean left or right, should not be the ones to play parent. Americans simply don't need a nanny state to dictate their family values.

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