



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on August 3, 2009

Rather Wants Obama to Save the News Business

Will a "media czar" be next? At a time when the federal government has already taken over much of the country's financial industry, is a partner in "Government Motors," and may soon be taking over the healthcare industry, former CBS News reporter and anchorman Dan Rather has called for a government commission to help save the nation's news media.



In a speech that drew little attention in the national press, Rather said the White House should come up with recommendations to save journalism jobs and create new business models to help news organizations survive. "I personally encourage the president to establish a White House commission on public media," Rather said, in what the *Aspen Daily News* described as an "impassioned speech" to the Aspen Institute in Colorado. In an interview earlier that day, the veteran broadcaster explained why he seeks government involvement in the news industry.

"A truly free and independent press is the red beating heart of democracy and freedom," he said. "This is not something just for journalists to be concerned about, and the loss of jobs and the loss of newspapers, and the diminution of the American press' traditional role of being the watchdog on power. This is something every citizen should be concerned about." Rather, who currently hosts "Dan Rather Reports" on HDNet, blamed both corporate and political influence for what he called the "dumbing down and sleazing up" of network news reports and a decline of investigative and international journalism.

Rather's call for help comes at a time when the big three over-the-air networks — ABC, NBC and CBS — have been losing viewers to the cable channels for years and a number of daily newspaper, including the *Rocky Mountain News* in Colorado, have gone out of business. Yet it is ironic that he should be calling on the White House for help while deploring "political influence" on the news media. A "free and independent press" depends on a determination to keep government out of the news business, as reflected in the First Amendment's mandate that "Congress shall make no law ... abridging the freedom of speech or of the press." Saving jobs and creating new business models for the news industry is not among the responsibilities of the federal government. Nor would such assistance likely inspire the news media to become more vigilant in its much-needed role of "watchdog on power."

Perhaps Rather's trust in a benevolent government has something to do with having an administration more to his liking in Washington. It is hard to imagine him calling for a White House commission on the



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public media during the administration of George W. Bush. CBS declined to renew Rather's contract after he allegedly used forged documents during the 2004 campaign in a *60 Minutes* report claiming Bush was AWOL during much of the time he was in the Texas National Guard.



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