



Sen. Rockefeller's Wish: TV News Censorship

It is common for aging humans to look back fondly on the imagined "good old days" of their youth. Sen. John D. ("Jay") Rockefeller IV (D-W.V.), age 73, apparently longs for the days of limited news options, when there were but three television networks offering more or less identical news coverage from the same narrow, inside-the-Beltway perspective.



PBS also wielded more influence in those halcyon days of yore, with such programs as *The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour* (now *PBS NewsHour*), still produced today at Washington's WETA, whose [president and CEO](#) just happens to be the Senator's wife, Sharon Percy Rockefeller.

[The Hill reports](#) that "Rockefeller used a Wednesday [November 17] afternoon hearing on retransmission negotiations between broadcasters and cable providers to slam the media for 'all but surrendering to the forces of entertainment.'" The paper continues:

"Instead of a watchdog that is a check on the excesses of government and business, we have the endless barking of a 24-hour news cycle," Rockefeller said in his prepared remarks. "We have journalism that is always ravenous for the next rumor, but insufficiently hungry for the facts that can nourish our democracy. As citizens, we are paying a price."

Thus far it is typical fare, and not entirely unreasonable. However, Rockefeller, Chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee, which oversees communications, ventured into more dangerous territory thereafter ([video here](#)), saying:

I hunger for quality news. I'm tired of the Right and the Left. There's a little bug inside of me which wants to get the FCC to say to FOX and to MSNBC: "Out. Off. End. Goodbye." It would be a big favor to political discourse; our ability to do our work here in Congress, and to the American people, to be able to talk with each other and have some faith in their government and more importantly, in their future.

So much for the Left's claim to value diversity! Rockefeller wants to be rid of the many diverse voices on cable news channels and stick to the staid, stolid statism of the type that held sway when Walter Cronkite was "the most trusted man in America" and no opinion unsuitable for the *Washington Post* or *New York Times* editorial pages was permitted to trouble television viewers' minds.

In truth, most of what passes for "Right" or "Left" in journalism these days is merely the Republican or Democratic variant of statism. Still, there is a much wider spectrum of opinion available on TV today than there was 20 or 30 years ago — and there are bright spots, such as Judge Andrew Napolitano's *Freedom Watch* and John Stossel's *Stossel* on the Fox Business Channel, plus Pat Buchanan's frequent appearances on MSNBC's *Morning Joe*. For all this Americans ought to be grateful.



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on November 19, 2010

Of course, it is for precisely this reason that politicians like Rockefeller hate the explosion in the availability of news and opinion. Cable news, talk radio, and the Internet have vastly eroded politicians' ability to control political discourse, leading to such things as the recent electoral rout of the Democratic Party. Thus, it comes as no surprise that Rockefeller wishes to shut down two of the most prominent cable news channels; nor is it any great shock that he would be more than willing to do so despite the First Amendment's guarantees of freedom of speech and of the press.

Besides ousting Rockefeller and others of his ilk, the ultimate solution to such threats is to abolish the FCC, which has no constitutional justification for existing in the first place and which has served for decades as an impediment to free speech. The ever-present threat of FCC license revocation hangs over the head of every broadcaster, with a chilling effect on criticism of the government. Just this year, for example, the lawyer for a Pennsylvania Congresswoman [threatened](#) local radio stations with the loss of their FCC licenses for daring to broadcast ads arguing that his client's vote for ObamaCare was a vote for taxpayer-funded abortion.

No matter how much Rockefeller may want to return to those boring days of yesteryear when Huntley, Brinkley, and Cronkite ruled the airwaves, the fact is that the genie of greater speech and press freedom has long since exited its bottle. The government will have a very difficult time cramming it back inside now, and that is all to the good. After all, without the Internet, how else would we even have found out about the Senator's expressed desire to silence dissenters?

Photo of John D. Rockefeller: AP Images



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