

David Brinkley: "There are never any complaints . . . when the news is good."

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Those Who Criticize TV News Misunderstand It, Brinkley Says

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Many complaints against broadcast news come from Americans unfamiliar with serious journalism who think television exists to entertain and not to inform, NBC commentator David Brinkley said yesterday. And he supported congressional scrutiny of broadcast news.

"There are never any complaints about bias and slanting when the news is good," Brinkley told a Senate Judiciary subcommittee investigating freedom of the press. "They appear only when the news is bad, and nowadays it often is."

Brinkley said every time television airs pictures of urban arson and looting, for example, he gets hundreds of letters asking why the networks "glorify and dignify this kind of unspeakable conduct."

Brinkley said many in the audience want to know about the bad news or "or ought to know about it," while the complainers are mainly "listeners

who have never until recent years been exposed to anything like serious journalism."

Brinkley said he does not think there is any intimidation of broadcast news by critics even though some earlier witnesses have testified that the government is intimidating television news programs.

"Anyone who cannot stand criticism should not go into journalism," Brinkley said, "as I think anyone who can't stand criticism should not go into politics."

Brinkley said he supports the contention of Rep. William L. Springer, (R-Ill.) that Congress should continually survey television news and documentary programs and publicly criticize the networks when the lawmakers think a subject has been presented unfairly.

"It's the constant surveillance by the Congress that has helped in getting balance into these programs and getting bias out," Springer told the subcommittee.

C. A. McKnight, editor of The Charlotte, N.C., Observer and president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, told the panel recent developments could threaten freedom of the press and, consequently, the public's opportunity to get information.

McKnight cited the Supreme Court's recent split decision allowing The New York Times and other papers to publish the Pentagon Papers. He said he was appalled at the government's attempt to restrain the newspapers from printing the reports and disturbed that some Supreme Court justices' opinions were not more absolute in defending the newspapers.

McKnight also said the ASNE believes newsmen have a constitutional right to refuse to disclose their news sources. He said government subpoenas of newsmen and their unused notes and film clips have a chilling effect on news organizations.