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Clay T. Whitehead, White House telecommunications chief.

Nixon's Top Radio-TV Adviser Would Drop Fairness Doctrine

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PRESIDENT Nixon's top adviser on the radio-television industry says the fairness doctrine has caused so much chaos and confusion that it should be abolished.

Clay T. Whitehead, director of the White House Office of Telecommunications Policy, said the requirement that all sides in controversial issues be given equal air time also intimidates broadcasters.

In an interview, Whitehead suggested that a broader approach linked with license renewal should replace the present enforcement of the fairness doctrine.

Asked for his reasons for proposing an end to the fairness doctrine, Whitehead said:

"Let me say that that proposal was part of a package of proposals. It was made for the purpose of getting the industry and the public and government to start discussing some of the problems we have in radio and television regulation.

"What we felt was needed was some specific proposal for people to focus on as an alter-

native to the way things are being done now. It's worked out pretty well. We have been getting a lot of discussion."

"The reason we proposed abolishing the fairness doctrine was not that we felt fairness was not important, because, of course, we do, but rather that the fairness doctrine, as it has come to be administered, is so confusing, so chaotic and so highly detailed and complex that it really is not a doctrine at all. Nobody knows what it means, no one knows how it would apply in various cases.

"I think it is safe to say it intimidates the broadcaster, who is constantly worried what Washington is going to do if he opens his mouth about anything or puts anyone on his television station. In short, it's just not producing the intended result of the broad, over-all fairness that we want to get.

"So we proposed that we do away with the fairness obligation of the broadcaster, but rather than enforce it on a case-by-case, day-by-day basis

here in Washington, that we enforce it as originally intended—at the time we renew the broadcaster's license.

"In his coverage of controversial affairs, has he been fair in covering all sides of all the important issues in his community?"

"So you see it was a proposal to get rid of this very complex doctrine as it has come to be applied and move to a more sensible way of enforcing the fundamental fairness obligation."

It was put to Whitehead that there have been indications that he doesn't think public television should be offering public affairs or national news programs. He replied, "That's not correct at all. Public television stations do have a responsibility to supply news and public affairs. What we have been concerned about is the tendency of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the organization that receives the federal dollars, to focus so much of their money and attention on things that the commercial networks already are doing.