

Broadcaster Assails FCC On Fairness

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The broadcasters' right of free speech is abridged by the fairness doctrine of the Federal Communications Commission, the president of the National Association of Broadcasters said yesterday.

Vincent T. Wasilewski told a special House Commerce subcommittee conducting a panel discussion of regulations he is convinced that most broadcasters feel the doctrine is legally unsupportable and impractical in operation.

"It discourages the use of broadcasting for the expression of opinion, and thus abridges the broadcasters' right of free speech," he said.

Wasilewski said his reference was to the FCC's policy statement that a broadcast licensee has an obligation to afford reasonable opportunities for presentation of contrasting viewpoints on any controversial issue that he chooses to cover.

William G. Harley, president of the National Association of Educational Broadcasters, said his group's chief concern is with how the doctrine is administered.

If the Commission followed a practice of "close over-the-shoulder surveillance of controversial programming," Harley said, educational and other broadcasters ultimately might have to avoid the discussion of important issues.

But Harley said he did not believe these are active concerns at present, "nor do I think that the fairness doctrine to date has been a substantial inhibiting force."