

'Official' News Proposal Jolts Congress

By Alan Emory
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The commander-in-chief of the Strategic Air Command has proposed a "national information program" on radio and television to counter what he calls "slanting" of the news. His suggestion alarms hawks and doves alike.

Gen. Bruce K. Holloway, who has pushed the idea in speeches, offered it most recently before a March 23 closed-door session of a House Appropriations sub-committee.

A transcript was recently made public.

"One of the things that has bugged me," the four-star Air Force general said, "is the vast amount of information over television and other instant news media that, one way or another, in my judgment, is a disservice to the security of the country."

He suggested it was "out-right efforts, perhaps, to give an erroneous picture."

"One thing that would be as valuable as anything I can think of right now today for the American people and the security of the country," Holloway testified, "is a national information program, such as maybe every week a half-hour program that would treat of some critical problem of the country, starting out with defense issues."

To give the program "impact," said Holloway, if some "material" could be declassified it "would serve tremendously."

For Authenticity

To give it "authenticity," he added, "you would have to have the President starting it off with a 30-second introduction."

The general said the program also should provide "entertainment," but did not elaborate, and efforts to reach him for an explanation were unsuccessful.

Coming on top of the Justice Department's efforts to restrain newspaper publication of the Pentagon papers, and the House Commerce Committee's recommendation for a contempt citation of the Columbia Broadcasting System for refusing to turn over unused film from its controversial "Selling of the Pentagon" program, the general's comments have drawn fire from backers and opponents of administration Vietnam policy.

Rep. John E. Moss (D-Calif.), author of the 1967 Freedom of

Information Act, calls the idea "dangerous in the extreme."

House Republican Leader Gerald R. Ford of Michigan says, "It would open the door to censorship of the news by the government for its own purposes."

"There is absolutely no chance that this country would stand for a national government news program," says Sen. Henry M. Jackson (D-Wash.), the only potential Democratic presidential candidate who backs present Vietnam policy. "While it is fallible as the rest of us, our press system and the people involved have done a good job over the years in serving freedom."

"My initial reaction is in the negative," commented Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield of Montana, who said it raised questions in his mind about government control of newscasts.

Sen. Jacob K. Javits (R-N.Y.), said it centered on the issue of whether information was classified "for convenience of the government or the safety of the government. The general seems to feel it is for convenience. That is a false standard."

The proposal has a "Big Brother air about it," according to Rep. Paul N. McCloskey (R-Calif.), who plans to challenge President Nixon for re-nomination in 1972.

McCloskey said, "We have been getting the administration's idea of the 'true picture' in Southeast Asia for years, only to learn that the administration in power is releasing only those facts and statistics which support the policies the administration believes are best for the country."

Proposed Compromise

As a compromise, he said, "The general can continue to do his job of keeping SAC at its present high level of excel-

lence, and the media can continue to do their job of telling Americans the truth, or at least trying to tell the truth from what facts the administration does permit to be released."

Herbert G. Klein, the President's director of communications, said in an interview that there had never been any such program under discussion at the White House in the Nixon administration and that, while some news was slanted, the solution was "not a government program, but improvement of the private programs."

"I would not be in favor of a government program of this kind," Klein said. "Matters of public interest for the government can be handled adequately by private industry, both broadcast and print. The government should not be in competition with private news."

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