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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Why an Interview With Mr. Ford Wasn't Broadcast

Jack Anderson's criticism of the broadcasting industry for declining to carry his interview with the President contains a number of misleading impressions. Among other things, it strongly implies that it was a deliberate attempt to keep the interview off the air. In the case of public broadcasting, at least, that was simply not so. In fact, we at WETA/NPACT devoted considerable time and attention to viewing and assessing the program before we reached our decision not to offer it to PBS for distribution to our stations.

Mr. Anderson's one-sided attack conveniently ignores certain basic facts and thus gives a distorted view of the decision:

1. The interview was indeed offered "free" to the public television audience, but the program appeared to be largely a promotion scheme for Mr. Anderson's "bicentennial slogan campaign." There was no reference in his column, for example, to the fact that a significant portion of the program consisted of his reading letters to the President which responded to his slogan promotion.

2. Our decision was not a rejection of an interview with the President. Our decision was a rejection of Mr. Anderson's use of such an interview to further one of his personal projects.

One of the principal responsibilities that any broadcaster bears is to guard against the use of the airwaves for such a purpose.

3. We did not refuse to "broadcast a conversation with President Ford about America." We simply judged the program on its merits or lack thereof, as indicated above. Indeed, this organization has broadcast virtually every major speech and press conference that President Ford has had since being sworn into office a year ago.

Our responsibility is to evaluate program content for our audience in the most objective way we know how. It's not a perfect science. On the one hand, we must do everything we can to keep the public fully informed about as many things as possible. On the other hand, we must guard against becoming a conduit for information which is self-serving or misleading. Surely this is an honest and simple journalistic rationale which Jack Anderson must clearly understand. He has rightfully earned a reputation as a hard-hitting reporter who courageously exposes deception wherever he finds it. It is regrettable that in this instance he appears to have wavered from his normal posture.

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