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TV Firing Criticized on Senate Floor

Washington

The firing of a local television editor whose wife is Mrs. John N. Mitchell's press secretary was criticized on the Senate floor yesterday as outrageous, intimidating and a "perverted way of trying to demonstrate news balance."

One senator, Republican Robert J. Dole of Kansas, noted that the Federal government gives \$6 million a year to educational television and asked how much the station involved is getting.

A round of floor speeches was touched off by Senator Mark O. Hatfield (Rep-Ore.) who said the firing of William Woestendiek, editor of WETA's "Newroom" program, was outrageous.

ASPERSIONS

"It casts aspersions on every newsman in the nation to say their wives couldn't work for a government official," said Hatfield.

Woestendiek, 46, was fired last week after his wife, Kay,

was hired as a press secretary to Martha Mitchell, wife of the attorney general.

The station, a nonprofit educational outlet, said the action was taken to avoid "any possible charge of bias or influence which might affect the program."

Hatfield's statement drew praise from several senators, including J.W. Fulbright (Dem-Ark.). Mrs. Woestendiek was hired by the attorney general with private funds a day after Mrs. Mitchell telephoned the Arkansas Gazette to criticize Fulbright for voting against the Supreme Court nomination of G. Harrold Carswell.

MANSFIELD

"It's a matter of freedom of the press. It's a matter of intimidation," declared Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield of Montana.

"This is an unfortunate action," said Republican Whip Robert P. Griffin of Michigan.

"This use of guilt by association is a perverted way of trying to demonstrate news balance," Griffin added.

Four contributors, among them New York Times associate editor Tom Wicker, resigned from the TV program after Woestendiek was fired.

Associated Press