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Decision to Dismiss TV Editor Phoned To Ford Foundation

By CHRISTOPHER LYDON
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, April 27 — The manager of WETA-TV, Washington's educational television station, told a House communications subcommittee today that he had had three brief telephone conversations with Ford Foundation officials before he decided to discharge William Woestendiek, a news editor.

Representative Torbert H. Macdonald, Massachusetts Democrat who is chairman of the

subcommittee, said the purpose of the hearings was not to judge the merits of Mr. Woestendiek's dismissal but to look into the Ford Foundation's participation in WETA's executive affairs and, more broadly, the independence of public television.

William J. McCarter, the station manager, insisted that his talks with the foundation officers were strictly informational "courtesy calls," and he said that he had neither asked nor received the foundation's advice on Mr. Woestendiek's status at the station.

Mr. Woestendiek was relieved of his duties as editor of the month-old "Newsroom" program on April 17, a week after his wife took a job as press secretary to the wife of Attor-

ney General John N. Mitchell.

Mr. McCarter repeated today that he had decided to dismiss Mr. Woestendiek because of "a definite conflict" in the Woestendieks' jobs "that would have adversely affected the confidence of the public in our news operation."

Mr. McCarter said he had called the Ford Foundation a day before the final decision and notified David Davis, the foundation's officer in charge of public broadcasting, about "our predicament."

"I explained the nature of the conflict," Mr. McCarter said. He said "Thank you" and we hung up."

The foundation has contributed \$750,000 for the first year of "Newsroom."

Mr. Davis later called back,

he said, and urged him to transmit the same report to Fred W. Friendly, an adviser on television to the Ford Foundation.

But Mr. McCarter insisted, and Mr. Friendly also declared today in a written statement, that neither the foundation nor its officers had in any sense participated in WETA's decision.

Mr. Friendly added: "Speculation in the press that I was in some way involved in the decision regarding Mr. Woestendiek has been particularly painful to me, not only because it is false, but because I have spent my entire professional career at the Columbia Broadcasting System, and later at the Ford Foundation, fighting for the independence of broadcast journalism."