

H A R L A N R I C H A R D S

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Bring Back the Fairness Doctrine

Rush Limbaugh created a furor when he called a college student a "slut" and a "prostitute" when she testified about the accessibility of contraceptives. Over 40 advertisers cancelled from his show and virtually everyone who has spoken out on the issue has criticized him. It is common knowledge that Limbaugh is a right-wing fanatic who routinely adopts the most extreme positions and touts them on his nationwide program. He has millions of listeners and has earned millions of dollars spewing vitriolic diatribes.

The problem, as I see it, is not that he is so popular and has so many listeners. It is how he got that way. Prior to Bill Clinton cutting a deal with Republicans to repeal the Fairness Doctrine, any commercial broadcaster who wanted to produce a show advocating a position on an issue, had to grant opponents equal time to present the alternative view. As long as citizens could listen to both sides of a debate, they had no trouble figuring out who was telling the truth. But once the Fairness Doctrine was repealed, wealthy, conservative, right-wing ideologues were free to saturate the air waves with biased, inaccurate propaganda to sway public opinion without an opposing viewpoint to expose their deceptions. Our current divisiveness is a direct result of the propaganda. Twenty years of lies, deceptions, mischaracterizations and misinformation has left us with millions of deluded citizens. These citizens routinely vote for some of the most extreme candidates who espouse positions contrary to the citizens' interests.

Had the Fairness Doctrine not been repealed we would not have had George Bush, the Iraq war and the steady roll-back of our civil rights. We are inexorably transforming our country into a police state thanks to the right-wing, pro-business, anti-poor-people judges the right-wing ideologues have packed the federal court system with.

One interesting note to this issue: when Obama was elected, the Republicans started decrying the return of the Fairness Doctrine because they feared he would try to reinstate it. He should have, but he was too timid and believed he had a mandate - not to lead but to bring everybody together in his all-inclusive consensus which he promised during the 2008 election. He eventually learned that Republicans do not compromise.