

Is Freedom of the Press at Risk?

The Federal Communications Commission plans to visit news organizations to find unfair bias in news reporting.

This upsets every journalistic inclination I possess.

If you have as much trouble believing this as I did, then check out the article, [The FCC Wades Into the Newsroom](#). Published in the *Wall Street Journal*, it is written by Ajit Pai, one of the FCC's commissioners.

In it he describes the "Multi-Market Study of Critical Information Needs." Called, CIN, he explained, "the agency plans to send researchers to grill reporters, editors and station owners about how they decide which stories to run."

I've worked in newsrooms. I can just picture the scene. How can you be sure the FCC is more unbiased than the reporters? I admit most of my friends in media are politically liberal, but those I worked with industry media have tried to be balanced. Reporters do not care about color or creed. We just want sources who can offer information and insight.

But it gets worse.

The FCC, he said, says the study is an "objective fact finding mission." The results are to be submitted to Congress to identify barriers for small businesses that want to go into media.

What barriers could there be? Anyone who can start a website can publish whatever they want. My WordPress blog costs me virtually nothing. It's real cost is in my time.

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This raises another point I have not seen covered. If the FCC can start going after reporters about what they publish, what is to stop the agency from going after bloggers or others who publish or speak in any media? After all, the journalism profession does not require any special certification. I happen to have a journalism degree, but there are plenty of reporters who do not. In fact, until the 1960s, many reporters were not even college educated.

What about companies that use brand journalism as part of their marketing and communications strategy? Could companies be judged as well?

Part of the problem is Americans are forgetting the lessons learned from history. Some of you know that genealogy is a personal hobby of mine. I have been learning about my ancestors in colonial Virginia and have enjoyed reading about their interactions with people like Patrick Henry. It is helping me to appreciate the priorities in the Bill of Rights.

Freedom of the press, speech and assembly were put in the First Amendment because the English Crown tried to subvert the publications by patriots including Patrick Henry and Ben Franklin. The framers of the Constitution understood that democracy is impossible unless the people have liberties including freedom of expression. If the FCC starts investigating newsrooms, how is that any different

from the British King getting printing presses destroyed?

The FCC is slated to start in Charlestown, South Carolina. The fact that they are starting there, when the major news hubs of the country are in Washington, D.C. and New York, is curious to me. Is it because South Carolina tends to be conservative? I hope not, but the first choice of venue is quite interesting.

Does this upset you? Let me know!