

VANITY FAIR

Radio Static

John Cole at Balloon Juice has expressed exasperated bafflement over the **wingnut obsession** with the reinstatement of the Fairness Doctrine:

With two wars and a crumbling economy and a budget that is a disaster, for the life of me I can not figure out why the GOP is obsessed with the revival of the fairness doctrine. It truly is bizarre the obsession with this, and in unrelated posts here, every now and then one of the wingnut trolls will pop in and spout off something about it. What is even weirder about it is that ONLY Republicans are talking about it.

I can't figure it out. Look, guys- you so did such a smashing job fucking EVERYTHING up that Congress and the Obama administration are too occupied with actual emergencies to worry about the stupid damned fairness doctrine.

Epecially given the tidy fact that, as Steve Benen put it in the **Washington Monthly blog post** cited by Cole, "[N]o one is seriously trying to reinstate the Fairness Doctrine."

TNR's Marin Cogan recently wrote a great piece, noting that she couldn't find anyone on the left who really wants to reinstate the policy. Cogan explained, "The prospect of being in the opposition often brings out the worst in conservatives -- paranoia and self-pity."

...let's keep in mind that Barack Obama doesn't want to see the Fairness Doctrine brought back, and both Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid have said this isn't going anywhere in either chamber of Congress. We're talking about a liberal campaign that exists only in the overactive imaginations of paranoid conservatives.

While conservatives from Grey Poupon George Will to your average substandard rightwing blogger is in a premature lather over the nonexistent prospect that radio stations will have to supply equal airtime to Cindy Sheehan or the ghost of Che Guevara to respond to a Rush Limbaugh rant or a Mark Levin bowel movement of the mouth, talk radio is already being destroyed--from the inside. It isn't endangered from outside liberal forces. It's the victim of its own corporate cannibalization and shortsighted greed. Just read **Jerry Del Colliano**:

...when I say radio is on hospice I mean it is on its last legs.

If you plan to be an auto retailer, you don't cut out all your cars and bring a few rentals cars in from another city and call that a business.

But in radio, you fire the local talent and give local advertisers nothing to buy other than whatever you

schlepped in from another market.

There's no *there* there anymore in radio.

[*snip*]

Hospice workers give their patients medication to ease the pain.

Radio groups inflict more pain by firing loyal people before the Christmas holidays.

And this brings me back to what's eating the radio business alive.

Sure, the next generation has moved on. Radio lost them from neglect. They're only available in new media -- a place radio CEOs know nothing about.

But the reason radio has dropped off the face of the earth in billing, morning drive and compelling programming is because radio was never meant to be a big business. And it was overvalued (in terms of multiples) to siphon larger sale prices from willing investors -- a strategy that now has come back to haunt the values of radio properties.

Radio was a bad candidate for consolidation back in the mid-90's but no one really cared. If those unbelievable debt structures weren't an indication, then how about the fact that radio is really a local mom and pop business.

Sorry guys, you ruined a good thing by taking it to Wall Street.

And now, we still can't seem to learn our lessons that Wall Street is not the answer for radio. That's why we keep turning to the magicians with financial resumes to bail us out of the mess we've created.

Or John Gorman on the **clusterpluck at CBS Radio**:

...over the next few years neglect claimed radio piece by piece. Just like a body ravaged by an incurable disease - the toes, the feet, the knees, the legs, the fingers, the hands, the arms, the heart - and finally life. The rot spread from station to station to station.

[*snip*]

Garbage is garbage no matter how you package and deliver it.

That's not to say that CBS doesn't have some great radio stations, talented performers, and top-notch management. They probably just haven't gotten around to firing them yet.

When conservatives started caterwauling about the Fairness Doctrine, I thought they were practicing their usual devious misdirection and trying to camouflage some other maneuver intended to consolidate media power in a few grubby hands. But now I think it's because they genuinely, honestly, ignorantly have no fricking idea what's actually happening before their eyes and under their feet. But they have to write *something*, their rusty reflexes kick in, and for them it's 1994 all over again, when Newt's butterball gleam was a beacon to them all.

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