

REMARKS OF HONORABLE BOB DOLE

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In 1920 commercial broadcasting commenced in the United States. And, appropriately, the initial transmission was of a political nature --- the Harding-Cox election returns. Now, 50 years later, the adequacy and responsibility of broadcast journalism, especially in political reporting, is the subject of continuing discussion in Washington and across the nation. The remarks of Vice President Agnew and the reaction of the electronic and print media have brought the mechanics and philosophy of news coverage to the public eye as never before.

Today, the public and the media are recognizing the vast power and influence of broadcast journalism. Along with this recognition must come a new awareness of the media's responsibilities. Issues and events in America today are too important and the public's need to know about them too critical to allow doubt of the truth and accuracy of journalistic accounts. In one word, then, it is fairness that should be the goal of both the media and its critics.

--Seeking Fairness--

I am critical of reporting which presents an obviously biased view of an event. I do not expect every account of every happening to conform with my opinions and beliefs. Fairness does not demand this, but it does require adherence to a basic standard that can be accepted by those of all persuasions.

No matter how elusive a specific standard of fairness may be, a general idea of impartial news treatment certainly can be articulated and followed -- and not only at the national level. While considerable attention is given to network coverage of national events, a small radio station in a small community can exert a powerful influence at the local level. In fact, it is often the rural and small town print and electronic media where news coverage is most unfair.

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We all know of biased small newspapers whose political leanings are so obvious that the opposition barely rates mention in the classified section. In areas where these papers are the only local forum, their impact is as great as any newspaper syndicate. The same is true of small broadcast outlets.

--Controversy and Commentary--

To be sure, broadcast journalism should not shy away from controversial subject matter. Some of the finest hours of network and local programming have been studies of topical problems presenting both sides of important issues. It is imperative that important questions be examined in a forthright and impartial manner, so the public may reach its own decisions on today's controversies. The responsibility of the media should be to provide their audiences with as much information as they can reasonably absorb. But the media should not attempt to make up the public's mind by means of what and how it reports.

This does not mean there is no place for commentary or editorials. It does mean that such expressions should be clearly identified. Usually editorials are clearly labeled in print and on the air. But, too often, especially on the networks, unlabeled commentary is passed off as hard news, and in this way the credibility of broadcast journalism is diminished. A balanced and objective presentation of issues and events should be the goal of all broadcast outlets in accordance with the ideals of reporting that is "factual, fair and without bias" as stated in the code of your broadcasting association.

There have been too many instances in recent months of network news departments crossing the line between commentary and straight news. In at least one instance, a network aired a report of a correspondent in Southeast Asia which played on the emotions of American troops just before they entered battle. That same network presented an equal number of Senators both for and against the nomination of Judge Carswell, a display of fairness

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no one can criticize -- unless he goes so far as to ask that the commentators observe the same balance in inflection, lifted eyebrow, and choice of adjectives in the conduct of their interviews.

#### Criticism and the First Amendment

It is important to recognize that the central issue in criticism of print and broadcast news reporting is not freedom of the press. That freedom cannot and will not be compromised in this country. With this point clearly in mind, let the media not raise the First Amendment as a shield against legitimate criticism. The media should not feel intimidated by criticism. There have been no suggestions from public officials that censorship be invoked or that a system similar to British Broadcasting regulation be adopted. In Great Britain the BBC and the so-called Independent Television Authority can be required by a government ministry to delete programs the government finds offensive and initiate programs it favors. I would be the first to oppose any such government censorship in the United States.

Censorship is out. But criticism -- constructive and justified -- should be accepted and responded to. It is not always easy to receive criticism but it is basic and vital to our American system. We all must be willing to accept and exchange criticism when it is voiced in the proper manner at the proper time.

--Cambodia--

Considerable criticism has been exchanged in the past month over action taken by the United States in Cambodia.

When the announcement was made that American ground troops had crossed the border into the sanctuary areas of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese in Cambodia, many were highly concerned that this foreshadowed an expanded war, increased U.S. casualties and diminished hopes for ending the Vietnam war.

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Many members of the Senate, myself included, expressed some doubts over the necessity of instituting such action. The risks were considerable, and our past experience with "master strokes" and "lights at the end of the tunnel" had left a lingering skepticism with all of us.

--A Different Situation--

However, several facts stood out in the analysis of the situation. This was a different time, a different place and a different President. This was after fifteen months of a working program of disengagement from Vietnam.

This was in an area which had been under the domination of enemy forces just as surely as if it had been in North Vietnam proper

And this was a President who had made reasonable promises and commitments regarding Vietnam. And, most important, this was a President who had kept every one of his promises and met every one of his commitments.

So, my personal doubts aside, I put my voice and my support where my faith and confidence were -- with the President

The Commander-in-Chief

We should keep in mind that the President, and only the President, is Commander-in-Chief of our Armed Forces. In addition to his duty to deploy and commit our forces in defense of our national security, he has the responsibility of assuring the safety of the men he commands -- to the maximum possible extent consistent with the fulfillment of their missions.

One of the President's two stated objectives in launching the Cambodian operations was the protection of our fighting men. Due to the United States' respect for the declared neutrality of the Cambodian Republic, enemy forces were afforded unrestricted mobility and freedom from attack in the areas they occupied in violation of that Cambodian neutrality.

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While these occupied areas remained relatively small and isolated, they posed no major threat to American men and programs in South Vietnam. However, the enemy in late April began operations designed to join these areas into a continuous base, along the entire South Vietnamese border. This posed an unacceptable and intolerable threat. Not only was the Vietnamization program jeopardized, but the safety of the remaining United States military personnel in South Vietnam was placed in grave doubt.

The President had no alternative in the exercise of his responsibility to the men under his command than to move quickly and decisively to protect them. And to his lasting credit he did what he saw was necessary.

--A Limited Operation--

The President made it clear in announcing his action that this was not an escalation or a widening of the war. It was, as he said, a "decisive" move and one which was specifically defined in extent and duration. He said U.S. forces would not proceed into Cambodia beyond twenty kilometers, and he said they would not remain beyond June 30.

Those were the President's reasons, and those were the President's promises.

I believed him then, I believe him now, and I think a majority of the American people believe him.

There were some who did not believe him. They said, "It is escalation." "It is more deaths." "It is more war."

They marched and they protested and they opposed.

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--Doubting the President--

Some of those who doubted their President's reasons and his promises are in the United States Senate. Their response to the President's actions and his statements was to introduce legislation to stop the President from conducting the operations in Cambodia. The legislation they proposed would have brought the Cambodian operations to a halt. It would also do several other things.

It would prohibit the United States from furnishing military instructors, instruction or support to Cambodian forces or helping any other country provide military assistance to Cambodia.

In other words, it would gut the Nixon doctrine of helping Asian countries to assume the burdens of self-defense. It would say, "we do not believe you can or will keep your promise to have our men out of Cambodia by the end of June."

It would say, "Mr. President, we do not want you to be able to send U.S. forces into Cambodia even to protect our men in Vietnam."

It would say, "Mr. President, we do not want you to be able to send U.S. forces into Cambodia -- even to rescue American prisoners of the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong."

It would say, "Mr. President, the Senate thinks it can do a better job as Commander-in-Chief than you."

I cannot say whether the Senate would be a better Commander-in-Chief, but I do know that if I were a soldier on the Cambodian border in South Vietnam or if I were a prisoner of the Viet Cong in the Cambodian jungle -- I would rather have the President of the United States making the decision affecting my safety or possible rescue than 100 Senators -- or the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

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--End the War Legislation--

I do not support this legislation. Many others in the Senate do not support it. We are attempting to amend this proposal to eliminate the features which would broadcast such a discouraging and untimely message to the President, to the men in our Armed Services and to the enemy in Hanoi who is counting on American division to win the war for him.

I do not support this legislation or other so-called "End the War" resolutions. I support the President...he bears the responsibility for ending the war. And he is ending the war.

As of April 15, 115,500 troops had been withdrawn from Vietnam since January, 1969. And by spring of 1971 at least 265,000 will have been brought home. And, as General Earle Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed out Thursday evening, whether we are able to withdraw even more men in that time depends on the enemy.

--Conclusion--

As I said earlier, well-founded, timely and constructive criticism in this country is vital to our democratic process.

But criticism which is opportunistic and unfair serves no good end.

So I would urge you to be vigorous and alert in your criticism. But at the same time be fair and responsible. By so doing, you will strengthen the broadcast industry, our public and private institutions, and American principles of free enterprise.