

Equal Coverage: Is the Cost Too High?

By

Requiring the media to provide equal coverage to every candidate for political office would be a flagrant violation of the first amendment. Although the intentions may be good, this would set a dangerous precedent and start the country on a perilous path toward government control of the media; I would certainly not support such an action by Congress on the grounds of the violation of Constitutional rights.

Furthermore, a major problem that would result from such an action would be choosing the method of measuring the media coverage of each candidate to ensure that they are receiving equal coverage. Would all coverage be required to be favorable or at least equally favorable? If equal coverage is required, this of course would result in strict control of how elections are reported. Everyone has an opinion, even news personalities and producers; how could bias be prevented from reaching the public? Every time bias toward one of the candidates is suspected, which I believe would happen quite frequently because of the large volume of programming on news channels and radio stations, a complex court case would result. Legal fees would run news companies into the ground and the court system would become clogged. How would the "crime" of unequal coverage be prosecuted and punished? Such an action by Congress would effectively kill the journalism business because those responsible for the content of newscasts would be facing criminal charges regularly.

Moreover, not necessarily every person who fills out the paperwork to run for office is qualified and deserving of media coverage. Many races involve several candidates who come from obscure parties that have a very non-competitive or no primary process. If a law was

passed requiring equal coverage of every candidate, the coverage would have to be very tedious to include every candidate regardless of whether they ran for office to take advantage of an equal coverage law just so their views will be heard or they are a leading candidate. Obviously this would take air time away from credible candidates to cater to those candidates that hold extreme views that are impractical and have no serious chance of winning the election.

For example, Jimmy McMillan, of the “Rent is Too Damn High Party,” was an unsuccessful candidate for the New York Governorship during the two-thousand ten elections. He managed to make national headlines when he took part in a six-way debate among the candidates for governor. He relied on theatrics and a shocking array of facial hair to grab media attention, but he had an extreme, underdeveloped platform which precluded his chance at winning the race. Imagine if television and radio stations had to devote the same amount of air time to covering candidates such as Jimmy McMillan and present his views as favorably as the two or three leading candidates who actually have a respectably large group of supporters. As entertaining as this would be, it would hardly be effective at helping to inform the voters.

It is important in a democracy to have a myriad of views at the table to debate; however, news services should ultimately make the decision to distribute their coverage between candidates and their platforms at their own discretion. Congressional action would violate the first amendment to the Constitution and set a dangerous precedent of media control. As I see no benefits to controlling media coverage, I would definitely not support such an action mandating equal coverage because of the impracticality, violation of the Constitution, and for the sake of the business of journalism.