

Conservatives decry FCC ruling on cursing: Definition of "news" at issue

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A Federal Communications Commission's ruling to allow profanity in a CBS news broadcast sets a dangerous precedent, the Parents Television Council has warned.

On November 8 the FCC reversed a previous indecency ruling against a CBS *Early Show* interview that aired a *Survivor* cast member describing another contestant as a "bulls-----."

The regulatory agency said it chose to defer to the network's characterization of the program segment as a news interview, according to an FCC opinion filed with the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit.

But the conservative Parents Television Council said that decision creates a loophole for abuse in programming and gives networks the power to make their own calls on profanity in television.

"They leave it up to the guys who are part of the problem to define news content," said Dan Isett, the group's director of corporate and government affairs. "Next, *Inside Edition* and *Entertainment Tonight* . . . may be seen as bona fide news events."

The FCC noted in its opinion that there is no "outright" news exemption for indecency, but said it is important to exercise caution in judging news programming in respect to the First Amendment's free-press guarantee.

The PTC acknowledges that editors have leeway to exercise news judgment, Isett said, but in his view the *Survivor* interview did not qualify as a news event.

FCC spokesperson David Fiske said the agency will continue to review complaints on a case-by-case basis. "What is important in all cases is the context," Fiske said. "Each set of facts will be looked at separately." -*Religion News Service*