

CONFERENCE CALL, April 7, 1959

STATEMENT OF SENATOR STROM THURMOND (D-SC) ON SENATE FLOOR UPON INTRODUCTION OF BILL TO AMEND SECTION 315 OF THE COMMUNICATIONS ACT.

MR. PRESIDENT:

Earlier in the day I introduced a bill to amend Section 315 of the Communications Act.

Section 315 has a commendable purpose--that of requiring equal time to be granted to opposing political candidates by radio and television stations. Without requiring any radio or television station to give time to any political candidate, it has insured that no particular candidate could be favored by a station. The results have been salutary, and the public has greatly benefited.

Recently, however, literal constructions of this section have resulted in what may become a substantial detriment to public interests. The Federal Communications Commission, in what appears to be an objective interpretation of the language of the section, has applied the operation of the statute to news broadcasts and telecasts. Rather than submit to the "equal time" requirements, there is every reason to believe that radio and television stations and networks will eliminate certain items of legitimate newsworthiness which serve to keep the public informed about their own affairs.

This should not be allowed to happen. It is incumbent on Congress to act to protect the freedom of the news gathering and distributing services by amending the Communications Act, while at the same time retaining the salutary features of the "equal time" section which prevents favoritism toward a candidate by a station.