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Regulations Erode Freedom of Press

AS lawyers, doctors, dentists, optometrists and other groups gear up to advertise their services and products, public statements seem to overlook two vital points.

First, the public has a right to know about services available and prices charged in a free enterprise system.

Second, the necessity of protecting this right by law gives advocates of government control another "foot-in-the-door," endangering our fundamental right of freedom of the press.

Professional pride may have blinded certain people to advantages of communicating with their prospective patients or clients. Whether this was done for additional profits or not, people ought not be compelled to grope for the names and addresses.

The possibility that certain practitioners may overstate their qualifications or offer reduced prices is no reason why reliable professional people should not offer their ser-

vices at reasonable rates and make them known.

It has been argued that professional people are above such trade practices as advertising. The vanity of this attitude is undermined by those who seek recognition by other means. Few professionals object to publicity (advertising) that they are not required to pay for.

Regarding the second point, people in politics and other positions of power frequently seek to influence or control the press and other communications media. Instances have occurred where officials have manipulated news through leaks, controlled release of public information and other devices.

In the current wave of consumerism, anti-business sentiment and centralization of government, certain controls of the press are being written into laws and regulations.

Power over content of television and radio broadcasts is held by the Federal Communications Commission and over business by the Feder-

al Trade Commission. The "Equal Time Amendment" of FCC regulations allows control for political purposes.

Not long ago, FCC directed station WTOP, Washington, D.C., to run, free of charge, commercials calling for a breakup of major oil companies, clearly a political issue.

This was ordered because WTOP had aired an ad by Texaco that praised the company's efficiency. Although the Texaco ad made no reference to pending legislation, FCC ruled that it was intended to shape public opinion on the divestiture bill before Congress and thus violated the Fairness Doctrine!

Freedom of the press is a precious right of Americans, and it is not likely to be taken away all at once. It is being eroded gradually by apparently minor regulations set up ostensibly to protect small interests from abuse. In the end, it could collapse and destroy other freedoms as it falls!