

UCC official urges new fairness doctrine rules: Countering personal attacks

News in the [November 2, 2004](#) issue

The plans of Sinclair Broadcasting to show an anti-John Kerry documentary days before the November 2 election “demand restoring the personal attack rule and the Fairness Doctrine,” urged Gloria Tristani, a former Federal Communications Commission member who now directs the communications office of the United Church of Christ.

Democratic Party leaders have also urged the FCC to disallow the film, which some senators called a “blatantly partisan attack.” The 62-station television company, which planned to air *Stolen Honor: Wounds That Never Heal*, by conservative filmmaker Carlton Sherwood, posted a notice on its Web site before Columbus Day saying that the film is still undergoing editing and that the criticisms are premature.

Regardless of how the preelection maneuvers play out, Tristani told a news conference October 13 in Washington that individual stations licensed by the FCC are expected by the Communications Act to serve the public interest by airing contrasting and balancing viewpoints. Yet, she added, “nothing in the present [FCC] rules or policy would explicitly require Sinclair, if it airs the documentary in question, to give others the air time to provide a contrasting or balancing view, or to give Senator Kerry equal time to respond.”

The Fairness Doctrine was in effect from 1949 to 1987, and the personal attack rule existed from 1967 to 2000. According to Tristani, “It is high time that the FCC, or even better, the U.S. Congress, reinstate the personal attack rule and the Fairness Doctrine.”