

Conservatives rap ruling on TV indecency: Rejected policy spurred on by celebrity slip-ups

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Conservative groups have blasted a federal court ruling that overturned a policy of the Federal Communications Commission intended to crack down on unscripted curse words and wardrobe malfunctions.

Spurred on by celebrity slipups from Bono and Cher, the 2004 FCC policy had fined television networks that did not censor indecency, however spontaneous. But broadcasting giants like Fox and ABC challenged the “fleeting expletive” rule as they tried to determine where to draw the line in regard to sexual content and controversial language.

The Second U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled July 13 that the agency’s policy was “unconstitutionally vague” and a violation of the First Amendment. Conservative family groups, however, disagree.

“We urge the FCC to get tough with Fox and stand ready to revoke the licenses of any and all broadcasters who refuse to comply with the terms of those licenses,” said Tim Winter, president of the Parents Television Council.

The PTC cited as examples of indecent shows Fox’s *American Dad*—the source of more than 100,000 complaints filed with the FCC—and the controversial cartoon *Family Guy*.

Washington-based Concerned Women for America also disagreed with the ruling. “A federal broadcast license is a privilege held in the public trust,” said Jan LaRue, the group’s chief counsel.

The court said the FCC policy did not specify what comprised offensive material, other than its banning references to sexual and excretory organs. Calling the attempt to control content “chilling,” it said “even if the FCC were able to provide a

complete list of all such expressions, new offensive and indecent words are invented every day." -*Religion News Service*