

# Equal Time Opportunity Not Quite Crystal Clear

By JACK ADAMS  
WASHINGTON (AP) — This is the election year in which every-thing was supposed to be crystal clear in relation to equal radio-TV opportunities for the politicians. But it isn't turning out that way. Already, the chairman of the

Federal Communications Commission and the chief attorney for the National Assn. of Broadcasters have had a head-on collision of ideas about what Congress meant when it threw a handful of new words into the "equal time" section of the Communications Act

last summer. According to FCC Chairman John C. Doerfer those few words—possibly unintentionally—have greatly broadened the area in which demands for equal time might be made.

las A. Anello, has entered a re-sounding dissent. Anello contends Congress did nothing more than exempt bona fide newscasts, in-terviews and documentaries in-volving candidates from the equal time provisions of the act, and to

call for fairness. The situation is this: No broadcasting station need ever carry any political material. But the law has always said that once a radio or television facility is made available to a qualified candidate, all other qualified candi-dates for that particular office must, on demand, be provided with matching time, and on the

same terms—free or paid for, as the case may be. In a test case last year involv-ing the Chicago mayor's race, the FCC ruled that if a candidate fig-ured in coverage by a station of news events, not necessarily in-volving his candidacy, the equal time provision came into play. Broadcasters complained this was all wrong, and would serious-ly hamper news programming. At

their request, Congress exempted the newscasts. But Congress went one step further, on its own motion. It ad-ded another sentence to the section which said radio and TV stations have an obligation to provide reasonable opportunity "for the discussion of conflicting views on issues of public importance." The FCC has always said broad-casting stations should maintain

balance in the handling of con-roversial material, but chairman Doerfer recently asserted: "Now an administrative policy has become a federal law. And a law, as you know, is more inflex-ible than an administrative poli-cy." The Belgian Congo is almost 20 times the size of Belgium, its moth-er country.

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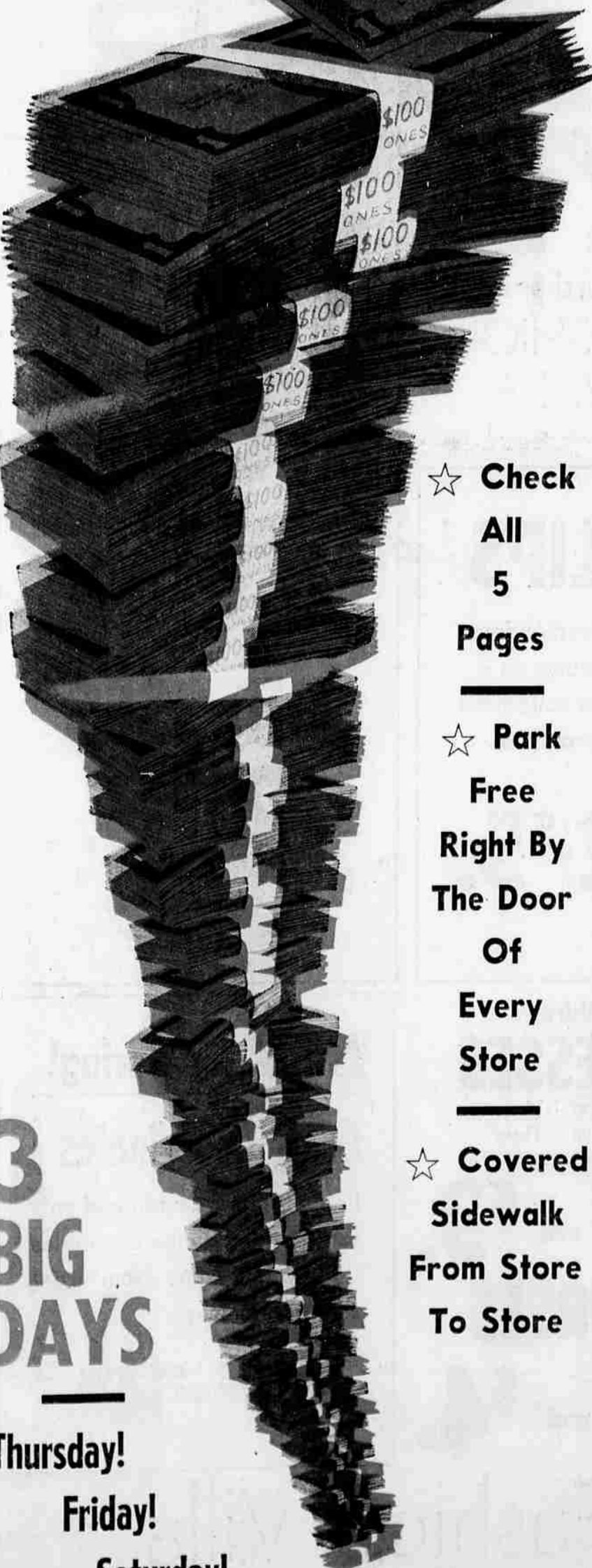
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