LOS ANGELES (Reuters) - The U.S. government's crackdown on media indecency could prevent World War Two veterans from sharing their stories in an upcoming TV documentary series by Ken Burns, the head of the Public Broadcasting Service said Wednesday.

Noted filmmaker Burns' highly anticipated seven-part series "The War" features salty language used by servicemen and others. If the expletives make it to air, they could lead to crippling fines for the offending stations as a result of a new law signed last month by President George W. Bush.

Paula Kerger, the president and CEO of PBS, told reporters at a media event in Pasadena, California, that she was reluctant to bleep the words out, because that would diminish the impact of the documentary. Airing the film after 10 p.m., when the new rules do not apply, would reduce the available audience, she said.

"The American people need to know this is not about Janet Jackson," Kerger said, referring to the singer's breast-baring turn at the 2004 Super Bowl halftime show. The incident sent shockwaves through Capitol Hill and spurred the bipartisan push to boost fines for indecency violations.

Under the new law, fines rise to as much as $325,000 per violation from $32,500. Television and radio broadcasters are barred from airing obscene material and are limited from broadcasting indecent material between the hours of 6 a.m. and 10 p.m., times when children are likely to be watching.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has defined indecency as "language or material that, in context, depicts or describes, in terms patently offensive as measured by contemporary community standards for the broadcast medium, sexual or excretory organs or activities."
Karger said she had unsuccessfully tried to get advance clearance for the documentary from the five members of the Republican-controlled broadcast regulator. But the FCC's policy is not to deliver an opinion before a broadcast.

PBS does have a favorable precedent. The FCC unanimously ruled last year that an airing of Steven Spielberg's gritty World War Two film "Saving Private Ryan" did not violate broadcast standards.

"The War," set to debut in the fall, will focus on the stories of ordinary people in four towns to show how the war touched the lives of every family throughout America.
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