

cc: SPAN

o. cable

[REDACTED]
Alvin Texas 77512-1785
[REDACTED]

PERSONAL

April 3, 1999

Mr. Ron McMullen, President
Time Warner Communications
4201 FM 1960 West
Houston TX 77068

Dear President McMullen:

Even after reading your interesting form-letter (dated March 26th, sent by 13.5¢ Bulk Rate mail, received here Wednesday 31 March) for a third time, and going over it with my wife (a veteran of reading corporate annual reports, at the University), I am still at a loss to understand several items clearly, and I did not get much help from the small Houston Chronicle article Wednesday reporting your statements of the day before.

Since we agreed for TCI to make a digital/telephone expansion of service about a year ago, we've enjoyed BRAVO and several other "grey-box" cable channels on our channels listing chart, though we were, at the time, disappointed and remain disappointed in TCI's failure to provide 24-hour service on both C-SPAN I and C-SPAN II, expanded. When we called C-SPAN about your limitations on broadcasting, we were told that their contracts with cable companies specified around-the-clock service, but after the "de-reg" of the industry, viewers were at the not-so-tender mercies of not-socially conscious owners/programmers of the cable companies.

First, your choice to broadcast C-SPAN I but NOT C-SPAN II is a very open political statement. You have decided that your viewers may witness only the points of view expressed in the House but not those expressed in the Senate. And our local elected officials, knowing of this political skewing of your service, nevertheless granted you a service monopoly for Alvin. While you certainly have no responsibility for their choices, you must understand that they, unlike you and your company, are local and therefore subject to pressures that you may not feel.

In any event, I wrote a postcard to you this week about your March letter, asking the most salient questions. What did the 28 April chart promise about #56 C-SPAN? Is it I or II, or a hybrid? We've already missed the Justice Thomas hearings in the U.S. Senate AND the impeachment of our President, both carried on C-SPAN II, in the Senate. The instructors of schools and colleges, in government classes, speech and debate classes, English classes, as well as mere viewers like ourselves, want the weekend book-trade coverage on C-SPAN II. But we continue to wait. My postcard inquiry covered all this.

Yet, when a young woman in your employ telephoned me here at home during supper this week, she was very confused, not so much about my card (she was moderately polite) but about your own company, her employer.

She did not know which C-SPAN your proposed #56 slot would carry and seemed not to know that our Congress has two parts, a House and a Senate, with different rules and customs and different means of dealing with legislation and other issues. The vast differences between the House and the Senate, not only traditionally but politically, means the coverage is very different. The young woman also had never heard of the popular success of the literary focus of C-SPAN II on the weekends.

When I suggested that (at the very least), she put C-SPAN II, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, on the REQUESTS tally-sheet, she was again puzzled ... "wha?" ... and I explained that some businesses keep a tally-sheet or other means to record suggestions, particularly the suggestions that the business itself has solicited. Despite her having phoned me, she said that she (thus, you) had no tally-sheets, file boxes, wall-charts, or anything else on which to keep even a minimal record of suggestions. Thus, the newspaper reference to your "customer surveys" clunks.

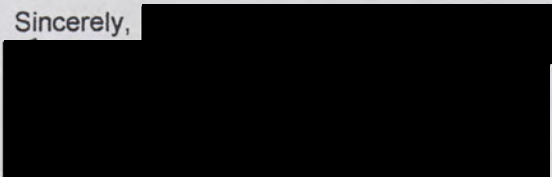
Have you seen the new C-SPAN II? And C-SPAN's presidential nominating convention wall-to-wall, no-comment coverage? We'd like you to check your records: Is our 1998 set-top box enough?

Your telephone person also said that there were no "empty" or "wasted" channels on our present channel lineup. I said there were several, and she still disagreed even though I tried from memory to describe some to her. She could not remember having seen anything that I described, and made her doubt of their existence apparent. But as you and I both know, Time Warner use of channels is infinitely expandable, limited only by what you choose to do, as we witness in the March letter.

Well, when I gave up trying to get her to write down the gist of my postcard and phone suggestions:

ALVIN CUSTOMER THINKS THERE'S A SOCIAL NEED FOR BOTH C-SPAN I AND C-SPAN II ON OUR CABLE-TV PACKAGE, FOR CONVINCING EDUCATIONAL, LITERARY, POLITICAL, AND ENTERTAINMENT REASONS, 24 HOURS-A-DAY, ALL THE TIME

I then asked that she at least forward the card to you, the person who wrote me, or in any event signed the letter. I feel fairly certain that she will not do so; thus this letter which I am trying to get directly to you.

Sincerely, 

CBD:m

cc: C-SPAN
BRIAN LAMB
→ SUSAN SWAIN
Washington, DC