

News Release

C-SPAN

Cable-Satellite Public Affairs Network

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*PHOTOS AVAILABLE

MEDIA BACKGROUND

FIFTH-YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF TELEVISED U.S. SENATE ON C-SPAN 2

Washington D.C., July 17, 1991 --- July 29, 1991 marks the fifth anniversary of permanently televised coverage of the United States Senate carried by the cable television network C-SPAN 2.

C-SPAN 2 is the first and only television network solely devoted to providing daily, uninterrupted live coverage of the "world's greatest deliberative body." Because today C-SPAN 2 is a 24 hour network reaching a potential audience of 60 million Americans, some may take tuning in to Senate sessions for granted. But, in fact, Senate TV was years in the making.

The following background information tracks:

- * the history of television cameras in the Senate, and the debate leading to SR 28;
- * the passage of SR 28 and the list of Senators, still in office, who voted against regularly televised coverage;
- * quotes and headlines from June 2, 1986 -- the day TV cameras began the broadcast test period -- including an original sonnet to TV by Sen. Howell Heflin;
- * C-SPAN 2 today, and new camera technology recently introduced in the Senate by C-SPAN.

HISTORIC PERSPECTIVE

Senate Resolution 28, the 1986 bill allowing television coverage, was preceded by years of intensive debate.

Occasional Senate hearings had been televised since 1947 -- when, according to the National Association of Broadcasters, .04% of American homes or 14,000 households had televisions. From 1947 until 1986 television cameras were permitted inside the actual Senate chamber only once: during the Watergate years,

(MORE)

on December 14, 1974, cameras transmitted the swearing-in of Vice President Nelson Rockefeller. It would be nearly a dozen years before live TV cameras would return.

Debate on the use of television in the Senate intensified in 1979 when the cable industry created C-SPAN to transmit live House sessions, and also promised to fund a second channel for the Senate.

Spearheading the effort in favor of Senate TV was 1981 Senate Majority Leader Howard Baker (R-Ten.). Baker made televised Senate sessions a priority until he retired from the Senate in 1985 -- one year before his efforts would finally come to fruition.

Taking up the cause in 1986, Senate Minority Leader Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.) and Senate Majority Leader Robert Dole (R-Kan.) presided over the most active debate on the subject.

Opponents of Senate television feared television would hinder the orderly conduct of Senate business, transforming the chamber into a television studio more suited to the production of soundbites than the enactment of sound public policy.

Chief among the opponents were Senators J. Bennett Johnston (D-La.), John Danforth (R-Mo.), and two Senators who have since retired, Senators Russell Long (D-La.) and William Proxmire (D-Wis.).

Senator Long said cameras in the Senate would stifle meaningful dialogue as senators tailored their words to suit the voters back home watching on television. "The greatest surplus commodity we have in the Congress are speeches that need never be made," he said. "Speeches that fail to improve on silence."

Meanwhile on the House side, C-SPAN's televised coverage was rapidly gaining distribution and audience awareness. Senator Byrd continued to counter with his concern that a non-televised Senate had become Congress' "invisible half".

Senators Byrd and Dole were joined in their support by several younger senators who had witnessed first-hand the debut of House television on C-SPAN. Among them was Senator Albert Gore (D-Tenn.), who said the success of House television, which marked its first day March 19, 1979, would prove instructive for the Senate. He said "speeches seem to have become more focused and more carefully drafted. Words are chosen with more deliberation and enunciated more precisely. Television, in other words, has helped to keep members on their toes."

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PASSAGE OF SENATE RESOLUTION 28

Ultimately, Senator Byrd and his allies saw the passage of Senate Resolution 28 -- authorizing a test of television and radio coverage -- in February, 1986 by a vote of 67 - 21. Senators who voted 'nay' to Resolution 28, and who are still in office, are:

- Update?*
- * Sen. Quentin Burdick (D-ND)
 - * Sen. John Danforth (R-MO)
 - * Sen. "Jake" Garn (R-UT)
 - * Sen. Charles Grassley (R-IA)
 - * Sen. Mark Hatfield (R-OR)
 - * Sen. Jesse Helms (R-NC)
 - * Sen. Ernest Hollings (D-SC)
 - * Sen. Daniel Inouye (D-HI)
 - * Sen. Bennett Johnston (D-LA)
 - * Sen. Nancy Kassebaum (R-KS)
 - * Sen. Sam Nunn (D-GA)
 - * Sen. Warren Rudman (R-NH)
 - * Sen. Alan Simpson (R-WY)
 - * Sen. Malcolm Wallop (R-WY)

JUNE 2, 1986

"Today, we begin page one of a video history book. No longer will the great debates in this chamber be lost forever . . .", said Senate Majority Leader Robert Dole on the first day cameras were tested in the Senate chamber.

On June 3, 1986 the New York Times headline ran: "Some Laughs, Some Qualms as Senators Take to the Air."

There was a mix of behavior on the first day of Senate television. In all, 10 Senators made remarks about the presence of the cameras stationed in the galleries. Senator Howell Heflin (D-Ala.) recited a sonnet he composed especially for the occasion:

Turn the spotlight over here;
Focus the camera at my place;
Pages, please don't come too near;
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(MORE)

Perhaps the most widely reported comment of the day was that of Majority Leader Dole who said, "I think that today we catch up with the 20th century. We have been the invisible half of Congress for seven years."

The Senate had originally planned to turn off the TV cameras for a two week "cooling off" period before taking a final vote on permanent televised coverage. The experiment was such a success, however that cameras were never shut down; thus it was no surprise that on July 29, 1986, the U.S. Senate voted overwhelmingly to make television a fixture of the Senate chamber. C-SPAN 2 became an official cable network on that day, moving to round-the-clock programming by January, 1987.

C-SPAN 2 TODAY

Today, due to C-SPAN 2's unblinking eye, the Senate is anything but invisible. Currently available in 24.5 million households nationwide and around the world via satellite, C-SPAN 2 has preserved for history some of the greatest debates of our times.

Over five years such events as the Persian Gulf resolution, the John Tower nomination, three federal impeachments and the ratification of the INF treaty have all been brought to the public without editing or commercial interruption on C-SPAN 2.

Most recently, C-SPAN pioneered another technological first in the Senate when in mid-May robotic camera technology was used to cover a Senate hearing.

The robocam was used again last week during the Senate Armed Services Committee hearing with testimony by General Norman Schwarzkopf. The new robotic technology provides improved and closer camera angles while being highly unobtrusive to the congressional proceedings.

* * *

C-SPAN is now available in 54 million homes nationwide and around the world via satellite. C-SPAN and C-SPAN 2 are privately funded to serve the public by America's cable television companies.

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