

16 March 1994
9:40 PM

Mr Brian Lamb
C-SPAN

Dear Sir:

I looked forward with great anticipation to the Oxford Style Debate on the Clinton Health Plan in the House.

I almost turned away after about 30 min. but forced myself to watch for an hour and a half, but then had to give it up in disgust.

Thanks for carrying the attempt on C-SPAN but if this is the best our Reps. can do they are hopeless. It was disgusting to watch the bickering with no one addressing the "elements". The hope that this debate would elevate the status of Congress was sure not met.

I hope you can pass this opinion on to those involved. They missed the boat completely and only did themselves harm.

Sincerely

P.S. I think C-SPAN and you in particular do a great job and this fiasco is in no way blamed on you.

Fingers wag, lawmakers shout about health care

WASHINGTON (AP) — The dons of Oxford University might well be horrified by what happened on the floor of the House of Representatives on Wednesday night, as lawmakers shouted back and forth and pointed fingers at each other for nearly two hours in a raucous, often very loud debate.

In an after-hours foray onto the House floor, four Republicans and four Democrats staged what Speaker Thomas Foley, D-Wash., called an "unprecedented experiment." They held what they said was an "Oxford-style debate."

It wasn't the kind of debate the lawmakers normally have — simply reciting prepared speeches or haggling over amendments. Instead, they imitated a formal British form — complete with a resolution, open statements, plenty of questions and plenty of rebuttals.

The difference was: This time, they haggled over substance. And, even with formality, the fight quickly got heated. Before long, there was shouting.

The topic of Wednesday's 100-minute debate was THE topic in Congress these days: health care reform. And those debating included some of the subject's key players, such as Rep. Pete Stark, D-Calif., whose House Ways and Means subcommittee is working on a bill, and Rep. Bill Thomas of California, the ranking Republican on Stark's panel.

At moments, it just seemed like noise: Reps. Nancy Johnson, R-Conn., and Rosa DeLauro, D-Conn., challenging each other with increasing volume on the number of uninsured in the state they represent. Thomas and Stark both talking rapidly at the same time about covering the poor. Jargon like "means testing Medicare" and "progressive taxation" was tossed around.

Members of the team referred to each other as "the gentleman" or "the gentle lady." But the atmosphere was anything but courtly.

When it was all over — after nearly two hours, because of numerous time extensions — Gephardt summed up the flavor beautifully: "I think we all have to remember that the House of Representatives is really a substitute for violence," he told C-Span.

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Londer asked Ms. Harding if she had any emotional or psychological problems.

"I don't know," Ms. Harding replied.

Ms. Harding later issued a statement saying there was no excuse for the bad decision she had made.

"I am committed to seeking professional help and turning my full attention to getting my personal life in order. This objective is more important than my figure skating," the statement said.

Ms. Kerrigan was clubbed on the knee Jan. 6 as she practiced for the national championships in Detroit. She was forced to withdraw, and Ms. Harding then won the championships and

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