

March 23, 1993

Mr. Brian Lamb
C-SPAN, Suite 412
444 N. Capitol Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001

002594 MAR 26 93

Dear Mr. Lamb:

By way of introducing myself, let me say I am not a "C-SPAN junkie", however I do watch C-SPAN when time and interest permit and coincide. This letter is written simply because telephoning C-SPAN is virtually impossible and the subjects would require too much air time in any case. I wish to generally commend you and the other C-SPAN broadcasters/interviewers for their professionalism and objectivity. There is one major and irritating point and a couple of minor ones that I hope to bring to your attention.

My primary gripe, for lack of a better word, has to do with the subject of Clinton's proposed change in policy permitting the entry and retention of gay personnel in the armed forces. Specifically, many supportive journalists and politicians who have appeared on C-SPAN have made statements which I believe to be inaccurate. Essentially, many have said, in effect, that they do not understand why the public reaction to Clinton's proposed policy change created such a furor and tremendous outpouring of opposition. They go on to say that Clinton made campaign promises and statements to this effect, and that the post-election announced change in policy should have come as no real surprise to anyone.

Before proceeding further, let me say that I am a retired Army officer, a two tour Vietnam veteran and that I readily admit that I oppose Clinton's proposal regarding gay persons in the Armed Forces. Having said this, I also attempt to keep up with current issues and events. Clinton's post-election policy change also took me somewhat by surprise. Listening to the various C-SPAN interviews spiked my curiosity. I mean: Why were I and many others so surprised when I hear all of these journalists and politicians saying that Clinton has been talking about and campaigning on this issue for many months?

Certainly you are aware that there are many various online services and databases that are available in libraries and from other sources. C-SPAN may even subscribe to some of them. One of the largest and most common is called DIALOG. It contains several hundreds of databases containing medical, scientific, literary information, news etc. Within DIALOG are also databases which index newspaper articles.

I did a DIALOG online search using the PAPERS file, which indexes articles from 40 major newspapers across the country, including the

Washington Post, New York Times etc. The search went something like this: (homosexuals or lesbians or gays) and military during the period of May 1992 through November 1992. Of course, I got thousands of "hits". But then I ran the same search and added Clinton. I did get some "hits", but not one "hit" (a citation of a news article) before the fifth of November 1992.

There is another DIALOG file called MAGAZINE INDEX, which is also available on CD ROM. It indexes articles from 400 plus magazines published in the United States including Time, Newsweek etc. I ran the same searches as I did with the PAPERS file and obtained almost identical results. That is, no citation for any article relating to Clinton and the issue of gays in the military until after the November election.

There are some possible conclusions which may be drawn. Clinton, in fact, may have mentioned or discussed or campaigned or promised such a policy change before the election. If he did, however, it went largely unnoticed and unreported by the media. Being the skeptic, I am inclined to think it was intentionally unreported. I dispute the notion that this subject (promised policy change) was ever publicly discussed, reported, recorded and published before the November election. Or it is possible my search strategies may not have been the best, nor my sources all-inclusive.

I invite anyone to do searches for information relating to this subject and produce citations which contradict my findings. I am not at all reluctant to revise my conclusions if they are in error. Until that time, I would ask that C-SPAN challenge its interviewees, who state or infer that the public should have known about Clinton's views on this subject, be asked to cite the sources by which the public should have known about and been aware of them before the election. They should either be able to cite such sources or not make such statements. In the coming months and with hearings imminent, ask each of them if they ever wrote an article or if their newspaper or magazine ever published an article on Clinton's policy change before the election.

On another matter and at the time that the House of Representatives bank/post office scandal broke and became a hot topic, many journalists attempted to downplay the importance, i.e. we need to move on to the real issues. Some of us did read the initial Washington Post article on the GAO report on the House bank, which appeared on the Federal Page. In that article, it was reported, but never subsequently discussed that congressional and Capitol Hill reporters and correspondents also used the House bank.

After several months of listening to reports and discussions and reading about the banking scandal, I took the liberty of calling Richard Harwood, then the Washington Post ombudsman. I asked him if accredited Capitol Hill correspondents and specifically Washington Post reporters had used the House bank. He affirmed that both were true. He, of course, would not name names and he either did not know or would not say whether any Washington Post

correspondents had ever bounced a check at the House bank. I may have missed it, but I never heard one C-SPAN interviewer ask journalists being interviewed whether they had used the House bank and, if so, whether they ever wrote a check with insufficient funds there, or whether they knew other reporters who had.

In one of the first reports on the Zoe Baird problem with hiring an illegal alien and failure to pay social security taxes, a Washington Post article mentioned, but not subsequently with names, that this was a rather common occurrence among VIP politicians, bureaucrats and media types including columnists and journalists. There was also an effort to diminish the significance of this illegal action. Yet when listening to journalists discuss the issue on C-SPAN, I do not recall hearing any interviewer ask the journalists if they ever have hired an illegal immigrant, failed to pay social security taxes or name the names of journalists and media types who they know have done so.

Another minor irritant was exemplified in a recent interview (9:45 AM, March 10, 1993) with a Time correspondent (Michael Duffy) conducted by Susan Swain. Over the last month or two, it has become customary for C-SPAN interviewers to ask call-in people how they voted in last year's election. One call-in viewer mentioned this and asked why journalists were not asked the same question. Ms. Swain referred the question to the Time correspondent, who declined to respond as to how he voted or elaborate as to why journalists shouldn't be asked the same question. I believe each of them should be asked for whom they voted and their responses, whether declinations to answer or not, be made a matter of record.

My central thrust in all of this is that journalists and those who represent the print and electronic news media, individually or collectively, are not and should not be more privileged than any other citizen. There is no published and universal code of ethics to which they must adhere, and because of the First Amendment shield they are accountable to no one. The news media, with few exceptions, are incestuously protective, wish to preserve the facade of objectivity and create and foster the false impression that they are and can not be co-opted. They certainly have faults, commit illegal and immoral acts and often indulge in hypocrisy. I feel that C-SPAN is an appropriate forum in which the news media can accurately and correctly be portrayed, and presented to and be examined by the public as they are in fact.

Finally, I have mixed feelings regarding C-SPAN's apparent advance preparation of and guidance to interviewees; that is that they will contain their facial expressions, listen intently and emotionlessly to questions from call-in viewers etc. On the one hand, it results in a temporary and illusive display of courtesy, interest and restraint. On the other hand, it tends to conceal and stem the usual arrogance, disdain and condescension that many journalists and politicians have for the public. I guess I come down slightly in favor of C-SPAN's coaching in that it provides a brief, albeit feigned, respite, but still allows the public to catch glimpses of

the true natures and agendas of many of the interviewees.

Like many other Vietnam veterans, I watched last year's commendable series on the war and the revisit to that country. It is just such programming combined with the public affairs and issues programs that justifies the continued existence of C-SPAN. Employees of C-SPAN, such as yourself and Ms. Swain, are an added bonus for the viewing public.

This rather lengthy letter is not meant as a criticism of (diatribe on?) C-SPAN. It is only offered in the context of observations and suggestions from a viewer. Realizing that you are a busy person, I neither anticipate nor ask for a reply. Thank you for your time and attention.

Respectfully,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of the sender.

Woodbridge, VA 22193-4803

Tel: 

Woodbridge, VA 22193-4803



Mr. Brian Lamb
C-SPAM, Suite 412
444 N. Capitol Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001

29 USA



Lefty's Deceiver

29 USA



Muddler Minnow

