

C-SPAN Viewer Mail
400 North Capitol St NW
Suite 650
Washington DC 20001

MADISON WI 53711 USA

Saturday, August 10, 1991

003575 AUG1491

OCT 2 ANS'D

Dear C-Spanners:

I've waited too long to send this letter to my absolute favorite TV channel, and so it may need to pass beneath several eyes. First, the fan mail:

Congratulations for the good taste, self-confidence, and sense of humor required to reprint that hysterical, sardonic love letter from *Mirabella* magazine! I literally fell over laughing—and yet it put into words all that I love about your network.

I also want to convey my general admiration for your interviewers, especially Brian Lamb. In today's "Future of Cable TV" panel, he demonstrated yet again his historical perspective. He also raised an interesting point that I'd urge you to expand into an entire program: the ethical issues in your kind of "anti-spoonfeeding" journalism. (Perhaps it should be called "chopstick reporting.")

In passing, Lamb contrasted C-SPAN's totally private funding with the hybrid support that underlies some state and local government programming—I'd like to hear more details. Such subtleties as camera angles, microphone control, and reaction shots probably also determine the message the viewer finally receives, and this 35-year-old certainly never learned how to "decode" this visual language in school. While—thank goodness—you don't edit your programs, the decision to cover an event in the first place (and when, or if, to schedule it) does require editorial debate. As evidenced in staff responses in the *Update*, you do concern yourself with that ultimately slippery concept of "balance," and I think many viewers would be interested in the philosophical basis of your editorial decisions.

continued...

The ongoing series comparing world parliaments around the world has been fascinating, and I look forward to more—perhaps the Soviets now, and again in a few years? Which brings to mind a more immediate program topic suggestion: language interpreting. The current *Update* mentions that you contracted for English voice-overs for the Bundestag. I'm afraid you were robbed: I switched off in despair after 30 minutes, because the interpreter was unable to convey a pfennig's worth of the speakers' emotions. Even if it had been simultaneous, the work was poor—ungrammatical word choices, all content, and zero affect. Compare this with the truly excellent live work heard during the Canadian Tories' policy convention this weekend. The interpreters managed to translate both the heat and the light of the often-contentious speakers.

003576 AUG1491

Although "interpreting in politics" might seem a truly obscure topic at first, I think an understanding of the limits of interpretation makes us better consumers of international events. One need look back only to the flap last fall about Gorbachev's request for aid—was it "50 billion" or generic "billions" or "500 million" or what? (Even the New York Times relied on an erroneous translation, at first.) When we hear Walesa or Landsbergis or any of the scores of other world leaders through their interpreters, are we hearing what they're really saying? How can we chronically monolingual Americans assess the quality of the interpreters we rely on?

I'll finish with a mundane administrative detail. The *idea* of the program "Hotline" is great, but the reality has so far been a little frustrating. I get cranky when I drop my dime (actually \$1.50) only to discover that there's no programming information at all! Could you follow the excellent policy you've developed for the phone-ins: if there's no data yet on the Hotline, don't answer the phone? If I got more than ten rings, I'd know that you just don't know yet, and I would call back later with no hard feelings.

Sincerely yours,

(Ms.)