

I WATCH C-SPAN BECAUSE...

For as long as I can remember, I have been fascinated by politics.

My first political memory is of watching the 1960 conventions at the age of seven. From that time, I was hooked. In later years, my passive participation has been enhanced by active volunteer work in campaigns at all levels from City Council to Presidential. The more I learn of politics, the more interesting and fascinating it becomes. The personalities, the strategies and tactics, the speculation, the statistics, the color of rallies and conventions, all merge into a grand, spectacular ongoing pageant. Politics has more human drama and suspense than soap operas, sports, or any other form of entertainment, even more so because the outcome will affect all of us. And the culmination, election night, has always seemed to me like Christmas, New Year's Eve, and the final game of the World Series rolled into one.

This is why C-SPAN is a political buff's dream come true. Commercial networks give only a general sense of what is really going on. Even the all-news cable channels are limited by commitments to cover non-political news and to keep providing summaries of what has already happened. To truly understand how politics works, and to get full enjoyment from it, you have to be actively involved, to get what the computer people call hands-on experience. But even the most dedicated activist is limited in ability to participate by constraints of distance and time.

The joy of C-SPAN is that it conquers these limitations and allows people to participate, at least vicariously, in all varieties of political activities. Even those who can travel to Washington can watch only a few minutes of the House of Representatives before having to make way for others. Attendance at partisan rallies is limited to the party faithful and to those who have been able to learn the time and place. Most Congressional committee hearings, are open to the public, but access may be difficult and seating limited. Prominent people like Congressmen, diplomats, and newspaper editors are rarely accessible, except to groups with clout. And who outside of Iowa could get into that grass roots exercise of fascinating mundaneness, an Iowa precinct caucus?

But C-SPAN is always there, from beginning to end, for as long as it takes, the

way politics really is. As one who has survived a city convention that lasted until two in the morning and a state convention that ran 14 hours in continuous session (the largest political convention in history, incidentally, with 9,000 delegates), I know that this can be a very long time. My schedule rarely permits me to see a big event from beginning to end. But C-SPAN has enriched my appreciation and enjoyment of this fascinating and important world, and for that I am grateful.

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