

[REDACTED]
Medina, Ohio 44256

27 December 1996
10:45 AM

Mr. Brian Lamb
C-SPAN
400 north Capitol Street #650
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Brian,

As a long time C-SPAN lover (you're the reason I got cable), I was able to catch the last segment of your show today and felt some of the pain and sadness and frustration (and a little anger?) that you felt from the impassioned calls you received concerning the phone changes during the call-in portions of the shows.

The loving stewardship you feel for C-SPAN is obvious to me. This is your "baby" and I feel is a contribution to American democracy right up there with the efforts of the framers of this country. If they could have imagined this electronic information age, I think they, too, would have said "Thank God for C-SPAN". I don't believe anyone or any power or any "conspiracy" has turned you in this new direction. I think you are a fine, decent and visionary man dedicated to excellence, but in this turn, and with utmost respect for you and your colleagues, I think you are wrong. Let me tell you why and how this looks to the viewer.

What makes C-SPAN so different and precious to its audience is its wide scope presentation of views through guests and televised speeches without insulting network commentary and its open, democratic call-in opportunities, where anyone who has the persistence and will may someday get through. (I keep trying, but that's OK, someday I'll make it!) While I really do understand that you are trying to get a wealth of opinions during the call-in, you have introduced manipulation into this most wonderful, democratic process. And I think this has cheapened C-SPAN, bringing it just a tiny, deadly step towards the media manipulation which has driven your audience to you and away from all the other news outlets. It is a bit like affirmative action for Democrats! I'm a conservative and I haven't gotten in - that's OK - I haven't tried hard enough. If so many fewer "liberals" got in with the old system, maybe that speaks volumes! Maybe that says they aren't as impassioned or persistent enough to go to such a bother, and that says something, also. They speak by not trying hard enough, like I haven't tried hard enough. Same opportunity. Can't you see that, while not malicious in intent, you have fallen into that most undemocratic of aims of trying to guarantee outcome, which is why I think the emotionalism and bitterness has reached such a fever. (I believe you truly don't remember, but I did hear the program where you said you would go back to the old system as soon as the election was over. Honestly, I heard you promise.) Unwittingly, I think you really have politicised C-SPAN. It really is no longer a free forum of opinion, but a managed and manipulated event, something I think it was created to avoid.

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I think this horrid blotch of bitterness and controversy eats at such a good man as you are. This is not flattery, just a very rare quality among the venality of our time. Character and quality and democracy are precious to your viewers. Take heart! If they didn't care, they wouldn't be so hostile; but I think they are hurt, mostly. And the fervor of their feelings, no matter how it hurts, also speaks volumes that they love C-SPAN so much and don't want to see it go the way of all the others.

Please know this letter carries no rancor; just an effort to convey what so many feel we miss. Currently, there is now no open forum in America. Please think about bringing the openness back. Even I find myself not watching as much or turning off the show because I feel that twinge of manipulation. You were right the first time. You ARE the alternative.

I will respect your judgment. I hope I won't be saddened. PLEASE think about it.

Wishing you all good things for the coming year,

your fellow C-SPAN lover,

