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Minneapolis MN 55414

8 December 1993

Mr Brian Lamb, President
C-Span
444 North Capitol Street SW
Washington DC., 20001

Dear Mr. Lamb;

Several years ago I successfully organized to get C-Span II put back on Minneapolis Paragon System full time, and since it was recently removed again, have been attempting to repeat this -- thus far unsuccessfully.

However, in attempting to get petitions signed, I have encountered considerable dissatisfaction with C-Span, particularly with call in programs, from my community of civic and political activists who successfully petitioned earlier. For while there is much support for diversity of response, the sense is that the phone system has been captured by "a minority with a message." How many "Journalist Roundtables" do we have to have during interesting news weeks with caller after caller coming on with a script about non-objective reporters? Certainly there are callers out there with good probing questions and comments on subject who would stretch your guests and make the program more informative. Somehow your present system doesn't allow them to participate.

National Public Radio's "Talk of the Nation" does screen calls, achieves great diversity on the day's topic, and achieves more of a dialogue between panel and callers. While I am not certain such a system is fool-proof it does seem to eliminate the repetitive message deliverers. I seriously recommend that you consider a variation on such a system on C-Span, as the present system is hurting you with the reasonably serious public policy audience you need to keep.

Pozner and Donahue on CNBC work with a combination of Fax, and call-in items that are screened for topicality. NPR has an internet connection for some call in programs. All of these do not eliminate diversity, they restrict repetition that isn't on topic -- and in general they keep the programs lively, interactive and informative. Perhaps access to such technology is a bit elitist and would not specifically serve C-Span, but something needs to be done soon so your knowledgeable policy-wonk audience doesn't give up on you.

We had a discussion of the Call-In phenonema several months ago at a DFL Central Committee meeting as many of us were concerned that our party's position on many state and local issues wasn't getting presented and argued. At that time we did come to understand that there are local BBS's that are not advertised or listed that post the "message of the day" and the local and national phone numbers, and also provide softwear for continuous dialing for the carefully screened BBS members. We talked about whether we (the Democrats of Minnesota) should replicate this, and virtually everyone found it distasteful as political dialogue. Perhaps we should re-think that conclusion, perhaps we will be forced to do so. Personally I think most people I know would find operating such a system a waste of time.

At any rate, Personally, I value C-Span very much, and continue to press for re-establishing 24 hour C-Span II before the Senate takes up Health Care. One concern I have is that before September, C-Span I & II were on the B side of our cable system, but in re-positioning they were removed. I do not understand why this happened -- why they were both removed from the basic Cable line-up, and only placed in the higher cost tier with only half-time service on C-Span II. I have always subscribed to the higher tier service, but know many who cannot afford it, and now really miss C-Span. It strikes me that this is really a violation of the deal that made C-Span possible in the first place. Had the industry not agreed to the funding of your co-operative public service venture, Congress would have reserved channels for it universally in the first place. While such an argument is probably not legally actionable, it really strikes me as a violation of trust. I should add that Senator Wellstone has asked the local management of Paragon to meet with him and his staff to discuss the problem of the cuts, and how they make the Senate essentially unaccessible to persons who work normal 9 - 5 hours, and they have not yet responded.

And while I value having at least partial C-Span, I also believe you need to consider reevaluating programing assumptions, and perhaps being a little less predictable. In particular, I would like to see more participation by persons with expertise on national issues who do not live and work in Washington DC. For instance, health care presents an issue where problems are quite different across the country, and policy makers need to be as pressured by this diversity as they are by the institutional voices in Washington. I believe you could do a terrific program or set of programs on how different local communities are dealing with economic re-structuring as a result of base closings and defense industry cut-backs. Communities all over the country need to see the creative and not so creative policy efforts in play. I also believe you have not appropriately provided a forum for the politics that emerged from the anti-war movement of the 60's and 70's. We have Veterans Day, and Memorial Day, and long return trips to Viet Nam -- but we don't have a forum (day or week) for looking at the evolution of the serious anti-war movement after 1975. Given your forums, one would think that all the movement did was spit. We did a good deal. Teach-ins, many many books and articles, we changed a major party's rules, in fact we created a critical culture. Just as the vets and nurses need the recognition they were denied when they came home to an American body politic that had come to distrust the warmakers and wanted to ignore the essential policy conflict -- the serious anti-war movement remains unrecognized.

We need programs that compare and contrast school reform strategies across the country that provide clear and critical definitions of the problem. If local school board elections are to contain good argument that defines the difference between and among reform strategies, we need more than the Washington debate -- we need the state and local examples and content.

I want to compliment you on keeping the Russian TV News program going. Last summer I helped host Yeltsin's personal representative to Tomsk who was in Minnesota for a month of study and fact finding, and it was a wonderful resource. I simply invited friends over, let it run, fixed supper, and the news stories sparked good evenings of useful conversation. C-Span enabled, for instance, an evening devoted to how the law of bankruptcy works -- and where it is embedded in Anglo-Saxon political culture -- Roman law, how it worked in Colonial America, all with the participation of Stepan who needed to know how

to apply the principle to hundreds of leaking oil wells, defense plants filled with highly trained nuclear and lazer scientists whose talents needed a new mission, and plutonium plants that tend to be most unsafe. I often wonder if any of the people who call in complaining about media bias and taking up the time of reporters with lots of interesting stories to tell --- watch and think about the content of your nightly Russian News presentation. Sadly, because of the removal of C-Span II from Paragon, the time of the program is now less predictable.

If you are looking for a suggestion for deploying a new technology -- figure out how to make the audio for C-Span accessible along the Interstate highways on some sort of low frequency receiver. I travel some and know that there is an audience out there for this. I like stopping at over-the-road truck stops, and much of the chatter you hear is about public policy. There clearly are a few CB base stations that background your audio, and carry on commentary by the truckers. Make it legal and accessible to all.

You need to revisit Eastern Europe. Your E. Germany (DDR) stuff of 1990 was so appropriate given the times. You need to go back and update issues and persons. Too many of the Wilson Institute seminars that refer to these are only on C-Span II which I lack -- but we need to go back to the early assumption that ordinary people with structured lives have ideas -- and we need to update what has happened to them. We also really need to dig into the various nationalisms in terms of political theory, and history, as well as on the ground manifestations.

Booknotes: Stop doing the natural best-sellers. Everyone did Thatcher. Martyrs' Day was a wonderful read, and while otherwise well reviewed, more needing of discussion than Thatcher on Thatcher. Moreover Booknotes needs to do both fiction as well as non-fiction where the fiction deals with political ideas. You did Ignatius's spy novel -- do more political fiction. In times that more or less equal the industrial revolution there are clearly novels about the politics of this change. And while you have done a reasonable job on one of my favorite contemporary authors, Salman Rushdie, (favorite since I read Midnight's Children long before his fatwa), why not do a program about his art -- it is political art -- with qualified political literary critics? If necessary, mask them and disguise their voices. There is lots of interest in the evolution of political ideas and the Indian sub-continent, and the great contribution of the English speaking and writing part of that world. There are, in fact, more English Speakers on the sub-continent than in England today -- and they have political ideas and write. Americans need to know about this part of our language center. Not because some religious nut decries death -- but because of their ideas. Given the present, Rushdie's ideas are vastly more interesting than Thatcher's -- and more critical.

C-Span generally would be worth a couple extra dollars a month if the boys who play games with the line-up would quit using it as a chit. I look forward to the day when I have my own dish and can choose for myself, and not be part of a market group. I am an American and an individual. I have learned two languages other than English -- Danish and German -- and would like to see and hear TV in both so as to keep my competence. The market system does not recognize my interests nor the 15 grad credits in SE Asian politics the NDEA paid for.

I gather Hubbard is about to float a satellite -- will you be on it? I live two blocks from his down link array -- and it is getting crowded. Why don't you go totally wild, and do the same thing with world-wide documentary and public interest programing.

Again -- the folk I activated a couple of years back to return C-Span II are not as devoted to C-Span these days because they think your call-in's have been captured by folk that are not about real dialogue. I intend to keep at it, but you have to help us out by fixing an obvious problem.

Hopefully you will succeed.

Si yo

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