

Modesto, CA

Dear Brian and All,

On Friday morning, September 4, 1998, Joe Conason was one of your guests. There was no indication that the topic was being limited. There was no topic typed over the telephone numbers. There was nothing on the screen associated with any topic when Mr. Conason's name was first shown at the beginning of Washington Journal. I called in that morning and the lady who answered, to my surprise, asked me what my topic was. I told her and she said that the topic was limited to the President. Also, on the morning of November 9, 1998 John Dickerson was one of the guests. Again there was no printed notice at the beginning of the program that would indicate any special topic and while he was on the air, there was nothing written over the phone numbers. I called in and I was asked what my subject was. I told the lady who answered the telephone my subject. She then asked me what I wanted to say about the subject. I told her but she said that C-Span's subject was different and cut me off. I listened to some of the callers and at least one caller's subject was not the subject she mentioned. I feel that asking what the caller's subject is, even though there hasn't been any announcement of any subject, O.K.. But asking a caller what he/she plans to say about the subject is, in my opinion, screening callers or might even be called censorship. This is especially so in view of the fact that at least one other person was not on that subject.

Your people seem to do a good job of identifying your first subject, generally Morning Newspaper Articles, but the rest of the program turns into a guessing game. Years ago there was a T.V. program called "I Have a Secret". It seems as though C-Span is reviving that old program by having viewers try to guess what your guests will be talking about or whether there will be a time for open topics. I believe that it would be nice that when Washington Journal begins and the guests are announced that their topics, or open topics, would be spelled out in print and the host mention this as well. Then, while the guest is on the air, the topic (or open topics) can also be placed over the telephone numbers. That way people who tune in late will know if the topic is limited or not.

However, if you prefer not having anything over the telephone numbers whenever there isn't a special topic, fine. But I, and perhaps others, would appreciate it if whenever there is a special topic for any of your guests that it would be noted at the beginning of Washington Journal and over the telephone numbers while that guest(s) is on the air. It would also be convenient if your program schedule on the Internet would include the proposed subjects or whether there will be open topics with your various guests. I have checked the Internet as late as 1:00 A.M. our time (4:00 A.M. your time) but have yet to find a topic listed.

Also, it seems as though C-Span does a lot of limiting topics thereby giving little time for callers to talk about what they wish to talk about. Even the program Morning Newspaper Articles is somewhat limiting. People might want to call about something important that happened last week or month or something that may be coming up in the future that wouldn't qualify for Morning Newspaper Articles. Some days, especially Saturdays, C-Span only has the Morning Newspaper Articles and a guest with a special or limited topic leaving no time for open topics. It's conceivable that a country like China might have talk shows with limited topics but a Communist country or dictatorship would never have talk shows with "open topics". Giving people more chances to talk about what they wish to talk about gives even more meaning to the words "free speech". I also believe that it would be better if C-Span would put its reminder of your 30 day policy at the beginning of Washington Journal or at the beginning of each guest if you wish. When it is shown while a caller is talking, some of your viewers might think that it is being shown at that time to show that that person is violating your 30 day policy. This happened the last time I called in Tuesday, November 17, 1998. I don't believe anyone was trying to show that I was violating your policy because the time I called before the last time was September 30, 1998 which was well over the 30 day period.

I still believe that having a time in the evening, say 6:30 P.M. to 8:00P.M. or 7:30 to 9:00 P.M. your time, for a call-in program would be a good way to make it easier for people on the West Coast to participate. When the "House" is in session, you could just have "open phones" (or "open topics") and no guests. When the "House" is not in session, then have guests. The ratio for calls from the East and West Coasts are now much out of balance. This is due partly because of the dropping of the telephone numbers for the time zones. But it's the early time of day that makes it so difficult for us. Thank you again for your time and consideration regarding these matters.

Sincerely, [REDACTED]