

cc: S. Trahem

Post-Newsweek Cable  
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Dear Sir or Madam:

I called C-Span's call-in program Monday evening, April 20th, and the lady who answered the phone asked me, "What is your question?" I told her that I had a comment. Evidently she told the producer because the producer then came on the phone and asked me, "What is your question?" I asked him if a caller had to ask a question and he said, "Yes." I said, "Then why don't you announce over the air that you accept questions only from callers?" I don't believe that he answered this question. However, it's hard to express an opinion, or disagree with someone, if a caller is limited to asking only questions. It's like saying to callers, "Our guests are the intelligent ones with all the answers and you callers are the dumb ones with all the questions."

Also, when the lady who answered the phone asked what my subject was, I said that I wanted to talk about having an "open convention" at the Democratic Convention. She said, "Could you elaborate more?" I said that she was doing what's called "screening the callers" and I told her that I felt it violated the First Amendment. Asking a caller what the subject of the caller is, is fine. But asking "could elaborate more" is going too far in my opinion. Conceivably, this is what could happen when a person calls in to a call-in program if the subject were, for example, nuclear power. The person answering the phones could say, "What is your subject?" The caller could say, "I want to talk about nuclear power." Then the person answering the phones could say, "Could you elaborate more?" Then the caller could give very good reasons for developing nuclear power. Then the person could say to herself (or himself), "This caller certainly has good arguments for nuclear power. I (the person answering the phone) personally am very much against nuclear power. Therefore, I will cut this caller off and wait until someone gives very poor reasons for nuclear power to go on the air. That way we can say that we had a balance of "pro" and "con" opinions regarding the subject of nuclear power."

The producer also asked me what my topic was about and I told him. He said that they were talking about "polling". I tried to tell him that my subject, "having an open Democratic Convention" was related to "polling" because the polls show that American people don't want Clinton or Brown (or even Bush). But he cut me off before I could say this.

Also, I have mentioned to various members of C-Span's business office, and over the air that C-Span should have one day a week when callers may talk about any political subject they choose on an "open phones" forum. C-Span does occasionally have "open phones" but the various hosts of C-Span try to limit the subject during "open phones" even though "open phones" means "open topics". I have had various people at the C-Span business office tell me that callers can talk about any political subject they wish during "open phones". But if the host tries to limit the subject during their rarely-used "open phones" times, then callers feel reluctant to talk on a different

subject. One time I tried to talk on a different subject during "open phones" on C-Span and the host cut me off.

Also, the times that C-Span has "open phones" is usually on a "hit or miss" basis and usually occurs when a guest doesn't show up or when The House of Representatives adjourns during the time the evening "call-in" is supposed to be in progress (C-Span's evening call-in time is 6:30 to 8:00 P.M. Eastern Time, weekdays). If there is a fair amount of time left, after the "House" adjourns, then C-Span usually has the scheduled guest on for the remaining time. But if there is very little time left, then probably the guest leaves and this is usually when C-Span has it's "open phones" time.

I know that C-Span's hosts don't like to make any comments whenever they have "open phones" because they wish to remain neutral on subjects. I totally agree with this. Therefore, I have suggested that C-Span either has a Congressman, or reporter, as a guest to either answer callers questions or respond to callers comments during "open phones". If this were done on a regular basis, say once a week, during the regularly scheduled evening call-in time, then callers could rely, or depend, upon this.

In my opinion, C-Span seems to be too domineering over their callers. Very seldom do callers get a chance to talk about what they wish. They can only talk about what C-Span wants callers to talk about. C-Span, also, seems to be unconcerned about the wishes of the public. I believe that since C-Span is publically funded from monies received by cable companies, that C-Span should be more sensitive to what the public feels.

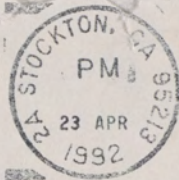
I would appreciate whatever you can do regarding these matters and thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

*Bill Smith*

"Bill Smith"

This is not my real name



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