

June 19, 1993

Brian Lamb  
C-SPAN  
400 N. Capital St. NW #650  
Washington, D.C. 20001

002594 JUN 30 93

Dear Mr. Lamb,

I think it is a bloomin' shame that the Rules Committee is the graveyard for the democratic process. It only reinforces the low ratings with the citizens and the belief that we have a junk food Congress.

Why is the supposedly world's greatest deliberative body not allowed its debating function? One of the main purposes of the House is to act as a sounding board for the population. There are many significant issues that need the full airing of debate by some of the keenest minds available.

1. The Rules Committee is used to circumvent the rules of the House that are designed to insure fair & orderly debate.

Before a major bill is considered on the House floor, it must be accompanied by a resolution from the Rules Committee outlining the ground rules for debate. These include what amendments, if any, can be offered and how long the measure can be debated.

With a two-to-one plus one majority, the Democrats on the Rules Committee, with you as third ranking majority member, change the ground rules with each bill to manipulate the results.

Take the issue of closed rules with no amendments submitted on the floor. How can a pluralistic society function if the public cannot witness the picking apart of the issues to their most salient points?

Fifty-five members begged permission to amend the Clinton budget. Among those rejected was House minority leader Bob Michel & Rep. Olympia Snow. They had put forward one of the most popular ideas that might have carried a majority if it got to the House floor--the elimination of Mr. Clinton's \$71.5 billion BTU tax and replaced it with spending cuts. Not willing to hear someone out, especially the leader from the opposing side, is totalitarian and as un-American as anything I can imagine!

The number of "open rules," which allow members of the House to offer relevant amendments, has plummeted during the past 16 years;

in 1977 it was 179, in '81 it was 90, in '85 it was 65, in '89 it was 47. So far this term it was 1.

2. Even when House members are allowed to offer amendments, the Rules Committee has figured out a way to make them superfluous if they are adopted. They use a "king of the hill" rule whereby a series of amendments can be offered to a bill, but it's only the last one adopted that counts. For example, President Bush asked Congress to approve a package to cut 224 wasteful spending items, pork that you often hear about, from the budget. The President's package was followed by a vote on a Democrat substitute that restored many of those same cuts.

As a result of this procedure, Members could have it both ways by voting to cut these programs with one hand, then voting to spare them with the other.

3. Another is to hide funding bills that are over budget. Among other things, the Congressional Budget Act requires any tax or spending bill to be within budget, and new spending and tax changes must be identified.

In 1991-92, the Budget Act was revoked on 47% of the measure that came through the Rules Committee. Not only does Congress refuse to comply with the laws it imposes on society, with the help of the Rules Committee, it routinely fails to comply with the laws it imposes on itself.

Many Democratic leaders justify this abuse of power as a means to improve efficiency. They label any proposed legislative changes as "obstructionist," ignoring the possibility that anyone other than a committee chairman can improve a bill.

They also disregard the intent of the founding fathers that Congress be a deliberative body. As James Madison wrote in the "Federalist Papers," the job of Congress is "to refine and enlarge public views."

It is said that Mussolini made the trains run on time. But the Italian people paid a tremendous price with their sweat and blood. Likewise, the American people are ill-served when the majority leadership of "the greatest deliberative body known to man" ignores enfranchisement and fairness and undermines representative government.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]  
Thousand Oaks, CA 91360