[redacted]
Somers WI 53171
December 30, MXMI

Mr. Brian Lamb, CEO
C-SPAN, Suite 650
400 North Capitol Street, N.W.
Washington D.C. 20001

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Re: Overdue Applause, and Sustaining C-SPAN Pre-eminence

Dear Mr. Lamb:

The waning days of MXMI seem an appropos moment for noting C-SPAN's contribution to American policy formulations. Although CNN's Ted Turner captured the cover of 20 percent owner Time-Warner's flagship magazine, the true story is in the consequences of cable news coverage. Mr. Turner alluded to part of that Time misperception with his plaudits to CNN's employees; Time also missed C-SPAN's substantial influence in domestic policy discussions.

This morning's call-in with Mr. Schram and Mr. Pruden drew sufficient calls, as your broadcasts consistently do, for me to still be keying the 'Redial' button unsuccessfully an hour after my first attempt. Consequently, a letter must suffice in disputing a widely broadcast assertion, and the resultant misperceptions will necessarily persist until another time.

Opinion diverging from fact is the principal complaint against other media of most cable news 'junkies', such as myself, and is the compelling motive for witnessing events directly whenever possible. One of today's guests, Mr. Pruden of the Washington Times, fell into inadvertent divergence during the broadcast, with consequent rebuttal per the enclosed letter. His primary tasks of running a daily news operation certainly qualify him for excusal; he too is reliant on the direct observers of events -- reporters -- for formulating distilled versions of them. An illustrative instance yesterday occured on one of the commercial network's Sunday shows. A reporter noted an "embarassment" to one presidential candidate derived from his business's employment of part-time workers who lacked health care coverage. My recollection of post-high school jobs is: don't bother me with details, I want to work and make enough for ... (fill in the blank). My son has worked three years with similar resolve, and has no more interest in purported technicalities that prevent him -- as did I -- from working all the hours he is able. In short, health care insurance is not -- and never has been -- significant to most part-time employees. Thus the embarassment accrues not to Mr. Kerrey, but to the reporter for mischaracterizing facts.

So also did Mr. Pruden's remarks, and their partial rebuttal by Mr. Schram and a few callers once more showed C-SPAN's vital role in keeping facts foremost, as does CNN. The nation is indebted to you as well as Ted Turner in pioneering that access's success.

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Sincerely

[redacted]

[redacted]
Somers WI 53171
December 30, MXMI

[redacted]
Washington DC 20002

[redacted]
New York NY 10166

Re: Who Is Overpaid?

Gentlemen:

This morning's C-SPAN appearance by both of you included a remark by Mr. Pruden that ascribing American automakers' sales problems with over-paid assembly workers. Unfortunately, I was unable to reach you by phone during the program for rebuttal of that and several related assertions; I'll do so herein instead.

The "over-paid" and "under-productive" appellations against autoworkers, and other American production workers, have been thrown into public policy debates for many years. In the decades of common, unchallenged dissemination it has always evaporated as quickly as its sudden, often uninvited and irrelevant assertion. When Volkswagen began gaining inroads on the American auto market in the late 1950s the domestic producers sought to counter their new competitor -- and other imports -- with scoffing, ridicule, and fault on the American workforce. They floated apocalyptic warnings of danger from every imaginable nook of propagandists' darkest demonizations: VWs would burn occupants horribly in the least collision; American companies would suffer losses so rejection of their products was un-American; imports were too small for American occupants and for the distances they traveled. Thirty years ago the competition was partly about price, and American manufacturers met it first with hype and histrionics; later they grudgingly met competitors' autos with half-hearted design adaptations which imitated foreigners' leads.

That cycle has persisted for much more than the last ninety days or since the last annual report to shareholders. Yet its assertion persists from some offices, such as Mr. Pruden, in full dispute of the facts. American workers now build cars for Toyota, Honda, Nissan, and Mitsubisihi with far greater efficiency than the established American builders. Their productivity is so much greater that domestic producers, such as General Motors, must plan for 100 percent utilization of their facilities in order to match Japanese-American plants operating at lower utilization levels. American producers deserve credit for matching J-A plants in another facet, though; they've equalled foreign quality and proclaimed their achievement loudly. So someday the cycle may be broken, even reversed.

However, most Americans are not fulltime students of auto production; they rely on past claims and experiences. They have several decades of unwarranted promises by manufacturers and salesmen matched against breakdowns, warranty non-coverages, and endless lesser dissatisfactions from domestic organizations. Many have turned to foreign companies simply for their lesser disparity between claim and performance. Onto this stage steps Mr. Pruden, who proceeds to blame over-paid autoworkers in the manner of 1950s irrelevance. There is no evidence supporting the charge, though it may soothe crumpled hopes in Detroit's upper echelons and feed the presumptions favored among other recalcitrant managers. Rather, its baseless perpetuation simply continues popular disbelief because of the disproven claim.

The underlying cause for American auto producers' inability to match foreign competition has been their managements' self-absorbed acceptance of their own propaganda. Disparate fact and management perception have prevented any direct confrontation of American autoworkers with overseas counterparts in a free market contest. Mr. Pruden's revival of ancient, now baseless assertions simply defers rediscovering the true worth of American workers. It's an unfortunate coincidence on the day President Bush leaves seeking opened auto markets in the Far East, accompanied by Messrs. Stempel, Polig, and Iacocca.

Sincerely

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cc: Mr. Brian Lamb, CEO, C-SPAN

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Somers WI 53171

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Mr. Brian Lamb, CEO
C-SPAN, Suite 650
400 North Capitol Street, N.W.
Washington D.C. 20001