

ESSAY

I WATCH C-SPAN BECAUSE

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San Francisco, Calif. 94116

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It is the best source I have found to learn what is going on in my Government; and to find out how, when, and to whom I can direct input which may influence the urgent national issues affecting my own, and my family's, health, safety, and well being. Until recently, I believed 'Government By Consent of Those Governed' meant exchanges of information and opinion between elected and electors, in addition to the consent given by votes and the accountability due that consent; which traditionally took place within the boundaries of geographically defined voter constituencies. Listening to C-Span not only provides access to the information necessary for such communications; but has made me aware of the urgent need for input and feedback exchanges between voters and Representatives beyond the limits of constituency boundaries.

Changes have erased these boundaries and eroded local district voter leverages of consent and accountability. Extensively collected PAC monies cross boundaries, invading electoral districts, to influence regional electoral territory in as many areas as their money will cover. Single issue candidates with accountability due their PAC(ks) are sent to Washington to vote on issues of critical national concern. Quantity and complexity of legislation has forced further erosions of direct district accountability as influence is dispersed to committee assignments and decisions.

These defacto erosions of voter ability to attach consent to accountability are not within the province of C-Span to correct. However, with C-Span's help, they are within mine. I cross constituency borders by sending input to those in positions to influence specific legislation whether or not they represent my own voting district. Information gleaned watching Congress gives me the ability to accurately respond to opinions I hear expressed in the Congressional well, and to intelligently and actively support or object to their voting records. For the most part, such letters have been well received. They elicit more issue oriented responses than those from one of my own Representatives who consistently votes a rigid, special interest, partisan ticket.

Come election time, I send my political budget, if not my vote, direct to those Congressmen whose responses I know, because C-Span brought them to my living room.

C-Span also brings to me an invaluable wealth of information and background from the finest minds in the country from a great cross section of expertise and interest, including reactions from other viewers. Congressional hearings, especially, focusing on current legislation, presents divergent views and factual information. Such exposures give me confidence to formulate and submit value judgements to which I can add personal assessments of consequential benefits or risks. I feel this kind of citizen input has value and gives Congressmen the support they often need to take assertive action against entrenched policies.

I believe C-Span is providing the communication means that is necessary for a new kind of grass roots movement which can revitalize and redirect the kind of informed consent necessary to democratic survival and lead the way to the individualization of people power in a technological society.

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C-Span Essay Contest

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