



November 21, 1994

The Honorable Newt Gingrich  
Republican Whip  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: A Proposal to Further Open the Congress to C-SPAN Cameras

Dear Congressman Gingrich:

As you and your colleagues prepare to lead the new Congress, we've been pleased to note your proposals--such as legislation on-line -- designed to increase the public's access to Congress.

We at C-SPAN are among those who have long been interested in expanding public access to Congress. As such, we would like to offer this proposal which we hope can advance this shared goal: Consider opening the 104th Congress fully to television cameras. Allow C-SPAN cameras into places where they've historically been excluded--most importantly, into the chamber of the U.S. House of Representatives.

Here, more specifically, is what we propose:

1) **Allow C-SPAN cameras to cover House floor debates.** As you seek ways to open the legislative process to the public via computer technology, consider bringing Congressional telecasts into the modern age, too. House cameras currently give C-SPAN and the rest of the news media a restricted view of the floor. As you know, the rules prevent House cameras from panning the chamber or taking reaction shots; viewers can only see Members as they speak from the well. These procedures were agreed to by a Congress which no longer exists. Only 58 members who were present for the 1978 vote on House television are still in office today; yet, all 435 members of the new Congress will serve under camera procedures established in another era.

Since C-SPAN brings Congress into American living rooms, most Americans (and, according to our last survey as many as two-thirds of the House members) think that C-SPAN is operating the cameras in the Congress. They don't know that the cameras in the chamber are controlled by government employees using procedures established by the Speaker's office. Help end the confusion and create a more complete picture of House debates by allowing C-SPAN--a private, not-for-profit company--to install its own cameras in the House chamber.

If you do allow our cameras into the chamber, we will commit to covering House floor debates in the same style we've established during 16 years and 25,000 hours of Congressional committee coverage. We'll present a full, honest, and accurate picture of each day's events, and make our telecasts available to others in the news media using accepted pooling practices. We hope you'll agree that allowing our cameras in the chamber is simply a way to use technology to extend Congress' public galleries. It allows 62 million C-SPAN homes the same opportunity to see their legislators that 616 citizens sitting in the gallery now have.

2) **Open the Speaker's conference to television.** Established practice has kept cameras out of these daily on-the-record briefings between reporters and the Speaker. Let cameras in and allow the public to hear and see these sessions for themselves. C-SPAN would commit to televising these briefings each day; we would also extend a similar opportunity to the Minority Leader.

3) **Allow C-SPAN to install a permanent camera position just off the Floor.** Our viewing public regularly tells us they need more context for the debates they watch. Allow a permanent camera position near the floor so that we can interview Members during votes and before and/or after our gavel-to-gavel coverage of House sessions.

4) **Unless it concerns an issue of national security, permanently open the House Rules Committee and all legislative committee hearings--including mark-up sessions--to television coverage.** Allowable coverage of some committees has been sporadic. As one example, after covering hundreds of hours of testimony on one legislative issue before a House subcommittee, C-SPAN cameras were excluded from that legislation's mark-up. We think the exclusion of cameras from these kinds of sessions only contributes to the public's present skepticism about the political process.

5) **Open all House-Senate conference committees to cameras.** Often, cameras are shut out of this important, final step in the legislative process. Budget Conferences are one important example. We propose that the public be allowed to witness--via television--the debate and decision making that finally determines how their tax dollars are spent.

As you can imagine, going forward with all of these proposals would require considerable additional resources from C-SPAN. You should know that the cable television industry, which is responsible for creating and funding C-SPAN, is committed to providing the additional resources necessary to expand our coverage of Congress.

The U.S. House of Representatives was among the earliest legislatures to televise its sessions. Since then, other democracies have followed suit--several of them allowing more complete television pictures than American citizens now get. We hope you'll agree that after 16 years, it's time for our Congress to take the next step-- allow C-SPAN cameras into the chamber and open up the other venues we've suggested. Expand what American citizens can see of their national legislature; and, make the television picture of Congress more complete and, therefore, more honest.

As you consider our proposals we are, of course, happy to provide any details or technical information you may need.

Sincerely,



Brian Lamb  
Chief Executive Officer

cc: Rep. Dick Gephardt  
Democratic Leader

P.S. Today, a similar proposal is being sent to the leaders of the Senate; we will also be sending copies to our colleagues in the news media.