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**C-SPAN**

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TELEVISION COMPANIES

Brian P. Lamb  
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer

November 21, 1995

The Honorable Newt Gingrich  
Speaker of the House  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: Cameras in Congress

Dear Mr. Speaker:

One year ago, I sent you a letter that sparked considerable discussion among members of Congress and the news media. It contained five specific requests to increase television access to the House of Representatives. Today, on the anniversary of that correspondence, it seems appropriate to review the status of those proposals and of the quest for greater public access to the House via television.

Here are the individual requests and a brief report on where the issues stand:

**Proposal #1) Allow C-SPAN—or other private media cameras—to cover the House floor debates.** On this, the most significant of the proposals, progress has been minimal. Early on, you asked a Members' Task Force to study our request. In March, that Task Force requested a written plan for the installation of private cameras. To date, we have not had a response to this proposal.

In the interim, you briefly permitted the House's TV production staff to experiment with fully opening up the camera shots they use in the chamber. However, when some Members complained about the new camera angles, House technicians were told to modify them. Overall, what the viewing public sees from the House floor today is an improvement from what they had seen for the last 16 years, but a modest one.

The protest by a few Members over the new camera angles aptly makes the case for private media coverage. As long as the only cameras in Congress are the ones controlled by government-employed technicians, the public will have a less-than-complete picture of their representatives at work.

**Proposal #2) Open the Speaker's Conference to television.** When you took office in January, you immediately opened your daily Capitol briefings to cameras. However, you soon canceled the sessions, citing confrontational exchanges with a few reporters. Mr. Gephardt, by contrast, now holds regular televised press conferences in the Capitol.

The information in these sessions is valuable for the press and the public. We urge you to reinstate televised "Speaker's Conferences" so that the public can hear daily overviews from the leadership on both sides of the aisle.

**Proposal #3) Allow C-SPAN to install a permanent camera position just off the floor.** With your permission and the assistance of the Radio/TV Gallery, C-SPAN now regularly positions a camera near Statuary Hall, just off the floor. Used for live interviews during votes, this camera helps us enhance public understanding of the legislation debated by the House.

**Proposal #4) Unless it concerns an issue of national security, permanently open the House Rules Committee and all legislative committee hearings—including markup sessions—to television.** On opening day of the 104th Congress, the House—to its credit—unanimously adopted HR6, "the committee sunshine rules." Since then, C-SPAN has been given access to every hearing we've asked to cover.

**Proposal #5) Open all House-Senate conference committees to cameras.** We can also report that every time a conference committee has agreed to hold public sessions this year, C-SPAN has been granted access to them.

We recognize that this letter arrives at a very busy time. Yet, it is precisely because of the importance of the issues being debated by Congress that we want to raise again the request for complete access for the American public via television.

A few months after you took office as Speaker, you told the Capitol press corps that "your bias is in favor of the cameras being allowed to show the country much more of the House." And, in fact, there has been some progress in further opening the House to television this year. However, important aspects—most notably your floor debates—are still insulated from access by private media cameras.

In the late 1970's, the House became an international model of open government when it made the decision to allow its debates to be televised. In the years since, other national legislatures have gone on TV, many of them allowing regular access to journalists' cameras. That's why we believe it is time for the House to revisit the issue and allow media cameras inside the chamber on a regular basis. Our Congress should remain the world's most free and open place of debate.

Sincerely,



Brian P. Lamb

cc: Members of the U.S. House of Representatives