

A CONVERSATION WITH BRIAN LAMB

by James J. Unger

Several weeks ago I was fortunate enough to have a very lengthy personal discussion with Brian P. Lamb, Chairman and CEO of C-SPAN, here in its Capitol Hill headquarters in Washington. Brian is viewed by educated observers as one of the most creative and influential individuals in national news media history. His insights, observations and opinions are all based upon diverse personal experiences as a company founder, program director, creative contributor, program interviewer, chief executive officer, media critic, and communications force. Sharing the discussion with Brian and myself was Harold Pizzetta, Debate Captain at The American University and staff member of the National Forensics Institute. Harold is currently a member of the Law Journal at the Georgetown University Law School.

Jim: Our structure to-day is going to take the advice of someone far wiser in the profession than I am. So I'll open with a quote from Brian Lamb himself. He said--you said--in an interview program, "keep the spotlight on the guest. Once a host begins to push and argue and banter, he gets in the way. My role is a conduit. If you think a lot about me, then I'm doing something wrong. We as interviewers should try to be ourselves but stay out of the way." And that's what we're going to attempt to do. So the "spotlight" today is directly on Brian Lamb of C-SPAN. Brian, let me start with what I think is a very typical question for many of our readers. What do the letters "C-SPAN" stand for?

Brian: Cable Satellite Public Affairs Network.

Jim: And how did you come about that name? Was it something that was imposed upon you?

Brian: No, I sat down in the beginning and made a list of about 100 possible names. This is a town of acronyms and in order to get people's attention, I thought you needed to both devise something that would fit in what people are used to but also create an atmosphere in which they would ask "what does it stand for?" In the days when we were starting, no one knew much about cable. They certainly didn't know how the satellite was going to help us. This created an interest in both the use of the cable

television system to deliver additional programming and also the satellite as a way to get there.

Jim: Robert Titsch has written "Brian was driven by a dream. He felt that the American public was getting screwed by T.V. He felt that the most powerful government in the world was hidden from its constituents and that the people should see it." Was this a dream? Was this a passion? Can you tell us a little about--how do I want to put it?--the gestation period--how long from conceptualization to realization?

Brian: Well, it was an evolutionary experience. Coming from a small town in Indiana, having a certain image of what it was going to be like when I got to Washington, then finding something different--finding, you know, a tiny little funnel in ABC, NBC and CBS that was located in New York which had three evening newscasts that made the decisions of what the rest of us could see on television. And I kept hearing all through my experience that this was a rich country with a fabulous communications system and that we were a country that didn't believe in concentrating too much power in any one area. It's a little more complicated than that but that's basically what was at work here. Not so much that I wanted the people to see the House of Representatives, but I wanted people to have the same opportunity that I had living here--seeing the entire city at work instead

of just that minute and a half on the evening news show.

Harold: Before the 1979 actual realization, did you find yourself to be a "voice in the wilderness" or did you get a lot of support right away?

Brian: There was almost no support in the beginning, and that's not unusual, though, with anything new in the United States. People in business naturally want to continue to control the marketplace that they have at any one given time--that's the nature of the human being. And there was a considerable lack of interest on the part of journalists at that time to talk about new avenues of communication, new ways of bringing in television. Certainly the television networks weren't interested in doing stories about the new media. Newspapers didn't like television at all, anyway. They would publish stories, but they weren't happy about it. And so it's like a lot of things in the United States, they have to start at the grassroots if they're really going to change things, because there's very big resistance to change whether its industry or government. So, this is something that kind of bubbled up. I was not a part of a big organization, I was not a part of any national, well-known group. I was a single human being in the mix that had a germ of an idea, but in order to get to where we are today it took a lot of people in the beginning to help make this happen--if they

weren't there, I couldn't have done it by myself.

Harold: To continue the reflection on the early days of C-SPAN, as I understand it, in 1979 it consisted of just four employees, a 500-square foot office building, and you even shared a satellite with the Madison Square Garden Network, sometimes being bumped off for pro wrestling. It was obviously not the 24-hour a day, gavel to gavel coverage that we're now used to. Can you give us an idea of the level of coverage in 1979?

Brian: When we started on March 19, 1979, all we did was flip the switch at 10 a.m. If the House was in, we had a picture and a sound. If it was not, we had nothing. That was our first several months. We didn't start adding new programming until we borrowed a tape machine. We hired a fellow who was in the basement of the National Press Club, who owned a camera, to go to the luncheon speeches and for \$200 buy a tape and take his camera and bicycle it up to us. Literally, we had a guy run the tape up to us on a bicycle. You know, I think it makes a better story today, but it probably wasn't the wisest way in the world to go about building a network like this. I mean, we started simply and then began to grow as people around the country, more and more, told us how much they liked it and wanted more.

Jim: We're down here now in your Capitol Hill offices. Your staff is close to 200. C-SPAN reaches about 62-63 million households and C-SPAN 2, about 35 million. From that date in March, 1979, has it been a consistent trend upward, or have there been peaks and valleys? What is that history?

Brian: There have been a lot of bumps in the road. One of the biggest ones was 1982, when we had to leave the satellite channel we were on that was owned by the Madison Square Garden Network people, because

they wanted it full-time. We found our own spot--it was actually the last on the RCA Satellite--which is another story for another day. And we went 16-hours a day and then 24-hours a day and in the process of that, lost over 400 towns. From 1,200 to 800. Another bump in the road came in 1992, when the Congress passed legislation that reregulated the cable television business and at the same time hurt us significantly, probably more than any other channel, because they forced the industry to make room for over-the-air television stations for a segment of the population called the "area of dominant influence." This a formula set up by the Federal Communications Commission--and those channels had to be carried on those cable systems whether anyone wanted to watch them or not, just because they were licensed by the government. And in several cases we were bumped off or cut back. It's been a long, hard road. I'm not surprised we're as big as we are and that we have so many people interested as I am that in spite of attempts by some people to make the road hard, that we have come through this pretty much intact.

Jim: Certainly a lot of our readers think of C-SPAN as "congressional" coverage. But there is so much more involved in C-SPAN. Can you give us some kind of sense of what are the other types of programs that you seek to cover? If you flicked on

I was a single human being in the mix who had a germ of an idea.

C-SPAN this morning you saw the Easter Egg Roll on the White House Lawn. A couple of days ago we'd see Newt Gingrich reporting on the State of the Contract. What

is your balance between--what do I want to say?--congressional and non-congressional coverage? What is worthy of C-SPAN coverage?

Brian: Well, the best way to describe what we do is try to let the American people in on as much of official public Washington and public affairs around the country as is financially possible. This is a complicated process that's made up of the House and Senate, the Supreme Court, the White House, the press, the lobbyists, the think tanks, different political clubs, parties, caucuses. It's never-ending. So, we try to show you as much of this process as is humanly possible. The other aspect of it is our own programming that we develop, for instance, the *Washington Journal* which is now on every day. It's the only place where you get serious discussion of the issues every day for three hours with call-ins, faxes. It's highly concentrated on the news of the day and events of this city. There's no weather, there's no sports, there's no advertising. And it's also a place, in the call-in segment, where people are literally asked to tell us what they think. They're not cut off if we don't like their question or their statement. And we let it flow without any interpretation, any argument with them. I like to call it the national network that's devoted to the national conversation.

Jim: So from your nomenclature "Public Affairs" is the guiding principle?

Brian: That's why it's called the Cable Satellite Public Affairs Network and not the Cable Satellite Congressional Network. It's not just "news." These are events that happen that we would like to think if you were here you could walk in and sit down and enjoy them and watch them for as long as you'd want to--but you could see the whole thing.

Harold: One of the most recent controversies that emerged is about the level of coverage on the floor of Congress. We think of C-SPAN and we think that you are in control. But who does control the cameras? Who makes the decisions as to what is covered on Congress?

Brian: Well, it's very difficult to get people to focus on who controls what cameras and when. And there are two different kinds of environments in which we find ourselves plugged in. One of them is the environment that the House and Senate control. If you ever see anything from the floor of the House and Senate, almost without fail, except for the State of the Union, the cameras are owned and operated by the tax-payer supported staff of the House and the Senate. In the House they take their instructions from the Speaker and the Speaker only. In the Senate, they take instructions from the Senate Rules Committee. It's complicated as to how those decisions are made. We have nothing to say about what they look at, what they shoot. Almost everything else you see comes from cameras that we own and operate and from choices we make as to what we want to cover. On any given day here you can have almost 80 different events--and we might go to seven, eight, or nine of them. We own 22 cameras that go out in the field. We usually configure those cameras two to a unit. Having said that, we almost never have more than 6 two-camera units working at any given time. They turn into, sometimes, three-camera units, because we now use a robo-cam, which gives us the ability to put a camera on a witness without having a person behind it and it just takes away that obstruction. You've got to know when you're watching, whether you're on the floor of the House or the Senate or anywhere else, as to who controls the cameras.

Jim: I understand that you've been a very strong proponent for showing us much more of what's going on, on the floor of Congress. You were recently quoted as saying, "this is the most open country in the world and if the First Amendment means anything, it's time for us to show the audience what's going on." There has been some experimentation in that regard, not all of which has been favorably received by certain members of Congress. Can you tell us a little of the ups and downs of the movement to show us much more of the whole process on the floor of Congress?

Brian: Last November, after the election, I wrote a letter to both Speaker Gingrich and Majority Leader Dole and asked them permission to let us put our own cameras in both chambers. We would even, at our expense, put cameras throughout both chambers to cover the entire event because it's one of the few places in town that you're not getting a journalist's view of what goes on. When cameras go into the White House, they belong to the media. They don't allow cameras in the Supreme Court, but they ought to; and in that case, they should also be media cameras. Any regulatory agency, any hearing that we cover, those cameras, again, belong to journalists. We have a tradition in this country that there is a separation between politicians and the media. Although it's blurred right now, there are too many of them coming out of politics and going into media and back. Radio's almost become the loser's medium--if you lose a congressional race or if you lose a senatorial race or a presidential race, you go into the radio business. What it ends up being is all celebrity-based. We are a country that is overwhelmingly celebrity-oriented, more than we've ever been in our history. That's causing people difficulty in understanding the difference

between politicians and journalists. All we've tried to do with this request is say "let us in, let us show the audience exactly what goes on." Basically, another way to say it is "stop trying to over-control your image" because people don't trust it when they know that government controls the media.

Jim: We've had some experimentation, haven't we, recently, that's been done on the House? I understand, that some congress-people have objected. They were caught picking their noses or falling asleep or giggling or whatever during the debate and they weren't quite used to that.

Brian: These debates almost always turn on something insignificant like an alleged congressperson picking their nose. This stuff is very serious, and our traditions are very serious, and it almost always ends up being a debate about "do they wear too many red ties?" and those are not important or significant items; but you'd be amazed how often an elected official is concerned about that. There has been some experimentation in the House and the Senate, primarily in the House. But every time they do experiment with it, the members get jumpy, because they know all they have to do is go to the Speaker and say "stop showing me sitting in the chamber." They're even considering the possibility of having an area of the House roped off that no camera can ever show, so that people know they can go within this roped-off area and talk to whomever they want to and not have to worry about the cameras ever picking them up. This is nothing more than control. If you sit in the galleries of the House and the Senate, you can see all of this. So, it is a discrimination against the medium of television. If you work for a newspaper or wire-service, you can sit in the gallery and see it all and report it all. We're the only ones that

have these kind of restrictions leveled against us.

Jim: Are you optimistic? Do you think you'll get what you want?

Brian: I'm realistic. I don't think we'll get what we want, certainly on this first go-around. It's not an issue, frankly, that a lot of people in our business care about. I'm surprised. I would think that people in the television business and the television/journalism business would see this as an example of a place to fight and to speak up. But we've had very little of it. Everybody is busy and this doesn't directly affect a lot of people but we could have used more support throughout this process.

Harold: Mr. Lamb, of great interest to a number of our NFL members is your recent reenactment of the Lincoln-Douglas Debates. As you know, the original debates served as the inspiration for the very popular high school format that I, myself, have participated in. Can you explain to us a little about why that particular event was chosen to celebrate the C-SPAN Fifteenth Anniversary?

Brian: Part of it was just pure happenstance. The Lincoln-Douglas Debates are a great example of what public discourse could be if people want to take the time. A lot of that hasn't happened in history, but those debates are often called the most important political debates, certainly in this country's 219 years. It happened because Harold Holzer wrote a book called *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates* in which he published what he called the unexpurgated transcripts of what was said there. It's complicated because he took the two newspapers that reported on it, the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Chicago Times*, which basically supported Lincoln and Douglas respectively, and he took the opposite paper's transcript as a way of trying to get a true

picture, which had never been done before, of what actually was said. We did a show with him in which he told us how it was done. And out of that came just an idea that we could go to Illinois and travel to the cities where the debates were originally held, and ask the people there about what they knew about them and what the history was. After we did that, we decided to write a letter to the mayor of each city and ask them if they were interested in reenacting these debates on their terms (choose the actors, choose the scripts, choose the locations). Then we would come in and televise them live. All seven mayors said 'yes.' They all put on wonderful three-hour debates. Each community, starting with Ottawa, tried to out-do the other one, and what we got was seven terrific performances that really gave us some video tape that will be useful forever. This will probably never be done like this again. They are dressed in period costume, doesn't matter when they're shown, and we're very excited about what we've got. It's not like everybody in the world cares about these debates, but the President of the United States, as we're talking, has on his desk the Lincoln-Douglas statue that was created by Lily Tolpo and he's referred to it as a good example of what goes on in this town all the time.

Jim: Do you think this is a unique event? Has anyone else suggested any other kind of events that you would do the same thing for, the reenactment of something else?

Brian: There have been a lot of other suggestions of other things for us to do, but I've got to tell you, this is special for us. Someone suggested to reenact the Civil War battles, and I don't think it's the same thing. We are a discussion network and that was an example of the greatest possible discourse you could ever expect between two human beings. To spend three hours, actually, it turns out

to be spending 21 hours, all on basically one subject, and it turned out to be slavery, and all the things that come off of slavery--it just shows you how difficult democracy is, how difficult change is, and how difficult it is to get people's attention long

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enough to get them to understand what all the issues are. I think it's a great example of what we try to do every day here. People said "oh, you'll never get people to watch three-hours of debates" And my reaction was that if we get people to watch 24-hours a day of public affairs, why would this bother them? And they don't have to watch it all if they don't want to. We ended up doing 50 hours of programming involving historians and local officials and speeches that were given in the different towns leading up to it and plays and all that. It's a terrific collection of material.

Harold: So far we've been discussing the content of C-SPAN. I'd like to talk about the fact that C-SPAN is now being brought to the nation via a large yellow school bus traveling to a number of communities. The school bus contains cameras, lights, computers, CD-ROM and you've even described the school-bus project as literally "a drive for education." Can you give us an idea of where this came from and it's exact purposes? How would you state its mission?

Brian: Well, like the Lincoln-Douglas Debates, the schoolbus comes from a book. It's not unusual for us to read a book around here and say that that's something that we might learn from and use. A Hofstra professor by the name of Doug Brinkley, who now runs the Eisenhower Center at the University of New Orleans, wrote a book about something he called the Majic Bus--spelled with a "j"--in which he taught American History during one of the quarters. He invited college students at Hofstra to join him on a six-week trip around the U.S. to see various historical sites, towns, and anything that might be considered useful in trying to teach History. He got an old bus, put bunks in it, put the college students aboard it and they went around the United States while he wrote a book as he went. We had him on our *Booknotes* show. We thought it would be a good idea to bring C-SPAN to life for a lot of people who are put off either by the name or put off by the idea of watching government do its business, which sometimes can be tedious.

Jim: Some of the more recent statistics I had seen in early 1994 talk about its visits to 116 schools, 22 state capitals, 75 cities, 28,000 miles--it really seems like an awesome project in that regard. Do you envision, just as you did with C-SPAN, that we are going to get a Bus 2, Bus 3...or is this the only one?

Brian: Well, we're talking about a Bus 2. It's an expensive proposition to put another bus on the road. It costs about \$5,000 a day to keep a bus out there. It's got to work for us--it's got to make a difference. The first one has made a big difference. Those statistics are really old--we're up to about 55,000+ miles that the bus has travelled. That bus has probably been to 44 states by now. In most of those communities, it's provided us a tremendous

opportunity to do historical vignettes that air on the network, to meet high school and middle-school teachers, to have double the number of students on board. It just doesn't stop, the possibilities. We're gearing up to use the bus during the 1996 presidential campaign. It takes on the air of a personality. This is a network that has no on-air personalities, but this bus, when it rolls into town, has that big yellow smile on its face, and people literally break out with a smile on their face. It's a great tool for education. I don't know if there will be Bus 2, 3, and 4, but we could have another bus.

Jim: In line with that, you were quoted as saying "the only star on this network is the bus." Our readers are high school students and teachers and I know a number of them personally who have encountered the bus and the reaction has been uniformly overwhelming. It almost strikes me as the single most favorable thing, in terms of enthusiasm, that you've been able to generate.

Brian: There's a little gimmick we use, though, and it's called the "C-SPAN Staff," that's out there with it. That is not an insignificant part of this package. From the driver, to the bus manager, to what we call our volunteer--and we have a new one go out every week from here--you get nothing but excitement and enthusiasm. People come back from this bus trip saying "that might have been the greatest week of my life--I might have learned more that week, more than I've ever learned about this country, because it forced me to think about what we do at C-SPAN, what the relationship is between the Capital, Washington, and the communities they're visiting, what education is all about, how hard it is to get students to pay attention in this day and age to anything, let alone something as, again I'll use the

word, "tedious", as a public affairs network dealing with issues that are complicated. And the staff that we have go out there has been just spectacular. Anybody at C-SPAN that works here can volunteer to go out on the Bus. One thing I can tell you is that no one is told to go out on the Bus. So if you're out there, you're out there by your design, not by ours, and that makes all the difference in the world. If people are told to go and do something, they take a whole different approach to it.

Jim: I wanted to allude to something you mentioned before. Preparatory to this interview, I called a number of our members, both teachers and students, and one question I asked them, for an impression purpose was, "in terms of C-SPAN, how is it funded?" And most people think that it's public television. That's their impression now. But I'd like to get a much clearer one. The literature says that it is "privately funded to service the public via America's cable companies." No tax dollars are used to finance its operation, but no advertising too. Maybe you could explain -- who pays the bills?

Brian: That's probably the most important question you've asked so far, because virtually no one understands how it's funded. But if they thought a little bit about it, I think they would learn something very important about our systems of communications. It's possible to create, in American business, a philanthropic institution, like C-SPAN, without taking any federal taxpayer money. We've gone through a tremendous discussion, and it will continue, about public television. I have nothing to say about public television--that's a subject that everyone has strong views about, and I want to stay out of that argument. But I will have strong things to say about the possibility that in this country American

business people can create something that has no bottom line benefit to them, and this is one of them. It took lots of different leaders of the cable television industry to say "yes" to this concept. Not only to say "yes" to the idea of forming a company called C-SPAN, but funding it. Not only about forming it, and funding it, but then carrying it on the different cable systems. Now, it hasn't been easy, but without that support along the way, we would be dead in the water. Every nickel that we spend--and that's about the way that the money comes to us, in nickels--comes from the subscribers to cable television systems around the country, to the local cable system, to the corporate headquarters, to us, in the form of a check that amounts to a nickel per home, per month. Our budget for 1995-1996 is \$24 million, we have 200 employees, 40,000 square feet, all of it located in Washington. None of it is supported by the government.

Jim: From what I have read, recent decisions of the government have resulted in some reduction in the possible homes you can reach, both in terms of the FCC "Must-Carry" Rules and the 7% cut in the cable rates. I know you were quoted as talking about these kinds of decisions as being basically "wacko" in nature. Maybe you could expand upon that term.

Brian: Well, I used the terms "wacko" because I felt that was the best way to express my observations of this bill. I think it gets people's attention. So much of what's done in Washington is done without thinking it through. It's done from an emotional standpoint. In this case, members of Congress set out to punish the cable television industry because they didn't like some of the individuals in it, and they didn't like some of their business practices. So they reached beyond--in my opinion--what

was necessary in order to, again I use the word, "punish." This was a punitive measure. I was asked to testify and I did so. I told the committee that if they were to pass this law we would be hurt. They passed it and we were hurt. I am sure it's an unintended consequence. I'm sure that if the members of the committee knew that it was going to hurt us as badly as it did, they would have given it a second thought. But it's not like they weren't forewarned. It's a great example of what happens so often. They were in such a big hurry to slap the hands of those people in the business who had been less than attentive to the things that they thought were important, that they hurt a product that was a direct result of what they all said they wanted. They all said they wanted new networks with public affairs and not commercially oriented. That's exactly what this network is, so it's a real sore spot and we didn't need this setback.

Harold: This is at least, in part, as I understand it, a product of regulations by the FCC. Do you ascribe the same kinds of problems with their decision-making process or was that a different error on their part? What led them to do what they did?

Brian: I was naive about how it all works in Washington. This is going to sound very cynical, but from my experience, it is the way I look at it: everything that happens here, happens because of money. Every decision that's made, is made for one reason or another because large sums of money are being moved around on a chess board. In this case, we were not big money. We had no clout, no financial clout. And at the Federal Communications Commission, they were very concerned about telegraphing to the public on behalf of the country that they were going to save them money. It was a political decision, as so often is the case. And it led up to the 1992 Campaign, it got all mixed

up in partisan politics. In the end, the Republicans and the Democrats voted for this bill. Out of 535 members of the House and the Senate, only 139 voted with the industry, so that means that a clear majority of both Republicans and Democrats all voted to reregulate the cable television industry, so they all have some responsibility for what happened in the end. And the FCC was only carrying out their wishes, and their wishes, first and foremost, were to tell the American people "we're going to get your money back." But in the end, very little money came back. And in the end, the cable television industry was not overwhelmingly destroyed or hurt, it was slowed. Our progress was slowed. Our ability to offer another channel was slowed. And it's just a great example of what can happen when something is not well thought through.

Jim: Do you find, in terms of your conversation with members of Congress and with members of relevant regulatory bodies, that there is greater recognition on their part today that a mistake was made or do they even perceive that the consequences were not what they had anticipated?

Brian: It's hard to know. This is a tough thing for me to get into, because it now becomes rather partisan, which I try to stay away from. Some members of the U.S. House and the U.S. Senate are trying to repeal the law. The segment of the law that hurt us the most is called "Must-Carry," and is a complicated situation no one cares about except a few of the cable television programmers. The system owners have bigger fish to fry. The Congress has bigger fish to fry and the Federal Communications Commission doesn't want to fool with it again. So, we're left with the consequences, and it's going to continue to stunt our growth. It won't kill us. But there are communities around the U.S. that do not

have us because of the "Must-Carry" law. I suspect before it's over there will be other communities that will have C-SPAN taken away from them because there will be a local shopping channel which must be carried, another religious channel in the area that must be carried, or the fourth or fifth public television station that must be carried, duplicating programming that's already available on the cable system.

Jim: That leads us very conveniently to some aspects of the future of C-SPAN. I know you've been quoted as saying you would look forward to a C-SPAN 3, a C-SPAN 4, a C-SPAN 5, one devoted to domestic politics, one to business and economics, one to environmental affairs--all within the predictions of a 500-channel universe. Can you give us some ideas in that short term, what kind of predictions you'd make for C-SPAN? Your growth, you say, has been hurt by the activities of Congress and the FCC, but you are still proceeding on a growth track, as I understand it.

Brian: This is a very pivotal point in the history of television and communications and, for that matter, data and telephone. And I, honestly, can't tell you what life will be like for us in five years. It will be different. There's a convergence of over-the-air television, cable television, telephone, and satellite-delivered programming. The people that used to own cable television systems have sold, some others have bought, there's a great migration going on. Telephone company people are in business with cable people and vice versa. Telephone companies want to compete with one another in the community. AT&T does not want to compete, but the existing local telephone companies want to compete with AT&T for long-distance service. So, where this all ends

up is really, at the moment, a big question mark. I said earlier, everything revolves around money. We have to continue to keep our eye on where the money comes from. There's a possibility, as the future unfolds, that we'll have to change the way we're financed. At this early stage, there's no way to know how long our industry will continue to be an industry or how long all the competing technologies will want to pay the same money for the same service. Instead of paying for basic cable service someday, you might end up paying for only those channels that you want. For people that are in the high-buck world, who have billions of dollars at stake, this is a frightening time, because they have no idea how it's all going to shake out. They have lots of money invested in their infrastructure. We have relatively small amounts of money invested. I think we have an infrastructure, a political infrastructure, for the country that's here now, that somehow will survive. But how it will be paid for and under what umbrella is, at the moment, up in the air.

Jim: A recent article stated, "Lamb's flock was sowing offspring around the world." Ireland, Australia, Venezuela, Japan--they cited 40 countries in all which had been in to consult with you about the broadcasting of the legislative procedures. I also noted, since I just happened to be up very late last night, on a C-SPAN broadcast reviewing the experience of cameras with Prime Ministers' questions over in Great Britain. And some of the comments were that it had become theatrical, disorderly--there was a lot that they didn't like. When you've consulted with these people, have you felt that certain types of legislative bodies are better suited to cameras than others, or is it just the process itself that opens itself to camera coverage?

Brian: Well, to start with, I disagree with the British. I would disagree with any British Parliament member who said that television has changed that institution. I was there before and I've been there since and there's not a dime's worth of difference since television has come to the

The only star on this network is the bus

chamber. What really has happened is that they're now conscious of the fact that television is there, and that changes behavior. What kind of behavior? It may be as simple as the way you sit in your chair to whether or not you want to speak at all. Prime Ministers' question time is a good example. Since it's only fifteen minutes long, it never changes. It starts and ends the same way all the time on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The only thing that changes is the perception of what is happening, which, in effect, has been exactly the same as it was before. I'm sure television has had a much greater impact but I'm not sure what the impact is. I'm not trying to avoid the question, I don't know what the impact is. But I know that we are everywhere, for every major political event, and a lot of minor political events, and so a certain number of people that are interested in this country, in America, can watch almost every aspect of the system unfold right in front of their eyes, from their living room. What that impact is, I do not know. I know that some of the most minor political events are seen by some of the most important political people. Because you hear them when they speak. You can hear people like Bob Dole say, "I was home last night watching such-and-such on C-SPAN," or Newt Gingrich saying the same thing, or Dick Gephardt, or one

of these folks, and so there's a cross-talk going on there. What that impact is, is significant, but it's for others to discover, not me. And we're kind of passive in that process. And that's very important for people to understand—that we just show up, and show it and never try to interpret it or analyze it and let people decide for themselves whether it's important or whether they think it's even worthy watching.

Jim: Let me just finish up in this area. I was recently reading the C-SPAN "Mission Statement." When was that authored? Has it been changed over the course of time? Or was the "Mission Statement" something that was authored right at the beginning of C-SPAN and that's been it?

Brian: I don't know how old that "Statement" is, it's not that old. It's probably at least between 5 and 8 years old. We operated in the beginning without a "Statement." That was developed by our administrative staff, working with the rest of the company. The company is run by two co-chief operating officers, Susan Swain and Rob Kennedy. I very much consider them to be the new generation here and, in fact, I am the oldest person in the company. And most of the people that work for Rob and Susan are younger than they are. I think this is very much a company for the future. We have about as many women as men. We have more women on the management team than we do men. There's no woman who works at C-SPAN who doesn't get exactly the same amount of money as a man does for a corresponding job. We have a significant amount of diversity here, which is not only important to the country, it's exciting to have people from different backgrounds to be around every day. It's one of the best things about working here. It's interesting, and the people are inventing things every day on their own terms.

And as much as it may sound like I am running the place, other than being very interested and involved in the overall, long-term goals, on a day-to-day basis, I'm almost completely removed.

Jim: To conclude the element of the future, I know you can't predict with precision what C-SPAN would be like by the year 2000. But you said it's going to be different. Can you attach any qualifier to that of "significantly" different, "substantially" different, different just in a minor way? What's your gut reaction at least, to the degree of difference we're going to see?

Brian: The greatest difference will be the amount that's available. You're going to have a lot more events available on a real-time basis. You might have events available on video on demand. It could be delivered via the cable system into your computer, so that you can call up things from time to time. Although, that's a very expensive proposition right now. I think the most significant difference, and it won't bother people that much, is how it's paid for, who can get it and how is it delivered to them? I suspect the idea, in one form or another, will be the coverage from gavel to gavel at political events. And it will be beyond where it is now because we'll be able to go to foreign countries on a live basis because this will be affordable.

Jim: Let's turn now to some of the conceptual questions that were raised both by our potential readers and certainly that are relevant here in the Washington community. I'd like to start with a fairly broad one and that is, what is the line for our officials of what is appropriately public and what is appropriately private information? I was struck by two illustrations that appeared recently in the press in terms of the balance between those two. One was

raised on a C-SPAN program celebrating the 50th anniversary of the death of FDR, pointing out how there were virtually no photos, no visuals of FDR with his braces or in a wheelchair. The majority of the public really didn't even know that he was suffering from polio. And this is now a major controversy at the FDR Memorial as to how he should be pictured. There was, if you wanted to call it, a "conspiracy of silence." It was not reported. It seems inconceivable that anything like that would happen today. The other was just an illustration briefly in the Washington Post about one of our more prominent, departed, colleagues Joe Alsop, and the whole idea of his being "outed" for sexual behavior. Quote: "Forty years ago, gentlemen ran the world back then. Now, a secret spreads in Washington, but if you know the right people, it doesn't spread too far." And the executive editor of the Washington Post was quoted as saying, "well, the climate was so completely different then, rumors about certain individuals were discussed among newsmen but never printed." Today the balance is totally shifted. I wondered if you could give us any reflections you might have on that balance and its movement between "appropriately public" and "appropriately private?"

Brian: Well, to start with, when you run for office and you're asking the taxpayers to pay your salary to

Everything that happens in Washington happens because of money. Every decision that's made is made for one reason or another because large sums of money are being moved around.

represent them, it seems to me that you'd give up some of your privacy. It's a work-in-progress, as everything is in this country. But it's changed dramatically over the years--we are a much more open country today than we've ever been. On some days, I know, sometimes people wince, they think we're too open. I don't know. I don't particularly care about peoples' private life, but if it becomes an issue in the campaign, we talk about it here. I would never sit down at an interview, personally, and ask somebody if they were a homosexual--it just doesn't matter to me.

Although, having said that, we do ask people if they are married, if they have a mother and father, if they have children and so forth. Maybe I'm a product of my own generation and that's why I wouldn't ask the question. If somebody else "outs" somebody, I'd have a strange reaction to it. The implication is that there's something wrong with being a homosexual, or a gay person or a lesbian--and gay people don't think that, so it's a complicated thing. You can't just immediately react with the right answer on this. Joe Alsop and FDR are in two different worlds. But back then, there was a lot of winking and nodding going on between the Joe Alsops and the FDRs. It's hard to know what's right and wrong. That's why I've always tried to stay in my world. I stay on this side and I'm not interested in becoming close with any politicians--I don't want to know them personally, I don't want to be their friends--I want to do a job. I think elected officials have got to understand that we have a right, especially when we write the check for them, to know a lot more than they would like to tell us. I'm more interested, though, in where the money comes from and where the money flows. I think that if you keep your eye on the money, the rest of it will fall into place. The thing that cor-

rupts the most is what people do with money.

Jim: Are you in a situation where you find yourself having to make editorial judgements about coverage or the level of coverage based upon these kinds of principles about public and private, or is everything adequately public?

Brian: No, we have a rule here, and we get into it all the time, and that is that if it's an open meeting and the gavel has come down, anything is fair game. It does not include a mike that is open and the individual sitting in front is thinking at the time that they are having a private conversation. It's real easy for us to pot up that mike and listen--that is against our rules. If the gavel has come down and it's a comment they've made in a public meeting, that is something we will not ever edit. Now, we've been asked to at least once a week. People come to us all the time and say, "I said something in a speech that I didn't want to say. It's only a couple of lines, will you take it out?" People come to us to say, "I didn't say something in an interview that is important to me--will you either take out the section where I inadvertently didn't say what I wanted to?" or, in some cases, "add something to the interview." Which we have let them do. We'll never let them take something out, but we will let them add.

Jim: Do you feel that today, among the powerful players within the media establishment, the kind of secrets we alluded to before still exist about our public figures? Are there any kinds of aspects in which we would say, "well, we still won't discuss that publicly?"

Brian: Well, there are people in our media business that know things all the time and don't publish them. Some of it is based on friendship, some of it's based on taste.

You know, news, for an editor, is in the eye of the beholder. An example would be that we have had major journalists in this country decide that the O.J. Simpson trial is news. I would strongly disagree with that. I think it's a show. I think it's an opportunity for institutions in the communications business to make lots of money. I think that although there may be people in the country who are interested in it, they're also interested in soap operas. It's a stretch for people to conclude that this is something so important to the body politic that it must be available to them on four, five, six television stations around the country. There's a lot of duplicity in this town and there's a lot of duplicity in our business. But I'll say it again and again and again if you want to know why decisions are made today in our business--they're often made because of the bottom line. And news is determined often by "how big will your audience be," not whether this is a journalistic endeavor. That's just the way it is. It's a free country. The only argument I have with any of this is what people call "journalism." How do you define "journalism"--not whether it's legal, or not whether it's right, or not whether it can be done or not whether it should be done. Because I will never do anything on O.J. Simpson. I think it's not irrelevant to this society. But it's not nearly as relevant as some organizations have tried to make it.

Jim: Will you tell us your definition of journalism?

Brian: I don't know that I can give you a definition of what journalism is. I can try. As I said earlier, it's in the eye of the beholder. I mean, it depends on what kind of journalist you are. Do you work for a tabloid, or do you work for *Reader's Digest*, do you work for *Time Magazine* or do you work for

CBS News? And if you work for CBS News, do you work for the *Evening News* or do you work for *Eye to Eye*? I think a lot of people call it journalism when it's convenient. It opens doors. If you said you're coming from the entertainment division, they'd say, "where's the contract?" When you say you're coming from the news division, people kind of waive the idea of paying for something and they let you in because you're covering from a news standpoint. They're very lucky in this society to have something called the First Amendment, which means that they can say it's anything. I'm not sure I should even try to define what news is. I can tell you what public affairs is. I could also say, a flip answer, it's pretty easy to tell what isn't news and what's purely entertainment. Even at our small organization, we have found ourselves televising events where we look at each other saying, "that's not public affairs." You know, when we have all of this time and all of these opportunities, it's easy to make mistakes. I think where we get caught is when we define what journalism is and then do soap operas.

Jim: Let me talk about two "hypertrends" in society which emerged in recent interviews that you yourself conducted. I'd like to get your reaction about their accuracy and their degree of impact. One of which was explored in an interview you recently did with President Clinton, about the concept of "hyperdemocracy." The trouble may be in Washington. Not that the government is too disconnected from the people, but that it's too plugged in. Every decision, he said, is subject to instant analysis, communications, polls. Congress can be paralyzed by a blizzard of faxes. Congress is too absorbed in constituent pressure. I was interested to see what I think was a re-echoing of that concept just last night on C-SPAN, on your Booknotes program. You had

Alvin and Heidi Toffler on, talking about the difference between what they categorized as "anticipatory" democracy and "participatory" democracy--a situation in which politicians are worried about the results of decisions they make five or ten or twenty days in the future as opposed to five or ten or twenty years in the future. The second trend was one that was raised in these interviews, too, and it's been cited as "hyperinformation." If we're moving to a 500-channel network, the voters will be subject to a blizzard of information. They can tune in, they can "channelsurf." They can get an immense amount of information readily available to them. I'd like your comments on those two trends. Do you perceive those as being accurate within our society or not and to what degree are they important?

Brian: I think they are very important. But it depends on who you talk to--whether you talk to academics or people in the commercial network business or whether you talk to politicians. It depends on whose ox is being gored. From my standpoint, you can't get enough information out in the marketplace. I want to make it clear, I love watching interpretation. I like listening to television commentators, newspaper reporters--they help me understand how the world works. I don't want that to be my sole source--I never have. I learned that first-hand when I came to Washington, after having been out in the country and being a recipient of the information and then seeing it for myself. Some people are very disturbed by the fact that information is everywhere. They liked it in the old days when it was controllable. Politicians liked it when there were only three outlets. The thought of ever going back to the time when everybody experienced the same media together, when you came to the office the next day

saying, "did you see this show" or "did you see that show" and everybody did because they only had three choices, I never want to go back to that. Personally, I never liked it, because it's really scary when you know that only a few organizations are deciding what you can see. Now, it's all over the lot. And especially for my generation. I'm 53, and it's harder to deal with this than it would be if you were growing up and had your hands on a computer when you were twelve.

Jim: In terms of "hyperinformation," I think you're talking about two different kinds of information, which you might label as "raw information"--the facts, the basics--and "interpreted information"--I mean, the talk shows' with a spin upon that information. What is the more relevant set of information for more and more Americans? Are they making up their minds on the basis of that basic, raw information, or are they actually making up their minds more on the basis of the talk show's interpreted information, which might be dangerous?

Brian: I think they make up their minds based on what's happening in their own pocketbooks. I don't think it has a whole lot to do with a talk show telling them how to think. I think they go to talk shows and find themselves in agreement with the talk show host before they even get there. Now, once they get there, talk show hosts can fill them full of all kinds of information that the host wants them to know about. One of the more valuable experiences is to sit down and look at the numbers. Only 37-38% voted in the off-year election in 1994. Only 55% of the public voted in 1992. The important number, it seems to me, is that 50% of the people out there don't pay attention at all. They don't read the newspapers, they don't watch television, they don't listen to the talk shows about

politics. We have a country now full of people that live separate and distinct lives, and never shall the twain meet. This is hard for people to understand and deal with because there's a tendency right now for one side to get very upset when a Rush Limbaugh says anything. Well, that's just a real waste of energy because next time around it's going to be somebody on the other side and they'll be terribly delighted. You've got to be very wary of what any side in this debate is saying if they have a personal stake in it. If you are the talk show host, or the radio station or the network, or if you are the politician, you're happy when you're winning. Your skin is thin and you don't like it when you're criticized. And there's no one segment in this society involved that's either right or wrong. I don't think it's frightening at all. I think it's very healthy and I think it's going to change so drastically in five years that there will be other concerns. People are now starting to spit and sputter about the Internet. They don't like some of the language on there. I'd rather have it out in public so you can look at it, than I would, in a diverse society, instead of doing it in the back rooms, which they've been doing forever. These people talking on the Internet have been talking this way forever. They've been talking this way in private clubs or letters that they write one another or telephone conversations. You're just able to see it now. I don't spend any time on it, I don't care about it, I don't want to look at it, it doesn't matter to me. So, attacking the system of communication seems to me to be something that I'd be wary of, and I'd just check and ask, "who is worried about this and what kind of financial interest do they have?"

Jim: I know in terms of the members of the National Forensic League that one of things they are most inter-

ested in is the coverage by the media of the political process, of debates, that has emerged and grown recently. I read recently that C-SPAN carried 104 campaign debates in 1994--five times as many as in 1990. They talk about how the presidential contenders are eager to come in and wear your wireless mikes for "C-SPAN's Road to the White House"--hoping for a little free exposure. Could you reflect for a little while upon the role of television in the process of the election and specifically the debates? Today they are no more than serial press conferences, very "quickie" responses. On the other hand, the Lincoln-Douglas Debates were three hours in length. Is there something in between that both fits the needs of the voters and the needs of television accurately?

Brian: I thought the debates in 1992 were very valuable. They tried four different formats, and we learned a lot about which kind of format we liked to watch. They had a huge audience, probably the largest audience for politics in the history of the country. It's just too bad a lot of those people didn't go vote. One of the reasons why the audience was so big was because everybody devoted time to it. That's going to change again. In a recent speech by Newt Gingrich on a Friday night, which all networks didn't cover, he had a very low audience. People chose to watch him on the basis of what their choice was for the night on the other channels and he didn't do very well. You see, I think most people make up their minds on political campaigns long before the last couple of days, last couple of weeks, of which side they're going to. I mean the majority of people--probably 75-80%-have already made up their minds. Twenty percent have some doubt as to how they're going to vote. And, at that point, everything factors into it. From the ads to their neighbors to the

newspaper article

We have a rule here: if it's an open meeting and the gavel has come down, anything is fair game.

they read the day they're going to vote. There's no way to control this. You're not going to control the flow. The only thing that will control what we see on television and see about politicians is money. Where does the money come from and what can it be used for? Do they have to continue to pay the exorbitant amounts of money they do to T.V. stations that don't pay anything for their licenses to talk back to the public? That's the big issue.

Jim: Do you think the debates are a good idea, though?

Brian: I think they're an excellent idea.

Jim: You mentioned before that in the last set of presidential debates we had an opportunity to make up our minds about what kind of format we like. Well, what format did you like?

Brian: I like a format somewhere nearer the Lincoln-Douglas Debate format than anything I've seen so far. That would mean a format in which the two candidates, or the three candidates, in some formula, had to talk among themselves, instead of through reporters. That should not be interpreted to mean that I don't like reporters. I don't like any show-biz aspect of it. If you've got a moderator, the moderator should be an unknown. You shouldn't be seeing people focus on an anchor, or any network, or any star. It should be close to the Lincoln-Douglas concept where they have to talk to each other. Those debates

were too long, in the sense that, in this day and age--let's face it--you want the largest possible audience. If an hour and a half is as long as you're going to keep people, probably having one moderator and some kind of a time system that's not two minutes for each answer is optimal.

Jim: The Lincoln-Douglas framework was actually not "talking to each other." It was, really, just a series of three set speeches. I take it you're recommending something in which there is more definite interchange between or among the candidates?

Brian: Well, I've had a letter drafted that I haven't sent yet, I'm not sure I will send it. I'm not sure what the reaction would be. It proposes to both President Clinton and Speaker Gingrich that they sit down right now in the context of the Lincoln-Douglas Debate and have a conversation. We would give them three hours time if they want. It could be structured or unstructured, depending on what they would like. But in the end, they have to deal with one another. They have to talk about all the issues in a way where we see the two of them cross-examining one another. It doesn't have to be a confrontation, it doesn't have to be a contest. But it can be, if they want to. They're both glib, and they're both smart, and they're both well-educated.

Harold: Could you share with us what would be any of the factors leading you not to send such a letter? You said you might not send it, why wouldn't you?

Brian: Well, you know, I've had this letter drafted for a couple months. I don't know, you don't want to be a fool in this city. I mean you don't want to throw something up just for the purpose of throwing it up and have people laugh at you. I've talked around this idea with both the President and the

Speaker in interviews I've done. And you know, I don't want a publicity stunt. The idea is that somebody would take this seriously. The fact that Newt Gingrich is not, at this moment, running for president is a plus, because it wouldn't be looked at as a presidential contest. Although if it happened, they'd probably write it up that way. I'm interested in a learning discussion not in a stunt; and I haven't made up my mind yet how it would be viewed, so I just haven't sent the letter.

Harold: Continuing in the area of politics, does it personally bother you in your role as an interviewer when callers to your morning talk show ask your political views, whether you are a Republican or a

From my standpoint, you can't get enough information out in the marketplace.

Democrat? And as a second part, now that you are the interviewee, would you care to reveal a certain leaning either way?

Brian: No, I would never reveal a leaning either way. You know, frankly, at this stage in my life I don't have much of a leaning because what I do for a living is not lean. We've convinced most people that "we don't care what you think." That's what we're here for, is to be a conduit. I'm not selling myself to anyone. Audience ratings don't matter in my life. I'm lucky that way. In order for us to be successful no one here has to become a star. As a matter a fact, it's not in your interest to do that here, you'd be in trouble. We have no agents, no contracts. People work this network as a vocation. A part of that is that you do everything. You

don't just come here and interview. We have a very small niche in this world. At the moment, we're paid for. Our weakness is our strength in the American system. In this system money is everything and your bottom line is what everyone looks at. And that's our weakness, because we don't have a bottom line profit required by our board of directors. But it's also our strength. We aren't judged on a day-to-day basis by the numbers we deliver. So, I guess one of the lessons in all this is that nobody has it their way all of the time. And as long as we have as diverse a communications system as we can get here, the public will be served with choice. That's what I think is the most important thing that you can have in this country.

Jim: When we talk to teachers and students around the country, and explain that we're from Washington, DC, there's no question that there's an attitude in the part of many about the Washington, DC, establishment. Maybe, maybe not, fueled by the news coverage. Let me cite two brief statements. Ellen Hume has commented that "each successive President has gotten more negative coverage. Clinton has been covered even more negatively than Bush, who was covered more negatively than Reagan in this kind of culture of criticism." And just on a C-SPAN program yesterday, Hamilton Jordan from the Carter administration said, "Watergate and Vietnam meant that the press went from skepticism to cynicism, and ever since it has gotten worse and worse." He said, "if you go to DC, in any major role, you may very well be trashed. You're career may very well be destroyed, so frankly, my advice to many people is 'don't go.'" Do you perceive that kind of movement from skepticism, to cynicism to negativism on the part of many areas of the media?

Brian: Jim, it's very

complicated. I don't think I can give you a glib answer. Most of the skepticism, and I don't know that I'd go so far as to say it's negativism, but most of the skepticism on the part of the media is very helpful. I think, as I look back on what I know of history, it might have looked more comfortable for us not to know that FDR was in a wheelchair, but it was wrong. If journalism is anything, it should be a window to the voters and the American people, and a true window--a true picture of what is actually happening. It's complicated because a lot of politicians over the years haven't told the whole truth. So that's the value of the journalist being there, saying, "wait a minute, you said this here, you said this there." Now the public, in the end, might say, "I don't care whether he told the truth or not, I'm gonna vote for him," and that happens all the time, "because it's my side." But, other than what I think might be an overdoing of some petty, personal things most of the time what journalists have gone after is healthy. If you've done nothing wrong, you have nothing to worry about. Very few people are run out of town because they did something right. And in spite of all of the negative publicity, many politicians' popularity hasn't changed that much.

Jim: So you would not agree with Speaker Gingrich about the "elitist media" and the "despicable demagoguery" of the press, as a general characterization?

Brian: I think that there's plenty of choice now, there should be more. Years ago the news media was far more partisan than it is now. You know, twenty-five years ago you might have found a tilt in the media. You might still find a tilt in some reporters now. But if you can't find every day enough material to read to satisfy your side of the

political trends, that's your fault, not the media's. It's all there.

Harold: In trying to root out any political tilt that C-SPAN as a whole might have, obviously you don't have the problem with picking out a specific sound bite from an event and having that taken out of context. But how do you achieve an overall balance when you're making a programming decision? Do you look at five or six conservative point-of-view programs versus five or six liberal point-of-view programs and try to balance them out? How do you go about making that decision?

Brian: We keep records. We look at the world in years, not days. We consider our mission to make sure that if you are a C-SPAN user that all sides are there over time. It comes in chunks. Some weeks it's the speaker's week and some weeks it's the president's week. But again, I go back to what I said earlier, I don't know very many people who make a decision at the very last minute, based on the last speech that they saw. In spite of what people think, they have some sense of where they are. And what we're doing is providing them with an on-going conversation about these different issues, with the intent that they hear as many sides as we can get on the air. A lot of people want this information when they're ready to watch it or read about it. When they don't get it when they're ready, they turn around and criticize the sender. I had a woman one time call in and say, "you know, you really bother me, you're only giving one side of the issue." And I said, "well, when do you watch, ma'am?" And she said, "well, I watch every Wednesday morning between 9 and 10. As far as I'm concerned, if you don't balance that hour between 9 and 10 every Wednesday, then you're not living up to what you say your mission is." And my reaction to that is, "get a new life. You're not being realistic about this.

You're expectations for a nickel a month are far greater than they should be." In many ways we are a very selfish nation. We've got more money and more choice than any place in the world and we want more, we want it our way now. And we have a very short attention span, and so people jump to a lot of conclusions about what the news media has done over the years that's not accurate.

Jim: I suppose this is partially a function of what you mentioned before, that people do not recognize the informational "bargain" on a cost-benefit basis that C-SPAN represents, because they don't recognize how it's paid for. Somehow they think that it is, in fact, a public service--that it is theirs by right. Under the circumstances, that is not the case.

Brian: One interesting thing is that the average telephone bill on a monthly basis is \$60 a person. And all you do is pick the phone up and talk to somebody--the telephone company does nothing else but have a pipeline. The average cable television bill is around \$35. And what happens? The average number of channels is somewhere around 40 that come into your home with all of this choice. It's the same thing about a newsstand--you go into a newsstand and spend \$35 on magazines. It's more than a little bit out of balance. You go to a basketball game. Somebody was telling me last night--you go to an NBA basketball game and it's \$33 a ticket. One game is worth one month of entertainment on cable television. People have a tendency not to do that very often--they don't compare pricing. You spend an exorbitant amount of money moving around in an automobile. You don't think about how much you spend because you pay your insurance on one bill, your gas on another bill, your car payment on another bill, and your taxes on another bill. And it all adds up to six, seven,

or eight thousand dollars a year. And you don't think about that. With cable, for some reason or another, people have an inflated idea about that, probably because they got television "free of charge" for years. It was never "free of charge." It's one of the great myths in the history of this country that over-the-air radio and television is "free of charge." Every day you buy a bar of soap, a roll of toilet paper, an automobile, you pay for your free radio and television. But it's hidden.

Jim: I'd like to shift radically here to several more personal aspects. I know, from your 22 years back in Indiana and at Purdue, that you have a degree in Speech, which is obviously of relevance to our readers. Now, today, in modern America, is that a relevant degree? Do you think you learned a lot through it? Or if you could go back, would you select a different subject?

Brian: I would not major in Speech. I think it's a relevant course of study, but I don't think it's a relevant major, unless you're going to teach it. Let me explain now, if I were to do it over again, I'd get a degree in History. I would love to take Speech-- I've always been involved in Speech and I learned a lot. And at Purdue University, where they had the "Motivated Sequences" taught by Monroe, it was a very easy way to learn how to get into this business. And I have never forgotten it and I will always remember the basic course-- Speech 114. I don't see how Speech would help somebody as a major, unless you were going to teach it, study it, or write about it. Now I don't want to be glib about this. I've not thought about it. I mean I've not thought about what the Speech degree does. I took Speech because I was not a very good student and I love that course of work, and I was interested in communications and broadcasting. And

I don't regret it for one minute. But I've learned since I've been in this business that I would have been much better off to have a double major in Business and History. I go back to what I said earlier-- for me it's a learned experience--that everything is money. "Everything," by the way, is not money to

If journalism is anything, it should be a window to the voters and the American people -- and a true window of what is actually happening

me personally. I want to make sure you don't misinterpret it--that's the last thing I think about. But in our society, it's the thing, at least in this day and age, in this generation, that moves the needle. And if you want to get in the "real world" and you can learn how to run a business, and you know the difference between a profit loss and a proforma, and all the things that I had to learn on the job, and you have some sense of history--in this kind of business, the first annual *Spirit of Lincoln* Award for Lincoln Life has a series of Speech courses, in the context of all that, I would have been just as well off as I am with a Speech major. But they had no Broadcasting major at Purdue.

Jim: I'd like to give you the opportunity to do a little--what do I want to say--personal proslutizing here. In surveys and discussions I've had with other individuals from our own membership, they obviously identify the debates on the congressional floor, some of the hearings, the various panel shows that are there. They can even tell me something about the Majic Bus. Many of them have experienced it personally. They

know about the Lincoln-Douglas Debates. But I would ask them about another program, Booknotes, and there were very few, surprisingly, who actually knew much about the program or who had seen it. And yet, I would have to confess, personally I find it one of the most fascinating programs in terms of the entire range of options offered. I know you've recently celebrated the Fifth Anniversary of the program. I understand that it was your idea to just combine "the guest, the host, the book, and one hour" and that's what it's supposed to be. Can you tell us something about the program?

Brian: Well, first of all, it's a reaction to what I saw on commercial television. I became increasingly frustrated when I would watch an author on a morning show get six minutes of time and at the end of the interview I knew nothing about the author--where he or she was from, what their background was. I learned a couple of spicy tidbits from the book, and I had no idea whatsoever whether I wanted to go buy the book. And so it was a direct result of this experience that we decided to try this idea. Actually, it grew out of something that has had such a dramatic impact in this country that it probably fits in this discussion, and that is the Vietnam War. One of the principal figures in the Vietnam War history is Neil Sheahan. He used to be a reporter for the *New York Times* and *United Press International*. And he wrote a book called *Bright Shining Lie*. When some early excerpts came out on *Bright Shining Lie*, my reaction was "I want to know more about this man, and this subject and this book than six minutes on the *Today* show." So, we asked him to sit down with us for two and a half hours. We made five 30-minute programs out of that, stripped it across at eight o'clock at night, and that was really the beginning of *Booknotes*.

Jim: Do you find that the

dynamics of each program are very different? I must confess, in those I've seen, sometimes I have the feeling that I've walked away learning much more about the author and not too much about the book. And in others I've learned a great deal about the book but not too much about the author. Do you try to balance out the degree of exposure, of exploration, of each of those kinds of subjects each time or do you have a set pattern as to what you want to learn for the hour?

Brian: There's no pattern whatsoever. Your perception is absolutely accurate. As a matter of fact, last night the Tofflers' show was all about the authors. And the reason for that is, the book is about 112 pages long. The Tofflers became famous for three big books: *Power Shift*, *Future Shock*, and *Third Wave*. We heard about their theories on and on but know very little about them. It's just a sense I have, and it's not always right that, on that occasion, people would rather know about them than they would the content of this little book. There's no rhyme nor reason to it.

Harold: I noticed from the advertisements on C-SPAN that you're going to have Bob McNamara on one of the next few programs in terms of his new book. Are authors selected from books that have made a big public impact? How do you select the books and the authors? Who gets over the threshold of visibility?

Brian: Well, it's a very complicated process, but not very sophisticated, on how we select the book authors. By the way, back to your earlier comment regarding how you were surprised that a lot of people hadn't seen *Booknotes*--our recent poll/survey indicated in the preliminary numbers that only 11% of the people that have access to C-SPAN have ever seen *Booknotes*. Now, that doesn't surprise me. It's one

one night, one hour. As I travel, I get more comments about *Booknotes* than anything else that I'm involved in. Of course, it's me, I'm on there. And you either really like it or you really don't like it. As to selection, we have a number of things we do to give it some tradition. An author only gets on *Booknotes* once. The book has to be non-fiction and it has to be a hardback, which eliminates a lot of other books. So you always know every Sunday night when you tune it in, you're going to see somebody you've never seen in that slot before. We like to find books no one highlights or spotlights, because there are a lot of books out there that never make it to the television. I'm looking at a book right now on Rutherford B. Hayes. You will not see a biography of Rutherford B. Hayes on the *Today* show--unless there's some scandal involved. It just isn't going to draw. We also would do a book like *The Moral Animal*, by Robert Wright, which is all about Charles Darwin and his relevance to the world, which you're not going to see on many shows, because, frankly, it's complicated and deep and ethereal. It's in a category that doesn't lend itself to spicy television or even large audience television. And then you get a book like the Robert McNamara book, where you automatically say, "you know he's going to be everywhere, you know the style of other shows--maybe we can shed some new light on it." Not always, but at least you know you're going to have 57 minutes uninterrupted to talk about the book. In this case, I haven't done the interview yet, and don't know how it's going to come out. I want to offer people an alternative to what they've been seeing other places. I'm not sure where the heavy emphasis is going to be. We know what he said in that book because it's been everywhere. And my question going into the interview is, "what don't we know?" "What don't we know and what

will help you better understand this phenomenon?" It's different than almost every other book that I've done. There may have been five or six in the history of *Booknotes* like it, because it's so visible and so controversial, and so much talked-about. You apply different tests in your own mind as you're preparing to sit down with a man like former Secretary of Defense McNamara.

Jim: Reflecting over those five years of *Booknotes*, since we just celebrated the anniversary--for most of the readers who obviously are not familiar with the program--you talk on the program about aspects like the dedications, the covers, what a simple question might be, a particular quote out of this, an element of surprise. Are there any particular reflections you find that you'd like to call to mind in terms of what you found particularly informative, educational, just enjoyable?

Brian: I'm always intrigued by the answer to the questions about the dedication, because it's often a surprise. You get stories out of people. They've thought it out. It is not something they have idly decided. The former Librarian of Congress, Daniel Borsten, always dedicates his books to Ruby, his wife--it's just the way he does it. Cheryl Woo Dun, *New York Times* reporter now in Japan, wife of Nicholas Kristoff, dedicated the book to her sister. Now, I wasn't paying attention, but it had a life date on it, like, I don't remember what it was, 1952-1983, and I didn't see the 83--I didn't pay attention to it. And I asked her where her sister lived. And she said, "my sister was killed in the KAL-007 disaster." I can't tell you what that moment feels like, when you learn those kinds of things and your mind is going 100 miles an hour saying "what do I do with this?" I didn't do anything with it, I just

left it alone. And when you go back over the now almost six years of *Booknotes*, there have been enormously interesting answers to the question of "who are these people?" Most recently, Lynn Shear was on talking about Susan B. Anthony. She dedicated it to her three step-sons, who were in their thirties, as I remember. I didn't have the sense to ask her what her husband did. Now her husband is deceased. I didn't know that, I don't know how long he's been dead. It's these personal things, without invading their privacy, which just help you better understand why a person is doing what they are doing. It's often a nice little window on the individual and what makes them tick. I would say that eight out of ten are predictable: my wife, my father, my mother.

Jim: I have the feeling, in terms of the readers that we have, the students and teachers, we've done a pretty good job of peaking their curiosity about the program. Let satisfy it in one more regard. Just tell us when it airs.

Brian: It airs every Sunday night, East Coast time at eight, and repeated East Coast time at eleven. It's seen around the country at the same time, based on your time zone. And then it's even repeated the next morning at 6 a.m. which gives you an opportunity, in any of these cases, to tape it if you're really interested. I can promise you a couple things about *Booknotes*. One, I'll start by saying what it isn't. It's not going to always be exciting. If you have the time, I can promise you that you're going to learn something you didn't know. And if you don't learn something you didn't know, you can blame both of us, both the author and the interviewer. We ought to be spanked if we can't, in an hour, come up with some relevant new information. Although I will tell you that once in a great while it hap-

pens, and I'm sure it's as disappointing to the author as much as it is to me.

*Jim: You discussed a while ago the future and the change going on. I'd like to talk about one more cosmic aspect of the future. We're constantly bombarded with the idea of the "global information society" and the expansion involved therein. I was struck with a recent survey that in the 1990s, Americans are very increasingly comfortable with technology. One in three has a personal com-puter and half use a computer at work. There are many, many vehicles on the information superhighway. This is of very great relevance to many of our readers. We are now starting to see competitive debaters doing their research through computers--even bringing their own personal computers to tournaments so they can constantly plug into the most up-to-date information upon a particularly critical subject. The rhetoric of "Internet, and Cyberspace, and digital, user-friendly" are very familiar. Last night on *Booknotes* the Tofflers identified the three fundamental revolutions as being the Agricultural Revolution, followed by the Industrial Revolution and then the Informational Revolution. All of that long, prolegomenon material is just to ask: what do you see the technology of*

The Lincoln-Douglas Debates were an example of the greatest possible dis-course you could ever expect between two human beings.

communication in the future as being? Are we becoming out-of-date?

Brian: "We," meaning?

Jim: "We," meaning standard T.V., if we think of it in this regard.

Brian: I don't know. I'm not terribly comfortable with computers. I never learned to type much when I was growing up, and so it's just not that easy from the typing standpoint. I know that for basic incompetents like me they allow the use of the mouse, which does make it so that even people like me can deal with it. It's just not as comfortable for me to use the computer as I can see it is for younger people. And I think that I'm the wrong one to ask about this. I love, more than anything, the printed word. I'm happiest with five or six newspapers and a 5-hour, transcontinental flight. I learn at my pace. I can dart around in the paper when I want to. It's quick--as quick as I can turn a page I can be on a new article. It's the best money that I ever spend for those five or six newspapers. The computer, unless you have a special line, which we do here at the company, is slow. You could waste an enormous amount of time finding just the area you want to be in. I find it even slow in our own area when I want to learn information quickly, when the computer is stuck, it won't move, or whatever it is. So, I'm not sure about all this. I'm not one to pooh-pooh it, I'm just not sure.

*Jim: One thing that struck me a great deal in the Anniversary tape on *Booknotes*, you personally said: "Books have been around forever, they will be around forever, and I suspect that they will be more important than they have ever been as time goes by." I was wondering how you would relate that to this world of computer and instantaneous,*

almost compartmentalized, information?

Brian: I'm not sure I'm right about that. We feel so strongly about books that we have over a million of them over at the Library of Congress. We go out of our way to preserve them. Sometimes they're not based on today's technology--the most efficient way to store information. But some things are there just because people like them. Speed is not necessarily everything. If speed were everything, no one would drive because almost everybody can afford to travel by airplane if they have to. But people enjoy getting in their cars and driving through looking at the scenery. It's too early to tell what the new generation really wants. There's some sense that the CD-ROM is a technology that for the time being is catching on, but it's still expensive. It's a rare occasion that you can buy a CD-ROM at the same cost of a book, especially the discount book. It's too confusing to know for sure how it's all going to end up. It's just a sense that I have that people are always going to want to read newspapers and always going to want to buy books.

Harold: Last night, the Tofflers made the interesting point that between the fifties and the sixties, Washington--the government, Congress--was out of touch with the technological changes. Do you still see that being the case in your interactions on Capitol Hill and the FCC concerning the new, emerging needs of communications?

Brian: There's no question. There are very few experts on Capitol Hill about the use of television. They hire consultants in campaigns. There's very little sophistication in the way television is being used on the part of individual members. That has not changed dramatically. And that's not criticism. The simplest way to put it is they will change as fast as they

have to in order to stay in their jobs. And so far, so good. But it's going to become increasingly necessary to know how to get to a targeted audience via cable and any kind of service. I think you're going to find more video-on-demand used eventually by politicians. They drop a note, they send an e-mail to your computer, "my latest statement on such and such is available--call it up by 'gingrich.com'" and all that special language they use. But there's some of it there but it's not universal by any means.

Jim: Do you think that with the growth of technology we are going to need colleges and universities anymore? Is there going to be a real barrier to effectively studying at home, to just plugging into a network and obtaining the lectures, et cetera, that are all there? Not that we won't need the professors, not that we won't need the thinkers, but can the classroom process be effectively replicated through technology?

Brian: Probably not. But again, I am not an expert on this. But I suspect that one of the things you can't shortchange is the importance of money and education. The cost of education is soaring, and it's getting harder and harder to imagine young people in the future being any more in debt than they are now. I know of a young lady who is 26 years old, \$60,000 in debt. And that's not, by any means, the highest figure that others have heard of. Now she was in law school, so that's graduate school, and doctors spend a lot more money becoming doctors than they do in almost in any other profession. That's a tremendous burden, and somehow or another that's got to stop. But remember you've got 3,300 colleges

and universities in this country that are businesses. They employ people, they own property, and it's very much in their interest to continue to operate as businesses. Most

BRIAN P. LAMB

Brian P. Lamb helped found C-SPAN and has served as the company's chief executive officer since it began.

The concept of a public affairs network that provides in-depth coverage of national and international issues was a natural for Mr. Lamb, who has been a journalist and a political press secretary. Interested in broadcasting since childhood, he worked at Indiana radio and T.V. stations while attending high school and college.

After graduation Mr. Lamb joined the Navy. His tour included White House duty and a stint in the Pentagon public affairs office. In 1967, he returned home but soon returned to Washington, where he worked as a freelance reporter for UPI Audio, a Senate press secretary and a White House telecommunications policy staffer.

In 1974, Brian Lamb began publishing a biweekly newsletter called *The Media Report*. He also covered communications issues as Washington bureau chief for *CableVision* magazine. It was from this vantage point that the idea of a public affairs network delivered by satellite began to take shape.

By 1977, Mr. Lamb had won the support of key cable industry executives for a channel that could deliver gavel-to-gavel coverage of the U.S. Congress. Organizing C-SPAN as a not-for-profit company, the group built one of D.C.'s first satellite uplinks by March 1979—just in time to deliver the first televised session of the U.S. House of Representatives to 3.5 million cable households.

With cable industry support, C-SPAN grew rapidly from a part-time video programming service. Today, more than 60

million households can tune in C-SPAN's flagship television network.

Brian Lamb, who is also one of C-SPAN's on-air hosts, lives in Arlington, Virginia.

In 1995 he was presented the first "Spirit of Lincoln" award for his re-creation of the Lincoln Douglas Debates by Lincoln Life.

of them don't make money, but it doesn't matter. They're social institutions, they're learning institutions and the human contact is very important. Whenever somebody said, "how did you get to where you are?", I never say, "well, it was that computer in the other room that got me there." I have always felt that I am somewhat of a self starter, but if I go back in my life, I will name you five college professors and high school teachers, who, had they not been there, I wouldn't be here. The man I give the most credit to teaching me what I needed was a high school broadcasting teacher, Bill Fraser. My high school speech teacher, Jim Hawker, [JJU Note: six Diamond Key Coach James F. Hawker was Director of Forensics at Lafayette's Jefferson High School in Indiana and is an Original Member of the NFL Coaches Hall of Fame] was not an insignificant part of my education when I was in high school. In college, I had 4 or 5 wonderful professors, including Dick Crowder who was a professor of music--he taught me the appreciation of music. And Eric Clithereau, who taught me the philosophy of religions. And Jim Houston, who taught me history. And I can go down the list of people impacting on me, who I can remember to this day. You know, I never say, "if it wasn't for that book I inadvertently found in the library." It still, for me, was a person. Now you do hear people say, all the time, "until I read that book, I didn't understand the world." But it usually is a teacher who says, "have you ever read this book?" A computer is an inanimate object, in the sense

that there's no humanity to it--it doesn't feel and taste and opine, except something that somebody else has put in there. I just think the human thing will be very important forever.

Jim: So, overall, you're optimistic about the impact of technology in your profession?

Brian: There's a down-side to it. As a consumer, I am personally concerned that the lowest common denominator has gotten lower. A lot of television is reprehensible. But again, I feel very strongly, I don't want any government to interfere in the process. It's probably going to get worse before it gets better. You're always going to have the bad and the good. But until you get a system that has tremendous opportunities at a low cost, you're not going to get a lot of people creating. There's some real quality being done, I don't want to shortchange the great work that some people are doing in this business. But, at the heart of all this is the dollar. And schlock sells. It's always sold and it always will sell. But it's like the printing press. If we started with the printing press and only three people owned it, and you had to get their permission and they set the prices. And they set the prices high enough so that you're entrance fee was so great you couldn't get in. Then we would never have had the 50,000 books a month and the incredible number of magazines that you can buy out there in all different walks of life, because people would have never been able to afford to get in. That didn't happen in print, but it has happened in television, and it's going to be years before we get over it.

Jim: Let me close with some brief questions which might be familiar to you. We've been trying our best to probe your thoughts on a variety of subjects here, some-

times skillfully, sometimes not so skillfully. But I'd like now to turn to a real expert in terms of questioning. These are all questions which you personally asked various guests on Booknotes, or in interviews with the President or elsewhere. I've tried to adapt them to our particular context here today. First, a question you asked President Clinton in a very recent interview. In your sense, if you could talk to any past media personality, or an author or political leader, who would it be and what would you want to talk about?

Brian: I'd love to talk with James Madison. I think he's probably the most unappreciated of all the founding fathers. I suspect it's because he wasn't very flashy. And he also did a poor job of keeping a lot of his records, unlike Thomas Jefferson who knew how to keep books and give books to the Library of Congress. You know, Madison was a small person in stature. In size he was only 5'2"-5'4", no one's quite sure how tall he was, but he had a tremendous impact on what we have today in the way of a foundation. And it goes back to the fact that he was very responsible for the Annapolis meeting that led to the Constitutional Convention. But more

JAMES J. UNGER

Director of Forensics at the National Forensics Institute and The American University, and former Director of Forensics at Boston College and Georgetown University. Unger received his B.A. as valedictorian from Boston College and his J.D. from Harvard University Law School. As an intercollegiate debater he reached the semifinals and finals of the National Debate Tournament. During his years as coach at Georgetown his teams reached the final round of every major intercollegiate tournament, including the Na-

tional Championship, often more than once. His teams were ranked "Number One" in the nation in the National Coaches Poll an unprecedented five times. Unger is a member of the National Federation's Committee on Discussion and Debate, the author of "Second Thoughts" and a Debate Consultant to both NBC and ABC. In every election since 1976, he served as Chairperson of the Associated Press National Presidential Debate Evaluation Panel. In 1992 he also assumed similar duties for United Press International and the New York Daily news, and appeared on more than thirty national media shows. In a recent national poll of leading intercollegiate coaches and debaters he was named both the Outstanding Debate Coach and the Outstanding Debate Judge of the entire decade of the 1970s. In 1982 he received an honorary gold "key" from the Barkley Forum of Emory University. He recently appeared as moderator-host for the distinguished NFL National Forensic Library, a comprehensive instructional videotape series supported by the Bradley Foundation. A substantial component of that Series was "Unger and Company," a set of McLaughlin Group format tapes in which Dr. Unger led top national collegiate debate coaches in often controversial "debates about debate." He is universally recognized as one of the most distinguished figures in American forensics.

than anything else, had he not been in the Constitutional Convention and taken notes--which were not released until 50 years after his death--we would not have any accounting at all of what happened inside the debate, because at the May-September meeting of 1787 in Independence Hall the windows were bolted down and everything that happened inside was a secret. So, give him credit for that. But you also give him credit beyond that for having a tremendous amount to do with the Feder-

alist Papers, which some people think are the most important political documents ever written. And, of course, he went on to serve his country as President and Secretary of State and all that stuff. But I really would be interested in talking to him about that time period and what he really thinks of openness. I'd like to think that he would be very big on today's openness. But I'm not so sure, because those white males back then had a strange view of what equality was. They said one thing and did another. I would want to know what they were really thinking in their own minds. I would like to interview Tocqueville. He's probably the most quoted individual that I find on a constant basis on both sides of the political fence throughout all these books I read for Booknotes--pops up all the time. I'm not sure why, but since then, I've gotten into his background extensively and we're going to pursue it beyond just the obvious. We may try to retrace his steps in 1997 after the campaign is over. When he came to the United States in 1831 with his friend Gustav Beaumont, they were here to study prisons, and they ended up going almost throughout the entire United States at that point, over a period of 9 months, and then he wrote *Democracy in America*. He was only 25 years old when he came here. When he wrote the first book he was 29. And the second book would be when he was about 34, 35, in 1840. I'd just love to know how he did it, because he was so young and so perceptive. He wasn't always right, but he was very perceptive at the time. And it would just give me a better sense of why so many people quote him today, other than the fact that his words are worth reading. It's just a good story.

Jim: You asked an author, Susan Garment, on a Booknotes program, and I'm paraphrasing now, but if you had to

give a reason, in a nutshell, one paragraph, why the average viewer should watch C-SPAN regularly as opposed to other media, such as network news or talk shows, what would it be?

Brian: I'd say, first and foremost, information. I don't watch this network all the time. I watch it, I assume like our other viewers, when I've got the time and when I'm interested in the event. And I'm constantly saying to myself, "I did not know that." Which is not always the case when I watch regular television. There's a lot of sameness there, while we're able to cover things here that are unusual and that are not seen anywhere else. So I'd say, first and foremost, information. Secondly, get a pulse. You can get some sense by watching what the pulse of the political system is at any given time. Thirdly, I would watch to find out who is next. We start covering people when they are very young and very inexperienced and just getting started. And we don't cover them because they are flashy or exciting or say something crazy, we cover them because they're there. And, all of the sudden, four or five years later, bingo, they are everywhere, they are stars. An enormous number of people you see on the establishment media today started here, quietly, at our *Journalists Roundtable* ten years ago.

Jim: Let me paraphrase a question you posed for writers on Booknotes about job satisfaction. And I was surprised at the answer by a number of authors who said that they basically hated to write. Former President Nixon said it was an "ordeal" for him to write. Bill Buckley said, "I don't really like to write." Well, are you enjoying your job now? Do you like what you do?

Brian: I love what I do. I think the only frustration is that things do not change

nearly as fast. And what do I mean by change? One of the things that I care about the most is "openness." And accountability. And we're not there yet. We're not as open as we should be and people in public life are not as accountable as they should be. It's somewhat sporadic. I'll say it again: there's too much money in government and politics. Of all the things I see, I care for that the least. There's a lot of duplicity, saying one thing here and another thing there. But yes, I like what I do a lot, even though I've had a lot of years of this, and those concerns don't seem to go away fast enough. But, you know, again, I can't control that. My responsibility is very small. I try to keep my eye on the ball, and that's the "Mission Statement," and not divert from what we came to do. This is a big, vibrant country that will, hopefully, figure out all the other stuff very much in its own time.

Harold: If you had your choice of any other profession, what would it be? In one of the Booknotes conversations it came up that when Nixon had been asked the same question and he replied "a sportscaster." Is there something else you'd be interested in doing?

Brian: Well, I like music. I used to play the drums when I was in college, and I made money at it. I thoroughly enjoyed that. I would like to

I've had a letter drafted proposing to both President Clinton and Speaker Gingrich that they sit down right now and have a televised conversation for three hours.

know enough and be capable

enough to play the violin. I've never tried it. It probably is more romantic to me than anything else, that's why I even mention it. It's an enormous amount of work, and I suspect that's not going to be something people would be clamoring for, is to hear my first violin solo. I would be happy, and this is not particularly in another life, being a radio talk show host. Doing the same kind of interviewing that we do here but on a daily basis. Having a daily audience in a less public environment. The thing about radio is that you don't have the same kind of public visibility you have on television. I like that anonymity, and I could do that easily. And, you know, I haven't given it much thought but I've found myself enjoying business here much more than I expected to, the business side of things. And I speculate, that if I had to do something else and if I believed in the product, I would be more interested in a business than I would have thought coming into this.

Jim: I know it's difficult for you--how do I want to put it?--to grade yourself, grade the product of C-SPAN, but you recently asked President Clinton, "when does his message get through the best?" Was it the State of the Union speeches, the Oval Office coverage, private interviews out on the hustings? Would you grade all your programs equally? Are they all "A+?" Or do you feel differences in terms of your own assessment of your various programs? How would you evaluate them comparatively? Are you equally satisfied with all of them?

Brian: I'm almost never satisfied. That doesn't mean I'm exasperated, I'm just almost never satisfied, and I suspect that's pretty helpful. Some of what we do here deserves a grade of about a "D+." Once in a while we'll get an "A," but, you know, I didn't do too well when people were grading me. I'm kind of a middle-of-the roader, I'm a

"C" student. I'm not a good one to ask about grades. If I were to grade what we do, I would say that, on a day to day basis, I would give a top grade to what our field people have been able to do in the way of providing a quality television picture and audio, out in the field. They do quite well in the studio, that's nothing, but it's the hardest thing in the world is to pick up your equipment, put it in trucks, move it out into the field, hook it up, bring the picture back here and get it on the air. That whole process, which involves a huge section of our company, gets very little credit for what it does and it does it every day, day in and day out, anonymously, and that's our strength. And all the rest of us could go away. That's the backbone of what we do. The young folks that do that here, in age range between 23 and 33. There are probably 100 people devoted to that process, from the time the product is decided on until it gets out to the public. That process deserves an "A" grade.

Jim: Let me close by asking you: on reflection, at the conclusion now of the interview, would you tell us what you feel was the single most important question which we didn't ask you and what your answer would have been?

Brian: I don't think there's an obvious question. It sounds like I'm pandering to your enormous ability to ask questions, which was excellent. I don't think there is an obvious question. You've given me an opportunity to say everything that I would want to say in this kind of situation. Always the most frustrating thing for me and I've been interviewed hundreds of times in the last 16 years is that reporters who I respect will come and it's hard for them to realize the importance of the others who have made this place work. It's easy to come in and focus on me

because I'm the spokesperson and Jim. for the network. It's difficult if we don't realize in this country that philanthropic works are good and deserve credit. There's always a great suspicion on the part of the people in the print press who have written about this place about the board members, the cable television executives who have given their time and effort and money to making this place work--for very little return. There's been a lot of suspicion that they did it for public relations, that they did it for political intrigue. None of that's worked very well or they wouldn't have been reregulated in 1992 if that was their motive. And in fact, we wouldn't be here today, in spite of what people might think, if individual human beings owning individual cable television companies hadn't said, "put that on our systems and leave it on." Because it doesn't move money to the bottom line and no one ever quite understands that. They think it just comes out of thin air and that it ought to just happen. There's no rule in the American system, no law that says C-SPAN has to be here, or that it should be carried by anybody. That's the way I like it. But at the same time, I wish people understood that it got there not because of one person or even the people that work here. It got there because of some major cable television executives who committed to keeping it there for a public who said, "we want it, we watch it, and we don't want it to go away."

Jim: Brian Lamb, in the Booknotes Fifth Anniversary tape, you said that the goal of each individual Booknotes episode was what we want the viewer to say at the end, "that was worth the time spent." I'd like to say, for all our readers out there, I think for them, and certainly for us, this has been worth the time spent very, very much. Thank you.

Brian: Thank you Harold