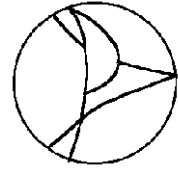


Community Matters

Watch Your Government in Action on Real Reality TV

By: Patricia A. O'Malley

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During the past year, public interest in the election and government processes has been greater than I've ever seen it. With the presidential election and the economic debates, people have been following news coverage of the campaign, White House, and Congressional events. That interest spans people of all ages, incomes, and political views. There are four television channels dedicated to covering all of those topics.

In 1979, major companies in the cable television industry founded C-SPAN, the Cable Satellite Public Affairs Network. Its purpose is to provide public access to the political process. The cable and satellite TV companies finance C-SPAN.

C-SPAN I offers live gavel-to-gavel coverage of US House of Representatives committee hearings and floor sessions, including votes. C-SPAN II covers the same events in the US Senate. When Congress is not in session, the network presents discussions, debates, press briefings, and other events relating to public policy. During evenings and weekends, there are several regular series. *Washington Journal* hosts interview government officials and other newsmakers. *Book TV* shows sessions with authors of books on US history and policy. During *Question Time*, the British prime minister takes questions from members of Parliament. C-SPAN III covers discussions about American history.

The best thing about the programs is that they take their time. Since there are no commercials, they don't have to rush through their segments. C-SPAN programs contain no editing, commentary, or analysis. There's no play-by-play. It's refreshing to watch an event without the incessant chattering of the talking TV heads on the standard networks.

Because it's a public service, C-SPAN doesn't track viewer ratings as the commercial networks do. However, some research groups have conducted studies to learn more about the audience. The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press estimates that 52 million Americans watch C-SPAN "sometimes" or "regularly". Their political views span all ideologies – conservative, moderate, and liberal. The viewers closely follow government and political issues and are very interested in international news. They are primarily younger than age 50 and are more likely to have college degrees than the viewers of other news networks.

You can watch past programs and live streaming video on the Web site, www.cspan.org. The site also contains an extensive resource section with links to many major US newspapers, magazines, and TV networks as well as Congressional caucuses, various government offices, and tutorials on the legislative process. In February, C-SPAN asked presidential historians to rank the effectiveness of all American presidents. The results of the survey are on the Web site.

You might want to check out the interesting programming coming soon. President Obama sent his budget to Congress last week, and we're in for the usual round of budget hearings, debates, press conferences, and other presentations. Meanwhile, Congress is still deeply involved in confirmation hearings for Obama appointees, the continuing saga of US economic policy, and the usual daily business.

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Pennsylvania's version is PCN-TV, the Pennsylvania Cable Network, also created and funded by cable and satellite TV companies. It covers the state legislature's hearings and sessions, interviews newsmakers, visits historic sites, and shows some state college and high school sports events. PCN has a very interesting series spotlighting Pennsylvania businesses and factories.

In the South Hills, you can find C-SPAN I on Comcast channel 2, Verizon channel 109; C-SPAN II on Comcast 17 and 186, Verizon 110; C-SPAN III on Comcast 105, Verizon 111. PCN is on Comcast channel 48, but I couldn't find any listing for it on Verizon.

For more information, go to www.cspan.org (202-737-3220), and www.pcntv.com.

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