

C-SPAN goes on campaign trail

Cable satellite programmer sponsors "Viewer's Day" to add new systems, help retain cable operators as service switches to Satcom III-R bird

The Cable Satellite Public Affairs Network sponsored a day-long "Viewer's Day" last Wednesday (Jan. 20) to rally grass-roots support for itself among its cable audience. Any support it mustered will be invaluable in the months ahead as C-SPAN cuts the umbilical with the USA Network, moves to its own transponder and expands from approximately nine to 16 hours of programming each day.

The changes begin on Feb. 1 when Cable Net One (Satcom III-R) becomes fully operational. C-SPAN will continue to fill the daytime hours of the USA Network as it has since its start in February 1978, but it will also simulcast the daytime programming and distribute eight additional hours of programming each evening on its own transponder. (C-SPAN has leased 16 hours of satellite time on transponder 19 of Cable Net One from RCA Americom.)

The critical juncture for C-SPAN is April 1 when it will be cut loose by the USA Network and challenged to float or sink on its own. C-SPAN President Brian Lamb estimates "conservatively" that 25% of the 1,200 cable systems that now carry C-SPAN will drop it on that date and that perhaps two million of the network's 10.5 million homes will be lost.

C-SPAN is best known for its gavel-to-gavel coverage of the House of Representatives. But according to the nonprofit network's 1981 year-end report, only slightly more than one-fourth of its programming is House coverage. There is also coverage of Senate and House committee hearings, speeches at the National Press Club in Washington and Close-up Foundation seminars involving high-school students and public officials. It has also programmed more than 200 hours of political call-in shows.

Over the next two months, Lamb said, cable operators are going to be shuffling their lineups and anything could happen. Some plan to retain the status quo by preempting USA Network's new daytime programming and picking up eight hours of C-SPAN off its new transponder. Others may drop the USA Network and pick up a full day of C-SPAN. And still others—and this is what has Lamb worried—will drop C-SPAN entirely and carry the USA Network all day.

And as an independent satellite programmer, Lamb points out, C-SPAN is not only competing with the USA Network, but also with 41 other satellite services, each pressing for carriage by saturated or nearly saturated cable systems.

The purpose of the Viewer's Day was to advise C-SPAN's audience of the changes that were taking place and encourage the faithful to urge their cable operators to retain C-SPAN. "One person," Lamb said,



Wheeler and Lamb

"can make a big difference," citing the efforts of one retired man who, after a vigorous two-week campaign, convinced the New York Times Co. to retain C-SPAN on its system in Cherry Hill, N.J.

The format of the Viewer's Day was all-talk with viewers invited to call in and discuss C-SPAN and cable with a list of guests that included John Evans, president of the cable system serving Arlington, Va., and Tom Wheeler, president of the National Cable Television Association. The talk was intended to send a message to cable operators, Lamb said. "It was an attempt to let the bad cable operator know that he can't get away with indiscriminately dropping" the service, he said. "He's going to have to answer to his subscribers."

Lamb expects his additional hours to do three things for C-SPAN. It gives the net-

work access to the prime-time audience, which will "have a chance to see what it's missed for the last year." It will provide the additional time necessary for gavel-to-gavel coverage of the Senate if and when that body decides to permit cameras in its chamber. And finally, a 16-hour service is more attractive to cable operators, who prefer full-time channels to part-time channels.

Following last Wednesday's effort, Lamb had mixed emotions. He was elated by the enthusiasm for the service expressed by viewers, but was, at the same time, "disappointed" to learn from them that many cable systems had plans to drop C-SPAN. "People are heart-broken. You have to hear it to believe it."

Lamb plans to hold another Viewer's Day near the end of March to once again beat the drum for C-SPAN.

Monitor

'MH, MH' creators return. T.A.T. Communications Co., Hollywood production unit that made *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*, first-run syndication hit during mid-1970's, has confirmed its announced plan (BROADCASTING, Nov. 23, 1981) to re-enter market in fall 1982. T.A.T./Tandem Productions senior vice president for syndication, Gary Lieberthal, said company will combine talents of Al Burton, currently T.A.T./Tandem's executive vice president for creative affairs and co-creator of *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*, and Alan Thicke, executive producer of T.A.T.'s first-run syndicated series, *Fernwood* and *America 2 Night* during late 1970's. Pair will produce *The Jeff Clark Show*, first-run, five-night-a-week syndicated comedy series for 1982-83 season. Lieberthal declined to name on-air talent for new strip, which he described as "the first show about a major superstar where the superstar doesn't exist." He said "there is no Jeff Clark and he will not appear on the show." □

Schedule changes. ABC-TV is moving four current situation comedies to new evenings and time periods in first phase of new programming plan. New schedule positions are *Bosom Buddies* to Thursday, 8:30-9 p.m., effective Feb. 4, replacing *Best of the West*; *Open All Night*, to Friday, 8:30-9 p.m., effective Feb. 5, replacing *Bosom Buddies*; *Best of the West*, to Friday, 9-9:30 p.m. effective Feb. 12 and *Making a Living*, to Friday, 9:30-10 p.m., effective Feb. 12. Last two shows replace *Darkroom*, Friday, 9-10 p.m., which ended its limited run on Jan. 15. □

More late-night NBC comedy. *The Billy Crystal Comedy Hour* makes its debut on NBC Saturday (Jan. 30) in time period originally planned for *The Devlin Connection*, starring Rock Hudson, now slated for spring entry. Guests on premiere show will be performers on NBC-TV's *SCTV Network 90*: Dave Thomas, Rick Moranis and John Candy, in addition to The Pointer Sisters and comedian Robin Williams.