

Visiting Professor Brings 'Old Friends' to Law School Class

By [Tara Laskowski](#)

When Brian Lamb comes to your house, he brings the entire federal government with him. Via television, that is. Founder and CEO of C-SPAN, Lamb won the support of key cable industry executives in 1979 for a channel that delivered unedited, "gavel-to-gavel" coverage of the U.S. Congress. Today C-SPAN is the nation's eighth-largest cable network.

Thanks to Mason Professor Clay T. Whitehead, who is teaching a course on communications policy and the law this fall, Lamb will be speaking today at noon in Room 221 of Hazel Hall on the Arlington Campus. The event is free and open to the Mason community.

Lamb has been a longtime friend of the university. In 2001, he was the commencement speaker and was awarded an honorary doctoral degree in humane letters. Lamb and Whitehead are also old friends, dating back to Richard Nixon's presidency. When Whitehead was the first director of the U.S. Office of Telecommunications Policy, he appointed Lamb as his assistant for congressional and press relations.

"Generally, he tried to keep me out of trouble," Whitehead says.

Whitehead, who has a Ph.D. in management and economics from MIT, is a distinguished visiting professor at Mason. He is working on a book about the evolution of electronic communications. With a career that spans 40 years in academia, government policy and business, Whitehead has worked with many of the key players in the development and regulation of broadcasting and telecommunication and is now trying to place it in a historical perspective.

"I want to write about how electronic communication in the United States got to be the way it is, why it is important, what factors are shaping it, and what that means going forward for society," he says.

Whitehead was responsible for much of the telecommunications policy set during the Nixon administration. He was integral in the "Open Skies Policy" that introduced competition into telephone and broadcasting and brought cable stations such as HBO and CNN directly to people's homes. After leaving government, Whitehead founded the first private enterprise



President Alan Merten presents an honorary degree to Brian Lamb at the 2001 Commencement.

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satellite business in Europe, now known as Astra, which brought commercial television broadcasting to Europe for the first time.

“We are living in an age when many new communications technologies are emerging, and we’re not sure yet what to do with them,” Whitehead says. There are new and emerging means of communication nearly every day, and these will shape the future of the economy and our culture.

“Just recently, my son signed me up for Google Talk. What is Google Talk? Is it a phone? Not really. Like instant messaging and video on cell phones, these new technologies continue to change the way we relate to one another and how we think about communication.”

Though he is teaching about these issues this semester, he’s also learning right along with the students. In addition to Lamb, other leading figures in the development of communications policy will be joining the class to speak with the students. What they will have to say will not only shed light on the course for his students, but will help Whitehead with his own research. Lisa Sockett, an adjunct professor at the School of Law, is assisting Whitehead in teaching the class.

On Oct. 26 at noon, another “old friend” of Whitehead’s will visit Mason to meet with the class and also to speak to the wider community. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia will talk about how constitutional interpretation on telecommunications issues has affected society.

“These are all people I’ve known over the years who have played an important role in law and policy and have a good perspective on it,” Whitehead says. “They are smart and thoughtful and will contribute greatly to th

Advice to Gore: Be Prepared

By CLAY T. WHITEHEAD

Bill Clinton declared over the weekend that he will not resign the presidency. Richard Nixon, of course, said the same thing.

When Nixon did decide to resign, in August 1974, Vice President Gerald Ford learned that he would become president with less than 72 hours notice. Yet the unprecedented transition flowed smoothly—thanks in part to plans that had been developed over several months in case Mr. Ford had to assume the presidency. Al Gore and his friends should take note.

The Ford transition plan started when Mr. Ford's close confidant Philip Buchen asked me to organize a small, secret group to develop a plan. Undertaking that responsibility was difficult for me personally, because I headed a subcommittee agency reporting directly to President Nixon. Like most in the administration, I did not want to believe the worst about Nixon's role in Watergate, but I agreed with Mr. Buchen that Mr. Ford had to be prepared.

We needed to assemble a small group of people who were knowledgeable about government and politics and who could be trusted to keep the effort totally quiet. I enlisted Brian Lamb, who had been my assistant for press and congressional relations, Laurence Lynn, who had been an assistant secretary in both the Defense and Interior departments, and Jonathan Moore, who had held assistant secretary level positions in the departments of State and Justice. None of us wanted to do it, and none of us wanted a job in a Ford administration, but we agreed it had to be done.

To maintain secrecy, we met for several hours a week around the dining room table in my Georgetown home from May through

July. We had little precedent to draw on, so our discussions ranged widely on such matters as White House personnel issues, foreign perceptions, an address to the people, and national security, legislative and budget matters that would require immediate action. Not knowing the circumstances under which Mr. Ford might have to assume the presidency, we thought about control of the Secret Service and the military and about the possibility that Nixon, if impeached and convicted, might raise a legal challenge in the Supreme Court. We did not try to chart policy or political changes, but rather focused on giving the vice president the means for executing the mechanics of the transition smoothly and for weighing his own decisions on important issues without getting dragged down by smaller matters.

Soon after Mr. Ford learned that he would become president, he was going through a thick notebook of issue papers with a one-page index, and was making the first decisions of his presidency. The president-to-be made prompt decisions: whom he wanted involved, the assembly of a transition team, coordination with the White House on the events of the next few days, assignments for speech-writing, and preparations for the next round of decisions.

It was crucial and remarkable that our work in planning and carrying out the tran-

sition did not become known in Washington until a few days after Mr. Ford took office. The planning had not interfered with the politics of the impeachment process. Free from the frenzy of press and congressional speculation as news of Mr. Nixon's resignation spread, we could go about our work quietly and effectively.

The resignation or removal of a president and the assumption of that office by the vice president is not a constitutional crisis as some have suggested, nor is it a crisis for the country or the economy. With proper preparation for the new president to take over smoothly and confidently, it can be a very positive step in getting the acrimony and uncertainty behind us. We can be thankful that Nixon took the responsible decision to spare us what could have been a lengthy trial of impeachment. Mr. Ford's pardon of Nixon added to the country's healing by avoiding a prolonged national debate about prosecution of the ex-president, and Mr. Gore should be ready to consider a pardon for Mr. Clinton.

Mr. Clinton surely will protest right to the end that he will never resign, and Mr. Gore has little alternative but to continue to voice confidence in the president. The vice president cannot do his own planning for what may be his most important political moment. His friends should be anticipating the very real possibility that he may become president with little notice and see that he is prepared to move government smoothly and quickly back on track.

Mr. Whitehead, a McLean, Va., consultant, served as special assistant to President Nixon and director of the U.S. Office of Telecommunications Policy.



Gerald Ford