BRIAN LAMB

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INTERVIEW

KELLER: This is the oral and video history of Brian P. Lamb, Chairman and CEO of Cable Satellite Public Affairs Network, C-SPAN. It is being made possible by the Hauser Foundation Oral and Video History Project of The Cable Center Oral History and Video History Program. Brian, I'll start with an opinion. It's often been said that C-SPAN is the crown jewel of cable programming and I want to agree with that. It's singularly the most important public and political relations project in cable television, and I'm delighted to be able to interview you. Since you are one of the most prominent names and faces in the cable industry, little is known about you personally. Would you please just give us a little bit about your background, where you came from, how you got involved, how you got involved in telecommunications.

LAMB: I spent the first 22 years in Lafayette, Indiana where I went to Purdue University; graduated in speech in 1963. I went from there to the United States Navy for four years. I ended up in Washington D.C. as a public affairs officer for two years in the Pentagon, working for the Defense Department. From there I got back into television for a little bit, working for about a year for a UHF television station back in my home town of Lafayette, Indiana. Came back to Washington. I worked on the Nixon campaign for only two months, at the end of 1968.

KELLER: As an advance man?

LAMB: No, I had a very insignificant job. I worked at a part of the campaign called "Citizens for Nixon/Agnew", which was kind of a catch-all for anybody that wanted to work on the campaign. They had an office for us down at the Willard Hotel in Washington. I happened to be sent out to Wisconsin, Minnesota and Michigan for those three months but it was not, frankly in retrospect, (as an experience) significant at all. It was more important to me than it was to the campaign. Then I came back to D.C. and worked for UPI Audio for a couple of months, then became press secretary to Senator Peter Dominick of Colorado for two years. Then I went to work as an aide to the director of the Office of Telecommunications Policy, Clay T. Whitehead - that was an office in the White House from 1971-1974. I came out in April, began a newsletter called the Media Report, quickly went to work for CATV Weekly, which was owned by Stan Searle. Did that for eight months. And then Bob Tistch hired me as the bureau chief, here in Washington, of Cablevision magazine.

KELLER: What did you do in the Office of Telecommunications Policy?

LAMB: I was an assistant to Tom Whitehead, as we called him. He was the director of the office. We were very young, and this was a new office that he had established through Peter Flanagan who was an aide to the President at that time. It was an office to promulgate communications policy on behalf of President Richard Nixon. Clay Whitehead was 31 years old; I was in my early 30s, no I was actually 29, when I went to work for him. I was his assistant for media and congressional relations.

KELLER: So you were involved in almost everything that the office did at that time, as long as you were there.

LAMB: For the time that I was there, I was involved in everything but I wasn't a policy maker. It was a great experience for me. I was able to sit and watch this process unfold. There were some very interesting people that worked there at the time: Antonin Scalia was the general counsel; he's now on the Supreme Court. Henry Goldberg was the general counsel after he left, and he's now our corporate lawyer for C-SPAN and has been for the last 20 years, and a very close friend of mine. Bruce Owen was the chief economist. He has a company here called Economist Inc. that does a lot of work for the National Cable Television Association. It was a great place for someone like me who was a generalist. All these other people had Ph.D.'s or law degrees. As a generalist, I was able to watch policy being developed, and it was a very important time for cable television because there was a freeze on. And it was Nino Antonin Scalia who negotiated with the industry the copyright agreement that took the freeze off and really let cable go.

KELLER: Is it your feeling that it was the copyright issue that kept the freeze on over so many years? The industry had fought it bitterly up until that point. I think it was after that decision there that the industry finally accepted the fact that they were going to pay some copyright. It was a great division in the industry up until 1972 or 1973.

LAMB: It was not only a division in the industry. The courts had really come down on the side of the cable industry, saying that they really didn't have a responsibility for copyright. But as you know, money is everything in this world. And as long as the copyright holders felt they weren't getting their fair due, they were going to put a roadblock in front of cable. You weren't going to get a release of the distant signal rule. I remember San Diego couldn't bring distant signals in from Los Angeles. It's like everything else that happens in this town; it's compromise. But we very strongly felt, and this was a very important time, that not only should cable television be allowed to flower, but that all the new technologies should be allowed to flower. You didn't have satellites, domestically until 1974. And that was the real key to what we have today called cable television - satellites.

KELLER: Had your office envisioned the use of satellites in cable television programming?

LAMB: It was not only that the office envisioned it, they knew that if you were going to break the hammerlock that the three commercial television networks and the telephone company had on this country, that satellites had to be open and free and competitive. And the Federal Communications Commission was on its way to making the decision that one company was going to control all satellite slots in the sky, believe it or not.

KELLER: Comsat?

LAMB: No, it was probably going to be AT&T, the way it was headed. It didn't matter who it was. The pricing was going to be set so high that C-SPAN would never have come about. But it was that experience, for three-and-a-half years, working around people who I thought were very intelligent and had the right motives. They weren't politically motivated at all, in spite of the fact that it was a very political-looking office from the outside. They wanted to break down this concentration of power in the communications business; they wanted cable television to flower and to be able to expand, and they wanted satellites to be able to expand. So this was a critical period. And that decision...Tom Whitehead is almost single-handedly responsible, as an individual, for reversing the Federal Communications Commission policy that they were headed toward, of having a single entity control the satellite system. It became an open skies policy, and that's why you have the flowering of all kinds of communications today.

KELLER: And he had a direct influence on the FCC?

LAMB: The FCC is not supposed to have any direct influence. It's supposed to be independent. But it's like they work for the Congress. Whitehead's influence was the reasoning behind it, which he issued through authority of the President of the United States - the policy that basically called for open skies. That had a tremendous impact on the town, on Capitol Hill, on the Federal Communications Commission and on the White House. And the White House got behind the policy and said, "This is what we think ought to happen." It was a bully pulpit more than anything else was for Tom Whitehead. He couldn't go into FCC Chairman Dean Birch and say "Do this" or to Dick Wiley. He just had to speak through reasoning. So, that's why, in my very strong opinion from watching it, you have what you have today in the communications business. The satellite business has opened wide open. I remember C-SPAN's first hour of satellite time only cost 100 dollars. This network could never exist if communications through satellites had cost us a thousand dollars an hour; the cable industry would never have gone along with it. It's because the cost was so low that we could do C-SPAN.

KELLER: Had you begun envisioning a C-SPAN type of entity at that point?

LAMB: I don't know when C-SPAN actually came to mind as an entity. I remember in 1969, before I went to work on Capitol Hill, that I wrote a letter to a friend of mine, Dick Shively, who used to own Telesis which is based in Indiana. I remember proposing to him that we create a Washington bureau for cable television where we would do information and interviews. That was my way of throwing my oar in the water, saying this is something that this industry ought to do and something that I want to do. What motivated me more than anything else, from the very beginning, was not cable television. I never had great caring for cable television per se, as a matter of fact I've never owned any cable stocks, I've never made any money, other than the salary I'm paid here, off of cable. I'm motivated by the desire that there not be one power center in communications. And cable was one way to break that power center down because the broadcasters had a hammerlock on this country and what the nation heard. And the diffusion of power came out of satellites, and cable, and the Internet - all these things we've seen over the years. So I was just there learning and trying to do my bit. And by the way, I was a bit player, always have been a bit player in this whole thing. This thing has gotten so big that there are many players in it. That's what I hoped for when I got involved in the early days and it's here.

KELLER: Was Dave Kinley at the FCC then?

LAMB: Dave Kinley was at the FCC in those early years, but I don't remember whether... Dave Kinley and Phil Revere were both very receptive, both of those men.

KELLER: He was in the chief of the Cable Bureau wasn't he?

LAMB: Dave and Phil were both head of the Cable Bureau in separate times and they were both obviously very receptive to the expansion of this whole business. They were both were very helpful to me in the very beginning.

KELLER: By this time, the idea had been fermenting in your mind. How did you go about developing it from here?

LAMB: First of all, I'd worked in television in Lafayette, Indiana for an UHF television station.

KELLER: Was it Dick Shively's at that point?

LAMB: I'm trying to remember when Dick actually bought it. I worked for him twice. I was on it in 1962 when I was a junior at Purdue University. I did an afternoon dance program. I don't think Dick owned it then. Dick bought it for 250,000 dollars in that timeframe back there in the '60s. It was worth nothing, no one watched, didn't have a network; then I went back as the assistant manager for that station, between the Navy and working on the Nixon campaign. So Dick was a friend and very helpful. And it was true, I learned about cable, probably more than from anyone else, through Dick Shively, up close and personal.

KELLER: Had he formed Telesis?

LAMB: He had formed Telesis and I worked for him back in 1974 as a consultant for about a year. The experience of working in UHF television - working for cable television and Dick Shively as a consultant, writing for Stan Searle's magazine and then when Bob Titsch picked me up for Cablevision magazine - it was all those experiences. And I knew satellites by then because I had been involved with that policy development with Tom Whitehead. It was at that time that I got to know the cable industry. It was through CATV Weekly. I was hired at the time by Barbara Ruger; she was the editor of the magazine. I'd been to an NCTA convention, and I met Barbara at the convention and along with her assistant Judy Lockwood. And the two of them eventually came to me when I was looking to pay the bills and said "Would you like to be our Washington correspondent?" And that's how it all started, my relationship between the magazine and the industry was how I got to know people.

KELLER: You had been contributing to the magazine before that?

LAMB: I had not contributed until...the first time I ever wrote anything for them was in May of 1974, and it may have been later than that. I remember Barbara saying to me "You come write for us, and we'll put your picture in the column. You want to do this network that you're talking about, this picture and this column in this little magazine (and some weeks we only had 8 pages in this magazine) will introduce you to the industry." And it worked. It was the beginning of my introduction to the people in this business. Every week in the magazine I would go out and interview a leader, and I'd take their picture and we'd put it on the front page of the magazine. I would interview them, just like you're doing right now. I'd transcribe it myself and we'd run the interview the next week in the magazine. I'd write my column with my picture on it. And it took a long time, but a couple years later everybody knew who I was in the business. And then I started to go to them and say what do you think about my idea for C-SPAN?

KELLER: Do you remember some of the people you interviewed?

LAMB: Well, one of them turned out to be my "sugar daddy", if you want to call it that. Bob Rosencrans. I remember taking a picture of him. I always got a kick out of this. He's Jewish, and the photo was in front of a Christian church in Wilton, Connecticut, the town where he lived - we always joked about that over the years - in that beautiful New England setting. I interviewed everybody from Jerry Levin to Amos Hostetter. They were the leaders at that time. I also remember, which is a bit off the subject but you'll get a kick out of it: I think it was 1976, it may have been before that, at the NCTA Convention, I think they invited Mike Wallace to speak. It was probably 1975. But I remember I was working out of my home in Arlington, Virginia. When I found out he was going to be the speaker, I picked up the phone, and I called up to CBS's 60 Minutes and I said, "I'd like to interview Mr. Wallace for CATV Weekly." I had no idea what I'd get, I'd never met those people before. I was home one day and the phone rang, and it was Mike Wallace. He said, "Do you want to interview me for this magazine? Why?" I said, "Because you're going to be the speaker at the convention. I want to put you on the cover." He said to me "When can you do it?" I said "In an hour and a half, when I get to the show." He said "Come on up." So I literally grabbed my tape recorder and my camera and I got on a shuttle within a half-hour and I flew to New York, and interviewed him. But it was a very instructive interview for this reason: because it's exemplary of the problems that existed in getting people to think of anything but the three networks. I remember asking him in the interview "Mr. Wallace, why is it that 60 Minutes hasn't covered this whole issue of cable television, satellites and the expansion and the change?" And he was kind of taken aback and he said, "Well, we have." I said "I don't think you have. If you look at it you'll see." He said, "I'm sure we have." And of course they hadn't. Later on, we were walking around the office, he took me around and introduced me to people, and there was Morley Safer sitting in his office. It was kind of late afternoon, and he'd been out for a long lunch. He was sitting there at his desk, and Mike Wallace went up to him and said, "Morley, I want you to meet this guy LAMB: from CATV Weekly. He's writing this article about me for the magazine. You know what he said to me?" Wallace said, "He said that we don't cover cable television because we're in the broadcasting business." Morley was a little loose at that point, and he looked up at me and he said "You know, he's god-damned right." I've never forgotten that, and I've since gotten to know Morley Safer.

KELLER: In a nutshell, he had it right.

LAMB: In a nutshell, that's what you were up against. And some of our own industry has been that way. As soon as they got a lock on the business, they didn't want competition. But that's the normal nature of the human being. Why have competition when you can control it all? That was how I got into this. Very clumsily, not sophisticated in any way, didn't really know where I was going. Along the way, finding what I think, looking back on it, were the best people I've ever met. Starting with Bob Rosencrans and Ken Gunter. Ken Gunter gets no credit for C-SPAN but deserves as much as Bob does in the beginning because they both collectively, the two of them, together said, "This is something we want to support." Both of them are great guys, they're great people, decent human beings. And they were the ones – as a matter of fact it was Ken who actually picked up the phone at a critical time, called Bob and said "Where's that 25,000 dollar check you promised LAMB:? He's got to have the money." And Bob was a little bit embarrassed by it, because he hadn't sent the check. Bob was terrific and shipped a check down overnight, and I got it the next day. And that was the beginning. But those two guys are the two human beings along with Bob Titsch, who is not in this business anymore.

KELLER: Tell us about Titsch's role in the development.

LAMB: Let me start by saying that Barbara Ruger gets credit for understanding what I needed in order to get an opening. She hired me and put me in that magazine, and put my picture in there, and that was the introduction. Bob Titsch who had been with Stan Searle, worked for him for awhile, then moved out and started his own magazine, came to me at a very critical moment, when Stan Searle just didn't want to go any further with what I had. It was not his interest and he couldn't fund C-SPAN, and I remember talking to him, and we were not going to stay together and Bob Titsch heard about this and called me up and said "How much do you want to make? What do you want to do? I'll not only hire you, but I will figure out a way to get some money for you, so you can start C-SPAN."

KELLER: Had you already pitched the process to him?

LAMB: I had not pitched the process. When Bob called me and said, "What do you want to do?" I had not pitched it to anybody. Barbara Ruger knew what I wanted to do. Bob Titsch called me up. I'll never forget it, because Bob said "I want you to be my bureau chief in Washington, and I'll find the money for you." Bob went on to have a serious bankruptcy problem but he's totally recovered from that bankruptcy and went on to form another company and has been very successful. But Bob is another one of the unsung heroes of C-SPAN. He let me work for him on a halftime basis, but paid me for full-time for over six months so I could put this place together. And it was in the middle of all that that Bob Rosencrans came along and actually funded the beginning of C-SPAN. And Bob Titsch was in the business, again I don't have the dates here, but it was like '76 when Cablevision magazine started. And he was very successful, until he got himself into financial trouble based on too rapid an expansion on things other than cable television.

KELLER: And so now you are actually in the process of putting this thing together with the financial aid of Titsch, and now you've got Bob Rosencrans involved.

LAMB: There are other people who should be mentioned that were critical at this moment and one of them is Rex Bradley. Rex Bradley had been chairman of the NCTA, he ran Telecable and he was running something called the Cable Satellite Access Entity. This was a group of 40 cable operators who got together and said "Hey, we got the satellite up there." Home Box Office started in September of 1975, and they wanted to find other things to use the satellite for. That's how primitive this was. Home Box Office recognized that. After that, along came Channel 17 out of Atlanta. Also, Pat Robertson was one of the first ones up there with his channel 27 WYAH out of Portsmouth, Virginia. Madison Square Garden was what Bob Rosencrans put up there, offering sporting events at night. They had this entity they called CSAE. They put some money in a pot, and they met periodically, and they invited people to come in and make a pitch about their programming ideas.

KELLER: Rex Bradley was a part of this?

LAMB: He was president of the thing; it wasn't a full time job or anything, he wasn't getting paid for it. But they had a meeting, I believe it was August of 1977, at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, down on Connecticut Avenue. Rex called me up and said, "You know that idea you're kicking around?" I had pitched it to a whole bunch of people, and they'd said, kind of, "Hey kid, go away, we're not interested." And Rex said "Come on in and make a presentation to us. So I did. I was about 36 years old, 37, and I was writing for Cablevision magazine, and I had a newsletter called the Media Report, and I was making enough money to make a go of it working in my home. And I went in and made a presentation. I said, "Here's my idea."

KELLER: Did you know at that point that you would be able to get into the chambers of the House and/or the Senate?

LAMB: It wasn't even on the radarscope; wasn't even what we were talking about. The House had had a committee set up and had been talking about it for six years. And everybody gave up on it.
One of the people involved over there on the Hill was a guy named Tony Cuello, who was an aide; he was not even a member of Congress. And then he went on to be elected to Congress and now he's gone from Congress. He ended up on the TCI board before it was all over.

KELLER: But that was not in the offing at that point?

LAMB: Congressional TV was not in the offing. I went in and made a pitch. There was no cable news network. There was no idea of Cable News Network on the drawing boards. It had never been discussed; it had never been mentioned. I went into this Cable Satellite Access Entity and I said to this group of 40 men, sitting in the room, most of them - Beverly Land was there, was one of the few women, maybe Polly Dunn - I said to the group, "My idea is that we figure out a way to do public affairs. That we do our own 'Meet the Press' type program, because cable has no identity to this. They've never done any public service."

KELLER: News from Washington type of thing?

LAMB: Public affairs, not news. Not anchor people sitting at desks telling you what's happening. More interviews with members of Congress, long-form interviews, something that cable television could do. After the meeting was over, it was a resounding dud, if you want to know the truth, most people looked at me like I was smoking something, like "What is he doing here? This is not real, is it?" Bob Rosencrans and Ken Gunter walked up to me in the middle of the crowd. I knew them both but not well. And they said "Boy, that sounded interesting. We'd like to help you. We'd like to do something. Let's talk." After that, we met, and Bob said to Ken and me, "We think we can do something and we will raise 150,000 dollars a year for you."

KELLER: Did they recognize the great need for public relations in the nation's capitol at that point?

LAMB: It was not what motivated Bob and Ken. The public relations aspect...

KELLER: To fill up satellite time?

LAMB: Yeah, they didn't care about public relations. One of the things about Bob Rosencrans that you learn about him is that he is first and foremost a fabulous human being. And secondly, he's interested in doing what's right. There's not a phony bone in his body. There's not a public relations bone in his body. He says, "Just do what's right." In the midst of all this, I've had a lot of cable operators from time to time say, "This is a great PR move." But it was never on the lips of Bob Rosencrans. And Ken Gunter didn't care about public relations. They cared about public service, and public good, and filling up the satellite and offering diverse programming.

KELLER: But the industry did need political relations at that particular moment.

LAMB: As I went through the process, and I took Bob's good name and his check for 25,000 dollars, I found people and by the way, in the early days of it, their motivation for doing this had nothing to do with public relations. The guy who has always been a very good friend of mine and always helped me from day one was John Evans. There's nobody more committed to this place than John Evans, and from day one. He's a neighbor in Arlington, he was building the Arlington cable system and he was the subject of the first column I ever wrote when I was with CATV Weekly - about what the importance of Arlington Cable was going to be to the regulatory process here in D.C. And John was there. He was on our first executive committee, I had my first meeting with him at the Westpark Hotel over in Rosslyn where we talked about how we would get a signal from the Capitol, over to where he is, and out to an earth station somewhere. First person to offer another 25,000 dollars was Ralph Baruch. I met with Ralph Baruch, I can remember it like it was yesterday, at the Madison Hotel, over on 15th Street, and I remember sitting in that room and Ralph said to me, "You have my commitment for three years, 25,000 dollars each year, to make this happen." Didn't want anything else from me, didn't ask for anything, he liked the idea, had nothing to do with public relations. The next guy was Russell Carp. Russell Carp I have not seen in almost 20 years. I don't know - he went away from this industry after he was the president of TelePrompTer, and he's never been back. I remember the meeting with Russell Carp was right over here,

in the Senate office building, where he was testifying one day. I couldn't get to him. I had met with him prior to the whole idea of C-SPAN and made a suggestion that we do something like this and he turned me down. I went up to him - he wouldn't see me in his office - so I went over and buttonholed him outside the Senate hearing room. And I said, "Mr. Carp, can I have two minutes with you?"

KELLER: You knew of these people from your association with . . .

LAMB: I knew him - I had interviewed Russell Carp; I had interviewed Ralph Baruch.

KELLER: From the Senator from Colorado?

LAMB: No, I didn't know him from the Senator from Colorado, I knew him from CATV Weekly magazine and Cablevision magazine, and the interviews that I had done with him while I was in the industry. But Russell Carp had turned me down before, and he was 6'5" or 6" and big and tough and hard for a little guy like me to know how to deal with. But what I didn't know was that there was a political animal behind that skin - big time. He went off to work on human rights. He was serious about it after he got out of the cable business. I went up to him and I said "Mr. Carp, I have an idea, and I know you heard my last idea and didn't like it. This time around we want to carry the Congress." By the way, I should probably tell you this. There was a time when Bob Rosencrans said, "I'm not going to do this." After he said, "I'm going to do this," he came back to me and said, "The industry doesn't want it, I can't raise the money, they don't care."

KELLER: Had he tried to raise money?

LAMB: It was dead. And that's important for people to know because I went back to him after I found out we could get the House of Representatives to go on television.

KELLER: Did you know then that they had already committed?

LAMB: I did not know at the time that he said, "It's dead." He said, "It's dead," in September, and I went back to him in October. The vote was in the House of Representatives on October 27, 1977. So between the August meeting at the Mayflower when he said yes and a month later when he said no and the October 27th meeting I went back and said, "I have another idea for you. Let's put the House of Representatives on television and we can do it for under 300,000 dollars a year." He said, "I really like that idea, let's go forward with it." Then it was from Bob Rosencrans to Ralph Baruch to Russell Carp. I've got to tell you this Carp story because it's very relevant to why this isn't a PR mode. I went up to Russell Carp and I said, "Here's our idea now. I've got Bob Rosencran's check; I've got Ralph Baruch's check; I need your check for $25,000 because we want to do the House of Representatives." Carp's light bulb went off just like that. He, almost emotionally, said to me, "Boy that's a great idea. If we could have done that years ago, maybe we could have avoided the Vietnam War."

KELLER: That's an interesting point.

LAMB: It had nothing to do with cable industry PR. So we're going through right at that point. Evans is not interested in PR, Rosencrans, Gunter not in PR, Baruch not in PR, and Carp not in PR. We're still not on PR yet. You have to go far into the industry's executive ranks before you have somebody say PR.

KELLER: Had Rosencrans committed his systems to carry the signal?

LAMB: Absolutely. Bob Rosencrans never, ever did anything but carry both networks from day one, on all of his systems. There's never been a phony story about "why I can't carry it". There never was a bellyache; "It's going to be on both systems." It's always been fascinating to me, all the reasons I get from people why C-SPAN can't be carried. Bob Rosencrans and Gene Schneider and Jack Frazee and Ed Allen never blinked. Never blinked. We were going to be on their systems full time, all the time, on all their systems. That's why it's hard for me and why I've gotten so frustrated over the years when I have people say, "Well, there's a reason here we can't carry it." And they give me all these reasons. So these are the guys, these are C-SPAN's "founding fathers". It isn't me. It was easy for me to have an idea. It was easy for me to go ask for help. They were the ones where their money was on the line, their businesses were on the line, and they were the ones that made the decisions everyday. They are the founding fathers of this network. And there are others that we haven't mentioned. Ed Allen is a guy...

KELLER: I want to get into Ed Allen as the third chairman.

LAMB: Ed Allen, just in passing, was a small player in this game. He came in early, and he didn't come in for 25,000, because he had a small company. But he came in, and he was an early member of the executive committee, and he was an early chairman. John Saeman was the President of Daniels & Associates at that time.

KELLER: Saeman was the second chairman. I want to get into more detail on him, too.

LAMB: John Saeman was a guy who recognized C-SPAN's value very early. It was funny, because as popular as Bill Daniels is in this business, and as visible, it was really John Saeman. He said yes. He gave us the support. He brought us the money and C-SPAN frankly wouldn't be in this building, sitting right here, right now, if it weren't for John Saeman.

KELLER: His interview with me under similar circumstances put an awful lot of emphasis on his involvement in the early days of C-SPAN and he told me much as you just said. He was delighted to be able to do it and thought it was a tremendous idea.

LAMB: Bob Rosencrans is the father figure in this whole thing. And he is the best. But John Saeman was my first taste of a real savvy business-type, who would spend time with me. I'm talking about a hard-nosed business guy who had to deal with all the brokering that was going on out there, and had a sense of what was needed. I remember walking in this building, right here and making a decision on that day that we were going to take space in this building, based on his attitude. I was afraid all the time. I didn't want to spend a dime. I didn't ever have any money in my life and I never knew how to deal with money and I never needed money. We're still talking about nickels and dimes comparatively, for the television business. But for me, the fact that I had to sign off for three thousand or five thousand square feet of space - had that kind of a financial commitment in this building - was frightening.

KELLER: I could see where it would be. Now I see how it developed in the early stages from the industry side. Tell us, how did it develop from the legislative side?

LAMB: Well, there was only one key legislator who carried water on Capitol Hill and that was Lionel Van Deerlin. And it goes back to something. I got to know Lionel Van Deerlin when I worked for Tom Whitehead at the Office of Telecommunications Policy. The chairman of the committee was Torby McDonald from Massachusetts. He was very partisan and communications was not a partisan issue. He did not like Tom Whitehead at all. He hated everything Whitehead did and made sure that everybody knew that he hated everything Whitehead did. Lionel Van Deerlin was number two on the committee, and Lionel Van Deerlin was not partisan. We would go see him and we would be able to reason with him because we never thought this was a partisan issue. But you've got to remember, the atmosphere was Watergate, so everything that Richard Nixon did was suspicious. We were fighting as much with the White House as we were with anybody else in this process because they were totally occupied with Watergate; they didn't want to fool with communications issues. And they had a knee-jerk reaction, anyway, to communications. They wanted to shut them down. All we wanted to do was open it up. So, there was this constant fight going on between Capitol Hill, and the media, and the Office of Telecommunications Policy in the White House, and the White House itself.

And so, Lionel Van Deerlin was someone I met when I worked for Tom Whitehead who was very open and very gracious at that time. When I went on to work for Cablevision magazine, Bob Titsch again, funded something called Cable Video. He went out and got 15,000 dollars; a thousand dollars from 15 different cable executives when I went to work for him so that we could go buy a camera and a videotape machine. I put that camera in the back of my car, and I would go around Capitol Hill and we would have Pat Gushman, who worked at the magazine – a good guy and good supporter - set up and operate the camera, and I would interview the members. Then we would take the interviews and ship them out to the districts. Lionel Van Deerlin was one of the first people I interviewed. At the time he was chairman; McDonald had either died or left Congress, and Lionel Van Deerlin became chairman of the Communications Committee in the House of Representatives. I sat right over there on the Capitol lawn one day for an hour and interviewed Lionel Van Deerlin. It was in that interview, which had to have been in 1975, in which Lionel Van Deerlin said, for the first time, "We're going to rewrite the Communications Act." The Communications Act in 1976. We're not talking about '92 or '84 or any others, 1976. And he did it. Which made a big difference to the cable business. It put cable in a position where they could compete fairly out there. It took care of things like - it was all part of the process of pole attachment agreements, copyrights and all that stuff. All of that in that Act, and he was there. Lionel Van Deerlin was a former anchorman on television in San Diego. He was very savvy about what I was doing. When I worked for Cablevision, I then went to him later for another interview in his office and it was a very interesting day. I remember it, again, like it was yesterday. I walked into his office, and he was sitting there. He had an old picture of himself looking at what was nothing more than a black and white television set and a security system, basically, that had been set up in the House of Representatives so they could test to see what it would look like if they were on television. No one in the outside world could see the feed. I'm interviewing him and at the end of the interview - we didn't have cameras on; there was just like your tape recorder, audio - I said to Mr. Van Deerlin, "What would you think of the idea, if the House would go on television? That we could carry this to the satellite and into cable television homes for the whole day? I know you're talking about it now." And he said, "Boy that's really a great idea, it's never been talked about." He said, "Could you write me a speech on it?" I was immediately in a great conflict because I was a journalist and he wanted a speech from me. I thought, "How am I going to get out of this?" I said, "How much time do I have?" And he said, "Oh, you have a couple weeks." This was in the morning. I went back to my office which was over in Arlington, Virginia, over in Crystal City. I was all by myself in this office over there, actually Pat Gushman and I were in this office, a little tiny office probably less than 500 square feet. I didn't have a secretary or anybody and the phone rang. It was about 2 o'clock in the afternoon and it was Lionel Van Deerlin and he said "Brian, this is Van. I'm in the cloakroom and you aren't going to believe this, but they're debating television now," that same day. And he said, "I need all those figures. What were those figures on how many dishes are out there now? How many cable subscribers? How can you do this whole thing?" And he literally walked to the floor of the House, right then, and gave a speech off the top of his head saying, "All you people worry about the networks and whether or not they're going to abuse this process and only going to run the bad things. The cable television industry is out there ready to go, to put the House on the satellite." Of course, that's all we had at that time. We didn't have a promise from anybody. "They'll put it on the satellite and get it into...there are already 200 communities out there that can get this." Now there's something like 11,000 cable systems alone. And that was in the day, by the way of the 10-meter dishes.

KELLER: Hundred-thousand dollar dishes.

LAMB: Yes. It's unbelievable. Little tiny places couldn't afford that thing. So that was the beginning on Capitol Hill. It really didn't have anything to do with anybody else but Lionel Van Deerlin. It was after that, that the idea started to take over and the House voted on that day, 300-something to 80-something to do this. That's when things really kicked in. Then I went back to the industry and said "Alright, this is serious stuff." I went to Bob Schmidt at the National Cable Television Association, who was very supportive, always was supportive from the very beginning. Tom Wheeler was there. Bob Ross was there, went on to work for CNN, Ted Turner, and built the international satellite system and did a great job with Ted Turner. I always thought that Bob Ross was one of the great-unsung heroes of this international stuff that Turner is involved in. But it was Bob Schmidt then who opened the door for me to go see (then House Speaker)Tip O'Neill. We had to do one of those days where you went in, had your picture taken and he nodded. He didn't understand what we were doing. Tip O'Neill was a great supporter of this whole concept, but he did not, in the beginning, understand it. His aide, Gary Hymel did. Gary is still around this town. He has been a great friend and a great leveling influence from the very beginning as that thing got hot up there and politics got involved in it. I was in some confrontation with one of the members of Congress, Gary was the cool guy in the background that kept saying "No, no, no, no." The fact that I'd ever worked for a Republican, even though I'd worked for Lyndon Johnson too, was in some people's craw up there. They immediately took it as politics. I've never been a member of a party in my life, and never will be. Never contributed to a campaign. I'm totally uninterested in party politics, but because I'd ever worked for a Republican, the Democrats on Capitol Hill started using that as a political thing, saying I was up to politics. Bob Schmidt was a card carrying long time Democrat, so he was able to open the doors. So we had to go through all that stuff in the very beginning.

KELLER: So politics obviously weren't involved when you were getting that process going.

LAMB: Politics is involved in everything that ever happens in this town.

KELLER: Any decision made by a political body is going to be a political decision.

LAMB: And very few people are left, but in some people's eyes, it's taken me 20 years to prove to them that I didn't get into this for partisan politics. I could care less.

KELLER: Tip O'Neill, Speaker of the House of Representatives, was not exactly an advocate of an open type of House, was he?

LAMB: Well, you've got to give him 150% credit for being the one that opened the doors, no matter what they thought he was in the past. He took the barriers down. He's the first guy to ever take the barriers down. And if he had wanted to, he could have stopped it and basically at that point the reason was politics again. The reason was the Senate was getting all the attention. Because the Senate was getting all the attention in the media, Tip O'Neill's younger colleagues kept saying "We've got to open this place up. If we don't open this place up, we're going to be forgotten." And so Tip O'Neill eventually said, "OK, I'm ready, let's go." And we were a part of that process. It was very important that we went in there to him at that time, because they were all frightened at what the networks would do to them. It's always been an amazing thing for me to understand how these networks had so much power up there, when everybody thought it was just the Republicans that were interested in reducing their power. The Democrats disliked them as much as the Republicans did. And so, this industry, promising to carry the House of Representatives to the

nation, made a huge difference on why there's television in the House and the Senate today.

KELLER: Uncut and unedited?

LAMB: Exactly. Most people in this business, not all, have lived up to the promise. There have been some wonderful cream skimmers who have come as they do in any business, and have enjoyed the benefits of what most of the leaders in this industry did, but never contributed to it by never carrying the network. But you always have that kind in any human endeavor.

KELLER: In the early days in the House, wasn't there some question about the technical aspects of how it was going to occur? Whether it was going to be one camera, two cameras, if it was going to be the entire House or whether it was going to focus on the speaker. How was that resolved?

LAMB: It was resolved by the House. A couple things need to be put on the record. C-SPAN does not pay any money for the House and Senate floor feeds, although we've offered. We offered to put our own cameras in the House chambers. We pay no money to carry it. It's available to anyone in the media. It's not a contract. We have no signed contract for the House of Representatives or the Senate. Anybody can come along and do what we do. We just said we'd do it, and we lived up to our promise from there. The cameras are all controlled by members of the House staff, under the direct control of the Speaker of the House, and in the United States Senate under the Rules Committee. There are eight cameras in each chamber. They're remote controlled cameras. They're operated in the basement of the Capitol. And we have nothing to say about this.

KELLER: Each has a director?

LAMB: Each has a director and a staff, completely paid for by the taxpayer, but under the control of each institution. The Floor debate amounts to between ten and fifteen percent of what C-SPAN offers our audience in a year's time. We own 45 cameras, and now we go all over the world, showing different events and things like that, in the public affairs arena, not in the news business. We're not in the news business and never wanted to be in the news business. Now you've got lots of people in our business in the news business. There's no one else in public affairs business.

KELLER: How, in the midst of this political morass, were you able to remain apolitical?

LAMB: Well, I am apolitical. I stuck my toe in the water working for Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon on Capitol Hill. At 30, I probably thought I'd run for some office, but the closer I got to it the less interested I was. And the more interested I got in what I'm doing now. We have a saying around here "If you care who wins, you shouldn't be here." It's just not our role. We're in the business of showing everything. Not doing what so many people did at CBC, NBC and ABC, controlling what we saw. We want you to see it all. The more networks we have, the more time we have, the more cameras we have, the less likely we can start to manipulate and control and decide that you're not going to see this, and you're only going to see that.

KELLER: And then you went through the same process in the Senate?

LAMB: The Senate went on television because the House went on television. It took them seven years. And over a seven year period, more and more House was being seen in the country than the Senate, and the Senate realized that. They began to say, "We've got to change this. We've got to do something about this."

KELLER: Who was most instrumental in the Senate?

LAMB: Howard Baker tried, and everybody thought they spotted him wanting to run for President and that's why he was interested. So they basically said "Not on our watch." And the guy who was the most against it, in the early days was Bob Byrd of West Virginia. Eventually, Bob Byrd decided that his institution that he loved so much was getting short-changed in the media. He didn't even have C-SPAN at home; he saw it in a hotel one night. He told me the story personally when he called me to come over and have lunch with him one day. We had done these polls showing whether or not senators were for or against television, because they fought it for a lot of years. He said to me "You know, I go back to West Virginia and some people think I'm the Speaker of the House, cause I've got this white hair." And they see the Speaker on television. He realized it, he said, "It's time." Bob Byrd, interestingly enough, was Minority Leader. He was not at the time Majority Leader. He had the acquiescence - but not support - of Bob Dole. Bob Dole was the Majority Leader. And every time anybody ever asked Bob Dole about it, he'd say "Ah, ah, ah." He literally wouldn't say a word about it; he wouldn't do anything. Because he knew the minute he opened his mouth for it - I never asked him about this, but my suspicion is - the minute he said he was for it, they'd all think he was up to something. So if Bob Byrd carried the water, if he went to the old line Southern Democrats like Russell Long and talked them out of being against it and filibustering it could work. In the end, Byrd was the one man responsible for bringing the barrier down in the Senate, and June 2, 1986, we went on television from the Senate.

KELLER: So now you've got the rudimentary support of the industry. You are in both the House and the Senate at this point. Rosencrans has been the actual business presence in the initial stages of the development. And you credit John Saeman with bringing a certain amount of technical or financial sophistication to the records and the business of C-SPAN although it is not a business, but it is still accountable to the industry.

LAMB: Yes. But it's a business anytime we're dealing with 33 million dollars a year now. Money's money.

KELLER: But you're not in the business of making money.

LAMB: Yes. But let me tell you. It's almost like they could understand the small amounts of money that we were spending here, so they could nit pick us to death. I used to sit in these board meetings and say "I can't believe how you're fussing over this little stuff, when you guys are dealing in the mega millions. But they could understand it. After you get up to the mega zeros, people just think it's another zero. People in this business have made so much money that 33 million dollars a year is nothing. That's the good news. The fact that we are so inexpensive for this industry protects us, in a strange way, from people messing with us. Because if we were spending lots of money, and not making it, they would say, "Why are they spending all that money and not making it?" They're making a lot of money. Every other entity is spending much more than we are. And so consequently, thank goodness, money is not an issue for keeping us going.

KELLER: So now it's easier from a financial standpoint?

LAMB: We're the only network in history that turned down a rate increase. And we have postponed the rate increase to 2001, that we could have gotten last year.

KELLER: Now, Bob Rosencrans helped develop the idea, John Saeman came in and gave some financial sophistication to the entire process, and Ed Allen came as a salesman. Correct? To really raise money.

LAMB: Well, if you go back to John Saeman for just a minute, John also recognized that we needed to strategically plan ahead. John called a meeting of the industry over at the Hyatt Regency Hotel back in 1982, and said "It's time for us to look ahead to when the Senate goes on television, and to decide whether we're going to commit to the Senate and a second channel. And that if we are, find the satellite time and begin that process." So he did that, very matter of fact. You asked about Tim Wirth earlier. I just have to tell you a story about Tim Wirth, because as supportive as Tim Wirth could have been, he almost caused a very serious negative the day that we had this meeting over at the Hyatt Regency Hotel. It was my idea to invite him over to talk to the industry, to kind of put into perspective what they had been doing on the Hill, meaning that he would say this is a positive development. And, at one point, he comes in, I remember he's sitting right next to me, and he says to the group "I don't know why you need a second channel, Brian. Why don't you just edit the House and use the best parts and the best parts of the Senate?" I could have clobbered him. Of all the people! And I said, "What part of your speech do you want us to edit? You're breaking down the entire principle that we've tried to establish here." But John Evans seemed to recognize the need for strategic planning. And, I kept saying to myself I never thought I'd met a nicer guy than Bob Rosencrans or more capable. I also never thought that I'd meet somebody as sophisticated as John Saeman. And then the next year around to have Ed Allen; you'll never meet a more decent, committed person. If he's committed to you, don't bother to try to change anything that he thinks about you.

KELLER: Those first three guys are the same way, Rosencrans, Saeman and Ed Allen.

LAMB: But Ed Allen is stubbornly committed, in a sense that I could not believe some days. Ed does not like confrontation. And Ed came as the third chairman and ran a relatively small company with the Chronicle people, Western Communications. The thing that Ed did, we've got it on the record, is he wrote letter after letter after letter to people in the business saying "Carry us."

KELLER: I remember how many times he contacted me when I was with Jones.

LAMB: Ed was unrelenting. He would not come to you and confront you in person, but he would write you one of those beautifully written letters.

KELLER: Over the telephone he would.

LAMB: By and large, he didn't like confrontation. If he really knew you he would; but he would just as soon send you one of those beautiful letters. He'd go to the office early in the morning, and he'd sit there and write out these letters. We've got a stack of them. That was Ed Allen, more than anything else. He could sell; Ed sold big time.

KELLER: You probably went from a rather minor percentage of participation to a rather major percentage of participation, during Ed Allen's chairmanship.

LAMB: Ed did something: one of our goals was to be on in all the state capitals. It was under Ed's regime that we were able to go on in all the state capitals, which we thought was politically very important to do. And, it's funny, in some state capitals today, we have less coverage than we had fifteen years ago. Because some of the people in this business have lost their way and they had to have those channels for something else. They've taken us off in some of these capitals or restricted us, or cut us back, which is just sad. So in some capitals we're having to fight back after 20 years on even C-SPAN being full time, which I find to be a real shortcoming on the part of some people in this business.

KELLER: Well, there was a quote in Frantzich and Sullivan's book, The C-SPAN Revolution, which has to do with the future of the industry, I think they make the point that one of the biggest problems in the future development of C-SPAN is the industry itself, and not being able to commit to further use of the type of product that you produce.

LAMB: This sounds severe but it's true. It's a matter of getting greedy. This industry has done very well. I know - because most have stayed with us full time, both networks - when somebody comes to me and says "We've got to take you off" that they're getting greedy. There's some reason out there that they insist that they have to take this channel off, for whatever reason. Because most never touch it. I've had the experience; I've had 20 years of it. I know who's giving me the BS. And most are not. The percentage of people who have stayed with us from start to finish has been fantastic and it's one of the great untold stories. Having been a member of the press, I know, the press does not like to write positive things about people in business. And so with every member of the press I've ever talked to, I've tried to get them to say what I'm saying now – that the industry deserves credit for its commitment to C-SPAN. But you can't. So I've had to say it in forums where I can be sure to be heard, including on our own network when I gave a speech to the National Press Club. That speech gave me a time when I knew the whole thing would be heard. And it's also in the editing of stories; you can't get people to report good things like that. They only want to report confrontations.

KELLER: So at this stage of it all, we've got a functional operation of two channels, adequately but not lushly supported for lack of a better term, but still adequately supported at this point. You're developing right along; you start branching out into other areas than just carrying the House of Representatives and the Senate. As an example, during this recess, you're carrying talk show programs from around the country. How are you accomplishing that, and how did you get into such a thing as that?

LAMB: We started very early. Remember our mission is to let people watch the political process, nuts and bolts and all; to see the whole thing, from start to finish. So part of that process is the hearings on Capitol Hill, the speeches at the National Press Club, the House and Senate gavel-to-gavel sessions, and then editorial meetings at newspapers and call-in shows around the country. We were the first ones to put Larry King on nationally, a radio talk show in 1980. We were the first ones to put Don Imus on television nationally, simulcasting his show back in 1993. Now he's full-time on MSNBC. We were the first ones to put on Rush Limbaugh on television, and then he subsequently had his own television show that didn't last.

But we're always looking for ways to let the audience see the whole process; take the myth out; let them see from the very beginning to beyond the end. That's why we got into televising radio talk show business over the years, because radio talk shows now play a very big role in the political process.

KELLER: You are quoted as saying on the jacket of this book that I quoted before,

The C-SPAN Revolution, that your mission was a radical one, to shift emphasis in television from entertainment to information and education. That's a rather broad

statement. It isn't directly quoted, but it is on the jacket cover of the book. Is that basically what your intent was?

LAMB: I'm fairly radical when it comes to this, because I can't stand to be spoon-fed by any media. I want choice. I read five or six newspapers a day. I listen to lots and lots of radio. And on television, my choice was quite narrow. And so, the more television you can give me, the better. The fact that we're going into the digital age, and they'll be a couple hundred channels out there is not enough for me. You look at a good magazine rack, in a good bookstore there are three thousand periodical choices. That's what America's all about. I think the real crime in this town was that the political system from day 1, when it came to television, only meted out these licenses free-of-charge to very few people and often to people who had the money, had the political clout. They got them and kept them and have kept them and resold them. It's a fascinating thing to watch. It's taken forever to break the system down. So I am a radical, when it comes to this stuff.

KELLER: Is this why you refer to it as a "revolution"?

LAMB: Absolutely. And it's hard for people in this country to live with it. There are a lot of people who are unhappy both with the political system and even in the media world right now, that this is no longer only the purview of three companies in New York City. Television is all over the lot. Turner's networks alone come out of Atlanta, they don't come out of New York City. You've got all these networks; Black Entertainment Television comes out of Washington D.C., we come out of here, Discovery comes out of Washington. But it's all over the United States. It's a breakdown of the concentration of thought, and that's what you're after. That's what is so spectacular about the Internet - that this industry is playing such a role when it comes to the modems, making the speed so good for people. There's not enough time in the day to even begin to watch all the programs available. And that's the way it should be.

KELLER: I agree with that totally. But you said that the C-SPAN revolution is not one of violence or conflict, it is rather a series of subtle changes in the coverage of public affairs by the media, and the use of public affairs coverage by political activists. That's a broad statement. That's how basically you think all the time, isn't it?

LAMB: The best way I think is I just want to see it for myself. And that's the driving force here, is to let people see it for themselves, don't try to tell them how to think, open these phones up. We started the national television call-in show right at this network on October 7, 1980. That's a very important part of our mission here, to hear the voices. I always get amazed how many times people call up on the phone and say "Why don't you just have regular people as the guests on your shows?" I always say back to them, "What do you think we do every day? We take a minimum of 50 calls in three hours, listening to people from all over the United States. We've done it for the last 19 years." It started here. And we stay on mission. I remember MSNBC came on, telling us all how they were going to be in touch with the American people better than anybody in history. We were going to hear all these voices. You watch someday, and see how many voices you hear. You hear the voices of the experts. And every day they have the chat rooms and things like that periodically. But you don't hear the kind of voices that you hear here. Here, people have a chance to say a complete sentence, develop a complete thought. It's the only place, by and large, the only place on television that you can do this. There are spotty areas, other programs where you can complete your thought. Our objective here is not to be in that big hurry, so that somebody can't get a full sentence or a full paragraph out on what they think of what's going on in this town.

KELLER: Changing the tenor just a little bit, to quote from the authors of The C-SPAN Revolution, "he wears his role as 'founding father' well, inspiring employees to look to the future and somewhat self-consciously recounting 'the good old days' when pressed." Were we pressing you today to recount the good old days in doing this, or is a part of your great delight in telling a story?

LAMB: No, it's not a great delight to tell a story. I've told it too many times. But it's important to tell the story. I just did this kind of interview yesterday; somebody came in the office; but that's what they hired me to do. Ronald Reagan probably did it as well as anybody. He could tell a story, he told it for 25 years for General Electric, day in day out. He knew that the people listening to the story were hearing it for the first time. That's the way it is here. As hard as it can be for me, a lot of people are hearing this story for the first time. You've got to give them the same enthusiasm you do the second time you told the story. Do I want to do it? It's not the best thing I do everyday. I love to listen and to learn. And when I'm talking I am not learning and I'm not listening.

KELLER: I had that quote marked in the book.

LAMB: I'm just much happier when I'm learning.

KELLER: I agree with that, but none the less, there are going to be students or authors in the future, who are going to look back at this cable television industry, which is a unique development in business in this country, and in communications. And they're going to want to know how the formation of C-SPAN came about. And that's why I think it's important that we discuss it at this point, for the use of the Cable Center.

LAMB: I think though, people ought to realize how important history is besides the cable business. Not enough people understand that almost everything happened before. Even what we're doing. What we do here has not been dramatically different than what was done before. The commercial networks started off doing hearings. ABC used to have time - everything on their schedule was open in the daytime. So they did a lot of hearings. They didn't have anything else to put on; hearings were cheap to produce. The problem was, they gave up on it. They all start out thinking that they're going to do something like what we do here, but they all give up because they find a better way to make money. I hope that we've been able to construct a model here, an economic model, that will work for a long time. But there's no guarantee. So it's important for people as you know, to look back in history, whether it be in politics or in business, or a specific business like cable to find out where it came from, so that hopefully we can keep some of this tradition, although it's hard. This is a country where tradition moves all the time.

KELLER: One of the purposes of the Cable Center and Museum is to be the depository for things like this. Hopefully, it won't be forgotten. I think what you have done is of course the crown jewel, if I can use that term again, of cable programming. I think it's generally recognized, even perhaps by some of these systems that do not now carry you, for whatever reason. And there are many systems that still have very limited channel capacity. You have to admit that with must carry rules, they have a very difficult time finding space to put you on. As soon as they rebuild, I don't think there's any question...

LAMB: You'd be surprised. It's not a perfect world. People need to know that the government did not mandate this channel so operators don't have to carry this. It was not mandated by our industry; you don't have to carry this. It's a voluntary thing. And all I can do is show you all the great people in this business who have thought that this was important enough to do, to help you along. What happens often is the leaders recognize the value of it, and the closer it gets down to the cable operator, who has a financial bottom line responsibility. They need to have a wink from that leader that says "You're OK, go ahead and carry C-SPAN, I'll understand if things don't come out exactly like we ask for it to come out, as long as you're doing it.

KELLER: More than a wink, they have to have a mandate to carry you.

LAMB: Absolutely. And the best board members of C-SPAN are the ones that have mandated carriage. Even the great decentralizer in this business, Amos Hostetter, would basically send a message to his operators. And they almost had 100% for C-SPAN and C-SPAN 2. And the message was, "Carry both of them." Even though he did not mandate it, they did; they carried both of them.

KELLER: Is Media One, the telephone company owned buyer of Continental, carrying through?

LAMB: MediaOne is sticking right with them.

KELLER: I think they, as a regulated telephone company, recognize the value; having been in a business where they really needed public relations or political relations.

LAMB: But the history of this, and I'm going to say this strongly, is that when people look back on C-SPAN they're going to realize someday - and you can't get anybody to write this today - that this was an effort by a lot of people who were dedicated to make the difference; who were not asked to do this. This is what's unusual about this. Remember that when all those public affairs programs hopped up on ABC, CBS and NBC, they were mandated. The networks had to do it. Ten percent of the programming, in order to get the free license was required to be public service. Otherwise, in spite of how they used to pat themselves on the back all the time, broadcasting saying how terrific they were, they would have never done that. It's obvious now looking back, based on what's happened since they don't have that requirement anymore, that some of them would have, but a lot of them wouldn't. They walked away from it very quickly when the public service requirements were lifted.

The thing that's interesting about C-SPAN is that it's voluntary. It was not a must carry. It was not a FCC requirement. It was not, as I tried to describe in the early part of this, a PR move on the part of the industry. Although you could find people and I won't name them; I remember who they were. I can name them privately in this business that said, "That's a great PR stunt."

KELLER: I didn't mean to imply stunt.

LAMB: They did, they did. They said it publicly. And all human beings don't march to the same drum. But the beginning of this process here, all those early chairmen and the late chairmen, all those executive committee members were there dedicated to make this happen. Not because it was a PR thing but because it was, they thought, the right thing to do.

KELLER: Wasn't there a point when the industry felt that when they came again under FCC control, that they would be required to put a portion of their time--like the broadcasters--into public service programming, and that maybe that was one of the reasons why they thought it was a good idea?

LAMB: I never caught that. I suppose somebody did. I'm not privy to all the conversations out there. It's always complicated. Some of the people who are in the business today, in 1998, don't have the same vision or view that the people had in 1978. So this is a moving target. With all the competition in the news and public affairs business right now, who knows why people do anything now. Programming services pay to get on these systems now, they are all part of retransmission consent which is this phony thing that the Congress passed that required people to have the kind of leverage that they have, the must carry thing. And so, it's artificial. In the very early days of this, in the first ten years of it, there was nothing artificial about it. There were no requirements. You could either put C-SPAN on or not put it on, and you got no direct reward. I've never, ever sold this place as, "You put C-SPAN on and you'll be guaranteed you won't be re-regulated." And I knew the day would come when the industry would be re-regulated and they'd come to me. There is a major figure in this business that blames me for the 1992 Cable Act because he says I didn't do enough to use this place to prevent the '92 Act from being passed, which is just pure bunk. I couldn't have stopped it. There's no way I could have stopped it. I have no power to do that. And being here wasn't enough to stop it, because what was partly driving the Capitol Hill people was the raising of the rates. You can't say "But well, they're doing C-SPAN when the rates were being raised. That was a whole different dynamic that we can't control.

KELLER: Specifically in Tennessee, you caught the ire from the then Senator from Tennessee, Al Gore.

LAMB: And it was done by a broadcaster. The raising of rates in Tennessee came to the industry from the broadcasting business.

KELLER: The president of that company was from a financial business too. So I understand why it happened, but unfortunately....

LAMB: And by the way, it had no commitment to this network.

KELLER: That is interesting.

LAMB: In Tennessee, Al Gore went out there to give a speech around this time. He called this office and said to me, "I need to know the numbers of how many systems in Tennessee are carrying C-SPAN, cause I'm going to make a speech out there and I'm going to let them have it." So he went out there and I think the numbers were out of 94 cable systems, 18 of them carried C-SPAN. None of those systems we're talking about were carrying C-SPAN. The president of the Tennessee Association's five systems did not carry C-SPAN, sitting right next to me there. That moment is an important snapshot. Interestingly enough, after he gave that speech, and the Nashville Banner blasted the industry for not carrying C-SPAN, the president of the Association put C-SPAN on all five of his systems, and these 28 headends that this group owned and doubled the price on, committed to carrying C-SPAN.

KELLER: A great populist issue?

LAMB: Gore had an issue, he's had an issue ever since.

KELLER: As I remember Pat Schroeder telling me, "Beware of Al Gore" and Pat Schroeder, of course, most assuredly was a populist and still is one, and she said to be sure to keep your eye on Gore, because right after this, there's going be real problems within the industry. In spite of the way she started out, during her first term in Congress, she became a great supporter of the cable industry.

LAMB: But I've got to tell you that must carry and retransmission consent was greatly aided by that whole episode that happened, because the vice president went on

to be a great supporter of must carry, and retransmission consent and in the end hurt us. Because, again, we're not mandated, we don't want to be mandated, we want to be a voluntary choice. But because of retransmission consent, it slowed us down, it got us taken off of systems, it's prevented us from moving ahead with C-SPAN 3, 4 and 5. All those things, because it favored, which it often does in this town, the existing businesses of NBC, ABC and CBS. Fox, and all the existing over-the-air television stations got a new lever, a new wedge, a new ability to go to a cable operator and say "We want another channel." That's how you got MSNBC, that's how you got FX, that's how you got Home and Garden, that's how you got Food TV, all those channels were really the result of the Federal Government.

KELLER: Was there ever any consideration in your mind to get Federal funds?

LAMB: Never. I would not be here. I'm out the door the minute any Federal money comes in.

KELLER: Had it ever been proposed to you from any of your board members or executive committee members. I don't want to name any.

LAMB: Let me say that almost everything has been proposed, especially in the early days from people who didn't want to pay very much. But almost everything was rejected. We tried advertising which I didn't want to do, which didn't work and ended up...there were 18 advertisers and six of them were telephone companies. I said, "How silly is this. We're pulling in 400,000 dollars a year on this advertising and they call it underwriting, and your competitors are getting hundreds and hundreds of spots, for what—saving the cable industry 400,000 a year?" It's funny. Almost always, the clear thinking, big thinking people do win out. But along the way...we had one operator suggest we auction, we go on the air and pitch for money, and get money from the audience out there. My reaction to that was, "Look, do you want credit for public service? Does this cost you that much money?"

KELLER: Now comes the issue of credit, it would be a public relations venture.

LAMB: But people want credit. There aren't very many people who do philanthropic things that don't want credit. They might not say that. They want somebody to say thank you, they want somebody to say they're doing that, and they deserve to have somebody say it. And that's the way it works.

KELLER: It's human nature.

LAMB: And they should get someone to say it. That's why I've said it 'til I'm blue in the face. I've said it to these people who've been on the board, "Thank you for what you're doing. Do you recognize how successful you've been? Do you realize how important your efforts are?" It takes a long time, but they obviously want credit someday from someone.

KELLER: Give credit to some additional people that have been instrumental in the development of C-SPAN over the years that we haven't already mentioned.

LAMB: Well, along the way I mentioned NCTA president, Decker Anstrom. It's an arm's length relationship because he's at the trade association and he never goes out and makes a speech without saying something positive about this network. Every chairman that I've had, and it's a danger to try to remember all the names, Jim Robbins, Jack Frazee, who is no longer in the business, our current chairman is Leo Hindery who made a huge difference for us.

KELLER: He made a huge difference for the industry.

LAMB: Amos Hostetter, Jim Whitson, Tom Baxter, Comcast was a great friend and still is a great friend. I think I've had 13 chairmen along the way and every single chairman has been important to me, because they've taught me something new, something different. And the executive committee members, Bob Miron has been on there for a long time. And he's got a great history in all this. But along the way, these chairmen have given their personal time. They've come here. Larry Wangberg. They've come to the meetings, they've listened to my telephone conversations, and they've answered the simple questions. They've picked up the phone and called their friends in the business to make sure it keeps on running. There are a tremendous number of people out there. Back in the old days Walter Kaitz. Walter Kaitz let me make a couple speeches out there at the Western Show. Had he not done that, we wouldn't have gotten the attention of the people out there.

KELLER: Spencer is continuing that.

LAMB: Spencer has always been supportive, but Walter was the first one to recognize it on the West Coast and he even made room for Charlie Rose, the Congressman who at times I had better relationships than others with Mr. Rose who is no longer in Congress. But he gave an important speech out at the Western Show one time at a breakfast meeting.

KELLER: There was no greater political animal than Walter Kaitz was.

LAMB: And no more likeable guy.

KELLER: You're absolutely right. What else do you want to add to this in the last few minutes that we have before we wrap this up. I think we're getting just about everything we needed.

LAMB: Well, I don't know if there's anything else to add, except that...

KELLER: Incidentally, I want to say that you react as an interviewee much the same way I interview. Of all the W's the Why is the most important, it's also the more difficult to get at. And I notice that when you do interviews, you head at the Why too, rather than all of the other incidental types of things in journalism. It's refreshing to hear someone react to an interview the way you have and focus in on the Why as opposed to the When.

LAMB: I always want to know where the money's coming from. And then I want to know why somebody spends it. Once I find out where it is, "why are you doing this?" And that's why I'm so sensitive to the suggestion that it was a public relations move, cause it's not. It's many times been brought up in very interesting forms. And it just didn't play a role. There are people in our business that only cared about public relations. But the majority didn't. And for this industry to be tarred with this - and the competitors love to do this - we're fighting the digital must carry issue here right now. And I'm out making noise. And it's funny because the broadcasters and the electronics industry people think I'm out stalking for the industry. I'll say this here. I could care less about the industry. The industry is big enough to make it on its own. They have been very successful. They'll continue to be successful. I'm out stalking for the American people, because if this place over here allows digital must carry to

happen, we'll get hurt in the business world out there because the bottom line is Number 1. No matter how many times I make a speech and it's hard for me. I'm not being critical of this cable business. I'm a realist. I've been around for too long. I've been in Washington for 32 years. I've worked with all these great people in the cable business that I have a lot of respect for. But I also understand what drives it. You've got stock, shareholders you've got markets out there to worry about, you've got analysts. You march into the stock market and say "We wanted to carry C-SPAN, that's why our stock went down 3 points" and they'll look at you like you're a crazy man. And there's no reason why they should have to do that. If a silly decision isn't made in this town that gives the broadcasters even more than they got when they got their free channel.

KELLER: I'm going to wrap this up now Brian, with a thank you for taking your time to do this, and mention again that this entire project was made possible by the Hauser Foundation's Oral and Video History Project of the Cable Television Oral History and Video History Program. And we thank you very much. I hope we can do a follow up someday.

LAMB: Thanks Jim, I'm looking forward to seeing some of the others you did too.

KELLER: Well, this is my first video, and the audio ones are pretty much available right now and will be on our Web site also, along with pictures. This will be the first video and I'm delighted that we were able to do it. This interview was made possible by The Hauser Foundation Oral and Video History Project of The Cable Center Oral and Video History Program.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B
