

**Statement to the Library of Congress Washington, DC Hearing on the  
Current State of American Television and Video Preservation  
March 26, 1996**

**Robert X Browning  
Director  
Public Affairs Video Archives  
Purdue University**

I am pleased to appear before this panel today. Today, you will be hearing testimony from the archival, industry, and educational sectors. I uniquely can speak from the perspective of each of these sectors.

I represent the Public Affairs Video Archives - the C-SPAN Archives at Purdue University. The Archives has a unique cooperative relationship with C-SPAN, a public affairs network which is privately supported by America's cable-television companies. Finally, I am an associate professor of political science at Purdue University where I continue to teach and direct a research program which extensively use the videotape collection.

The mission of the Public Affairs Video Archives is a simple one in purpose, if not so simple in execution. The Archives was created in 1987 within the School of Liberal Arts at Purdue University to record and make available videotape copies of C-SPAN programming. The initial planning, funding, recording, indexing, and duplication procedures were all implemented by Purdue University with the full cooperation and support of C-SPAN.

C-SPAN recognized the value of its primary source public affairs programming for teaching and research. They also recognized the expertise and value of having an archive developed and maintained by a university. Scholars and researchers, it was believed, would have the greatest interest in the programming and the greatest understanding of how it should be organized and indexed.

Purdue University is a land-grant university, with a mission of teaching, research, and service and the Archives complements the school and university mission.

### **Collection**

The PAVA collection consists of all C-SPAN programming telecast since October, 1987. We record, off-satellite, all C-SPAN programming telecast on two 24-hour networks, C-SPAN and C-SPAN2. From this 17,520 hours we abstract and index all "master" or "first-run" programs. Approximately 5,000 programs totalling about 7,000 hours air each year and are archived on 6,000 S-VHS videotapes. The

programs are not copied, rather the tapes recorded off-satellite are retained. Approximately 2,500 tapes are recycled each year because they contain only duplicate programming. Backup copies of programs recorded on different tapes are also retained.

The collection consists of 22,000 VHS tapes covering the period October, 1987 to December 1990. 29,000 S-VHS videotapes contain the programming from January, 1991 to the present.

Approximately 3,000 original C-SPAN 3/4 inch videotapes from 1979 to 1989 are also archived at the Public Affairs Video Archives.

## **Content**

C-SPAN's primary source coverage includes the entire proceedings of the House and Senate. The Archives contains the complete record of all House and Senate Sessions since November, 1987. Other programming includes C-SPAN call-in programs and interviews, House and Senate committee hearings, the only gavel-to-gavel political convention coverage, complete speeches from policymakers, elected officials, and political candidates. Unlike other networks, C-SPAN covers events in their entirety without editing and without commercial breaks. Thus, this collection takes on added importance as the complete record of primary events in an indexed, audio and video format.

## **Preservation**

Since the collection is relatively new, we have not encountered any preservation problems. No use is made of the masters except to duplicate copies. We monitor the number of times that the masters are used to make copies. When a large number of copies need to be made, we create a submaster from which we duplicate copies.

## **Storage**

Videotapes are kept in a controlled storage vault. All tapes are stored in closed boxes on high-density compact shelving. Access to the tape storage facility is limited.

## **Information and Access**

The videotape collection has always been accessible through the purchase of duplicate copies. One of the unique features of this archive is that the original and current design was to make it self-sustaining through the sale of videotapes. The Public Affairs Video Archives was licensed by C-SPAN to provide duplicate

copies of C-SPAN programs for a fee. The Archives also creates compilation tapes of significant public events and on topics of interest to educators. This mechanism has helped to meet the twin goals of making C-SPAN programming accessible for teaching and research and providing an on-going source of revenue to finance the operation.

The number of tapes distributed has increased each year. In 1995, 8,000 tapes were duplicated and distributed. In 1996, approximately 12,000 tapes will be distributed. Since the Archives began in 1987, over 53,000 tapes have been duplicated and distributed.

### **Cataloging and Documentation**

The size of the collection required indexation in order to manage and retrieve the vast amount of information and the media required to store the information. Since the Archives was created at the time that software and hardware were becoming more affordable and decentralized, the Public Affairs Video Archives has been able to build a very impressive relational database to manage all aspects of the operation.

The master recording, the tape collection, the duplication system, the indexing and retrieval system, and the customer base are all electronically managed by software and hardware designed and implemented at the Archives. All C-SPAN programs are indexed by subject, format, sponsor, committee, location, person, title, affiliation, and keywords. Abstracts are written for each program. Highlights indexed by time are added to many programs to allow us to locate specific events in the program.

The level of indexing, although labor-intensive, is the strength of the collection. Since the programs that we index are primary events in their entirety, we are preserving and making accessible, a significant record of the debates and proceedings that are the very essence of our democracy.

### **Staff**

The full-time staff of the Public Affairs Video Archives consist of nine positions. The positions are:

- Director
- Assistant to the Director
- Clerical Assistant
- Archivist
- Assistant Archivist

Reference Desk Assistant  
Operations Manager  
Duplication Assistant  
Technical Manager  
Programmer

## **Relationship with C-SPAN**

The Public Affairs Video Archives was created in 1987 by Purdue University with the full cooperation and support of C-SPAN. Purdue determined the policies, procedures, pricing, and cataloging standards. C-SPAN supported the Archives through grants to professors to acquire videotapes, through promotion and advertising, and by using the Archives for tape duplication services to C-SPAN viewers. The Public Affairs Video Archives provided tapes and research directly to educators.

In 1996, C-SPAN and Purdue University entered into a new contract arrangement that aligns more closely the operations of the Archives with C-SPAN. Requests for videotapes by educators and noneducators are now handled through one 800 ordering number and a fulfillment company contracted by Purdue University. This company handles shipping, sales inventory, and all financial services including billing, collection, and credit card sales. The Public Affairs Video Archives staffs a research desk and identifies programs in response to telephone inquires. The Public Affairs Video Archives continues to index and abstract programming, assist users in locating material, archive the tapes, duplicate tapes as requested, and to develop compilation and educational tapes. Purdue receives a percentage of all proceeds from videotape sales and is guaranteed a minimum budget by C-SPAN.

The new contract is a recognition of the value of the archive Purdue had created, the value of database and on-going operation, and the shared goals of C-SPAN and Public Affairs Video Archives to make its programming widely accessible in the videotape medium.

## **Educational and Research Value**

As a political science professor, I had often looked for video that could be used to illustrate concepts and ideas that I lectured on and about which the students read in their textbooks. Before we created the Public Affairs Video Archives, it was difficult to attain much more than feature films and television documentaries. C-SPAN programming makes it possible for the teacher to show the political process and the actions and words of the policy makers without the editing and

selection of television producers. Professors such as myself and the over 13,000 members of C-SPAN in the Classroom actively use C-SPAN programming in lectures, as outside viewing assignments, and in research. These programs are used as short clips to illustrate concepts and demonstrate process. Some professors assign students to watch an entire hearing or speech and to complete analyses or to write their own newspaper articles about the event. The Public Affairs Video Archives prepares compilation tapes that allow shorter segments selected for their value for particular courses or disciplines.

Professors are using the videotapes for research. C-SPAN has funded a research program at Purdue which enables us to employ undergraduate and graduate students to assist with research using the videotapes. I am conducting research on the floor speeches of Members of Congress. A student working with me is studying the visual images seen in presidential addresses to the nation. Others have studied the differences between an entire event as telecast by C-SPAN and the edited broadcast and print news reports. C-SPAN videotapes contain the complete record of speeches of future presidential candidates and Supreme Court nominees. The possibilities for future research are unlimited and the collection of C-SPAN videotapes at Purdue University will allow future scholars access to a unique public affairs record.

## **Conclusion**

The archive I have described is a unique partnership between a national television network and an educational institution. It represents a significant industry commitment to preserving public affairs programming that is unparalleled in scope and completeness. C-SPAN is the only television network with a complete - on-going archive of its entire telecasts. This cooperative relationship is serving a significant need that exists among educators, researchers, viewers, and policy participants to obtain, review, and use a public affairs record in a widely available and accessible format - VHS videotape. While not a long-term preservation medium, the last nine years of C-SPAN programming are completely recorded, indexed, and accessible. The technology and expertise that we have developed will ultimately allow all or part of the collection to be transferred and preserved in another format.