

## Warning: Watching C-SPAN Will Not Make You Fun at Parties

Written by Kathleen McCarthy  
Wednesday, 05 March 2014 23:06

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Try something novel and experiment with your news diet. Stop consuming CNN, MSNBC, Fox, ABC, NBC, or CBS news broadcasts – as well as the equally redundant counterparts in talk radio (Rush Limbaugh, Ed Schultz, Thom Hartmann, Glenn Beck, Alan Colmes, Sean Hannity) – all of which strategically perpetuate political divisiveness. Instead, turn your dial to C-SPAN (channel 96 on Mediacom cable), C-SPAN 2 (channel 87), C-SPAN3 (channel 88), or [C-SPAN.org](#). Be warned, however, that watching C-SPAN with any regularity will expose the mainstream media's woeful neglect of the relevant news of the day. Prepare to be shocked at the amount of information that goes under-reported, or not reported at all. As America's watchdog, C-SPAN is the most compelling indictment of the mainstream media's systematic failure.

Sure, a lot of the legislators' speechifying during C-SPAN coverage is vacuous and mugging for the camera. While Congress feigns oversight, especially during congressional hearings, panel members and/or legislators leak need-to-know information.

At a minimum, names and organizations are given, allowing anyone to do an Internet search to glean insightful information about these so-called experts and their connections and associations. DC begins to shrink with our expanding knowledge of its inhabitants and their activities, providing for better perspective, understanding, and manageability of relevant data moving forward. Information is empowering, and hopefully for some provides inspiration to get engaged more meaningfully and effectively.

Observing DC's dysfunction can be highly motivational because it informs solutions from Americans, who are not mired in concerns over the political consequences of actually solving problems. It is too easy to listen, then immediately dismiss, news being delivered by

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broadcasters, whose coverage practically ensures disengagement of viewers. Couple it with mainstream-talk-radio coverage's purpose to elicit emotional responses by directing blame for America's woes to the proverbial other party and you have a well-honed formula for discouraging public participation.

Both types of coverage have been strategically designed to maintain the status quo by convincing voters to stick with their party's candidates or suffer. This is the great deceit of partisanship. This practiced media manipulation delivers the intended result that no matter how egregiously or often incumbents betray their constituencies, voters will not deviate from party affiliations – even though the only promises ever kept once elections are over are to the special interests.

If more citizens would more often watch Congress in (so-called) action, this veil of partisanship would lift, and we could stop this endless loop. Voters can impose term limits if they are willing to accept the competing party's candidates as a means to hold their own party's candidates accountable. As I have often stated, Americans have a limited number of extremely powerful tools: the power of the purse, the power of the vote, and the power of the jury. It is time to use them, even if it means inconveniencing ourselves. Honestly, the difference between the two parties is theoretical at best, pure fiction at worst.

Granted, C-SPAN exposes plenty of political manipulation, especially during congressional hearings – in which the partisanship is deliberately on steroids. But more often than not, questions get asked that are highly informative. Perhaps more illuminating are the questions that *don't* get asked. Those become glaringly apparent and inform viewers of the unreported agenda. You can be a dyed-in-the-wool Democrat or Republican, but the consistent partisan avoidance and blustering reveals these politicians for whom they really are – unlike any information you are fed as news by the networks and talk shows.

C-SPAN also provides viewers insight into the endless foundations, NGOs, think tanks, and associations that plague DC and American politics/civics. It is a whole underworld of influence that goes completely under the radar but for C-SPAN. While all of these organizations have strategic missions that serve an array of special interests, many have a taxpayer-funded component, which means taxpayers are entitled to know what they are funding in part or in whole.

Again, learning of their existence then researching board members, affiliations, funding sources,

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missions/tasks, and expenditures all helps connect important dots. Any intimidation you might have relative to politics and/or DC will disappear when you recognize that your own skill sets likely far exceed those running the show.

Congress is largely composed of career politicians and lawyers who have truly lost touch with their constituencies in favor of the special interests that fund their campaigns. Learning what committees they each serve on is extremely useful in knowing whose special interests they are looking out for. C-SPAN is one of the few tools Americans have to monitor legislators' political/economic influence, as each serves on relevant committees that advance their benefactors' interests.

It baffles me why, with so many truly talented people unemployed, more would not opt for legislative office, especially considering the average annual salary is \$175,000 – plus valuable benefits such as 75 percent of health-insurance premiums paid thanks to special exemptions for Congress, lifetime pensions regardless of tenure, and lavish expense reimbursements, not to mention a fully paid-for staff. In today's political market, as evidenced by watching C-SPAN, just about anyone with a pulse is eligible for office. Imagine if men and women with relevant skills (and a sense of old-fashioned honor) decided to challenge the status quo. We the People might finally get results-oriented representation.

One of the greatest threats to America is the increasing unwillingness of new folks to run for political office, whether local, state, or federal. This dire lack of competition for seats is what perpetuates the status quo and special interests' stranglehold on today's politics. Well, that and a highly orchestrated two-party political system whose primary mission is to keep incumbents incumbent. Attend any local party meeting – it doesn't matter which party – and learn for yourself just how irrelevant they have become. It is far more about the race itself and re-electing incumbents, regardless of performance, than it is about real solutions.

So for those of you who don't aspire to politically serve, yet refuse to extract yourselves from the two-party theater that defines us politically, at least get over to your party meetings and take a hard look at the same old players running them. You will find most of these organizations begging for genuine leadership. These lifers could not be less concerned with platforms conforming to their proclaimed political ideologies. As an experiment, pose relevant questions and see what that gets you. I would be delighted to be proven wrong, so try.

I propose that local party leaders, including those of the Scott County Republican and

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Democratic parties, are generally cheerleaders for incumbent elections. Beyond that, apparatchiks' mandate is to screen candidates to ensure that only malleable challengers willing to go-along-to-get-along prevail. The local party groups have degraded into nothing more than exclusive vetting organizations for the status quo.

The solution here is to get involved with replacing this destructive political process with one that boasts restorative goals that are inclusive. Start working to get elections, especially local elections, back to something with genuine change that is representative of residents and taxpayers. You can't do this from the couch, or via e-mail or Facebook. You have to be present to win.

Our collective failure to hold government accountable, regardless of which party has control, has resulted in no less than five decades of massive growth in government agencies and spending, with ever-increasing levels of spending for both corporate welfare and social programs, education, and gov-co services, resulting in the largest income gap ever, and a staggering degradation in education, infrastructure, civil rights, oversight, and economic stability.

Far greater wealth is in the hands of far fewer people; more people are in poverty; the middle class is shrinking faster; 80 percent of congressmen are millionaires (many becoming so after being elected) and 70 percent are attorneys; almost every agency executive position is either a career position or occupied by executives from the industry the agency is supposed to oversee; law enforcement is becoming more arbitrary with administrative statutes that have little if no Constitutional authority; and perhaps most alarming of all is that civic education and understanding is almost nonexistent in the current voting population.

Basic civic information is readily available for our consumption by visiting state, county, and city Web sites and nonpartisan informational sites such as [VoteSmart.org](http://VoteSmart.org) , [OpenCongress.org](http://OpenCongress.org) , [GovTrack.us](http://GovTrack.us) , and [CBO.gov](http://CBO.gov)

. Before we can effectively hold government accountable, we must first get solid footing with our own knowledge base, political ideals, civic values, and aspirations for governance.

You might even find it is a lot more interesting than prime-time TV.