The original documents are located in Box D67, folder "Commission on Presidential Debates, 1987-1997 (2)" of the Melvin Laird Papers at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

February 13, 1990

Dear Janet:

I appreciated your letter giving me the up-date on the Commission on Presidential Debates. The videotape project outlining the key steps in putting on a debate sounds like a wonderful plan.

I would, of course, like to be helpful to you and the Commission and will look forward to receiving further information as your plans develop. Unfortunately, I will not be able to attend the symposium which will be held in Washington on May 9th. I have a long standing commitment to be in New York on that day. I do regret that I cannot be with you at that time.

With best wishes, I am

Sincerely,

Melvin R. Laird

Janet H. Brown
Executive Director
Commission on Presidential Debates
1350 Connecticut Avenue, N. W.
Suite 900
Washington, D. C. 20036

COMMISSION ON
PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES 1350 Connecticut Avenue, NW • Suite 900 • Washington, DC 20036 • (202) 872-1020

January 31, 1990

Mr. Melvin R. Laird
Senior Counselor
Reader's Digest
1730 Rhode Island Avenue, N.W. Suite 212
Washington, DC 20036

Dear Mr. Laird:

I write to bring you up to date on the Commission's activities in 1990, and to invite your participation in events we have planned.

The Commission has several projects in the works, the first of which is a videotape being produced in partnership with the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB). Since the 1988 debates, the Commission has received numerous requests for assistance with the fundamentals of debate sponsorship. The videotape was designed to respond to such requests. Targeted to state and local debate sponsors, it outlines the key steps in putting on a debate. It will be accompanied by a written pamphlet which will also suggest ways to hold issues debates, student debates and related events. The videotape, which will be transmitted by satellite to all NAB members, will be previewed at the NAB's March, 1990 annual convention and introduced in Washington in May.

NY On May 9, 1990, the Commission will hold a symposium in Washington on "Debates 1992." This event will take place in the afternoon and be followed by a reception. The issues which will be discussed during the symposium include format, viewership and debates' effect on voters. Further information will be mailed to you soon; we hope you will be able to join us on that day.

The Commission is also working on an oral history of debates; videotape excerpts of this project will be shown for the first time during the symposium. Finally, the Commission is starting a newsletter which you will receive shortly. It will keep you informed of our activities as we head into the planning stage for 1992.

With ongoing thanks for your support of the Commission's work, — a special thanks for help!

Sincerely,

Janet

Janet H. Brown
Executive Director

Commission
on
Presidential
★ Debates ★

May 17, 1990

Dear Mr. Laird,

I thought you might be interested in the transcript from last week's symposium. I've also enclosed the project we just completed with the National Association of Broadcasters. The "Inside Debates" video and pamphlet outline the fundamentals of debate sponsorship in a way that can be used for candidate debates, issue debates, or student debates. The NAB has sent this to all its radio and TV stations, members of Congress, and various educational/ public interest groups.

With best regards,

Janet H. Brown
Executive Director

1350 Connecticut Avenue, NW • Suite 900
Washington, DC 20036 • (202) 872-1020

COMMISSION ON PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES

"DEBATES '92"

A Symposium

Wednesday, May 9, 1990

Decatur Carriage House

Washington, D.C.

Transcript by:

NEWS TRANSCRIPTS, INC.
1333 H Street, N.W., Suite 500
Washington, D.C. 20005
(202) 682-9050

In Association with:

JANSCRIPTS
(703) 998-7113

COMMISSION ON PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES

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The views expressed during the course of the symposium are those of the individual participants, and not necessarily the views of the Commission on Presidential Debates.

Transcript by:

NEWS TRANSCRIPTS, INC. - (202) 682-9050

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JANET BROWN: I would welcome you all here this afternoon. We've got a full program as you can see, and I think we're going to have some very interesting conversations in the next three hours. I will start by introducing the co-chairmen of the Commission, Paul Kirk and Frank Fahrenkopf.

FRANK FAHRENKOPF: Thank you very much, Janet, and thank you, ladies and gentlemen for being with us today. We hope that the next few hours will provide some interesting, lively and hopefully instructive discussion on some of the issues that we believe are critical in the whole arena of discussion of presidential and vice presidential debates. As you know, from the program, we have structured the next few hours to take, in order, the question of format, a discussion of the role of journalists in presidential and vice presidential debates, and a discussion of the candidates perspectives, in other words, how do the participants in these debates view the process.

We're fortunate today also not only to have the wisdom and experience of those men and women who are going to participate as speakers and moderators and panelists, but also of an audience, we believe a unique audience that has tremendous experience over the years in political and debate activities in this country, both at presidential, vice presidential, and local levels, many people who have been involved in debates at the senatorial level or House level or gubernatorial level.

And we really earnestly urge and solicit the participation of those in our audience. We want your advice. We want your thoughts. We want your comments.

The Commission would hope to take the results of this Symposium and to be able to work up suggestions, suggestions that come about not in the heat and emotion of a presidential election year, but years ahead of time, when we anticipate that people can give the time and energy and thoughtful consideration to these things without the urgency of a campaign interfering.

We want to particularly thank Philip Morris. This Symposium has been made possible through the generosity of Philip Morris, who was one of the principal contributors to the debate commission during 1988, and, in fact, made our presentations of the three debates possible.

We're also going to be transcribing and videotaping the proceedings today, and hope that these observations and the observations that come out of this meeting can be viewed by others who couldn't be with us, who can also add to the wisdom we hope to gain from our proceedings.

Note for those of you in the press who are covering the Symposium, we will be showing today for the first time on screens here in the hall taped portions, excerpts of the oral history that we are preparing of presidential debates in the United States. As you know, for those of you who have followed this work, Jim Lehrer, the MacNeil-Lehrer report have been interviewing former presidents of the United States who have participated in the debate process to get their views. And a couple of times during the afternoon, we'll actually get a preview of what that final documentary is going to look like.

A transcribed version of those presidential interview excerpts is available at the registration table if you haven't already picked it up.

The transcript will be available--of this meeting--will be available later this evening by computer on the Reuters data bank. Hard copies of the transcript will be available tomorrow morning.

So without further ado, let me now turn over the microphone to my good friend and cohort in this endeavor for the past few years, the former chairman of the Democratic National Committee, Mr. Paul Kirk. Paul?

PAUL KIRK: Thank you, Frank. Thank you for joining us, ladies and gentlemen. Before

kicking off the first panel and introducing the participants, I would like to welcome and acknowledge on behalf of the Commission on Presidential Debates a distinguished delegation of political leaders from Eastern Europe who are with us this afternoon. This group is present as our guest under the sponsorship of the American Council of Young Political Leaders.

Our guests have come from Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany. They will be with us here this afternoon and will be joining us at the reception to follow across the street at the Hay-Adams, and I would ask if they would be good enough to stand. We'd like to acknowledge your presence and welcome you to us this afternoon.

(Applause)

It happens that yesterday I had the opportunity to discuss with a group of government ministers from the people's Republic of China some of the important processes and systems of our United States government. And if I may, I must say that the presence of today's guest, and that experience of yesterday lead me to perhaps take the privilege of the chairman to put in context the, not just the importance, but perhaps the necessity of sessions such as this.

The context, of course, is the times in which we are meeting. It was just four years ago, with great pomp and ceremony, that our country celebrated France's gift to the United States, the Statue of Liberty, commemorating our hundred years of independence.

Three years ago, we celebrated the bicentennial of our Constitution. Next year, we will celebrate the ratification of the Bill of Rights to that Constitution. And, of course, we know that during this period, from almost every area in the globe, we see the emergence of freedom, multi-party systems, and the flourishing of democracies.

And we can hardly forget that picture of that young student standing along in Tiananmen Square in the face and defiance of the roll of tanks, reminding us of both what is put at risk, and the courage that is needed to stand up in defense of freedom.

For our Constitution, really the essence of freedom is the right to choose the type of government we have in this country. And yet, our guests should take note, as we most importantly should take note, elections here have always been free. And yet, in this context, in the election of 1988, only 50.1 percent of those voters in this democracy responded to that right and responsibility.

Today, we can't change those figures, and we can't change all the things that I say, unhappily, may be providing some disconnect between the tactics and techniques of modern political campaigns and the serious business of governance of this republic.

But the Commission on Debates does play a particular role. We hope that as important as debates were in 1988, and the exit polls show that it was the single most important event that affected decision making by those who ultimately did vote, and it was the largest political audience for debates in recent history.

We can't remedy the photo ops and the sound bites and the proliferation of negative campaigning, but it is our purpose to improve debates, to enhance the dialogue, to try and enlighten and inform the voting public, and to make sure that the debates we sponsor in 1992 have the best kind of input from you folks as to what would be more educational and informing, and to reach out to connect with the people in this country, because if we are going to be an inspiration to others, we have some work to do to inspire our own citizenry.

And today I think will be a small step, and hopefully an informative and constructive step in that direction.

Questions that will be raised, as Frank mentioned, are about format. You may want to hear about how many debates there should be, how long they should be, how should we divide the topics and

the subject matter. But we turn for answers to some of those questions to some experts in the field.

On our first panel, we're happy to have a member of our own Advisory Commission on Presidential Debates, a professor of communications studies at the University of Kansas, Diana Prentice Carlin. She has done extensive research on presidential debates, and I'm sure will be most helpful as we move ahead on this project.

We await, hopefully, the presence of another member of the first panel, a distinguished professor and dean of the Annenberg School of Communications at the University of Pennsylvania, Kathleen Hall Jamieson. Ms. Jamieson has written many books on this topic. She has been sought out by news media, written and electronic, for her opinions, which are forceful and penetrating, and we're hopeful that she'll be here to share them with us before this hour expires.

In the meantime, I would ask Professor Carlin if she would come to the table and Frank and I will be here as well to perhaps raise some questions at the conclusion of Professor Carlin's presentation, and we also would want to make sure that this is really, at the conclusion of these presentations, a forum that is open to you.

Before the questioning, opinions, any kinds of suggestions and input that you can provide this Commission as it goes about its work.

Thank you very much. Professor Carlin.

PROFESSOR DIANA PRENTICE CARLIN: Thank you, Paul. First of all, I would like to thank you and Frank Fahrenkopf for inviting me to participate in this. This is an area I have a great deal of interest in and having worked with the Commission for nearly three years, and very excited about the potential for further improvements in political debate formats for 1992.

As Paul said, I'm going to make some overview comments, and what I'm hoping to do is provide a framework from which we can examine possible changes for formats and political debates. They'll then respond to some of that, and then we want to open it up to your questions or comments or suggestions.

What I want to do in providing a framework is two things. First of all, I want to look at why past formats have been criticized, and what some of those criticisms are. Secondly, consider why some of those criticisms are perhaps exaggerated or possibly even unfounded, and then get into sort of the framework for what we need to consider for any future debate formats.

To begin with, the notion of the criticism of past debates: I think there are three reasons why our past debate formats have been criticized. One of them is purely expectations. I think when people hear the word "debate", they expect a head-on type of confrontation between the two candidates, and we usually envision Lincoln and Douglas trooping around Illinois talking for 90 minutes a piece on that particular topic. Anyone who has any background in academic debate usually thinks of something once again more focused, longer in duration, without panelists. And as I summarized for Janet a couple of years ago, most of the criticisms of debates, a large percentage of them centered around the panelists. So I think when we talk about format, the next particular panel will be of particular interest, because I don't know that you can really separate those two when you are dealing with criticisms.

I think a second reason why there are some criticisms of debates is that we tend to evaluate them possibly by inappropriate standards of hold them up to perhaps inappropriate standards. Many of my colleagues in academia, especially those of us in the speech discipline who have done a lot of work in argumentation and debate, have referred to the debates as pseudo-debates, or counterfeit debates, or non-debates, and in fact many journalists have suggested they ought to be called forums instead of debates.

I don't think the criteria they use that usually lend those determinations are especially applicable. Most academic debates, and even the Lincoln-Douglas debates, were on a single issue. It's impossible in this complex time in which we live for our candidates to center an entire debate on a single issue; I doubt if anyone could reach consensus on what that issue probably ought to be.

I discovered after the '88 debates, when people found out I was working with the Commission--after the first debate I received a letter from a member of the Gray Panthers in Kansas City, who was saying--she wanted a question on what was going to be done about the elderly, because that had been left out. We have an incredibly large number of constituencies. Evaluating the debates on the basis of what you can do when you're dealing with a single topic I think is probably somewhat unfair.

The other thing that I think we have to take into consideration are some practical realities about debates, if we want candidates indeed to debate. Political campaigns are in-depth long-term types of processes, and we shouldn't view the debate as a singular event that begins and ends with the debate. Much of what goes on in that debate, and even the questions that are asked, have resulted from statements that have been made on the campaign trail, and, if when you think about the debates that have occurred in the past, those debates are not over when they're over. There continue to be comments after the debates in fact; the debates oftentimes cause the candidates to more sharply focus what they think about an issue.

So if we try once again to evaluate them on the fact of just what happens within that 90-minute time frame, that's inaccurate, because the debate is a more continuous process than that.

I did some analysis with a couple of graduate students at the University of Kansas on the '88 debates, and one of the things we discovered in sort of a post-debate analysis was where some of the topics in the debates went after the debate, and then what happened to them in the subsequent debate, and saw that there really was some development. So unlike an academic debate that's over when the round is over, these continues. And so I think from that perspective you need to look at the debates for what they raise later in the campaign.

I think the third reason why there are criticisms, many of the people who do the critiquing of debates, or criticize them, are far more knowledgeable and involved than the average voter. We tend to know how many undecided voters there are up, you know, in the last month of the campaign. Many of the journalists who write and complain, many of my colleagues who complain about the fact these debates weren't real debates, there wasn't enough clash, they talked about the same things--have been people who have been following the campaigns for possibly 18 months. Most voters are not that intimately aware or involved in the process until the last few weeks. So for most voters who listen, this is the first time that they really know what someone's position might be. So I think that's another thing we have to keep in mind.

The second thing I want to discuss is some of the criticisms and whether or not they are entirely justified. One thing we have to realize is that in any debate it centers around a question, and someone has to raise those questions. And what we've typically had is a group of panelists who've raised those questions, but regardless of who's doing it, whether it's someone who has written questions ahead of time and simply filters them through a monitor, there has to be some basis for debate. And in that sense, you know, a lot of the criticism that the panelists are an unnecessary part of it isn't entirely accurate, because someone has to start the debate at some point. Lincoln and Douglas had a more obvious kind of place to begin, because, as I said, that was the issue of the day.

One kind of side note I'd mention on Lincoln and Douglas is we hold that up as a standard, but, interestingly enough, one of the criticisms of debates is that the candidates have too much input into the formats. Lincoln and Douglas planned those debates entirely on their own; they were the only ones

involved. So I think, once again, in a fairness kind of perspective, we have to take that into consideration.

The other thing that I think we have to think about is that there is a large overriding question involved in all political debates, and it's not one that a journalist or anyone else is asking, but it's basically a broader question of who is better qualified to be president or vice president of the United States, and all of the individual questions that are asked, all the issues that are raised, are really means of getting at answering that question. So if there is a large question in a political debate, that is really it. And in that sense I think once again some of the criticisms are invalid.

The third thing I would mention as far as looking at the criticisms is that there've been numerous content analyses of past presidential debates. I participated in one of the 1980 debates and also the 1988 debates. And of those half a dozen or eight that I've worked at and have been involved in, there is clash in those debates in a true debate sense. And I notice one of my colleagues from the University of Nebraska, who is a debate coach, nodding
--there has been clash in the pure academic sense of that term. They have presented policy statements and positions in the debates. They have compared their philosophies and positions. They have taken issue with their opponent's particular statements or positions. In fact, in 1988 the candidates were able to circumvent the ascribed format and went after one another on several occasions and had fairly lengthy exchanges beyond the time limits in the structure of the format. And as we went back and looked at the past debates, there was more of than in '88 than occurred in any other year. So there was some direct confrontation.

And, finally, they did present some evidence and analysis of what they were talking about, not to the extent you would have in an academic debate or in other types of debate where people have access to information. We set our presidential candidates with nothing but paper to take notes on. So you can't expect extensive quotations or statistics when you're in that position.

The other thing that I would mention here, a fourth item, is there is some thought that if we give them a longer period of time and if we eliminate the panelists, we're going to have more in-depth analysis, more information provided and maybe once again newer information.

I'm not sure those of us who have worked with a variety of formats at the state level have found that that's necessarily the case. Often time, the candidates want to talk about their agenda and if the agenda is not the one that was raised in the questions or, in fact, it's not even the public agenda, they're going to talk about what they want to talk about any way. So, the longer time you give them doesn't necessarily mean you're going to have more in-depth analysis.

One final thing is really important, on this notion of something new, is that candidates have to be consistent about their positions. You're not going to get a new position with most candidates in every debate. So, there is going to be some repetition and I don't think that is necessarily something that we should be surprised about or that we should necessarily be critical of.

So, even though there are flaws and I wouldn't say that with all of these comments that I think the debates have been perfect -- I think we could have had far better formats than probably what we've had in the past. I do think the debates are useful, even in their current form, but I think there is some room for improvement.

One of the many factors people do cite as helping them form a decision is the debates and the exit polls have indicated that is a factor. So, this leads into the question of how can you improve the debates.

And I'd suggest that any format that we discuss here, we need to take a couple things into consideration. One is that in any debate for fairness there needs to be equal time allotted to both of

the candidates. That doesn't necessarily mean they have to talk at the same -- the same length of time in any one answer.

And there were a couple handouts as you came in with some suggestions of some things that I would throw on the table when we open this up to look at. And one of those suggestions is that we allot a certain amount of time per question, but let the candidates decide how much they give on their opening statement and how much they give for rebuttals.

A second thing is there has to be some basis or beginning point for the debates and there has to be some kind of question raised, whether that's from a panelist or whether it's done ahead of time. And I don't even think it's necessarily a bad idea to give candidates some or all of the questions ahead of time.

The third thing is that we need to have a format that really allows them to clash with one another, which may mean more rebuttal time, it may mean a cross-examination period for the candidates and at least some opportunity to make those comparison.

And then, finally, and probably in some ways most importantly, is we have to consider the television audience. We have to consider that we have to compact this to 90 minutes, unlike Lincoln and Douglas who had three hours and we have to think about what's going to work for a television audience.

So, that is where I'll close it and I'll turn it over to you gentlemen for comments and then I think I will be directing questions and responses from the audience.

KIRK: Diana, could I just ask -- I assume that in 92 and beyond there will be an opportunity to have perhaps more than one format, if there is to be more than one debate in the general election. Can you conclude at all in your own opinion whether the -- a panel versus a single moderator is a better group to follow if you try to take the different factors that you mention in terms of who controls the agenda and whether you want some free wheeling or whether you want to cover more substance than numbers as topics and is there -- is there anything that you would like to leave us with?

CARLIN: As far as whether a panel or a single moderator would allow for more interchange between two debaters, I don't know if it's so much who you have asking the questions, whether it's one person or three, so much as it is what you do with the number of rebuttals, what you do with follow-up questions, also whether or not you allow some opportunity for cross-examination.

One suggestion that I made on the one handout that you might think about, and this could be used regardless of whether you have a panel or a single moderator, is to, instead of really formalizing and having a set cross-examination period -- this was done in a gubernatorial debate in Kansas in 86 -- was to allow each candidate three or five opportunities within the hour long debate that they had to raise questions. They had a little card they held up.

And when they wanted to interrupt and ask a question, they were allowed to do that. And, you know, those kinds of things are probably more likely to produce some of that than necessarily whether you have one or a single panelist.

FAHRENKOPF: Let me ask you a question. I was taken by your suggestion, which I never really heard before, actually, that the candidates be allowed to have the questions prior to the debate.

If we accept your hypothesis that the whole context of the debate and those individuals who are watching it at home on television and who have not been, like most of the reporters, had the same answers repeated to them for weeks and months over the campaign trail, if the American public is

getting an impression from the television set, from the debates, as who is the best qualified to be president, isn't one of those factors that is going to weigh in that decision their ability to handle themselves in -- spontaneity -- how they handle themselves on their feet in responding to a question that they don't know is coming?

Wouldn't you lose that if -- and all you would be getting back would be a canned answer if they had the questions in advance?

CARLIN: There is that perception and I have been involved in debates where they have had the questions ahead of time and I've worked with candidates who haven't had them and quite frankly most candidates and their staffs are going to assume 75 to 90 percent of the questions that are going to be asked. There aren't very many surprises. I think there were a few in 88, which were good.

FAHRENKOPF: Bernie Shaw.

CARLIN: Bernie Shaw is exactly who came to mind. I think there would be the perception that they were even more canned than what they're -- seem to be now. However, there is still opportunity with that type of a format to respond, because if you included with that questions from the other candidate or if you allowed -- once there was an initial statement made, say, a follow-up question by a moderator, to ask them to challenge them on something, I would suggest if you use that format that you not do it for the entire debate, that it may be --be combined with -- there would be two or three questions that they knew ahead of time. And then the rest of the questions would be spontaneous.

This was done with the Buckley FIRING LINE debates on the primaries in 88. I remember the Houston debate especially, there was a question asked, if they knew ahead of time about whose pictures would you have in the Cabinet room and they had had some time to think about that. I think that's a valid point, but I think you can balance it with some other things

KIRK: I'm sure and I hope that there are questions from the audience. The microphones are keyed into television and through the good auspices of C-SPAN we're able to broadcast this. And I would ask those who have questions to come to the microphone so that the television audience can hear the questions as well and we welcome those at this time.

FAHRENKOPF: While people are formulating, maybe I can ask you one more. And just go and line up behind the microphone if you have a question.

As I recall during the 88 campaigns, there were two experiments in different formats that were taken voluntarily by four candidates. I was present in Des Moines when it was Pete Dupont and Bruce Babbitt -- had a debate, which was just with a moderator, and it tended more toward the classical debate. And if I'm correct, I didn't see, I think Jack Kemp and Richard Gephardt also experimented with a format that not -- which did not involve a press panel's questions and answers. I wondered what your observations of those experiments were, Diane

CARLIN: I'm having -- there were so many primary debates and I watched several -- I don't remember if I saw either of those. I have experienced other debates that were similar on more state level and have found that they can be more successful as far as getting more depth if, indeed, you have fewer topics covered within the time period and that probably is the key as much as anything, is how

much time you've allotted for discussion of a particular topic.

I think some of the debates that I remember as being most effective from the 88 primary debates were those that centered on a single issue area, such as -- there was one I remember at the Iowa State Fair in the summer of 87 that dealt only with economic issues. And there were multiple questions on that. But when you got finished, you had a pretty good sense of the economic issues. And then there was another at a university somewhere I think in the South on education.

So, I could refer back to those, but I'm afraid I can't specifically talk about the two you mentioned.

KIRK: We have a number of other topics we're going to be discussed during the course of the afternoon. But before you leave the podium, I wonder if you have any observations about the next topic that we'll hear discussed and that is the role of journalists in debates and whether there's any opinion or any area of that general topic that would be helpful to hear from your point of view

CARLIN: One thing I would reference as far as the role of journalists is that I do think they have a role in the debates and we shouldn't remove them entirely. Maybe the way we include them should be changed.

There's been some research that's been done by Robert Meadow and I think it's Marilyn Jacksonbeek on the triple agenda of presidential debates, that really what you have operating are three agendas. There is the press agenda, there is the candidates' agenda and there is the public agenda -- and that a good debate format will find a way of serving all of those agendas.

The press should be included, because they have followed the campaign for 18 months. They perhaps know those areas that haven't been developed very well by the candidates and need to do some probing. But I don't think they should be used exclusively, perhaps, to set the agenda with the questions, because often times, as some Jacksonbeek and Meadows research showed, the public agenda, those things that were indicated as highest on the public's set of interest in public opinion polls were never asked about in the debates.

PROF. UNGER: I wonder if I might ask Diana and really all three members on the stage to comment on the question that I have and that is we seem to be assuming in what has become, I think, an era of information by impression that the presidential debates are not merely fixtures, but that they are good ideas, that the debates as they exist should, in fact, continue.

And I was wondering, in terms of A, the existence of research; and, B, the existence of your own impressions, what the correlation is between the ability of an individual to perform well as a candidate in a debate and the ability of that individual to perform well as the winner of the debate, i.e., as the occupant of the White House. Is there any real strong correlation between effectiveness as a debater and effectiveness as a president? Is this a wise way, in short, to conduct our election, especially given your research that indicates that it is so important to the American people making up their mind?

CARLIN: I knew Professor Unger would come up with a challenging question. I think that there are several things that people glean from debates when they watch them. And I don't think that necessarily because someone is a good debater they necessarily be a good decision maker, a good administrator and that type of thing.

There has been some research done by several people as to what a debate really does prove to people who are watching. And what they tend to get a handle on is someone's leadership potential.

And we talk about the image versus the issues dichotomy in campaigns.

But, quite frankly, the image that I think a lot of people are looking for under this broad title of leadership is how people do make decisions, how they do respond to something unexpected such as Bernie Shaw's question. I think that question told us a lot about Michael Dukakis' personality. I think it told us a lot of things.

There were several other questions during that particular campaign that I think gave people insights into these people who were likely to be their next president.

So, in that sense, maybe on a purely debate scale skills level the best person as a debater may not be the best president. But I do think that the public can glean some things from those debates about personality and leadership style.

Someone did some research, I know, on the 76 debates and said that if you paid very careful attention to the some of the responses that you got from Jimmy Carter, you would have gotten a very good indication of management style and administrative style based on what came through on those questions.

KIRK: I guess I would respond by saying that while nexus and linkage between performance on stage and a debate may not relate precisely to the ability to lead and educate and preside over the governance of this country -- but given our campaigns, in my view, it's the best of a series of things that are going on, some good and some much less good in our current campaign atmosphere.

Every other -- almost every other hour and minute of a candidate's schedule is managed totally. All in advertising is pre-scripted and filmed and too much of it, I would have to add, is negative these days, and I think as a result, you get a pox on both their houses and as a result you do more to turn voters off than to turn them out.

You have that. You have the set up photo opportunities, all these things that are managed and structured to provide the most positive response from -- to the audience.

This is the one window where two individuals, while they may pre-rehearse their sound bite answer here and there -- that you really can get glimpse of what makes this individual tick. We had 90 minutes to see them both together and compare different qualities and aspects. And while, as I say, the stage and setting of a debate is not perfect, I think and hope that they will be permanent.

I think one of the purposes of today is not only to try to be responsive to your question in a general sense, but perhaps to make them even better in terms of allowing an audience to get an impression of the views, the values, the vision, the character and the abilities of these individuals who are contesting for that office.

So, I -- they're not perfect but we're going to work to improve them and I'm a cheerleader.

FAHRENKOPF: I tend to agree with both. I would just add something else. As Diana indicated, while those of us who are involved in the campaigns either as journalists or being involved on one side or another from a partisan viewpoint have heard the answers before. We know -- we kind of can guess from the question as asked if it's a substantive issue question what the response is going to be.

For those men and women who are at home and have not been hearing those answers over a period of time and, in fact, do learn positions, they're not only seeing the candidates acting on their feet and how they control themselves and respond to things, but hopefully there's substance there on the issues, which go into that decision making process. So, it's a mix of things. It's not just who is the best debater. What they're, in fact, saying we hope also is added.

QUESTION: I have a question that goes to the form of debates. This last time around there seemed to be a large number of canned answers by all candidates in debates and I wonder whether Professor Carlin can suggest a format that would lessen these canned, rehearsed answers.

MS. CARLIN: The question was whether or not there's a format that can reduce the number of canned, prepared answers in a debate. I don't know that you can entirely escape it. And I talked on this issue from two perspectives, one a researcher and one the wife of a politician who's just getting ready to run for office again. And I know from having sat in on his preparation and that of other candidates I worked with that you do anticipate, you do think through everything possibly that you're going to get.

The only way that you can maybe take some of that canned type of atmosphere out is with some cross-examination from your opponent, follow-ups that cause people to really delve into what was said. I don't think we'll eliminate it completely. I don't think it's the nature of the beast.

I was a debate coach for eight years. And my debaters certainly never went into a round without having been prepared on every possible argument at least. There were some that occasionally surprised them, but generally speaking, it was just kind of the nature of the debate that you anticipate and you prepare.

FAHRENKOPF: Let me ask another question. One of the things that I know cause great concern to Paul and I and certainly to Bernie Shaw -- and since we're in the format mode, I know that the representatives of the candidates in the last hour will probably also discuss this -- but Paul and I, for about 20 minutes prior to the debate actually commencing, urged the audience not to become involved in the debate by cheering answers or booing answers or responding, which impacts in a number of ways the people at home here. And, of course, it takes time. It takes some of the valuable time away from what is going on.

As I recall, the first of the modern era presidential debates between Mr. Nixon and Mr. Kennedy, that took place in a room with just Howard K. Smith as the moderator without an audience of any sort. Do you have any comment on the presence of an audience as opposed to just having -- whether it's a panel of journalists or a moderator -- with the candidates isolated?

CARLIN: I was at two of the three debates. And of all of the problems that may have occurred, I think, perhaps that was probably the biggest one. I got the feeling from watching the tapes it wasn't nearly as big a problem to those people viewing. But I could see some merit in limiting the number of people if you simply can't control an audience.

The other way of controlling an audience is that any time that comes out for that is taken from the speaker's time. And I think maybe their followings would be quieted if they knew that it meant their candidate wasn't going to get an answer. I think we have time for one more. One more question and then we're going to need to rap it up.

QUESTION: I'll try to keep it to a short question, then. I'm wondering, Diana, if you could talk a little bit about how you define clash when you're looking at these debates. In a number of the after graphic studies that we've done at the University of Nebraska, we've actually seen that what debate coaches consider clash, the public often considers attacking and really has a negative reaction to it. I wonder if you could just talk a little bit about how you define clash.

CARLIN: The question deals with the definition of clash that, from a debate perspective, it's very different from what the audience perceives and what we would consider good clash as debate people might be perceived as being very negative.

I think it's a very good issue to raise and it's one reason why I have some mixed feelings about whether or not we do cross-examination, because they can become very confrontive and while, you know, it's great debate and it's getting at some things, there is that perception that there's negatives.

So, I think that's one reason why I would propose that there be, you know, the option for questions as opposed to making sure it's in there in all of them. Because I think you could end up with the audience more upset about the format and about the fact that these people were being very antagonistic than, you know, with the formats they have now.

Do either of you have any final comments?

FAHRENKOPF: I think you covered it well. Thank you.

KIRK: Thank you very much, Diana.

CARLIN: Thank you all for your comments.

KIRK: The next panel will focus on the role of journalists in debates.

. . .

PAUL KIRK: The next panel will focus on the role of journalists in debates. Is there a role? What is the appropriate role? How should journalists be selected, if they are to have a role? And what are the other concerns that make this a particularly critical question?

In moderating this panel and lending his views to it as well, we are fortunate to have a veteran of television and politics and coverage. I'll finish the introduction and then we'll cue up a tape that's going to roll.

Sander Vanocur is a senior correspondent of ABC News. He will moderate this next panel and was one of the panelists in the first Kennedy-Nixon debate in 1960. He moderated the vice presidential debate in 1984, and was ABC News' chief overview correspondent covering the Democratic and Republican candidates in both 1980 and 1984. In 1988, Sander was the anchor for "Business World" and interviewed both Vice President Bush and Governor Dukakis on their respective economic agendas.

When Sandy takes the podium, he will also introduce the members of his distinguished panel, and we look forward to hearing their views.

While the technicians are getting things together, Frank Fahrenkopf mentioned at the outset that there's another project which the Commission on Presidential Debates has undertaken. It is an oral history project recorded on videotape, produced and inaugurated by Ed Fuhy who is our talented Commission's executive producer. It was started in early 1989 and consists of interviews with former presidents and presidential candidates on their own observations about debates and their debating experiences.

This will be the only repository--video or otherwise--of debate experiences recorded by our former presidents. The work is ongoing. There are other tapes to be undertaken. But we have excerpts from

Presidents Ford, Carter and Reagan; and all the interviews were conducted by Jim Lehrer. And we're delighted to have him anchoring this project for us. So, as soon as the tapes are ready, we can roll.

Thank you.

(Documentary Clip #1) JIM LEHRER: Generally, Mr. President, do you think these debates should be a required part of the political process, the presidential election process?

PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN: I'm inclined to lean that way, yes, because--and they could in different formats than maybe we've had in the past, but the content is finally there before the people. The people have a right to know all they can in comparison to make a decision. But if the debate is concentrated then on the major issues and the views of the two individuals on those issues, then it is of service to the people.

PRESIDENT JIMMY PRESIDENT CARTER: I think it would be very good to set up this sort of thing maybe with a responsible, objective, fair, unbiased kind of sponsorship, and then take all the guesswork out of it.

PRESIDENT GERALD PRESIDENT FORD: In my judgment, we ought to have two presidential debates, plus one between the vice presidential candidates. That's adequate. On the other hand, I think we ought to change the format.

LEHRER: What's wrong with the one that they use now?

PRESIDENT FORD: To some extent, it becomes a newsman's press conference, and I'm not sure that's the best way to determine the comparative qualities of the two candidates. I would cut back on the press interrogation--maybe one debate should be with the traditional format we've had and the second debate, a more head-to-head confrontation.

LEHRER: Did you go in there with a feeling, though, that you--I can take this guy? I mean, was there a sense of competition about it that evening, for that 90 minutes?

PRESIDENT CARTER: Yes, there was. This was really the first time I had had a direct confrontation with President Ford. And as a matter of fact, although we were hot competitors, I had an admiration for him because I knew the difficult circumstances under which he had become president. So there wasn't any personal animosity or vituperation there. There was one of respect for a very worthy opponent--but, still, a highly competitive atmosphere. And I think I did go in as though it was an athletic competition, or a very highly charged competitive arrangement.

When you have a media event like that, even a White House press conference in later years, you can anticipate 85-90 percent of the questions that are going to be asked by watching your program or by reading the New York Times or Washington Post. You can pretty well say, "Well, I know these questions are likely to be asked because they're burning issues."

LEHRER: (Regarding the 28-minute break) Everyone in America who was watching was very--couldn't figure it out. It was unreal. What was it like standing there?

PRESIDENT CARTER: I watched that tape afterwards and it was embarrassing to me that both President Ford and I stood there almost like robots. We didn't move around. We didn't walk over and shake hands with each other. We just stood there.

PRESIDENT FORD: I suspect both of us would have liked to sit down and relax while the technicians were fixing the system. But I also think both of us were hesitant to make any gesture that might look like we weren't physically or mentally able to handle a problem like this.

PRESIDENT CARTER: But the fact is that we didn't know at what instant all of the power was going to come back on and the transmission would be resumed. So it was a matter of nervousness. I guess President Ford felt the same way.

PRESIDENT FORD: Because that was 28 excruciating minutes. You're on TV nationally, and yet you're not doing anything.

PRESIDENT CARTER: I don't know who was more ill at ease, me or President Ford.

LEHRER: It looked like a tie to me.

PRESIDENT CARTER: It was a tie. Neither one of us were at ease,
no question about that. But those events, to some degree, let the American public size up the candidates.

PRESIDENT FORD: So it was uncomfortable, and I think unfortunate. But we both survived.

MODERATOR SANDER VANOCUR (ABC News): This is the second part of the program. I'm Sander Vanocur. As Paul Kirk said, I'm a senior correspondent at ABC News. I now have a program called "Business World." I don't know really why I was asked to moderate this panel this afternoon, except possibly for two reasons--one, I'm considered wise. Being considered wise in Washington means you've outlived all your earlier mistakes.

The second reason may be that I am one of the survivors from the first debate in late September 1960 between John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon. There are only three survivors, three of the panelists. Stewart Novins of CBS, Bob Fleming of ABC and Charles Warner of Mutual are dead; President Kennedy is dead. Howard K. Smith, the moderator, is still alive; Richard Nixon is still alive; and I'm still alive--though some would argue.

I didn't think they were going to invite President Nixon because it might turn into a discussion between the former president and me about what happened in 1960. And then some wag would make a documentary called "Milhous and Me."

So here I am. I'll introduce our panelists. Immediately on my left, David Broder, chief political correspondent and senior associate editor of the Washington Post; Ken Bode, who used to be one of us--will always be one of us, who now is the director of the Center for Contemporary Media at DePauw University and an adjunct fellow at the Hudson Institute in Indianapolis; John Mashek, formerly of the U.S. News and World Report, the Atlanta Constitution, and now political correspondent and White House correspondent for the Boston Globe, who asked Janet Brown to specifically have me note in the introduction that it's Mashek, as in Czech--which confirms what all of us have long suspected--that

Mashek has a real instinct for always being there to root for the side that's already won.

And our final panelist is Margaret Warner of Newsweek, now the chief diplomatic correspondent, and also a former political correspondent. And for those of us who are political correspondents, once a political correspondent, always.

The issue is the role of journalists in debate. I will give each of the panelists five minutes, if they choose to; and then we will have them grill each other. And then I'll open the discussion to questions from the floor.

David?

DAVID BRODER (Washington Post): I can do mine in substantially less than five minutes. My answer to the question, What role for journalists in debate? None. I think it would be wonderful if they threw a debate and no reporters showed up to ask questions--just have the candidates walk out on stage, look around to see who's going to be asking the questions, find nobody else there, and force them to deal with each other.

I think the role of journalists in a political event of this size is much too intrusive. We ought to be covering the story, not participating in the story. I think the temptation to dream up the question that is going to change history is always there, and has occasionally been succumbed to. Those wonderful hypotheticals that are going to suddenly reveal the character of an individual is something that I--is a role, frankly, I don't think a journalist ought to play.

I think reporters ought never to be in a position where directly or implicitly they are subject to selection and clearance by the campaigns that they're covering.

Finally, I would say that the opportunity to participate in the debates takes too much of the pressure off the candidates to have regular news conferences. What we ought to be about is negotiating and insisting on a simple rule of behavior for presidential candidates. If there are 168 hours in a week, you control 167-1/2 of them. We want one half-hour a week in return for our attendance on you. Whatever you choose to do the other 167-1/2 hours, we want a news conference that is a legitimate news conference for all media.

I think the public would learn a great deal from watching candidates deal with reporters in news conferences as, indeed, they do from President Bush's regular news conferences at the White House.

But that's what reporters ought to be doing--is insisting on and participating in news conferences, and the debates ought to be for the candidates.

VANOCUR: Ken Bode.

KEN BODE (Center for Contemporary Media, DePauw University; CNN): Thank you, Sandy.

It's hard to disagree with anything that David has said, and I'll try to do mine in substantially under five minutes as well.

I noticed in Ed Fuhy's list of debates that have been held from time immemorial, he left out the debate that I moderated in Iowa in 1988--or I guess it was '87--which has got to have been the dullest debate that anybody ever moderated at any time. It was the Iowa Municipal League debate. There were seven candidates in that debate.

And we had--it was suggested a little while ago perhaps we ought to have the questions, all the questions go to the candidates beforehand. Well, in that debate, they did go to the candidates beforehand. All the questions were given to the candidates beforehand. The moderator's job was to

step out in front of the microphone and ask--repeat the question for the audience, essentially.

And we achieved the perfect symmetry in that debate. They had all the questions in advance; they had the all answers in advance. All the questions were the same; and all the answers were the same.

And the only thing interesting about that debate that night was that the moderator learned at about 87 minutes into the debate that it was not a 90-minute debate; it was, indeed, a two-hour debate. And it was a dicey three seconds while we made that transition.

I think that, basically, we may be beating a dead horse. In 1984, we had seminar after seminar about straw polls--and how there were too many straw polls, straw polls didn't decide anything, and there shouldn't be any straw polls.

Well, in 1988, there were no straw polls. And since that time we've talked a lot about debates and what we ought to do about debates.

In 1987 and '88, everybody in the state of New Hampshire or the state of Iowa who had a gymnasium or could charter a gymnasium held a debate. And one way or the other, the candidates went to them. And when there weren't enough debates on the agenda for the candidates, as you know, people like Bruce Babbitt and Jack Kemp and DuPont and so forth scheduled their own debates. They hired their own halls; they hired their own TV cameras; they hired their own satellites and they conducted their own debates.

So, really a thousand flowers were allowed to bloom in '88; but it seems to me that, unless the Democrats come up with somebody who's interested in the nomination pretty soon and running for it, there may not be any need for debates in 1992, or even primaries.

But if there are--but if there are, I have two minds about what David said. I think the job of a journalist is just about as David defined it--except that, in a way, in debates we act as a surrogate for the informed citizen, or the citizen that wishes to be informed and isn't there. It's our job to take issues a little further, to raise the questions that haven't been addressed, to ask the questions that need to be pressed a little bit further that we can't get answers to out in those press conferences where they're being asked again and again and being ducked.

The only reason it's different is that it's on live television and so many people are watching. If you can't get an answer to an Iran-contra question at a press conference, if you can't get an answer to an Iran-contra question on the candidate's plane, you're not likely to be able to get an answer to an Iran-contra question that's any different at a debate--except that there are millions and millions of Americans watching and making their own minds up about something like that.

I think the problem is that--I agree with David--that the notion of clearance by the campaigns is not a good one. It sometimes leaves you with reporters who have had no experience covering the candidates at all that year and who are added only because they are sort the least-common denominator that can be agreed upon by the campaign; or because they happen to be a female and black, and both are needed on the panel--and that has happened.

But next time, I think, if we have debates and a campaign and journalists involved, I fear that Bernie Shaw's question--which I think of as the primal question, which probably would not have been asked to Mr. Dukakis by Mr. Bush because I just don't think Mr. Bush could have mustered that question. But I think there will be a rivalry to ask the primal question by all the journalists next time.

VANOCUR: Mr. Mashek

JOHN MASHEK (Boston Globe): Thanks, Sandy.

I'm going to agree in part with Dave Broder and dissent heavily in part--and I could say it would be wrong, as Mr. Nixon, that I could expect that from a Chicago Cub fan; but I'll overlook that.

In my checkered career, I've served on campaign panels in 1984 with U.S. News--the Bush-Ferraro debate; and in '88, the Dukakis-Bush debate with the Atlanta Constitution. My colleague, Tom Oliphant, says if you can get on one in '92 with the Globe, you'll do a hat trick. And my colleague, Curtis Wilke, says it just shows you can't hold a job.

The selection and format, I think, is almost inconsequential to the final result of the debate. I think there should only be a moderator and the two candidates. I believe the best debate in the 1984 campaign was in Illinois when it was Rather and the candidates--the Democratic candidates close in. I think the voters got a real good shot up close of the candidates.

I don't know what David's proposing about people just walking out there. You're going to have to have somebody policing this thing. That close-in type of format really forces the opponents to think on their feet, and I think without the panel of journalists who do form a filter. And I would just as soon get rid of them, too.

Of course, in the '88 campaign, the Dukakis people were up against Jim Baker and they were anxious to have the debates and were about ready to agree to anything. And so we had a panel of journalists in those debates. And I don't know if it worked well or didn't, but the Dukakis people agreed to it.

In 1984, about this clearance situation, Bob Boyd of the Knight-Ridder papers and I called the League of Women Voters and we said that we were going to resign in 24 hours if they didn't complete selection of the panel--which, indeed, did bog down, I guess, into, you know, one candidate would kill names; the other candidate would, or they didn't like names. It became a real contest. Well, they did fill out the panel.

In 1988, I think that the panel selection--and I don't know all the ins and outs--worked pretty well. Nobody asked me what questions to ask. And in David's newspaper, a columnist--certainly not him--wrote right after the panel was selected that, of course, there was no prospect that its members would decline the invitation.

Too much ego is involved, and this is the age of the TV-media people. Well, this comes from a journalist who certainly is on television a lot; and I don't see his ego being hurt too much by going on television. And if we're talking about media events, political conventions are media events, presidential press conferences are, and the Washington Post and the New York Times are sure as the devil covering those events.

So I don't see anything, you know, by saying something's a TV show; what isn't these days in politics?

The long and short of it is that we can wring our hands about the selection process, but we do get a view of the candidates up close. Let's face it, friends. Dukakis had his shots in 1988. He perhaps held his own in the first debate, but he blew it in the second.

In 1992, you can set your watch on the fact that the White House is going to be in control of the arrangements. People will try to say, well, that's not going to happen--but it's going to happen. But I think that the president is going to be the heavyweight champ. He's not going to be defeated by a decision. He's going to have to be knocked out. The Democrat who does it is going to have to beat him clear in a debate. And I hope there are some.

Thank you.

VANOCUR: Margaret Warner?

MARGARET WARNER (Newsweek): Thank you, Sandy.

I think, in analyzing the role of the press in the debates, we're all agreed on two irreconcilable factors. One is that the debates do give the voter the most unvarnished look at the candidates; and we wouldn't want to eliminate debates.

On the other hand, I can speak from experience as being a panelist in a debate. You really are nothing but a prop for the candidate's production. They have set the rules. It's true they don't know what the questions are, at least in the general election. But they've set the rules about follow-up questions, about the order of questions, and so on. And you are reduced to a prop, no matter how hard you try not to be.

Now I don't think it's practical for the press as an institution to think it can force the candidates to agree in advance to debate each other one-on-one, or even, I would think, with one moderator in the general election because, as John pointed out, I think there's always one candidate who thinks it's in his interests to be protected and he doesn't need to take any risks.

So, I'd like to offer a modest proposal for the next panel of reporters that's chosen. And what I think they ought to do is walk out on the stage; and when the house lights dim and the stage lights go on, the moderator should just turn and say, you know, thank you ladies and gentlemen and thank you to the candidates, and we're going to change the rules up here. Nobody here's going to ask you a question. We're going to ask you just to debate one another for the next 90 minutes, and cross-examine one another. We're going to stay here to make sure you don't come to blows. And, Candidate A, why don't you start?

And I think if that happened once, perhaps the press might be in a position then to--I mean, the candidates would be a position then that they'd have to either look foolish by leaving the stage--it would be sort of Nashua II; or they'd have to engage. I think you'd see a real debate.

VANOCUR: Can we address for a moment this whole selection process?

If memory serves me, I don't remember who told me I'd be representing NBC in 1960. I was simply told to report to Chicago on a Monday--I think it was the last Monday in September--where Don Hewitt, who is the director, would show us how to turn around and introduce ourselves; and then the sequence of the questioning.

I don't think there was any palaver between the camps and the network and the newspapers about which reporter would be acceptable. I think the institutions--whether network or newspaper--said it will be this person or that person; and I think that was the subsequent process throughout the rest of the remaining three debates.

Is there any way--and any of you can answer--that you're going to stop the two camps from engaging in this vetting process. I don't know when it began.

WARNER: Well, couldn't you have a blind drawing of news organizations, and then, just as we do with presidential news conference, the Washington Post chooses who goes for The Post to the president's news conference, rather than the candidate choosing?

The problem would be, of course--I mean, you can see problems in it because who would be in the pool and who wouldn't be in the pool? But that would be one way of doing it.

VANOCUR: Now, it's true in 1960--and I don't want to make that the mother lode--but it was

true in 1960 that not all the panelists had covered the campaign. Should, as David Broder suggests--not demands--David, should it be somebody who's covered the campaign?

BRODER: I don't want to be sort of rigid about that, but I don't think we ought to be playing that game about trying to work out modifications of the rules.

I think--to answer John's point--I do think there is clearly a need for a moderator to say the first topic we'd like to hear you discuss is drug enforcement. You've got two minutes to tell us what you think about that, and move it on when they seem to have exhausted themselves on that.

But I do not see any value, either for journalism or for the public of us playing that kind of role in that debate--no matter how we're selected or what we've done.

There is a standard for reporters covering politics to engage with politicians. It's called a news conference. That's what we ought to focus on getting set up and institutionalized before we go through another campaign in 1992 where one of the candidates at least decline to answer questions from the reporters covering him.

How can a self-respecting news organization put itself in the position of supplying somebody for something, as Margaret describes, where the format is structured and controlled by the candidates--and, at the same time, have those very candidates deny that news organization's reporters access to ask them simple, basic, routine questions while they're out campaigning for the presidency?

If you can reconcile those two things journalistically, you're much more skillful than I am.

MASHEK: Can I respond to that a little bit?

First, Dave, you could choose not to cover it; and I doubt if that would happen. Second, I just go back, I think, the moderator format; and I think people like Chairman Kirk and Fahrenkopf, who exhibited some leadership this last time round, and the Commission can be very tough and say no to people like Jim Baker who then he can come in as the enforcer and the Dukakis people yield to him and say there is not going to be a panel.

Now, they'll say well, there are not going to be any debates. So be it. There's no debates. And then the Democrat can say, well, the Bush people didn't want debates--and they can fight that one out over why the debate process broke down. But somebody's going to have to be tough about it.

VANOCUR: Ken, will candidates agree to debate if there's not the mediating force of reporters on a panel?

BODE: Yes, I think they would. I think they would agree to debate. I think they would agree to a Lincoln-Douglass style debate. We came a little bit close to that with the candidates volunteering that kind of thing in the primaries of 1988.

But I think there's going to have to be some force representing the public that makes them come to that debate.

As I recall, in 1988, Chairmen Fahrenkopf and Kirk thought they had agreement of all the candidates to participate in these debates under a certain format. And you find out, once the candidates are nominated, that the weight of the candidate and the interest of that candidate both get very much stronger, and they can renegotiate all the things that have been negotiated.

I would love to see what David is proposing. I think a moderator is important to have--but a kind of Lincoln-Douglass style debate with a moderator just to maintain order and keep things going. I don't agree with David, entirely, that journalists have no role in something like this.

I think basically it was functional and useful to have three journalists sitting up at the panel in Texas or California or wherever we were at that time asking Dan Quayle, What did you say you would do in the first few minutes after taking the presidency?, because he didn't seem to be answering the question--follow-up questions like that.

I still believe that you're going to get a better opportunity for the American public to judge candidates at debates than they're going to get them at press conferences.

VANOCUR: Can you address, though, the fundamental matter that I think David Broder has brought up?

You used the word "surrogates." I don't know who appointed us surrogates; and I must say, again--and I've stated this publicly at past meetings--that I agree with David Broder. Why should we be there? Aren't we too deeply involved in the political process already?

MASHEK: Well, I think those are two separate questions. Maybe we are too deeply involved, but that's not a case with anybody that we've talked about so far here.

I think we're there because we cover the candidates, that we represent major news organizations--or any news organizations. We're familiar with what the issues are; we're familiar with how far the debate has gone on those issue. We're familiar with what questions the candidates have not answered at a given point in time. And we can, as surrogates for an informed citizenry, push those matters a little bit further.

VANOCUR: Margaret, do you agree with that or disagree?

WARNER: Well, I actually agree with David that we should have only a moderator. I think a journalist makes a good moderator.

But I think the problem will be that, if everybody on this table and everybody in this room as a journalist refuses to participate, they'll just go get local reporters somewhere.

I think the big problem is, how do you force the candidates to agree to a format in which they can't hide behind us? Now, I think the Commission with the parties offers an opportunity--maybe for the first time--in that I think if the Commission really were tough about it, the Commission now has a certain credibility, a certain standing as an independent institution. And the candidates, I think, would be hard-pressed to shop around for another sponsor.

So perhaps in '92 or '96, there will be an opportunity for the Commission on our behalf to essentially refuse to put in a panel.

VANOCUR: David?

BRODER: I think there is an answer to the leverage question. It goes to a deeper point; but let me just stay with the practical. The deeper point is, Whose campaign is it? We have accepted, I think, far too passively the notion that it is up to the candidates and their advisers to determine what takes place and what's talked about and how it's talked about in a presidential campaign.

This campaign belongs to the public. It's the public's time to get its questions answered and its concerns addressed. But when you're talking about presidential campaigns, you don't have to go to theory. There is very simple leverage. We are paying for these campaigns. The public pays for these campaigns. All it takes is a very simple appropriation rider saying in accepting this X million

dollars of public financing, the candidate agrees to participate in X number of debates under a format to be established by the Presidential Commission on Debates, period.

I don't think George Bush would veto that bill, and I don't think he would ignore that law if it were, in fact, in law.

VANOCUR: John Mashek, should we add anything more in terms of legislation to the legislation that I think has already screwed up the American legal system royally?

MASHEK: I'm worried about more legislation and the 500 amendments that would be tacked on in the United States Senate before it ever passed. I don't want to get in a quarrel with David here; but I've got to go back to a point on the bottom line on the debates, and how the voters are served.

And since the Commission passed this out, I see they picked a column of David's out from Winston-Salem in which he says the first debate of the campaign did what debates were supposed to do. It did not decide the election; but it sharply clarified the choice the voters have to make.

Well, if the process was bad, I think it did clarify the choice the voters have to make. And, again, I just go back--I don't want a panel of journalists out there, either. But I think that we need to have the debates. I think they do serve the voters. We found out a lot about the candidates. And I don't think that a fuss and quarrel over this selection process is so terrible that any self-respecting paper or newspaper wouldn't have their people on--that a lot of papers have permitted and a lot of damn good newspaper editors have allowed their people to be on panels.

VANOCUR: Ken?

BODE: What would you say to a proposition that you had the presidential--you recognized that a panel is useful in some ways, at least for some debates?

I agree that we ought to see the candidates face-to-face for an hour-and-a-half debating Lincoln-Douglass style, if we could. But if you say that a panel is the right way to go but journalists is the wrong way to go, what about a format where each political party provided two panelists--so we would have Michael Dukakis versus George Bush. On the Democratic side, we might have Barney Frank asking some of the questions; on the Republican side, Newt Gingrich. And the candidates for president couldn't do anything but accept. How about that?

VANOCUR: Well, the trouble with that proposal is that when a party gets into party, it reduces the national committee to dust. The White House is, in effect, the national committee of that party. And I argued in the Annenberg program that Baker and the other people--that the White House would not be able to turn down something like David has advocated. And Al Hunt of the Wall Street Journal corrected me, and I think properly that Jim Baker would run roughshod over it, whether the party--i.e., Frank Fahrenkopf wanted it or not.

What do you think, Margaret?

WARNER: I think you're absolutely right--no offense intended to Frank Fahrenkopf. I think that's very true. I think the candidates when they get to the general election, there's just too much riding on it. I think Ken's right. During the primaries, they're willing to experiment with a lot of formats, they're so desperate for the exposure. The stakes aren't that high--it's just next Tuesday's primary.

But I think in the general, there's got to be some kind of real authority--and I really think the Commission is probably it--that is as insulated as possible from political pressure on either side.

MASHEK: Let's take presidential debates and divide them--the fall and what happens in the spring. I wanted to turn in my merit badge during the first debate, I think, in '84 when Dr. Tom Oliphant produced the memorable phrase "St. Anselm's disease," as the torpor swept over the audience.

It started off all right with Ted Koppel; and then it went to Phil Donahue who did a kabuki dance in the second part--and I think Norman Lear--was I right--was one of the major forces. And it was brought about because people were you saying you have to liven these things up.

Well, I come from the school that considers good politics and good government dull. But in the initial debates, isn't it better to have a moderator--because you can't operate it without a moderator, can you, David, with six or seven--

BRODER: No, you can't.

MASHEK: So, you're drawing a line, aren't you, between the--

BRODER: No, I think you need a moderator in every case.

VANOCUR: Moderator in every case? Any disagreement. All right. Then, what's wrong with having a moderator in two-on-two?

BODE: I'll disagree. I think that sometimes during the primaries the self-starting debates--which were kind of useful debates where they picked the subject and just went at each other, I thought those were pretty good debates. They didn't need a moderator. They went at it just fine.

VANOCUR: Right. I want to conclude. Are--is the consensus of this group--I know where David stands--the other three of you, though--that, if you don't have the panels, the candidates will very likely not agree to debate? Is that your position, Ken, John and Margaret?

WARNER: No. Well, I don't think so. I mean, I think what we've been discussing up here are ways to somehow prevent that from happening. And I keep going back to the Commission; and I just think that, in some way, between the press and the Commission there ought to be a way to simply say there will be one moderator. And I don't think--you're going to have at least one candidate who wants to debate, and then you always have that gave of chicken.

And you're right--maybe if it's a sitting president, he'll just refuse; but I think it'll be difficult.

VANOCUR: Let me before I go to--go ahead, John.

MASHEK: No, I think I agree with that. I just think in the last debate, preparation and the debate on the debate, Jim Baker clearly had the experience; and the Dukakis people apparently weren't too concerned about if there was a debate about who sabotaged them, if they would have had somebody experienced like Dick Moe up there, I think he could have given Baker some problems. But it appeared he had clear sailing and maintained control. And I think the Commission ought to have

control.

VANOCUR: Are the two chairmen still here? Can I put the question to you each: What do you think would happen if journalists refused to participate, and they said just one-on-one with a moderator? Chairman Fahrenkopf?

FAHRENKOPF: I think that we've come to a point, if we realize, first of all, that debates have not been institutionalized--I mean, we had the Kennedy-Nixon debates, and then we skipped how many years? I'm trying to remember.

VANOCUR: Three elections.

FAHRENKOPF: And I can remember being in Baltimore a few years ago and Ronald Reagan debated John Anderson and Jimmy Carter was God.

I think, however, with the creation of the Commission that candidates for the presidency of the United States will be expected by the American people to debate, and would debate, regardless of whether it was a panel of reporters or they were standing up there and debating themselves one-on-one.

VANOCUR: Chairman Kirk?

KIRK: I don't disagree with Frank. I think the panel has spoken, I think implicitly and sometimes explicitly, about the fact that debates in the context of our campaigns are not only important--perhaps essential. I don't think an incumbent president or a challenger is going to put himself in a position of denying you people a right to watch debates and make that an important equation of the elections. And I think my own view would be, despite quibbles about their ideal format, that the pressure of the public, as exercised through the press, would make a debate inevitable, regardless.

I would like to ask a question that relates to that and invites not only comment--but if you think that there's some merit in what I'm going to suggest, to invite the help of the press as well.

If we agree that debates can be improved and that they are going to be institutionalized and that the Commission takes its business seriously, if we took away from this symposium after deliberation as Commission members--and let's say we arrived at a conclusion that at least one of the proposals that the Commission would put forward--that there be a debate without panelists with a moderator--and for purposes of this hypothesis, we'll say it's a non-journalist moderator, and we announced that early--well in advance of perhaps even the primary process, and said--

This is our position. This is what, after listening to and exchanging ideas with professionals we conclude this will best benefit the American people as they make this decision in the quadrennial calendar--and we're going to make it known and make it known it now that is our position.

First of all, I would like to ask the members of the panel whether you think we would get full support from the breadth of the media--electronic and print--about an improved format, and, therefore, would that increase the leverage on whoever the candidates ultimately would be to respond to that kind of a proposal and we could get on with our business?

VANOCUR: David, you want to start?

BRODER: I don't speak for anybody in the press except myself. I mean, I would certainly

support it.

I think, in the real world, the problem would be how do you keep some other eager sponsor from saying to the candidates, listen, if you don't like that format, we'll be glad to talk to you about a different format, if you'll come debate under our auspices? It is, I think, clear, that there is a certain amount of prestige that attaches to the sponsorship of these debates; and you would probably have that kind of competitive pressure.

VANOCUR: Margaret?

WARNER: Well, I agree with David. I can't speak for anyone except myself. And I think the problem might be that, yes, including news organizations such as a network might come in with their own offer. So I think you'd have to do a lot of, you know, back-channeling beforehand.

MASHEK: I like the idea, Paul. But I think it matters less whether the press is behind you. It might--it would help. But what is really critical is whether the two candidates are going to be in agreement on one. And I'll just bet you right now if it's Bush and X in the next election that they'll say, well, we may do that on one occasion, but we want a panel or we want the journalists in the other.

I would like to see both of them done that way, if, indeed, there are two presidential and one vice presidential in the next--what's crucial is getting the candidates and their people to agree to it.

VANOCUR: Ken?

BODE: So far, the news organizations in the general election have not moved into the debate--or at least in the last general elections have not moved into the general election debate. But you can bet your life that if a candidate were--one of the two major-party candidates were unhappy enough to offer a network the opportunity of sponsoring the debate that they would agree to, that the Commission would see an additional debate on the agenda quickly.

VANOCUR: I invite questions now from the floor--and just say who you want the question to be addressed to.

Q: I know your time is limited, but I wondered if you could speak to a slightly different role of the media. That is the role of the media in the presidential debates after the debate is over.

The polls and the results certainly tend to show that, in fact this has become an exercise quite often in terms of the media as theater critics reviewing a first-night performance; and that, in fact, people's votes in these debates are made up on the basis of who they are told wins the debate--not who they perceived initially wins the debate.

I cite only two quick examples. Number one--the Ford-Carter debates. The immediate poll, in terms of President Ford's explanation of domination of Eastern Europe, showed that immediately after that debate, a large percentage of people thought that President Ford had, in fact, won that debate. With the erosion of time--24 hours, 72 hours later, the sentiment shifted drastically in terms of Mr. Carter.

The 1984 Reagan-Mondale debates--the initial perceptions by ABC News, CBS News and USA Today has a general five percentage difference between the candidates immediately after that debate. By the time a week had elapsed, there was a huge percentage that gave their decision to Mr. Mondale.

We speak of the American public as making up their minds.

VANOCUR: What's the question, sir?

Q: Okay. Are they making up their minds, or is the media making up their minds for them?

BRODER: Can I address that first? You're referring to the Teeter study done in 1976 which showed this big gap.

I think in 1988, after President Reagan lost his train of thought, it was not really an issue until the Wall Street Journal--a Jim Perry article--long planned in advance and the networks picked it up--that you got in that.

But aren't you getting into a whole First Amendment question? I'm not for spin control or anything else. How can you stop that? Anybody on the panel?

BODE: Yes. Professor Unger, I think you point out a time that, for a change, journalists played a useful role in this whole thing.

If a lot of American citizens didn't notice that President Ford made that mistake, obviously he had a couple of days afterwards where he was fumbling with the issue. It was headline news; it was leading all the networks. You can't keep it quiet, Professor. I mean, you know, it's something that's an important piece of news--and if then the American people watch the news and they change their minds, that's not so surprising under those circumstances.

VANOCUR: Next question? Congressman Rhodes?

REP. RHODES: Thank you, Sander.

It seems to me that it's obvious that the preparation for debates is absolutely huge on both sides. And it would also seem to me that, in those preparations, there would be two functions at least. One would be to make the candidate come out well; and the second one to make sure that his platform, his program makes sense.

And, Dave, it seems to me that that might be the main reason to have some people in the press there because, if, with your follow-up questions--and I would hope that we would always have follow-up questions, that if one of the candidates really goes off on a tangent and says something is not proper or certainly makes no sense, that about the only way that the American people can be apprised of that, other than by their perception, is if some member of the press or some erudite person there who might not be there are--those who are not members of the press--that they would be ale to pick it up and to say something about it.

In other words, it helps. It seems to me it helps the candidate--or maybe forces the candidate is a better word--to clean up his own program before he goes on the air because not to do so is to perhaps say some things which may haunt him at a later date.

BRODER: I agree with you. I think there is a value in that. But I think that much of that value can be obtained also if the reporters covering the candidate knew that they were going to have an opportunity the next morning at a press conference to go back to some of the assertions the candidate had made the night before.

This happens routinely, as you know, John, in state campaigns. People who run for governor

or senator don't think that they can then go into a shell for a week after they've been in a debate and refused to answer any questions from the reporters who are covering them. Only in the presidential campaign have we indulged politicians in the conceit that they have no responsibility to answer questions about what they may have said to 50 million people.

If it's on television at night, a vigorous questioning of that candidate about some assertion that people have seen him make--and then he starts to backtrack, I think you can count on the people to make their own judgment about that. And it seems to me that that is where the role of the press in sort of bird-dogging and truth-squading what these candidates say in the debate is more appropriately played.

VANOCUR: Yes, sir?

JERRY HACKS: Jerry Hacks from the National Journal. I'd like to follow up on David's point about these press conferences because, as I've been sitting here thinking about this, I realize it would be one thing to see these two candidates debating by themselves; I think that would be fine.

But, on the other hand, if we are possibly giving up the opportunity of seeing the presidential candidates questioned on national prime-time television by members of the national press corps, I think we're giving up something very big. And at the present time, if we take the journalists out of the debate, there really is no format for that--I mean, especially considering the amount of attention that the American people devote to this particular occasion.

Maybe David would talk a little bit more about his desire for press conferences--because we certainly don't have that, at least by the challengers--maybe by the presidential candidate, if he's already in his office, but certainly not regular ones by the challengers.

BRODER: Well, I'd rather hear from my colleagues who have been on debate panels about their reflections on how much opportunity there is for good questioning in the debate panel format.

MASHEK: Well, very little. And, Congressman Rhodes, there really was no opportunity to follow up directly. You could try to wheel it through the other candidate, but that was quite difficult.

I think the idea of press conferences is great, but how are you going to institutionalize that? You got to try to force them to do it; and I think the reporters out covering the campaign certainly do. And if the candidate isn't going to answer, you just hollering questions from the sidelines--try to force them into having press conferences.

But I just don't see how you can make that a part or an offshoot of the debates, other than all of us just try to do our jobs.

VANOCUR: Members of the panel, where did news conferences during a campaign start to die? Was it when we had presidential debates?

I remember in 1960, President Nixon got angry at Phil Potter of the Baltimore Sun--which was easy to do--and stalked out of a conference in Missouri, and didn't have any more news conferences after. Vic Gold, in 1964, used to plead with reporters after a Goldwater conference, For God sakes, why can't you guys print what he means and not what he says?

When did they start to die?

BODE: Well, they haven't always died. As I recall, Dukakis had news conferences during the general election this year? Right?

WARNER: That's right.

VANOCUR: Were they reported on television?

BODE: Well, no, but that's the thing, Sandy. They weren't reported on live television.

MASHEK: In '68, Humphrey had a lot of them, Nixon had almost none, and Wallace had them every day because that's how they got free television. But Nixon had a very structured campaign--didn't want to have any press conferences.

WARNER: It's usually in inverse proportion to the risk the candidates want to take.

VANOCUR: That's exactly right. And we didn't see Jimmy Carter outside the Rose Garden for the entire primary season in 1976. We saw a lot of Rosalyn.

BRODER: That's where we have to go back to the basic question and challenge the premise that certainly I have accepted for 30 years as a reporter and which I now find rather embarrassing--which is this underlying premise that it's up to the candidates to decide what they want to talk about and how they want to talk about it, as if they had some property right in the campaign. And we have to assert institutionally and really try to make this point clearly--first with the public and then with the candidates--this is not the property of the candidates; this campaign belongs to the voters.

This is your campaign, and you have a right to expect certain things from the people who are asking you for your vote. If that becomes the premise, then this sort of nonsense of the controlled-access campaign and so on--all the things that suit the candidate's interests but do not suit the country's interest, I think would become far more suspect, a more dangerous tactic for the candidate to seek to employ.

VANOCUR: Last question, sir?

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: What does removing the press from the debate format do to the quality of debate? There are, in fact, political consequences that attach to the way in which one candidate treats another; and there's been some commentary that candidates are sometimes loath to press a question too hard or to raise certain questions, lest that, in fact, have repercussions for them.

Do you diminish the quality of the debate and the level of information and the kind of information that goes out to the American people?

BODE: There are very few instances that you can point to as cases to observe that. But we did have at least two of those in 1988. One was the debate between Gephardt and Kemp; and the other was the debate between Babbitt and du Pont. And, in both cases, it proved that, first of all, the good debates were good debates.

Secondly, they hired their own satellites; they put up on the airwaves; and all over the country, people who wanted to bring them down--stations that wanted to bring them down could bring them

down. Not many did, but maybe in the future they will.

I don't think it had a deleterious effect on the debate at all. The two candidates agreed on the subjects. They went at each other in a very solid way. And those of us in the press sat in the audience and watched them do it and reported on the event as a event; we weren't part of the event.

I don't know that you'll ever get an agreement to do that in a general election campaign. But it was pretty good for the primaries.

VANOCUR: Any parting comments or shots on the panel?

BRODER: The one thing that it would do, I think, would be to help close the gap that was raised in that earlier question an hour ago about what's the relationship between doing well in the debate and doing well a president. What presidents mostly do is deal with other politicians. A debate or forum between two presidential candidates requires both of them to deal with another politician.

I think it is imaginable under this kind of format that, instead of Bode and Mashek just battling each other, one of them might actually have the wit to say, You know, I've listened to you and I know what your ads are saying, but I don't think we're that far apart on this issue. I think you would probably agree that such-and-such. And suddenly, the American people would get a picture in their living rooms of a real politician doing the work of a real politician--which is looking for a way to work out a problem.

That might be very instructive for people to see that a presidential candidate actually had that kind of ability--which they'll never see in the kind of format that we've been locked into up to this point.

VANOCUR: I'm going to have to end on that note. I will say only in summation--man and boy, I've spent every four years discussing with other people how we're going to cover the next election. And, as my benediction, I offer the words of that wise and ancient surveyor of the political scene in America--Walter Mears of the AP--given to me in the Howard Johnson Motel over breakfast in Augusta, Maine--

When he said that, in 1976, a magazine did a survey of leading political analysts and reporters and had a picture of them about how they were going to cover the campaign the next time around. And everybody said, This time, we'll really concentrate on the issues.

When it came to Walter's picture, the cut-line was, the AP in 1976 will do the same splendid job it did in 1972.

Thank you.

(Applause)

. . .

FRANK FAHRENKOPF: Ladies and gentlemen, we want to begin the final segment of our symposium, and, as earlier announced, it will deal with the candidates' perspective on debates, where they fit into the rhythm of the general election cycle. Do they in fact, as Jim Baker says, freeze the campaign, to use his terminology? How do issues like format, audience, panelists, and scheduling get resolved in the real world of debating? We are very fortunate to have as a moderator today for this section Jules Witcover. Jules is certainly no stranger to everyone here. He's written a syndicated column with Jack Germond for about 300 years, and, as you know, it's carried in The Baltimore Evening Sun and about 120 other newspapers. He's covered every presidential campaign since 1960 and written books on the last four, three of which were co-authored with Jack Germond. He's going to introduce the other panelists when he comes and takes the microphone, but I think the first thing we want to do is show you the second taped excerpt from the oral history of debates that the Commission is sponsoring, and then we'll turn it over to Jules. Thank you very much. Go ahead.

(Document Clip #2) LEHRER: Did you have a strategy going into the debate that you wanted to accomplish the following, if nothing else--or establish a certain thing?

REAGAN: Well, I believe that I had a program--that I wasn't just going in there asking for the job and saying, now, what do we do? I had some things that I thought very definitely should be done and that was what I felt should come out of the debate--that the people had a right to hear what were our plans, what were our philosophies.

LEHRER: First, the 1976 debates--you had three with then-President Ford. It was his decision to debate you. When he made that decision, was that good news from your standpoint?

CARTER: Well, it was, because, as you know, an incumbent president has a lot of advantages--particularly against a relatively unknown governor from Georgia. So I had been quite successful in the primary season; but it was a very disturbing concept for me to be on the stage with the president of the United States. I've never even met a Democratic president in my life, but there was an aura about the presidency that was quite overwhelming.

But I saw it as a good opportunity to let the people know that I could, indeed, deal on an equal basis hopefully with an incumbent president on matters relating to domestic and defense and foreign policy. I was very excited about it, but filled with some trepidation. There was an insecure feeling about being placed, at least for that hour-and-a-half, on an equal basis with the president of our nation. And I had done my background work. I was familiar with the issues. But I would say that it was one of the most difficult challenges that I had ever faced in my life to be appearing before 70-100 million people on the same level with the president.

LEHRER: Do you feel like you made a mistake in deciding to debate Jimmy Carter?

FORD: Not at all, no. When you're in a ball game, whether it's on the gridiron or in politics, you can't hit a home run all the time. You have to look at the overall. So even despite the problem in the second debate about my comments on Poland, I feel that I had--in the three debates put together, I had come out helpfully to my campaign. And I had no regrets at any time.

LEHRER: Generally speaking about the '76 debates, taking all three of them, how important do you think they were in your victory?

CARTER: I don't have any way to know. I think they permitted the American people to make a much more informed decision on election day. And whether I actually gained a lot of points or lost a few, it's hard to say.

I think the general consensus afterwards was that a couple of them were ties and I may have won the third one. But who knows? It's a totally subjective sort of thing. I would say that, although they may not have affected the outcome of the election more than a few percentage points one way or the other--even not that much, they certainly let the American people size us up better.

LEHRER: Assuming president Bush runs for a second term and is the Republican nominee, would you urge him to debate in 1992?

FORD: Yes, I would. I believe presidential debates are in the national interest and two of them are adequate to give the public a full exposure to the candidates. And even though George Bush would be an incumbent president seeking re-election, he should accept--or should agree to a debate with the Democrat nominee. Now, he'll get some advice that the incumbent shouldn't do it; but i've always believed that whether you're a challenger or an incumbent, you ought to be willing to face your opponent face-to-face, and let the public make its own choice.

LEHRER: Even if you're ahead in the polls by thirty points?

FORD: Sure--probably better to do it. (End documentary clip.)

JULES WITCOVER (Baltimore Evening Sun): Well, folks, we've heard from a distinguished academic on format; we've heard from a panel of distinguished journalists on the role of the journalist in a debate. And now we get down to the mud-wrestlers.

(Laughter)

We've got a couple of guys here who have hit more than their share of home runs on the gridiron of politics.

(Laughter)

I think we may get a little more insight into what really goes on inside the planning of debates and the participation in debates from our two panelists. Before I introduce them, though, I'd just like to recall in terms of giving you an idea of how these things really work on the inside the story of the negotiations in the Dukakis-Bush debates. As you recall, Jim Baker and Roger Ayles were the representatives for the Bush campaign, and Paul Brontes and Susan Estrich were the representatives for the Dukakis campaign. Baker wanted only one debate, or possibly two; Ayles didn't care whether there were debates or not; and the Dukakis campaign obviously wanted as many as they could get. So the story is that four of them sat down and they talked for awhile, and Ayles kept saying, hey, we don't think there should be any debates, your guy is a professional debater, he's been on television--and our guy, we all know what a bumbler he is. And they went on and talked like this for awhile, and finally Jim Baker got up and looked at his watch and said, gee, I've got to run out of here, why don't you, Paul and Susan, work it out with Roger, and so that quickly brought about an agreement to have

two debates.

Let me tell you a little bit about our panelists. First I'll tell you a little bit about Charlie, who will be speaking first because he is, as Tom indicated, the winner. Charlie is an old Ronald Reagan and Jack Kemp hand who, after George Bush's nomination, joined the Bush campaign as a senior advisor. Charlie has spent nearly 20 years in politics and has managed the successful campaigns of more than a score of members of Congress, some of whom he will admit to having gotten elected, like Jesse Helms, Bob Dole, Phil Gramm, and David Durenberger. He was political director of the Republican National Committee under Bill Brock, and he ran the Jack Kemp campaign in 1988, and then coordinated the 1988 party platform deliberations and the Bush-Quayle campaign in Texas. In addition, he was a campaign strategist with Bush campaign manager Lee Atwater. Charlie holds a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Florida, and a doctorate from American University, and is a partner in the Alexandria consulting firm of Black, Manafort, Stone & Kelley.

Tom Donilon is a veteran of the Jimmy Carter, Walter Mondale, Joe Biden and Michael Dukakis campaigns with particular involvement in debate preparation for Mondale, Dukakis, and his running mate, Lloyd Bentsen. He worked in the Carter White House and was Carter's chief delegate head hunter in 1980. He helped draft the Democratic Party nomination rules for 1984 and 1988, was campaign coordinator and convention director for the Mondale campaign, a senior advisor to Biden, the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee on Supreme Court nominations. And in the 1988 primary campaign served a lick as a political consultant for ABC News. He's a graduate of Catholic University and the University of Virginia School of Law, and is now a lawyer in the Washington office of O'Melveny & Meyers.

First, Charlie.

BLACK: Thank you, Jules. First of all, I'd like to say, as some of the previous panelists did, that I'm speaking only for myself here today, and will just be rendering opinions based on my experience and not necessarily reflecting those of any other Republicans. Speaking for myself, though, I'm a big supporter of debates because they provide the maximum opportunity for political consultants to participate in spin control.

(Laughter)

Now, I'm not the only past recipient of the spin doctor of the year award, but I am the only one who took the award as a compliment and circulated the news to all my family and friends. I have always enjoyed being around the presidential debates. The only dangerous trend I would like to cite in that, though, is we did see, though, in the '88 post-debate spin rooms reporters interviewing each other and spinning each other, and we ought to probably have legislation to stop that so the rest of us get plenty of attention.

(Laughter)

In presidential elections there's one unique factor that's not true in our other American elections--statewide races for U.S. Senate, governor, elections for Congress or local races. In the presidential campaigns' news coverage, the free media coverage is the single most determinant factor of the outcome of the election. Now, most of these other campaigns at the state level, they advertising is dominant. Sure, the news coverage is important, but the advertising messages and the volume of advertising and the strategy and tactics there is more likely to decide the race than the news coverage. That's not true in a general election for president. The news is the single most important factor.

Debates in the last several elections have been the most important news events, not just the debates themselves, but the coverage of the debate negotiations. The debate negotiations have been

an important element in most of the recent campaigns. The coverage leading up to the debates where the challenge facing the respective candidates is defined, obviously the debate itself, and then the coverage coming out of the debate, and the coverage of issues that were raised in the debate for several days, though, really have dominated more than any other single news event in the last several campaigns.

Now, I think the debates have played a big role. The direct exposure that the candidates get to the voters is important--and that's especially true for candidates who are less known and haven't been around the track before. Some of these debates in recent years have produced a real contrast on some issues that was highlighted for the voters and that endured through the balance of the campaign that was important. But the news coverage following the debates has really had more impact on voter decisions than the direct exposure of the candidates to the voters in the debates themselves. Certain kinds of dramatic vignettes that get played over and over, the definition of winners and losers, what effect the debate had on the horse race--all these follow-up news stories, which can last several days after a debate, really have had more impact than the debates themselves.

So almost everyone would agree that debates are in recent history an integral part of the campaigns, and even the debate negotiations can be a major part of the campaign. If you take into consideration the amount of time, talent, resources that the campaigns have to invest in preparing for debates, executing them, and doing the damage control to follow up, what you have here is that debate decisions are the most important set of tactical decisions that the candidates have to make in the general election. Sure, there are a number of other things you have to decide--scheduling, where to go, what to say, what kind of commercials to run, where to run them. But the debates are probably the toughest and most important set of tactical decisions.

Now, that being the case, I personally believe that the candidates must maintain the maximum amount of flexibility in making those decisions about debates. I happen to personally like the idea of the parties sponsoring debates--I think a bipartisan commission formed by the parties should be available and should be prepared to go out and sponsor and host debates, if the candidates decide that they want to debate.

But, frankly, it's absolutely essential for each nominee, when they become the nominee, to make their own decisions about whether they're going to debate; if so, when, how many, where, who the sponsors are going to be, what the formats are going to be, and what the ground rules are going to be. It's simply too important a part of your campaign to let someone else decide or to make those decisions in advance.

Our current secretary of state has had his name invoked many times today, that he ran roughshod over the other side in debate negotiations and all. Well, I hope so; if he did, I'm proud of him, because all he was doing was the best possible job for his candidate. And I think it's very likely that any representatives of Democratic nominees have done the best job they could for their candidates in making these decisions.

So I just urge patience with those in the media and the other people in the process who would like to be able to adopt a program to make it mandatory to debate a certain way and to have it all settled in advance. But it's just--it's not realistic, and from the perspective of the candidates, which is who we're here to represent today, we must maintain the maximum flexibility to make these decisions if we're going to do our job correctly. There's plenty of time after the conventions for the nominees and their representatives to get together, decide whether to debate, when and where, work out the details and the ground rules and still you've got plenty of time to lay on as many debates as you want as efficiently during the general election.

So I argue for patience and understanding that we must run our own campaigns and that we need that flexibility. Thank you.

DONILON: I guess I'll agree and disagree in some parts with Charlie today. And I'll try to separate out my comments from mud-wrestler participant and someone who has an interest in good campaigns and good government. I don't know if--they're certainly in conflict a lot. I don't know if I can separate them out in my own mind most of the time, though.

First, in the panels that we have heard so far, there seems to be an assumption when you discuss format and discuss the role the press, that debates are inevitable in presidential campaigns. I think as Charlie just said and I think recent history will bear out, they're not at all inevitable in presidential campaigns.

In 1980, it was not at all inevitable that there would be a debate between President Carter and then Governor Reagan. It didn't happen until October 28th. And it might not have happened at all, frankly, if I think Pat Caddell and some others wanted internal debate, frankly.

Second, in 1984 I guarantee you there was no guarantee that there would be debates. I think given then-President Reagan's lead over Vice President Mondale, that it was not inevitable that they would debate twice or at all.

In 1988 it was my perception, I came into the Dukakis campaign to help prepare Governor Dukakis and Senator Bentsen for their debates around labor day. And a lot of the groundwork had been laid. But it hadn't been officially agreed on as of Labor Day. And I guarantee you that Secretary Baker and Roger Ayles would have walked easily--and probably wouldn't have paid a price. It is difficult, and any presidential campaign, at least in my memory to remember anyone paying a price for not debating, or indeed not campaigning as President Carter, who did not campaign in the winter and spring of 1980 for the nomination.

In 1992 with a sitting president, it's not inevitable that there will be debates either in my view. So I think that is something that should be a focus of this conference. In my view, that is how to--and I agree with Charlie that campaigns, these are big decisions in campaigns, how you present your candidate in front of 100 million people on one or more occasions.

But I'm not so sure that the decision of whether there should be debates should any longer be left with candidates. But I'll get to that in a second.

And I say that because I believe they are an integral part of and an important part of a campaign process that has gotten sick in recent times. Mike Oreskis (phonetic), who's here today, wrote a piece for Lee Atwater, Charlie's partner and chairman of the Republican National Committee. I think as accurately as I've ever seen described in print describes what happens in a general election campaign day in and day out. You come to the morning meeting, somebody opens up the donuts, you know, you sit down, you say, all right, what's the bite tonight.

Somebody says the bite of these three lines. You put it in a speech, no matter what speech you're going to give that day. What's the backdrop, this is the backdrop, you go see the candidate, you say: sir, say these three lines, look in the camera when you say them, give this emphasis, use these hand gestures. And that's it for the day.

That is not a very satisfying way, I don't think, to run for president or for the people to have to choose their president. But again I can tell you from experience, that is what happens. In 1988 general election I think the only divergence from that were some in-depth interviews with journalists, which I think did reveal some things about both candidates, and the presidential debates. I think, although they're not perfect, given that state of affairs in general elections, they are a very important

thing to contend with.

I agree with David Broder, it would be nice if presidential candidates would have press conferences every week. But I don't see a way to enforce that. We had a candidate for president this time who got elected president, who declared in the summer of 1988 at a press conference in Denver I will not have any press conferences until after the general election. Follow-up question: Why? Because I might mess it up.

And indeed that man, who's now president of the United States, didn't have any press conferences for the entire fall, didn't mess it up, and is now president with historically high approval ratings.

So I'm not confident that pressure from the press or otherwise can ensure that you can get presidential candidates to agree to a series of press conferences. Because those are big decisions, too--not as big as debates.

So I think the debates are very important for the voters given the state of our general election campaigns for president right now.

Third, and this I think I can present uniquely from a candidate's perspective, or candidate adviser's perspective--I think debates are good for the candidates, they are good for the soul of the candidate. It is the one time or two times or three times in the general election where this person, who is running ragged around the United States of America, giving speeches, shaking hands, posing for pictures, to get on television every night, speaking sound bites, doing four cities a day or three cities a day or six cities a day, can actually think and is forced to sit down and say, all right, how do I disagree or agree with this person against whom I'm running. And what is my position on x,y, and z, I haven't had time to think about it since I started running for president.

In my experience in preparing candidates for debates in the last two presidential campaigns has been that it is one of the few times in a general election where candidates really do get an opportunity to sit and think and say how am I going to tell the American people how I disagree with Vice President Bush or with Governor Reagan or President Reagan on economics.

I don't know this, but it seems to me obvious that Vice President Bush hadn't really thought about his position on abortion until a debate with Michael Dukakis this last time. And I can tell you, without violating any confidences, I think, that Michael Dukakis hadn't thought about a lot of things in certain areas of foreign and defense policy until he was forced to have to go up there one on one with the other candidate and present himself.

It is with those things in mind that I would ask serious consideration be given to the Markey-Graham bill that mandates presidential debates. I think there are some flaws on it, the main one being that it doesn't allow party organizations to sponsor presidential debates, and I think it's a little too much of a micro management attempt.

The parties did an excellent job in 1988, in my view. They are a natural sponsor of debates. The alternative is probably the networks, and that is a bad idea, if I've ever heard one. The relationship between the networks and candidates and their advisers is already incestuous and complicated enough. And you would have a terrible situation, I think, if you had a network reporter on an airplane trying to aggressively cover a candidate, and at the same time you're on the phone with his or her boss trying to negotiate the terms of the debate. I think it would be a terrible situation and is a bad idea.

So I would ask that the legislation be given serious consideration, because although with regard to format and timing and a lot of other things, I think candidates should retain maximum flexibility, because they are running for president. Whether there are debates seems to me is a matter for the

public interest.

I'll just say a couple of quick things, one on some particulars, one on format--indeed, I think John Mashek mentioned it--that the best format that I have seen was the law library debate--I think it was New York, not Illinois--in the spring of 1984, where Dan Rather was--it was produced by Joan Richmond, and Rather was the moderator, and Reverend Jackson, Hart, and Mondale sat at a table in the round and discussed things. And Rather performed the true moderator's role, I think, in that debate, where he didn't insert himself in every question; he let it flow among the three men there and it was the most fascinating debate I've ever seen.

And I think it is--it was asked of Professor Carlin earlier if there were any formats where canned answers wouldn't be the rule. And I think's the only format I've seen, frankly, where canned answers weren't the rule. I mean, when Walter Mondale leaned over the table and said to Gary Hart: Why are you running those ads about me killing kids in Nicaragua? You know, it's difficult to have a canned answer to that 24 inches away from your opponent. So I think that is the best format, although in the long run I don't know that format makes all that much difference. A candidate who is well-prepared and thinks about it can usually figure out a way to break out of format. But in terms of--the question was asked, and I thought that was a format that worked.

Lastly, the role of the press, it doesn't bother me at all that--first of all, it is uncomfortable for campaigns to be involved in the selection process. I think the selection process this time worked a lot better because we had the Commission to make final decisions, and that proposal actually came from Secretary Baker, who had gone through this horrible system in 1984 where they went through, I think, Charlie, over 100 names or something.

BLACK: Yes, that's all we did for a week.

DONILON: Yes. Secretary Baker came in the negotiations this time and said I am not going to do that. We're going to give some names to the Commission and let them make the final judgment. I thought that worked a lot better. It's not perfect, it still is uncomfortable, although, frankly, there are a lot of journalists, or people who call themselves journalists, who have pretty strong opinions and you wouldn't want them posing as a neutral questioner.

Lastly, with regard to the press, I think this obsession with who won debates is dangerous and irresponsible and these post-debate polls taken within 60 minutes after the debate are irresponsible. I would hope that the press would take more of a watch-dog substantive role in debates and not try to declare winners and losers based on a poll that they take before 1 o'clock in the morning so they can get it on the last five minutes of "Nightline," but rather think about what the candidates said and report that.

One last thing on audience, because it came up, too. One of the things that I was proud of as a presidential operative and ashamed of as an American was our manipulation of the audience in the 1988 debate. I think for the first time, and I think it's one of the few political tactics that we thought up and Charlie's people didn't, we did fly in people from around the country, and we had--in fact, I'll say this here, we had a whip system at the Omaha debate, one person for each row. Tony Curato, who is the best convention operative in the Democratic Party--he certainly got my name in the paper enough getting credit for it--but he is the best operative I could find; I flew him out there. And we actually put people in each row who were to signal our supporters when to clap and when not to clap, and when to yell and when not to yell. And that is bad thing. And that was an attempt to take advantage of television. Because if you looked at the tape--you can give people the sense that all of

America is supporting your man's position when you have a kind of roar behind him. And I think that was the case with the Bentsen-Quayle interchange. You know, everyone was queued up and--

BLACK: Looks like you could have found at least 300 people in Omaha that would come, though, and not have to fly them in from all--I know it's a bad state for a Democrat.

DONILON: I think it says something about our electoral position, right, Charlie.

BLACK: You had a lot less confidence in Bentsen than I did.

DONILON: I guess you knew more about his opponent than I did. In fact, though, that should be dealt with as a problem. I know you have contributor problems and things like that, but that is a problem that should be addressed the next time around.

WITCOVER: Tom, there was another story involving anticipation of what would happen in the audience. I believe you told me about your concern that Charlie and his gang were going to bring in the Willy Horton victims and put them in the front row and have them ask a question. I don't know whether they didn't think of that or they just thought it was a little too dicey.

DONILON: I'm sure they thought of it, but--I will tell the 90-second version of the story. About 15 minutes before the debate one of our advance men came in and said they're fooling around with the microphone out there and want to see if it will swing all the way around so that Bush can face Dukakis directly. And we were trying to figure out what they were up to. And one of the things we did discuss is they would have the victim of the Willy Horton crime in the front row, or the second row or the third row, and have Vice President Bush turn around and ask Dukakis if he had anything to say to them. But these are the kinds of things and this is the level of obsession, I guess, that presidential campaigns go through in these things.

BLACK: Yes, part of the problem is you get there the last afternoon and evening, and there's nothing to do, so you think up all these cute things. And I don't want to name names, but in one of the Republican debates during the primaries we had a big scandal, because you weren't supposed to take in notes, and one of the candidates had a whole notebook that he was trying to take on the stage, so we got the gendarmes and the League and everybody after him and he just stuck it down his pants and we couldn't do anything about it. You get into all kinds of irrelevant nit-picking things.

DONILON: I will say, though--we tell these stories--but ultimately these are very important things. And I'll just say one last thing. From the candidate's point of view, these are real tests of character and ultimately it's the two men or women who are standing on the stage that it comes down to.

And I will never forget walking Mondale up to the stage for the first debate with President Reagan. And they gave the cue to go on stage--and I had lived in that same hotel suite with him for about a year, and you get to know someone pretty well--you know their faults and their strengths, and you get pretty familiar with them. But you watch this person go up in front of a hundred million people, and you realize that this is where the men and the boys get separated, that this is a real test of character. And that is an important thing for the American people to see, I think.

WITCOVER: Let me just start the questions. Given the high stakes of the debates that you both laid out, is it naive to expect politicians to take the view that debates belong to the public, that campaigns belong to the public, and that there ought to be some way of forcing candidates to debate through perhaps tying it to the federal subsidy? Is that at all realistic?

BLACK: Well, I don't doubt that it could happen, given the Democratic Congress, but I hope not. I mean, why not have an amendment that mandates that you have to do a press conference every day, and, you know, why not mandate that if you take public funds you have to visit all 50 states which, you know, someone might think would be a good government idea. In my personal opinion, I would like to do away with the public funding of the campaigns anyhow and let us raise private money again, even if you put limits both on individual contributions and on the total. The taxpayers have no business funding this thing.

But in modern American politics the press is going to get at these candidates enough, especially in cases where there's an incumbent running, who, you know, is under the microscope every single day and is well-known to both the press and the voters. I don't think you really have to force debates. The odds are you'll have them more times than not, and the odds are that any particular vulnerabilities on the personal side or issue side or anything else will be aired out, that at some time during the course of the campaign the press is going to have ample opportunity to get at the candidates. It might not be every day, it might not always be in a debate. I'm in favor of that. I think the press plays a vital role in the campaigns. And I think, especially with all the debate and skepticism about the nature of our advertising in campaigns these days, I think it's very helpful that the press serves as something of a referee of the advertising. And the more coverage you give it, the better. I like what Dave Broder's been promoting on that.

So I don't know if it's a naive suggestion, but I sure hope it doesn't pass, to mandate debates.

DONILON: I don't think it's naive, and I think it might be a good idea. It is absolutely conceivable to me that you can run a general election campaign, because I've seen several, where the press don't get any access to the candidate for the entire general election. After the debates in 1988, the press wouldn't have had any access to Bush, I don't think. And I think I could imagine myself running a campaign where I don't think I'd pay too high of a price if that was my chosen strategy, not to get off the message every day and not to expose your candidate to the press. I think that generally--and I'm generally against regulatory intrusion into the political process. But in this case, given the state of our campaign, it might be a good idea that these two people face each other at least a couple of times during the general election.

WITCOVER: In the context of a national campaign, has it ever been your experience that in discussion about debates within the campaign that anybody has ever looked at them as an educational experience, an educational process, or is it always what do we have to do to win? It seems to me that that is usually the yardstick, and Charlie seemed to reinforce that today.

BLACK: Well, but I also think that what Tom said is true about it forcing the candidates to think through positions, to establish positions on--I mean, you end up with a couple of hundred different subjects on the briefing book that you could get asked on, and it forces them both to establish positions and be able to defend their positions. And I think--you know, not in every case and in every debate,

but I think there's been a lot of good development of contrasts on major issues in the debates. And I think to the extent people watch them and absorb some of that, that's good.

We certainly in every case that I've been involved in, have tried to say how do we get--despite the fact that we don't get control the questions, how do we get on our agenda, present our issues and draw the contrast between our candidate and the opponent on the issues. So, yes, it's education.

DONILON: I think obviously winning the debate is on the top of everybody's mind, Jules. But I think whether it's recognized as such at the time, it is an important educational process and a thinking process and a kind of a coalescing of ideas and contrasts for the candidate. And it's a rare opportunity for these folks that are running for president to really sit down and think about why they want to be president and what's different about them and the person they're running against.

BLACK: I wish that the press sometimes would set up in defining the standards and expectations for the debates, I wish they'd set up and say that you know, candidate X needs to address these three issues tonight which haven't really been adequately addressed, instead of just setting up, you know, put this huge extreme pressure on Dukakis. He's behind, he has to hit a home run in the second debate, he has to clearly beat Bush or he's out of it, the race is over. It's hard enough to walk out in front of all those people if it was a neutral set of ground rules. With all that pressure on you, no wonder you muff the first question. I wouldn't want to have to do it.

WITCOVER: What little I know about debate preparation, as I understand it, you do go through mock debates. You do try to anticipate all the questions.

How good a job do you do and how good a job does the press do in terms of asking the questions you think should be asked, both in terms of giving your candidate an opportunity to say his piece and catch the other guy up on some of his vulnerabilities

DONILON: You can do a pretty good job.

BLACK: You can get 90, 95 percent of them. And I would give the press, you know, all taken together over all the panels, all the debates I've seen, about a B plus. They do a pretty good job of getting the issues that are important.

Occasionally somebody gets off on some tangent that you know is going to put the voters to sleep and is not really a cutting issue or a difference in the campaigns. But, by and large, the reporters have done a pretty good job.

DONILON: I think so, too. I think you can--and some of it is a lack of having had press conferences during a general election, because there are certain issues that sit there. And they're fairly obvious. And I think you can predict 90 percent of the questions. There might be an oddball question once in a while. But I think the press has done generally a pretty good job of asking the questions that seem most important.

WITCOVER: From the candidates' standpoint, how do you come down on this question of having panelists or just a moderator? Would your candidate do better one way or the other?

DONILON: It depends on the candidate, it depends on what your goals are. I think, Jules, it

really is difficult to answer in the abstract. Probably ultimately it wouldn't make all that much difference.

BLACK: The answer is it depends on the candidates and the circumstances. I've been involved in debates in some Senate races and state wide races where you just had the two candidates and a moderator and all kinds of different formats.

And some of them do encourage more mixing it up and more spontaneity and less predictability. But you know, it would depend on who the candidates were and what their strengths were as to how they would fare in the various formats.

DONILON: But in terms of interaction, again the best
--and the candidates taking the most time out of the 90 minutes, whatever it is, 60 minutes or 90 minutes, which is in large part taken up with journalists' questions, if you wanted to maximize candidate time and interaction, the single moderator sitting at a table probably is the--would be the debate format that would maximize that.

Candidates choose different formats for different reasons. You want to get a variety of issues on the table if you think your opponent's weak on knowing a broad range of things. Some candidates are very nervous about confronting the other candidate.

So you do try to protect your candidate and it does depend. But in terms of maximum interaction, obviously the moderator model would be the one that would maximize it.

WITCOVER: How about some questions from out there.

QUESTION: Tom, I dare say that if the Quayle campaign had flown 300 people in and done what you did that you would be charging that it was a dirty trick.

Was this a little sleazy, a dirty trick? And it also brings into mind, were you aware that Bentsen was going to find an opportunity to answer the Kennedy question, which of course drew the big response from the audiences, and is what most of the reporters used as the highlight of that debate.

DONILON: I think on the first question, I don't think it was a dirty trick at all. We had tickets to give to our supporters and supporters who were strong supporters of Bentsen and Dukakis from around the country were flown in for the debate. It was a big event in the country. And one I think they enjoyed attending.

Second, you don't--you hope in a debate that there will be a moment in that debate where your candidate can make an impact. And we certainly hope for that in all three of the debates, the Dukakis debates and the Bentsen debate. You don't know when it's going to come, and certainly Senator Bentsen did--when it came, realized it was there and took advantage of it.

WITCOVER: Somebody else? Okay, thank you, gents.

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FORMER PRESIDENTS FORD AND CARTER JOIN COMMISSION

WASHINGTON, July 23 -- Former Presidents Gerald R. Ford and Jimmy Carter have become Honorary Co-Chairmen of the Commission on Presidential Debates. The Commission is making plans for the general election campaign debates of 1992; it sponsored the one vice presidential and two presidential debates in 1988.

Commission Co-Chairmen Paul G. Kirk, Jr., and Frank J. Fahrenkopf, Jr., said, "The Commission is extremely proud to have President Ford and President Carter join us at this important time. Their participation in past debates and the office of the President which they held bring prestige to the work which the Commission began in 1988 and seeks to improve in 1992 and beyond. Their advice and counsel will be invaluable as the Commission works to ensure that the continuation of substantive exchanges between the candidates is the essence of voter education."

Both former presidents have participated in an oral history program on previous debates which the Commission is producing for television. In interviews with program host Jim Lehrer of the MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour, Ford and Carter noted their support for making televised debates a permanent part of the presidential election process.

"I firmly believe that debates are in the public interest," President Ford said. "[They] give the public an opportunity to see the candidates under pressure. . ."

President Carter emphasized the value of communication skills: ". . . one of the major roles of a President is to communicate ideas, concepts, concerns, dreams, ambitions, facts to the American people. I think if a President can't communicate well, then in some ways that President is handicapped in doing a good job. . . [a debate] makes the candidates realize how important this ability to communicate is. I think it has nothing but beneficial effects."

The Commission sponsored a symposium on "Debates '92" in May, 1990. Commission members will use the results of that meeting to formulate specific recommendations for the 1992 series of presidential debates.

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October 30, 1991

MEMORANDUM TO: ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS
VOTER EDUCATION PARTNERS

FROM: JANET BROWN

The Washington Post recently ran an editorial regarding next year's presidential debates. Co-chairmen Paul Kirk and Frank Fahrenkopf wrote a response which you may find of interest. Enclosed are copies of both articles.

Debates in '92?

Washington Post
Oct. 14, 1991

PROPOSALS for presidential campaign debates are being put forward. A couple are worth thinking about. One plan has been pulled together by the four major television news organizations—ABC, CBS, CNN and NBC. It would strip away all the trappings of what have passed for "debates" and allow the candidates to go at each other without any panel, studio audience or complex rules for responses. With only a moderator on hand merely to change subjects, clarify points if necessary and keep some kind of order, each of four 90-minute programs would be devoted to direct exchanges between the candidates. The first two and the last of the debates would be between presidential nominees; the third debate would feature the vice presidential candidates. The networks are serious enough to have drawn lots and agreed to broadcast dates, locations and production responsibilities for this series.

One of the first two presidential debates would address the candidates' policies on international affairs; the other would address domestic policies. The final presidential debate and the vice presidential debate would be open for discussion of any issue. All debates would be carried live by all four participating networks, with feeds available to any requesting network, station or cable system. Sites would be network studios in New York, Atlanta, Chicago and Los Angeles.

There's one huge hitch at this point: A debate panel set up by the two political parties has rejected the idea. The co-chairmen of the Commission on Presidential Debates—former Republican chairman Frank J. Fahrenkopf Jr. and former Democratic chairman Paul G. Kirk Jr.—warned against "conflicts which arise when media organizations whose function it is to report political news undertake to produce or participate in the news-making events." But the whole idea here is to minimize media involvement—and let the candidates do what they want to each other.

Another proposal comes from Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government: a nine-week series of Sunday-evening televised presidential debates, candidate conversations and speeches. A report by the school's Joan Shorenstein Barone Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy suggests two presidential debates, one vice presidential debate and five "conversations" between each presidential candidate and a panel of questioners on five issues, with concluding speeches by each on the final Sunday before Election Day. Marvin Kalb, director of the center, cites the same difficulty here as with the networks' proposal: getting the candidates to agree, particularly when an incumbent/front-runner isn't eager to share air time with a challenger. But there surely will be debates, and it would be great for public dignity if for once they could be worked out in advance without the familiar brinksmanship and horseplay.

Paul G. Kirk Jr. and Frank J. Fahrenkopf Jr.

Washington Post
October 27, 1991

Debates and the Networks' Role

As co-chairmen of the Commission on Presidential Debates, we welcome discussion of next year's general election debates, which is already underway. However, a recent Post editorial ["Debates in '92?" Oct. 14] not only omitted some important debate history but contained imprecise information when reporting our reaction to a network proposal for next year's debates. We would like to set the record straight on both counts.

First, the editorial characterized the Commission on Presidential Debates as a "debate panel set up by the two political parties." In fact, the impetus for creating an independent debate sponsor such as the commission was provided by two distinguished nonpartisan studies. In 1985 Georgetown University's Center for Strategic and International Studies sponsored the Commission on National Elections to examine steps to improve the American presidential election process. The CSIS panel, co-chaired by Melvin Laird and Robert Strauss, included 40 senior executives from labor, business, government and the television networks, as well as Post publisher Katharine Graham.

There were many changes to the election process that the Laird-Strauss panel considered, but the *only* recommendation that its members overwhelmingly supported was the establishment of an independent entity whose sole purpose would be the production and sponsorship of general election debates on a permanent basis.

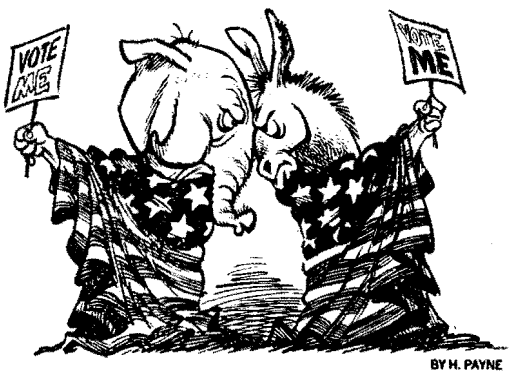
The same recommendation was made in 1986 by a Harvard University study chaired by former FCC chairman Newton Minow. In order to ensure to the greatest extent possible the participation of the major party nominees in general election debates, both studies recommended the involvement of the major parties in institutionalizing those debates. In response to these studies and recommendations, we, as the then-chairmen of the Democratic and Republican national committees, jointly supported the creation of the Commission on Presidential Debates.

Second, The Post's editorial noted that the Commission on Presidential Debates had "rejected the idea" of a recent proposal by the four major television networks—ABC, CBS, NBC and CNN—which specifies format, number, dates, locations, length and production responsibilities for the 1992 presidential debates. We want to make it crystal clear that what we rejected was network sponsorship of debates, not improved debate format.

The Laird-Strauss panel recommended the creation of the Commission on Presidential Debates precisely because of (1) dissatisfaction with past debate sponsors, including the networks, and (2) the need for a permanent institution to which professional and predictable sponsorship could be entrusted. The panel concluded that presidential debates should be sponsored by an organization with no agenda other than debates.

The commission does not report news, conduct polls, cover candidates or campaigns, analyze or lobby on public policy issues. It exists solely to produce general election presidential and vice presidential debates.

Compare, however, the potential problems posed by network sponsorship of general election



debates. First, there is the issue of conflict of interest. ABC, NBC and CBS are parts of giant corporate conglomerates with many legislative and regulatory interests in Washington. They, as well as CNN, have major issues pending before federal agencies and Congress. Do these interests enable the networks to act impartially and objectively as debate sponsors with no real or potential conflict of interest? We doubt it.

Consider the further dilemma for a network executive who is simultaneously responsible for his company's news operation while negotiating with candidates on debate format, sites and dates. In order to ensure that debates are in fact held, some aspects of debate production can be settled only if negotiations are entrusted to those who will conduct them privately. Wouldn't network producers feel compromised by an inevitable tug to cover these matters as news? We think so.

Taking Exception

Will a TV network be objective in choosing debate dates, which have a significant impact on the network's financial interest? Presidential debates occur in September and October, as do baseball's league championships, the World Series, NFL games and new fall TV series. The best night for a particular network may or may not be the best night for public viewership of a debate. At a time when the networks are under increasing pressure to achieve greater profits, will network executives negotiating with the campaigns be able to ignore the substantial revenues at stake in choosing one night over another? We doubt that also.

Finally on network sponsorship, we agree with The Post's observation: "It would be great for public dignity if [debates] could be worked out in advance without the familiar brinksmanship and horseplay." But, if The Post agrees with us that presidential debates should be an educational forum on which voters can rely every four years, can it guarantee that these four networks will remain as permanent entities sufficiently free of their own competitive "brinksmanship and horseplay" to commit to the sponsorship and production of debates as an ongoing mission? We doubt it.

As to improved format, we welcome the networks' suggestions, many of which are consistent with the commission's review of past debates. Indeed, since its sponsorship of the 1988 debates the commission's primary focus has been to study the advantages and disadvantages of different formats. We have held a symposium and interviewed former presidential and vice-presidential candidates on the subject. We have consulted experts in the field of debate studies who are familiar with the pros and cons of "classical debate" rules and reviewed formats used in recent debates, including the one-on-one style employed by some 1990 gubernatorial candidates and by some Republican and Democratic contenders during the 1988 presidential primary season. The commission is committed to pursue improved format and hopes to work with networks, the print media, the candidates and other key organizations to that end.

There is no question about the importance attached to presidential debates by voters. In 1988, more than 160 million Americans watched the debates; exit polls indicated that more voters based their final decisions on debates than any other single factor. The commission was established precisely to ensure debates for voters every four years and to provide an independent forum for their fair and impartial production. We believe 1988 represented the first major step toward permanent sponsorship. We intend to do an even better job in 1992.

Paul G. Kirk Jr. and Frank J. Fahrenkopf Jr. are, respectively, former Democratic and Republican national committee chairmen. They are co-chairmen of the Commission on Presidential Debates.

COMMISSION ON PRESIDENTIAL ★ DEBATES ★

Janet H. Brown
Executive Director

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MELVIN R. LAIRD
Suite 212
1730 Rhode Island Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

June 11, 1993

Dear Janet:

Many thanks for sending me the "Review of 1992 Presidential Debates." It was good to review the transcript of these interesting debates, and I appreciated your thoughtfulness.

With best wishes and kindest personal regards, I am

Sincerely,

Melvin R. Laird

Ms. Janet H. Brown
Executive Director
Commission on Presidential Debates
601 Thirteenth Street, N.W.
Suite 310 S
Washington, D.C. 20005

COMMISSION ON PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES

REVIEW OF 1992 PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES

May 4, 1993

The Freedom Forum

Arlington, Virginia

Commission on Presidential Debates
601 13th Street, N.W., Suite 310 South
Washington, D.C. 20005
(202) 872-1020

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JANET BROWN (executive director of the Commission on Presidential Debates): Welcome, everyone, and thank you for coming. My name is Janet Brown. I'm executive director of the Commission on Presidential Debates, and we're really pleased to be here this afternoon in this gorgeous setting at the invitation of the Freedom Forum. The president of the Freedom Forum, Charles Overby, who has been very generous about putting all of this together for us, is going to open the proceedings. Charles?

CHARLES OVERBY (president, Freedom Forum): Janet, thank you very much. I want to add my welcome to all of you all here.

As I look out in this audience and see all these distinguished pundits, I know that the purpose of our building these offices across from the seat of power there has come true. When we built these offices and got a 40-year lease, we said it was designed so that we could bring into these offices the best minds in the country and the world. And surely at least some of the best minds are here today.

A lot of you we've worked with during the last presidential campaign. Some of you know that the Freedom Forum Media Studies Center coordinated a study on the media and the campaign. Many of you helped with that study. Many of you participated in some of our forums in Houston and in New York City.

But as the Freedom Forum tries to have forums on important subjects, I can't think of a better forum to have than on what I consider to be the most successful forum of 1992, and that was the presidential debates. The Commission on the Presidential Debates, I think, showed unparalleled, unprecedented leadership in bringing together, shall we say, disparate interests. And the ability to bring those groups together and to experiment in an area that seems to be devoid of experimentation I think benefitted the American public in a big way.

So we're delighted that this idea that was hatched with Janet and Paul and Frank could come to fruition this afternoon. I hope we all can learn from this and I'm delighted now to turn the program over to Paul. Paul, glad you're here.

PAUL KIRK: Well, thank you very much, Charles. On behalf of my counterpart, Frank Fahrenkopf, and other members of the Commission on Presidential Debates, let me welcome all of you here and thank Charles and the Freedom Forum for providing this beautiful facility as a forum for this afternoon's discussion. The Freedom Forum is engaged in the cutting edge of public debate and participation, and we're glad to join with them as a partner for this afternoon's session.

I would describe this afternoon's purpose as an element in what I call continuing education. Prior to the successful 1992 debates, in 1990, we also held a symposium to learn from the debates of 1988 and to better equip us to prepare and produce the debates of 1992.

Many of you were helpful in that role, and we're delighted that you're with us again this afternoon. The debates of 1992 are historic in a few ways, not the least of which we had three presidential candidates and candidates for vice president debating on the same platform together. All those debates were televised.

As a result of the symposium of 1990, the Commission on Presidential Debates recommended that there be a single moderator for the debates of 1992. And it eventuated that, in three out of four of those debates, there was a single moderator. In addition, happily, since the purpose of the debates is education, the debates of 1992 had the highest television audience ratings of any prior debate of its

kind, and we think played a central role in the decision-making process of a very important question that faces the country every four years.

I would say that while we're glad to be here, we're just as glad that you are here, and we invite you folks to participate with your comments and questions so that we might better learn the lessons that might be applied, looking forward to 1996. It's bit of a balancing act because we are in a quest to improve the debate process. But I think we have to careful to balance against that. We shouldn't change too much just for change's sake--the old saying--if it ain't broke, don't fix it.

So we hope over this afternoon's dialogue and exchange of ideas, we might be able to arrive at a proper formula to improve the process so that the American voter will be better educated in the next election process.

There are many household words in the form of distinguished individuals at this table who will participate in the first panel. And I will leave it to its moderator, the distinguished journalist of the Washington Post, E.J. Dionne, to introduce his fellow panelists. E.J.?

E.J. DIONNE (Washington Post); I hope you'll forgive me for this, but I can't resist. Who are we? Why are we here?

And I think the fact that that line would draw roughly the same response before any randomly assembled group of Americans in the country suggests how successful the 1992 debates were--that everybody saw them, everybody saw that moment and responded to it.

Moderators aren't supposed to be biased, but I will confess to one up front, which is I think that the '92 debates were a huge success. And I think they were partly successful because of the accidents of politics that required all of the candidates to agree to this mixed and experimental form. And I think that what you got out of these formats, you got something out of each format that you wouldn't have gotten if only one of them had been used. And I think one of the things we want to talk about is how one could reproduce that, or how much did we learn about formats that didn't work so well. We also learned how tough each of these panelists could be.

The problem of how to introduce substance into campaigns is a very old one. At the end of one campaign, a vice presidential candidate said that, quote, "photos and carefully rehearsed moving picture films do not necessarily convey the truth." And that was Franklin D. Roosevelt after he got clobbered as a candidate for vice president on the Democratic ticket in 1920.

Debate formats themselves have been highly contested. After his 1968 debate with Robert Kennedy, Eugene McCarthy wrote: "I described our joint appearance as a contest with three referees and the contestants wearing 16-ounce gloves." I think one of the advantages this year is no one was wearing 16-ounce gloves.

We very much want this discussion to involve the audience. You can think of it as a Carole Simpson style discussion. And I found a text for the day, a sort of reading that I hope will describe the spirit of it. The text is from a character called One-Eyed Mack who's a hero of Jim Lehrer novels. And this appears in a book called "The Sooner Spy." And One-Eyed Mack says, quote, "Be willing to put your mind and your spirit, your time and your energy, your stomach and your emotions on the line. Risk, risk. The way to happiness is to risk it."

So I hope everybody on the panel and in the audience will follow One-Eyed Mack's advice.

Just very briefly, what we're going to be doing here--what we want to do is we've asked the panelists to talk for about 3-5 minutes. We'd like then to devote most of the session to an exchange

between you and the panel. The topics that we hope to cover are the moderators' views on the number and the schedule in the various formats of the '92 debates. There are a range of other issues that might come up, including the selection of moderators and the way in which they're selected, and also Mr. Perot's impact on the debate.

We might also get into legislation and the whole issue of whether participation in debates should be required as a condition of getting federal matching funds.

But before I introduce the panel, we're going to have a clip from the debate, from one of the debates, just to refresh everyone's memory. In this particular clip, Hal Bruno attempts to defend the free speech rights of Admiral Stockdale against the torrents of invective flowing between a current and a former vice president. Hal is one of the most persistent people I know. But where two politicians gather to scream at each other, even Hal had to push awfully hard. So why don't we do the clip?

(Tape): HAL BRUNO (ABC News): Admiral Stockdale, it's your turn to respond next. Then Senator Gore will have his chance to respond.

ADMIRAL STOCKDALE: Okay. I thought this was just an open session this five-minute thing, and I didn't have anything to add to his. But I will--

SENATOR GORE: Well, I'll jump in, if you don't want.

VICE PRESIDENT QUAYLE: I thought anybody could jump in whenever they wanted to.

BRUNO: Okay. Whatever pleases you, gentlemen, is fine with me. You're the candidates.

ADMIRAL STOCKDALE: I'll let you figure out--

VICE PRESIDENT QUAYLE: But I want Admiral Stockdale's time.

BRUNO: This is not the Senate where you can trade off time. Go ahead, Senator Gore.

SENATOR GORE: I'll let you all figure out the rules. I've got some points that I want to make here, and I still haven't gotten an answer to my question on when you guys are going to start worrying about this country.

But I want to elaborate on it before--

VICE PRESIDENT QUAYLE: Why doesn't the Democratic Congress pass this jobs bill?

BRUNO: Mr. Vice President, let him say his thoughts and then you can come in.

SENATOR GORE: I'll be very patient in letting you get off that string of attacks. We've been listening to trickle-down economics for twelve years now. You all still support trickle-down to the very last drop.

And, you know, talking about this point of concentrating on every other country in the world,

as opposed to the people of our country right here at home, when George Bush took former Secretary of State Baker out of the State Department and put him in charge of the campaign and made him Chief of Staff in the White House, Mr. Baker, who's quite a capable man, said that for these last four years, George Bush was working on the problems of the rest of the world, and in the next four years, he would target America.

Well, I want you to know we really appreciate that. But Bill Clinton and I will target America from day one. We won't wait four years before we concentrate on the problems in this country.

He went on to say that it's really amazing what George Bush can do when he concentrates. Well, it's time we had a president like Bill Clinton who can concentrate and will concentrate and work on the problems of real people in this country.

You know, our country is in trouble. We simply cannot continue with this philosophy of giving huge tax cuts to the very wealthy, raising taxes on middle-income families the way Bush and Quayle have done, and then waiting for it to work.

How much longer will it take, Dan, for trickle-down economics to work in your theory?

VICE PRESIDENT QUAYLE: Well, we're going to have plenty of time to talk about trickle-down government which you're for. But the question is--

SENATOR GORE: Well, I'd like to hear the answer.

VICE PRESIDENT QUAYLE: The question is--the question is--which you have failed to address--and that is why is Bill Clinton qualified to be president of the United States?

You talked about Jim Baker--

SENATOR GORE: Oh, I'll be happy to answer that.

VICE PRESIDENT QUAYLE: You talked about trickle-down economics. You've talked about the worst economy in fifty years. You haven't given us one reason--

SENATOR GORE: I'll be happy to answer that. May I answer that?

VICE PRESIDENT QUAYLE: --why he's qualified to be president.

SENATOR GORE: I'll be happy to--

VICE PRESIDENT QUAYLE: I want to go back and make a point.

SENATOR GORE: Well, you've asked me a question. If you won't answer my question, I will answer yours. (Cross talk)

VICE PRESIDENT QUAYLE: I did not ask a question. I made a statement that you have not told us why Bill Clinton is qualified to be president of the United States. I pointed out what he said about the Persian Gulf war. Let me repeat it for you. Here's what he said, Senator. You know full

well what--

SENATOR GORE: May I answer your question?

VICE PRESIDENT QUAYLE: I'm making a statement; then you can answer it.
(Laughter.)

BRUNO: Why don't we give Admiral Stockdale a chance to come--

VICE PRESIDENT QUAYLE: Here's what he said. I mean, this is the Persian Gulf war, the most important event in his political lifetime, and here's what Bill Clinton said: "If it's a close vote, I'd go with the majority."

BRUNO: Let's give Admiral Stockdale a chance to come in.

VICE PRESIDENT QUAYLE: --even agreed with the minority.

DIONNE: Let's hear it for Hal.
(Applause.)

What we're going to do is, we're going to do it in the order of debates. So we will start with Sandy Vanocur, then go to Hal, then to Carole Simpson, and then to Jim Lehrer. And I won't go into all of the wonderful things that these folks have done in their careers, but just point out that Mr. Vanocur served as a panelist for the first presidential debate; and he also served as a panelist during the first Kennedy-Nixon debate in 1960. So he's going to talk to us also about "lazy shave" today.

Hal Bruno moderated the 1992 vice presidential debate, is well-known from ABC, both on TV and on radio. Carole Simpson was the people's voice in the second 1992 presidential debate in Richmond, in that town-hall format. There were 175 participants brought together in that one by the Gallup organization. And then there was Jim Lehrer who moderated the first debate and also the third debate. And he was alone, all alone, in the first half of that debate. And just for historical purposes, he moderated the first presidential debate in 1988. So he has a lot of experience.

And I think we have some of the folks in the audience here who were on the panels for those.

So let's start with Mr. Vanocur and move forward.

SANDER VANOCUR (independent journalist): I can't really talk about "lazy shave" at WBBM in late September 1960 because those of us who were on the panel, I'm the only one living--couldn't see the candidates on television. Nixon insisted on no make-up. What we didn't know when we sat down is that Nixon had banged his knee getting out of a car and was in pain. He had an infection in his knee that resulted from some trip to Atlanta earlier in the campaign.

So, therefore, the panelists were the worst people to ask about five o'clock shadow or who won the debate. I did not know until I heard the following morning in Painesville, Ohio. Kennedy was asleep, and knocking on his door was Frank Lausche, the great weathervane of the U.S. Senate, who voted Republican and ran as a Democrat. And when I figured Lausche was there waking up Kennedy, Kennedy had probably won the debate.

But let me address the matter at hand. I'll talk first about format and then about legislation. And at the risk of repeating myself, because I've done this at every panel that the commission has organized--and some others that it has hasn't--I'd like to see the commission in 1996 to try and push yet one more time for debates between the candidates with no panels of reporters and no questions from the audience.

Without taking anything away from the success, if that could be measured in size of audience and response and the brilliant job that my colleagues did in all of their roles in the debates, without taking anything away from all that, of the varied 1992 formats, they were not debates in the sense I was brought up to understand what a debate was and what it was not. If past experience is any guide, the candidates and/or their handlers are likely to resist a classic debate or debates. They always have and possibly they always will.

But just as the formats in 1992 were varied, why cannot the commission in 1996 strongly urge--I will go farther and say "demand" because it's never been in a stronger position than it is now--that failing having all debates carried on in the classic manner with a single moderator, no questions from the audience or panel of reporters--then why not allow for at least one of the debates to be a classic debate?

It merits, in my judgment, as much legitimacy as questions from the audience or questions from the audience plus the first half of the event being a debate with a single moderator, which is what Jim Lehrer did, I believe, in the last debate.

Why not an hour debate with only the principals plus the moderator? We'll never know if it works until we try it. And I would think that given the prestige bestowed upon the commission by the way it discharged its responsibilities in 1992, it will be, as I've said, in a stronger position than ever before to push its case that debates really be debates, nothing more, more less, in 1996.

On the matter of legislation, I'm absolutely opposed to any legislation that says that the candidates have to debate, will not get federal funds, if they don't. I think we have too many laws governing our politics in this country. If I could, I'd love to go back to the wonderful world before Maury Stans went around busting corporate kneecaps in 1972 and to keep the Congress of the United States and all well-wishing organizations which I won't mention out of the presidential process.

So therefore, if people don't want to debate, then let them take the responsibility for that. But don't get legislation that penalizes them by barring funds for their use.

Thank you.

DIONNE: Hal Bruno is next.

HAL BRUNO (ABC News): I have to confess I was at the first 1960 debate, too, except I was backstage covering it; and I, too, thought Nixon hadn't done badly because you couldn't see it on television. Ever since then, I've always told everybody, don't watch a debate in the hall; watch it on television because that's the way the American people see it. That's one of the reasons why I'm a very strong advocate of holding the debates in studios without an audience. But we'll get to that in a second.

The words, "why are we are, who am I," et cetera, are words calculated to strike fear into a moderator's heart.

(Laughter.)

I went into that debate with the idea of the moderator--well, let me back up a little bit. I've always been an advocate of the single moderator format. This goes back to 1976 when the League of Women Voters brought the debates back into campaigns. In that election, I was on the vice presidential panel with Marilyn Berger and Walter Mears.

And we probably were the first panel that actually conspired together ahead of time on the questions we were going to ask and the sequence in which we were going to ask them. And as I recall, I asked the first question that night, but it actually had been written by either Marilyn or Walter because we wanted to develop the vice presidential debate.

I also used the same question this time out, and that was to establish that these were vice presidential candidates. We were talking about vice presidents. And that's the reason I asked as my opener, I threw the topic up there: As vice president, what is it that you want to do? You know, what role do you want to play? So we could let the whole country know that we're not talking about presidents tonight, we're talking about vice presidents.

Well, anyhow, thanks, Walter, for the question. I appreciated it in 1976, and I appreciated it in 1992.

My idea going in was that the moderator is very low profile, that you simply put the topics up there, and these gentlemen will then have an orderly discussion of it. And about three minutes into it, I realized that I had to do something, that this thing was spinning out of control, and I had to be more assertive than I ever intended to be. It was only partially successful. At one point, I probably got too assertive, and I'm grateful to Ed Fouhy for being in my ear and warning me that I was getting a little bit heavy-handed at one point.

I think I agree with Sandy: we've got to have the debates institutionalized. There's no doubt about that. This time, we almost didn't have them again. There was the usual debate over the debates, and the result was that you had four debates crammed into--what was it--a ten-day period. And it shouldn't have happened that way.

I disagree with Sandy on this point. I think having, by accident, we discovered the four different formats. And I think having four different formats contributed a lot to the interest that the viewers showed. I mean, these debates attracted an audience like we've never seen before. And I think having four different formats probably made it more interesting.

I believe, and I've advocated this for some time, that maybe it's up to the parties to discipline the candidates, that it should be maybe party rule at the convention, rather than federal law, but a party law, that if you accept the nomination of the party, you will agree that you will take part--you and your ticket--will take part in four debates in the general election. And I think four is exactly right--three presidential, one vice presidential.

I think one should be on foreign affairs and national security; a second one on domestic; the third and final debate for the presidential candidates could be open to all subjects. I think the vice presidential debate should be open to all subjects.

I'd like to see the debates take place from mid- or early September to mid- or late October so that they're spread out; they don't all happen in a ten-day period, such as had to happen today. As I said, I like the varied formats--a single moderator for, say, one presidential debate and the vice presidential; a panel, news media panel for a debate, and the audience participation one. I thought that was a very interesting format that Carole had to handle, and she deserves a lot of credit for being the pioneer in handling it.

The single moderator format I still believe in very much. Again, I believe it should be in a studio without an audience. I think all of the candidates should be seated at the same table. I think it's much more conducive to a discussion. I think it's perhaps a bit easier for the moderator to control.

I think in that format, you should try and tackle fewer topics. Under the agreement that the campaigns had signed, I had to cover--we had to have eight segments. And I think it was too little time on some of the topics that we wanted to cover. I also think that the moderator should be allowed to follow up. Again, under the agreement that we had, I wasn't supposed to do that. And there were times when I wished I could have come and snapped them back to the topic they were supposed to discuss. You know, when we get to the tail end and I feel they haven't really addressed the topic, I'd like to have some time there to force them to address the topic that was presented, or to ask a clarifying question.

I still believe that the single moderator format is the one that could lead to the most interesting discussion between these candidates. In the case of the debate I did, it was almost impossible. Quayle came in programmed to attack Clinton. Gore came in programmed to attack Quayle and the Republican Party. And the Admiral still didn't figure out why he was there, but I had great empathy for him, and it was true--I was protective of him. Some of you have heard this before. The closest I personally came to disaster in that debate was near the end when Admiral Stockdale lost his hearing aid and it was the tip of my tongue, I almost blurted out, "You may be the luckiest man in America." And thank heavens, I didn't do it.

DIONNE: Carole Simpson.

CAROLE SIMPSON (ABC News): This may be the last time I will have to talk about the second presidential debate--not. I cannot stop talking about it because the people I run into, wherever I go, will not let me. I have appeared on many forums discussing the election and the debates, and I hope this is not too repetitious for those of you that have already heard my thoughts on my matter, but here goes.

Based on my mail, phone calls and personal encounters, the second presidential debate was without a doubt the public's favorite. It's been--what--seven months since the debate, and I'm in Orlando, Florida last week in the airport and I'm still being stopped and recognized by everyone who calls me "the debate lady" and wants to talk about it.

I've told this before, but I was in Indianapolis in February doing a story at a homeless shelter for an "American Agenda" piece I was working on. And all of a sudden, a very dirty and very smelly man came up to me and he said, "Ain't you the lady that ran that debate with the presidential candidates?" And I said, "Yes, I did." And he yells out to the entire shelter, "This is the lady that did the debate with the presidential candidates." And I found myself in a receiving line with homeless people shaking my hand and telling me how much they enjoyed it and how I really handled those guys. And I was amazed that people in the homeless shelter had seen this debate. I am stopped in restaurants, on the streets, in shopping malls, by taxi drivers--lots of taxi drivers, guys at the car wash, convicts. I get lots of prison mail; they all saw it, loved it.

I don't know how to explain it, but that television event apparently touched something in the American people. Perhaps it was because real people were asking questions, asking the kinds of questions that the people at home wanted answers to. Perhaps it was because they could see the

candidates in a more relaxed setting, moving about the floor. And perhaps it was some of the moments during the debate that many people tell me helped them make up their minds. And these are some of the moments.

I've heard many people say the man with the pony tail who called on the candidates to stop the mud-slinging expressed their sentiments exactly. They said, like the Richmond audience, they wanted talk on the issues. They told me that when President Bush started talking about bozos and Clinton and Gore not knowing more about foreign policy than Millie, they got mad.

Scores of people have mentioned the young black woman who asked how the national debt had personally affected the candidates. Remember, the question was not phrased as she may have intended. But Bush said, "I don't get it." I tried to help him by suggesting the questioner was talking about the economy and the recession. And she did go on to point out that her friends had trouble meeting their bills and having their cars repossessed. But President Bush still didn't get it, and he went on to talk about pregnant teen-agers in a church. And I felt sorry for him. But I had a lot of people tell me that right then and there, he lost the election, in their minds.

Many women say they remember when the question was posed about when a woman or a minority might be elected president. And Mr. Bush and Mr. Perot started naming prominent black men, and I pressed for women, and they stumbled a bit. And Perot mentioned Justice Sandra Day O'Connor and NIH Director Bernadine Healy. And Mr. Bush said his wife Barbara might have won if she were running. And then he said lots of women were running for the Senate. And he added, "I hope they lose." --A little joke he was probably making because they were Democratic women that were running. But a lot of women did not appreciate hearing him say, "I hope they lose."

I've heard many comments about how stiff the president was and how he and Mr. Perot stood close to the stools during the night while Bill Clinton walked freely about the floor, coming within arm's length of some of the questioners.

Janet Brown told me to include a discussion of what it was like to see it from the vantage point that I had. And standing amidst the audience and facing the candidates, there was a great deal of tension. You could just feel it. You could feel it in the audience. You could feel it coming back from the candidates. And I tried my best to lighten up some of the heaviness in that room, I guess with mixed results. But it seemed as though it was interesting television. But I did not appreciate how interesting until I saw the videotape.

Again, like Sandy and Hal at the Kennedy-Nixon debates, until I saw it, I did not appreciate how effective Bill Clinton was. I could see President Bush's uneasiness come through across the TV screen that I did not see facing him in person. Even Ross Perot, who seemed just a fun ole guy in some of the other debates, seemed very prickly, watching him on TV this time. The camera angles, the close-ups all contributed to what on TV became a riveting television event. And as I said, I did not appreciate it at the time until I saw it.

So I could appreciate much better, once I saw it on TV, why the public responded so positively. Now I think Jim Lehrer and Hal Bruno and the panels of journalists all did a fine job, but we won. My debate won. It was the clear winner.

(Laughter.)

Now I don't think a town meeting is the only format that should be used in presidential campaigns. We still need the professional journalist with lots of expertise in the candidates' histories and records and flip-flops on issues. But I like what happened last year. I thought the public was well-

served in eight days having four debates. I think you had the audience build just like during "Roots, the Mini-Series." Attention was there and people continued. So I don't think that was bad, to compact it in one week's time.

And I think it was great having the variety of formats for the public to draw from. I do not like the very stilted first debate with two minutes here and one minute there, and the public tells me they don't like that at all. I keep hearing about "we don't like that kind of format."

So I really think we have to realize, this is TV. The public is used to seeing talk shows in different kinds of formats and that kind of thing. So I would like to see--and I think it should be included in all future formats--but to have the people's debate, and have the public have an opportunity to question the candidates.

DIONNE: For our second hour, Hal will moderate a debate up here over which debate won. Jim Lehrer.

JIM LEHRER (MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour): E.J., thank you. First of all, I think I'd just like to say for the record how delighted I am to realize that the Washington Post bar against participation in presidential debates does not cover debates about the debates.

DIONNE: I didn't ask anybody. I'm not here.

LEHRER: Look, at the risk of sounding a discordant note here, I happen to believe that, based on my experience, that the format is the least important thing on the list. It's important, but the least important.

I think that the bottom line has to always be that any time you get two--or in this case--'92--you had three presidential candidates on the same platform, as Paul said, on the same platform talking about something that matters, something that is important, that it's worth the exercise. The fact of the matter is, I don't believe the formats had a thing in the world to do with the size of the audience for the debates. I think it had to do with the fact that people were interested in the election, they were interested in the candidates, they were interested in the issues.

We had bad economic times, and I don't care if you had nothing but talk-show formats, Carole. People would not have watched or listened at the rate they did if they didn't give a damn about what was going on between the candidates and what was going on in the country. That's my own view of it.

And I think the size of the audience was almost the same, whether you had a stilted format or whether you had the Billy Bob Don format. I mean, those are just the numbers, and I think that speaks to the level of interest, rather than whether or not it's a television program, or not.

On the single moderator format, one that I've had some experience with, I must tell you, ladies and gentlemen, everybody who is involved in presidential debates from this point on, you must handle that format like it's live dynamite. The rules are difficult and they come over stilted, but they are rules and you can control things. There were moments of my 42 minutes with the three candidates on that stage in Michigan where I knew I had dynamite in my hands, and I had judgments to make about what was fair and what was not fair. And there was no way for anybody to help me. There was no rule to fall back on.

I'll give you one quick example that you all may or may not recall. There was a time early on when Perot said, "Oh, I thought it was going to be equal time, it's not fair," something like that. And I had to make a decision, with no help from anybody, whether or not it was, in fact, fair; whether or not to pursue his point or whether to try to deflect him and get on with what I had planned to do or had hoped to do. And it was my judgment alone before millions of people, affecting the outcome of an election, as to whether or not it was fair or not to Ross Perot.

Now Perot went with me on my decision and did not continue to press the point. But I lay in hot terror in the bed that night and nights afterward when I realized he could have pressed the point, he could have pressed the point, he could have pressed the point. There was no rule to cover that sort of thing, and you've got to be very, very careful because, as everybody has said, you're sitting out there. And having done live television as long as I have, the perception of what's going on around the table is not always the perception that's going on outside.

So what I think is fair--I mean, you just have to be very, very careful. In other words, you have to choose not only your moderators well, but you have to choose your candidates well. And you don't have a damn thing to do with choosing the candidates.

And keep in mind that we can have all the seminars in the world and all us great minds can say what's the best format, what's this and that. The fact of the matter is, this is a decision that's going to be left to the candidates. It always will be and it always must be. You can make all kinds of recommendations and whatever, but you cannot make demands. They must run for president the way they want to run for president, and we must be very, very careful that we don't decide that we are running the candidates for president of the United States. We are not.

We are there to facilitate and we are there to help the American people understand what's going on, and not to whatever. I won't go on and on about this. But I would strongly urge when you think about the single moderator format and all of its wonderfulness, it is dynamite. It can affect the outcome of an election, if somebody makes a bad decision, somebody that you can't suddenly stop things and say, "Okay, now, what's the hell's going on here?"--because of the demand of a television program. You're live. You've got an audience. I agree with everything. You've got to get the live audience out of there, if you possibly can.

But here again, that isn't going to be our decision. You can't demand that. That's going to be negotiated. Everything is going to be negotiated. So, anyhow, end of speech.

DIONNE: On Jim's Washington Post point, I'd just like to say that I'm glad the Post has a policy that lets me not participate and then shoot the wounded afterward.

We'd like to turn it over to the audience. Let me just list a few questions, at least that came to me, that were raised here.

You have, did cramming the debates in over a ten-day period, was that a bad thing? I actually think it was a good thing, but I'll leave it to you. Should we go to an old-fashioned debate style? Should debates be required as a matter of law? Did the people's town meeting debate win? Did the formats have any relationship to the size of the audience? How much does equal time matter?

The issues we won't discuss are how Mr. Fahrenkopf and Mr. Kirk manipulated the debate to their own purposes, Mr. Fahrenkopf to elect a Democrat president and Mr. Kirk to get Perot 19 percent of the vote. So I turn it over to you folks. Who would like to comment first? Sir?

PROFESSOR JAMES UNGER (American University): I'd just like to make a couple of very quick comments, if I could. First, in terms of Mr. Vanocur's comment about the classic debate format which I think is an excellent idea. I think that that will be very importantly determined, however, when we talk about classic format. Whether there are two or more candidates under the circumstances, a classic format inherently offers a much greater chance of success if it is limited to two individuals.

We do not, in fact, I think even really have an appreciation of what the classic format is beyond that--and we shouldn't confuse a classic format with simply a moderator and the candidates.

VANOCUR: May I just respond for a moment? Hal will recall this because he was very helpful to me when I was the moderator in 1984, the League of Voters, Amfac Hotel, Dallas-Fort Worth, Mondale, Hart and Jackson--and, if I recall, Hal, that went rather smoothly, didn't it?

BRUNO: Yeah.

VANOCUR: And was fairly useful. So you're absolutely right. You can't have a classic debate--3 by 5 cards and so forth and everything like that. But you might want to look at that--people on the debate commission. It's a point of personal privilege. But I think, Hal, and I recall it worked rather well between the three of them. So it can work in a three--

BRUNO: Dallas worked well. I'll just add real quickly, we tried a number of times over the years in the primaries to use the classic debate format. And we never, ever could get candidates to agree with it.

From 1976 onward when the debates were restored, we couldn't even get them to agree to a single moderator format in a general election--until this year was the very first time.

UNGER: Two other quick reactions. Despite having chaired a number of expert panelists, may I say I agree with those panelists who argue for the compaction of the debates. And one of the reasons not raised here is, I think it reduces the ability of the spin doctors--as much as I do not want to condemn fellow colleagues here--to have more substantive impact upon the voters. We may not even get to a weekend in which the weekend talk shows will have the ability to assess who won or who lost under the circumstances.

Viewing it as a single play with four acts is probably a lot better than four independent acts.

Finally, in terms of Carole's comment, I do not think we should confuse--as was amply pointed out--the popularity of a format with the substantive success of a format. "Indecent Proposal," "Dynasty" and "Dallas" have all been at the top of the ratings. That doesn't make them valuable.

SIMPSON: Well, I want to take issue with that. If the public thought that they learned the most from that format, why would you argue that that was not substantive, since that's what the election is about? It's what the voters feel about it and what kinds of answers they get to questions that they may be interested in.

So I would think not only was it popular, but I think in terms of the public's mind, it was substantive. It did give them those moments and those kinds of things that were decisive in their minds.

UNGER: I don't think they learned from the format. They learned from the particular issues as they were raised in that particular debate, which could have been just as easily raised in any of the other debates.

SIMPSON: Maybe not, maybe not.

UNGER: Maybe yes.

DIONNE: Walter Mears and then Jules Witcover.

WALTER MEARS: Hal, you mentioned that the vice presidential debate, you were committed to eight segments and that there were to be no follow-ups. That suggests a rather tighter negotiated agreement than I had been familiar with before.

Was that applicable in other debates? How tightly were the rules drawn?

BRUNO: I can't say for other debates. For our debate, for the vice presidential debate--Ed Fouhy, correct me if I'm wrong at any point in recalling this. They had agreed on what the times would be--that there would be so much time for their opening statements and then so much time for an exchange. And the clip that you saw where they said it was supposed to be free-wheeling--not according to the debate agreement. According to the debate agreement, you were supposed to go to them in turn, in a sequential order, for the rebuttal segment of it.

And Jim is right. You make split decisions right there on the spot. And I made the decision right there--well, if you guys don't want to do it that way, it's okay with me. If you want to go free-for-all, so be it, you know. And I just felt that I shouldn't waste the listening audience's time by getting into some sort of a hassle over the rules that were signed.

And anyhow, the way the time segments worked out for a 90-minute debate, it meant covering eight topics. So how it was for the other debates, I don't know.

Ed, am I correct in that?

ED FOUHY: Well, Mike Brewer and I are back here trying to remember.

BRUNO: Yeah, the eighth topic we knew would only be a five-minute segment. It was going to be a shorter segment.

FOUHY: Bev Lindsey probably is a better source than we are.

DIONNE: Is there a parliamentarian there?

LINDSEY: If I recall correctly, the candidates did agree together on how long the questions should last specifically, also, and how long the response was and how long the rebuttal was.

DIONNE: Could I just on behalf of the record--

LINDSEY: So the candidates themselves did set the length of time to allow for each question which then set the standard for how many questions should be discussed, could discussed.

BRUNO: This is one of the reasons why I feel so strongly that there should be some sort of party discipline involved here. If everybody--if the two parties agree that the debate commission is the administrator, the body responsible for putting on debates, I strongly believe as a political reporter, let's take it away from the campaigns and this constant bickering and pettiness that goes on to see who can get the edge.

If they know, if they're going to accept the nomination of their party that, in the fall, they will be required to take part in four debates, that maybe it will be a varied format, et cetera--you know, as I described--

But their job is to prepare, to show up and debate. And I'd like to see an end to the debate over debates that goes on.

DIONNE: Could I say just one thing? If people could wait till the mike goes to them in the interest of the record for this conference.

SUSAN ROOK (CNN): Following up on the issue of follow-ups, I know that during the third presidential debate, the one that I was in, that it was very constraining, especially when a candidate doesn't understand the question, like, for example, asking then-President Bush about the issue of women and minorities getting beyond the glass ceiling, and he said, "Well, I have Margaret Tutwiler." And he just really didn't understand.

I violated the format and jumped in and tried to correct him, which I shouldn't have done but couldn't help myself. But I would really urge to stop the ban on follow-ups because, if you just ask a question and it just goes floating out there, it doesn't do any good.

DIONNE: I'd just like to respond to Hal about on the question of doing it through the parties. It seems to me that any party chairman whose candidate was 40 percent ahead in the polls should be exiled permanently if he insisted that that candidate debate. And I just don't see--I don't see how you will ever do it through the parties myself. And Frank Fahrenkopf has some experience on that, even sitting on this side of the fence. And I think if you're going to do it, you have to do it by law.

VANOCUR: Man and boy, I've never seen a presidential campaign where the candidates' handlers listen to the chairmen of the respective parties.

DIONNE: No, but the chairman would listen to them on this issue, I think.
Jules Witcover.

JULES WITCOVER: Speaking in terms of the content of the debate, I thought in Carole's debate--it is Carole's debate--there were questions that were asked directly by voters to the candidates that I wonder whether reporters would ask.

Would a reporter get up to the president of the United States--except perhaps Dan Rather--and

say, "Stop slinging mud"? The fact that these voters--and would the candidates be obliged to respond directly if that question was asked by a reporter? I think there's a different dynamic existing when voters are asking the questions.

LEHRER: My point--may I just say, Jules, my point is that, in terms of what causes people to cast their votes and causes a candidate to say something that would affect a vote, that it doesn't matter who asks the question and in what format it's asked.

By the time the debates came up, there was not one new piece of information that came out during the course of the debates. Nobody changed any positions; nobody initiated any new programs. It was a case of seeing these three men function in comparison with the other two right there in front of you. And it didn't really matter.

VANOCUR: I disagree. I think that question--bragging on oneself--that I put to Clinton about--I put it to Bush about drugs--and Clinton threw his brother right on the rack--whole testament-- he said everything but, "My brother has hairy arms"--was an indication to me that this guy was going to break with the Democrats on the issue of law and order. I don't know how much more a guy could show a break with the past as Clinton did with the question about drugs and his brother.

So I think that was an instance where--I must say, these things are accidental. But I do think things come out.

LEHRER: Oh, sure. But my point is that if you get 500 people, half of them are journalists, half of them are bus drivers, the chances of them coming up with similar questions are always there because it's in the context of a presidential election, and it's in the context in this particular case of a mud-slinging campaign that involved the economy.

So 90 percent of all the questions were in that kind of context. And that's why it was terrific. Every format, in my opinion, was terrific. I wasn't putting any of the formats down--quite the contrary. I thought your format was terrific--I thought they were all great. It didn't matter what they were, though.

My point is that the public was geared into the election. And, Jules, people on national television and on national radio ask those kinds of questions every day. They're being asked right now as we sit here. I mean, that's where the people learn how to ask those questions is by watching the national media. They're not being asked by quiet folks like you and me, but they're being asked by others.

DIONNE: John Mashek? And I'd also like to encourage anybody who wants to argue that this year's debates were an abysmal failure. That would be an interesting point of view. John Mashek?

JOHN MASHEK: Carole, given the importance of the debates that everybody has said and the wide viewership, could you make an historical footnote for us and tell us, since some of the Bush-Quayle campaign people have persisted in saying that you were talking to the audience ahead of time, preparing them, helped Clinton immeasurably, can you tell us what went into your thoughts there and defend yourself against that charge?

SIMPSON: I'd be happy to. After the debate, I found out very early on that word had gotten out by the Republican spin doctors that I had manipulated the debate, that I chose the questions, and that I had prevented someone from asking a question about Iran-contra, that there was someone in the audience.

This, the next day, was picked up by Rush Limbaugh and his viewers. And I started getting calls and faxes. I even got death threats about what I had done during--how much I had exceeded my role as moderator.

What I had done--and it was wide open--I went in to see the audience. I was terrified; they were terrified. This had never been done. There were no tapes I could go back and look at and figure out how to do this debate. So I felt that if I got to see the people and talk to them, that I would loosen them up, it would loosen me up, and we'd have a good debate.

So about two hours, when Ed Fouhy wanted to check camera angles, I went in, introduced myself to the audience, told them who I was, told them my background as a broadcast journalist for so many years, told them what I had covered--that I had covered George Bush for eight years, and kind of went and, "I'm really scared, and aren't you scared, and tell me about yourselves." And they yelled out--I said, "What kind of occupations are you?" And there was everything--dentists, doctors, businessmen, housewives--every--

And I said, "I don't want to know your questions, but I want to get an idea of the kinds of topics you're interested in." So I said, "Just tell." They wanted me to read their questions and hear their questions. And I said, "No, I don't know what know your questions. Just tell me what kinds of things do you want the candidates to answer."

So they yelled out, the deficit and taxes and poverty and crime and education and welfare reform and all kinds of things like that--gun control. And it occurred to me--this was on the heels of Hal's debate--I said, "You're not interested in the draft? Clinton and the draft?" And people said no. I said, "Iran-contra?" Everybody, the chorus of no's gets louder. I said, "The Jenifers with a J and a G?" And they started getting up and saying, "We're sick of hearing that stuff. We want these guys to answer the questions about what they're going to do for the country and where the country is headed."

So I thought that was pretty significant--that they were not interested in the kinds of things that were being hammered by the politicians, by the candidates. And we fully expected George Bush to come into that second presidential debate, after Quayle had been hammering Gore about the character issues and trust, we fully expected that Bush would come in with that.

So clearly it was. Two questions into the debate, he brought up Clinton going to Britain and demonstrating against the Vietnam War, and that trust and character were important issues. Well, I felt I had wide latitude as moderator in my debate, and a lot of people didn't know that. I was allowed to follow up. I was allowed to redirect the questioning. I was allowed to help frame a question. Those were all in the guidelines agreed to for the second presidential debate.

So I thought I was perfectly within my rights as moderator to let the candidates know that I had talked to the audience and that the audience had indicated to me that those weren't the kinds of issues that they were interested in hearing about.

And that's when I said, "Would someone like to express that view?" And that's when the guy stood up with the mud--actually there were two people there--a woman and the guy with the pony tail who stood up and said, "We're tired of the mud-slinging."

And I could see George Bush--it was like the wind went out of his sails. It was like a pin had been stuck in him. You could just see that he was knocked off his game from that moment on for the rest of the debate.

Is that manipulating the debate? I don't think so. I hadn't prepped that audience. All I had done was ask them what they were interested in. And then in my role as moderator, thought I had the perfect right to indicate that these people had told me earlier they weren't interested in it.

To the question of whether somebody was--I picked the questions, I thought I was going to be able to pick the questions. But Ed Fouhy was in my ear, and he said, "Go here, go there." He determined who was called on. I did not determine who was called on. And he was trying to balance the audience geographically so that we get some people in the front and the back and so on. So I had no control over the questions. I did not plant the questions.

Is that a good enough defense?

MASHEK: For the record, Ed Fouhy said he didn't get any death threats.

BRUNO: But I think you should broadcast Fouhy's home address and phone number, though.

DIONNE: We'll put an 800-number on the tape. Carl Leubsdorf?

CARL LEUBSDORF: I'm interested in a question that was alluded to by both Jim Lehrer and Hal, which is the question of scheduling and how the debates fit into the fall campaign.

I guess I come down with Jim that by doing it in a compacted period, you built a lot of interest, but you didn't prevent the debates from being used as an excuse by candidates for not doing the other things candidates do in campaigns.

Do you think there's any danger, if you spread the debates out too much or if you adopt something like the Sunday night plan that came out of Harvard last fall, that the candidates will decide that they get so much exposure through these things, they can just sit home the rest of the time, especially perhaps an incumbent president? If each of you could comment on that.

LEHRER: Well, I think you're onto something, Carl. I think that could very easily happen if you did that, if you were to program it. You know, you never know. The problem is, you're always dealing in unknowns. Now we're dealing in one known, and the known was the one that happened in '92--what is it? Four debates in ten days. It worked like a charm, in my opinion.

Now, I don't know whether the other ones would have worked. The original plan that the commission wanted--am I not correct, Janet--you wanted it all very planned out, did you not, over a period of a month, right?

Well, Carl, your point is, if that had happened, it would have probably frozen the campaign for a full month, probably even for two or three weeks before and probably two or three weeks after. And that would essentially have been the campaign for the presidency. It's an interesting point. It's for others to decide.

BRUNO: Carl, there are a number of reasons why I'd like to see it spread out over a period of six weeks from September through October. I think, yes, it was very dramatic having all four in the

ten-day period. And as I say, though, that happened by accident because the Bush campaign realized that they were losing the election and they were losing the debate over debates.

You know, the debates did not change the outcome of the election in any way. Political reporters all knew that Bush was losing the election before the debates. He failed to use the debates to turn it around. And Clinton didn't make any bad mistakes. So in that sense, Clinton overall won the debates and we went on with the election.

I think this. For one thing, these debates were not in real prime time. As I recall, it was 7 o'clock Eastern that we started. I think at 9 o'clock Eastern, you would have even bigger audiences, especially on the West Coast. You couldn't do it, though, in this crash ten-day period because there were too many conflicts with other things going on.

Richmond you were able to do 9 o'clock, okay. The other three, though, were 7 o'clock Eastern start-ups, weren't they?

FOUHY: Yeah, but that's because of baseball.

BRUNO: Ah, that's exactly the point I'm making. All right. We live in a real world. And in September and October in the United States, you have everything from Jewish holidays to baseball play-offs to baseball World Series to Monday night football, et cetera.

Now, in a perfect world, we'd say, well, who cares? Everybody should watch the debates. Well, that's not the way it is. And if we want America to watch the debates, we have to acknowledge reality. And that is that in that two-month period, there are only perhaps a half-a-dozen nights in which you can have a debate at 9 o'clock Eastern time without running into a conflict with something else.

So I think that's one of the reasons why it should be spread out over the two-month period. I think that's the practical reason.

But also I think crashing it into this ten-day period or nine-day period, really the whole campaign came to a stop. There was nothing but that. And, Carl, I think the danger of the candidates relying only on this is perhaps greater when it's all compressed into the one-day period.

To me, it's just not rational to have it be this way. I think it's much better. It's just more logical to have it spread out over a period of six weeks.

LEUBSDORF: Perhaps by 1996, the powers that be that run baseball will have come to their senses and decided to have a few World Series games in the afternoon. Then that will solve this problem.

BRUNO: Never credit a baseball owner with intelligence, okay, John?

VANOCUR: Ed Bennett Williams once said on a plane to New York, I said, "Ed, what are the winters for you like now that you're no longer running a football team, you have to go to baseball meetings?"

He said, "Sandy, if there's anything dumber than a pro-football owner, it's a smart baseball owner."

And, Carl, I've testified, always get them done earlier, rather than later. But I don't think there's any sure-footed way to analyze this--because I remember in 1980, Carter and Reagan didn't go

at each other until Cleveland very late. But you know, despite what the polls said, that campaign was over. And I don't think that campaign had an important effect, other than to ratify what was already going on.

But I do think earlier is better. And get started right after Labor Day. That's my own feeling about it, because it does have a tendency to put everything on hold.

DIONNE: Ed Fouhy?

ED FOUHY: E.J., I wonder if everybody on the panel agrees with what Sandy said, that there should be no law tying debates to campaign contributions. Is there any dissent on the panel on that one?

DIONNE: I'm for it. I mean, I would do it. I think you can put conditions on taking people's money, basically. But I'm curious if anybody else feels that way.

LEHRER: I don't comment on things like that on MacNeil/Lehrer.

FOUHY: How about gays in the military?

LEHRER: I think we should make limited air strikes, okay?

BRUNO: At selected targets. I hadn't thought about tying it to campaign funds until Sandy mentioned it. I do agree with Sandy, the less tampering we do with law, with the system, the better off we are. We've gotten into the mess we're in because, in the name of reform, we brought in some things that just backfired and had unintended consequences, which is why I was thinking more of it in terms of party rules.

I do think that if the two parties have a rule that says you must debate in order to get the nomination, that the campaigns do have to agree. I want to take this thing out of the hands of the campaign managers, if you can possibly do it. Now that may be unrealistic.

I'd like to ask Paul and Frank, do you think the parties could do it, as a contingency or as a rule for getting the nomination, you must agree ahead of time that you will participate in the debates? Could the parties oppose that?

FAHRENKOPF: If you had then a candidate who didn't want to debate, they'd get the rules changed. I mean, the candidate, nominee of the party, is going to control the committee and they'll change the rules.

KIRK: All in favor, say "aye." And that's it.

FAHRENKOPF: Plus when you realize that it's got to be, under the present Federal Election Act, a 501(c)(3) debate sponsor, where you have the distance between the sponsoring agency--in our case, the commission and the party--there can't be any direct ties, and there have not been since the commission came into being. I would rather not have that get into it.

KIRK: I don't think the parties can dictate to it. And I think what Frank just touched on in his last remark became apparent this time around with the Perot candidacy, and there were others as well. Those questions will be raised, I suppose, when the candidate's perspective is talked about, the last panel.

But if it's solely the two major parties just sort of dictating the process, it raises a lot of other questions. So while the history of the commission arose through the Commission on National Elections suggesting the two major parties undertake the responsibility, the evolution and strength of different candidacies, criteria as to how people are invited, have to be made basically by those who would be viewed as credibly independent and making independent judgments about us.

So it's got more than just the can we dictate to the candidate aspect to it.

DIONNE: Sandy, you wanted to say something, and--

VANOCUR: I want the two chairmen, now that I do think the commission is more institutionalized than ever before, has greater prestige, would both of you please respond to my request to at least try one single moderator? It hasn't been tried in 30-odd years--a single moderator, no audience, to the degree possible, if it's a two person, a class debate? Could you try that? We'll never know.

FAHRENKOPF: Well, we did--

KIRK: Let me say, from my part, that's an easy one to say "yes" to. When we reviewed the 1988 debates, the suggestion was that we have a single moderator. There was a question about live audience or no.

But the thrust of our recommendations for all the debates of 1992 would be there would be no panel, there would be a single moderator.

The variation that was introduced was the variation introduced by Carole's winning debate; and that was introduced, I think, initially by the Clinton campaign and agreed to by the Bush campaign.

But my answer to that question is, yes, Sandy.

FAHRENKOPF: I agree.

DIONNE: Unless somebody has a burning remark that they have to make, I am told we are supposed to shut this down. I think we can agree that there should be a rule in the future that these four people should be required to be on all future discussion panels about debates.

Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

(There was a five-minute break.)

FRANK FAHRENKOPF: The 1992 debates were watched by more Americans than any debates in the history of American politics. And we also know that more Americans based their final decision on who to vote for on the debates, than any other single consideration in 1992.

Yet most of the post-debate polling information and analysis like we heard just a few moments ago focused on who won or lost, and that's what you normally got the night after, or the day after a debate--who won or lost--in other words, a racehorse-type approach--rather than what the viewers actually felt, what the viewers believed to have been the most important thing from a format standpoint or from a question standpoint, as to what educated them the most so that they could make an educated decision on who to vote for.

Well, during 1992, the Commission on Presidential Debates developed a project to ask voters what they thought about the format. And under the direction of Professor Diana Carlin, a member of the CPD advisory board, approximately 600 people around the country came together in focus groups held immediately after the end of each debate.

The next panel will present to you the results of those focus group discussions, and we're pleased that actually we have four members of the focus groups who will be with us today to directly comment on their observations and feelings.

So let me at this point turn the podium over to Diana Carlin, to whom we, on the commission, owe a special thanks for this project. Diana is also the one who was so instrumental in getting the Speech Communication Association, one of our voter education partners, to work with us and participate with the commission. So with that, let me introduce to you Professor Diana Carlin from the University of Kansas. Diana.

DIANA CARLIN (professor, Communications Studies, University of Kansas): Thank you, Frank. As a way of introducing this public reaction to the debates, I want to begin with a very short clip of the focus group that I conducted in St. Louis immediately following the St. Louis debate. This is the very last question, the kind of wrap-up question.

(Tape:) CARLIN: Do you have any thoughts about how you would remake the debates?

MAN: I think you should ask--go ahead.

WOMAN: I think they need to devote more time to each question. I don't know if they should have debates that focus on one issue because I think there's too many issues to do that and we're only having three debates. I don't think we could pick three issues, but this time it was 90 minutes, and maybe 10 minutes a question, and somehow allot that time between the candidates, however many there are, so they can get in depth, so we can compare the specifics of their programs, rather than all these generalities.

CARLIN: So more opportunities for speech on each question, instead of just one time through?

MAN: I think I counted 13 different subjects that they discussed. We're going to have three different debates--maybe break it down over the 13--so they can devote more time to each question.

MAN: I think some of the questions you're asking us now should be after we watch all three debates because they're all going to be a little different. You know, there's going to be a moderator. So maybe this is an ideal thing--you know, a new trend--of having more debates longer, having them, mixing them up, having different variables.

MAN: I'll tell you what I really like. I really like having them four weeks before the election instead of having them, you know, spread out from the convention to the election, because you focus it in this four week period. This is cut-bait time for the election. And this really focuses the campaign for everyone.

WOMAN: Maybe we need to dedicate more time than three debates. Maybe we need even more because there are so many issues and there is so much to say. We're talking about 4-1/2 hours of debates for someone who'll be in there for four years. Maybe we need to spend more time looking at the issues and learning what they have to say.

MAN: Yeah, we do, particularly since the parties themselves do not play the traditional roles of defining the candidates specifically.

WOMAN: Or putting out a platform.

MAN: Exactly, exactly. I think that's a good suggestion.

MAN: There are more requirements to get a minimum wage job than to be the president.
(End of videotape)

CARLIN: The public speaks. There were several questions raised during the last panel, such as, Does it matter who asks the questions? Would members of the media ask different kinds of questions than the general public? Would we have had the same questions out of Richmond from the press, if we had, you know, more debates, possibly?

Also, do people learn anything? Is there any new information that comes out of the debates.

What we're going to explore in this panel are the answers to those questions from the people about who you were speaking during the last panel, actual citizens and people who are involved in the focus groups.

Since the first debate in 1960, there have been attempts to gauge what the public gained from the debates. A lot of that research, however, has been in the form of survey research, asking people questions about, What did you think before the debate about this person's honesty or character or trustworthiness, and then did this change at the end of the debate? Or asking the horse race questions, Who won? Or, the other question that becomes very common in any kind of post-debate analysis from voters: Is this going to change your mind?

And oftentimes, members of the press, even my colleagues around the country at conventions when they analyze the political debates will say, very few people changed their minds, so do we really need them?

What we decided needed to be done was to add an element that oftentimes isn't discussed, and

that's the public agenda. Since the 1960 debates, a lot of media critics who've analyzed the debates have noted that, of the three agendas--the media agenda, the candidate's agenda and the public agenda--oftentimes, it's the public agenda that's overlooked in terms of the kinds of questions asked and what really goes on in those debates.

So the determination was made to try to find out what the public thought about debates. And I was asked to organize a project of focus groups around the country that SCA, Speech Communication Association, members helped me conduct. We did these in 17 cities in 16 states. We ended up over 50 focus groups and over 600 people. It was kind of a major undertaking, but fortunately I had very capable people to help me, and I'd like to introduce a couple of those.

There are actually five panelists and I'll introduce the fifth one in a minute. To my left, Mari Tonn who is on the faculty of the Communication Department of the University of New Hampshire. She and her husband, Mark Kuhn, who's in the audience, conducted focus groups in New Hampshire. Mark is also on the faculty at the University of New Hampshire. Next to Mari is Jack Kay who is the chairman of the Communication Department at Wayne State University in Detroit and also conducted focus groups for us in Detroit. To Jack's left is Mitchell Bible who is a free-lance photographer, and he was one of the people selected by Mark and Mari to be in the focus groups in New Hampshire. He is from Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

Next to Mitch is Richard Green who is from Richmond, Virginia, and he was in the focus group which was organized by David Thomas from the University of Richmond, who's also in the audience.

We're going to begin this part of the panel with sort of an overview of what the focus group project was, and that's going to be done by Mitchell McKinney, who's my graduate research assistant at the University of Kansas and, without whose help, this never would have been pulled off.

MITCHELL McKINNEY (research assistant, University of Kansas): I would direct your attention to a hand-out that you have in your information packet that gives you a demographic overview. And what I would like to do for just a few minutes is briefly describe the project, the structure and the design. So I think that that will help you perhaps better understand the analysis and the interpretations that you will be hearing by the panelists.

As Dr. Carlin indicated, we had a total of 62 focus groups. Our focus groups were run after each of the four debates, and we also ran a number of focus groups that we called "the debate on the debates." During the period when the debates were on-again, off-again, we ran a series of focus groups to determine from the voters, in terms of what are your feelings about this debate on the debates. Do you want debates? How would you like to see the debates structured? What issues would you like to hear? What questions would you like to hear in the debates?

So we had a total of 62 focus groups, as Dr. Carlin said; 624 participants in 16 states. In our structure of this project, we tried to reach some type of geographic balance. You will notice on your list of cities there, we had West Coast cities, East Coast cities, Midwest cities, southern cities. And also we tried to select cities with a population diversity. We have several rather large cities--metropolitan areas--such as Atlanta, St. Louis, Detroit, Boston. And then we also tried to find several smaller rural areas to make sure we had a mix of the type of voters and viewers that would be involved in the project--such cities as Stephenville, Texas, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, for instance.

Each evening, instead of running focus groups in each of our cities, we were only able to run 10-13 following each of the debates. And this was a factor, actually, of the time of the focus groups.

We found in trying to recruit members that the early start times for the debates, that we could not get West Coast people to show up at 4 o'clock in the afternoon to participate in focus groups. They were working.

So on the Sunday debate, for instance, the October the 11th debate, and also on the Richmond debate when we had a later start time, we were able to use our West Coast cities. And we had a variety of types of focus groups that we used. Roughly 50 percent of our focus groups, we used different participants each evening. But we also had a couple of other types of focus groups. We caught one of the types--roughly a quarter of our focus groups consisted of stable participants, or our stable participants. These were the focus groups where we tracked the same viewers for each of the evenings of the debate.

And we were interested in several things in terms of were there changes in perception, were there changes in how the viewers were thinking about the candidates after each of the debates. And also previous research has looked at the intervening media attention given to who won the debate or the commentary the day after the debate. So we were interested in getting some sense of how is that commentary affecting your perception of the debates.

We also ran our split groups, our male-female split groups. And in these focus groups, we were also looking for differences in terms of are there certain differences in issues or perceptions in male groups versus female groups. And we were also looking at trying to replicate some previous research in focus group research that talks about certain gender biases in terms of leading the discussion, talk time, various influences that we see in split gender groups.

Very briefly, in terms of some of the recruitment procedures, we had a variety of recruitment procedures of where, how we constructed these focus groups. We tried to get the most systematic recruitment procedures possible. For instance, we tried several groups with random digit dialing in the local areas, obtaining voter lists and getting certain numbers from the voter lists. We tried phone books.

We had several limitations to where some of our groups--again, because of the on-again, off-again nature of the focus--of the debates--where we went to using such methods as what we have called the neighborhood intercept method, where the focus group facilitator would simply try to find representative samples in the neighborhood, people that they knew that would participate in these focus groups.

The demographics that we came up with we felt are pretty good in terms of the randomness, in terms of the age you can see listed there, the gender, the party affiliation. I would make note on the ethnic background, we had greatest difficulty with recruiting from minority populations for our focus groups, and for several reasons. One of the requirements to participate in the focus group, our first requirement is the person needed to be registered to vote because we were interested in perceptions of likely voters. And we found, of those not registered to vote, the largest numbers coming from minority populations.

We also had, in terms of many other conflicts, job conflicts, transportation, those not able to make it to the focus group site, people indicating to our focus group facilitators that they would love to participate but had very practical concerns, such as child care. And several of these reasons combined hurt the minority population in terms of the percentages of participation.

You can also see listed there on your demographic sheet, we were interested in some other issues in terms of where are people getting their campaign information? What are the dominant

sources of campaign information? And also level of exposure: what has been the level of exposure in terms of this political campaign? When have you started listening or viewing and trying to get interested in what's going on?

I would end by simply noting that our focus group facilitators, as Dr. Carlin has indicated, were college and university professors who were trained in focus group procedures. Our method of analysis, we made audio and video recordings of our focus group sessions. Transcripts were made for each of these sessions and then content analysis methods applied to the transcripts to look at such issues as what did the voters tell us that they learned from the debates? What issues raised did you think were important? What issues were not raised that you wanted to hear raised? What were your impressions of the formats? Did the formats help in terms of your learning from the debates?

And that's the commentary that we'll hear from the panelists.

CARLIN: Thank you, Mitchell. I've asked Mari Tonn to address the issue more, most directly, of the formats and the reactions to formats, and also the kinds of things that people really learned from the debates, in terms of those format variables.

One other thing that's in your packets is an example of the kinds of questions. Every focus group leader had identical information. They followed the same set of questions. And what's in the packet is the set of questions for the first debate. Those questions then were varied for the vice presidential debate to get at specific vice presidential issues. And then, as we got into subsequent debates, there were questions related to some of the intervening media kinds of issues.

So Mari will address the issue of reactions to formats.

MARI TONN (University of New Hampshire): Thank you. The format seems to be very interesting this afternoon, so maybe I have the prime topic.

I will talk first of all about the "debate over the debates" focus group which Mark and I ran together before we moved into the split-gender groups. And in the debate over the debate focus groups, there was a pronounced displeasure among participants with the traditional format, and primarily on two fronts. One had to do with the panel of reporters. Many people were suspicious of panels of reporters and believed that many of them were more interested in their careers than they were interested in what voters wanted to know.

And one thing that they cited from previous debates was the notion of what they called the gotcha questions--you know, the question that would make their career. So they were upset by that.

On the second front was time constraints that they were quite upset by. They saw time constraints as artificial and detrimental, both to the candidate and to the electorate. They were frustrated, for example, by a candidate's ability to evade or what they call tap-dance around questions; the lack of time for a candidate to develop an answer to a very complex question--you know, when he had two minutes to talk about them; the lack of time for someone to rebut something that had just been said that maybe was true or not true and you didn't have the time to rebut that; and then the lack of follow-ups.

And I think many people are not aware that there are constraints placed within the format about whether or not a journalist can ask follow-up questions that have been talked about. They just see journalists as not having the ambition, I think, to do that, or having their own list of questions and their own agenda, and therefore, not interested in doing the follow-up kind of work.

So those were really two of the major fronts in debate over debates. Another thing I do want to include is that there was disagreement in this first debate over debates on who should be included. And focus group participants recognize the difficulty of allowing anyone into the debates. But at the same time, they were concerned with the arbitrary nature of who was included, particularly in this round. Why was Ross Perot included, for example?

The other thing that I would comment on is that they were incredibly creative in offering alternatives. And I'm not going to go through all of them, but I'll give you a sample of some of the alternative debate formats. One had to do with give the candidates the questions ahead of time. They guess what they are, anyway. Let's see them prepare an answer. Let's have them bring visual aids. Let's have them talk for a whole hour on the education, or a whole hour on the economy.

One person even said, "I would like to see some of the top people that this person is going to have deciding environmental issues or education issues come in and talk, too"--that there are people behind the scenes who make policy. You know, have them come along.

And so you can see that there's a variety of kinds of creative things that were offered from people.

The actual debates, because there was a variety of formats this year, let some of those notions be tested. And surprisingly enough, many of the results were quite consistent with the comments that were made ahead of time. The least satisfying debate was the first debate with the panel of reporters. Very unsatisfying to the focus groups.

The second one was the split debate, and they were more satisfied with Jim Lehrer's single moderator portion of it than they were with the panel of reporters. And then the most popular debate, as you have heard already today, was the debate in Richmond with Carole Simpson, the single moderator.

I do want to talk about some of the concerns that they had about the panel of reporters actually during the presidential debates. They saw that many of the questions--they felt that many of the questions were superficial and were poorly conceived, poorly worded. They also were very upset about time. There was no in-depth of any particular issue. There was a poor opportunity to discuss complex issues and rebut those. There was no face-to-face challenge in those debates, the way that they wanted.

And they saw the time element as forcing candidates to, quote, sloganize their positions, to do the sound bite and sloganize. So what they heard was cliches that they had heard already during the campaign.

The other thing that bothered some people was the relationship they saw between the candidates and the reporters, and this was sort of an interesting relationship, in some ways, contradictory. In the one group, they had talked before about the antagonism or the gotcha kind of questions where you're trying to catch people up. But on the other hand, they sometimes talked about a clubby atmosphere that they saw between the reporters sometimes and the candidates, and that came through in some of the comments, and that bothered them.

A couple of groups talked about if there was a panel and you wanted a panel, why not have a panel of experts, rather than reporters, somebody who knows about education, somebody who knows about the economy, and have them ask those questions?

No, single moderator, very quickly--the one in Richmond, I do want to talk about that debate real briefly. The experts here they saw as real experts because they were real people so the issues were issues that they wanted to address and they were asked in ways that they wanted them to be

addressed.

One of the reasons that I think they were successful based upon the commentary by the focus group is that they saw the candidates having less opportunity to evade the questions of real people than evade the questions of the reporters because the relationship between the real people and the candidates was very different. There was a real exchange between the candidate and the voter. "What do you mean? How has the recession affected you? Tell me about your life."

And in many ways, I think this simulates the campaign trail, particularly for those of us in New Hampshire who get to see the candidates on a daily basis, you know, and live with them in many ways. It simulates what happens there in exchange. And so I think that that was important.

There was some concern about the amount of power invested in a single moderator. And that was a concern, but they did seem to prefer that a lot.

There was ambivalence about Ross Perot's inclusion in the debate. They seemed to most interested in the effect that he had on the other two candidates--in other words, how it changed the dynamics of the debate. Some people talked about the fact that it seemed to make them more honest, and there was a focus on the deficit and issues that they were concerned about. Some people talked about him as humorous but distracting. And there was concern about why is he here? You know, why is he here? He was in none of the primaries. Why is he included and other people are excluded? And so that concern was talked about.

So in conclusion, I would say that one of the things I was very struck by in doing this research is that people desperately want to experiment with the format of the debates. They want their questions addressed, and they want adequate time to have people develop answers to those questions. And they seem to welcome various formats saying that we don't have one format that we think is going to be necessarily better than others, but we do want to experiment.

CARLIN: I might add, one of the most consistent comments we got from all of the focus groups was this notion that there are too many topics covered in each debate. If you're going to have three debates, cover three to four topics per debate, do them thoroughly, get rid of the two-minute soundbites--very much what Mari was talking about.

Jack Kay is going to address the issue that was raised by Jim Lehrer--you know, the fact that all the information is already out there. There's nothing new coming out in the debates. Is there? What do voters think they learn from them? Do they get new information? And Jack will answer those questions.

JACK KAY (Wayne State University): I was thrilled to be part of this research project because, unlike a lot of the past research that's been done, particularly the survey research, the focus group interviews allowed us to get at some of the intensity issues, the involvement issues, a lot of the issues that you don't get at by just crunching a bunch of numbers. And so I'm very, very pleased to be part of this research project. I learned a lot from it.

I guess as I look at the primary contribution of the debates, compared to other information sources, as told by the voters that we talked to, there probably is just one major difference, and that is the people felt that this was providing them with unfiltered information, whereas every other information source filtered things. And that really became the primary contribution that universally the focus group members that I dealt with talked about.

Let me identify, though, four specific kind of summary comments. I hope that these don't sound like I'm spearheading a Carole Simpson fan club, but they may very well do that because there was a great deal of positivism toward the type of format and the type of thing that was going on in that particular debate.

I guess the first comment that I would have to make is the whole issue of ownership. In many ways, citizens who we talked to started feeling like the debates, particularly the debate format that involved more of the town meeting, really provided citizens the chance to own the debates. And they were actually hostile to the fact that the politicians were holding the debates hostage; they were hostile that the media was taking over the debates; they were hostile that groups were owning the debates, and they weren't owning the debates.

I think this whole issue of ownership became so important to the focus group people that we talked to because they felt like at last--you know, politicians controlled government, but at least now citizens were being given a chance to own the presidential debates. And that was really an exciting feeling, and some of their people really started climbing on about and talking about this a great deal. So I think that whole ownership issue is something that we should look at as we look at future involvement.

Certainly, the candidates have to agree to formats and all those sorts of things. But, you know, the citizens are saying, "Candidates, you people are simply our representatives. You don't own the format or the debate. It's the public that should own that format."

I think that becomes a message that I think that candidates and candidates' staffs really need to hear over and over again. I think also the whole notion--kind of a second conclusion that there was really--we were detecting some outright hostility toward the media. And it wasn't necessarily the media as the messenger sort of hostility. But it was the fact that there were a lot of people who started feeling that the media just didn't get it, that people would be asking these questions that the candidates didn't understand but seemed so obvious to them. They would be asking questions that the media said, "Oh, we've been asking these all along," when the voters felt like, "They haven't been asking those all along."

And there was this real connection that people felt by having citizen questions, even if the questions were totally redundant. The citizens felt that they were their questions, that they owned them. And I think at a symbolic level, that becomes very, very important. And so I think this notion of some of the members of the press just don't get it, that we really need to look at the hostility toward the media that is there on the part of citizens, becomes a second kind of conclusion that we were finding.

Third, although people did like the compressed nature of the debates--the fact that they were all fit into that one short period of time--there was a lot of sentiment that at least one debate needed to be conducted earlier to sort of just set a tone and to start getting some information out there. Our groups were really very, very strong on the notion that they were basing their information mainly on the debates, not on other sources of information, and therefore they wanted these debates a little earlier.

And finally, a fourth comment would be that we really found a desire on the part of the citizen to institutionalize the debates, to make sure that they are part of the process every time; and also for them to really focus on more specific issues, as was said earlier. A lot of people said, "Yes, we do want to see a law that requires candidates to participate." But then when they started talking about such

a law, they started backing down from the law and just said, "Well, as candidates, they should just recognize that they need to be part of the process, and they will be punished if they are not part of the process."

Those would be the four major thoughts that I had, based on the interviews that I conducted.

CARLIN: Thank you, Jack. Our two focus group members--we'll begin with Mitch Bible from New Hampshire. And what I've asked the two focus group members to do is just talk about what it meant to them to participate, what they learned from the debates, what the whole focus group experience was like. So, Mitchell?

MITCHELL BIBLE (focus group member, New Hampshire): Thank you. I'd like to thank the commission for letting me be a part of this. They've been very gracious hosts, and I've really enjoyed my stay here in Washington. With this as a grand finale, it's been really important for me because there's a lot of people that are in this audience that are people that I listen to and are really in awe of, and really shape my opinions a great deal.

You know, I want to try to express to them how that happens and how we feel about that. And I'm going to give you, you know, just a little bit more background about myself because I think that's important in terms of what I took to the debates, the focus groups, and, you know, just the insight that I had from my background as to how I watched the debates and how I judged the debates.

I was born actually in Kansas, but I now have resided in New Hampshire for the past seven years. So I think those two things give you kind of a different perspective on political issues than some areas of the country--New Hampshire, in particular, for obvious reasons. And since I've moved there, I have only increased my interest in politics and following primaries and debates from that standpoint.

But in the middle of those two periods, I went to high school in Texas in the '60s, so I was actually living in Texas when Jack Kennedy was assassinated; and my father was an engineer for Boeing Aircraft Company, which gives me another--and he was working on a SAC base in Texas. So that gives me another aspect of, you know, viewing politics for a long period of time. And then I lived in Chicago through most of the '70s. And I have a different political perspective from that experience. Most of you know Chicago politics and what they're like.

And so when I came to this focus group, I had a really pretty varied perspective about how to listen to it and how to address it.

I'm now a small businessman, and so I'm very much affected by what goes on politically. And the day-to-day decisions that politicians make affect me day to day. And I have a wife who is also runs another small business, and so both of us see the effects on our economy every day. I have a couple of small children. Although I've been married for quite a while, my children are young. And my concerns are also from them and the future that they have in this country.

As I said, I grew up in the '60s and so also I had the experience of watching the Vietnam war going on and was actually very--I consider myself fortunate that I didn't have to go on that. And that was one of a couple of other things that I have in common with our current president. And one other thing is that we were both born in the same year and we both graduated from high school the same year. And we both have wives who make more money than we do. So I have some insight there, too.

The focus group that I was a part of was interesting in that it was a neighborhood group and it was really valuable to me because it drew a bunch of neighbors together, some of whom didn't know

each other very well before this whole focus group thing took place. And I'll tell you, I was in a focus group that talked about the first debate, and I was also in a focus group that talked about the debate on debates. And so it gave me, you know, some additional perspectives.

But there were a number of things that I was particularly struck by about being a part of that. First of all, like I said, I got to know my neighbors better. And I think when you know your neighbors and their political values, you know them a lot more intimately than you do even, for example, for maybe the possibility of marital indiscretions which, you know, so often gets focused on in the kinds of questions the media, for example, pays attention to.

Also, the people that were in this group was very aware politically, and that kind of surprised me, too, because we had a lot of differences in age groups and backgrounds. And I certainly want to say, don't let any politicians tell you that the public isn't aware of what's going on. And I saw recently a very prominent politician make that statement on a news program. And I hope that the media will hold him accountable for that three years from now when he's so obviously running for the next presidential campaign.

But my feelings about how the debates should evolve are much like what the last panel said. I think variety is important because I think variety gave this debate session a lot of interest for myself. I see personally maybe eventually town meetings that are connected by satellites taking town meetings that are going on in several different locations hooked up by satellites with moderators at each one, and questions from the people and whatever.

Thank you. That's the main thing I wanted to get across. Thank you.

CARLIN: Our next focus group member is Richard Green from Richmond. And I failed to mention at the beginning that Mr. Green represents a lot of kind of interesting demographics for us. One is that he's a retired Army veteran. He was decorated with the Bronze Star in the Korean War. After retiring from the military, he also started his own business, an automotive business, so he also represents a small business person in the debates and the focus groups. So, Mr. Green, we'd like you to comment about your experience.

RICHARD GREEN (focus group member, Virginia): Thank you very much.

First, I want to thank Mr. Thomas. He called me and told me about the forum here, and I was really overjoyed to be able to come and for him also to call me to be in the panel there in Richmond, Virginia, at the University of Richmond. And also he invited my granddaughter, and also we had five other young girls that were first-time voters that came in. And I mean, I think that persuaded them to vote, because they didn't know whether they were going to vote or not. And so I think that helped them a great deal.

And also we had there, we had a different--a group consisted of different type of people with probably everybody they knew what they wanted. I know what I wanted before I got there. And the issues that came out was that one thing was on--one thing that they debated on was on young people, which I thought was for young people to get schooling. A lot of them are not getting their proper schooling. And I think if they can get more schooling as they grow up, because later on they're going to have to take over.

I mean, the younger group, they're going to have to rise up. So if they get their training down young, then they will be able to step in.

And also I have on it, I am a veteran and I was in Vietnam. Also, before that I was in Korea. And one thing I know in the debate, they seemed to leave their veterans out. I don't know but I guess the veterans' problem was a small issue. But at least the veterans, they were the ones that were actually the backbone of the United States, especially when it comes to any world war. We went through it and we know what it actually consists of.

And part of the debate that I did like was putting young people back to work. I know it's a slow process going on right now, but I hope as the months progress that they will get more people back to work. It's just things--even it's not no more than, like I said, road jobs. That will put a lot of people back to work.

I'll give you one example. It may be a little bit off the record, but I went to New York back when--right around I think December. And I want to emphasize on the New York bridge. Okay, when we crossed the George Washington Bridge, they would work on this bridge. And so it mean traffic backed up. And there was a lot of potholes and everything in these bridges, and you all know the bridge shakes a lot. I guess a lot of you have been across it and know what it, how it feels when you're setting on the bridge. And I know that bridge been there a long time because I had crossed it for a long time, and I think that that would be one way of putting people back to work. I know the bridge is old. All right, that was one of my issues. That would help put some people back to work, I know.

So I don't have too much more to say outside of those few things. I didn't--it just hit me a little bit by surprise at the little short time. I didn't really come really prepared for this. But although I did go up to my church and I told them that I was coming up here and I was happy to be asked to come here. And I also enjoyed Washington because Mr. Thomas took me around before we came here. And we seen some of the--one thing was the Vietnam Memorial; we went to it.

And I thank you very much.

CARLIN: Thank you. I think what you've seen from the panelists is that we had people that were concerned with very real issues, and they expressed that concern in the focus groups. I think one of the things that we concluded with was that, even though there were a lot of major issues touched on in the debates, there were a lot of things that were really at the heart and soul of what citizens were interested in that they still felt were not talked about or not answered as to how do you get at doing these kinds of things.

We're going to have to, I think, cut this session a little bit short because we need to get the other ones started earlier. So we have about 15 minutes for questions or comments, if there are any.

Susan?

ROOK: I'm directing this to Professor Tonn, and also to Mr. Green. I'm interested in your reaction to who participated in the debate. So you think that just the major two party, traditional two party candidates should be the only ones allowed to debate? How did you feel about Ross Perot debating?

And for Professor Tonn, what was the general reaction? Was there any consensus? Should be just be the two party, or open up? And if so, open it up to how many candidates--because I know, talking to a lot of people, there was a certain amount of frustration that Ross Perot was the only independent candidate that was allowed to participate?

You want to go ahead and answer first? What was your reaction to Ross Perot participating

in the debate? Do you personally think that just two major party candidates should be in the debate, or three, or even more than that? What would help you most, as a voter?

GREEN: Well, I would think that two. This may be a little bit off the record, but I didn't go along with a lot of things that Mr. Ross Perot said. I know of one thing--he is a rich man. And so he's probably not worrying about the people down below. And just to say this: if President Clinton goes along with the things that he said he was going to do, I think the country will grow.

TONN: In response to your question, I would probably say that that is probably the area that, in terms of format, that my focus groups were the most divided on, in terms of who should be included.

There were a number of people who said, you know, the more the merrier. Then there were other people who said, "Let's be practical about this. There has to be some sort of way that we determine who's going to be included and who's not going to be included, although they weren't necessarily sure on how that was going to be done.

There were talk about participation in primaries. There was talk about polling and how far they came in the polls, and that kind of thing.

One of the things that I do think that Mr. Green pointed out that seemed to be troubling to people about Mr. Perot's inclusion was that there some irony there; that here is a person who talks about being, you know, a people's candidate, a real ordinary person who's going to change the system, and what they saw in terms of their healthy cynicism is that the reason that he was included was because he was entrenched within that system and had all sorts of money. And that came through in a number of focus groups, that they saw that as a very curious kind of irony.

So they enjoyed him. I think many people would say that they liked the debates because he was there, although at times he was distracting. But they were troubled by how he came to be there.

VANOCUR: In your focus groups in New Hampshire and Detroit, it's clear the press is not liked. But did your members of the focus groups suggest who should be role models? Did they suggest we might be more like Donahue or Sally Jessy Raphael? I ask that quite seriously.

KAY: Yes, I understand, because Donahue was mentioned as one of the role models, which kind of cast aspersions on the whole thought there. However, really a number of people wanted to see very strong media personalities in the role of moderator, but not in the role of asking questions. And that became--they saw a real difference between the questioner and the rule maker or rule keeper, essentially.

VANOCUR: Did you two draw any conclusions from that kind of response?

KAY: I didn't. I could, but I really don't have any immediate conclusions about that. Mari?

TONN: My response and what I would like to talk about is a little different than that, has to do with the notion of the media as agenda setters. And this, I think, follows up more what Carole Simpson was talking about, is that there wasn't frustration, even in the debate over the debates, about what was being talked about and what was the focus of the media coverage. And we had people from

both parties talk about the fact this is what we do not want to hear about. We don't want to hear about somebody's personal indiscretions. We don't want to hear about things that happened 20 years ago. And they went through and talked about that very, very specifically.

And one older man in one of my focus groups that I thought was talking about Bill Clinton, come to find out he was talking Dan Quayle and something that he had supposedly done when he was in college, and he didn't want to hear about that.

So in that sense, I think that that's what part of the resentment comes from in terms of setting an agenda and then everyone having to follow that agenda, and the agenda that the media has is not always the agenda that the public has.

The character issue I will say that I think was important to people. But they judged it on different grounds. One thing that they said was, the benefit of talking to real people was that when a candidate evades a question and defines things a particular way, then I can tell about their personality and I can tell about their character.

And what happened in the Richmond debate is the way the candidates dealt with real, ordinary people, to them was very, very revealing, as revealing to them, I think, as any sort of policy or position paper was about how they felt about that particular candidate.

CARLIN: I might add from having looked all the transcripts pretty much from all these groups was not so much necessarily a model. As Mari was saying, they want a moderator to direct the questions to kind of keep this thing from becoming out of hand. And one of the comments about the vice presidential debate was that they were very ambivalent. They liked the engagement. They liked the fact that they could go at one another directly.

But as I commented in one of these others, they wanted the moderator to be able to turn off the microphone for the person who wasn't talking and control it a little more.

And you know, what they were saying was it's not so much who's asking the questions, as long as the public questions get asked. And we kept hearing that over and over and over again. You know, where do the questions come from? When these journalists sit down to ask them, where are they getting the ideas for these? They obviously didn't come and ask me what I want asked.

And that was one of the things that I think people felt very empowered by these focus groups because they kept saying, "You mean the people who put on the debates really want to know what we want asked, and they really want to know what we think, and they're really going to take this and do something with it?"

And there was a little bit of cynicism at the beginning, but it was very interesting when we did the debate over the debates with a list of questions that people did and didn't want asked. You know, the first thing we all got was, "I'll tell you what I don't want to hear about," and they went through Vietnam, you know, personal things. And then they went through the list of what they did, and it almost perfectly paralleled what happened in Richmond.

And then there were questions from the panelists that they said, "I would never ask that question. Who cares?"

So I don't know if it's a model as much as the content. Now there was another question in back.

CHRISTOPHER BREWSTER: Mr. Kay in his comments earlier had said that one of the things that people seemed to appreciate most about the debate format was the extent to which they were

getting information unfiltered. Arguably, the less control that you have over the debate format itself, the less filtering you have of the information that people get.

And what I'm interested in is how much your focus groups volunteered that things that influenced them were non-verbal forms of communication--George Bush looking at his watch, Governor Clinton walking up to people when he talked to them. These were non-verbal substantive issues; yet clearly they affected how people perceived the candidates. And it may argue that the questions and who asked the question really isn't as important as how free-wheeling the format is itself.

Did they speak about that?

KAY: My groups all talked about some of the proximic relationships and the movement toward the camera and all those sorts of things. However, they were kind of--they use those as indicative of the sort of strategy that the candidate was using, rather than as a substantive issue. And they would always go back to discussing the issues.

So I was as a matter of fact very pleasantly surprised that that was going on; that they acknowledged it but then would say that really wasn't what it was all about. There were other things that were involved in terms of the issues.

TONN: I would say that maybe Mitch Bible is a person who can respond to this because he told me that the most momentous part of the debate for him was the question in Richmond by the young black woman who said to President Bush, "You know, how has the recession"--"the deficit"--I believe it was you said--"affected you personally?"

To me, I think that's both the substance question, substantive, as well as the way it was responded to, in the kinds of ways that you're talking about, non-verbal in terms of proximics. But he might want to speak to that. I don't know. I don't want to put words in his mouth.

BIBLE: Yeah. You know, it was definitely the moment that I came away. You know, I went into the focus group pretty much having made my mind up what I wanted in. But one of the surprising things was that I found that most of the people that were in the focus groups hadn't made up their minds yet, which is contrary to what I, you know, read. At least some people believed that, you know, debates don't really have any effect on decision-making. But that particular moment was a moment that I felt like, yeah, you know, the American people are seeing what I've been saying for a long time--that George Bush just really doesn't understand what mainstream America is going through right now because he's never been there.

DAVID THOMAS (University of Richmond): A view from Richmond--we've been hearing about the real people and the voters in the panel at the second debate at Richmond as reflecting what the voters want. And I'd just like to point out that the Richmond papers in the backgrounding information after the debate pointed out that this Gallup sample, which it was a very closely guarded secret of who these voters were until they got there, was drawn from a panel of uncommitted voters. Democrats and Republicans were screened.

And when Carole Simpson tells us that when she asked the voters what they wanted to talk about, they didn't want to talk about character issues and they didn't want to talk about Iraq. That left us with the spectacle of a debate where a voter would say, "What are you going to do about my pet

domestic issue?"

Clinton, the policy wonk and the outsider would say, "Here's what I think we ought to do to solve the problem." Perot, on the outside, would say, "Here's what will happen to the deficit if you do that." And that left Bush in between these two, whipsawed back and forth.

And so Carole Simpson was very astute in saying that he looked like he had the winds taken out of his sails.

And i'm just saying that the panel of voters had a lot to do with the framing of the issues that were seen on television--not that they weren't real voters or real people; but that if the panel had been drawn from the voters, there might have been some Republicans in the audience who would like to have heard the candidates all address the character issue or some foreign policy issue.

FAHRENKOPF: Let me comment on that because there was not an exclusion of Republicans and Democrats. There were Republicans, Democrats and independents. The agreement between the parties provided that they be uncommitted voters, undecided voters. And you have a mix of Republicans and Democrats and independents. These were people who just hadn't made up their minds yet. So there wasn't an intentional screening out of any party members.

CARLIN: I think we have time for one more.

JUDY WOODRUFF: Excuse my laryngitis, but I wanted to ask Mr. Bible and Mr. Green whether it matters to you that there be debates established ahead of time, or whether it's okay with you that the main candidates argue between themselves at the beginning of the campaign as to whether there will be debates, how many, what format? Does that bother you? That's the first question.

And the second one is, does the format matter to you? I know we've heard about the results of all the focus groups, but I'd be interested to hear in your own words what you think about the format and about whether the debates ought to be established ahead of time.

BIBLE: Well, you know, I think I said before that I liked the idea of some varied formats, because I really don't like the idea of the one political candidate having an advantage because of format which I think a lot of people felt like Bill Clinton had an advantage in the Richmond debate. Actually, the media had already told me he was going to win that debate, based on that kind of knowledge.

But I think I still looked at that debate objectively and made my own decisions. Yeah, he is a product of a media-conscious country. And, you know, people in the media certainly can't fault him for that. And the other--?

WOODRUFF: Whether the debate should be established ahead of time, or is it all right to have the candidates argue among themselves about whether there will be, how many, and so forth?

BIBLE: I think it would probably be good idea to set it up ahead of time, primarily because in this situation, I think it was real unfortunate that they were delayed, like they were, by the unwillingness of one side to make a commitment. And you know I think the debate should be held at

a particular set time. And if that person doesn't want to show up for it, you know, he's going to have to answer to America why he didn't show up.

GREEN: I think that the debate--excuse me, will you repeat that again for me, please?

WOODRUFF: Whether you think the debates ought to be established ahead of time, or whether you think the candidates should argue among themselves about when, how many and so forth?

GREEN: Well, I think the debates should be set up ahead of time. And I don't think that the candidates should argue among themselves, because when they argue among themselves, to me, it puzzles the audience. And when you argue yourselves on the debate, you sort of get frustrated, and somebody gets angry. I think they should, you know, somebody should ask them the questions and let them ask.

CARLIN: I think we're getting a time signal there. We have to take a ten-minute break, and I'm sure if you want to talk to some of them during the break, we'll come back and Judy Woodruff will moderate the third panel, from the candidate's perspective.

(There was a break.)

KIRK: Well, we've heard some very interesting comments from the last panel about the sense of ownership and proprietorship that the voters felt about debates, and perhaps, it could be said, about elections generally. And I think it was Hal Bruno who said, "Well, in my opinion, they ought to go ahead and establish debates, and all the candidates ought to do is just show up."

Life isn't quite that simple, as we've learned a couple of times. But it is important that the debates were held. There were some questions before we got to the first debate.

A very important perspective with respect to all of this is the perspective of the candidates. And to draw that out and to further educate us and to illuminate us as we move ahead to the next general election is the distinguished panel. And the moderator of that panel is most distinguished, Judy Woodruff.

Judy, thanks for doing this for us.

JUDY WOODRUFF (MacNeil/Lehrer): Thank you, Paul. Because I do have laryngitis, I'm going to limit the number of words that I speak and say that we want to start this discussion by looking at a tape which consists--because I introduce the panelists--this tape is going to consist of a couple of excerpts from the general election debates, in order to refresh our memories. The second excerpt is from the Richmond meeting on October the 15th. The first one is from the October 11th debate in St. Louis, using the more traditional format. So we're going to look at those first.

(Tape) SIMPSON: I talked to this audience before you gentlemen came and I asked them about how they felt about the tenor of the campaign. Would you like to let them know what you thought about that, when I said are you pleased with how the campaign has been going?

AUDIENCE: No.

SIMPSON: Who wants to say why you don't like the way the campaign is going? We have a gentleman back here.

MAN: And forgive the notes here, but I'm shy on camera. The focus of my work as a domestic mediator, is meeting the needs of the children that I work with, by way of their parents, and not the wants of their parents. And I ask the three of you, how can we, as symbolically the children of the future president, expect the two of you, the three of you, to meet our needs, the needs in housing and in crime and you-name-it, as opposed to the wants of your political spin doctors and your political parties?

SIMPSON: So your question is--?

MAN: Can we focus on the issues and not the personalities and the mud? I think there is a need, if we could take a poll here with the folks from Gallup perhaps, I think there's a real need here to focus at this point on the needs.

SIMPSON: How do you respond? How do you gentlemen respond to--

GOVERNOR CLINTON: I agree with him.

SIMPSON: President Bush?

PRESIDENT BUSH: Let's do it. Let's talk about programs for children.

MAN: Could we cross our hearts? This may sound silly, but could we make a commitment? You know, we're not under oath at this point, but could you make a commitment to the citizens of the United States to meet our needs--and we have many--and not yours? Again, you know, I repeat that it's a real need, I think, that we all have.

(End of videotape.)

WOODRUFF: As usual, those of us in the communications business are not great at communicating. I didn't get the message, didn't receive the message, didn't hear the message that we were only doing one excerpt. You all are familiar with the other formats. So let's turn now to the panel, and we're going to comment on the different formats--not just Richmond, but St. Louis and Lansing, as well.

Well, in the middle, let me start with Beverly Lindsey. She was the debate coordinator for the Clinton-Gore campaign. On her left, on your right, is Bobby Burchfield, and he's a partner at Covington and Burling. He was counsel to the Bush-Quayle campaign. And all the way over to your left, Clay Mulford, who's a partner in the Hughes and Luce law firm in Dallas. He served as counsel to the Perot campaign.

And Clay Mulford, let's start with you. From your candidate's standpoint, what do you think

were the strengths and weaknesses of the different formats?

CLAY MULFORD (Hughes and Luce, Dallas): We would have preferred a straight head-to-head debate with a single moderator. There was a strong belief on Mr. Perot's part that part of the debate and debate on debates, the whole television, the whole orientation of the debates as TV events, as good TV--as Carole Simpson was saying, whether we like it or not, the Richmond debate was good TV, dramatic TV. That was not what we thought was appropriate for the debate format.

We would have preferred a single moderator having very limited authority, other than to control the timing perhaps.

Jim Lehrer was mentioning earlier that when Ross Perot asked him what the rules were governing time--and he thought that he would be guaranteed equal time--I may have been responsible for that because, in the briefing on that debate, the instructions for the third debate said the moderators will use their best judgments to try to guarantee equal time on the candidates. And so he deferred to that when he raised the issue.

But that would have been clearly our preference. However, I'd like to make one supporting remark about the Richmond debate. I think in general the personality of the questioner in a debate format such as the Richmond debate can become too dominant in the debates. I'm not sure that that happened this time. But I think that's a risk.

But we thought that ultimately it was a very positive exposition of the fact that people in the country took the issues very seriously, which is something Ross Perot thought he was trying to communicate.

The composition of the audience, as was brought up earlier, was a source of some contemplation and concern among certain people in the media that I had conversations with, because the requirement was etched in the agreement established by the two major party candidates that those people be non-committed or uncommitted voters. Two or three weeks before an election, to have a group of people that are uncommitted voters generally means that they're less well informed, they're less knowledgeable about the issues. And there was concern that the type of commentary questions coming from individuals such as those would not be of an elevated variety.

I think the opposite was proved true, that the people were very interested in the issues. They don't like 30-second or 60-second mud-slinging TV ads. They wanted substantive discussions, and so I think that it provided a valuable exercise on several levels.

WOODRUFF: What about your thought on having the panel of questioners?

MULFORD: I think that, again, the preference would be an exchange among the candidates, and not for a give-and-take with a media representative.

WOODRUFF: Bobby Burchfield, speaking from the Bush campaign perspective.

BOBBY Burchfield (Covington and Burling): From our perspective, the principal issue is that the candidates, I believe, as Jim Lehrer said, should have a voice in setting up the format. I think this year what we saw was that the commission's initial proposal which was tabled in June would have had three presidential debates all in the single-moderator format. We would never have had the audience

participation debate--only because the candidates were close enough to the electorate to understand that the people were watching the call-in shows, they were watching the Phil Donahue type shows on both television and listening to them on radio. Did that ever come about?

I don't think that's the sort of thing that can be planned for a year in advance.

With regard to that format, we agreed to it and I still have no regrets about it because George Bush had been doing "Ask George Bush" forums since 1979 when he was campaigning in New Hampshire and had traditionally done very well in them. We wanted at least one of the debates to be in the traditional format of a moderator and a panel because that had worked before,and it seemed to us that you should have some anchor in the debates, that you should not have all of them in an experimental mode, that there was little experience in a presidential general election before.

And then finally, with regard to the single-moderator format, it was I think conventional wisdom that we were dead set against that. We were not. We were willing to take the single-moderator format, but not as the only format. And ultimately, where the agreement came out, I think, was considered by both the Clinton and the Bush campaigns to be a fairly good mix of formats with a lot of experimentation, with a lot of opportunity for interchange by the candidates and, for the first time, with some input from the voters.

WOODRUFF: So if you had it to do over again, what would you like? A mix again, then, or what?

BURCHFIELD: Judy, I think it depends on the year that the election is being held. Nineteen ninety-two is not going to repeat itself again. You had a mixture of a number of different things that happened in 1992 that contributed to the success of these debates.

I think to say that the formats drove the interest in the debates would be a great over-statement. I would isolate--and I'm sure there are more--three factors that contributed to the interest in the debates this year. The first was that everyone had a very high level of consciousness about the economy. Number two, Ross Perot undoubtedly had the effect of raising the interest level in the presidential campaign and in the debates. And, number three, as it happened, the debates occurred, were packed into a period fairly close to the election, as people were making their decisions.

My understanding from talking to pollsters is that people tend to make their decisions much later in a three-candidate race than they do in a two-candidate race. So I think these debates occurred at a time when people were really getting down to brass tacks and making their decisions.

Those three factors are unlikely to occur again. And so that's why it's so important in each campaign, and from my perspective and from the people on our side of the negotiating table, this is what we held out for ultimately and took a lot of public heat for it. It's important for the candidates to have a say in the format in which they're going to appear.

WOODRUFF: Beverly Lindsey, what format or formats worked best, from your point of view?

Beverly LINDSEY (debate coordinator, Clinton-Gore campaign): We accepted the commission's proposal early in July--was it--

BURCHFIELD: June 11th.

LINDSEY: How do you remember that?

BURCHFIELD: A date that's etched in memory.

LINDSEY: Their proposal for the single moderator for the panel, and at that point, we did think that was the most appropriate format. And I'm sure we would still say that that is better than the panel format that is used.

However, I want to echo some concerns I've heard earlier today in that the success of a single moderator format depends so heavily on who that moderator is and whether that moderator is able to move the discussion along and to remove himself as the object. I think specifically the participants in the democratic primary had not so good experience in the spring with the networks where some of the network people, we thought, hogged the camera too much, and it became more of a spectacle or a game show atmosphere, rather than a serious dialogue.

And along those formats, I thought that the best debate in that series was the Jim Lehrer, sitting around the table with the three or four candidates at that time, having just a normal conversation.

WOODRUFF: That's during the primaries, isn't it?

LINDSEY: Right, during the primaries. The problem with that is, once you get into the general campaign, all expectations, all levels of activity are raised so much that that sort of one-on-one conversation is just simply not possible. If that could be accomplished, I think it's something that should be considered.

I also have to say that the town hall format works very well because I think it was necessary for the TV viewing audience to see what sort of questions their colleagues or their peers across the country came up with and to see that a selected group of uncommitted voters in Richmond had a lot of the same concerns that they did, and that weren't coached--the questions weren't asked in such polished and rehearsed terms as some of the moderators were. And it just gave for more of a dialogue.

WOODRUFF: Are we getting any--go ahead. I don't want to interrupt; go ahead.

LINDSEY: I'm maybe about to answer another question, so why don't you--

WOODRUFF: I was just going to ask, are we getting agreement here that what used to be considered the way all these debates were moderated--and that is with a panel, or were handled with a panel of reporters--is passe, that that's not the format of choice any more?

I heard Clay Mulford saying that, I think.

MULFORD: Well, just for the record, maybe we should establish that the Perot campaigns was not one of the campaigns involved in setting the format for debates. And your question to me was what would we have preferred? And what we have preferred was the sole moderator.

But that is not to say that the debates weren't an unqualified success.

WOODRUFF: Bobby, you want to comment on that?

BURCHFIELD: Well, I think that the single moderator format was useful in 1992. It proved to me a workable mechanism. Does that mean that it would be used exclusively in the future? I would certainly hope not.

It does put an awful lot of pressure on the single moderator, not only to come up with thoughtful questions, thoughtful follow-ups, but also to control what can be a very difficult interchange of people on live national television.

MULFORD: While at the same time not becoming a participant in the debate.

BURCHFIELD: Exactly, exactly, and I do think--

MULFORD: This is a tightrope, difficult.

BURCHFIELD: And I do think that with a single moderator, that at least with a panel, it's unlikely the viewers, it's less likely the viewers are going to conclude that every single person on the panel is biased in one way or another against one person.

With the single moderator, I can at least foresee hypothetically a situation where that might be true.

So I would be reluctant to establish a solely single moderator format for that reason.

LINDSEY: I would agree with that and I especially would repeat what Bobby says. I think the single moderator format worked extremely well in 1992, but we just don't know at this point what would be the best format or the best schedule or the best arrangement for any other year--because, just as presidential politics or the economy or whatever else is dynamic, you know, the structure around debates will have to remain dynamic, too.

I don't think, however, that that means that there shouldn't--that you shouldn't look at something just as a starting point or a benchmark and depart from there. And I think that perhaps, you get into the role of the commission in establishing or proposing formats, and series of formats.

WOODRUFF: What are you suggesting?

LINDSEY: Well, that it's important for us that the commission exists to keep a record or a public history on what worked and what didn't work so that somebody has their fingers on it and so that we all get together occasionally like this and discuss all the aspects of it.

And it's important for them to propose the different formats.

WOODRUFF: For the commission to come at the outset with the proposal?

LINDSEY: To come out with a proposal. But because the times change so much and because the dynamics of different campaigns change, there will always necessarily be changes to that.

MULFORD: Can I ask you a question? Did the proposal submitted by the commission influence the discussion that you all had on the format--because they were obviously suggesting a format?

BURCHFIELD: I have a different perspective on that than maybe Beverly does, so I'll follow her response.

LINDSEY: Did it have a--did the commission's proposal have an impact on--

MULFORD: I understood what you were saying to be that you think it's important to institutionalize the commission so that they could present proposals each election cycle on the formats that might be considered.

My question is, was the proposal they made this year influential on what you all finally decided should be the format?

LINDSEY: Not necessarily, but it gave you a starting point. It gave you something to come around the table and discuss. Like I say, we agreed with--

MULFORD: Go with that proposal.

LINDSEY: --to the format that they proposed.

MULFORD: I don't want to cut Bobby short, but the--I think from our perspective the idea that there are debates is more important than the format of debates and the fact that those debates can include or have a mechanism to include non-traditional major-party candidates.

WOODRUFF: Yes, we want to get to that in a minute, definitely want to get to that in a minute.

Bobby, do you want to respond to that earlier question about the influence of the commission proposal?

BURCHFIELD: Yes. I think this is really one of the most important points that needs to be carefully looked at over the next four years, and that is what is going to be the status of the commission on presidential debates as we go towards the 1996 campaign and thereafter.

There have been legislative proposals floated to condition federal funding for the general election on participation in four presidential debates. That was a provision, Section 803 in the campaign finance bill that President Bush vetoed last year. It may be submitted in this congress, and I know we're not here to debate that.

But as an adjunct to the question of institutionalizing the debates, I think there is the question of what the commission's role is to be. It was the Bush campaign's understanding that the commission was a facilitator, a sponsor of presidential debates, and was not there to dictate the terms of those debates. And there was--I've addressed this in a paper that I've prepared, if anyone is interested in it.

So we were somewhat surprised that the commission's proposal, once it was floated, gathered its own momentum, took on an appearance in the public eye and in the eye of the media as a mandate that the candidates either had to accept or reject. It wasn't the only proposal, nor was it intended, I think, by Frank and Paul or the rest of the commission, to be the only proposal that was to be considered.

Rather, the candidates have traditionally gotten together and discussed the formats that were acceptable to them. That's what happened this year. We paid a heavy price politically in order to get those negotiations. But it was the intention to vindicate what we considered to be an important public interest of allowing the candidates to have a say in the way the debates were conducted.

WOODRUFF: Frank or Paul, would one of you or both of you want to respond to his point about the role, precise role of the commission in this?

KIRK: I would just say that the commission never felt and does not now feel that its proposals are dictates to any campaign.

We started off in exhaustive negotiations with all of the networks, to get back to Hal Bruno's point about when can an event other than the play-offs and Monday night football, World Series, find the largest national audience. And so we chose our dates and our calendar accordingly and selected sites accordingly, knowing that the campaigns might have a difference of opinion, that there would be dialogue. But we felt, having come through 1988, you have to start from somewhere and to put a blueprint out there that people could talk about.

When then-candidate Bill Clinton, who I think--and Beverly can speak to this perhaps better than I--recalled a debate about the debates in 1988 and figured we don't need that anymore--soon as the commission put out its proposal, as Beverly correctly says, they embraced it and wanted to get on with the issues,and not the issues about format and so forth.

The Bush campaign, and Bobby speaks well for it, had a different viewpoint, either about format or about the commission or whatever. And that basically started the change in both the schedule and then, ultimately, when the candidates got together, the change in the format.

So that's sort of my perspective. And maybe I could just ask a question. As we look ahead, and to try to improve on our responsibilities--and assume for a minute that it is the commission that's going to propose some calendar of events and formats in 1996--would it have been helpful when you came to negotiations that the commission was at the table, either for reaction or as a mediator? Or do you folks feel that when it comes down to the actual working things out between the campaigns, it's better campaigns head-to-head and then we'll get back to you later in terms of what we want to do?

And I ask this only in a totally constructive way, in trying to say would we have improved the process, had we--speculatively, of course--but would it have been helpful to either of you or both had we been at the table to move the process along, or not?

LINDSEY: No, because you would never have agreed to the town hall meeting.

KIRK: How do you know that?

BURCHFIELD: No.

WOODRUFF: Why not, Bobby? Why not?

LINDSEY: My name's not Bobby.

WOODRUFF: Both of you.

LINDSEY: For the legitimately voiced concerns of Ed Fouhy's which we discussed a lot over that ten-day period. It was almost an insurmountable task for the commission that we were asking to perform--not that you object to the format, but at that point, it was so late in the process, you did not have time to turn it around that fast.

And I think that that goes onto the discussion about the compactness of the debates. I don't think once we got rolling and once we got involved in doing it, it was a very big problem to our campaign, at least. And we managed to keep the campaign process going all the time. The major objection, I think, was the production objection on your standpoint, which was totally legitimate. But with a little foresight, we might have been able to have worked around that beforehand.

WOODRUFF: Bobby, you want to amplify on why you think it's not helpful for the commission to be--

BURCHFIELD: The commission has a valuable role to play, and I don't mean to minimize the role of the commission. The commission promptly accepted the proposal that we'd worked out, and they put on four debates in eight days. And that was truly impressive, if not unprecedented. They deserve much, much credit--more credit than we can possibly give them for that.

But I think the commission, what the presidential candidates are looking for in the campaign is a neutral sponsor of the debates. And it is at least possible if the commission tenders a proposal that it begins to have a vested interest in that proposal.

Both candidates may not feel equally strongly about that proposal. They may both want some minor revisions or some major revisions. But this year I think we saw a situation in which the proposal the commission had tabled grew its own momentum; and rather than just being a sponsor in the debate, they became more of a participant in the debate. And that I personally think that that is not what the candidates in an election want.

As I understand it, that's why the networks are no longer sponsoring the debates. They began to demand too many of their own scheduling and format and other details to be incorporated into the debate process, and the candidates wouldn't accept it.

WOODRUFF: Frank Fahrenkopf?

FAHRENKOPF: Well, part of that is true. And I think what Bobby is saying was certainly the perspective. But I think the important thing to remember here is that, at least on the Republican side, Jim Baker had felt--and I think rightfully so--that in negotiating the debate agreement of 1984 with Mondale people and negotiating the debate format in 1988 with Governor Dukakis' people, they had cleaned their clocks, they'd gotten everything that they wanted, and there was no desire to have

anybody at the table but the opposition--hopeful that they could do the same thing again.

The sponsor of the debates had always been at the table in past debates when it was the League, with their working out the final format. It was simply a strategy move, in my view, by the Bush campaign that, if we go head-to-head with the president, now-President Clinton's campaign, that we'll cut a better deal, we'll be able to do a better job than that that had been proposed.

There was no surprise whatsoever to the Bush campaign that what was going to be proposed by the presidential commission. They knew well in advance, as did any of the campaigns who had paid any attention. They knew we were going to come forward with three presidential debate recommendations and one vice presidential with a single moderator. It was no great secret. It was a tactic to try to get advantage for their candidate, that had very little to do with making a contribution to the public domain, in my view, as to what was to educate the American people.

BURCHFIELD: Can I respond to that briefly? Frank is right that there is no question that there was campaign tactics involved in this, as in any other decision that the campaigns made. But it was the understanding which I believe the commission promoted in a letter from Frank to Sam Skinner on April 16th last year in which Frank said that the question as to whether debates will be held, how many, where, when, format, et cetera, is a matter that will not be finally resolved until the nominees and/or their representatives have an opportunity to meet and discuss same, following the two nominating conventions.

It was our understanding that in 1992, as in prior years, that those details about the debates, would be worked out in face-to-face negotiations from the candidates. Rather, the day before--the Friday before the Republican National Convention began, August 14, having issued a schedule on June 11, on August 14th the commission then announced the sites that it was proposing. It had a full proposal on the table. It was considered by the media, it was considered by the public to be either a quasi-governmental or an authoritative entity speaking on a take-it-or-leave-it basis. And we objected to that. And we took the political heat for objecting to it, and I have no reason to believe that that was determinative in any way in the election.

But it was definitely a rugged road, trying to get out from under that proposal. And I think everyone who followed it in the paper realizes that.

FAHRENKOPF: But the proposals were very, very clear. It was always said by the commission that it was merely a proposal; that it was something to be suggested to the candidates; that the reason we announced the dates, which everyone knew long in advance, was because of the conflict with the series and play-offs.

We also made very clear that the proposals were out there naming cities because you have to have sponsors. You've got to do a lot of groundwork. And what happened here was that, if you recall, the difficulty that was presented which caused us to cancel two debates was, in fact, because you would not sit down with Governor Clinton's campaign to discuss the matter. You got into an argument over whether or not we would be present or we wouldn't be present, we weren't demanding to be present, we never demanded to be present--

BURCHFIELD: I understand.

FAHRENKOPF: We just wanted the debates to get on so the American people would have an opportunity to see the candidates go at each other.

WOODRUFF: Let's move onto another--take a question, Sandy?

VANOCUR: I'd like to contribute something, because I'm so old. There's no sense talking about this as if it just occurred. Forget 1960; that was simple. It was John Pastore suspending Section 315 of the Federal Communications Act, Frank Stanton pushing it for CBS, the networks, including Mutual, agreeing on it. So it was done.

So you're really talking about starting in '76. And there have been studies--and Bev is right to talk about the commission as being an institution of historical memory and procedure on this thing because there's a long battle about who have should have done the debates--the League of Women Voters, then the Presidential Commission. The 20th Century Fund studied it about ten years ago. Newt Minow and Cliff Sloan at Harvard studied the whole thing. And then Ed Ney put together a presidential commission--it wasn't entirely on broadcasting. It was chaired by Mel Laird and Bob Strauss--and this issue was incorporated in the final report.

Eventually, some quasi-statutory agency--and that's being too broad--the Presidential Commission came into being. And it's been my experience, both as somebody who's participated in these and who's reported on them, that it was never a carte blanche. And Frank is right. Eighty-four and '88, it was Jim Baker rolling people; and this time the Clinton people said, "Uh-uh. We'll have it here. We'll have television cameras," and so forth.

So I think to the degree--I hate to be disrespectful, Bob, because I think you were unfair to Frank and Paul this time.

BURCHFIELD: Well, I respect that, Sandy; I really do. But I think, as Jim Lehrer pointed out earlier--and I'm not the only person that holds this view--you're not going to have presidential debates if you have an entity that becomes too involved or is perceived by the candidates to be too involved in setting forth the terms on which the debates are going to be held.

VANOCUR: If you go back to the guerrilla warfare between the League and the Presidential Commission, this will never be resolved.

WOODRUFF: You're really saying that debates can never be institutionalized, is what you're saying; that it's going to be fought out at every election.

BURCHFIELD: Debates are institutionalized in the sense that, as I believe the focus groups indicated, the public now expects debates. And I can tell you that the Bush campaign paid a heavy price for being perceived not to want debates, even though it was always our position that we were willing to sit down directly with the Clinton campaign and talk about the terms and formats of debates.

What I'm saying is that each election year is different, each candidate is different. And just as there is a market of ideas and a market economy out there, you have a certain interest by each of the campaigns in achieving their own tactical advantage. And this year, it happened to work that it produced a pretty good series of debates.

Will that happen every year? I don't know, but I have more confidence in it happening and the candidates participating in it willingly than I do if you set up an agency or a commission that dictates those terms. That's just my personal opinion.

WOODRUFF: Bev, you want to come in on that point, and then Clay?

LINDSEY: Well, I certainly agree with Bobby that I think debates are institutionalized in that I don't think there's any way a candidate now can responsibly refuse to debate. And I think the commission is institutionalized at this point as the producer of debates because of their record in '92 and '88. I can't imagine how they would not be the sponsoring organization in '96, which is the year I keep trying to forget about.

MULFORD: Me, too.

LINDSEY: But I do think there has to be latitude. I think the candidates themselves have to be involved. I think there's too much that goes into negotiations--not negotiations--but into debates of a personal nature or a nature that's specific either to the candidate himself or to that specific campaign, or to the issues. And the process has to be dynamic enough to allow something like the town hall meeting to happen.

The town hall meeting may not be useful in '96. It may have been so over-used. I saw on TV the other day, a grocery store ad that had one of the CEOs staging a town hall format, trying to explain to his customers why the lettuce was always fresh. And I thought, "It may be over at this point."

But just for those reasons, because it is a dynamic process, I think the candidates do have to be involved.

WOODRUFF: But what you're saying is that all that's institutionalized I hear you saying, is just that there will be debates. The number, the format, the time of the answers, the number of subjects covered and all the details, you're saying, really have to be determined by the candidates. Isn't that what you agreeing with?

LINDSEY: I think candidates will always--and, of course, I have a very biased view here--but I think the candidates will always want to be intimately involved in those decisions.

WOODRUFF: Clay, do you want to weigh in on this, or do you want too--

MULFORD: Sure. I think the conclusion to that is that they agree that the commission should be, I guess, a repository of historical documentation on the debates and that the candidates would have all power.

(Laughter.)

I'm very sort of philosophically prone to agree with Bobby that you want to keep power in the hands of the players and not power in the hands of somebody else who's determining what's going to happen to players.

But as a practical matter, I see that as a situation that is ripe for just institutionalizing existing dogmas or approaches, and ultimately supportive of a status quo structure. If you think back historically before the advent of the Commission of Presidential Debates, the proportion of the American people that voted was much, much higher--85 or 90 percent--at a time when you could vote for a week, when you could vote on any kind of piece of paper you wanted to, when the rules weren't so difficult, when the laws weren't so strenuous on making it difficult.

And I think sometimes when we tend, when we try to do the right thing by institutionalizing processes, we end up institutionalizing established situations. So that makes me philosophically oriented towards kind of a marketplace. However, when the institutions are so firmly in place as they are now in the parties, I think the role that the commission can play is determining who the players should be in the negotiations for the participation in the debates.

I would prefer ultimately to see an institutionalization of the debates, a requirement perhaps tied to federal funding, although that is ripe with problems and difficulties. I think it's important.

WOODRUFF: Aren't you contradicting yourself, though, if you're philosophically you think it ought to be in the hands of the candidates, but then on the other hand, it ought to be legislated?

MULFORD: Yes, I am. I mean, philosophically, it's the same idea, you know, but probably philosophically, 20 years ago, Bobby may have been opposed to seat belts. But eventually, a public interest can overwhelm a logical argument.

WOODRUFF: Carl Leubsdorf, you've had your hand up a long time.

LEUBSDORF: Question for Bobby Burchfield. As I understand what you're telling us here today, one of the reasons the whole debate negotiation was delayed was because the Bush campaign didn't want the commission in the middle of it, and they only wanted to discuss it with the other campaign.

Isn't it true, though, that one of the factors operating here was that you're all operating on the premise that the election would be decided late in the campaign? You really wanted to push the debates toward the latter stages of the campaign. And because of the fact that you were losing at that point, that was another reason you wanted to do that.

And second question is, to what extent did the appearance of all the chickens help push you to the negotiating table?

BURCHFIELD: Let me take the second question first.

LINDSEY: What chickens?

BURCHFIELD: It is true that the appearance of the people in chicken costumes that got a lot of exposure on the nightly news was a matter of great concern to President Bush because he wanted to debate. But the triggering factor, the catalyst that got the negotiations going, in my opinion--and it can be argued either way--but in my opinion was President Bush's proposal on September 29th that you have the Sunday evening debate for each of the final four Sundays of the election, and throw in

two vice presidential debates for good measure.

The day after that, we were at the negotiating table because we had a proposal on the table at that point that people were taking seriously and that we were serious about. So I think it wasn't the chicken costumes because we were always saying we were willing to talk to the Clinton campaign directly about the formats and timing of the debates.

As to your first question on the timing of the debates, again, I think there's something to what you're saying. It was a factor. There are always tactical decisions that go into these matters.

We knew that we were running behind. We knew that a late debate would be more to our advantage in trying to catch up than early debates. And we also knew that if the scheduled debates were set too early, what we hoped would be a run on our convention bounce--which never really got going--would be allowed to play itself out before we sat down at the debates on a more even keel.

As it turned out, because we were taking the heat for not debating, I think that cut severely into the post-convention bounce that we were expecting. So it was a lost force, both ways.

But no. I think if the Clinton campaign had come forward right after the Republican convention and said, "Okay, let's sit down and talk about debates," we would have been there.

WOODRUFF: Ed Fouhy?

FOUHY: I wonder if Bev and Bobby could also comment, as Clay Mulford did a few moments ago, about the legislation, whether they would support the legislation or not.

BURCHFIELD: Everyone's looking at Bev.

LINDSEY: I think based on my experience from '92, I would not approve of legislating the process. I just think again it has to be too dynamic. And it seems like sometimes to me when you legislate parameters or processes, it loses a lot of its meaning because you're not able to fine-tune it enough. So I would be opposed to legislating.

BURCHFIELD: I would be opposed to it, Ed, on a number of different reasons. Whenever Congress gets involved in legislating about what candidates can do during an election, the first bell that rings to me as a lawyer is the First Amendment bell. And I think there are some real First Amendment concerns here, even if it is conditioned as the legislation last year attempted to be, on receipt of public funds.

The Supreme Court has held in a number of cases that you can't attach just any condition to the receipt of public funds. It has also held that you can't force a person to speak against their will. So there are some real First Amendment concerns there. How the courts will resolve them, I don't know, but there are present First Amendment issues.

And, second, there are real philosophical issues there about how much control the federal government--putting aside the constitutional issues--exercise on a candidate's campaign.

TED DUVALL: I worked for the Commission on the debates. Is there any way to avoid that excruciating process that we went through? I'm not hearing any answers. I'm just hearing you saying, well, no, this won't work, this won't work. Have particularly Miss Lindsey and Mr. Burchfield given

any thought to some things that might be offered up so that we can avoid having to crush people's feelings, like in San Diego and Lexington and spend the extra money so that we've got this compact format?

Is there any thoughts that you might have as to how to get around that?

LINDSEY: I don't have an answer, but I certainly recognize it as a problem that ultimately reflects badly on all of us. I mean, the people in both Louisville and San Diego were grossly disadvantaged.

BURCHFIELD: Let me just say, I haven't met you before but congratulations on the job that you did. I've told everyone else that.

I don't know the answer to the question. I think my view of this is that the process necessarily will be very dynamic. It would be good if you could set it up and I do recognize the problems that the commission faces in lining up sponsors and cities and auditoriums to hold the debates enough in advance to do your production work there. I know those are problems.

But the candidates are looking in a sense at a larger process; and in future years we hope that those will be resolved earlier, but I can't give you any way to guarantee that.

DUVALL: Well, it sounds as if almost everybody that's involved in the whole process wants exactly the same thing. So it's not as if we're all that far away. It sounds to me like from the focus groups, people want debates. It sounds as if the campaigns know that any responsible candidate is going to have to debate. And at least I'm a big fan of the Commission on Presidential Debates being involved in '96. So I don't know. Maybe this is just a statement that we're very close. Maybe it's not law, but maybe it's spirit.

And also I would like to mention in fairness to Mr. Burchfield, it sounds as if you're taking a lot of heat for the commission. The proposal of the commission took on a life of its own. But actually, the stock reply, whenever the Republicans said, "We're ready to debate, let's sit down and negotiate," was the commission--the Clinton campaign said, "The commission's proposal is fine, let's do it." And that's a lot why I feel that the debate commission proposal took on a life of its own is because that was the stock reply.

BURCHFIELD: Exactly. And I compliment the Clinton campaign on the way they used that issue. It was very well done politically. But nevertheless, I think the commission proposal did take a life beyond what the commission intended it to do, and we were disadvantaged by that.

WOODRUFF: I don't know what the time situation is, and I want to come to some of you. But I have a question that I'd like to get to now, and that is the inclusion of third candidates, independent candidates, and obviously the Perot candidacy.

How did the two candidates in your own negotiations come to the decision that you wanted to include Mr. Perot? It's my understanding that the commission had set whatever its criteria were, and then the Bush campaign went ahead and invited Mr. Perot. But I invite you to straighten me out on that.

BURCHFIELD: You're almost right, Judy. The commission had I think it was three pages of criteria that would be considered for determining whether a non-major party presidential candidate would be included in the debates. At the time we sat down at the negotiating table on September 30th, Mr. Perot was not in the race. He reentered the race on the 1st of October as their negotiations were concluding.

We decided, for reasons of self political benefit, and reasons--since it was late in the process--not getting involved in another debate about who was going to be in the debates, that we should just put in the contract, in the agreement, that Ross Perot would be invited to participate in all the debates. And he was.

The commission's concern on that one is a perfectly understandable one; and that is that they have a concern about their 501(c)(3) status if they appear to be aligning themselves too closely with the two major parties.

My view on that is that the more intimately the commission gets involved in setting the format and the terms of the debate, the more likely they are to subject themselves to that charge. But that's a little off the point. The way it evolved this time around was that the parties agreed Mr. Perot would be included.

WOODRUFF: Do either Frank or Paul want to weigh in on that?

FAHRENKOPF: Well, Bobby's right. When the contract was presented to the commission, signed both by Governor Clinton's campaign and President Bush's, it stipulated that Mr. Perot be included.

Our view was that we were going to go through our process. We sent it out to our independent committee. They reviewed it and made a recommendation to the commission that Mr. Perot be included. That recommendation was approved by the board, and he was, in fact, included.

I'm going to tell you, though, if that independent commission had come back and had said "no," I believe that the debate commission would have rejected the contract, and they probably would have gone on and had to find another sponsor. I don't think we'd have gone forward.

LINDSEY: But, Frank, don't you think the only reason they would have come back is because that particular candidate did not meet the guidelines?

FAHRENKOPF: That's what I mean. By looking at the guidelines--and that's what that independent committee did--they looked at it to make a determination and then make a recommendation to the Commission on Presidential Debates.

LINDSEY: So any third-party candidate who meets those guidelines would be certainly invited to participate. And I don't think, I mean, also from the Clinton campaign's perspective, I don't think there was any discussion about not including him, because he was considered a viable candidate.

We might have had--we would have had serious reservations to some of the other third-party candidates.

WOODRUFF: What were the guidelines on third-party candidates?

BURCHFIELD: They include such things as the third-party's candidates standing in the polls, the consensus of political reporters as to whether they have a legitimate chance of winning the election, whether they're qualified for the ballot in all 50 states.

MULFORD: It's been dynamic, somewhat. When Anderson was running, it was a requirement that you have a 15 percent standing in the polls, and now I think it's a realistic expectation of being elected.

But I'd like to address some of those, too--

WOODRUFF: Please do.

ROOK: And following up on that, what about the media's role? Travelling around, a lot of people say, well, these other candidates, they don't have a chance of getting elected because the media isn't covering all of these candidates. So what about the symbiotic relationship between coverage and standing in the polls and exposure and electability?

MULFORD: Well, let's legislate that the media has to cover every third-party candidate in the country in order to get funding from the foundation.

Third-party standing obviously is something very interesting to me, and our connection to it. I'd understood--Bobby's trying to get me to back down on a couple of points that we were trying to insinuate ourselves into in the negotiations--was that the Bush campaign had gotten us into the debate, and I should forget about trying to get anything else from it.

And, you know, one of the things that has not come up yet but may is the title of the commission which is the Bipartisan Commission rather than the Non-partisan Commission. But something that Paul Kirk has said I think is absolutely true. It doesn't matter who serves; it's how they serve. And I don't think that the nomenclature is really very important at all. And the commission was absolutely advised.

I thought in the exchange that Bobby and Frank had that the issue, according to the third party, that was going to be brought up is whether or not you would be protected from being sued by other third parties in the event that you did not have the Perot candidacy meet the requirement.

And as we all know in this room, you're going to be sued by some of those candidates anyway--and always are.

But the criteria is of great importance. And I guess I want to just mention, though, that I was very pleased that the logotype here has a three-winged animal. And I assume that we're the centrist element. That's how we saw ourself.

FAHRENKOPF: There's only two heads.

MULFORD: That's what I said. There's no cranium attached to that wing. So I didn't want to bring it up.

The situation for recognizing third-party candidate status for inclusion in debates to me is a little bit like Potter Stuart's definition of pornography: "I can't define, but I know it when I see it."

There are four things I think that probably should matter, though, and I think it's very important that the Commission err on the side of inclusion of candidates. And I think as time goes on, as I've said to some of you before in other forums or fora, that I think there's going to be an increasing fracturing of the American population because there is greater direct access by people to elements of the population going from three broadcast stations to 50 cable stations to 500 cable stations--people like Rush Limbaugh, Bill Cosby--people are going to have access to developing a constituency and may be able to mount a direct communication campaign with people.

You may have pockets of support in varying areas. So I think this is a very important issue, whether or not Perot had been in the race this year.

First, though, it should not be a springboard for an individual. I think, in answer to your question, it should not be a basis for somebody who's unknown and does not have widespread public support that they've gotten on their own to launch onto the national stage. That's not the function of the debates. So it is appropriate to have criteria besides filing a document saying "I'm running for president."

I think one of those criteria should be that you're on the ballot in enough states to carry the electoral college, until we get it abolished--which raises other constitutional issues.

Second, I think that you should also have an organization, a real, live-type organization, in states that evidences some kind of support within those states. The Libertarians and others who do have support obtain ballot status frequently by employing people to circulate petitions and so forth, and it can be bought. So you want to make sure that there's some kind of organizational standing, also.

Third, and the one that's sort of conventional wisdom, is that there needs to be some kind of financial viability standard, which always meets--people that followed the Perot campaign as somewhat surprising. We really disagree with too much emphasis being placed on that. We were very happy it was this time. And one of the questions I would get from Janet and her staff was what was our media budget, how much time we were going to buy, how much time we were contracted to buy.

And I, in fact, had anticipated that, being somewhat familiar with the requirements for inclusion in the debate, starting October 1, buying time immediately that day, because I was having trouble getting my candidate to get out there and press the flesh.

And if you're at 7 percent in the polls and going down, pretty soon it doesn't take too many days to start looking like someone who is advocating the gold standard, in the eyes of the commission.

However, I think that, as a practical matter, unfortunately, financial viability is relevant; but I think it's far less relevant than it's given credit for. I think we got into the debates more because of the money than we should have. And the real reason we should have gotten into the debates is because at 7 percent of the polls when Mr. Perot re-entered, he was also a candidate who had been number one in the polls in June and would have carried by exit polls both the Republican and Democratic primaries in California.

That was really a novel historic event, and we think it has very little to do with Ross Perot and a whole lot to do with how the country viewed the government and the problems it faced. And at the time that he was number one in the polls--which was historic--he had not spent any money. He'd never run a commercial, never asked anybody to vote for him, not do anything, except go into a couple of places.

The fourth and final event--polls. Polls are very dangerous for third-party candidates because

the questions are usually phrased, "If the election was held today, who would you vote for?" And what the polls should ask, "If the elections were held today, who would you prefer to see elected president?" There's a lot of data that shows--it's not well-documented in the media but it's all at the Roper Center, if anybody wants to look at it--from exit polls that 30 to 33 percent of the people that voted would have voted for Ross Perot if they thought he could have won.

And the polls begin driving the results when you say, "who will you vote for." If you cannot win, if there's a perception you cannot win, that has an impact, understanding. And we think that puts too great a power, influence in the polls. So polls are important, but the question and how it's asked is very, very important, too. And in any race with more than two candidates, you need to ask, "Who would you prefer to see as president?"--because the dynamics of the two-way race don't work in that question.

WOODRUFF: If one didn't know better, one might suspect you were arguing for criteria for the next presidential election.

MULFORD: Which I'm not.

UNGER: I'd just like to ask in conjunction with this, we find in terms of our research that the forces of the voters, by and large, are read in two ways. One is for continuation, i.e., the incumbency; and one is all the rest for alteration, for change.

Is there a danger in allowing additional candidates that you are institutionalizing the forces for change on a non-representative basis? By that I mean, there is only one force for continuation in any of these debates--one force for incumbency. All the rest represent forces for change.

And if, as has been suggested, we have maybe three candidate debates, four candidate debates, five candidate debates--when the answers are given to the questions, there is only going to be one-fifth of the time or one-fourth of the time allocated to the forces for continuation. All the rest of the time will be allocated to the forces for change, even though that may not in any way, shape or form, represent the way in which the voters apparently endorse change or alteration.

MULFORD: If you're asking for comments, I understand what you're saying, that you bifurcate a move. But I think that, you know, to those on the outside of the traditional political parties, the argument would be that they have a lot more in common with each other and they have a lot more in common in the pursuit of FEC regulations that benefit them both and so forth than people on the outside--so that you are, in fact, reducing the influence of a dynamic process to generate organic change by limiting to two institutionalized parties.

UNGER: I'm just asking, as a campaign tool, though, is there an inherent unfairness to the forces of the incumbency in large numbers of candidates because of the way in which, in fact, the questions are structured and then a kind of equal precipitation of responses, even though there's only going to be one force, as I say, for continuation, and all the rest for alteration?

MULFORD: I think the dynamic is much more complex than just those that aren't in office against those who are, and that analysis would only apply in a situation where you do have an

incumbent president, as well.

WOODRUFF: Anybody else? Bobby?

BURCHFIELD: Yes, two points on that, Jim. The first is that if you have too many candidates present, I think you run risks beyond hurting the incumbent. You run a risk to the system itself.

There was a lot of literature published this year about the possibility of a three-party race ending up in the House of Representatives. I don't think that's what the American people want their political system to turn into. (end of tape side--break in audio) --and that we've had a strong two-party system that has, on occasion, allowed itself to evolve from the two parties that are existing to two different parties when the Republican Party arose a century ago.

The second problem that I see--the second comment I would make is that you're stating the conventional wisdom. As you remember, Jimmy Carter would not debate in 1980 until John Anderson fell low enough in the polls that he no longer qualified to be in the debates. And their view was that, with two challengers there, they would both be sniping at the incumbent.

We saw that to some degree this year, but the dynamic was such--and again 1992 was a very unusual year--the dynamic was such that George Bush got in the polls to about 38 percent in May and stayed there through November 3rd, so that we were at our base and we viewed the dynamic this year as being that we were--that Bill Clinton was debating Ross Perot, essentially, for the people who were going to vote against George Bush.

So I don't think that situation is going to recreate itself any time soon.

TONN: I'm struck by some slippage regarding the role of the public and what the public has because occasionally we get the public and what the public wants invoked here. And very clearly from the focus group research, the public wants to have some ownership of the debates, right?

In the same way, I see some slippage regarding the role of institutionalized anything. On the one hand, we're talking about a two-party system, and it is the institution and we can't jeopardize that in any way. On the other hand, we're talking about how institutions bother us and they constrain us, and what we want is the dynamic.

I mean, can we not do some institutionalization that then allows for some flexibility? I mean, the election, after all, comes on the second Tuesday of November every year, and is an institution. Who is in that election always changes and that's a dynamic.

I mean, can we not set up a debate procedure in which every Tuesday--let's say, for example, every Tuesday of October, we have a debate and we have x amount of formats. And you know that a year-and-a-half ahead of time. Who's engaged in that debate, who the moderator is going to be, can be up to the parties to slug it out.

WOODRUFF: Or nine Sundays, for that matter, or some other format.

LINDSEY: Well, I presume you're talking about a larger issue than just the actual schedule because the schedule is driven not by the candidates' preferences or by the commission's. I mean, the schedules from September and October are driven by the networks in available time.

TONN: That's one of the things I think is very confusing.

LINDSEY: And other events that are happening. I mean, we will not go up against the final game of the play-offs or Monday night football.

KIRK: Two networks and CNN covered the debates, the first debates. CBS came to it after, you know, for the wrap-up after the baseball game.

LINDSEY: But that was not something we would have preferred because fewer people were able to see the debate. But we were forced into a situation that was out of our hands.

TONN: If you institutionalize ahead of time, then what takes precedence? The ball game or the debate?

LINDSEY: The ball game will, but not to us.

TONN: I think what's interesting here is like who has ownership of the debates? And sometimes we talk about the people because the people want it; and then other times we talk about the candidates, and the candidates have ownership of the debates. And then another time, we're talking about the media, and then it really belongs to us. And everybody seems to want to take ownership of it in some way.

BURCHFIELD: I think there's an assumption here--and I would agree with it personally, but not everyone would, as demonstrated by the fact that some people watch the baseball game. And that is, the debates are more entertaining than baseball.

There's no way you're going to make people watch debates. Some people are going to watch debates if they're on every channel, simply because they always have to have the TV on. But given any option, given re-runs of "Lassie" on a cable station, some people are going to watch that, rather than watch presidential debates.

I don't think that it's our role necessarily to cut off the options of those people who don't want to watch the debates.

The second point in response to your observation is that, if we had had a proposal tabled a year and a half before the 1992 election, you would have never had the town hall debate. You would have not had the panel debate.

I think, in looking at the criteria, I thought at the time and it was my advice to the client, that there was no guarantee. It was at least an open question whether Ross Perot on October 1st met the criteria that the commission had set forward.

So that was an issue that would not have been resolved in the way that it was.

There are a lot of decisions that were made this year, in 1992, during the year, that couldn't have been made the same way a year-and-a-half before.

FAHRENKOPF: How about this as a proposal? Let's suppose the commission were to do, in effect, what we did in both 1988 and 1992--namely, go out, sit down with the networks, like we did,

and try to find--and let's assume, for our purposes, we're talking about three presidential and one vice presidential debate, and we realize that could change as far as numbers. And we found four nights that had as little competition, whether it was World Series or play-off games or Saturday nights or Sunday night football, where there was agreement by the commission and the networks that there wouldn't be any major conflicts, and we said that the debates, the four debates, the commission proposes be held on these four evenings, in advance, as we did this time.

I thought it was July. Maybe it was June when we announced it. I thought the press conference was in July.

So that all we're putting out there is these are the dates. We might very well propose that the first debate be with a single moderator, the second be town hall, and then sit down with the candidates when we reach a point and work out within the dates that are out there--so we know that the dates are there--whether or not it's agreeable that the first debate be held with this particular format rather than the fourth debate and so forth and iron it out--

So that the commission is not attempting in any way to dictate every element, but that the commission--and perhaps we give us ourselves too much credit in this. We tried very hard to be the representative of the people at the table in 1992, to not take the side of the Republican candidate or the Democratic candidate or Ross Perot, but to be an arbiter there, to be fair, to sit down and work out those other details--but set the four dates out there.

Would that work?

WOODRUFF: And how is that different from what you did this year?

FAHRENKOPF: It's not.

KIRK: As one who's been on both in a campaign mode and, to quote a famous former president, and also now Commission on Presidential Debates, I think we have to have a little more candor than perhaps we've heard, for the record, and you can rebut me, if you choose, Bobby.

We went to great lengths to try to get a proposal out well ahead of the conventions. We didn't know who the Democratic nominee was going to be. Because we had the symposium in 1990, we did agree that the single candidate moderator was preferable to the panel, and we proposed that as well.

I think my own reflection on this is that when Governor Clinton became the nominee of the party, as I said before, it wasn't so much format, it was what Jim Lehrer said: the most compelling thing about these issues are these issues, and what format is not all that important.

But once Governor Clinton took that position and said this proposal is fine with us, I believe this--that the Bush campaign said "no." And now we were into tactics. Then it comes back to Frank's point. The most important debate in 1984 and '88 were the negotiations. And if you'll think back on Jim Baker's proposal, he's always been one guy who said, "Debates freeze the campaign." So in 1988, we're going to have a short schedule; and in 1992, because we're losing, we're going to freeze this campaign up to the Sunday before the Tuesday. And by the way, just to keep people confused, we're going to invite Ross Perot in, even if the commission doesn't.

Now that was my view of what was going on in terms of trying to keep this campaign and this election up for grabs as long as it could. I still believe that when we're looking for dates that provide the largest audience with the least conflict, we should do that. Frankly, we don't have to make a pact.

I mean, some institution--and I presume it's going to be the commission--is going to look for those windows. And I come back to basically saying it isn't much different, at all different, than what Frank's proposing and what we did last time, and looking for the nuances that might change.

One thing we do know is it's unlikely that candidate Bush will be involved. And we tried to stay clear of preferences and so forth. But I guess what I'm saying is, if we did the same thing, how would we change it so that we did have a sense of institutionalization, that the people out there understood that there would be debates, that they'd be chosen, hopefully, when there's the least traffic involved. In other words, how would you help us help the people that Mari's talking about, the people who have a proprietary interest in what goes on in the election?

WOODRUFF: Bobby and then Bev.

BURCHFIELD: Let me respond first of all to one of the comments you made,and then try to answer the question. I don't have a good answer to your question. But it is the case that the Bush campaign made a tactical decision not to accept the commission's proposal. But it is also the case, Paul, that the Clinton campaign made a tactical decision to accept the proposal.

You can't say that one is tactical and one is pure. Both were tactical decisions. At the time the Clinton campaign signed on before the Democratic convention, it was a much different race. It looked like a much different race than it turned out to be.

So I don't think it's fair to say, with all due respect, that the Bush campaign unfairly made this a tactical issue. It's always going to be a tactical issue. It will be a tactical issue if you tie federal funding to the participation in debates. It will even be more of a tactical issue then.

The second thing, your question as to what can be done--it seems to me that the commission can serve a valuable role in holding itself out as a neutral sponsor of the debates. I think it can come forward with dates that the networks agree to make available to the candidates. I would be opposed to coming forward with a list that includes only four. And I know the networks will kick and scream when you try to get more dates than that out of them. But they will always end up covering the debates, as shown this year, except for a baseball where they've got a lot more money on the line than they do for the normal programming.

But if you were to come forward with the proposal that had, from the end of the last convention through the election, ten days, 15 days, on which the networks agreed to make available time, then the candidates could sit down and negotiate as to which of those days best fit within the context of the campaign they want to run. The Clinton campaign emphasized very strongly to us over the first day we spent cooped up in the conference room, that they had plans for the final two weeks of the campaign that were not negotiable. And after they told us that a hundred or so times, we finally believed it, and then we struck a deal.

But the key thing is, that scheduling was sacrosanct to them. And each campaign is going to run its campaign in a way that certain dates are sacrosanct; that they want to speak at a dinner at the candidate's alma mater in mid-October. Well, that date's off the table. So I think you're always going to get into a problem, it seems to me, if you set forth dates. The more specific you get, the more it looks like a take-it or leave-it proposal. That's my reaction.

LINDSEY: I would have to agree with Bobby. I just don't think there's much more you can

do, other than what you've done and what you did. I don't know what you might do in order to not be as conclusive with the host communities because I don't know what that process was. But what you might do to lower those expectations a bit.

And like I said before, I cannot imagine a candidate, presidential candidate, major presidential candidate, not agreeing to debate. But if he's not going to agree to debate, then there's nothing any of us can do about it. And the public outcry will take care of that on its own.

But I think you all went as far in '92 as you could have gone and you did everything that you could have done to prepare the process to go forward once the candidates got on board.

JOEL SWERDLOW: I'd just like to add two quick things from an historian's point of view. One is, if you look at a list of things that are institutionalized for presidential candidates to do, the list is not very long. I think the commission may be setting up a pretty high and false standard for itself.

Candidates are expected to vote. But it's hard to think what else, in 200 years of history, candidates are institutionally expected to do.

Secondly, I think to a certain degree, we may all be talking about something which is becoming an anachronism left over from 1960, which is the blockbuster debate. One of the patterns that we have in American politics is things that happen in local politics and state politics and presidential primary politics eventually hit and inevitably hit general election politics. And one thing that's been happening is democratization of debates.

Now if you run for Congress or mayor, governor or senator or for your party's presidential nomination, often you debate so many times that no one can even count it. How many debates did the Democratic Party have in 1988 or 1984 or 1992? No scholar can get an answer. You can't even count how many debates in the New York state primary.

If that happens, if you have a flowering of debates, then a lot of this becomes moot. There will be some commission debates, some debates on the Larry King show, various combinations of candidates, and discussions like this will be a thing of the past.

I'll hang up the phone and let your guest answer.

WOODRUFF: Does anybody want to comment on that? In a way, it's a self-sustaining statement, I think.

I think we have time for one more, maybe one and a half.

BRADY WILLIAMSON: There are some fascinating ironies explored this afternoon. And as somebody who was on the Democratic debate team for 1984, 1988 and 1992, I'd like to just point one out. And that is, in a sense, the commission is becoming a victim of its own success. And the debates are becoming a victim of their own success, because what is likely, I think, is that candidates are going to be more interested in, quote, controlling the process in the future than less.

I will point out that in 1984, the Baker-Johnson agreement was three pages long; in 1988, the Baker-Brountas agreement was 13 pages long; and, Bobby and Bev, correct me, but I believe it was 33 pages long in 1992. And as a lawyer, if I might hazard a guess, in 1996, it could be 66 pages long.

So I think that's just part of the reality. Having said that, I think through a wonderful combination of serendipity, including the League of Women Voters performance in 1988, the

commission has ascended to this pivotal role, which is one I hope they continue.

WOODRUFF: Anybody else dying to get something off their chest? Well, let's thank all of our panelists.

FAHRENKOPF: Ladies and gentlemen, for your information, there will be transcripts available of today's proceedings. They will be mailed to you. Again, we want to thank Charles Overby and the staff and trustees of the Freedom Forum. We couldn't have asked for a better place to have it, and we're going to have a reception out here, and you're all invited. Thanks.

Thanks, Judy.

COMMISSION ON
PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES 601 Thirteenth Street, N.W. • Suite 310 South • Washington, DC 20005 • (202) 872-1020

April 29, 1994

Melvin R. Laird
Senior Counselor
Reader's Digest
1730 Rhode Island Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20036

Dear Mr. Laird:

The Commission is planning some 1994 educational programs designed to engage young people in the discussion of public policy and politics. I was wondering if I might be able to schedule a brief meeting with you to describe them and hear your thoughts. Given your godparentship of the Commission and your understanding of our agenda, your counsel would be a big help.

I will call your office next week to ask if a meeting would be convenient.

With many thanks and best regards,

Janet

Janet H. Brown
Executive Director

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PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES 601 Thirteenth Street, N.W. • Suite 310 South • Washington, DC 20005 • (202) 872-1020

June 20, 1995

Melvin R. Laird
Senior Counselor
Reader's Digest
1730 Rhode Island Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

Dear Mr. Laird:

We are gearing up for next year's debates and have a very interesting voter education project underway. Is there any chance you might have fifteen minutes when I could brief you on it and get your thoughts?

With ongoing thanks for your godfathership to the Commission,

Janet H. Brown
Executive Director

Feb. 8 - 1'96.
thanks to hosts for the B...
on Feb. 9th

Bob Strauss - 887-4190

COMMISSION ON
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December 28, 1995

Honorable Melvin R. Laird
Senior Counselor
Reader's Digest
1730 Rhode Island Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20036

Nancy - could we give ... another date ... like to do ... Bobby Strauss

Dear Mel:

It has been ten years since you and Bob Strauss chaired the Commission on National Elections whose recommendation to establish a permanent debate sponsor was the reason that the Commission on Presidential Debates (CPD) was created. We are indebted to you and Bob for your foresight regarding the importance of debates. As I'm sure you know, the 1992 debates set several records, viewership being only one: 97 million people watched the third and final debate. More Americans based their votes on the debates than on any other single issue. As we plan for next year, we are mindful that the debates will play a larger role than ever in educating viewers and listeners about the candidates.

The CPD would like to honor you and Bob as our founders at an event on February 8, 1996 here in Washington. The ITT Corporation has generously agreed to host a luncheon to which potential contributors to our voter education program, "DebateWatch '96," will be invited. We would like to salute you and Bob that day for your critical role in our accomplishments. No tickets will be sold to this event; invitees will simply be asked to come in order to honor you and to hear about DebateWatch '96. (A DebateWatch packet and related press release are enclosed for your review.)

We hope you will agree to our request. It would be a great way to kick off a new debate year and would give us the opportunity to thank you for your central contribution to voter education.

With best wishes for 1996,

Paul

Paul G. Kirk, Jr.
Co-chairman

Frank J. Fahrenkopf, Jr.
Co-chairman