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Chairman and Chief Executive Officer

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Sen. Robert Dole  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Sen. Dole:

One year ago, I sent you a letter that sparked considerable discussion among the Capitol Hill community and the news media. It contained four specific proposals to increase public access to the Senate via television.

Upon receipt of our letter, you issued a statement saying that "you'd take a serious look at anything that increases public access to Congress." You promised to take up our ideas with the Democratic Leader. Today, on the anniversary of that letter, it seems appropriate to review the status of those proposals.

**Proposal #1) Allow C-SPAN—or other private cameras—to cover Senate floor debates.** On this, the most significant of our requests, there has been no movement. The only video coverage of the United States Senate is produced by Senate employees.

We continue to believe that private media cameras also belong in the Senate chamber. As long as the only cameras in Congress are controlled by government employees, the public will have a less-than-complete picture of their Senate at work.

**Proposal #2) Open the Leader's "dugout chatter" to television.** On Congress' opening day, you and Sen. Daschle introduced a measure which would allow these daily pre-session exchanges with reporters to be televised live from the Senate floor. Your measure made it to the Senate Rules Committee in March and was reported out by a 10-2 vote. To date, we have heard nothing further from the Senate on this issue.

In the interim, you and Sen. Daschle offered to hold daily briefings off the Senate floor, where our—and others'—television cameras were permitted to record them. You held only one such briefing while Sen. Daschle continues to conduct them on a regular basis.

The information in these briefings is valuable for the press and the public. We urge the majority to reinstate daily televised briefings so that we can hear overviews of the day's session from the leadership on both sides of the aisle.

**Proposal #3) Allow C-SPAN to install a permanent camera position just off the floor.** We haven't yet received such a position, but we still think it would be useful. This camera would be used during quorum calls and breaks to help enhance public understanding of the issues being debated by the Senate.

**Proposal #4) Open all House-Senate conference committees to television.** S Con Res 1, introduced on opening day by you and Sen. Daschle, would permanently do just that. Like your other Senate television proposal, it was referred to the Rules Committee and still awaits action. You should know, however, that when conference committees have agreed to hold public sessions this year, C-SPAN has been granted camera access to them.

Early on in this process, you acknowledged to the press that "improvements can clearly be made" regarding television access to the Senate. You promised to name a bi-partisan working group of Senators to address camera access issues. One year later, little has changed to bring the public a more complete view of Congress' upper chamber. Important aspects of the Senate—most notably your floor debates—are still completely insulated from access by private media cameras.

We recognize that this letter arrives at a very busy time for the Congress and for you. Yet, it is precisely because of the importance of the issues being debated by the Senate that we want to raise again the request for complete access for the American public via television.

Students of the Senate's history, including yourself and Sen. Byrd, have often noted that public access to the Senate has been an evolutionary process. And, in fact, the Senate took an important step when it first allowed its sessions to be televised in 1986. In so doing, it became an international model for the openness of the American government process.

However, in the decade since the Senate went on television, other national legislatures have gone on TV, many of them allowing regular access to journalists' cameras. That's why we believe it is time for the United States Senate to revisit the television issue and to allow private media cameras inside the chamber on a regular basis. Our Congress should remain the world's most free and open place of debate.

Sincerely,



Brian P. Lamb

cc: Members of the U.S. Senate