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PRESIDENTIAL TALENT HUNT

-- A MISSION FOR PUBLIC TELEVISION

...Public broadcasters should initiate new forms of programming on the Presidential election process that facilitate rational comparison of potential or declared candidates, sustained exploration of issues, and the thorough and objective review of candidates' political experience.

--Recommendation of the American Assembly on "Choosing the President," December 1973

NPACT President: James Karayn
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February 1974

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OVERVIEW

THE TIME HAS COME in the public life of the United States to make a major breakthrough in informing the people about the character and stature and depth of the persons they consider for the Presidency.

We propose the use of television, our age's most powerful tool of political communication, in an imaginative, vigorous, open search for new national leadership.

We recommend a major commitment by public television to this goal, employing a year-long series of hourly broadcasts in 1975, before the nation plunges into its next Presidential election campaign. We believe the programs would constitute an unprecedented preparation for the choice of a new Chief Executive -- a contribution in living history, rather than a recitation of past glories, as we approach the nation's Bicentennial year Presidential election.

A major objective of the series would be to assist the leaders and members of the regularly constituted political parties -- as well as the people at large -- in the quest for an outstanding President.

To ensure balance and fairness and to help identify the series as an important event in American public life, we propose establishment of a blue-ribbon national commission to oversee and guide the project.

Employing several formats, some never before attempted, some close to those previously utilized on public television, we propose that the public be able to examine a broad number of potential Presidents and Vice Presidents from such perspectives as these---

... how they lead and guide and interact with policy counsellors -- the heart of the Presidential decision-making process;

... their capacity to ask insightful questions and learn from what they hear -- rather than their showmanship, their rhetoric, or purported omniscience;

... how they respond to a group of informed "people's surrogates" selected to represent a cross-section of the United States population in the mid-1970s;

... their public records, viewed in a way to illuminate basic traits of character;

... their understanding and view of the American dilemma and opportunity at this moment of history;



... their view of the powers, responsibilities, and limitations of the Presidency; and

... in an era of awesomely expanding problems and opportunities at home and abroad, indications of their ability to govern.

While many aspects of the program formats relate to tests of potential Presidents, we wish to emphasize the other, equally important function of the series: to provide air access for possible Presidential candidates who would otherwise not have the public visibility or financial resources to present themselves and their cases to the American people through the dominant medium of television. Non-incumbent candidates in particular work at a tremendous disadvantage because of the prohibitive costs of purchased television time. This in turn short-changes the American people, who do not have the opportunity to view and assess fresh national leadership potential in a format which permits the possible candidates to show their attributes in a relaxed and thorough manner.

There is a critical need in the United States today for a wide range of efforts to rebuild public confidence in the country's political system and the persons who make vital decisions of public policy. Clearly, no single political reform or television series would be sufficient to accomplish this goal. But the series we propose, by moving behind the facade of political image-making to show potential Presidents struggling in good faith to develop solutions for our national problems, could make an important start.

THE NATIONAL NEED

There should be no underestimation of the gravity of choice which will face the country in its Bicentennial year election. We live in an era of deep and virtually unprecedented public distrust and alienation, which has its roots in events that occurred long before the word "Watergate" entered the vernacular and has been demonstrated beyond doubt in authoritative public opinion surveys.

The Congress of the United States is so concerned with the problem, in fact, that a Senate committee in 1973 commissioned a national poll on the American people's attitude toward government -- the first time any committee of Congress ever turned to a professional polling organization for a report on the public mood and concerns. Louis Harris, whose organization conducted the survey, observed in reporting the gloomy survey results that the key question facing the United States today is "no less than how to restore the faith and confidence of a free people in their own government." [Details of the Harris survey appear in Appendix A.]

One of the most respected political analysts, David S. Broder, wrote recently of the people's sense of impotence about the things they feel have gone wrong with their country:

The frustration knows no geographical, educational or ideological bounds, and it represents the greatest unharnessed power for change -- good or evil -- abroad in the land....

Widespread, impotent rage at government, coupled with an ignorance of, or disinclination to employ, the processes of legitimate politics to alter the makeup or character of that government, poses an explosive danger to American democracy.

One way or another, the people are going to figure out how to relieve their frustration. If they can't do it through politics and the processes of democracy, the danger is they will turn to demagoguery or dictatorship.

The program series here presented cannot be considered any kind of panacea in deciding the course for responsive government over the chilling alternatives we face as a nation. But it could lay the groundwork for that to happen in 1976. It could present both the people and the political parties with a view of prospective Presidential leadership unprecedented in its depth and scope. It could contribute to a substantial broadening of the field of talented Americans seriously considered for the Presidency. By giving potential Presidents an opportunity to share with the people their exploration of the answers to critical national problems, it can begin the arduous process of rebuilding public faith in the integrity and

competence of our leaders. It can enable the people and the parties to start making judgments regarding an expanded field of possible Presidential candidates, long before the political din of the election year reaches a crescendo.

One advantage of launching this series before the 1976 election is that both major parties' nominations will be wide open, or more so than in recent elections. This is the time to create the precedent of substantial free television time for potential Presidents, a precedent that would then permit a repetition of the program concept in future elections, even when one party or the other had an incumbent President seeking reelection.

THE ROLE OF PUBLIC TELEVISION

This is a unique moment -- both in the history of the United States, and in the brief, promising history of public television. In the past year, particularly through its coverage of the Watergate hearings, the public television system has demonstrated that it can present public affairs programming that is provoking, topical, and non-duplicative of the commercial networks. The letters to NPACT and the individual public television stations from some 150,000 viewers demonstrate that public television was responding to a legitimate and deeply felt public need, building a greatly expanded national following in the process. The next and logical step is for public television to move into the heart of the American electoral process, tying together television and the problems of elective choice and governing where they should be tied. Public television now has the capacity to become the "people's forum" of America. Broadcasting a thoughtful and responsive series of programs leading up to the Presidential election of 1976 presents us with a rare opportunity. It is an opportunity we dare not ignore -- for the sake of public television, and even more importantly, for the sake of the democratic process in this sorely troubled country.

THE COMMISSION

The commission we propose would have a broad mandate to shape the entire series, from the formulative stages through to airing of the last program. The commission would include many highly regarded citizens known to the country at large. All major political points of view in the United States would be represented, but none would dominate. We also propose that each national party chairman, either formally or informally, be invited to suggest two persons to serve on the commission. The commission membership should include a nationally recognized public opinion analyst, the secretaries of state of one or two states where that officer actually designates candidates for the Presidential preference ballot in 1976, one or two leading political scientists, prominent officials of the public television world, university presidents, editors, minority group leaders, and spokesmen for business, labor, women's, and cause groups. An overall membership of about 20 persons, possibly with a smaller executive committee, is contemplated.

The full scope of duties of the commission, including the decision on which potential Presidents should be invited to appear on the programs, is spelled out in Appendix C. From start to finish, an effort would be made to keep the decision-making process of the commission as open as possible. Portions of commission meetings would be televised, and we propose that all formal meetings be open to the press.

THE PEOPLE'S ROLE

The people of the United States would participate in the formulation and execution of the program series to the maximum extent practicable.

Before the series starts, major on-air, newspaper and magazine news coverage and advertising should be inaugurated, asking the public to mail in ballots, cards or letters in which they would give the names of persons they believe should be considered for the Presidency and invited to appear on the series. The people's proposals, while not binding on the commission, would be expected to play a major role in the commission's final decisions on the potential Presidential candidates to be scheduled.

The people would also be asked to suggest issues they would like to see discussed on the programs, and aspects of candidates' lives and records they would like to know more about. Surveys of this type might be continued through much of 1975. (A by-product would be a prime mailing list of friends of public broadcasting.)

To maximize and dramatize the people's role in the series, we also recommend selection of a panel of about 200 "people's surrogates" from all regions of the nation, who would appear in smaller groups on the programs from time to time. A national polling organization might be asked to suggest the types of representative persons (age, race, occupation breakdowns, etc.) that would give a good national cross-section. We would then rely heavily on public television stations to recruit and manage the surrogates' panels. The surrogates should not be everyday "man-or-woman-in-the-street" types. Rather, the objective would be to recruit the "first level up" in effective representation -- knowledgeable weekly newspaper editors, businessmen, ministers, labor union members, women's groups and civic leaders, students, and other first-time voters, majority and minority group spokesmen, and the like. Their role would be to voice the real cares and concerns of the people of the United States.

Once recruited, the surrogates would commit themselves to watch all the programs in the series and to take notes in preparation for their opportunity to question the candidates directly.

THE PROGRAM CONCEPT

We propose that this series, running through calendar year 1975, consist of an hour's introductory program at the start of the year, four major program phases of several weeks or months each, and a summary hour at year's end. Our initial proposals are spelled out below, although each of the formats, as well as the progression of the series, would be subject to substantial refinement in a research and development phase proposed in Appendix E. Our intent would be to construct the series with maximum flexibility to respond to changing political conditions, especially the emergence or withdrawal of potential Presidential candidates during the 52 weeks the program would be aired.

Because of the importance of this series, we propose that the programs be broadcast twice in prime time each week of 1975.

PROLOGUE (first week of January 1975, 60 or 90 minutes)

This introductory program would be a well-scripted effort to lay out for the country the whole concept of the series -- the reasons for a new form of search for Presidential leadership, the role of the commission, the opportunities for public participation, the mechanics of candidate selection for the programs, a background piece on the history and problems of Presidential selection. The public would be introduced to the commission (live or through films of its meetings), to the "people's surrogates," and to the director of the entire series. There would be cuts to several of the public television stations around the country which would be playing a major role in implementation of the series, discussion by commission members with authorities in Presidential choice, and a report on results of the national mail and telephone survey on the potential candidates and issues the people of the country would like to see included in the programs.

PHASE ONE -- THE CANDIDATES ASK THE QUESTIONS (approximately six months, beginning in January.*)

This would be a new form of public affairs programming in which national leaders, rather than answering questions from reporters or television correspondents, are asked to take the initiative in questioning and leading a dialogue with policy experts made available to them. A single subject (in the field of the economy, energy uses and problems, crime and justice, health care, welfare, the environment, defense, foreign policy, etc.) will be discussed on each program.

*The actual time periods for each phase would be worked out by the commission and editorial-production staff.



The intent of this new approach is to test the mind and character of each potential candidate by gauging his or her capacity (1) to ask meaningful questions, (2) to engage in extended dialogue on a subject of national importance, and (3) to "manage" a policy briefing and refine his or her thinking with the assistance of the articulate and well-qualified experts made available on the programs.

We expect that a wide range of potential Presidential candidates would be included in this initial phase. At the start of each program there would be an explicit statement by the moderator, program series director, or a member of the commission, pointing out that the guest's willingness to appear on the program in no way implies an announcement of candidacy on the person's part. The point, to be repeatedly emphasized, is that invitations to appear come from the commission, acting frequently in response to viewers' suggestions, as a part of a vital public function -- the search for leadership in our time.

The hour would start with a brief but sharply focused biography of the candidate-guest, focused on the person's major achievements and present importance in national life. After that segment, of perhaps three minutes, there would be a five-minute mini-documentary to give the issue selected for the program visual reality for the public. The "experts" selected for the week's program would contribute heavily to preparation of the mini-documentary, and possibly provide part of the narration.

Then, only 8-10 minutes into the hour, the candidate-guest would be asked to initiate questions of and dialogue with the policy experts.

Incumbent Presidents, it should be noted, do not have the luxury of "choosing" the vital national problems to which they must address themselves. Often the most discussed issues of their campaigns -- the question of Quemoy and Matsu in the 1960 Presidential campaign is a classic example -- are scarcely issues at all once a man has taken office. Rather, Presidents often find themselves obliged to make crucial decisions in policy areas initially unfamiliar to, or unexpected by them. To do this, they must draw on the expertise of advisers -- as well as their own political instincts. Therefore, we do not propose informing a guest-candidate in advance of the precise issue which he will face on one of the broadcasts in this series. In advance of the series, we will make public 10 or 15 major policy questions which might be used on air (thus assuring a guest that a narrow and esoteric subject such as foreign aid to Afghanistan would not be thrust upon him.) Only on arrival at the studio would the guest be told which issue from the list is the actual topic for the day. Nor would he be told in advance the names of the policy experts who would appear with him. (He would probably be introduced to them to begin informal conversation, about an hour before air on taping time, and be provided with a page of biographical

information on each.) The ban on advance notice would prevent the guests from boning up extensively on the issue, learning all the past policy positions of the experts, and thus -- in familiar political style -- mouthing pre-set and sometimes devious policy positions developed by campaign-professional staff. An effort would be made to avoid topics in which a guest had special expertise, precisely because this could vitiate the spontaneity of the exchange and provide a less informative view of the candidate's consultative-executive skills.

The exchanges between potential candidates and experts would develop their own dynamic, based on the self-interest of all parties. A candidate would want to show his ability to learn from others, and thus would use the first part of the hour eliciting information from the experts; by the same token, to show his capacity to reach decisions, he would move as the program progressed to testing and enunciating some of his own conclusions in dialogue with the experts.

The experts, hopeful of gaining national recognition and rendering a public service, would be motivated to be helpful but not didactic or domineering. They would be instructed to act as resource persons for the candidate, and not to interrogate him about his past policy stands, votes in Congress, etc. But there would be no bar against the experts challenging a candidate who began to fill the air time with empty rhetoric, sloganizing, or lines of highly specious reasoning. The format is designed to make possible sustained periods of discussion, without interruptions, getting at basic issues, and precluding the short, diversionary answers that plague programs like the commercial networks' weekly press interview shows.

We believe this approach will provide many clues about the kind of leader a potential President would be, quite apart from his precise position on matters of substantive policy. In this respect the program would be a kind of "practice Presidency" in which the viewing audience would have a glimpse into the intellect and working methods of a national leader which is simply unavailable in existing television coverage of Presidential candidates.

A side benefit of the exercise -- related to the question of rebuilding public confidence in national leadership -- would be to demonstrate the complexity of national issues and the dangers of espousing quick or easy solutions to the opportunities and problems facing the United States in the 1970s. To underscore this point, an explicit rule of the programs would be that guest-candidates would not be expected to provide a neat, conceptually rounded answer to the policy issue at the end of the hour. The more important question would be the kind of concerns they voiced through their questions.

The selection of the policy experts for these programs would be of great importance. They should be persons who know their subject areas well, and who can present policy suggestions coherently and

effectively, in a way that television viewers can understand. They should represent contrasting points of view on the subject at hand, but not positions of such extremism that rational debate is precluded. Some should be activists, advocating major new government action to solve certain problems; others should advocate a minimum of action, suggesting that problems will solve themselves better without governmental intervention. They need not be "famous" experts; to the contrary, the programs should seek out articulate, well-versed persons from the vast reservoirs of generally unknown talent in this country. Thus a side-benefit of the series would be to give national exposure to exceptionally able persons who thus become known to the political-government community and who might sometimes be selected as advisers for a candidate, or as White House advisers or other important posts in the next national administration, and possibly even in state and regional positions.

PHASE TWO -- THE PEOPLE CONFRONT THE CANDIDATES (approximately three months beginning in June.)

In this phase the potential Presidential candidates will have an opportunity to interact with public television's panels of people's surrogates across the country. Although each program will be broadcast nationally, a strong regional element will be introduced and the candidates will be given an opportunity to have contact with the people in sections of the nation not their own. Two candidates would appear, in separate half-hour segments from different regions, on each week's hour. Ronald Reagan, for instance, might meet with a panel of citizen's surrogates in New England, Walter Mondale in Atlanta, Edward Kennedy in Chicago, Nelson Rockefeller in Dallas or Houston, Howard Baker in Los Angeles, George Wallace in Seattle.

Five or six citizen's surrogates in a selected region would lead the questioning of the candidate-guest, backed up by as many other surrogates from the area as could conveniently be brought to the studio, plus other specially invited citizen guests (a total, perhaps, of 25 persons in the studio with the candidates). The surrogates will have been asked to watch all the programs in the series and to take notes in preparation for their opportunity to question the candidates directly. Many questions may relate to the particular issue a candidate discussed in his "Phase One" exposure with the policy experts, but there would be no bar on questions on other policy areas. We expect the format to go beyond mere questioning to a real dialogue between the candidates and the surrogates on questions of pressing concern to the American people. Previously mailed-in questions, or possibly questions phoned in from citizens of their region selected for a particular broadcast, would be invited.

PHASE THREE -- "WHAT MANNER OF PERSON?" (about two months, late summer-early fall). (By the autumn of 1975, a large number of earlier potential candidates will have eliminated themselves from consideration, making it practicable to focus on a smaller number of possible candidates at this point.)

In this phase, each of the hour-long programs will examine in depth the life, record, and general philosophy of one of the leading Presidential contenders. The broadcasts should originate from the public television station in the candidate's home city or area. We propose this general format:

1. "This Is Your Life" section -- film piece, narrated, of 5-8 minutes on candidate's childhood home, what manner of civilization he grew up in (small town on the Plains, rich Boston suburb, etc.), education, early career. The candidate, present on the set, would then be asked what essential values and life outlook he feels he drew from his early experience. The questioning would be done by a skillful interviewer considered quite "above" any kind of partisan preference or personal bias.
2. Public career -- an extensive examination of the candidate's record in public life, lasting about 25 minutes. Salient biographical points (offices held or run for, major achievements) would be covered quickly, with the focus then switching to a dialogue about the person's record in which two political analysts -- one favorable to him, one critical -- would each consider a number of key questions:
 - a. what kind of campaigns for office has the man waged (issue-based, primarily rhetoric, clean tactics?)
 - b. if he has been a governor, how does his record look in retrospect?
 - c. if a member of Congress, how distinguished a performance?
 - d. what real contributions has he made to the development of state and national policy?
 - e. has he worked closely with other members of his party, or been principally a loner?
 - f. has he been willing to break with his party on matters of conscience?

- g. with what type and quality of policy advisers has he surrounded himself?
- h. what policy analysis resources has he had to draw on? how well has he utilized them?
- i. what basic constituency (poor, rich, white, minorities, etc.) does he respond to? is he sensitive to the needs of all groups?
- j. does he take criticism well and benefit from it, or does he downgrade or attack all critics and opponents?
- k. has he learned from mistakes?
- l. has he ever risked his career rather than "going along" with what he considered wrong?

The two analysts would debate these issues between themselves. The candidate will then be brought back onto the program and given an opportunity to comment on what has been said about him. Some fairly sharp exchanges with the commentators would be likely.

- 3. The personal man -- some low-key questions, lasting about eight minutes, to throw light on character, with the interviewer of the first section of the program returning to place the questions. What does the candidate like to do with his spare time? What books has he read lately? With what kind of people does he like to associate socially? How does he feel about the demands of public life on his time?
- 4. The Presidency -- about 15 minutes devoted to the man's concept of the Presidency, continuing with the same interviewer. How does the candidate-guest feel about the way the office of President has evolved over the past 30 or so years? What kind of staff does he believe a President should have? How much dependence should be placed on the Cabinet? Should the President be commanding general of his political party, or should it have some measure of independence? Problems of Presidential isolation, leadership of the bureaucracy, relationships with Congress, etc. What past Presidents would be his model (excepting Washington and Lincoln), and why?

PHASE FOUR -- THE TEST OF NATIONAL LEADERSHIP (approximately two months, end of year.)

This concluding phase would be a severe test of a leader's capacity to handle one of the most serious problems likely to confront the United States in the term of the next President. The commission, working cooperatively with the program staff and the policy experts associated with the programs, would make the determination of the issues to be discussed. All the programs in this phase would be broadcast from the nation's capital.

This phase would be a kind of "leadership game plan," but a realistic exercise because the issue at hand would be very real. This format would have some similarity to the first phase, in that highly qualified policy experts would be available to the candidate-guest. But the phase would be much more tightly focused than the programs earlier in the year. Now the explicit questions would be as if the person were President of the United States: How do you deal with this problem? What resources do you call on? To what persons or groups do you look for counsel? How do you deal with problems of the federal bureaucracy, Congress, and the like? What do you tell the American people about the problem at hand?

To assure that those tough questions were asked -- and followed through on -- a person with intimate knowledge of the policy area and of federal policy-making mechanisms would be on the program. He or she might be an exceptionally well qualified journalist, a person with extensive administrative experience in the federal government, or an academic authority with a highly practicable bent. Thus, after the candidate had questioned the experts, getting the full dimensions of the problem out onto the table, he would be subjected to rigorous questioning -- keeping "his feet to the fire," as it were -- in the most realistic test possible of a person's ability to govern.

An extension of these programs for an extra half hour might be considered, in order to allow questioning by some of the citizen surrogate panels.

EPILOGUE (last week of programming, 60 or 90 minutes)

This wind-up program, just before New Year's Day 1976, would be a full and thoughtful review of the year's programs. A concluding part of this program could include discussion by members of the commission about the new forms of programming attempted during the year and the lessons to be drawn about the ways of presenting potential Presidents to the people in 1976 and future elections.

PUBLIC RADIO

We strongly recommend that public radio be invited to share in the planning and implementation of the entire program series. Public radio not only has its own growing audience -- often one that does not watch public television a great deal -- but it also has a flexibility of approach that would facilitate many uses of the program material not practical on television. Local public radio stations, for instance, could broadcast all or parts of the series and then create the opportunity for more state- and local-level commentary on each candidate's appearance. The commentary could come from public radio's own personnel, from politicians and political sages, from local policy experts who understand the implications of proposed national policies in their own region, and from different kinds of people's panels.

In addition, public radio could play a major role in building up public interest in the entire series. Public radio listeners could be invited to participate in the late-1974 poll on candidate-guests they would like to see (or hear) on the programs. And through the reactions of its listeners to the series, public radio could provide a valuable additional avenue of "feedback" to the commission and national program staff.

All of this requires, however, that public radio be involved in this project from the R & D stage onwards.

SPIN-OFFS

Numerous possibilities exist for ancillary or spin-off activities to maximize the public benefit of the series. Such activities could be carried on through the appropriate divisions of PBS and CPB, and/or directly through the program's staff. Some possibilities are listed below. Funds for such additional activities are not included in our principal budget, so that special earmarked funds would have to be made available.

1. Instructional Television. The programs would provide unique, stimulating material for high school and college-level courses in civics, government, or political science. Complete descriptive materials on the series, including tentative schedules and the rationale for the various formats, could be made available to colleges and to the major school districts of the United States.

The compelling reasons for ITV use of the series are clear: giving young people a more mature way to judge candidates and leaders, and building their confidence in the competent leadership of this country. There is no population group for which these instructional functions are more vital.

2. Party and Civic Groups. Close liaison with the national party committees should be established for passing the word to state, county and city party committees, which in turn could schedule open houses to view the programs on candidates of special interest to them. This could be one of the best briefing devices for possible convention delegates ever conceived.

Similarly, civic groups such as the League of Women Voters might schedule group viewings of the programs, followed by commentary and debate with local policy experts, academic authorities, and/or political leaders.

3. Video Cassettes. A video cassette service might enhance usage of the programs by all of the types of groups enumerated above. In some areas public television stations might choose to rebroadcast the programs during daylight hours for school and college use.

4. Transcripts. Edited transcripts could be published weekly and distributed widely through school, university, political party, civic group, and library channels. Any person or organization should be able to request individual transcripts, or to subscribe for the entire series.

5. Books. A commercial publisher might choose to market, late in 1975 or early in 1976, a series of separate paperbacks based in major part on the series, most particularly Phases Three ("What



Manner of Person?"') and Four ("The Test of National Leadership"). There could be individual paperbacks on each of the candidates -- a unique kind of campaign biography which would provide both an expanded sketch of the candidate's public career and commentary, pro and con (prepared by writers of contrasting political persuasion) on how the candidate has measured up, in his public life, to the tests of leadership and character we propose for Phase Three. There is every reason to believe that a high-grade publishing venture of this type, stemming from programs already aired but expanding substantially on them, would meet with major public acceptance.

6. Additional Local Programming. In addition to the follow-up programs which local public television and radio stations might choose to broadcast, an outreach group could be organized to assist local stations in duplicating or adapting the new program formats for important state-level and municipal elections.

7. Weekly Press Symposium. The programs are likely to receive major press attention, because they will be a major event in American political life. But it would be possible and entirely appropriate to formalize -- and in effect guarantee -- thoughtful press commentary, not only on the famous candidates appearing on the series, but also the business, university, labor and cause group leaders invited, and on the lesser-known regular political figures. This could be done through a weekly symposium of outstanding national and some state and regional political correspondents. They would be asked to write 250-350 words of commentary on the program of the week, and those commentaries could be assembled, with some introductory material, and distributed to newspapers across the United States for use within a few days of the program's airing. A full range of reaction -- both to the potential President, and to his and the experts' way of dealing with the problem discussed on the program -- would thus be assured. A senior political correspondent without a known political bias or leaning could be made editor of the weekly symposium -- a man like columnist Bruce Biossat of the Newspaper Enterprise Association. Then the panel of five would include, perhaps on a rotating basis, strong conservative writers like George Will or James J. Kilpatrick, strong liberals of the stripe of Walter Pincus or Richard Strout, and able and respected "centrists" like David Broder, David Murray, Vera Glaser, Jack Germond, Jules Witcover, Martin Nolan, William Boyarsky, or R.W. Apple, Jr. A leading political correspondent from the relevant candidate's home state should be included in each (or most) week's panel of five. Many of the nation's newspapers would make the symposium a regular feature. It could be syndicated through an established organization in the field, or directly by public television.

8. Uses of Material in the 1976 Campaign. In examining the campaign and stands of any candidate during 1976, any public television programming would be able to pull out clips of policy statements made by the candidate during the 1975 series. Numerous future uses of this rich backlog of material might be found.

9. International Use. The series could have major international implications. Either through the USIA or other channels, portions of the programs would in all likelihood be re-broadcast in Europe and other parts of the world, giving foreigners a new (and more balanced or elevated) view of American leaders and the American electoral process. Moreover, the new formats might well be adapted in the next years in foreign lands which have already taken many cues -- and sometimes the whole methodology of campaigns -- from American Presidential elections, and most particularly from our political television techniques. With television now becoming an almost universal form of political communication, the time is ripe for U.S. television to provide some superior "models."

Seeing Americans of good will and intelligence expressing strong differences of opinion as they confront and try to solve thorny issues of national policy, foreigners might come to see that the United States' problems are not susceptible to the kind of pat solutions often put forth rather glibly in the reports of foreign correspondents stationed here. More understanding of and respect for this country could well result. By this process, one might say, we would be "going over the heads of" the foreign correspondents -- just as the entire series would, in effect, "go over the heads of" the domestic political reporters who have often been criticized for an inordinate power to make or break prospective Presidential candidates.

In an even broader context, the series could have an impact abroad analogous in a modest way to the effect of the American Revolution 200 years ago. In this case, the "message" going forth from our shores would be that despite the unsavory image of American politics and government in recent times, our system remains vital enough to dare to examine the essential character and skill of its potential Presidents in the context of a spirited and honest discussion of pressing national issues. The message would be one of hope for democracy: that a mature and responsive electoral process, rather than a politics and government of deception and manipulation, is possible for free peoples.

THE STATUS QUO VERSUS THE NEW OPPORTUNITY

The alternative to a new approach in television coverage of potential Presidents is a continuation of the status quo. Candidates now are seen by the public under circumstances which provide few clues into the real character and psychology of the office-seeker:

-- In occasional news film clips, where candidates' positions and thoughts often are filtered through the reportage of others.

-- In the gladiator-like combat of programs such as "Meet the Press," where the objective often is more to make a headline or embarrass a candidate than to throw real light on his personality and capabilities.

-- In the steamy and distorted arena of the national nominating conventions, primarily through rhetoric-packed acceptance speeches designed to unite a party, not to enlighten the electorate.

-- Finally, spot television commercials using snappy and irrelevant slogans designed to sell a President of United States like a box of soap or breakfast food.

All these formats encourage superficiality and posturing by candidates. None of them is designed explicitly to let people see what candidates are really like. None of them provides opportunity for dialogue between candidates and the public. And none of them provides real opportunities to dispel the cloud of public cynicism about political leadership.

Our present-day national political trauma would seem to require of television, the prime political medium, a basic reexamination of the ways that potential Presidents are presented to the people. But there is no indication that the commercial networks are about to undertake a fundamental critique of their past record in Presidential elections, or to move to a new level of commitment in this area. Even if so inclined, the commercial networks are severely restrained by their fear of economic loss in freeing substantial periods of scarce prime time for new public affairs series.

This is where public television comes in. It has the flexibility, the air time, the potentiality for innovation so seriously needed in the arena of political communication in our time. Properly planned, public television programming leading toward the 1976 Presidential election could provide a bipartisan, carefully balanced, imaginative model for substantial air access by and testing of potential future Presidents of the United States. This is a challenge to expand the frontiers of public service for which public television, by its charter and proven following, is uniquely qualified.

If the new formats and approaches we have suggested here prove successful, they would provide a milestone in television coverage of the electoral process in America and be a prologue to public television's coverage of the 1976 Presidential election year itself. Quite possibly the commission, the basic program staff and the people's surrogates could be kept on line for the coverage leading up to November 1976. There is a great likelihood, for instance, that Congress will change the law to make possible, or even require, substantial free television time for the major party nominees in the fall of 1976. The commercial networks would normally seek some kind of repetition of the 1960 Kennedy-Nixon debates. But public television, through its 1975 experience, would be in a position to propose much superior formats, and to play a major role in airing them.

Whatever transpires in the field of Presidential campaign television between now and 1976, we feel that one overriding objective should be kept foremost in mind -- to create a precedent of openness in the American elective-governmental process. It is possible that the pattern of sharing the complexities of problems with the people, begun with public television's 1975 programs, would be carried into the White House by future Presidents. Should that occur, this pioneering series would also increase the likelihood that Presidents would turn increasingly to public television as their medium for dialogue with the people of this nation.

APPENDIX A -- "CRISIS OF THE PRESIDENCY" AND THE ALIENATION PROBLEM IN AMERICAN LIFE

The much-discussed "crisis of the Presidency" did not begin with President Nixon and Watergate, nor with President Johnson and Vietnam.

The roots of the crisis, in the eyes of many thoughtful observers, lie in the breakdown of traditional party loyalties in the past three decades, the emergence of an instantaneous, mass communications culture symbolized by television, and in the growth of an affluent, mobile society where traditional loyalties toward one's place and church and local political organization have been replaced by personal mobility and affluence.

Secularly, American civilization is undergoing an atomization of its societal forms parallel to the disintegration of stable religious beliefs and orientation which the Protestant Reformation brought to northern Europe four centuries ago. In both cases, old institutions lose their hold. Individuals suddenly find themselves "on their own" in a world far more confusing than their forebears had known, in a society convulsed with change.

Dramatic evidence of the radically altered situation in the United States is provided by contrasting the unity of national will and purpose which existed during World War II and the dissolution of so many loyalties that has taken place since, a general disorientation in the body politic that gained momentum in the 1960s and appears to have reached a spectacular high point in the early 1970s.

Last year the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Intergovernmental Relations commissioned Louis Harris and Associates to conduct a public opinion study on the attitudes of a scientific cross-section of Americans toward their government and other leading institutions in the society.

Presenting his findings to the committee in December 1973, Harris reported what we all knew viscerally -- a "veritable floodtide" of disaffection and disenchantment, "seemingly gaining momentum with each passing year." On a scale of powerlessness, cynicism, and alienation used by the Harris firm, the trend was steady and unabating from 1966 to 1973:

ALIENATION INDEX

1966	29%
1968	36
1971	42
1972	49
1973	55



The alienation index is a composite of a number of questions, including the extent of the public's agreement with such statements as "People running the country don't care what happens to you" -- up from 26 percent in 1966 to 55 percent in 1973 -- and "What you think doesn't count much anymore," which rose from 37 percent agreement in 1966 to 61 percent in 1973.

The results showed the most cataclysmic decline in public confidence in the Executive Branch of the Federal Government -- down from 41 percent in 1966 to 27 percent in 1972 and to just under 19 percent in 1973. Among 22 public and private institutions included in the survey, only two -- medicine and local trash collection -- received more than a 50 percent confidence rating in 1973. Confidence in major companies had declined in six years from 55 to 29 percent, in organized religion from 41 to 36 percent, in institutions of higher education from 61 to 44 percent. Confidence in the military had dropped from 62 to 40 percent, in the U.S. Supreme Court from 51 to 33 percent, in the Senate from 42 to 30 percent, and in the House of Representatives from 42 to 29 percent.

Only the press and television news showed gains over the six-year period, but their confidence ratings -- 30 and 41 percent respectively -- were not much to boast about.

The ray of hope in the Harris study was that popular disaffection was directed more at the leadership of American institutions than at the institutions themselves. No more than 5 percent of the public was found ready to scrap major institutions of the society, for example. And nine out of ten people expressed the cardinal article of faith that government can be made to work efficiently and effectively, and within the parameters of liberty a free people require. Evidently the people do not want to overthrow the system; they want to make it work the way they think it should.

Comment: A return to the simpler and more ordered American society of yesteryear is clearly impossible. Rather, ways of building a more cohesive democratic society must be found through the communication means of our times. This places a heavy onus on television to find new ways to bring the people and national leadership into contact with each other in a way that builds legitimate dialogue, trust, and mutual understanding. The program series here presented is designed to contribute to that objective.

APPENDIX B -- PLACE OF THE SERIES IN THE REFORM OF AMERICAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

There have been few times in American history when thoughtful citizens were more concerned about the need for thoroughgoing reform of the way that they choose their Presidents. And the television series here proposed meets or complements a large number of the worthwhile changes being proposed. Fresh examples can be taken from the final report of the 44th American Assembly,* approved by 50 scholars, politicians, and leading citizens at the conclusion of a meeting at Arden House in December 1973. A number of the American Assembly's conclusions are cited below, with parenthetical reference to their relevance to the proposed series.

1. The number of people given serious consideration for the Presidency should be larger than at present and the early stages of the winnowing process made more competitive.

Effective choice requires a reasonably large array of possibilities. Yet over the past quarter century only about a hundred individuals (nearly all white males) have been considered "serious" potential candidates. Furthermore, there is strong evidence that usually, by the time the formal nomination process starts, a front-runner has been identified who then goes on to win the nomination. Thus the parties and the public are all too often presented with a virtual fait accompli.

Therefore, we recommend that, well before the formal nomination process begins, national, state, and local party organizations, members of Congress, state and local officials, and private organizations, not only assess such candidates as present themselves, but also conduct a systematic search for persons who should be encouraged to contend. Serious consideration by such organizations should stimulate appropriate attention by the media.

[Comment: The commission scheduling candidates for the public television 1975 series would obviously be open to suggestions from all such organizations, and the public at large. The media would certainly take notice of outstanding appearances by potential candidates on the programs. And all of this would occur before the Presidential election year, when the increased air access and public exposure of possible candidates would make the most difference.]

*The American Assembly is a national nonpartisan public affairs forum, founded by Dwight D. Eisenhower at Columbia University in 1950.

2. Those who bring forward potential candidates should be prepared to argue that the persons they propose are fit to be President, not just to win the election.

In practice, the present system over-emphasizes name familiarity, manufactured charisma, access to large financial resources, and premature calculations of electability.... We call upon the candidate-proposers to argue thoroughly and directly the case that their candidate has what it takes to lead the nation with excellence for the next four years.... At a minimum, he should have demonstrated devotion to the rule of law, talent and desire for political negotiation, and a capacity to seek the truth, to articulate it effectively to the public, and to keep his word.

[Comment: Our commission would not be a "candidate-proposer" in the sense suggested by the Assembly. But it would provide, through appearances on the series in each of its formats (dialogue with experts, "what manner of man," and contact with the people's surrogates) a unique opportunity for the candidates put forward by others to demonstrate whether they have the desired attributes for a President.]

3. Party responsibility and grass roots democracy in the nominating process should be revitalized....

[Comment: Both the established parties and other political groups would, through the proposed series, have a splendid opportunity to judge candidates they might choose to support.]

4. Access to television and radio time should be allocated more fairly among Presidential aspirants.

The present situation is grossly unfair. It deprives the electorate of the information it needs to choose intelligently.... We recommend:

a. The networks and stations should be required to assume as a condition for the renewal of their licenses the obligation to provide substantial free time to candidates for the Presidency and Vice Presidency, in both the nomination and the election campaigns. Public broadcasting stations, television and radio, should be encouraged to make their facilities available to such candidates, and the public broadcasting system should be strengthened to permit such communication throughout the country. (Emphasis supplied.)....

[Comment: Implementation of the proposed series, with appropriate follow-through in 1976 itself, might indeed provide compelling arguments for increased support of public television from public and private sources.]

b. The equal time provision of the Federal Communications Act should be repealed and a formula for differential equality of access for major and minor candidates should be adopted.

[Comment: Even if this step is not taken in 1975, the equal time rule would in all likelihood pose no problem for the proposed series, because few if any candidates would actually be announced until early 1976.]

c. The independent stations and public broadcasters should initiate new forms of programming on the Presidential election process that facilitate rational comparison of potential or declared candidates, sustained exploration of issue stands, and the thorough and objective review of the candidates' political experience. (Emphasis supplied.)

In retrospect, it is clear that the need for the type of programming we propose has been apparent for many years. In a prescient article for the New York Times Magazine at the time of the 1960 Kennedy-Nixon debates, historian Henry Steele Commager warned of the debasement of the political process that could result from the scatter-shot inquisition of candidates by reporters under tight time limitations:

The joint television appearances of Vice President Nixon and Senator Kennedy -- really press conferences improperly dignified by the word "debate" -- are the distinctive feature of the current Presidential campaign....

These televised press conferences are a misfortune in this campaign, and in a future campaign they could be a disaster....

They are not debates. They are not even discussions. They do not fulfill the most elementary political purpose of permitting the candidates to explore and clarify the vital issues before the American people. They are not designed to enlighten or to instruct the public on the nature of those issues.

They submit the greatest elective office in the world to the chances of arbitrary and miscellaneous questions put not to elicit information or to illuminate problems, but to provide sensations. When journalists or commentators are assigned the role of inquisitors, there is no assurance that they will be concerned with real issues, and there is already substantial evidence that they are not....

This formula of tense and concentrated confrontation, even at its best, is not designed to discover in candidates the qualities really needed for the conduct of the Presidential office. What are those qualities? They are patience, prudence, humility, sagacity, judiciousness, magnanimity. But these qualities -- or many of them -- are a positive handicap in a television interview. These televised question hours put a premium on glibness and fluency -- qualities not of great value in a President....

[The 1960 debate format] encourages the American public to believe that there are no questions -- no issues before us -- that are so difficult that they cannot be disposed of in two or three minutes of off-the-cuff comment....

So we are seduced to believe that our candidates ought to know, offhand, what to do about inflation, about Berlin, about Cuba, about the offshore islands, about civil rights, about future relations with Russia.

Worse yet, this television technique creates a situation where it is politically awkward, if not impossible, for a candidate to say, "I don't know."

"If all earthly powers were given me," said Lincoln, "I should not know what to do about slavery." That is what sensible candidates should say about a great many of the issues that now confront us.... What we very much need in public life today is men who do not think they know all the answers....

If any problem can be solved by a two-minute comment it is not a serious problem....

These television performances, with their scattered questions and with answers limited to two or three minutes, encourage discussion of the irrelevant and the trivial. A Presidential content is not an exaggerated "Information, Please" program, with prizes to the member of the panel who scores the most points. It is a dialogue about great issues of public policy....

What we want in a President is the ability to think deeply about a few matters of great importance; what television encourages [in the 1960 format] is the trick of talking glibly about a great many matters of no particular importance....

Finally, one of the almost inevitable by-products of interviews of this dramatic character is that they tend to pre-empt the field. So great, and so intense, is public concentration on this game of wits that people are reluctant to listen to slower, longer, and more serious discussions of great public questions....

But it is not the instrument of television itself that is at fault; it is our abuse of it. It would be imbecility not to take advantage of television in this and future campaigns. The trouble is that we are not taking advantage of it all, but permitting it to take advantage of us.

The present formula of TV "debate" is designed to corrupt the public judgment, and, eventually, the whole political process. The American Presidency is too great an office to be subjected to the indignity of this technique.

What we need is deep discussion and clarification -- the searching out of the meaning of great public issues and the full revelation of the minds and characters of the candidates.... Let us return to debate in the grand manner -- in the press and on the air.... Let us have discussions that will produce thorough and concentrated consideration of the great issues that face our generation.

APPENDIX C -- DUTIES OF THE COMMISSION

We propose that the commission be vested with virtually complete authority over the proposed series. It would carry out its will through the program staff, whose director would serve as executive secretary of the commission. The commission would meet several times prior to and during 1975, and in interim periods might delegate some of its powers to an executive committee.

After their initial selection, we propose that the members of the commission be asked to participate in a two-day conference (possibly at Airlie House or Dumbarton Oaks) to consider the problems of Presidential choice in 1975-76 and thrash out many of the details of the program series.

Among the substantive duties of the commission would be these:

1. Candidate-guest invitation. The commission would have the ultimate responsibility to decide on which potential candidates would be invited to appear on the program, and the dates of their appearances. Invitations to candidates would be issued by the commission and signed by its chairman.

Many of the candidates invited would be major Republican or Democratic leaders, prominently mentioned in the media or party circles, or surfacing in the polls, as potential candidates for the Presidency -- or Vice Presidency -- in 1976. Leaders of major third- or fourth-party movements would be included as well, and particularly if the public expressed a desire to see them, occasional invitations would go to prominent persons not normally viewed as Presidential possibilities -- men like David Packard, Henry Ford II, Leonard Woodcock, J. Irwin Miller, John Gardner, Peter G. Peterson, or Ralph Nader.

We feel that virtually all the major Presidential possibilities for 1976 would agree to appear on the programs, for these reasons: (1) invitation from a commission of the high prestige we envisage; (2) access to an hour's national television time; (3) the high tone of the entire series; and (4) fear of unfavorable comparison to other potential candidates who will have agreed to appear on a program in which rigorous testing of a person's leadership potential and skills will take place.

2. Issue selection. The commission would have ultimate authority over the policy issues selected for the various programs, although in practice it would probably delegate a substantial degree of discretion in this area to its executive committee and/or the program

staff. The commission's guidance in its early meetings would be most helpful in exploring issue areas for use on the programs.

3. Choice of the policy experts. This is another area in which the commission would have basic authority, although in practice it might delegate many of those powers. We would urge that public television stations across the country be encouraged to nominate persons for the expert slots. In addition, staff members or consultants of the series should scout meetings of professional, business, and cause-oriented groups, looking for individuals of exceptional ability and powers of articulation. Names and biographical data on all persons considered would be retained on "talent bank" lists freely available to candidates or to the next President.

4. Insuring public involvement. A major commission responsibility would be to guarantee maximum involvement of the people through informal surveys, feedback mechanisms, and the people's surrogates.

In our proposed national panel of 200 people's surrogates, we suggest selection of 50 each in the major regions of the country (North-east, South, Midwest, West) with local public television stations heavily involved in the recruitment process, working under general guidelines spelled out by the program staff and approved by the commission. Through a competition or other means, three to five public television stations in each region would be "home base" for ten to 17 surrogates in their individual areas.

5. Formats and program phases. The commission would have final powers in this area, working cooperatively with the program staff.

6. Insuring impartiality. The bipartisan and broad nature of the commission's membership would insure a careful political-ideological balance in the candidates invited and assure scrupulous fairness in all aspects of the series implementation, including selection of experts, people's surrogates, commentators, and any other persons invited to appear. By its very existence and powers, the commission would protect public television from politically or personally motivated attacks connected with this series.

7. Quality. The collective wisdom and monitoring function of the eminent persons on the commission should help to raise the entire program series to an exceptionally high level of quality. In addition, we expect that many ideas for the future development of outstanding public affairs programming would emerge from the interchange between commission members and the personnel of public television, local and national.

APPENDIX D -- THE PROGRAM SERIES STAFF

The director of the project would be Neal R. Peirce, the author and political affairs specialist. Mr. Peirce originated a major portion of the program concepts set forth in this proposal, working cooperatively with officials of NPACT. He is the author of the definitive modern work on the electoral college system, The People's President (Simon & Schuster, 1968). Since 1969 he has written a multi-volume study on the government, politics, economy and social development of the states of the United States in our time -- an updated and greatly expanded version of John Gunther's classic Inside U.S.A. Titles already published include The Megastates of America (1972), The Pacific States of America (1972), The Mountain States of America (1972), The Great Plains States of America (1973), and The Deep South States of America (1974). Volumes finishing the work on all 50 states are presently approaching completion, all published by W.W. Norton & Co.

A Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Princeton University, Mr. Peirce was political editor of Congressional Quarterly from 1960 through 1968. In 1969 became one of the founders, and later a contributing editor, of the National Journal. He has served as a consultant and occasional on-air expert for election and convention coverage for NBC News (1964 and 1966) and CBS News (1962, 1968, 1970, and 1972). During the 1960s he served as a consultant for several NET programs, including the "State of the Union" broadcasts, and participated on-air in some NET programming. Presently he is a Fellow of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, the Congressionally-created national memorial center for the late President located in the Smithsonian Institution.

Additional staff (tentative):

- Executive producer of the entire series
- Assistant director for issues and concepts
- Two correspondents
- Assistant director for public involvement
- Consultant-scout to recruit experts and outside political analysts, and one assistant
- Research director and two assistants
- Three producers for the four phases
- Four segment producers
- Business manager
- Three unit managers
- Two writers
- Six production assistants
- Public information director
- One camera crew
- Two film editing crews
- Secretarial pool

APPENDIX E -- SCHEDULE

1. Research and Development Phase
 - a. Director part-time and two assistants, beginning May 1974. Establishment of commission.
 - b. Director (full-time) and executive producer and support complement, starting July 1974.
2. Pre-Broadcast Phase. Three-quarters of full staff, starting October 1974.
3. Broadcast Schedule. Full staff, January 1975 through 1976.

APPENDIX F -- FUNDING

Initial cost estimates

Seed money	\$ 20,000
R & D funds	
Editorial and pre-production staff	100,000
Production	
Staff	290,000
Guests experts and analysts	75,000
Special travel	50,000
Commission expenses	75,000
Program production including production staff:	
Phase I	550,000
Phase II	300,000
Phase III	240,000
Phase IV	150,000
Opening and closing programs	100,000
Total	\$1,950,000