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ABSTRACT

The author describes the program which permitted six out of seven candidates for the May 1972 senatorial primary in North Carolina to appear free on educational television. Each candidate was given one hour for his program, with the first thirty minutes spent in a presentation of his own choosing and the last half hour devoted to questioning by a panel of four. The author discusses each candidate's methods of presenting himself during the period when he had rhetorical freedom of choice. Basic differences centered on whether a candidate concentrated more on the campaign issues or on himself, his background, and his personality. (RN)

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THE 1972 CAMPAIGN FOR THE UNITED STATES
SENATE IN NORTH CAROLINA: DEBATE ON
EDUCATIONAL TELEVISION

JAMES W. PENCE, JR.

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One of the concerns of the Public Broadcasting System is the place its stations can and should have in the election process. During the past election campaigns, most PBS stations played some part. One of the most ambitious programs was that of WUNC-TV, the educational television outlet in North Carolina, which is administratively a part of the University System. Dr. George E. Bair, director of educational television for UNC, decided upon a policy of "saturation" with respect to candidates for the State offices of Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and United States Senator,¹ by authorizing Mr. Richard W. Hatch, director of public affairs programming of WUNC-TV, to present 27 one-hour programs, one hour for each candidate in each primary.² Supporters of this schedule of programs hoped to better inform the electorate, and some supporters hoped that such programming might become a means for reducing the costs of campaigning, or at least for equalizing the opportunity for campaigning.³ This study focuses on the Senatorial race.

Entered in the May 6, 1972, Senatorial primary were four Democrats and three Republicans. This list of

voting returns in the primary indicates the relative strengths of the candidates.

Democrats:

Nick Galifianakis - Congressman from the fourth Congressional District and Durham attorney . . . 377,993

B. Everett Jordan - incumbent Senator for fourteen years and mill owner in Saxapahaw . . . 340,391

J. R. Brown - vice-president of a small manufacturing firm in Greensboro . . . 27,009

Eugene Grace - Durham ophthalmologist . . . 22,156

Republicans:

Jesse Helms - radio and television broadcaster in Raleigh . . . 92,495

James C. Johnson - Concord attorney and member of the State House of Representatives . . . 45,303

William H. Booe - Charlotte attorney who argued the Mecklenburg County school busing case before the Supreme Court . . . 16,032⁴

All but one of these candidates accepted the invitation to appear on WUNC-TV. The one candidate who did not appear was Jesse Helms -- who went on to win the election and break the Democratic control of this office.

His unwillingness to appear may be accounted for: (1) by his continued criticism of the University at Chapel Hill --

the location of WUNC-TV; (2) by the fact that he had easy access to television through WRAL in Raleigh; and (3) by his campaign strategy of avoiding comparison with other candidates and running as a non-politician.

The six participating Senatorial candidates were scheduled by chance drawing, one each Monday night at 8:30, beginning March 20 with Senator Jordan. Then April 3, Dr. Grace; April 10, Representative Galifianakis; April 17, Mr. Brown; April 24, Mr. Booe; May 1, State Representative Johnson.⁵

Each candidate was given one hour, the first thirty minutes devoted to a presentation of his own choosing and the last thirty minutes devoted to questioning by a panel of three newsmen and Mr. Hatch. The only restriction on the first thirty minutes was that it must be filmed in the WUNC-TV studios. No previously prepared films were acceptable. This requirement, Mr. Hatch told me, was intended to insure the appearance of each participating candidate and to reduce the disparity among candidates having different campaign funds.⁶

Before analyzing each candidate's performance some observations on these requirements are in order. The format of these programs restricted the rhetorical alternatives of the candidates. First, by requiring that

all filming be done in the WUNC-TV studios, the possibility of a visually varied presentation was greatly reduced. Then, by distributing the appearances across six weeks, candidates were discouraged from facing immediately current issues or recent statements by their opponents. Attention inevitably shifted toward presenting one's views broadly within the campaign. The format tended to make the first thirty minutes much like the second thirty minutes -- both rather like Meet the Press or Face the Nation.

Let us see now how each of these six Senatorial candidates presented himself in the period when he had some rhetorical freedom of choice.

The two strong candidates in the Democratic primary contrasted sharply in their approach to the thirty minutes of free choice in design. The incumbent, Senator B. Everett Jordan, stressed his record and had nine supporters speak on his behalf. The challenger, Representative Nick Galifianakis, a three-term Congressman, stressed his own personality and had his wife appear with him.

Senator Jordan's appearance was the first in the series. He placed himself in the center of the setting with the moderator beside him and the nine speakers flanking them, forming a slightly semi-circular line. All

participants remained seated throughout. The list of speakers suggests the range of Jordan's supporters and his attention to his record on questions salient for North Carolinians.

Dr. Earl Dandley, President of Elon College, a private school on whose Board of Trustees Jordan had served 25 years, was the first speaker. Jordan's record in education showed, according to Dandley: (1) support for institutional grants; (2) support for student aid funds; (3) support for vocational education funds; (4) progressive college administration such as adding faculty and students to Boards of Trustees. Following Dandley was a Black, Dr. John Larkins, who praised Jordan's support for education of Blacks, and who referred, also, to Jordan's support of research in sickle cell anemia. John F. Adams of the Raleigh Chamber of Commerce and President of the Neuse River Basin Association, spoke next about Jordan's help whenever he visited Washington on the business of the Basin Association. Here Jordan chose to amplify what the speaker had said by adding specific information: he was third-ranking member on the Public Works Committee; he was a member of the Rivers and Harbors Subcommittee; he helped write the 1971 Water Act.

The pattern of Senator Jordan's presentation had now been established. People of different backgrounds from various professions, and different regions in North Carolina, praised the contributions of Senator Jordan to the state, and the Senator added further information whenever he wished to do so.

This format enabled Jordan to capitalize on his record of 14 years in the Senate, to use the prestige and group appeal of a variety of types of supporters, and to infuse variety and vigor by reducing the amount of speaking done by the seventy-four-year-old Senator, reportedly in poor health.

Three weeks later, Congressman Nick Galifianakis' appearance presented a very different approach. His theme was the man -- as his moderator said, "the man Nick Galifianakis will remain" after the issues have passed into history. Appearing with the Congressman and his moderator was Mrs. Louise Galifianakis who lavished adoring gaze on her husband. These three persons carried on a lively, informal conversation, seemingly impromptu except for the quick skillful questions of the moderator who kept these thirty minutes moving. The viewing audience was told that focus on the issues would come during the following thirty-minute news conference.

Topics dealt with during the first thirty minutes included: 1) Galifianakis' Greek name -- "if you can spell it you remember it," he said -- and his father's love for America; 2) Louise Galifianakis' love of politics -- her feeling that their marriage was not weakened by the campaign; 3) Galifianakis' feeling uniquely prepared to be a Senator by his experience and his friendships in the House of Representatives; 4) that Nick doesn't call Louise "Lou," as her friends do, because he had a Marine Sergeant named Lou; 5) that Galifianakis has "a lover's quarrel with America," wanting, especially: bigger personal exemptions for small taxpayers, welfare reform, and computerized information for Congress in order to free the Legislative Branch from dependence on the Executive.

In the end, a lively, personal program presenting a vigorous family man in his mid-forties and a public man -- a person with whom many North Carolinians, especially those in their thirties and forties, might identify. A sharp contrast with the old, mature, fatherly incumbent Jordan.

Republican candidate William H. Booe, Charlotte attorney, used a format somewhat like Jordan's. He had three persons raise questions which he then answered. The three were: two men and one woman representing the

upper socioeconomic, white class in Charlotte. Herein lay one weakness in Booe's presentation -- participants lacked geographical, social, and socioeconomic variety. To make matters worse, Booe devoted almost half his time to school busing, the lack of restraint in the federal judiciary, and the general movement toward Washington of control over public schools. He appeared to be a candidate with a very narrow political base.

The other Republican candidate, James C. Johnson, appeared with his campaign manager. Johnson said he set out to speak with the voter "over the kitchen table after supper." He maintained this folksy tone, having two later references to "over the supper table," referring consistently to "Dick" Nixon, never President Nixon, and saying about people attending rallies, "Bless their hearts; they don't understand that you're just about wore out." He devoted the bulk of his time, as Nick Galifianakis had, to talking about campaigning, his family, and his qualifications.

The folksy tone contrasted sharply with Johnson's image among politicians and newsmen as a handsome, wealthy, not-too-energetic legislator. In this presentation, he spoke as an energetic campaigner, a family man, and a moderate Republican.

Democratic candidate, Dr. Eugene Grace, Durham ophthalmologist, used the same format as Johnson's --

being questioned by his campaign manager -- but he addressed himself to the issues with very little personal reference.

Grace and Johnson, then, used the same two-man, question-answer format, but one centered on the issues whereas the other focused on his own personality and qualifications.

The only candidate to appear alone was J. R. (Joe) Brown, Democrat; vice-president of a small metal stamping plant which employed 25 persons under his direction. Brown was the right-wing candidate, reading a speech which condemned: forced busing, federal intervention in local affairs, evasion of taxes by the rich and by foundations, a foreign policy too easy on communism. The format lacked variety -- even in camera work -- and, in addition, Brown read poorly, mispronouncing words like "revered" which sounded like "reeve erred." His proudest line was, "Liberalism is simply a bad trip." He insisted that he was a working man who could represent the interests of working men and women.

A few brief conclusions, then:

1. Senatorial candidates in their first thirty minutes chose to emphasize either the issues or their personalities.

2. Candidates displayed varying amounts of imagination (Jordan and Galifianakis the most) but no candidate exploited fully the potentialities of the television medium.
3. Candidates did not perceive their appearances to be part of a series which might invite rejoinders to arguments by opponents.
4. Restrictions by WUNC-TV reduced the candidates' opportunities for interesting television programming.
5. The thirty-minute News Conference, not discussed in this paper, is an adequate vehicle for examining the issues. WUNC-TV would do well to invite more varied, unrestricted types of programs by candidates in their thirty-minute periods.
6. Some form of debate or panel, including more than one candidate, would be informative for viewers. This might be a variation for the first or second thirty minutes.
7. Crucial to the success of such programs are being varied, interesting, and appealing to the viewer.

NOTES

¹Interview with Dr. George E. Bair, March 10, 1972.

²The Chapel Hill Weekly, March 8, 1972, page 1, second section. Twenty-six programs were actually aired.

³Interviews with Mr. Richard W. Hatch, May 9 and September 12, 1972. Address by Mr. Hatch to the North Carolina Speech and Drama Association, November 10, 1972.

⁴The Durham Morning Herald, May 17, 1972, page 3A.

⁵The Chapel Hill Weekly, March 8, 1972, page 1, second section.

⁶Interviews with Mr. Richard W. Hatch.