

From the desk of:



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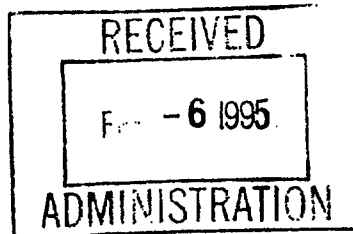
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Hi!

We've now grown to a stature such that Newsweek has devoted an entire page just to NET. I thought you would enjoy seeing this.

Regards -

Diana



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Surfing on Newt's Network

NET: On conservative TV, dogma around the clock

BY JON MEACHAM

IN A SMALL CAPITOL HILL studio, on a set that looks like what you'd get if "The McLaughlin Group" did its thing in the "Wayne's World" basement, 6 twentysomethings are playing pundit. This is "Youngbloods," National Empowerment Television's Generation X answer to mainstream talk shows. At the moment, one of the program's liberal foils, Chris Murphy, is getting pummeled by his conservative costars—Washington has failed, they shout, and it's time to pass a balanced-budget amendment to prevent the government from spending money, even in emergencies. "Wait a minute," Murphy sputters. "How do you think we got out of the Depression?"

"Oh, that's not proven," sneers Kevin Pritchett, a 25-year-old Trent Lott staffer. "That's just Keynesianism, and Keynes, along with Karl Marx, has been discredited over the last 20 years."

Every revolution needs a division of propaganda, and in the Age of Gingrich, NET is fast assuming the role. Though tiny compared with the reach of Rush Limbaugh, the 24-hour-a-day cable network is the first of its kind in America—an unabashedly ideological political-TV channel. It now reaches more than 11 million homes, and is growing from the suburbs of Washington to southern California.

Watching NET is like falling through a TV looking glass. Bryant and Katie are replaced by "Mitchells in the Morning," a perky couple—Dan and Nancy—who drink coffee and shake their heads over the liberal outrages in the morning papers. Instead of Larry King, there's Paul Weyrich, NET's founder and a stalwart conservative, interviewing guests and taking calls. Rather than infomercials for hair extensions, there are two hours of Newt Gingrich every week. One show features selections from his lecture series (you can order the 10-volume video collection for \$229.95). The other, "The Progress Report," has Newt holding forth and taking calls.



The Mitchells: Dan and Nancy play perky pundits



'Youngbloods': 'McLaughlin' meets 'Wayne's World'

PHOTOS BY JAMES COLBURN—PHOTOREPORTERS

NET's shows have a common message: Washington is bad, the rest of the country is good—and many viewers agree. Roughly 65,000 callers phone in every month, and their specific grievances include liberals who want to take their guns away, bureaucrats who don't work and a federal government that taxes too much. "Since FDR, Washington has had a megaphone pointed at the rest of America," says Weyrich. "We're turning the megaphone around."

The sounds NET's megaphone produces are in a different key than other news-and-talk channels. Coverage of last week's Democratic attacks on Gingrich's aborted \$4.5 million book deal, for example, failed to mention the speaker's ethical troubles, noting only: "House Democrats delayed legislative business for the second day in a row." On a recent Weyrich show, the host

asked Texas Rep. Steve Stockman, a GOP freshman: "Can't you repeal this crime bill? Can't you repeal the assault-weapon ban?" On Gingrich's "Progress Report," one recent viewer, "Jimmy" from Phenix City, Ala., listened to Newt's spiel about the Internet, then called in. "Is all this technology going to help us get shed of the bureaucrats all over the United States that work for the federal government?" Gingrich's ebullient answer: "I think it does."

Still, what's striking about most of NET's offerings is how much they resemble similarly styled fare on CNBC and other cable networks. There are news stand-ups, theme music and callers from the heartland. NET shares advertisers—including Magnavox and "Forever 80's" albums—with other channels. And the network, like other outlets, sells chunks of time to fill empty hours. In NET's case, "associate broadcasters" such as the National Rifle Association pay about \$150,000 for weekly slots.

Talking heads: But the network's shows are not always one-sided. Conservative spokesmen outnumber liberal guests, yet there are liberal guests, a mix that gives the network more apparent balance than, say, Pat Robertson's interpretations of the news on his "700 Club." In fact, NET has become a regular stop on the Washington opinion circuit, drawing many of the same "talking heads" who turn up regularly on other shows. Conservative Robert Novak (of "Capital Gang") hosts a weekly one-on-one NET program, interviewing heavy hitters like Jeane

Kirkpatrick and Pat Buchanan. And the occasional liberal is fun, too, because the conservative hosts and callers can take the fight directly to the enemy. The Mitchells were delighted when "Crossfire's" Michael Kinsley made a guest appearance last week.

The assumption behind NET is that conservatives need such a network to counterbalance the rest of the media, which the right routinely asserts is as left of center as Kinsley is. Ironically, many Democrats feel the press is mistreating them these days. Last autumn a Center for Media and Public Affairs report found that 70 percent of network-news comments about President Clinton were negative. As yet, there is no National Liberal Television. But as the 100 days wear on, who knows? Muses liberal Rep. Barney Frank: "We really need something like this." ■

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