

Ann Thompson
Campaign for America's Future

Dear Ann,

March 20, 2007

It was a genuine pleasure to speak with you at length on the phone a few days ago. You asked me to send you an e-mail describing my ideas. You can read my brochure, which should explain the basic concept of sponsored TV at www.earthtelevision.org. It also includes several previous write-ups I have sent to other groups.

BROADCASTING THE CONFERENCE. I am sure your upcoming Take Back America Conference, June 18 – 20 in Washington, D.C., will bring together excellent presenters, offering cutting edge insights and proposals. The catch is that even the most successful event will rarely reach more than 500 people. This content ought to touch many other targeted individuals and groups, plus millions of members of the public.

My production company has a thirty-year history making fifteen-minute presentation tapes for civil society groups based on their live events. I am not in that business anymore. As Chairman of Earth Television Public Education Foundation, I am instead proposing to non-profits who are holding a major event to view their live happening as raw material for a well-promoted television broadcast after the fact.

RESTRUCTURING CONFERENCE EVENTS. I have many suggestions for how to improve audience members' experience of your gathering. Most of the time, they are only asked to sit and listen to celebrity presenters, with time for just a few individuals' questions and answers. All attendees could use a chance to formulate a personal response to what they have heard. Then too, few participants actually meet up with other activists, even during breakout workshops, because there is little provision for this to happen. Every speech could instead begin with the M.C. asking people to introduce themselves to the folks around them, then to pair up with someone s/he does not know, and to share briefly where each is at now regarding the listed topic. After the talk, these pairs can hook up with another pair to review their reactions. If there is time, a few representative spokespersons can provide feedback to the whole.

My ideas for restructuring the Conference will also make for better TV. You could restage your planned panels as talk shows, with the moderator guiding a cumulative conversation on a living room set, rather than as a series of individual speeches delivered at a lectern or behind a table that then proceed to random audience questions. This conventional panel format rarely excites audiences and does not edit well.

If the panels used the time normally allotted to Q and A to instead have groups of attendees gather around each presenter to discuss where they collectively might go from here, audience members would see who else shares their specific interests for follow up after the presentation.

Rather than wall-to-wall programming, which allows little actual time for networking, you can provide space in the schedule for folks to meet up regionally and/or by interest areas, such as universal health care, election integrity, or ending the war in Iraq. Including trained facilitators to keep such conversations on track and maintain participants' focus on action results could really build the progressive movement, plus provide attendees a lot greater satisfaction than I remember experiencing when I came to the 2004 Take Back America conference.

PRODUCING FOR TV. If it is impossible to reconfigure your event beyond speeches and panels, to secure television-friendly content, you can set up an on-site studio and have knowledgeable hosts talk with your presenters in groups of two or three. In either case, you need to budget up to \$2000 to edit a 60 to 90 minute TV program out of whatever you videotape.

You might well find sponsors who would support a TV broadcast listing their names or showing their work who would not otherwise pay for just producing a video. Moveon.org, union education funds, and progressive 527s continually raise tens of millions of dollars to pay for 30 second spots. Redirecting a tiny proportion of such funds to producing, airing, and promoting alternative *programs* would provide them much bigger bang for their bucks. We need more than thirty seconds to lay out a progressive agenda, such as to make the case for peace in Iraq or public financing of campaigns. Take Back America has the connections and the credibility to finally start this shunt of the massive money drained away each electoral season in counter mud-slinging.

Airing a two hour program of thematic Conference highlights on UHF TV in the Washington area on Sunday late afternoon, with modest outlays for advertising and promotion, can draw a viewership of 20 – 50,000. The overall budget will require little more than \$5,000. Listing your 800# and website address will bring in more contributions than you spend, besides vastly expanding the reach of your messages. Other local groups can readily rebroadcast this show elsewhere around the country, using the same print ads and radio spots you develop for D.C.

You mentioned that you have an in-house videographer already planning to cover the event. My extensive career as a producer has taught me that the motivation of a near time air date is virtually a pre-condition for raising the necessary money and focusing the organization's attention on getting to a watchable product quickly. Your experience with the yet-to-be-edited footage from previous years should corroborate this observation. As of now, the full

speeches of each presenter from last year's Conference appear exclusively on your website, so people have to already know about you to find this resource. Only the most dedicated will watch 45 minute talks on their computers.

STEPS TOWARD MANIFESTATION. I was most pleased that you wanted me to identify specifically the next steps we need to take together to get these proposals implemented. A first move is to designate 1 – 3 staff members to work with me on both redesigning some aspects of the Conference and preparing for the television broadcast. They and I can readily outline the key parameters. I can talk with Politics TV or other videographers you already plan to use about their production plans and above all their *post-production* needs. Next, your team has to line up sponsors to defray all costs, in exchange for promotion of their organizations or policy proposals during the telecast. Then, at least one person needs to be responsible for arranging for UHF air time, developing and placing print ads in the local alternative weeklies, the *Washington Post's* "TV Week" and the regional *TV Guide*, plus radio spots on NPR and Pacifica. The PR firm promoting the convocation can add the TV program into their publicity package.

MY ROLES. I am seasonally bi-coastal, living in the summer and fall near Woodstock, New York with my fiancé, who is a therapist in Manhattan. I move back to Los Angeles for the winter and spring. I could be in Washington the week before the happening to coordinate all these elements. I can work with the video crew to enhance their production results and keep their attention on shooting to edit. I also have a lot of experience as an on-camera host, if you want to use me in that role. I stay well-informed on all the real political issues of the day from a progressive perspective. A local production company should handle the editing, but I can serve as a consultant as the program takes shape. We ought to aim for a broadcast within a month of the Conference and plan on multiple rebroadcasts soon thereafter around the country.

If you decide it is worth your while, I know how to help you make all this happen. I hope you will call me at 310 795-4910 soon to move the process forward.

Yours,
David Lionel