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Impact of Televised Committee Hearings

Impressions of the effect of televising committee hearings.

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I think, the, especially the witnesses were very excited about it, very excited that they could actually, you could actually, watch them testify, instead of just reading the transcript. You could see the interaction between the Member and the witness, which you really hadn't been able to do before. The only way people could find out what went on in a hearing was either to listen to it on a feed, or get the transcript, after the fact. But you couldn't pick up the nuances of conversation and the intensity involved.

And it also became very apparent that editing transcripts was not an option, which had been prior to that. To make it sound better, Members and staff would edit transcripts to make the flow read better. Well, if you have a visual online where this person is saying just what I'm saying, "blah-blah-blah-blah-blah," and it doesn't say that on this, they're going to go, "You can't do both." It is a transcript. It is an official transcript. You could do a subset under it, perhaps, and say, "When I spoke about a billion dollars, I meant to say a million"—you know, a little asterisk, caption, footnote, but it actually streamlined everything. I think it made Capitol Hill so much more accessible to the public.

And our goal was to get students involved. And a lot of students, we would get calls: You know, "When are you going to have this hearing on such-and-such because our energy group at such-and-such university wants to be able to tune in to hear the debate? And that was, Members loved that. "That's great, that's exactly what we want to do." And we would make sure that they knew. And then you could see the spike go up on the people that are tuning into it. And then, we would store them online afterwards, and they would come back and look at them, it was great. It was a way for the public to actually see how it worked. They could see it on the floor of the House, but they couldn't see it in committees. Once you got past the floor, this place was like big secret place, you know. So, I think it was wonderful.