

Cavett Show: Vidal Edited

By Tom Shales

The ABC television network has again lowered the boom on talkshow host Dick Cavett, cutting guest Gore Vidal's comments about Vice President-designate Nelson Rockefeller from the Cavett show to be seen Thursday night at 11:30 on channel 7 (WMAL) here.

Cavett yesterday called the censorship "another attack of the sillies" and "one last tango" for him and the ABC legal department. Cavett and ABC lawyers have engaged in repeated skirmishes over political opinions expressed on his show.

The censored remarks—about 20 seconds in length—were part of Vidal's answer to Cavett's question, "Where would you find an honest politician—Rockefeller?"

Vidal's reply, now cut from the tape, begins, "Oh, no!" and includes references to Rockefeller having allegedly "given money to everybody in the state of New York for services, maybe rendered or not rendered" and having "bought the entire Republican machine

since 1958 in the state of New York."

"I believe that the man who corrupts is as wicked as the man who is corrupted," Vidal says. "This, I am told, is un-American." That ends the censored material.

A spokesman for ABC said yesterday that Vidal had made "a potentially libelous statement involving allegations of dishonesty" that was "particularly irresponsible in view of the confirmation hearings going on."

Cavett said the network insisted on cutting not only Vidal's words but his visual image from the tape (usual practice is to "blip" just the words) and refused to let Cavett add a disclaimer to the opening or any other part of the show informing viewers that a cut had been made.

Cavett also said that Vidal, currently on the promotion trail for his new book, "Myron," made similar statements about Rockefeller and other politicians on other talk shows in recent weeks.

"I wouldn't know about

that," the ABC spokesman said in response.

Cavett estimates that "three or four times" the ABC legal department has changed the content of his programs. The most publicized case involved a program early this year featuring radical leaders of the '60s. ABC lawyers insisted that 12 minutes of comment by "conservatives" be added to the show before it could aired.

Cavett announced recently that he was leaving ABC (his contract with the network expires Dec. 31) and joining CBS, where he will host entertainment specials and not a talk show. The Vidal program is the fourth-to-the-last of his ABC programs, all of which have already been taped.

"I thought all this was over," he said dejectedly yesterday. "The network can take out whatever it wants, but they wanted us to edit the tape so cleanly that no one would know it had been edited. And it was done just that way. Now there's nothing I can do. The show will air and the public will be deceived."