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Presidential Use of TV-- 'Imbalance'

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Increasing presidential use of television threatens the government's traditional system of checks and balances, a three-man study group said yesterday.

The group, which includes former Federal Communications Commission Chairman Newton N. Minow, told a news conference there is an urgent need to correct what it termed an imbalance among presidential, court and congressional access to national TV.

"Our basic point is that television has, without anybody thinking about it, amended the Constitution," said Minow, FCC chairman from 1961 to 1963 during the Kennedy administration.

GROUP

The group, which also included John Bartlow Martin, a writer and former U.S. ambassador to the Dominican Republic, and attorney Lee Mitchell, offered five suggestions:

- Suspension of political "equal time" requirements by the FCC to allow at least four "great debates" a year in Congress, tailored for live

broadcast by the major networks during prime evening time.

With such debates, Minow said, "we think the president won't have an uneven edge in access to the electorate through television."

- Restricted "automatic right of response" for the major opposition party after national TV addresses by a president during the ten months prior to national elections or within 90 days of off-year congressional elections.

the networks and public TV by which leaders of Democratic, GOP and smaller parties could hold nationally broadcast debates on major issues during prime evening time.

- Changes that would give federal courts the option of allowing live broadcast coverage of their proceedings.

- And "voters' time" in which major presidential candidates would be assured a minimum amount of free national television time.

LATTER

Under the latter, the Democratic and GOP candidates would get six half-hour evening periods on television in the 35 days before an election, with minor party candidates receiving less time. All the time would be paid for by the federal government at half the commercial rates charged by networks.

The group's recommendations are contained in their 232-page book, "Presidential Television." The study was financed by the Twentieth Century Fund, a private foundation in New York.

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