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## Commentator insists

# It's reality, not TV, that elects president

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"Reality determines the outcome of an election, not the power of TV," according to television commentator Jeff Greenfield.

"Voters vote for a president based upon how they think they're doing personally, as well as how they think the conditions in the country are," he asserted at a meeting of the Chicago Council of Foreign Relations last week.

Greenfield, star of ABC's Good Morning America and Nightline, as well as the author of nine books, tried to dispell the theory that TV has changed the character of politics.

He told a full capacity crowd at Wilmette's Michigan Shores Club Thursday that TV has not had as much of a change on politics as people think. Greenfield, who has been referred to as a news-media maverick, insists that despite all the mudslinging this election season, what happens on TV will not be the determining factor in the election — common sense will be.

"The effect of TV on national and international events is vastly overrated," emphasized Greenfield, "Television has changed the look of politics . . . but not how people vote."

GREENFIELD conceded that the 1988 election has been dominated by talk

claimed Greenfield, "but if that's true, then how do you explain the two candidates we have in the presidential race?"

GREENFIELD believes that a voter's personal life plays more of a part in ballot box choices than any other factor. While Greenfield acknowledges that TV clearly creates an intimacy far above any other medium, he maintains that the images candidates are trying to portray through symbolism in this age of the electronic media are not vastly different from the images political hucksters tried to create during the infancy elections in the 1700s and beyond.

And he further claims that in the end, "tricks didn't work than and they won't work today either."

The University of Wisconsin undergraduate and Yale Law School alumni says that you can't explain what happens to candidates by virtue of TV.

By way of example, Greenfield pointed out that Republican candidate Pat Robertson spent more money on TV than any other candidate in both parties. Robertson also had the most experience with that medium because he worked as a TV evangelist for years, yet his primary campaign failed.

ON THE other hand Senator Robert Dole won big in the Kansas and Iowa primaries, but forgot to organize for



Television commentator Jeff Greenfield spoke to a meeting of the Chicago Council of Foreign Relations last week.

The speaker had the same criticism of Democratic presidential candidate Michael Dukakis who stumped the countryside in full army regalia while mounting the top of a war tank to show that he is not soft on the military.

distance himself from the legal profession during the campaign. Every time the reporters came around, Abe worked very hard at "splitting rails" — because that was a common man thing to do.

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election has been dominated by talk about how people perform on TV, but he systematically burst the bubbles connected with theories about this year's presidential campaigns.

"We were told that the road to the White House leads through Des Moines," said Greenfield, "because that was the first caucus state, so Dick Gephart proceeded to move his mother to Iowa and they did non-stop campaigning there for months. Where is Dick Gephart now?"

"We were also told that one couldn't win an election without money, but Jesse Jackson spent the least on the election and made a most powerful show. Like Ronald Reagan, has another way of communicating to voters. They're both master speech-makers."

"We've also heard that a person can't get elected without charisma," pro-

primaries, but forgot to organize for Super Tuesday. "Dole spent so much money on the early primaries that he forgot about the remainder of the contests. It is not a TV phononenum to organize your states," said Greenfield.

Greenfield strongly objects to the charge that the three major networks had a joint meeting to call a halt to the antics of the two current candidates because each went too far in creating symbolism to promote their candidacy.

"The networks independently made it very clear that they wanted to cover more substance than symbols," said Greenfield.

He went on to say that when Republican presidential candidate George Bush visited a flag factory in New Jersey to show, among other things, what a proud American he is, he went one step over the line.

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Greenfield very matter-of-factly told the crowd that TV played an insignificant role in the election of 1840, yet the campaign then, as the one today, was dominated by the image of the common man. So William Henry Harrison made doubly certain that people knew he was born in a log cabin, even though log cabins had very little to do with his life or his upbringing.

Abraham Lincoln was of course born in a log cabin, but he went from that log cabin in Kentucky to Illinois where he had a career as an unsuccessful politician and a lawyer before attempting to become president.

ACCORDING to Greenfield, who is also a lawyer, members of the bar weren't held in any higher regard in Lincoln's day than they are today, so "Honest Abe" went to great lengths to

that was a common man thing to do. "Obviously he was projecting a symbol," said Greenfield.

Greenfield said that the expectations for J. Danforth Quayle, Republican vice-presidential candidate in Wednesday's debate are "not low, they're non-existent."

"Quayle has been painted by the media as the class clown," said Greenfield, "something akin to Larry, Moe or Curly with a Bennie cap on. Under the circumstances, it won't require a lot to erase that image."

Greenfield contends that if Quayle does dispell that image the public will have the further sense of the press being unfair to the junior Indiana senator, and that could work to his favor.

Greenfield's prediction for Nov. 8, based upon his media analysis: "All things being equal, the Republicans will win. The odds (and he emphasized that word) are with the Republicans."