

PBS looks at cultural politics

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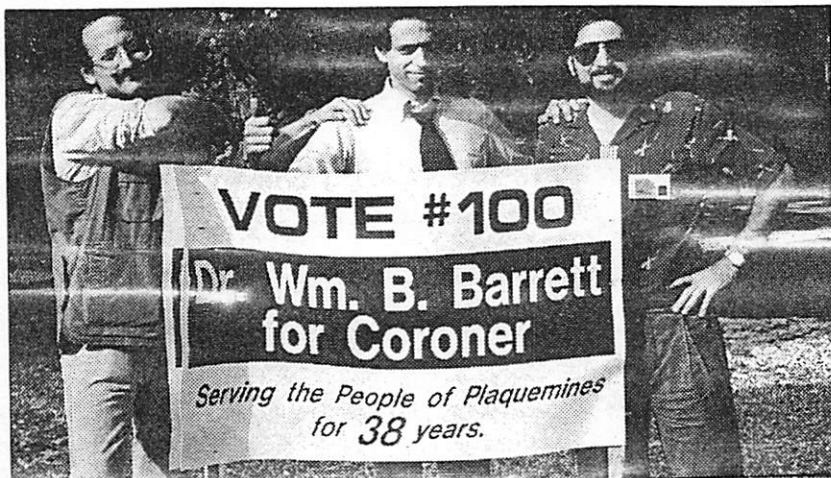
The first primaries are still more than 17 months away, but PBS and WETA are already making plans for their coverage of Campaign '96.

"Politics in America," a five-hour series devoted to the history, meaning and current status of the American electoral system, will debut in the fall of 1996 and will likely serve as the centerpiece of PBS' election-year programming in 1996, Washington affiliate WETA announced yesterday.

The series' mission, according to co-producer Andrew Kolker: to explore "politics as cultural anthropology."

"'Politics in America' will be unlike any series about politics," said David McGowan, WETA vice president for news and public affairs, in a statement. "It's not about who's winning and who's losing. It's about how and why we all play this game."

Instead of the increasingly common horse-race-style reportage, Mr. Kolker and co-



Andrew Kolker, Paul Stekler and Louis Alvarez are co-producers of PBS' five-hour series "Politics in America."

producers Louis Alvarez and Paul Stekler say they want their project to provide a broader perspective on the American political system.

"Everybody else [in the media] will be thinking about deadlines and polls," Mr. Stekler says. "Hopefully, this series will give it all some sort of context."

While the producers will attend the 1996 national conventions and other major campaign events, the program won't usually focus on the specific Democrat vs. Republican presidential match-up.

"A good sheriff's race in Kentucky may be more important to us than following the pack on the Clinton or Dole campaign," says Mr. Stekler, adding that the program's goal is to help viewers

"understand why politics reflects American culture."

Production on the series began several months ago, with location filming already completed in Philadelphia, Minnesota and Montana. Initial funding for the project — which will end up with a price tag of "several million dollars," according to the producers — has been supplied by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Private sponsors are also expected to contribute to the program's budget.

The trio of producers last teamed up to produce PBS' "Louisiana Boys: Raised on Politics," which won the 1992 Alfred I. duPont Silver Baton Award for broadcast journalism.