

Fantasy State of the Union coverage

The State of the Union address (9 p.m., ABC, CBS, Fox, NBC, WTU, MSN, Fox News) may not be as sexy as 'Grey's Anatomy' or pack the ratings wallop of 'American Idol,' but I never miss it.



Kevin McDonough

I like to think of the speech as the Super Bowl for the C-SPAN set. In other words, nerds like me. But unlike that football-and-commercial spectacular, the State is not limited to one network.

By custom, if not mandate, it tends to dominate the TV landscape for one January night per year. Is that too much to ask?

These speeches often boil down to laundry lists of proposals and promises. While most in the media concentrate on the big issues like war and peace, taxes, debt and the environment, I pay attention to the small-bore projects, the kind that get mentioned only in these speeches and then vanish from the national conversation.

What ever happened to our mission to Mars? I seem to remember it in a State of the Union some years back, and I haven't heard about it since. When are we going to Mars?

And while I am generally reluctant to make predictions, I can all but guarantee that somewhere in tonight's speech the president will utter the words "Pell grants." They always seem to come up.

Here are some other inelegant phrases you can look forward to. Look for: "discretionary spending" and the even sexier sobriquet "nonsecurity discretionary spending." Things will be "earmarked." Commissions will be commissioned, and they will be bipartisan.

I'm fairly confident that initiatives will be initiated, and they will be initiated to a smattering of polite applause.

With a handful of networks, cable news stations, C-SPAN and roughly 5 billion bloggers following these things, you'd figure that someone would be keeping score. I propose that C-SPAN, Sci Fi and Comedy Central pool their talents to create a "Mystery Science Fiction 3000" of State of the Unions past and present.

Rerun last year's speech and provide commentary about the fate of past proposals. What ever happened to funding for those hydrogen fuel cells? Did those initiatives initiate? Or were they nonstarters?

If this works out, perhaps other basic-cable networks could take a crack at it. Can you imagine if E!, Style and TV Guide covered the State of the Union?

Picture Joan and Melissa Rivers loitering on the Capitol steps, buttonholing the powerful

and screeching, "Dennis Hastert! What are you wearing?"

In the end, these speeches boil down to a wish list. Most people make their New Year's resolutions at the beginning of the year. The president takes a few weeks to get around to it.

For all of the politics, pageantry and pomp behind the State of the Union, these are really exercises in tentative optimism. If you were keeping score during last year's address, the president used the word "hopeful" 18 times.

While most of us think of our ancient ancestors as living a pretty low-tech lifestyle, the folks behind the new series "Ancient Discoveries" (9 p.m., History) beg to differ. They contend that ideas behind robots, skyscrapers, helicopters and other gadgets date back hundreds if not thousands of years.

Tonight's other highlights

'American Idol' (8 p.m., Fox, TV-G) holds auditions in Memphis, Tenn.

Back from London, Rory finds that Lorelai has put Christmas on hold to await her return on "Gilmore Girls" (8 p.m., CW, TV-PG).

UFO conspiracy buffs gather in "The Real Roswell" (9 p.m., National Geographic).

Cult choice

Tara Reid plays a newlywed who learns that her new hubby (Kip Pardue) wants to speed up the "til death" part of their vows in the 2003 thriller "Devil's Pond" (9 p.m., Lifetime).

Series notes

Tom Bergeron hosts "America's Funniest Home Videos" (8 p.m., ABC) ... A research lab needs help with the case of the missing monkey on "Veronica Mars" (9 p.m., CW, TV-14, D, L, V).

Late night

Ricky Gervais, Forest Whitaker and the Shins appear on "Late Show With David Letterman" (11:35 p.m., CBS) ... Jay Leno hosts Switchfoot on "The Tonight Show" (11:35 p.m., NBC).

Kevin McDonough is a TV columnist for United Features Syndicate.

TUESDAY EVENING

JANUARY 23, 2007

Table listing TV programs by time slot (7 PM to 11:30 PM) across various channels (WTTV, WRV, WTHR, WISH, WTHR, WFYI, WNDY, WTIU, WHMB, WCLJ, WXIA, WPIX, WDTI, A&E, AMC, AP, BET, BRAVO, CNBC, CMT, CNN, COM, DISC, E!, ESPN, ESPN2, FAM, FNC, FOOD, FOXMV, FOXSM, FX, HALL, HGTV, HIST, LIFE, MSNBC, MTV, NICK, OXY, SCIFI, SPIKE, TBS, TCM, TLC, TNT, TOON, TVL, USA, VH1, WE, WGN, DISN, ENC, HBO, SHOW, MAX, TMC, STARZ).

ACCENT ON PEOPLE

The Associated Press

Winfrey cried after betrayal of pregnancy

Oprah Winfrey says in the February issue of her magazine that she cried for three days when a relative told the National Enquirer that Winfrey became pregnant at 14 and lost the baby after birth.



WINFREY

Winfrey already had confirmed the Enquirer's 1990 report that she got pregnant as a teenager, telling Parade magazine later that year that the baby was born prematurely and died shortly after birth. Her half sister, Patricia Lloyd, sold the story to the tabloid, according to news reports at the time.

Winfrey, who did not name Lloyd in her column, wrote in O, The Oprah Magazine that the relative "sat in a room, told them the story of my hidden shame and left their offices \$19,000 richer."

Winfrey now says having the secret out was liberating and it allowed her to begin to heal.

NEW YORK

Whitaker took time to feel comfortable as actor

Over his career, Forest Whitaker has played roles that weren't written for black actors.



WHITAKER

"I had moments where the directors were open enough to let me do that, yeah," he told Newsweek for editions on newsstands Monday. "In 'Good Morning, Vietnam,' my character was written as a nerdy Jewish guy. In 'The Color of Money,' the character was originally a Yuppie."

Whitaker received a Golden Globe for best actor in a drama for his portrayal of Ugandan dictator Idi Amin in "The Last King of Scotland."

He also is considered a favorite for an acting Oscar.

But there was a time when his family had doubts about his choice of careers.

"I wasn't making much money, and sometimes really

struggling, but I was, like, 'No, Ma. This is what I want to do.'"

LONDON

Lawyers deny report of McCartney's divorce offer

Lawyers for Heather Mills McCartney said Monday that she has not agreed to a financial settlement in her pending divorce from Paul McCartney.

Mishcon de Reya Solicitors, which is representing Mills McCartney in the bitter split, denied a report in Sunday's News of the World that McCartney had offered a settlement worth \$63 million.

"With regard to the article in yesterday's News of the World, we would like to state that there has been no offer made whatsoever at any time to our client and therefore no settlement has been agreed," the law firm said.

Former Beatles member McCartney, 64, and his 38-year-old second wife announced their separation in May.

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The began divorce proceedings in July. The couple have a 3-year-old daughter, Beatrice.

LOS ANGELES

Fractured arm forces drummer off tour

Drummer Travis Barker is leaving a European tour with his new band +4 because of an unhealed fractured arm.

The former Blink-182 drummer

had been on tour despite a fractured right arm he suffered Sept. 9 while filming a video, according to Interscope Records.

Barker, 31, will return to Los Angeles to be treated. The band, fronted by former Blink-



BARKER

182 singer and bassist Mark Hoppus, has not announced a replacement drummer.

A message left at Interscope Records was not immediately returned.

Barker starred in the MTV reality series "Meet the Barkers" with former Miss USA Shanna Moakler, to whom he was married at the time. The show documented the former couple's lavish wedding and life.

Canary Creek Cinemas 8 178 Mile West of Applebee's on Mallory Parkway. Showtimes for Tuesday-Thursday. THE HITCHER (R) 12:30, 5:00, 7:00

AMC Advanced Ticketing at amctheatres.com or (317) 684-1780. GREENWOOD PARK 14 Madison Ave and Fry Road. THE HITCHER (R) 7:30, 9:30, 11:30

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