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The Agenda with Steve Paikin

TVO enters emerging world of “citizen journalism”

“There is really nothing else to compare it against anywhere on television.” Steve Paikin is describing TVO’s new hour-long flagship current affairs program, *The Agenda with Steve Paikin*, premiering **September 25th at 8 pm**.

Time is the natural enemy of most current affairs programs, especially news magazine shows that slot several topics into a single hour. “You just get into a story and you have to wrap it up,” Paikin explains. “Even cable news has to cut experts off, and they’re on air 24/7.”

The Agenda will practise what Paikin calls “long-form” journalism. Each program will tackle no more than two topics, and often no more than one. “We are going to be out there giving people what they’ve been telling us they want: more intelligent analysis, and more robust, thought-provoking debate and discussion.”

Dan Dunsky, who co-created *Diplomatic Immunity* with Paikin eight years ago, and who is now *The Agenda*’s executive producer, sums it up this way: “We are going to leave it up to the news shows to tell the audience *what* is happening in the world. People will tune into *The Agenda* to learn *why* something is happening.” And not just on television. As TVO embarks on a new digital strategy announced earlier this summer, it is expected that people will be able to access more of *The Agenda*’s content wherever and whenever they wish, through the use of technologies like iPods, PDAs and video-enabled phones.

The Agenda will also mark TVO’s entry into the emerging world of citizen journalism, a term given to the growing number of people using digital and video camera technology to record events and generate stories. “No matter where an event happens, there is now a



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good chance there will be multiple recordings of it,” according to the **Interactive Media Lab** at the **University of Toronto**. (When an oil depot 32 km northwest of London, England exploded last December, the BBC received 6,500 e-mailed mobile images and video clips of the fire.)

“There is going to be a grass-roots element to *The Agenda* that we hope will grow as the program grows,” Dunsky points out. “Content sent in by our viewers from across the province will add to the diversity of voices, ideas and stories that need to be told.”

Indeed, *The Agenda*’s unique one or two issue format is custom-made for including a broader and more vibrant mix of opinion. “In every discussion there is always room for one more voice,” Dunsky says. “Because we’re going to spend more time on each topic, we’ll have the chance to add more voices to the debate. These will be voices and backgrounds that will reflect the diversity of Ontario in 2006.”

The Agenda with Steve Paikin will offer many ways for viewers’ voices to be heard. The companion web site will include What’s your Agenda, an electronic meeting place where viewers can recommend show topics or guests, and continue the discussion with one another. There will be no shortage of subjects to debate, some of which will likely spill over to the blogs that have been set up and will be maintained by each of *The Agenda*’s producers.

As for the show itself, viewers can look forward to each broadcast setting the stage for debate by opening with an interview between Paikin and a newsmaker of the day. For the balance of the hour, the floor will then be given over to intelligent and vigorous discussion and analysis by opinion-makers and analysts who are experts on the subject and will not shy away from expressing their points-of-view. **“I want *The Agenda* to provide the smartest content available, both on air and online,” Paikin says. “I want**



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people to watch our program – or download some of its content – and say: ‘that was smart. I haven’t heard that discussion anywhere else.’”

Once a month, *The Agenda* will get out of the studio to broadcast before a live audience at the **University of Toronto’s Munk Centre for International Studies**. Founded by **Professor Janice Stein**, the **Munk Centre** is itself a forum for lively discussion on global issues. Viewers wanting to be part of the audience will be invited to sign up online.

“We want to engage our audience,” Dunsky explains. “Whether it is participating at one of the Munk Centre shows, uploading content to perhaps be used online or sometimes on air, or recommending a topic to be debated on a specific night, we want the viewer’s fingerprints to be on this show.”

For Steve Paikin, *The Agenda* is the latest challenge in an impressive journalism career that has also included newspaper and radio reporting, three books and national praise for the work he did moderating the federal leader’s debate during the most recent national election campaign. “It’s going to be a daunting challenge,” Paikin says of his new show. “But I have worked at TVO for almost a decade and a half, and I can tell you will confidence there is no other media organization like it in the country. ***The Agenda* will be our next significant contribution to a better understanding of our province, our country and our world.**”

The Agenda with Steve Paikin

Weeknights at 8 pm, beginning Sept. 25 on TVO

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