

Every month, more than 170 million Americans have their lives enriched by tuning in or logging online to public radio and television stations. These local stations serve every major city and many small towns in America. In many rural areas, they are the only source of free and high-quality local, national and international news, children's shows, music and cultural programming. Public broadcasters employ more than 17,000 people, providing family-wage jobs in every state.

Once broadcast and print journalism was local, but today that era is over. A few giant, private companies dominate. Public broadcasting is one of the few remaining journalistic institutions organized around and rooted in local communities. There are over 9,000 local board members to assure community interests are reflected in programming.

Local newspapers are shuttering their doors at an unprecedented rate, and national broadcasting networks are cutting back, making federal funding for public broadcasting more important than ever. As most news sources are downsizing – if not closing – their foreign bureaus, leaving one person to cover all of Russia, public broadcasting is one of a handful of sources able to provide original content and news from abroad.

National public broadcasting is very cost effective and an excellent example of a public-private partnership maximizing value for the taxpayer. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) annually receives around .0001% of the federal budget. Cutting CPBs funding would save Americans less than half a cent a day and would result in the loss of the Public Broadcasting System (PBS), considered by the public to be the second-best use of taxpayer dollars, outranked only by defense spending.

The vast majority of CPBs funding goes directly to local stations, no strings attached, providing them with the revenues they need to produce local content and purchase national content from producers like NPR, which brings us programs like Morning Edition, All Things Considered, Garrison Keillor's A Prairie Home Companion, and the Diane Rehm Show. The CPB also provides the infrastructure for all of America, not just big cities, making programming universally available.

Federal funding gives our communities a voice through programming like Think Out Loud, an award winning radio show by Oregon Public Broadcasting; a show focused on the Northwest. In

Wyoming, Public Radio's Open Spaces is one of the few ways Wyomans can find out what's happening in their state legislature.

Federal support also provides critical seed money. Local stations leverage each federal dollar to raise over six more through contributions from millions of people who voluntarily support pledge drives and with private grants.

If federal funding was cut, big cities like New York, Los Angeles, DC, even Portland, would still be able to sustain public broadcasting stations, albeit with reduced programming.

It would be the rural areas of our country that would suffer the most. Providing public broadcasting services to Burns, Oregon costs eleven times as much as what it costs to reach Portland.

Lakeland Public Television in Bemidji, Minnesota is the only local broadcaster in most of its service area, and it is also the regions only source of local news and public affairs programming. In Colorado, Rocky Mountain PBS is the public media resource for all Coloradans. Both rely on CPB funding for about 30% of their annual budget, what local contributions could not cover if CPBs budget was eliminated.

Public broadcasting support brings us so much more than news. It provides us with historical and cultural content as well. From the much-loved Ken Burns documentaries on our National Parks and the pastime of baseball to the Story Corps series, documenting the experiences of brave Americans like our troops overseas, public broadcasting reminds us all of what is essential about the American experience.

Public broadcasting offers a cost-effective educational service used in homes and classrooms across the country. There is no doubt that other media options are available to families, but public broadcasting is the only source free from commercial volatility and influence, with the singular interest in educating our kids.

We all agree that now more than ever we must find ways to tighten our fiscal belts and right-size

government spending, but recent legislation to eliminate funding for public broadcasting, including H.R. 68 and H.R. 69, overlooks the critical value of local stations. We must tighten our belts in a way that doesn't rob citizens across the country of this fundamental way to become informed and engage in our democracy.

Now is not the time to let some of the most important and iconic voices in our national conversation become victims of misguided political gamesmanship. We cannot turn our backs on one of our most successful public-private partnerships and we cannot deny our communities their voice. Funding public broadcasting is not a luxury, but rather an indispensable service that helps us understand complexities and tradeoffs, both local and national. It is an appropriate role for our government and one that this Congress should fully support.

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