

The New York Times

Proposed Legislation May Affect Future of Public-Access Television

By FELICIA R. LEE

One recent afternoon, in a small brownstone dwarfed by the shine and sprawl of the nearby Time Warner Center in Midtown Manhattan, Joel Igartua got ready for his close-up. The 18-year-old high school senior was honing his interview skills and mastering video camera basics to make public service announcements

for Manhattan Neighborhood Network, a public-access television station.

"People should have the right to make their own shows," Mr. Igartua said. "TV is powerful. Everyone watches TV."

For every hour of "Desperate Housewives" on ABC, the nation's 3,000 public-access television channels present dozens of hours of local school board meetings, Little League

games and religious services. Not to mention programs like "The Great Grown-Up Spelling Bee," a spelling bee for adults that raises money for the Kalamazoo, Mich., public library, and "Fruta Extrema," a bilingual gay talk show in New York City.

Now, though, the future of the channels deemed "electronic soapboxes" in 1972 by the Federal Communications Commission is uncertain, as proposed legislation about

how the telecommunications industry is regulated winds its way through Congress.

The main concern for public-access advocates is that the law preserve the ability of municipalities to negotiate franchise agreements for cable television. Those agreements pay for the public-access programs and allow municipalities to determine how many channels they want and allow public access program-

mers like Manhattan Neighborhood Network to train nonprofit groups to produce their own shows. The proposed legislation varies in its specifics, but several bills aim to allow more video-services competition — easing the way for telephone companies to compete for the franchises — and minimize regulations for franchises. Advocates of the legislation say that the fears of the demise of public access are exaggerated and

that some local control of franchises is written into the bills.

Currently, most cable franchise agreements include a franchise fee paid by cable providers for using city property, putting millions of dollars in city coffers, some of which can be used for public-access channels. Some agreements also provide explicit financing and support for the community's use of the cable system.

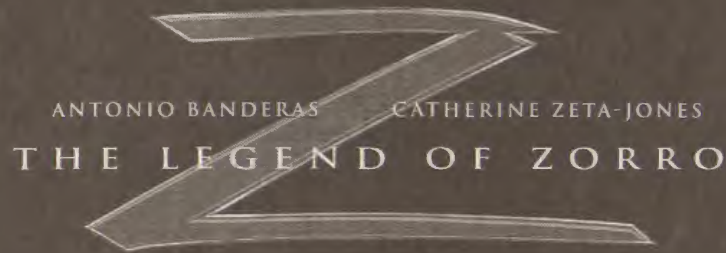
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A Writer's
Curious D

THE TV WATCH
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Larry Raliff, SAN ANTONIO EXPRESS-NEWS



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 BROADWAY &
 84TH STREET
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 *64TH AND
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 Peter Travers

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Arts, Briefly
 Compiled by Lawrence Van Gelder

Award for Joyce Carol Oates

Joyce Carol Oates was named the winner yesterday of the Prix Femina, a major French award for foreign literature, Agence France-Presse reported. Ms. Oates, right, was chosen for her novel "The Falls" (Ecco/HarperCollins). With Niagara Falls as its backdrop, it explores the American family and society in the mid-20th century. Orhan Pamuk, a Turkish author, won the Prix Medicis for his novel "Snow" (Alfred A. Knopf). Read by many as a critique of Islamist culture, it tells of the homecoming of a Turk who has lived for a decade in Frankfurt. The Medicis prize for best French work went to the Belgian author Jean-Philippe Toussaint for "Fuir" ("Escape"), a dreamlike novel set in Shanghai and Beijing and on Elba. The Femina for best French work went to Regis Jauffret for "Asiles de Fous" ("Mental Asylums"), about love and family relationships.



Rivals' Gimmicks Don't Stop ABC

The first Sunday of November sweeps was full of attention-grabbing gimmicks. But a live presidential debate on NBC's "West Wing" (an estimated 9.6 million viewers) and "The Contender" (about 8 million) were the night's highlights. Category 7: The End of the World" (about 7 million) was the night's supremacy on Sundays. The debate was between 8 p.m. and 11 p.m. Extreme

...be so productive.
...took part in a new
...translation of the Bible: she
...ed on the Books of Ruth and Ju-
...th. And now, at the same time she
...prepares a new novel, she is writing
...a screenplay with the French di-
...rector Claire Denis.

Such undertakings might be intimidating for some writers. But what is evident is that Ms. NDiaye has never lacked confidence. She began writing stories when she was 12, though showed them to no one. In fact, no one had read the manuscript of "Quant au Riche Avenir," or "As for a Promising Future," until she mailed it to three French publishers in 1984. The next day, Jérôme Lindon of the French publishing house Éditions de Minuit arrived at her high school with a contract to sign. She was only 17.

"I can't say it changed my life because I was very young and I thought it was normal for a publisher to accept a first book," she recalled. "Recognition is not something I thought about. But I did not want an ordinary life. I didn't want to be a teacher, like my mother or my brother. I wanted a life that would be a bit special."

As a guide, she plunged into world literature, drawn first by Henry James and later counting Kafka, Nathaniel Hawthorne, William Faulkner, Malcolm Lowry, Juan Rulfo, Wole Soyinka among her favorites. Most recently, she said, she was impressed by "The Darling" by Russell Banks.

Her most recent book, "Self-Portrait in Green," has autobiographical elements, including a description of a painful reunion with her aged, blind Senegalese father, who returned to Africa when she was a child. But it is also peopled by mysterious women "in green" who appear and disappear — or perhaps do not even exist.

As so often with Ms. NDiaye's fiction, then, the line between real and imaginary is blurred. In her latest play, "Les Serpents," for instance, a boy is devoured by snakes. Or is he? "What's to prove that at any moment we only exist in someone else's dream?" she asked.

REMEMBER THE NEEDIEST!

...of dollars.
...\$55,000 lighting
...a while with how she
...would enter, then the light cues were
...programmed to place her in a dap-
...pled pinpoint of light.

"The trickle effect of this gift, I can't even get my hands around it," Mr. Wand said.

During a recent tour of the lighting and sound control booth, Mr. Maag described the clever use of automated lighting in a sequence of "Richard

...drin Nordli, experi-
...a while with how she
...would enter, then the light cues were
...programmed to place her in a dap-
...pled pinpoint of light.

"It took five minutes to place the lights," Mr. Maag said, whereas before the automation, he would have had to take down instructions during a technical rehearsal, then have a technician come in before the performance, crawl along catwalks and

...his
...theaters visited
...was envy. Then the
...buy the software.

"I've been truly amazed by the uses that Bruce Wand and his band of wizards have come up with for our software," said Mr. Wobber, who goes to Ashland twice a year.

Now, each year, around the middle of the summer, Mr. Wand sends an e-mail message to Mr. Schroeder

...his
...the
...appel, the artistic di-
...the festival, takes care to
...make sure that it doesn't eclipse the
...art, something she said was "over-
...decorating."

"Don't take me too literally when I say this, but I'm a great believer that it's about the text and the actor and some lights," she said.

William Bloodgood, the festival's resident scenic designer, said: "The

...his
...hotel re-
...gels each morning
...friends who make the
...them.)

When he watches the plays in Ashland, technology isn't the first thing he thinks about.

"I suppose if some light went bananas in the middle of a performance, it would take me back to that line of thought," he said. "But a good play really sucks you in."

Proposed Legislation May Affect the Future of Public-Access Television

Continued From First Arts Page

tem. Public, educational and government — or "PEG" — access channels tend to be uneven in their quality and production values. But, say advocates, these shows are not meant to sell products or just entertain, but to mirror community interests and needs.

"There has to be some portion of the system open to public use, which has public revenue supporting it," Anthony T. Riddle, executive director of the Washington-based Alliance for Community Media, said of his advocacy of public access. The group represents 1,000 media centers nationwide.

Yesterday, to take advantage of election eve, thousands of public-access channels nationwide were scheduled to show one minute of video snow simultaneously to protest the legislative proposals, beginning at 9 p.m., Eastern time. The alliance is joined by the National League of Cities and the United States Conference of Mayors in opposing any bill that would strip local control of cable franchises. Public-access advocates are appealing to politicians and to the public to hear their case.

The cable business has \$60 billion in revenue annually, and last year cable operators paid \$2.4 billion in franchise fees, according to the National Cable and Telecommunications Association, the cable industry's principal trade association.

Under federal law, cities can collect a franchise fee that is up to 5 per-

cent of the gross revenue generated from the delivery of cable services.

With 33,000 local cable franchises across the country, telephone companies are now pressuring the federal government for speedier access to franchises and fewer restrictions. In Texas recently, SBC and Verizon got that state to set up a uniform clearing-house approach, meaning that these companies can apply to the state for franchises and do not have to negotiate agreements with each municipality separately.

"One of the big questions is, Is there a place for public interest in our media policy, or is it one size fits all?" said Rick Junger, the director of community media at Manhattan Neighborhood Network.

The National Cable and Telecommunications Association has not weighed in on any specifics of the proposed laws because it is too early, said a spokesman for the association, Rob Stoddard. The organization's concern, he said, is that any new rules on franchises apply to all video providers, whether they are traditional cable providers or telephone companies.

What advocates hope is not lost in all the fights over politics and technology is their idea of public access as a First Amendment right, especially for people and towns underrepresented on television. The local franchise agreements, they said, have provided a tried and true mechanism to handle customer complaints, determine local programming needs and deliver the money to produce those programs.

Mr. Riddle said that the groups he represents produced 20,000 hours of new programs a week, using 1.2 million volunteers and 250,000 community groups in any given year. That's more programming, he added, than the broadcast networks combined.

"It's where we turn for a sense of self," Laurie Cirivello, executive director of the Community Media Center of Santa Rosa, said of the four access channels in her Northern Cali-

'Is there a place for public interest in our media policy?'

formia community of 150,000. The channels feature locally produced shows like "Mrs. Twizzleton's Magic Garden," a children's program with a local psychologist as host, and a number of Spanish-language shows.

Ms. Cirivello noted that Santa Rosa, near San Francisco, has no local television stations.

Legislators say their bills are needed because the current telecommunication laws did not foresee the Internet explosion, or new video technology like telephone service over the Internet, and interactive television.

The Video Choice Act, introduced in the House by Marsha Blackburn, Republican of Tennessee, has been referred to the House Energy and

Commerce Committee. The Senate version, introduced by Gordon Smith, Republican of Oregon, and Jay Rockefeller, Democrat of West Virginia, has been referred to the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee. In the Senate, a bill introduced by John Ensign, Republican of Nevada, which covers a broader range of telecommunications issues, is known as the Broadband Investment and Consumer Choice Act.

"This legislation allows consumers — not government bureaucrats — to choose the best services at the best prices," Senator Ensign said in an e-mail message. The Ensign bill, now also in the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, has drawn the most fire from opponents, who say the House and Senate versions of the Video Choice Act are more flexible in their language.

"It is just flat wrong to say we eliminate public, educational and government channels," Senator Ensign said. "Our bill specifically requires video providers to carry up to four PEG channels."

He said his bill did not eliminate the 5 percent franchise fee. It extends it, he said, to new video providers and also has an entire section protecting the ability of state and local governments to manage their rights of way.

Representative Blackburn said that her bill was intended to create more affordable video options and more diversity in programming. "My bill seeks to keep limitations

and regulations to a minimum in order to encourage an active, growing marketplace rather than the atrophied one we have right now," she said in an e-mail message.

But public-access advocates argue that these are empty words and that questions remain, including those concerning how franchise fees are defined and who oversees the collection of right-of-way revenue. Senator Ensign's aides acknowledged that the definition of "revenue" for franchise fees was still debatable. Whether revenue from purchases on a home shopping channel should be included, as they currently are, is one question that has to be answered, an aide to Senator Ensign said. The Ensign bill also caps the number of access channels at four in each municipality, although some big cities already have more. New York City, for example, has nine PEG channels.

Ralph Engelman, the chairman of the journalism department at Long Island University's Brooklyn campus, said, "The whole concept is a somewhat radical, democratic vision — giving ordinary citizens access to the most persuasive communications medium that exists." He added: "It's incredibly diverse, and it's very raw. It's probably a better reflection of what our society is than mainstream television."

The personalities from public access sometimes even make it onto mainstream television. RuPaul, the cross-dressing entertainer, kicked off his career in 1982 on a weekly public-access show in Atlanta called "The American Music Show."



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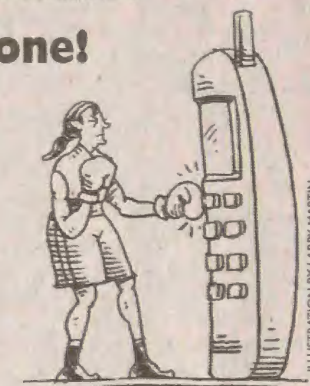
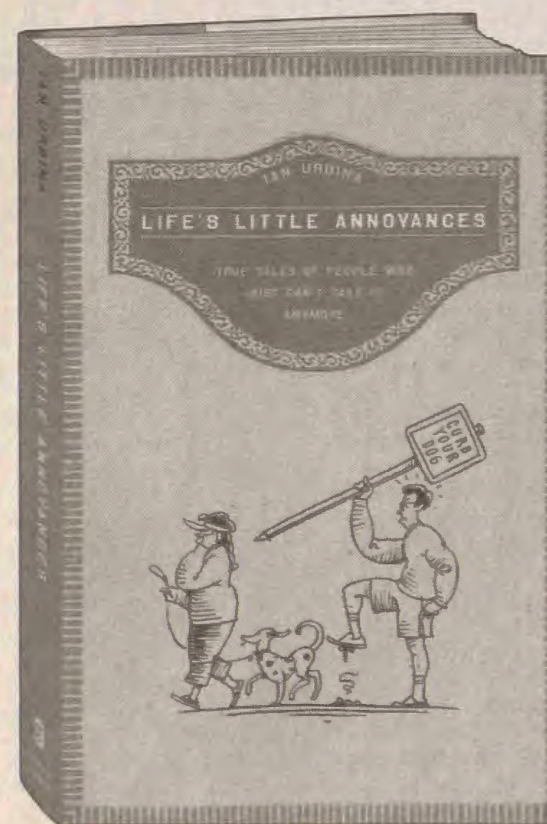
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9/1/05 Colum. Journalism Rev. 14
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Columbia Journalism Review
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September 1, 2005

Volume 44; Issue 3

SOUND BITE

Anonymous

"By and large, educational and public television producers and directors have a rather unobvious liberal bias. The remedy to this should be provided by the Board of Directors, which can exert a strong influence to see that a sound mix of programming viewpoints is provided in spite of that bias."

- From a December 8, 1970, memo to Nixon chief of staff H.R. Haldeman from White House staff assistant Clay T. Whitehead regarding the corporation for Public Broadcasting

---- INDEX REFERENCES ----

Language: EN

OTHER INDEXING: (BOARD OF DIRECTORS; PUBLIC BROADCASTING; WHITE HOUSE) (Clay T. Whitehead; H.R. Haldeman; SOUND BITE)

Word Count: 93
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12/22/94 Newsday B65
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December 22, 1994

Section: PART II

THE MARVIN KITMAN SHOW Newt Targets Public TV Doesn't he know its programs are on his side?

Marvin Kitman

I'VE BEEN listening to the rancorous debate about Rep. Newt Gingrich's proposals for how to solve public TV's financial problems by eliminating public TV, starting with the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. That will certainly cut the costs to taxpayers.

If Newt was as smart as he thinks he is, with the next appropriations bill he would add a proviso that CPB hire as its chief financial officer the man who handled the finances for Orange County. Then we'd wake up one day and there would be no public TV to fight about.

Newt is right - and I'm sure this will be the last time I will say this - about CPB. But he's right for the wrong reasons.

CPB is a fifth wheel, totally unnecessary to the most important thing about public TV, which they are quick to forget: making programs. It doesn't own a single camera or studio. By eliminating it, Newt will be eliminating at least one extra layer of bureaucracy.

The purpose of CPB, when it was founded in 1970 by the Republicans, was to provide employment for rich, unemployed Republicans. Look, they've got to eat, too.

It also served as a buffer. By giving CPB public TV's money five years in advance, it insulates public TV a little from congressional passions. Whatever Newt gets down now won't take effect until 1999.

Newt and his fellow anti-public-TV group want to exterminate public TV because it's controlled by communist left-wingers. "We know that," one of the bomb throwers in the public TV establishment joked. "It was just something we keep among ourselves."

The fact is, public TV is not a left-wing communist front organization today, any more than, as Newt's forefathers used to say in the 1970s, that Dan Rather is a communist.

The idea that public TV was a hotbed of Reds dates back to the great civil libertarian, Richard Nixon. Through his Office of Telecommunications Policy, Czar Clay T. Whitehead was out to eviscerate public TV in 1970 by forcing out a group of documentary producers whose crime was doing films that were absurdly critical of Vietnam war policies. Producers like Mort Silverstein who did "The Banks and the Poor" had to testify before Congress. Instead of documentaries critical of the administration, producers were asked to do programs on Earth Day. The extra level of management and program review by CPB was designed to frighten the radicals at Ch. 13 and elsewhere in the system. Now they don't have to be frightened anymore. They are so corporate they frighten themselves just by looking in the mirror.

Newt and other followers of Newtonian fiscal physics keep repeating the big lie that public TV is hostile to conservative ideas. The position is so totally ridiculous. Public TV is as left wing as a group of major-league baseball owners.

My theory is that Gingrich doesn't know about public TV because, like most politicians, he doesn't watch it. As a result they have no idea how conservative it is. For every "Frontline" that strays into areas that might bother the right, there are 10 shows that do just the opposite. There are three programs that cater to the business community - "Adam Smith's Money World," "Wall Street Week" and "Nightly Business Report" - and they don't have a single series that caters to the environment, consumer or labor communities. That's what's missing in Newt's otherwise astute analysis.

Good Lord, he has no idea how conservative this thing is he wants to exterminate. It is conservative in the internal workings. PBS, for example, has a president who is a Beltway politician, just passing through on his way to somewhere else. Its program executives, the fund raisers who deal with the corporations who have more power than sponsors did in the worst days of commercial TV. And, to a large extent now, the producing corps, the filmmakers themselves, are conservatives.

What people in the Republican right don't understand is they have so many shows going for them. Public TV is bending over backwards to please them. They even have a series coming up called "Peggy Noonan on Values," which will give her a chance to put her spin on some basic self-evident truths.

Those attacking Newt's proposals say he is responsible for making public TV run scared. I've been around for 25 years, and they were running scared for 24. They may have had one year when they forgot about being scared (1970).

There is already an atmosphere of fear in public TV. The only producers who keep on working are the ones who do fuzzy animal shows. And even they are starting to get nervous: protests are coming in saying animals in the jungle copulating is a terrible thing for children to see.

All you have to do to know the climate is look at the weekend schedule at Ch. 13. It's filled with the life stories, movies and appearances of ancient entertainers. I'm sure there are people who love it, but when was the last time WNET had something on Sundays like "Fawlty Towers"?

Where is public TV going, Newt should rightfully ask. First of all, its is politically conservative now to a fault. And, second, it is conservative in taking

chances with new formats and concepts that couldn't be necessarily branded as left-wing, but just fresh. Can you imagine public TV doing "The Great American Dream Machine" today?

The kind of programs public TV is doing today - and Newt can find this out by issuing subpoenas to PBS executives to testify at his public TV hearings - is the Holocaust, AIDS and children with cancer.

Newt and his exterminators have nothing to fear from public TV but fear itself, which is quite a lot, if you stop to think about it.

I favor dismantling CPB and putting the saved money directly into programing.

What public TV could do to defang Newt and his Newtonian physicists is put the Rush Limbaugh TV show on. It would fit right in with William F. Buckley Jr., and is more interesting.

Also, CPB might announce it is moving its headquarters - to be closer to the people it serves - to Atlanta, Ga. Ted Turner and CNN are already there.

Meanwhile, if I know my public TV, it is already planning its next pledge drives, using Newt as the new bogeyman. Theme next season: The Gingrinch Who Stole Public TV. The same thing happened when Ronald Reagan made noises about cutting funding in 1980. It's an ill wind that doesn't blow somebody good.

Talk with Marvin Kitman on Newsday Direct's bulletin board. To connect to the online computer service, call 1-800-4NEWSDAY, ext. 276. Or send him a private e-mail message at wqky92a@prodigy.com.

AP Photo-TV is on Newt Gingrich's mind - like eliminating the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which funds public TV. COVER:

PD:

---- INDEX REFERENCES ----

INDUSTRY: (TV (1TV19); Public Television (1PU41); TV Stations (1TV23); Entertainment (1EN08); Traditional Media (1TR30))

Language: EN

OTHER INDEXING: (AP PHOTO; BANKS; CORPORATION; CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING; COVER; CPB; GREAT AMERICAN DREAM MACHINE; MARVIN; NEWTONIAN; OFFICE OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS POLICY; PBS; PD; PUBLIC BROADCASTING; PUBLIC TV; REDS; RUSH LIMBAUGH TV; STOLE PUBLIC TV; TV; WNET) (Adam Smith; Clay T. Whitehead; Mort Silverstein; Newsday Direct; Newt; Newt Gingrich; Richard Nixon; Talk; Ted Turner; Theme) (COLUMN; TELEVISION; NEWT GINRICH)

EDITION: ALL EDITIONS

Word Count: 1350
12/22/94 NWSDAY B65

pub broadcast.
1979 / 1997

Westlaw.

NewsRoom

10/1/97 REASON 70

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10/1/97 Reason 70
1997 WLNR 3844868

Reason
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October 1997

Volume 29; Issue 5

Public Radio and Television in America: A Political History. (book reviews)
Walker, Jesse

Among Beltway power brokers, public broadcasting means PBS: multicultural muppets, a soporific newshour, and a perpetual Three Tenors concert. (Why three tenors? Is that supposed to make the show three times as good? A friend suggests that PBS has embraced the Universal Studios Principle: If Dracula, Frankenstein, and the Wolf Man were scary in their own movies, they'll be really scary together.) Sometimes someone will remember National Public Radio, domain of Some Things Considered and Terry Gross, the rich man's Arsenio. But that's pretty much it. As far as policy makers are concerned, PBS and NPR represent the sum total of noncommercial broadcasting in the United States.

That's one reason to appreciate Ralph Engelman's Public Radio and Television in America: A Political History. Engelman served on the national board of Pacifica, America's oldest noncommercial radio network, from 1973 to 1979. Perhaps because of that background, he is more attuned than most writers to public broadcasters who do not fit the standard NPR/PBS mode, such as independently licensed community radio stations or public-access channels on cable TV.

For Engelman, "public" refers not just to state subsidies but to citizen participation - not just to city hall but to town square. "A fundamental distinction," he writes, "emerges between federal and community forms of public radio and television, with the former rooted in the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, the latter in more decentralized and participatory processes." His book aspires to be the story of both brands of broadcasting - not a path-breaking history rich with primary research but a synthesis of the many books and articles that preceded his.

His book is also, one gathers, an attempt to defend these stations against the alleged Threat From The Right, i.e., Republican politicians' now-dormant efforts to defund the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. This seems odd, as his account actually suggests that government money has been as likely to curb good noncommercial broadcasting as to nurture it. Again and again, federal funds have transformed genuinely grassroots stations into ratings-driven, "professional" outlets. But Engelman repeatedly lapses back into conflating the public sector and the public sphere. For Engelman, however flawed PBS and NPR may be, they are "public" institutions worth preserving. Profit-seeking businesses, he implies, could never create anything comparable.

That is nonsense. Talk radio, at its best, is the local, participatory platform for exchanging ideas that NPR no longer even aspires to be. Anyone who doubts this need only scan through the AM band on a Sunday afternoon. The last time I did, I heard citizens debating the proper direction of their school district, relying on personal experience rather than ideological cant. I heard state legislators fielding calls about pending bills, forced by the format to answer in more than soundbites. I even heard a rabbi debating some Randites over the existence of God. The best talk radio has a vitality that most NPR programming lacks.

Still, Engelman is happy to describe public broadcasting that takes place outside the state, even if he draws the line at embracing the business sector. He notes, accurately, that broadcasting was invented not by businessmen but by hobbyists: the grassroots network of amateurs who were jockeying discs and covering sports back when both government and corporations assumed radio would be used only for point-to-point communication. Unfortunately, Engelman doesn't describe the amateur ether in detail. Instead, he passes along a few quotes from Susan Douglas's *Inventing American Broadcasting* (arguably the best history of the medium ever written) and other sources, then hurries on.

This is a loss. The ham subculture of the 1910s bore a striking resemblance to Bertolt Brecht's later demand for a radio system that "knew how to receive as well as transmit, how to let the listener speak as well as hear, how to bring him into a relationship instead of isolating him," one that would "step out of the supply business and organize its listeners as suppliers." The difference is that the socialist Brecht believed that "only the State can organize this." The early amateurs, by contrast, were a spontaneous, self-regulating subculture that emerged without the state's support or affection.

What does this have to do with the Three Tenors? Not much. Engelman's "fundamental distinction" between federal and community broadcasting seems more like a giant canyon.

Community radio - independently licensed, listener-sponsored, volunteer-run stations not married to any narrow programming format - was born in 1946, when Lewis Hill founded the Pacifica Foundation. Hill, a pacifist, had come to reject the state as an innately violent institution; he had dreamed up his radio project during World War II, while interned in a labor camp for conscientious objectors. Imbued with this anarchism, the first Pacifica station - KPFA-Berkeley, launched in 1949 - received no support from any level of government. In an unconscious echo of the hams' do-it-yourself ethic, KPFA relied on its listeners for money and on community volunteers for labor.

In the 48 years since, Pacifica has become known for broadcasting diverse and interesting music, serious radio drama, and, especially, political dissent. Engelman relates this history in considerable detail, though he treads lightly when discussing the original Pacificans' politics. Suspicious of both communists and liberals, the young station was far friendlier to the likes of anarchist poet Kenneth Rexroth than to, say, one-time Progressive presidential hopeful Henry Wallace. It's moved in several different directions since 1949, some more worthy than others; these days it's little more than a leftier version of NPR. (It also takes in over \$1 million a year from the federal government, a far cry from its early independence.)

Engelman's brief biography of the network is useful as far as it goes, though he prefers to ignore his subject's recent problems, proclaiming instead that it "remains unique in its commitment to sustain an independent, critical, and oppositional public sphere on the broadcast spectrum." (Yes, he really writes like that. A professor of journalism, Engelman at his worst combines the clear prose style of the academy with the intellectual precision for which we reporters are renowned.)

Fortunately, the idea of independent noncommercial radio survived Pacifica's decline. In 1962, a stray KPFA volunteer named Lorenzo Milam founded a new station, KRAB, at the high end of Seattle's FM band. His inspiration and expertise - and money - helped launch more outlets, the so-called "KRAB Nebula," around the country. Federal grants came only later, along with funding guidelines that often undermined the stations' volunteer-based, community-oriented character.

Engelman's history of community radio strikes me as the weakest section of his book - a bad sign, since it's also the topic that I know the most about. He lavishes almost all of his attention on Pacifica, devoting less than two pages to the KRAB Nebula and scarcely more to the National Federation of Community Broadcasters. He barely touches the recent, Corporation for Public Broadcasting-sponsored efforts to "professionalize" community stations by increasing paid staff, reducing volunteers' power, and adopting more mainstream programming. The micro radio movement - illegal low-watt stations often formed in explicit rebellion against these new controls - is not mentioned at all. (See "Don't Touch That Dial," October 1995.) And sometimes Engelman's facts are out of date. Citing a 1990 source, he describes WORT in Madison, Wisconsin as "at the commercial end of community radio." That was true then but is no longer so today.

Still, Engelman tells enough for readers to see the basic differences between community radio and public TV. The former is a pluralistic movement built by many different people in many different places, from the ground up. The latter was invented by a handful of would-be social engineers at the Ford Foundation in the 1950s. Educational television, they declared, could be a force for social uplift, "an instrument for the development of community leaders," even "a form of psychotherapy." Their money and lobbying skills created a small network of public TV stations over the next decade, building an infrastructure that would begin receiving a few federal dollars in the early '60s and a lot more after 1967.

That's the year Congress created the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. The CPB was launched at the recommendation of the Carnegie Commission on Educational Television, a nominally independent panel that was in fact largely directed from the Johnson White House. CPB and PBS were supposed to be independent institutions shielded from government influence. In actual practice, they're federal bureaucracies run by political appointees, as susceptible to political pressure as any other part of official Washington.

At PBS, even demands for decentralization often come from above. Richard Nixon distrusted the network, believing - rightly - that it was biased toward the Eastern establishment. So in 1971, Clay Whitehead, head of the White House Office of Telecommunications Policy, tried to weaken the national network by calling for a "return to localism." It was an odd choice of words: How could public TV "return" to

an arrangement it had never enjoyed? The ultimate result was not to decentralize or defund, but to neuter. PBS's commitment to controversial programming, already weak, softened even further after the Nixon attack. (Despite its radical reputation, PBS seems less committed to socialism than to the British class system.)

If community radio is noncommercial broadcasting at its most decentralist and anti-bureaucratic, and if PBS represents the other extreme, NPR falls somewhere in-between. Like community radio, educational radio emerged without federal direction: Some schools were sponsoring stations even before World War I, and dozens were born in the 1920s. Unlike community radio, these stations were, to judge from historical accounts, spectacularly dull - "pap for the intellectual masses," in Lorenzo Milam's words. You won't get this impression from Engelman's book, which prefers stressing the stations' allegedly populist roots over describing the enervating lectures that made up their usual programming.

At any rate, the foundations that created PBS weren't interested in radio, and the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 would have ignored the medium altogether were it not for some last-minute lobbying by the National Association of Educational Broadcasters. The result was NPR, founded with CPB cash in 1970. It was William Siemerling, the innovative manager of SUNY-Buffalo's WBFO-FM, who conceived the new network and its flagship program. The original All Things Considered plan called for news reports from public stations around the country, with the Washington offices serving more as a clearinghouse than as a command center. Instead, NPR became yet another centralized institution run by political appointees, especially after Siemerling was fired as program director in 1972. By 1993, things had gotten to the point where the head of the CPB could seriously call for merging NPR with the Voice of America.

Competition from a rival network - American Public Radio, recently renamed Public Radio International - hasn't reversed the trend toward centralization. In 1987, Engelman notes, 60 percent of public radio's programs were locally produced. Today, the ratio tips the other way. Meanwhile, most NPR and PRI programs are upscale and middlebrow, broadcasting hour after hour of candy-coated brie. It's hard to see how one can call this arrangement "public," unless one's only criterion is a heavy influx of public dollars.

Earlier this year, KPFK (Pacifica's Los Angeles outlet) canceled a program called Music of the Americas. The show, whose music ranged from Dixieland to film scores to contemporary experimental compositions, was "too arcane and challenging," station manager Mark Schubb told the Los Angeles Times. Thirty years ago, it would have been unheard-of for a Pacifica station to drop a show for such a reason. Today, it's par for the course.

Schubb also killed the Opera Show, a Sunday-morning fixture for 26 years. Like Music of the Americas, the Opera Show didn't limit itself to spinning records. Host Fred Hyatt interviewed guests, offered informed commentary, and sometimes went beyond the traditional boundaries of opera - all the way out to The Pajama Game. The problem wasn't the show's quality, Schubb explained; it was the ratings. "All that matters is coming up with matching funds," Hyatt complained to the Times. "And now, they're really punching the so-called multicultural thing. It's all very cynical."

Supposedly, government money was going to protect noncommercial stations against the

Vengeful God Arbitron. It hasn't work out that way. Engelman's book would be much better if he spent a little more time wondering why that might be so.

Jesse Walker (jwalker@w-link.net) is media editor of The Seattle Scroll. He is writing a history of the micro radio movement and its historical predecessors.

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REGION: (Americas (1AM92); North America (1NO39); District Of Columbia (1DI60); USA (1US73); Washington (1WA44))

Language: EN

OTHER INDEXING: (Engelman, Ralph) (AMERICAS; CARNEGIE COMMISSION; CONGRESS; CPB; ENGELMAN; FORD FOUNDATION; INVENTING AMERICAN BROADCASTING; JOHNSON WHITE HOUSE; KPFA; KPFK; KRAB; KRAB NEBULA; LORENZO MILAM; NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF EDUCATIONAL BROADCASTERS; NATIONAL FEDERATION OF COMMUNITY; NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO; NPR; PACIFICA; PACIFICA FOUNDATION; PAJAMA GAME; PBS; PROGRESSIVE; PUBLIC BROADCASTING; PUBLIC RADIO; RALPH ENGELMANS PUBLIC RADIO; SEATTLE SCROLL; SUSAN DOUGLAS; TV; UNIVERSAL STUDIOS PRINCIPLE; VENGEFUL GOD ARBITRON; WHITE HOUSE OFFICE; WORT) (Among Beltway; Bertolt Brecht; Brecht; Clay Whitehead; Competition; Educational Television; Hill; Host Fred Hyatt; Hyatt; Jesse Walker; Kenneth Rexroth; Mark Schubb; Nixon; Richard Nixon; Schubb; Siemering; Terry Gross; Thirty; William Siemering; Wisconsin) (Books (Reviews)) (Review (C))

Word Count: 2663
10/1/97 REASON 70

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9/1/02 Colum. Journalism Rev. 67
2002 WLNR 5439879

COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW
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September 1, 2002

Volume 41; Issue 3

PBS: Problematic broadcasting system

Grossman, Lawrence K

PBS is looking especially vulnerable these days. In the fastchanging, multichannel media world it seems to be merely treading water. Most of its shows have been around for decades. Its audiences are shrinking. Memberships have hit a plateau. Underwriting is down. And it's being assailed on all sides, both inside and outside the public television system. Some complaints about public TV have been heard for years: Conservatives think it's too liberal. Liberals think it's too conservative. Populists think it's too elitist. Culture mavens complain it's not elitist enough. Even The Wall Street Journal thinks PBS is getting too commercial.

Unlike public radio, which has found an important and successful role for itself providing its fast-growing audience with what is now the nation's best source of broadcast news, public television's dilemma is that everyone has a different view of what its role should be. Some say that in the digital age, PTV should return to its original mission as ETV, and provide education and training on the air. Others want it to be more innovative, experimental, and cutting-edge, a source for quality, noncommercial, independently produced cultural and information programs. Minorities argue it should basically serve their special needs and provide opportunities for those denied access to mainstream media. Public television's loyal station members see it as the high-road alternative to an otherwise tawdry commercial TV world. Others say, who needs taxpayer-supported public television now that we have all those commercial and pay channels?

Most recently, Representative Billy Tauzin, chairman of the House committee that controls public broadcasting's federal dollars, took offense at PBS's beloved Sesame Street attacking its plan to introduce an HIV-positive Muppet in its programs for AIDS-ravaged South Africa. Tauzin and several congressional colleagues dispatched a threatening letter to PBS expressing concern that innocent young American children might be exposed to the infected TV puppet and wanting to know how much federal money was being spent on this "inappropriate" new Sesame Street character. In a response hardly calculated to shore up confidence in public television's political independence, PBS assured Congress it would not "incorporate an HIV curriculum... into (Sesame Street's) protected, safe, education rich environment" in this country, lamely explaining that AIDS is less of a problem here than in South Africa.

Two recently published books add new complaints to public television's list of woes. *Viewers Like You?* by Laurie Ouellette, who teaches media studies at Rutgers University, offers an academic, thoroughly researched, although narrowly and at

times maddeningly doctrinaire "cultural studies" analysis of PBS. The author attacks public television's elitist, reformist, upper middle-class, Eurocentric, eat-your-spinach-because-it's-good-for-you mentality. PBS public affairs programs like Washington Week and the NewsHour with Jim Lehrer, she says, reflect the "cultural habits of well-educated, white male opinion leaders." With their calm, rational, informed talk, she charges, public TV programs defend "a racist capitalist society" and preserve public order. As a result, "public television does more to perpetuate cultural injustices than to ameliorate them." In a characteristically opaque passage, Ouellette argues that public television should put on "programs that people like to watch ... mandated to represent racial, class, gender, and sexual diversity" that maintain "standards of social and ethical accountability that are negotiated by audiences themselves." Even Sesame Street she writes, is a product of "humanitarian noblesse oblige" that tends "to encourage volunteerism but maintain the dominant power/knowledge hierarchies" in our society.

The Other Face of Public TV. Censoring the American Dream, by Roger P. Smith, a veteran public-affairs producer for both public and commercial television, argues that public television is nothing more than a "decorous government information service," politically supine, bureaucratic, propagandistic, and dull. For him, Washington Week and NewsHour are no more than tepid, talking-head "examples of Washington examining its navel." Smith advocates a billion-dollar trust fund for public television to insulate it from the control of politicians. However, the annual income from such a fund, about \$50 million, is a pitiful fraction of what is needed to run public television today and hardly enough to insulate it from political control.

Further, Smith's book is bedeviled by errors, meandering diversions, and sloppy editing that undermine his points. For example, he calls the respected magazine editor Clay Felker a "Nixon hatchet-man" who instituted "an inquisition of noncommercial broadcasting" in his role as the president's principal TV adviser. Smith probably meant to vent his ire at another Clay - Clay Whitehead. He attributes a quote to one of "the journalists of my acquaintance," "The New York Times Editor-in-Chief Nodding Carter," who, of course, never held that job. Perhaps Smith meant Turner Catledge, another Mississippian who was, indeed, a Times editor. He describes the current Corporation for Public Broadcasting chief, Robert Coonrod, as a "former CPB President." And in a mystifying and notably unhelpful departure from all precedent, the book's index lists the people mentioned in its pages in alphabetical order by their first name. So Felker can be found under Clay, Carter under Hodding, Orwell under George, etc.

Corporate volunteers working the Channel 13 phones during Pledge Week in New York in August

I agree with both authors that public television suffers from too much conventional, establishment thinking; timidity in the face of controversy and pressure, and an excessively elitist, "we're good for you" attitude. If PBS only had a sense of humor and encouraged more independent creativity and originality, its programs would serve audiences far better. But neither Viewers Like You? nor The Other Face of Public TV offers coherent, practical suggestions about how to make that happen.

I sympathize with public TV's leaders who are mired in a bureaucratic,

underfinanced system and have to serve too many masters and satisfy too many expectations. If I were writing a book about how to fix public television, I'd urge - at the risk of alienating academic cultural theorists - that it continue to take the high road in this new multichannel digital age and concentrate on four critically needed areas:

1. Become the nation's premiere forum on democracy. Every week, do what none of the hundreds of existing broadcast and cable TV channels does. Examine in lively, fair-minded, provocative, clear, in-depth prime-time documentaries the great public issues of our time, such as education, race, campaign financing, welfare, immigration, aging, social security, health insurance, taxes, the environment, homeland security, defense, human rights, business and labor, terrorism, globalization, foreign policy. Provide room for all responsible viewpoints, even if they're outside the mainstream. And before every election make lots of free time available to all major local and national candidates.

2. Continue to be the primary source of quality educational children's programs.

3. Take full advantage of the new digital telecommunications technologies to focus on lifelong education and training. Help transform education in its broadest sense in this nation. Adventurous public television stations in places like Kansas City, Nebraska, Connecticut, Washington, and elsewhere are launching promising new initiatives. They are opening up exciting new avenues for education and training in their communities; putting school curricula on line; serving as outlets for their universities, libraries, and public health centers, and starting impressive new civic engagement efforts.

4. Deliver a strong, entertaining strand of arts and cultural programs featuring star-filled original productions of the great American dramatic repertoire, plays by Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, William Inge, Arthur Miller, August Wilson, Tony Kushner, Wendy Wasserstein, Edward Albee, and others, mixed with the best of talented new playwrights. Add off-center stuff outside the dominant culture for spice and diversity.

If PBS starts showing more spine, innovation, and imagination, and finds ways to take better advantage of the diverse creative talent available throughout the nation, perhaps it would improve its chances of getting the public funds it needs to bring out the best in our society. *

VIEWERS LIKE YOU?

HOW PUBLIC TV FAILED THE PEOPLE BY LAURIE OUELLETTE

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS. 288 PP. \$49.50, \$18.50 PAPER

THE OTHER FACE OF PUBLIC TELEVISION: CENSORING THE AMERICAN DREAM

BY ROGER P. SMITH ALGERA. 336 PP \$22.95

Lawrence K. Grossman is a former president of PBS and NBC News and a trustee of Connecticut Public Broadcasting.

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REGION: (Americas (1AM92); New England (1NE37); North America (1NO39); Connecticut (1CO13); USA (1US73))

Language: EN

OTHER INDEXING: (AIDS; AMERICAN DREAM; COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY; CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC; CPB; GRADUATE SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM SEP; HIV; HOUSE COMMITTEE; MUPPET; NBC NEWS; PBS; PTV; PUBLIC TV; RUTGERS UNIVERSITY; TIMES; TV; VIEWERS) (Arthur Miller; Carter; Clay; Clay Felker; Conservatives; Edward Albee; Eugene O'Neill; Eurocentric; Felker; Hodding; Jim Lehrer; Laurie Ouellette; Lawrence K. Grossman; Minorities; Nodding Carter; Ouellette; Populists; Representative Billy Tauzin; Robert Coonrod; Roger P. Smith; Smith; Tauzin; Tennessee Williams; Tony Kushner; Turner Catledge; Underwriting; Viewers; Wendy Wasserstein; William Inge)

Word Count: 1816
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2003 WLNR 4336847

RDSL (Europe)

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February 21, 2003

Luxembourg - SES Global agrees to settle dispute

SES Global (Luxembourg), satellite operator, has agreed to pay Euro30.05 mil to settle a decade-long dispute with Clay Whitehead, former director during its start-up years in the late-1980s. The dispute relates to unpaid dividends. However, SES is still appealing the decision to the Supreme Court in Luxembourg and will claim the payment back if the appeals court judgement in favour of Whitehead is overturned.

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REGION: (Europe (1EU83); Western Europe (1WE41))

Language: EN

OTHER INDEXING: (INFORMATION SERVICES; SES; SES GLOBAL; SUPREME COURT) (Clay Whitehead; Whitehead)

Word Count: 100
2/21/03 RDSLEUR (No Page)

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2005 WLNR 24295362

St. Louis Post-Dispatch (MO)
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May 18, 2005

Section: Editorial

For the hard right, control of the government is not enough

ERIC MINK emink@post-dispatch.com

Kenneth Tomlinson's crusade to purify public broadcasting is Nixon Redux. It's also Reagan Redux and Gingrich Redux. For nearly 40 years, the independent news and public affairs work of public television and radio has stuck in the craw of the radical right, which smears any questioning or criticism of its positions as liberal prejudice. Bad strategy and poor timing limited the impact of efforts during the Reagan administration and after the 1994 Republican takeover of Congress to throttle public broadcasting's loose confederation of local stations, national programming and scheduling executives and independent producers. Now, however, the ideologues may have achieved the critical mass needed for success.

Tomlinson, a former editor of Reader's Digest and an occasional Republican functionary, made his first move within weeks of becoming chairman of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting in September 2003. His target of opportunity: Bill Moyers, the award-winning journalist and editorialist long despised by the right wing and a vigorous critic of policies of the Bush administration. In a commentary published last week by the Washington Times, Tomlinson attributed the origin of his concern to a November 2003 phone call from an "old friend" who runs a foundation. The friend threatened to withhold future contributions to a local public TV station "until something was done" to correct what he regarded as the liberal bias of "Now with Bill Moyers," a little-watched one-hour news and interview program carried by some public stations on Friday nights. Never mind that "Now's" blend of tough journalism, probing interviews and occasional commentary displayed more interest in and respect for opposing views than conservative propaganda outlets like Fox News Channel. Such an assessment apparently was beyond the ken of Tomlinson, who secretly hired a consultant to produce proof of the show's bias. (In doing so, he ignored the results of two broader opinion polls commissioned by CPB, which, according to reporting by Salon's Eric Boehlert, found "little viewer concern about bias" and impressively high opinions about the quality and fairness of public television and radio programs.) Even before he had his consultant's findings, Tomlinson began pressuring executives at the Public Broadcasting Service about "Now." Eventually, they caved, cutting the show's airtime in half and adding a couple of openly conservative talk shows to the PBS lineup. Moyers quit "Now," although in a feisty address to a conference of leftist media activists last weekend in St. Louis, he teased adversaries with the possibility that he might return. Bolstered by his early success, Tomlinson has since hired a Bush White House staffer

to help create CPB fairness standards and is championing a former GOP national co-chair for the chief executive's spot. Now, according to a report in Monday's New York Times, Tomlinson and other Bush appointees on the CPB board have turned their predatory gaze on National Public Radio and are pushing for -- I kid you not -- less news, more music. Contrary to CPB's most important statutory mission -- protecting public radio and television from political influence and interference, whether from right or left -- Tomlinson has been focused on the politics of program content since ascending to the chairmanship two years ago. All this reads like chapters from the Nixon attack plan against public TV and radio. Archives of administration memos and other papers from 1970, 1971, 1972 and 1973 document the systematic political interference of President Richard Nixon and his aides in the affairs of public broadcasting. The goal -- in direct defiance of the law -- was to ensure that program content served Nixon's political and policy objectives. Clay T. Whitehead directed the Office of Telecommunications Policy in the Nixon White House. Operatives worked through it to pack the CPB board with sympathizers, then set about trying to discredit adversarial journalists, eliminate news programming and engineer the replacement of the CPB president and chairman. Their more blatantly corrupt schemes collapsed, however, when the new chairman, former Missouri Republican Congressman Thomas B. Curtis, turned out to be a man of integrity and principle who stood up to them. Even so, the political thugs and convicted felons of the Nixon administration managed to leave public broadcasting saddled with a decentralized structure that has undermined its ability to serve viewers and program underwriters alike. They might have had more success had they heeded the telecommunications office's general counsel, a sharp young conservative lawyer named Antonin Scalia. In an urgent 1971 memo to Whitehead, Scalia warned that administration efforts to interfere directly with the operations of public broadcasting were likely to fail and to become public. "Naturally, this is the worst possible outcome," he wrote. Earlier in the year, Scalia had advised that "the best possibility for White House influence (over CPB) is through the presidential appointees to the Board of Directors." If it weren't so damaging, the hard right's obsession with public broadcasting would be merely pathetic. By commercial television and radio measures, after all, PBS and NPR audiences are minuscule. Focus more narrowly on the news and public affairs programming that whips right-wingers into a lather, and you're dealing in truly tiny percentages of the viewing/listening audience -- notwithstanding the high quality of the product. Yet instead of just sucking up their annoyance with something few people see or hear, conservatives pump their pulse rates into triple digits and bleat about being the poor victims of liberal media bias. You'd think they'd take at least some small measure of comfort from their control of the White House, the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives and, if their plan works, the federal courts.

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REGION: (Americas (1AM92); North America (1NO39); USA (1US73))

Westlaw.

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Language: EN

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KEYWORDS: COMMENTARY;MEDIA;VIEWPOINT;OPINION

EDITION: Five Star Late Lift

Word Count: 1189
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Westlaw.

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5/29/05 Boston Globe D12
2005 WLNR 8670640

Boston Globe (MA)
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May 29, 2005

Section: Letters

NIXON'S CAMPAIGN AGAINST PUBLIC BROADCASTING

AS A FORMER executive of the Public Broadcasting Service during the Nixon years, I am amazed at the short memories of the American people and occasionally its media. The Globe's May 15 editorial, "The War at PBS," is a perfect example of deja vu all over again. Richard Nixon's Office of Telecommunications policy under Clay Whitehead was given the task of bringing "balance" to public broadcasting, along with a simultaneous attack on commercial broadcasting. Perhaps like Hitler's strategy in World War II, politically opening two fronts against the enemy (the media) was doomed to failure. And, to a large extent, Nixon's effort to bring his version of "balance" to public and commercial broadcasting did fail.

I'll mention one irony among many in the situations then and now. The Globe illustrates one irony by retelling the story of Cal Thomas on the show "Now." But remember that at the time of Nixon's earlier attack on PBS one of the most popular shows on PBS was William F. Buckley Jr.'s talk show. It was arguably the only showcase for scholarly and intellectual conservatism available. So even 40 years ago there was more "balance" on PBS than available in most other media. However, one thing conservatives are good at is long memories.

Another point about the Globe's editorial is smushing together the Corporation for Public Broadcasting [CPB], The Public Broadcasting Service [PBS], and the all encompassing term "public broadcasting." Here may be one time when separating the parts is more important than homogenizing them into generalities. Note that I spell out what PBS stands for. PBS is not a "system;" it is a service for the American people. This is important because it reflects what Congress intended from the outset: a separation of parts.

Why did Congress create CPB as the essential funding agency, with its board selected primarily by the president, and then create another entity named PBS, which is essentially the mechanical delivery system run as an association of broadcasting license holders? Why create two entities to do what one entity could do more efficiently? It was intended as checks and balances against the possibility that the president would use a single entity as a propaganda machine. Just like the US Constitution, this method provides protections against usurpers, but we pay a price in inefficiency.

The Bush administration's effort to "balance" the PBS offerings should be seen through this historical perspective. It is the same today as it was in the Nixon era: a power grab to silence anyone with a different view. This time, unless the American people are watching, the power grab could succeed.

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Cohasset

---- INDEX REFERENCES ----

COMPANY: GLOBE GROUP

Language: EN

OTHER INDEXING: (CAL THOMAS; CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING; CPB; EDITOR; GLOBE; LETTERS; NIXON; PBS; PUBLIC BROADCASTING SERVICE; US CONSTITUTION) (Bush; Congress; Nixon; Richard Nixon; TERENCE A. MCCARTHY; William F. Buckley Jr.)

EDITION: THIRD

Word Count: 542
5/29/05 BOSTONG D12

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7/21/05 San Diego Union-Trib. B
2005 WLNR 11544103

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July 21, 2005

Section: OPINION

Public broadcasting then and now

Lionel Van Deerlin, Van Deerlin represented a San Diego County district in Congress for 18 years.

Almost unnoticed, the U.S. Senate has restored most of the money for public broadcasting that was targeted for removal by angry House Republicans in early summer. But PBS' foes are hanging on to some freshly sharpened knives. They'll be back. As that fretful Scotch thane, Macbeth, once warned, "We have scotch'd the snake, not kill'd it."

Nothing seems safe with all branches of government in step with a single party. Noncommercial broadcasting has survived to this point only because its serious public affairs coverage and instructional programming for young children retain goodwill across a wide segment of the populace. Among all but the hard right, maybe. The recent effort to kill PBS has been more subtle than in the past. By going after its budget, the ambush this time came lots closer than the would-be killers of yesteryear.

How well I remember that first assault, early in President Nixon's second term. He had established a White House Office of Telecommunications Policy under a haughty Ph.D., Clay T. Whitehead. (Its equally cavalier legal adviser has since done quite well for himself -- a young lawyer named Antonin Scalia.)

The rabble-rousing was entrusted to Vice President Spiro Agnew and eager speech-writers Pat Buchanan and William Safire. Agnew hit the hustings, describing modestly paid toilers in public broadcasting with such alliterative broadsides as "nattering nabobs of negativism." He planted seeds of distrust against any government-subsidized information entity -- overlooking the highly trusted British Broadcasting Company, of course.

Agnew generated a considerable head of steam and might have inflicted lasting damage. But the Lord works in divers ways. This vice president, it developed, was a common crook still on the take from his days as governor of Maryland. When he was eased from office, no one else seemed immediately eager to take up the anti-PBS crusade.

This over-air service, which seems so upsetting to conservatives traces its beginnings to the early 1920s. Though never such a power as the tax-supported BBC,

our system boasts a rich history of its own. Herbert Hoover, who was secretary of commerce when radio came into commercial being, saw the new medium as a technological miracle that should not be handed over totally to hucksters. Thanks in part to Hoover's early vision, Congress was persuaded to set aside a portion of the broadcast spectrum for educational use.

Depression times meant few universities could make the investment needed to underwrite noncommercial radio as an adjunct to their traditional classroom teaching. But the bands allocated for educational purposes -- and, in time, television channels as well -- remained unavailable to private licensing. The colleges and other public entities occupying this spectrum space are subsidized to about 15 percent of their financial need by the national government.

Conservatives take aim not only at public broadcasting's budget, but have begun infiltrating its control levels as well. To this end, a reliably loyal administration functionary, Kenneth Y. Tomlinson, was quietly appointed chairman of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting -- a vantage point from which he declares it his intent to see that public radio and TV news and public affairs programming provide equal outlet for all points of view.

Could anyone fault that? The irony here is that the CPB was created as a quasi-public entity in the 1960s with a single purpose -- to protect public broadcasting against precisely the sort of political tinkering that the present administration and this man Tomlinson seem all about. Questions of his intent should have been dispelled weeks ago when Tomlinson began slipping nationally prominent Republican activists and donors onto the CPB board. One of these, Patricia de Stacy Harrison -- who served as co-chair of the GOP National Committee -- is the new board chairman.

Tomlinson is one of those self-perpetuating bureaucrats whose survival illustrate what's known as the Peter Principle -- they're often found in positions a step or two above their demonstrated level of competence. This man served an earlier stint on the Broadcasting Board of Governors. That oh-so-weighty-sounding panel supervises U.S. overseas propaganda efforts. Tomlinson had persuaded Congress that our broadcasts to the Arab world are projecting "America's message" as never before. Knowledgeable Yanks in the area insist that while our music is well received, most Arabs place no trust in the spoken word accompanying it. Or bother to listen.

And what new fare does this fellow plan for PBS? His first added offering has been a weekly discussion panel featuring Wall Street Journal editors. They've proved marginally more enthralling than a Dorcas Circle quilting bee.

---- INDEX REFERENCES ----

INDUSTRY: (TV (1TV19); TV Stations (1TV23); Entertainment (1EN08); Traditional Media (1TR30))

REGION: (USA (1US73); Americas (1AM92); North America (1NO39))

Language: EN

OTHER INDEXING: (BROADCASTING BOARD OF GOVERNORS; COMMERCE; CONGRESS; CORPORATION

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FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING; CPB; DORCAS CIRCLE; GOP NATIONAL COMMITTEE; HOUSE
REPUBLICANS; PBS; PETER PRINCIPLE; US SENATE; WHITE HOUSE) (Agnew; Antonin Scalia;
Clay T. Whitehead; Depression; Herbert Hoover; Hoover; Kenneth Y. Tomlinson;
Knowledgeable Yanks; Macbeth; Nixon; Nothing; Pat Buchanan; Questions; Spiro Agnew;
Tomlinson; William Safire)

EDITION: 1,2,6,7

Word Count: 948

7/21/05 SDUT B

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