

NPR and PBS say they will “push back” on Trump’s executive order terminating their federal funding

Kevin Reed
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The chief executives of National Public Radio (NPR) and the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) made statements on Sunday saying they will fight the executive order issued by President Trump on May 1 terminating federal funding for the two major public news media services.

The executive order, entitled “Ending Taxpayer Subsidization of Biased Media,” instructs the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) Board of Directors “and all executive departments and agencies to cease Federal funding for NPR and PBS,” and “cancel existing direct funding to the maximum extent allowed by law and shall decline to provide future funding.”

The order also demands an end to “indirect funding to NPR and PBS, including by ensuring that licensees and permittees of public radio and television stations, as well as any other recipients of CPB funds, do not use Federal funds for NPR and PBS.”

The order, like the other decrees signed by Donald Trump during his 100-plus days in office, is aimed at intimidating and silencing any criticism, including from establishment news outlet like NPR.

Both NPR CEO Katherine Maher and PBS CEO Paula Kerger spoke on CBS News on Sunday morning’s “Face the Nation” and opposed the unprecedented executive order as unconstitutional.

“We’re looking at whatever options are available to us,” Maher said when asked if the radio broadcaster would file a lawsuit. She continued, “I think it’s a little preliminary for us to be able to speak to specific strategies that we would take.”

Kerger said, “We have never seen a circumstance like this. This is different. They’re coming after us on many different ways.” She added, “Obviously we’re going to be pushing back very hard, because what’s at risk are our

stations, our public television, our public radio stations, across the country.” She also called the executive order, “blatantly illegal.”

Maher said the funding cuts would hit local stations and their audiences the most. NPR, which was founded in 1970 following the passage of the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, has 246 member organizations with newsrooms in every state.

According to information published by Public Media Alliance, as of 2020 approximately 60 million Americans accessed NPR content weekly across various platforms, including radio broadcasts, podcasts and digital services.

This reach is facilitated by NPR’s network of over 1,000 member and affiliate stations, ensuring that 98.5 percent of the US population resides within the listening area of a station carrying NPR programming.

Maher said the federal funding cuts would be damaging to journalists covering their local communities, “especially at a time where we’re seeing an advance of news deserts across the nation.” She added, “Twenty percent of Americans don’t have access to another local source of news. The impact of this could really be devastating, particularly in rural communities.”

PBS’s Kerger said the public television network gets 15 percent of its funding from the federal government, but some stations in small communities get 40 to 50 percent of their budgets from public funds. She said, “To them, it’s existential.”

PBS is a non-commercial, free-to-air television network that also began operations in 1970. Kerger said Trump’s executive order could impact PBS’s funding that comes from the Department of Education, a partnership that has supported the research, development and creation of educational children’s programming such as “Sesame Street” and “Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood.”

Kerger said, “Half of the kids in this country are not enrolled in formal pre-K. That’s why programming for children on public television was created.” Programming in development would “skid to a halt,” with the termination of federal funding. “We work directly with preschool providers and parents, and this funds those activities, so the immediate impact would be fairly significant,” she said.

The CPB, which has been instructed by the White House to cease funding of NPR and PBS, is a publicly funded, non-profit corporation created in 1967 to support public broadcasting in the US. The CPB’s mission, according to a statement on its website, is to “steward the federal appropriation and to ensure universal access to content and services that educate, inform, foster curiosity and promote civil discourse essential to American society.”

On April 28, 2025, the CPB filed a lawsuit against the Trump administration after the president attempted to fire three of the five members of the CPB’s board of directors. In a statement, Patricia Harrison, president and CEO of the CPB said, “The Corporation for Public Broadcasting is not a government entity, and its board members are not government officers. Because CPB is not a federal agency subject to the President’s authority, but rather a private corporation, we have filed a lawsuit to block these firings.”

Responding to Trump’s executive order, Harrison said:

Congress directly authorized and funded CPB to be a private nonprofit corporation wholly independent of the federal government. In creating CPB, Congress expressly forbade ‘any department, agency, officer, or employee of the United States to exercise any direction, supervision, or control over educational television or radio broadcasting, or over [CPB] or any of its grantees or contractors.

Trump’s assault on the CPB, NPR and PBS is part of the attempt by fascist and far-right political forces within the White House and the Republican Party to label voices of political opposition within the US as “radical left-wing” and “communist,” including those of the public radio and television networks which are generally aligned with the pro-capitalist politics of the Democratic Party.

As reported previously on the *World Socialist Web Site*,

House Republicans, led by the QAnon conspiracy theorist and Trump mouthpiece Marjorie Taylor Greene (Republican from Georgia), staged an anticommunist hearing on March 26 entitled, “Anti-American Airwaves: Holding the Heads of NPR and PBS Accountable.”

Legal experts have stated that the White House does not have the authority to cut off funding to NPR and PBS. Leonard M. Niehoff, a First Amendment and media law professor at the University of Michigan Law School, told the *Washington Post*, “Congress controls the federal purse strings and has approved a budget for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. The president does not have the power to undo that budget allocation.”

David Cole, a professor at Georgetown University Law Center, referred to a 1984 case, *FCC v. League of Women Voters*, where the Supreme Court ruled that the government cannot condition federal funding on a station’s editorial decisions. Cole told the *Post*, “Trump’s executive order appears to do the same thing here.”

However, pointing to the unconstitutionality of Trump’s executive orders because they usurp the power of the purse vested in Congress has not stopped the White House from proceeding with massive budget cuts and layoffs of federal employees. Meanwhile, lawsuits, emergency restraining orders and stays imposed by the federal courts and the US Supreme Court have been repeatedly ignored or openly flouted by the White House.

Characteristically, the Democrats have barely mustered a response to the attack on NPR and PBS. Senate Democratic Whip Dick Durbin of Illinois issued a statement that warns freedom of the press will “backslide” with Trump’s order, that it is “dangerous,” and implores “my Republican colleagues to act to reverse the President’s course—our democracy depends on it.”



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