

US Senate votes to end funding of public broadcasting

David Walsh
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The US Senate voted early Thursday to withdraw financing already allocated for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), which in part funds National Public Radio (NPR) and the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS).

By a vote of 51-48, the most august legislative political body in the US cast its support for the elimination of public broadcasting, first established in 1967 under Lyndon Johnson. The majority of senators, in effect, announced their determination to do whatever lay in their power to encourage ignorance and backwardness and suppress political criticism, even of the most limited variety.

The Senate vote corresponded to a White House demand to take back \$9 billion for foreign aid and public broadcasting. The administration submitted a rescissions bill, a measure that cancels previously approved funding. In this manner, Congress reverses its own spending decisions. The House is expected to approve the action, sending it to Trump for his signature.

The amounts involved are minuscule by American government budgetary standards. The CPB had been allocated \$1.1 billion by Congress for the next two years, to be disbursed among some 1,500 local stations nationwide.

“I think \$9 billion is a very small amount of money—as I mentioned, one-tenth of 1 percent of all federal spending,” Senate Majority Leader John Thune, Republican from South Dakota, told Fox News. “But we’ve got to look at all aspects of the federal budget and figure out where we can root out waste, fraud, and abuse, to put this country on a more sustainable fiscal path. We just can’t sustain where we are.”

Of course, this comment has no bearing on objective reality, except in so far as the latter is perceived by a representative of the US ruling elite. The American government spends unimaginable sums each year on murderous weapons and equipment, spying on its own and other populations and countless illegal and bloody military-CIA operations in every corner of the globe. It grudgingly hands out what amount to pennies on culture, education and the arts, and Congress is now resolutely trying to put a halt to that fearful “waste” of public money.

The funding of NPR and PBS is complicated, and comes from a number of sources, as there has never been a significant or adequate federal government subsidy.

NPR only receives a small amount, some 1 percent, of its funding directly from the federal government. PBS receives approximately 15 percent of its money from the government.

The majority of the CPB’s appropriation goes to local public television and radio stations through grants. These local stations then choose to become members of PBS or NPR and pay dues and fees to the national organizations for programming and other services.

According to the Public Media Alliance, approximately 60 million Americans accessed NPR content weekly across various platforms in 2020, including radio broadcasts, podcasts and digital services. This reach is facilitated by NPR’s network of member and affiliate stations, ensuring that 98.5 percent of the US population resides within the listening area of a station carrying NPR programming.

The attack on NPR and PBS is an assault on the democratic rights of the population, its right to information, emergency services and culture. It will be particularly devastating in rural areas, where smaller broadcasters may be forced off the air over the coming months. As CNN noted,

stations in rural areas and smaller communities tend to rely more heavily on the federal subsidy. Stations in larger markets typically have a wider variety of other funding sources, like viewer donations and foundation support.

In a statement, Patricia Harrison, President and CEO of the CPB, insisted that

For nearly six decades, public media has served families in every corner of America, especially rural and tribal communities, providing extraordinary vital content and services free of charge. Without federal funding, many local public radio and television stations will be forced to shut down.

(In May, Trump attempted to fire three members of CPB’s board. The agency then sued the president, who recently sued the board members.)

The *New York Times* commented July 14 that an internal NPR report from 2011 estimated

that if Congress cut off funding to the public radio system, up to 18 percent of the roughly 1,000 member stations would close, with broadcasters in the Midwest, South and the West affected the most. Nationwide, up to 30 percent of listeners would lose access to NPR programming.

At work here are both an immediate political goal, the suppression of news sources that do not parrot the fascistic line of the Trump government, and the larger principle of opposition to the existence of radio and television programming outside the control of giant profit-making conglomerates. With Trump, there must always be the hope too that somehow the growth of private broadcasting at the expense of PBS and NPR will produce filthy lucre for him and his family.

Attacks by the extreme right on PBS, NPR and other bodies such as the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) have been under way for decades. Half-hearted or more determined efforts to stop their funding have been made by previous Republican administrations, including Trump's first administration.

But, as part of the broader social and cultural counter-revolution, Trump and his accomplices have made it clear that this time around they intend to destroy these agencies and institutions once and for all.

In April, for example, the White House announced plans to terminate financing for 85 percent of National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) grants. The endowment is the largest federal government source of funding for museums, libraries, colleges and universities, historical sites, cultural research projects and individual scholars.

Instead, the NEH's acting chairman told its 24-member advisory council that the endowment "would pivot to supporting the White House's agenda" and in particular "would support Mr. Trump's planned patriotic sculpture garden and the broader celebration of the 250th anniversary of American independence on July 4, 2026."

In early May, the White House released the President's Fiscal Year 2026 budget proposal, which called for the eradication of the NEA, the NEH and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS).

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

On May 1, Trump issued an executive order regarding the CPB, "Ending Taxpayer Subsidization of Biased Media." The order offered several arguments for doing away with public broadcasting.

Unlike in 1967, when the CPB was established, today the media landscape is filled with abundant, diverse, and innovative news options. Government funding of news media in this environment is not only outdated and unnecessary but corrosive to the appearance of journalistic independence.

In reality, of course, while the Internet has had vast consequences, the monopolization of the mainstream media industry has grown by leaps and bounds. As recently as the mid-1980s, some 50 corporations controlled the majority of the US media—that number is now down to six.

Media analyst Ben Bagdikian proved *two decades ago* that 1,468 daily newspapers, 6,000 assorted magazines, 10,000 radio stations, 2,700 television and cable stations, and 2,600 book publishers in the US were under the aegis of five major multinational corporations.

The May 1 White House executive order further claimed, repeating the mantra of the far right, that neither NPR nor PBS "presents a fair, accurate, or unbiased portrayal of current events to taxpaying citizens."

The White House and the Republican Party regularly label voices of political opposition within the US as "radical left-wing" and "communist," including those of the public radio and television networks generally aligned with the pro-capitalist politics of the Democratic Party.

David Bozell, of the ultra-right Media Research Center, celebrated the Senate's decision in an X post. "PBS and NPR were chartered to provide objective journalism," Bozell asserted. "Instead, we got drag shows for kids, gushing coverage of Democrats, and silence or smears for conservatives."

One has to pull apart this comment for its various strands of right-wing fantasy and social backwardness. In fact, the general course of the NPR and PBS officialdom, as part of the Democratic Party orbit and upper-middle class liberal milieu, has been steadily to the right over the decades.

Under attacks from figures like Sen. Jesse Helms of North Carolina, the cultural establishment took a knife to its vital parts years ago and did its best to remove or neutralize them. Every reasonable effort has been made to fund the anodyne, innocuous and non-threatening in television, radio and cultural programming generally.

Almost inevitably, given the catastrophic role of the corporate and financial oligarchy, with its relentless and lethal crimes against the population, a degree of criticism of American business practices and official political life has made its way onto the public airwaves, along with a measure of historical objectivity, e.g., the Ken Burns documentaries. This is termed "lunatic, Marxist" propaganda.

The depth of the American bourgeoisie's crisis is so great, and its terror and anticipation of mass opposition so pronounced, that serious analysis or social reproach is now considered impermissible, a casting of aspersions on and a threat to the American "free enterprise" system.

The response of the Democratic Party to the Senate action has been predictably pathetic. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, speaking on the Senate floor, contended that Americans relied on public broadcasting for weather alerts, adding that "these cuts couldn't come at a worse time."

In fact, the destruction of public broadcasting, along with every other social gain or right, means little to the Democrats or wins their overt or covert support. Far more important, from their point of view, is Trump's sudden surge in interest in arming and encouraging Ukraine against Russia. The defense of public access to information and culture falls to the working class and its political development in a socialist direction.



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