



March 24, 2025

The Honorable Marjorie Taylor Greene
Chair
Committee on Oversight
Subcommittee on Delivering on
Government Efficiency
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Melanie Stansbury
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight
Subcommittee on Delivering on
Government Efficiency
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Taylor Greene and Ranking Member Stansbury,

On behalf of Reporters Without Borders (RSF), the world's largest nongovernmental organization devoted to the independence, safety, and pluralism of journalism, I am writing to express concern about the Subcommittee on Delivering on Government Efficiency's upcoming hearing regarding National Public Radio (NPR) and Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) government funding.

In announcing the hearing, Chairwoman Greene indicated that the CEOs of NPR and PBS will be asked to answer "why the demonstrably biased news coverage they produce for an increasingly narrow and elitist audience should continue to be funded by the broad taxpaying public." This framing mischaracterizes the nature of American public media and its value to the American public. It also risks creating a dangerous precedent where independent media editorial discretion is subject to second-guessing and pressure from the state.

Editorial independence free of government intimidation is a hallmark of our nonpartisan American value of press freedom, and this notion should apply to any news organization, regardless of its funding sources. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting was founded by Congress decades ago to ensure nationwide access to public media and "to support programs and services that inform, educate, and enrich the public."¹ It was not created for the government or any political party to be able to control or interfere in coverage.

Public media provides Americans across the country with free access to daily local news and valuable information across a myriad of platforms. These public radio and television organizations are independently owned and operate autonomously in service of their

¹ <https://cpb.org/aboutcpb>



communities. They are able to connect with the local community, better understand its needs and keep citizens informed on matters affecting them. This is especially important in news deserts, areas with very limited or no consistent local news coverage, because it ensures there is some outlet connected to the community. Without access to local news, not only do communities lack a source to learn about their area's current events and an organization to hold their governments accountable, they also lack a place to feel connected to the people, businesses and environment around them. Local news binds communities together by creating more shared awareness and connectivity with one's neighbors.

Contrary to the assertion that NPR and PBS serve an "increasingly narrow and elitist audience,"² millions of listeners around the country tune into the thousands of unique and independent local stations that partner with these organizations and support the shared mission to provide free programming and coverage that reflects the unique communities across the country and connects audiences to the people around them. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting distributes more than 70% of its funding directly to public media stations through grants. Of the 544 TV and radio stations receiving those grants, 245 are considered to be rural. Rural stations are disproportionate beneficiaries of public media funding, with 17% of the average rural station's revenue coming from CPB grants, compared with 9% for non-rural stations. Make no mistake: cuts to public media will hit rural communities the hardest.

At a time when trust in American institutions is waning across the board, Americans by and large have very positive views of their local media outlets, with an impressive 85% saying local news outlets are at least somewhat important to the well-being of their local community, 69% saying that local journalists are in touch with their community and 71% trusting that their local media report the news accurately.³

In many American communities, the public broadcaster is often the only source of local news due to geographic or economic restrictions. Its journalists are often the only reporters in a school board meeting, a town hall meeting or at the scene of a crime. Without coverage of crucial events such as these, people are less likely to be involved in their local communities, to have a say in policies affecting them and to be able to hold local officials accountable.

The Local News Initiative's 2024 report found that 206 counties in the country lack any local news source and 1,561 counties have only one source, which accounts for almost 55 million people.⁴ According to an RSF report on press freedom in swing states, the rise of news deserts

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<https://oversight.house.gov/release/doge-subcommittee-announces-npr-and-pbs-leaders-will-testify-on-march-26/>

³ <https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2024/05/07/americans-changing-relationship-with-local-news/>

⁴ <https://localnewsinitiative.northwestern.edu/projects/state-of-local-news/2024/report/>



is especially acute in the states that are most critical to our democracy.⁵ For example, more than 300,000 Floridians lack a local news source. Lacking a local news source, citizens are forced to turn to national news organizations for election coverage which, even at its best, can never replace the context and perspective that local journalists can provide for their audiences. Alternatively, they turn to far less reliable sources of information on social media, where mis and disinformation spread unchecked.

Public broadcasters are vital lifelines during times of crisis. When several regions in the country were hit with major weather emergencies in the past year, such as the wildfires in California or Hurricane Helene in the Southeast, local news proved vital for providing critical information and updates. During power outages, traditional radio, where public media is aired, becomes a lifeline for those caught in these disastrous situations. Meanwhile, during each of these natural disasters, social media users' feeds were awash in disinformation at a time when Americans were in greatest need of accurate, reliable information about their communities.⁶⁷

Examining bias is something every responsible media outlet should constantly be doing, and I am confident that editors and reporters at NPR, PBS and their independent affiliate stations around the country do this each and every day. It is important that Congress not interfere with the editorial decisions that national program producers and distributors make, or that which independent local stations choose to carry in service of their districts. Doing so would set up a slippery slope towards government diktats overruling the media's constitutionally protected discretion. Instead, Congress should explore ways to reinforce public media's strengths so it can provide better, more resilient coverage to more Americans and help create a better-informed citizenry.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Clayton Weimers', written over a white background.

Clayton Weimers
Executive Director, Reporters Without Borders (RSF USA)

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<https://rsf.org/en/usa-rsf-report-shows-press-freedom-shortcomings-key-swing-states-ahead-2024-electio>

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<https://www.npr.org/2024/10/13/nx-s1-5148893/misinformation-and-conspiracy-theories-about-hurricane-helene-are-spreading-online>

⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/jan/16/disinformation-los-angeles-wildfires>