

April 28, 2025

The Honorable John Thune
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Michael Johnson
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Senate Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Leader Thune, Leader Schumer, Speaker Johnson, and Leader Jeffries,

We, the undersigned coalition of press freedom and media organizations, write to urge you to reject the White House's request that Congress rescind funds appropriated to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). The funding was approved by Congress in a continuing resolution and signed by President Trump on March 15.

These cuts have been framed as cost saving. Yet public media costs Americans just \$1.60 annually on average. As a result, all Americans have access to a wealth of non-commercial broadcasting that enriches the lives of millions of Americans, young and old, rich and poor, urban and rural. We hope you will continue to agree that this is a tremendous bargain.

Instead of producing any meaningful savings for the American people, rescinding this vital funding will do irreparable harm to millions of Americans who rely on non-commercial public broadcasting for a reliable, free source of information about their communities, their country, and the world. As you know, American public media is composed of a network of 1,216 public radio stations and 365 public television stations spread across 50 states, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Guam. These independent stations each individually provide a true public service by delivering access to a broad range of educational, cultural, and local programming, as well as lifesaving emergency information, that will not be replaced by other forms of commercial media.

Make no mistake: these proposed cuts to the CPB will result in the shutdown of dozens, if not hundreds of local, independent radio and television stations serving Americans in

every corner of the country. These closures will unnecessarily exacerbate a widening economic crisis afflicting the news media industry.

According to the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) [World Press Freedom Index](#), the precarious economic situation for the media is one of the primary factors that led to the United States falling in its ranking to its present position of 55th out of 180 countries—a historic low since RSF began keeping statistics in 2002. Declining revenue in the news industry has led to steady closures of media outlets both national and local, and the net loss of jobs for journalists and media workers.

According to the [Local News Initiative \(LNI\)](#), the United States has lost more than 3,200 print newspapers since 2005, a rate of more than two per week. By contrast, the number of public broadcasters has remained largely constant, allowing them to continue providing up-to-date, factual information to their audiences. LNI's 2024 report found 206 counties with no local news source at all, and 1,561 counties with only one local news source. In many cases, that single local news source is the public broadcaster. There are currently almost 55 million people in America living in [news deserts](#). Shutting down public broadcasters will drastically add to their numbers.

The harm of these cuts will disproportionately befall rural American communities. Less densely populated parts of the country tend to have fewer options for reliable news sources. These markets are often less viable for commercial media, making it unlikely that the gap left by shuttered public media stations will be adequately filled.

During a House DOGE subcommittee hearing in March, multiple members suggested that the internet has made public broadcasting obsolete since rural Americans can now turn to a variety of online sources of information. The internet, however, is a poor substitute for public broadcasting. Internet access remains persistently unequal across the country and is more vulnerable than terrestrial radio during an emergency. Moreover, the assertion ignores that shutting down public media doesn't just end the broadcast—it ends local reporting, as well.

When people lose access to their local media, they're forced to turn instead to national media which are less attuned to the needs of their communities (and which cost far more than \$1.60). As it stands, public media journalists are often the only reporters attending a school board meeting, or a local zoning hearing, or at the scene of a crime. They are the journalists most likely to hold local public officials accountable and expose corruption. Faraway digital media outlets will not replicate this coverage, and the American public will lose out. To the extent that social media posters cover local events in rural areas, they generally base their coverage on reporting from outlets including

public broadcasters. Few have the resources or time to produce original journalism. The internet can be an effective news distribution method but it still needs content to distribute. In much of America, that content comes from public broadcasters.

Public broadcasting also plays an especially vital role during local and national emergencies. Time and time again, during natural disasters, public broadcasters have proven to be the most reliable source for up-to-date information that allows citizens to stay informed and safe. We have seen this as recently as earlier this year, when wildfires ravaged Southern California or flood waters inundated the Southeast. Meanwhile, unverified reports and outright false information thrived on social media sites. Closing down public media stations play into the hands of actors who intend to misinform or mislead, endangering public safety and undermining trust in verified information from local, state, and national authorities.

The editorial independence of public media is protected by the Constitution and the laws of the United States. The independent local stations that will be most harmed by cuts to the CPB are free to purchase or not purchase programming according to the needs and tastes of their audiences. Much of the nationwide programming available through public broadcasters has nothing to do with national political or cultural divides. If local stations believe a certain program that does discuss partisan issues is biased, they do not need to air that program. If local audiences believe those programs their stations air are biased, they can change the channel or complain. We urge you to insist that disagreement with public media content be addressed through debate and persuasion among the public to effectuate appropriate change in their programming. That's how Americans deal with speech or content we dislike – not by punishment or censorship.

Thank you for your attention to this matter of national importance and would be happy to discuss these important issues further.

Sincerely,

Reporters Without Borders (RSF)
Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)
Freedom of the Press Foundation (FPF)
United Church of Christ Media Justice Ministry (UCC Media Justice)
Fight for the Future
Women Press Freedom
Radio Television Digital News Association
First Amendment Foundation
Press Freedom Center at the National Press Club

Authors Guild
Rebuild Local News
National Press Photographers Association (NPPA)
PEN America
Association of Foreign Press Correspondents in the USA
Society of Environmental Journalists
Public Knowledge
Indigenous Journalists Association
Indigenous Media Freedom Alliance
Society of Professional Journalists
First Amendment Coalition
The Media and Democracy Project
Association of Health Care Journalists