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Vice President defends PBS in AU speech

Gore offers response to Republican overtures to cutting PBS's government funds

By AARON NATHANS
Eagle Senior Writer

Vice President Albert Gore, Jr. came to AU to defend public broadcasting Thursday, lashing out at Congressional leaders for propelling a "head-long rush to condemn everything that has been done with public money."

"Public broadcasting is a part of American culture," Gore said. "People have grown up with it; we rely on it. It has educated millions of American children at a yearly cost to families of what we spend on two candy bars. And if you try to kill it, we will fight you every step of the way."

Gore's visit to Kay Chapel, sponsored by the School of Communication, was joined by an unannounced guest that SOC Dean Sanford J. Ungar said would be "fondly familiar" to audience members — Fred Rogers of "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood," public television's longtime children's program (see related story).

"It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood," Gore said, acknowledging Rogers at the start of his address, "and I'm glad the weather is warming up. A couple of weeks ago, it was so cold I froze stiff — and nobody noticed."

The vice president said the new Republican leadership in the House of Representatives is moving to remove necessary government support from programs like "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood" that support and educate children.

"I want to point out that the attack on PBS has not occurred in isolation," Gore



Vice-President Gore angrily refuted the idea of limiting public broadcasting's funding. His speech came in response to various factions seeking to shrink government by eliminating federal support of PBS.

He said that in discussions with Americans around the country, they are "absolutely mystified" since it was not a topic

"It is part of a broad assault on programs that enrich the lives of American children, offer them hope for a brighter future and care for them when no one else can or will."

Gore said the Republicans in Congress have been going after public broadcasting with the same zeal that they have pursued government-subsidized school lunches, national service and summer

jobs.

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Mr. Rogers stops in the AU neighborhood

By AARON NATHANS
Eagle Senior Writer

Fred Rogers, longtime host of PBS's "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood," joined Vice President Al Gore in defending public broadcasting in a surprise visit to Kay Chapel Thursday afternoon.

Rogers led the small, giggly group of students, AU administrators and members of the community in a round of his trademark song, "Won't You Be My Neighbor."

His audience captured, he then turned to the subject of the day — the merits of public broadcasting.

"Think of all the young people who are influenced by what they see and hear on TV," Rogers said. "What a wonderful gift is it when what they see clicks with what is inside of them. If people can look at TV and get the message that no matter who we are, we can make a positive difference in someone's life, our work as television producers will have been worthwhile."

Rogers said he believes public television provides role models that children can imitate and learn valuable skills from, like reading and writing.

"What do you love to do? Writing? Welding? Sculpting? If you do that in front of children, ... it can be one of the best gifts you can give them," Rogers said.

Likening public broadcasting to part of the growing process, Rogers turned to one of his favorite themes, teacher and loved ones, to help illustrate his point.

"I'd love to give you one minute of silence in this very busy day to think of those who might have been important to you," Rogers said, and the group obliged.

Rogers closed his brief address by reading out of Gore's book on the environment, "Earth in the Balance."

"One focuses on being faithful to the future. It shows a lot of hope when you plant a seed for a tree that won't be there until his or her grandchildren are grown," Rodgers read.

"Thank you for such a wonderful welcome. It's good that you've been able to use television over the years."

After the discussion was over, Rogers joined Gore in the basement of Kay to meet with children to talk about their views on television.

GORE: Stresses the importance of PBS for children

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During the 1994 campaign.

"I hope you will allow me to paraphrase Mr. Rogers when I frame a question for those who want to gut public broadcasting," he said. "The American people, when they hear about this assault on public broadcasting, have the impulse to get the Republican leadership in a room and talk to them about why they're wrong. It's as if they want to sit them down and ask them, can you say 'children?' Can you say 'education?' We want their response."

Gore also pointed to AU's on-campus public radio station as a source of education for children.

"The backbone to public broadcasting is, after all, community involvement," he said. "And who knows that more than the people on this particular campus, WAMU — a public radio station that provides

forums for students to talk about violence in local schools and volunteer recruitment drives, in addition to all the wonderful programming that it makes available for this particular community, the entire Washington area. And it's the same in every city in America."

The vice president then took aim at those who have labeled PBS as "elitist" — an accusation which he said is totally unfounded.

"There are some who argue that public broadcasting is elitist. Well, that is simply absurd," Gore said. "Ask the parents and teachers of our young children if Mr. Rogers is elitist or if Sesame Street is elitist. Their kids will tell you right quick they don't want any epithets applied to Mr. Rogers."

Gore said that those who propose

privatization really mean commercialization — "and we all know that commercial broadcasting is vastly different from public broadcasting," he said.

After the speech, Gore and Rogers went into the basement of Kay, where a group of preschool children were waiting. The two donned Rogers' trademark red sweaters and talked to the children about the kind of television they watch.

"It's different here," Rogers said to the children. "You wonder if everything on TV can come out and visit you. We're real people. There's a lot of scary things on TV, but they're just pictures."

While many students were noticeably excited and pleased by the vice president's speech, some were not in agreement with his views. Freshman Eric Eikenberg said Gore missed the point of the issue.

"Since when do we need television to educate children?" Eikenberg said. "Isn't that the role of the parent?"

Kim Hodgson, general manager of WAMU, said that while Gore's support is comforting, he's not sure if the effect will be potent.

"I suppose any statement from the administration on the issue is helpful, but it does seem like the House is kind of on its own track," Hodgson said. "I don't expect the chairman of the House Appropriations Committee to say, 'Oh, Al Gore said we were wrong,' and change."

Hodgson added that Gore's speech was crafted skillfully, and while the speech chastised Republican leaders for wanting to privatize public broadcasting, Hodgson said it opened the door for discussion about change in how PBS is funded.