

Domestic Policy - Carol Raso

PBS

Puerto Rico

R.I.F.

Mitzy Labin

Race Relations

Radiation

Recessions

Reconciliation

Red Cross

Refugee Program in Miami

Regulatory Flex Act

Regulatory Policy Advisors

Regulatory Review

Rehab - Conflict Creatively Prog Stud 94 (RCCP) 10-10³⁰

Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 93

Reich Speech

Reinvent Government

Religious Freedom Restoration Act

Republican Cuts

Rett Syndrome Foundation Inc.

Risk Assessment, Management and Communication

Risk Legislation

Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government

Governor Romer - State of Colorado

RL 486

Russian Iron Imports

National Rural Conference (postponed)

Rural Empowerment Zones, Rural Enterprise & Change Communities

ENCLOSURES FILED OVERSIZE ATTACHMENTS

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Remarks
by
Vice President Al Gore
at
The American University
Washington, DC
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Most of us think of Thomas Jefferson as our third President, but of course, on Jefferson's own list of accomplishments, the Presidency finished far down the list. His tombstone doesn't even mention it. The inscription he wrote for it, reads, "Here was buried Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of American independence, of the Statute of Virginia for religious freedom, and father of the University of Virginia."

He was passionately committed to the University. During the first year of its existence, there was an incident in which students rioted, then, armed with bricks and canes, attacked the professors trying to restore order.

Jefferson was devastated. The next day, at a meeting between the students and the University Board, he began to speak, then burst into tears. At which point the students were so penitent that each of the guilty ones confessed, one of them saying, later, "It was not Mr. Jefferson's words but his tears."

It is not surprising that Jefferson cared so deeply about education -- this voracious reader with 12,000 books in his personal library that later became the foundation of the Library of Congress.

"If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization," he wrote, "it expects what never was, and never will be."

Why talk of Jefferson today? Because at this moment, an all out attack is being waged against an institution born of the principles that governed his life.

It is an institution that has done much to enrich the educational and intellectual life of America -- and that can do a lot more.

That institution is public broadcasting.

I want to talk today about public broadcasting. I want to describe for you the many ways in which it serves as a full partner in carrying out this nation's commitment to public education -- particularly for children.

Next, I want to take head-on the arguments propounded by some that public broadcasting is a frill this nation can no longer afford -- or a luxury that could be (quote) "privatized."

And, then, I want to suggest some principles that should guide those of us who care deeply about education and want to help reshape it for the future.

Finally, I want to point out that the attack on PBS has not occurred in isolation. It is part of a broad assault on programs that enrich the lives of American children, offer them hope of a brighter future, and care for them when no one else can or will.

The Contract presently being rushed through the House of Representatives will deprive children of programs that can teach them to read. It will deprive them of the healthy lunches they get in the school cafeteria. It will deprive them of inoculations against polio or measles. It will deprive them of the programs which help them steer clear of drugs -- or get a summer job. It is mean-spirited. And it is wrong.

And there is nothing that's more wrong than the attacks the Republican leadership is now waging against public broadcasting.

Frankly, when I talk to people around the country about this attack, they are absolutely mystified. People tell me they understand some of the of the proposed cuts, but "why would anyone want to threaten public broadcasting?"

It's a mystery to me, too.

I know you heard from Fred Rogers earlier -- and I'd like to thank him for being here. But allow me to paraphrase Mister Rogers when I ask those who want to gut public broadcasting:

Can you say "children?"

Can you say "education?"

Let me give you some facts about public broadcasting as an instrument of education. And keep in mind that I'm going to skip over many of the crown jewels of public broadcasting like the "MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour," Bill Buckley's "Firing Line," "Scientific American Frontiers," and "Talk of the Nation." They are all great programs. But children rarely watch or listen to them.

Close to 90 percent of the 70 million children in this country, though -- from all areas, ethnic groups, and socioeconomic strata -- were reported to have regular exposure to at least one of the many PBS programs. Those numbers are so big even The Count from "Sesame Street" would have trouble explaining them.

The fact is, public television is often the first exposure many young children get to numbers and letters -- the joy of counting to ten for the first time, or spelling their name. And for older children there are programs like "Nova." Stanley Johnson -- a local Jr. High teacher whose with us today -- has been using "Nova" to teach his students for years. And there are, as you all know, countless other programs which have transformed our living rooms in classrooms.

There's also a side to public television for children that many of us never see. But it's a side that is well-known to day-care providers, to classroom teachers, and to hundreds of thousands of Americans trying to prepare themselves for the future.

For instance, PBS and dozens of public television stations around the country have launched a service called "Ready to Learn" -- a program designed to ensure that our children are, in fact, "ready to learn" when they start school. "Ready to Learn" combines an energetic outreach program with the best pre-school programming in the business -- featuring the great icons of educational television like Fred Rogers and Bert and Ernie.

The result?

Parents, day-care providers and teachers who know how to use these programs to help children learn through television -- and to keep learning once the TV is turned off. Public television's a learning tool once a child is in school as well. Public television reaches about 70,000 elementary and secondary schools throughout the United States. It's the number one resource for instructional classroom programming.

And that's just television.

National Public Radio has been indispensable to its local listeners across this country. Each station across this country tailors its programming to meet local needs. For instance, when school funding for classical music training was cut, it was KUER in Salt Lake City that produced a series introducing elementary school students to classical music.

In Kodiak, Alaska, on KMXT, children learn about life and earth sciences by tuning in to "My Green Earth" -- a program hosted by a local science teacher.

On "Tree House Radio," kids in Urbana, Illinois have the opportunity to read their own poetry and play music on WILL-AM/FM.

WCBE's "Kids Sundae" allows children in Columbus, Ohio to take part in all aspects of production from sound effects to news reporting. And it sheds light on yet another way public broadcasting influences and teaches children (and adults)... even when it is not seen and heard. The backbone to public broadcasting is community involvement.

Who knows that more than people on this campus? WAMU, a public radio station, provides forums for students to talk about violence in local schools and volunteer recruitment drives -- in addition to all the wonderful programming it makes available for the entire greater Washington area.

Yet there are some who argue that public broadcasting is somehow elitist.

That's absurd.

Ask Daniel Castro, the host of "The Sancho Show" in Pasadena, California if public broadcasting is elitist. His radio show, which has been running for over ten years, teaches kids in poor, minority communities the value of staying in school. That doesn't sound elitist.

Ask the 40% of all Americans who do not have cable -- many because they can't afford it, or because they live in rural areas where they don't have access... ask those who depend on public broadcasting as their lifeline to news and culture if it's elitist. 60 percent of public television viewers live in families that make less than \$40,000 a year. That doesn't sound elitist.

Ask Wanda Cromer (CROW-MER) if public broadcasting is elitist. She's also here, today. She has a job, a husband, and two children. And soon she'll have an Associate of Arts degree earned through "Distance Learning" telecourses -- classes offered over television. She's one of 2.8 million people who have jobs, children, and who've earned credits in telecourses. That doesn't sound elitist.

And ask the parents and teachers of our young children if "Sesame Street" or Mister Rogers are elitist. Public broadcasting is the only source of educational programming available to every American. That doesn't sound elitist.

What does sound elitist is trying to take away a valuable resource from the people who need it the most. What sounds elitist is a small group of ideologues in Washington telling the American people that public broadcasting isn't good for them.

Could such programming exist without government support?

The Administration's record on this issue is clear. President Clinton and I believe in federal funding for public broadcasting. We view it as crucial to the enterprise. We see it as sound investment and a sound federal policy.

And a great value.

The fact is all of public broadcasting -- all of the programs, all the stations, all of the marvelous educational services that help our children -- all of that costs each American just \$1.09 a year.

About a dollar. That might be something worth complaining about if you're Oscar the Grouch. But if you're not a little green furry guy who lives in a garbage can (or the Speaker of the House), you realize what a great deal this is. As the President of PBS, Ervin Duggin, points out: a Sunday newspaper in any city in America will cost you more than public television costs in a year.

Our federal investment may be the most highly leveraged dollar the government puts into any educational effort: Public TV and radio stations raise five or six dollars from private sources for every public dollar they receive.

They are, in short, doing exactly what the federal government has expected them to do for more than 25 years: taking a small share of public money, leveraging it into generous private support, and producing excellent, diverse and universally available services that all Americans can use every day.

So why continue federal funding at current levels?

Why not require even more leverage of public broadcasting?

Because the small amount of seed capital that the government provides -- about 14 percent of the total public broadcasting budget -- the seed capital is what makes the rest possible. Without it, many radio and television stations would fall immediately, and the entire superstructure of public broadcasting would begin to crumble.

It's like baking bread... yeast makes up a very small percent of the total ingredients. But if you don't sprinkle that little packet of yeast into the bowl, the bread will never rise.

That's why I must disagree with those Republicans on Capitol Hill who want to kill off public broadcasting, or to throw it into the marketplace as just another commercial alternative.

Republicans have suggested that we "privatize" the funding arm of public broadcasting -- the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

This idea simply would not work.

"Privatizing" CPB would mean selling off its assets in the open market. CPB, however, has no assets, as its President, Richard Carlson, pointed out in his testimony before Congress.

CPB is merely the instrument through which federal funding passes on its way to nearly 1,000 public radio and television stations across the country. For that reason, privatization is just a codeword for stopping the flow of federal dollars to small and local stations -- the small-town, rural stations who need this money most, and who will die if this money is taken away.

As for PBS and NPR... they are already private.

Those who propose "privatization" really mean commercialization. We all know that commercial broadcasting is vastly different than public broadcasting.

Recently, I heard a humorist suggest a new schedule for a commercialized PBS:

SESAME STREET: Jerry Falwell teaches Big Bird to be more judgmental.

WHERE IN THE WORLD IS CARMEN SAN DIEGO? Guest detective Pat Buchanan helps kids build a wall around the U.S.

MISTER ROGERS SEGREGATED NEIGHBORHOOD

Republican leaders argue that privatizing public broadcasting would be a good example of reinventing government. The marketplace, they say, should determine what our families watch on television.

There's nobody more interested in streamlining government than President Bill Clinton and me. We want to increase efficiency. Introduce market forces. Privatize where it's appropriate.

After all, it was the Clinton Administration that has cut the federal bureaucracy by 100,000 positions... and there are more cuts to come. It was the Clinton Administration that has cut the deficit by 700 billion dollars. And it was the Clinton Administration that reduced the deficit for three years in a row... something not seen in this country since Harry Truman was President.

But there's a big difference between cutting government and killing it. I'm reminded of the veterinarian and the taxidermist who went into business together. Their slogan was: Either way you get your dog back.

We don't want to kill government... stuff it and put in on the wall. We want to fix government so that it works better and costs less.

And nothing works better and costs less than public broadcasting.

Some say, "Sure public broadcasting does some good things. But, why do we need government involvement when we have an alternative in the private sector?"

Well, what about libraries? There are bookstores all over Washington. But because there are Dalton's and Borders does that mean we no longer need libraries? Of course we need libraries. That's why we have made a commitment as a nation to supporting these institutions that provide all citizens, regardless of income, with access to books.

And that's not the only example. We have no turnstiles or ticket booths at the Smithsonian. Art in the National Gallery isn't pay-per-view.

Public broadcasting fills a similar role as part of our system of universal education. It's a national treasure... and one that is increasingly important as we enter the Information Age.

Are there ways to make it better? Sure. But first you have to believe in it. And we will make it better. But we can't if the extremists win in their crusade to scrap it.

And let me say this without mincing words.

When I said the attack on public television was no isolated event, I meant what I said.

How could anyone who picked up a newspaper this week -- or watched MacNeil/Lehrer -- feel otherwise? [NOTE: YOU MAY WANT TO AD-LIB A REMARK ABOUT THE ARTICLE IN TODAY'S STYLE SECTION ANNOUNCING THAT ABC IS DROPPING A KIDS' EDUCATIONAL SHOW... AND ADDING A CARTOON VERSION OF "DUMB AND DUMBER."]

The Republican attack on public broadcasting -- an attack on our children -- is part of a pattern that makes my blood boil. You've seen it when they go after everything from school lunches to national service to summer jobs.

Of course, public broadcasting isn't and shouldn't be a political issue. It was founded and has been maintained through bi-partisan support.

But, because the attacks on it are political, please allow me a partisan note.

Public broadcasting is a part of our culture. 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'll fight you every step of the way. And if you do kill it, the American people will not forgive or forget.

You know, if you make a million dollars a year and belong to a country club, you might not think that you will ever need any help. You may not think that you have to depend on your neighbors.

But, whether you make a million or the minimum wage, if you have children, you sometimes face problems money alone can't solve -- problems that can only be solved by working together. You're going to need help... from your neighbors, from your community, from the federal government.

One of these problems is finding positive, high-quality, educational television.

For over 25 years public broadcasting has been there. And they want to take it away?

I can tell you... if it didn't exist, we'd be trying very hard to create something like it. But you just can't create "Sesame Street" or "Mister Rogers Neighborhood." We are lucky enough to have something very special, something very dear to so many families. And they want to take it away!

Now...

To stand for this institution is not to ignore the need for change. We must begin to think about principles that might guide public broadcasting in the future. I believe any reform of public broadcasting -- and I mean reform, not extinction -- should be mindful of the following:

First : public broadcasting must retain its noncommercial character. Trying to combine commercial imperatives with the educational and instructional mission of public broadcasting is a recipe for failure.

Second: public broadcasting -- and particularly public television -- should go back to its educational roots, and further improve its services for children, for adult learners, and for teachers.

Third: We need to ensure that public broadcasting is operating with maximum efficiency. The federal government is right to ask how its seed capital is invested, and whether it is being used wisely. Public broadcasting's 1000 TV and radio stations have maximized their reach. Now they must maximize their service by eliminating duplication.

Fourth: and finally, I believe we need to find a stable, permanent source of public seed funding for public broadcasting -- a stream apart from annual federal appropriations, and insulated from politics.

So far, I've talked as an elected official.

Let me talk for just a minute, as a parent.

When Tipper and I had no children, we had many theories about how to raise them.

Now we have many children -- and no theories.

But we do have some observations. And one of the things we've observed is how children learn.

In our culture, much of learning comes from television. For some children that means an endless diet of robot superheroes flattening people with punches and kicks, punctuated by ads for plastic toys or cereals with a sugar content higher than sugar itself.

That's why I'm so grateful for public broadcasting.

I've known Fred Rogers for some time. About ten years ago, Tipper and I and our children had our picture taken with him. That picture means a lot to me.

For one, it hangs on the wall in my daughter Karenn's bedroom. But more than that, it reminds me of all the times I watched Mister Rogers... with Karenn, then with Kristen, then with Sarah, and finally with Albert.

If you ask me where Oscar the Grouch lives, or what the Count sounds like, or who lives in Mr. Roger's neighborhood, I don't have to do any research. It's all in my head, the result of twenty years of watching these programs with my children -- and watching the effect it has had on them.

Of course, my children don't watch Sesame Street or Mister Rogers any more. But as they have developed, so has their taste in programming. And so we watch together and discuss programs on the Civil War, or Joseph Campbell or the five senses.

And what I hope is that in the future, they'll be sitting down to watch Oscar and Big Bird once again, watching the next generation learning to count to ten in Spanish.

When Thomas Jefferson offered his library to Congress he talked about the educational tool of his age: books. "I cannot live without books," he wrote. And as soon as the last wagon-load of them left Monticello bound for Washington, he began collecting again.

In our age, one in which whole libraries can be entered from thousands of miles away, by pushing a few buttons, the tools are different, but the thirst for knowledge remains the same. Let us preserve a system that has worked so well for so many. Let us use government to stimulate education in the Jeffersonian tradition.

Let us remember that if we take away a tool our children use to learn, we lessen their ability to achieve. But if we enhance it, whether through Bill Buckley or Big Bird, there's no limit to what they will get done.