Educational Telecommunications Board of Directors

**Executive Director’s Report**

July 20, 2023

I am sharing the latest update to General Managers from APTS (America’s Public Television Stations) to keep you up to date on national issues.

On Thursday, July 13, 2023, the House Labor, Health and Human Services and Education (Labor-HHS-Education) Appropriations Subcommittee released its draft fiscal year (FY) 2024 funding bill which was marked up and passed by the subcommittee this morning.

In effect, the bill proposes a total elimination of funding for public media masked in the elimination of the two-year advance.

The bill proposes to:

* Eliminate funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) in FY 2026, a cut of $535 million.
* Eliminate funding for Interconnection in FY 2024, a cut of $60 million.

The bill’s elimination of the advance funding mechanism would by itself overturn a well-settled bipartisan policy (first proposed by President Ford) that has empowered the success and independence of public media for the last 47 years and strikes at the core business model of public media which has enabled one of the nation’s most successful public-private partnerships.

As we have advised stations for a few months now, we had been warned to expect “ugly” numbers as the House set overall spending caps at the FY 2022 levels. This is about as ugly as it gets, short of an outright rescission of the funding previously approved by Congress.

This bill could be considered by the full House Appropriations Committee as early as next week.

This bill is just the House’s recommendation, and it is one step in a very long process, with final funding levels ultimately needing to be negotiated between the House and the Senate.

We expect the Senate Appropriations to mark up its FY 2024 Labor-HHS-Education bill the last week in July, and we will be asking all stations with Senate appropriators to weigh in with them before then.

The only way to combat these proposed cuts in the House is to have the highest funding levels possible in the Senate bills.

We must ensure that every Member of Congress understands the local impact that public media funding has on their constituents and the invaluable public services that this funding enables.

The FY 2024 funding bills are not likely to be finalized until much later in the year, but these devastating numbers proposed in the House bill emphasize how important your engagement is on both sides of the Capitol and at every turn is essential to our ability to secure the highest funding levels possible.

I should have further updates when we convene in person in August.

On the bright side, battles over CPB funding should not impact funds awarded to FEMA to work with CPB and local stations on infrastructure improvement and replacement grants. We are currently prepping for the grant application window to open soon and intend to apply for a matching grant to upgrade our interconnection system. We further intend to ask for the anticipated match dollars from the State in this year’s budget request.

BIT senior leadership will be meeting for two days in late July and early August to discuss next year’s budget requests. Severn, Laura, and I will be attending the retreat. We are anticipating asking for general fund increases to match the FEMA grant if awarded and to right our deficit in personal service dollars. More to come at the meeting.

SDPB senior leadership met to review FY23 strategic plan goals and make appropriate updates for FY24. The revised strategic plan for SDPB is in your board materials. We will spend some time at our board meeting looking at data from FY23 and talking about goals for FY24.

For the past four months I, along with 8 other general managers from around the system, have been serving on the CPB Community Service Grant review panel. By statute CPB is required to review and make recommendations to their board for any changes/ revisions to CSG policy every 4 years. During the last CSG review, policy was changed to give more dollars to small and medium sized stations. While the policy change succeeded in doing just that, the major producing stations are now upset they are seeing flat or reduced CSGs grants. While the work they do to provide programming for the national schedule is very important, it is not what the CSG grant pool was created for. The CSG grants were created to assist local stations in creating local content and local services. We will wrap up our work after a final two-day retreat next week. I hope to never have to do this again.

SDPB continues to work through our rebrand. The steering committee recently met with Fresh Produce to discuss their findings and thoughts post discovery phase. They interviewed around 50 staff, board members and Friends of SDPB. Additionally, more than 500 surveys were filled out by members and non-members alike. We are anticipating a second meeting in the next month or so to hear their recommendations on any changes to our logo, tag lines, etc. I am very pleased with the work so far. I am also pleased that comments from staff, board, members, and the public were largely similar and positive. It does seem to show that the effort we have put into localism the past decade is paying off.