

REMARKS BY
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Before I conclude today, I will discuss the important work of the U.S. Broadcasting Board of Governors, the institution that oversees U.S. international broadcasting and the organization responsible for the extraordinary expansion of satellite TV to the Arab and non-Arab Muslim world.

But I realize most of you came here today to get a sense of what in the world is going on in public broadcasting, and I will first address my work at CPB.

I serve as chair of these two boards. This is my 5th Senate confirmed Presidential appointment. I have been chairman of three presidential boards. I spent years as editor-in-chief of Reader's Digest. I was director of the Voice of America at the height of the Cold War.

How then, late in life, have I ended up in so much controversy? With full-page newspaper ads: "Can we trust this man with our public airwaves?"

All this reminds me of the great story that was told of Senator John F. Kennedy when he was running in the presidential primary in West Virginia.

Everyone knows I'm a Republican. Supply-sider. Equal opportunity conservative.

Despite my politics, I also have been known as an honest broker.

In the first Reagan Administration, I received credit from both the political right and the political left for my even-handed effort to bring political balance to international broadcasting.

I said then America doesn't speak with one voice. You can't understand America unless you listen to the Voices of America from across the political spectrum.

Some of those decisions were tough. As much as I personally supported the President on the Contras, when he gave a major political speech on this policy I was informed that Senator Chris

Dodd was going to offer opposing views on network television. I said put Dodd on VOA right after the President. There were folks in the NSC who were none too happy with that decision.

As I was leaving town to return to Reader's Digest, National Journal ran a nice piece about how I turned a controversial job into a non-controversial job because I put both sides on the air. And in the early days of encouraging political balance in public broadcasting, I thought this will be as easy as it was at VOA. How wrong I was.

I believe aggressively in balance. I also believe in aggressive reporting.

As editor-in-chief of Reader's Digest, I was responsible for the article, "Can Oliver North Tell the Truth," a piece many believe cost North a Senate seat in VA.

In retirement I wrote the expose that caused the Boston Globe to fire Mike Barnicle.

So how have I become such a lightning rod? I asked for—some would say—I demanded political balance in public broadcasting, and there are people in this town who would see me pay for this sin.

On the surface, it started with a page one above the fold New York Times article last May that sparked the controversy. "Chairman Exerts Pressure on PBS, Alleging Bias: Cites a Need for Balance."

When I read the article, I thought to myself, there's nothing here. How can anyone be against my efforts to require political balance in public broadcasting? After all, it's the law. CPB by statute is charged with the responsibility of maintaining objectivity and balance in current affairs programs.

Especially laughable was the article's assertion that following the Republican victory last November, I warned an audience of public broadcasting leaders that they had better follow the Republican mandate.

Now stupid, I am not. And it would be nothing short of stupid to tell public broadcasters they'd better follow a Republican mandate.

In most circles the reaction to the Times expose was so what? Don Imus expressed amusement that the Times would put page one above the fold a story that called into question political bias in public broadcasting. That's news, Imus asked incredulously.

A friend who used to work for Bill Clinton called my wife and said doesn't Ken understand that if we didn't have NPR we wouldn't have any radio at all. Now don't go quoting me to Kevin Klose. I told that story in jest.

But then another shoe dropped. And Congressmen Obey and Dingell asked for an IG investigation of the issues raised in the Times article—and as you can imagine IG investigations are no fun—and seemingly endless.

If I threatened the cozy atmosphere of public broadcasting over the failure to balance the liberal advocacy journalism of Bill Moyers, so be it.

The irony is that unlike many conservatives, I support public broadcasting. I happen to think that one of the greatest legacies of American journalism is the tradition of political balance Robin McNeil and Jim Lehrer brought to public television. It was the origin of we present, you decide.

Indeed, one of the first things I did when I was named director of the Voice of America 20 some years ago was to take Jim Lehrer to lunch to get advice.

By the way, I'll never forget one point he made that day. He said the show—this was back when it was 30 minutes long—had 36 employees, and he asked me how many came from the ranks of American broadcasting. None, he replied. Robin McNeil had worked for the BBC. The rest, like Lehrer, were former print journalists.

I also say you can't understand the importance of public television without grasping the importance of localism in this era of media consolidation.

In Kentucky, I found none of the controversy that haunts public broadcasting in Washington. Both Republicans and Democrats have a sense of ownership of Kentucky public broadcasting. They run the political debates. Each side gets its fair share. Good bluegrass too.

In South Dakota I found public broadcasting is the sole outlet for live coverage of high school sports—something I consider very important to this country. During the annual wrestling championships, South Dakota public broadcasting's web site gets something like 30,000 hits.

In North Carolina I found an extraordinary state network and watched a documentary series on smoking that tobacco farmers and anti-smoking activists could say was fair.

This thing of balance is not rocket science—and that is why I had so little tolerance for public broadcasting's inability to achieve balance. Let the record show that I gave as good as I got!

But never once, did I advocate taking any liberal program off the air. Never once did I attempt to pull back the millions in set-asides for minority consortium programming. I simply urged, some would say too forcefully, that if you air a liberal program, you should air a conservative program by its side.

I will leave the chairmanship of CPB with the conviction that the greatest challenge facing public broadcasting is its greatest opportunity. Education-based children's programming.

That's where our focus ought to be—and that's where CPB's focus in recent months has been and as long as I am on the board that's where our focus will be.

The best way to attack poverty in this country is through education—and I don't mean cartoons that make our kids feel good. Effective education-based children's television is expensive. But television represents an incredible vehicle to teach deprived kids how to read. To introduce them to the basics of our history and civics. And, yes, to introduce them to math and science—as in the challenge Tom Friedman has given us in “The World is Flat.”

I am highly skeptical of so-called non-partisanship in public broadcasting, because that appears to mean the same old liberals making the same old decisions. But I do strongly believe in bipartisanship in public broadcasting and Republicans and Democrats and conservatives and liberals should join together to support education-based children's programming.

Let me conclude by talking about work in international broadcasting.

Our Radios—the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty—are credited with winning the Cold War. Truth is a powerful weapon. But in the decade following the end of the Cold War, American spending on international broadcasting was reduced by a real 40 percent.

Then came 9/11.

Today, thanks to the Bush Administration and key Republican and Democratic supporters in Congress that deficit has been erased.

Indeed, the Bush Administration is proposing another 10 percent increase for fiscal year 2006, and there is every reason to believe Congress will support that level of spending.

Satellite television is to international broadcasting what shortwave radio was to the past. Again, thanks to the personal involvement of President Bush and support from both sides of the aisle on Capitol Hill, we have had an extraordinary increase in broadcasting to the Arab and non-Arab Muslim world.

Our Arabic-language satellite television Alhurra is available 24/7 from Morocco to Jordan, from Iraq to Yemen.

We now have an hour-long daily satellite TV news program to information-starved Iran. A program that is repeated four times each night. And thanks in no small part to Secretary Rice, approval of the FY 06 budget will expand that program to three original hours.

Last week, a leading American diplomat who has spent extensive time in Afghanistan told me how our 24/7 FM broadcasts in that country have played an integral role in that country's journey to political democracy. I was in Afghanistan two months back and returned with plans to augment what we are doing there.

We have done extensive ACNielsen surveys to gauge the popularity of Alhurra and our youth-oriented Radio Sawa in the Arab world. The results are very promising. At the time of 9/11, our weekly audience of VOA Arabic was well under 2 million. Nielsen found an unduplicated audience for Alhurra and Radio Sawa said to be 36 million and climbing.

Weekly audience was placed at 65 percent in the UAE, 70 percent in Iraq, and 40 percent in information-saturated Jordan.

Before we went on the air, critics warned that in countries where people regularly boycott American products we would have little hope of gaining acceptance for our news and current affairs programs. But now that the people of the Arab world have had a chance to gauge the quality of what we do, listeners in overwhelming numbers say our news is reliable. The credibility level runs well over 80 percent in Egypt and the UAE, and close to 70 percent among critical listeners in Jordan. These news and current affairs programs are at the core of what we need to do because we cannot understand what's happened in this era of terror without grasping that there is a human development disaster in the Arab world. The knowledge gap that plagues this region is the centerpiece of the problem. According to the United Nation's 2003 Arab Human Development Report, the aggregate of Western books translated into Arabic since the dawn of publishing amounts to little more than 10,000 books—equivalent to the number Spain translates in a single year.

Only time—and a major effort—can eliminate this knowledge gap.

I was asked recently by a Congressional Committee Chairman when are we going to move the needle, and I said all this reminds me of my son, who today is a Naval officer just back from a two-year deployment driving a guided missile frigate. But when he was a little boy, we would be no more than thirty minutes from home before he would demand, "Are we there yet?" No, we're not there yet. But we're getting there!

We're in this effort for the long run. And we must make every effort to see that Western principles of freedom and democracy, opportunity and equality are understood as the keys to the future in the Muslim world. Programs featuring discussions and debates are critical on Alhurra in no small part because enlightened moderate viewpoints rarely have been heard, much less understood, in that part of the world. But just as the Lincoln-Douglas debates had a profound influence on this country's understanding of the scourge of slavery, we believe that discussions about the importance of economic freedom and women's rights and religious tolerance are critical to the future there.

I'm often asked why do you see television as so important in the developing world. And I go back to the role television played in my own life.

I grew up in an isolated region of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Both sides of my family had resided in the same valleys for more than a hundred years. My father was killed in a mill accident when I was five, but my Mother instinctively understood that the world is flat, and she devoted herself to seeing to it that her son had opportunities beyond those mountains.

She saw to it that we had one of the first televisions in the county. Had an antenna on a telephone pole, and we received far away stations in Charlotte and Roanoke. I saw Douglas Edwards report Brown versus Board of Education. I watched the Army-McCarthy hearings. I saw Joe Martin run the Republican National Convention. I laughed with Milton Berle. I saw Dark Star upset Alfred Gwynn Vanderbilt's Native Dancer in the '54 Kentucky Derby—and I dreamed that one day I would go to the Derby and own race horses. I discovered a whole new world out there—and my life was profoundly changed by the experience.

That's what we want for the youth of the Middle East. That's the world we hope to offer them.

Thank you very much.

Now I would be happy to entertain questions.