

**Remarks by Patrick Butler, President & CEO  
America's Public Television Stations  
Communications Forum Virtual Luncheon  
The Media Institute  
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Thank you, Rick, and thanks to The Media Institute for this opportunity to share some good news about public television.

When I last spoke to The Media Institute, nine years ago, public television had only recently emerged from one of the most serious assaults on its federal funding in the history of our system.

The House of Representatives had voted to cut our funding by \$50 million, and many in Congress were determined to eliminate that funding altogether.

The Great Recession of 2008 was still having its pernicious effects on our state funding, as well.

We had lost \$90 million in annual appropriations in the 34 states then supporting public television.

And some very smart people, within our system and outside it, were predicting that public funding for public television would be a thing of the past within five years.

Nine years later, that funding is still here, at an all-time high, and nicely growing.

Two years ago, America's Public Television Stations secured a \$20-million increase in federal funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting – the first such increase after a decade of flat funding.

Last year, we secured a further \$10-million increase.

In May of this year, the House of Representatives approved a \$90 million increase for CPB.

And the chair of the Senate Appropriations subcommittee responsible for our funding has proposed an identical \$90-million increase.

There are still some serious negotiations ahead about how much the federal government will spend overall, and those negotiations may well have an impact on the size of our ultimate increase.

But that's a much better problem to have than whether we're getting any increase – or any funding at all.

In the latest round of appropriations in the 39 States now supporting public broadcasting, we earned an increase of \$25 million, to \$233 million overall – and 30 percent more than in 2012.

And these increases came despite the continuing economic challenges associated with the pandemic that never seems to end.

What accounts for this dramatic turnaround in our public funding fortunes?

It is the growing capacity and commitment of America's public television stations to serve their communities in essential ways.

And it is the growing understanding and appreciation of that work among our federal and state lawmakers and other officials.

Public television is still best known for its iconic programming:

Masterpiece, NOVA, Nature, Great Performances, American Experience, American Masters, Finding Your Roots, Antiques Roadshow, Frontline, Washington Week, PBS NewsHour, the works of Ken Burns and the world according to Rick Steves; Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood, Odd Squad, Molly of Denali, Donkey Hodie, Alma's Way, and so much more.

We're very proud of the fact that these programs make us America's largest classroom, its grandest stage, and its most trusted voice in public affairs.

We're especially proud that while 50 percent of America's youngest children have no access to pre-school education, our programming helps millions of kids get ready to learn in school and succeed in life.

And the best thing is that this Ready To Learn initiative – funded by Congress and administered by the U.S. Department of Education, and enhanced by local station partnerships with parents, caregivers, Head Start, Boys and Girls Clubs, and others – produces especially good results with children from economically disadvantaged homes, reducing the achievement and opportunity gaps with their more affluent peers.

This work alone would more than justify the modest investment of federal funding in public television, still about \$1.40 per citizen, compared with more than \$60 in Japan, more than \$80 in Great Britain.

But beneath this gleaming reputation at the national level lies a remarkable story of service in education, public safety, and civic leadership at the local level that wins more converts to the cause of public television every year.

In just the past year alone, when America's schools suddenly shut down with the pandemic in March 2020, America's public television stations quickly stood up standards-based, curriculum-aligned remote learning services in all 50 States.

And people noticed:

Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson said: “This partnership between Arkansas PBS and the Arkansas Department of Education demonstrates the type of creative solutions we need during this crisis. Our goal is to limit the amount of lost instruction time and to limit the impact on our children as much as possible. This coordination helps accomplish that goal.”

Idaho Superintendent of Public Instruction Sherri Ybarra said: “For the State Department of Education and educators throughout Idaho, a crucial objective during this soft closure has been to find ways to reach all of our students with distance learning.

“Although online access is a major challenge in many communities and households, I am thrilled that Idaho Public Television has stepped forward to level the playing field, providing instruction through equipment that virtually all households already have: their TVs.”

And Oklahoma’s State Superintendent of Public Instruction Joy Hofmeister said:

“These are unprecedented times for our State and nation. But Oklahomans are known for coming together in a crisis, and we are grateful to Oklahoma Educational Television for swiftly stepping in to ensure that thousands of Oklahoma teachers, students and families can access high-quality educational programming at the touch of a TV remote.”

When it became appallingly clear that 20 percent of America’s kids didn’t have adequate Internet connection to pursue their studies remotely, our stations helped bridge the digital divide by delivering classroom content to the home through datacasting over television spectrum.

As South Carolina Governor Henry McMaster noted:

“The opportunity and technology now exist to use datacasting to deliver lessons, assignments and educational content to students with limited or no internet access. South Carolina ETV’s broadcast signal covers 98 percent of the state. If a student can receive SCETV over the air, then datacasting is a viable option for the student to receive instructional content. We are taking the schoolhouse to the child.”

And Jennings County, Indiana’s school superintendent Teresa Brown said:

“When the pandemic hit, we knew we needed a sustainable cost-effective solution to enable remote learning in the areas of our country where Internet connections are challenging. And (public television) datacasting was the answer.”

Other stations in other states also helped bridge the digital divide by creating new educational networks and new programming line-ups featuring master teachers.

The Michigan Learning Channel now provides this service to the entire state.

California’s public television stations created an At-Home Learning initiative with the Los Angeles Unified School District that brought distance learning to every student in California and then spread to 29 other states.

And Syracuse, New York, Mayor Ben Walsh said of WCNY's TV Classroom Network:

“I want to applaud WCNY and the Syracuse City School District for their partnership to provide this critical educational resource to students, especially those without Internet access at home. This new network has the ability to impact thousands of students across Central New York while supporting teachers, educators, parents and families.”

In addition to all of this, PBS LearningMedia continues to help 2 million K-12 teachers enhance 40 million students' education every day with tens of thousands of engaging, interactive learning objects adapted from the best of public television programming and additional resources from the Library of Congress, the Smithsonian, the National Archives, NASA, National Science Foundation, and more.

Our public safety mission has also grown dramatically in the nine years since I last reported to you.

To cite only a few examples:

With the California Office of Emergency Services, we've demonstrated the ability to reduce the standard warning time for earthquakes from 30 seconds to less than three seconds.

We've created an Emergency Communications Network for the State of Tennessee that helps with everything from wildfire management to National Guard operations.

We've worked with the City of Houston and Harris County to provide crowd management during large-scale events, flood evacuation routes, and other critical public safety information through a system that never goes down.

In an alliance with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, we've shown the power and reliability of our communications infrastructure in applications ranging from a school shooting scenario in rural America to over-water communications 35 miles from shore in the Atlantic Ocean.

Public television has partnered with FEMA to operate the Wireless Emergency Alert system, enabling cell phone users to receive geo-targeted text messages in the event of an emergency – reaching them wherever they are in times of crisis.

Between March 2020 and August 2021, more than 10,000 Wireless Emergency Alerts were issued by state and local authorities and transmitted over the PBS WARN system in different parts of the country.

And many stations now serve as their states' primary Emergency Alert Service hub for weather and AMBER alerts.

As the FCC's Communications, Security, Reliability, and Interoperability Council concluded last year:

“PBS and its member stations are integrated as a key component of the Wireless Emergency Alert system, providing a national over-the-air feed as a robust, redundant alert source available to wireless carriers....

“The alerts are delivered over broadcast airwaves to local PBS member stations and are not subject to network congestion or typical outages.”

And two years ago, the FEMA National Advisory Council's report on “Modernizing the Nation's Public Alert and Warning System” recommended that emergency managers should “use public media initiatives with other alerting authorities to ... expand alert, warning and interoperable communications.”

Our third pillar of public service – civic leadership – has also fortified its foundation in America's community life.

Public television stations continue to serve as the “C-SPAN” of many state governments – a service that connected governors and other state officials directly with their constituents for useful information during the pandemic.

Public television stations are using their convening power and their towering public trust to create community initiatives addressing the opioid crisis in Pennsylvania, job training in Nevada, health care in Florida, veterans' needs in Maryland, rural development in Kentucky, and racial justice everywhere.

And public television stations are preserving the unifying sense of place in America, with programming on local history, local culture, local public affairs, and coverage of high school sports and the heroes of our heartland.

We are literally Bringing America Together – the fitting theme for our Public Media Summit next February.

These examples only give you a flavor of the rich menu of public services that public television provides in communities across America every day.

To learn more, I encourage you to visit our website at [apts.org](http://apts.org) and savor it all.

But with all of this service, all of this success, all of this support, America's public television stations still face some formidable challenges in the years just ahead.

We lost \$100 million in purchasing power to the effects of inflation during a decade of flat federal funding.

We have a backlog of \$300 million in urgently needed infrastructure improvements that we have no way to pay for, since Congress eliminated funding for the Public Telecommunications Facilities Program 10 years ago.

We have a conversion to the new ATSC 3 broadcast standard to finance, to enable our stations to make the most of that revolutionary standard's enhancements in mobility, interactivity, addressability, signal strength, and spectrum efficiency, as well as picture and sound quality.

And we have ambitions to create a national platform to use a part of our spectrum for non-broadcast services, ranging from much more comprehensive distance learning, to telehealth, to Smart Cities connections, to national defense applications, and beyond.

So, there's plenty of work to do, plenty of progress still to be made, plenty of ways to improve our service to the American people, plenty to justify a growing investment in our work by federal and state governments that share our public missions.

We are proud of the bipartisan support we have earned through this commitment to public service, and we are grateful that both Democratic and Republican Congresses, like Democratic and Republican governors and state legislatures, have supported our work so consistently and generously in recent years.

If we're in a nine-year rotation at The Media Institute to tell the story of America's Public Television Stations, someone else will be telling it next time.

And I promise it will be an even better story than the one I've told you today.

Thank you for your interest and your support during these extraordinary years just passed, and I'd be happy now to respond to any questions you may have.

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