

**Remarks by Patrick Butler
Presenting The Media Institute's
2022 American Horizon Award
To Ken Burns
October 19, 2022**

Thank you, Dick.

It's my great honor this evening to present the Media Institute's American Horizon Award to the legendary documentary filmmaker Ken Burns.

I've been privileged to know Ken for more than 30 years.

As chairman of the Public Programs Committee of the National Endowment for the Humanities, I recommended the largest grant in the history of the Endowment to help Ken complete his masterpiece, "The Civil War."

We served together as executive producers of a documentary on the Medal of Honor, and I am fortunate to be a member of the board of the Better Angels Society, supporting the work of Ken Burns and other filmmakers following in his tradition.

And, of course, we share a deep commitment to public television, which has been home to all of Ken's films for more than 40 years.

It may well be that no one person has been more singularly responsible for the success of public television than the man we honor tonight.

For millions of people, Ken Burns *embodies* public television – in the quality of his productions, in the rigorous standards of scholarship that inform his work, and in the fearless devotion to the truth – the whole truth – in the stories of America he tells so well.

The breadth of those stories spans the Brooklyn Bridge and the Vietnam War, Mark Twain and Muhammad Ali, the Dust Bowl and the Gettysburg Address, Thomas Jefferson and Jackie Robinson, Jazz and Country Music, Baseball and Shakers and suffragettes.

This astonishing range – and there are so many more of his subjects to be celebrated – is all in the service of explaining America to Americans.

It is not always a pretty picture. For all of our abundant strengths and revolutionary ideals, we are not – and have never been – a perfect people.

But what Ken makes clear in each of his productions is that the real greatness and glory of our country lies not in our perfection but in our striving to be "more perfect" – to confront our flaws,

our shortcomings, our sins honestly and humbly, and to try to overcome them courageously and relentlessly.

This is the essence of his work, the substance of his surpassing contribution to our national life, grounded in the abiding confidence that, as scripture says, “ye shall know the *truth*, and the *truth* shall make you free.”

With such confidence, the American horizon will always be bright.

And it is altogether fitting and proper that we present this American Horizon Award tonight to the man who makes us want to be always better than we are: the incomparable Ken Burns.