

**Remarks by Judy Woodruff
Presenting The Media Institute's
2024 American Horizon Award
To Patrick Butler
October 29, 2024**

Thank you, Dick Wiley. I am so honored to be here tonight.

Thank you to The Media Institute for this wonderful dinner, and congratulations to all of tonight's awardees.

It's a thrill for me to introduce the winner of the American Horizon Award – someone I've known for more than four decades, going way back to the days when he was an aide to his fellow Tennessean, Republican Senator Howard Baker – including during those years when Baker served as Senate Majority Leader.

I was a reporter for NBC News, my fiancé at the time, Al Hunt, was covering Capitol Hill for the *Wall Street Journal*, and Baker and his staff were among the most respected and admired in the entire Congress. It was said if they worked for Senator Baker, they were honest, they were really smart, and they were patriots. That defined Pat Butler.

In fact, Pat had *already* proven how precocious he was: He started out as a newspaper reporter in Chattanooga, Tennessee, then moved to Washington to work for the House Judiciary Committee. From there, he became a speechwriter for President Gerald Ford.

Pat was “in the room where it happened” from his earliest days in Washington.

When Howard Baker was asked to become President Reagan's White House Chief of Staff, Pat was his special assistant. Moving to the private sector, it wasn't long before he was named vice president of the Times Mirror Company, then the corporate parent of the *Los Angeles Times*. Along the way, he helped to found a program that evolved into the Pew Research Center, which we know today to be one of the world's leading and the country's most respected public opinion research institutions.

He then spent almost two decades at The Washington Post Company as one of its top executives, where among other things he founded and led Newsweek Productions, which created award-winning documentary programming.

All of this before he became President and CEO of America's Public Television Stations, the organization that represents licensees operating 356 public television stations across the country and that serves more than 97 percent of the American people.

There, as its longest-serving leader until he stepped down earlier this year, Pat turned around an organization that was losing members, and ensured the long-term survival of public media, in part by emphasizing its role in public education. PBS President Paula Kerger paid Pat the

highest compliment: She told me Pat is one of the nation's "great citizens, someone who cares deeply about civic life and civic education."

Under Pat's leadership at APTS, federal and state funding for public broadcasting reached record levels. Congress enacted a new "Next Generation Warning System" – a program that enables public broadcasters to be reliable participants in safety communications at the federal, state, and local level.

APTS focused on what it called three pillars of local public service: In education, doing things like partnering with rural school districts in Nevada to reach the students they need to reach.

In public safety – for one example, partnering with the California Office of Emergency Services to provide early earthquake warnings to 40 million people.

And in civic leadership, working with the state legislature in Ohio, for instance, to bring transparency and accountability to the work of government.

There are more examples than I could possibly name – of moves by Pat that have won bipartisan support in Congress and among political leaders at the state and local level.

Pat had a vision for what public media could and should be: APTS's Board Chair Franz Joachim, who runs New Mexico PBS, says Pat "has been an innovator and a builder" ... that he "made it possible for hundreds of local public TV stations to make their case before Congress and state capitols in ways that appeal to the entire political spectrum."

Republican Congressman Jake Ellzey of Texas, one of the co-chairs of the Public Broadcasting Caucus in the House, said of Pat that "your leadership and vision have been instrumental in shaping the landscape of public broadcasting. You have left an indelible mark on our country."

Pat's successor as the president of America's Public Television Stations, Kate Riley, told me that Pat's leadership and mentorship have had a profound impact on her, have not only made a smooth transition possible, but will also continue to inspire her in the role for years to come.

And Pat has shared his energy and talent far beyond APTS: Here at The Media Institute, he has been instrumental along with Floyd Abrams in establishing The Madison Project, out of deep concern over threats to freedom of speech and freedom of the press, freedoms that our democracy depends on.

Now, just one week away from the election, at a time when we see social media in its best and worst forms, when misinformation and disinformation seem to be at a fever pitch, the work of The Madison Project couldn't be more important.

Pat also serves on the boards of the Howard Baker Center for Public Policy at the University of Tennessee, and the Better Angels Society, supporting the work of America's documentarian, Ken Burns. And he has been deeply involved in the D.C. College Access Program, which over the past 25 years has helped more than 30,000 D.C. public school graduates attend college.

The character and values Pat Butler embodies are exactly the values we look for in difficult times like this: honesty, hard work, love of country, and a vision of what the future should look like. It's his deep love of America that has driven Pat from his earliest days as a journalist, then a speechwriter for a president, then an aide to one of the nation's most inspirational political leaders. Now his passion for strengthening education and spreading information lifts us up, instead of tearing us down.

It's why I am so proud to present my friend Pat Butler with The Media Institute's American Horizon Award.