

Under Direct Attack: WXXI in Rochester and WNED and WBFO in Buffalo

WASHINGTON – Today Congresswoman Louise Slaughter, Ranking Member of the House Rules Committee, spoke on the House floor regarding the Republican effort to prohibit federal funding for National Public Radio.

In part she said:

“Our nation was built, and will be rebuilt, by the quiet efforts of millions of Americans across the country who will never make it on cable news and will never appear on national television. It's these very Americans whom NPR dedicates its resources to finding, to covering, and to sharing with the world.”

NPR is under attack in the name of fiscal responsibility and yet a preliminary report by the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office has determined that the legislation does absolutely nothing to reduce the deficit. Meanwhile its cost to each taxpayer in America: a mere 77 cents per year.

Slaughter's full remarks are below. [Click here](#) to view her speech.

Opponents of NPR today resorted to diversion tactics as they attempted to cripple the trusted news organization. On the House floor, a member from Tennessee suggested that Americans should be able to fund only the programs they like. Slaughter responded by saying

“While it may be nice to think that every taxpayer can pick and chose which programs they'd like to pay for, we know and everyone in America should know that democracy doesn't work that way. If I had my choice, I'd rather not write an \$8 billion check for the wars every month – the troops have my support but these wars do not. This diversion won't work on the American people. Today we ask the question should we continue to fund high-quality public broadcasting and the answer is yes.”

Slaughter today voted against **The Prohibition of Federal Funding of National Public Radio Act** noting that it would have a devastating impact on Western New York stations WXXI, WNED and WBFO.

Defunding NPR will hurt Western New York

- Under direct attack are Western New York’s NPR affiliates: WXXI in Rochester and WBFO and WNED in Buffalo.
- Rochester is the proud home of local affiliate WXXI
- WXXI is among a handful of locally owned media left in our community.
- The Corporation for Public Broadcasting has funded a Local Journalism Center in Upstate New York to delve into important regional issues. Five stations, led by WXXI in Rochester and including WNED in Buffalo, are doing in-depth reporting on efforts to reinvent our regional economy, to attract businesses and jobs. These are the kinds of stories often ignored by other media outlets.
- WXXI recently received a grant from the New York Humanities Council to produce an educational series on the causes of the financial crisis. The series was shared with other public radio stations throughout our state.
- In Rochester, we are fortunate to have a full-time classical music station, WXXI-FM. It is staffed by local announcers, who also cover arts and culture in our community, and promote music education in our schools. This station is important to a broad range of our community, which is also home to the Eastman School of Music, the number one music school in the nation, and the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra.
- Buffalo is the proud home of 2 NPR affiliates, WBFO and WNED
- More than 100,000 listeners tune in to WBFO 88.7fm, and they come from every political and religious persuasion. WNED boasts more than 90,000 Western New Yorkers who tune into the news and classical music service of their two public radio stations every week.
- WBFO is a 50-year proud founding member of NPR
- These funding restrictions will devastate WBFO, and their remote broadcasting signals to rural communities, such as Olean (home of St. Bonaventure Univ.) and Jamestown, NY, (home of The Chautauqua Institution). WBFO is the only NPR station in those counties and small towns. These restrictions will eviscerate WBFO’s ability to attract new audiences, develop stable local revenue bases and, most importantly, continue to produce more local programming including local/regional news.
- WNED AM 970 is a leading provider of news and information programming, mixing the best of NPR, PRI, the CBC, the BBC and more with local reporting and community forums. AM 970 regularly files reports for NPR from our region.
- Since the beginning of the economic downturn in 2008, WNED-AM and FM have each reduced their annual operating expenses by more than 3% over the past three fiscal years

despite rising costs. They have reduced fulltime staff while officers, senior managers and staff have taken pay cuts.

- WNED AM and FM serve audiences with local productions, which could also be at risk including regional classical music by the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, the Chautauqua Symphony Orchestra and other local groups.

- In addition to regular coverage of important events, the staff produces political debates and regular listener call-in programs with community leaders.

Slaughter's Remarks on the House Floor

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I thank my friend from Florida for yielding me the customary time.

Mr. Speaker, this bill yesterday was brought to the rules committee as an emergency meeting. Now, what would be emergency in the United States? The cost of the war? Damage of the war? Unemployment figures? The deficit? Home foreclosure? The tragedy in Japan? A no-fly zone over Libya? No, the emergency is that they want to destroy National Public Radio. This is the latest in a long string of misplaced priorities by the Republican party. It does nothing to fix the long-term fiscal condition, nor does it create a single job, in fact it will lose some. The Congressional Budget Office has determined that the legislation does absolutely zero to reduce the deficit.

When so many Americans want our Representatives create jobs to responsibly reduce the deficit, bring our sons and daughters home from the battlefields overseas, why are we wasting valuable floor time on an ideological battle that does nothing to achieve any of those goals?

Because the bill is a political stunt, it has been rushed through Congress under draconian rules. Violating their own promises of transparency, the Republican Majority held no hearings, no committee action of any kind, listened to no expert testimony, and provided no chance for the American people to weigh in. Just by saying it is an emergency apparently in many minds it does become one.

By not providing a true 72 hours, and the bill itself omitted the fact the bill would lay over to allow all members to review the legislation, they violated the spirit of transparency they promised the American people just five months ago. My colleagues on the other side must know they have to pass this legislation quickly before the American people, who have said to the rate of 69% that they do not want this to happen, before they are allowed to speak to tell them it's something they don't want to hear. For the American people, unlike the far right wing, they know that NPR is not an ideological news outlet and NPR radio bases their reporting in fact, really an anomaly today in the United States.

NPR doesn't try to blur the line between opinion fact and political agenda. Instead, it takes the time and spends the money to do in-depth reporting across the country and around the globe and go where no other news organization will go. Unlike commercial news outlets that are driven by the need to garner ratings and sell commercial advertising, National Public Radio concerns itself first and foremost with informing the nation on the complex issues that face our country.

In stark contrast to the bare-bones and often sensationalist reporting found everywhere, National Public Radio operates 17 foreign bureaus. In fact, it is one of the few news outlets to maintain a full-time bureau in Afghanistan, reporting from the frontlines of a largely forgotten war. It's also in the process of opening a bureau in Turkey to report firsthand on the democratic uprisings throughout the Middle East. In the United States its correspondents spread out across the United States from Texas to Oregon, telling the stories not covered by cable news pundits we see on TV every day. In rural America particularly, NPR can be the only best source of news. Defunding NPR will cut off this valuable source of news from the Southern Tier of Western New York to the plains of the Upper Midwest, and would put rural communities at a major disadvantage in the information age. It's because of their valuable unique reporting that Americans increasingly turn to NPR to learn about our ever-changing world.

In fact, despite the challenges facing the news media, a new report from the Pew Foundation has shown that NPR is strong and growing more popular every day. According to the report, NPR's audience has grown to 27.2 million weekly listeners. This is a 58% increase since the year 2000. In addition, the website is a premiere online news destination, garnering 15.7 million visitors a month, an increase of more than five million people over the course of a single year, and are those people really going to be angry.

I have been a proud supporter of NPR my whole life in public service. While serving in the New

York State Legislature, I fought for a launch of news programming on my local public radio station, WXXI. From that humble beginning over 30 years ago, I find myself standing on the floor of the House of Representatives fighting for NPR again today. 30 years later.

I stand here because, quite simply, facts matter. The nation wasn't built because we huffed and puffed and wished it was so. We didn't become global leaders by bloviating on 24-hour cable news. We aren't solving fundamental issues that face our nation by passing this politically driven legislation to appease the far right.

Our nation was built, and will be rebuilt, by the quiet efforts of millions of Americans across the country who will never make it on cable news and will never appear on national television. It's these very Americans whom NPR dedicates its resources to finding, to covering, and to sharing with the world. Their stories aren't simple. Their efforts don't sell advertising space, but their stories matter. NPR's work to find the stories that matter is the in-depth, intelligent report that I fight for today.

No matter what I say, some will still believe that NPR isn't worth funding because they want it to be true. Some will find it in their interest to scare Americans into believing in an NPR strawman. While others take comfort in watching the strawman fall.

But deep in our hearts, all of us know that governing through fear and divisive legislation is not a responsible way to move this country forward. It is certainly no replacement for creating jobs. With millions of Americans, unemployed, struggling to live we can't waste another minute on the House floor without debating a bill that will put some Americans back to work. We should not waste another minute ignoring the needs of millions of Americans while playing cheap political games.

Yesterday I asked why only National Public Radio? Why not television? I think I know the answer to that. A few years ago that was tried. The House of Representatives actually tried to kill Big Bird, destroy Elmo, get rid of Bert and Ernie, but it didn't work. And I think they didn't want to try that one yet again.

The backers of this bill said to me yesterday, the taxpayers shouldn't have to fund with their hard-earned money what they don't believe in. Well, that's an interesting theory but

democracies don't operate that way. If they could, my husband and I, and 2/3 of the people in America, would gladly be excused from paying the \$8 billion a month that we pay for a war which we profoundly do not believe in. We simply must stop this nonsense, it makes us look ridiculous in the eyes of the world. National Public Radio is something you could turn off if you don't want to hear it. But for the millions of Americans who depend on it, this just cannot be done.

For this reason I urge my colleagues to vote 'no' on the rule, and 'no' on the underlying bill, and I reserve the balance of my time