

## June 23, 2005 - Rep. Slaughter Leads Rules Debate on Funding of Public Broadcasting

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Ranking Member Delivers Stinging Rebuke of GOP Attempts to Kill Public Broadcasting

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-28), Ranking Member of the House Committee on Rules, today led debate on the rule concerning the Labor, Health and Human Services Appropriations Bill. Her opening remarks were a stinging repudiation of the Republican Majority's attempt to eliminate funding for public broadcasting. Rep. Slaughter is a co-chair of the Congressional Arts Caucus and the Future of American Media Caucus.

From Rep. Slaughter's Remarks:

"Mr. Tomlinson also felt that prominent PBS programs, such "NOW with Bill Moyers," were liberal in orientation.

He therefore did the honorable thing... and hired several ombudsmen to secretly spy on the programs and report on their activities.

And just last week, we learned that in 2004, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting...now firmly under partisan Republican leadership... gave two Republican lobbyists \$15,000, and then didn't tell anybody they had done so.

Is this what we have come to in America? Spying on the network that brought us Sesame Street, the Electric Company and Capitan Kangaroo?

And if so, what's next? Satellite Surveillance at the Antiques Road Show? Wire taps in Oscar's trash can?"

Rep. Slaughter's Remarks In Full:

"Today, we rededicate a part of the airwaves - which belong to all the people - and we dedicate them for the enlightenment of all the people."

President Lyndon Johnson spoke those words at the White House Ceremony, which marked the official creation of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting in 1967.

Much has changed in the 37 years since then.

But in the realm of television, M. Speaker, the PBS programming that reaches millions of families every day has been the only constant.

PBS programming is, first and foremost, about children.

At a time when so many television networks are wary of producing educational programming because it won't be cost-effective as they define it...PBS stands alone.

They are proud to present wonderful programs that teach children how to read, how to share and to be tolerant of others.

But PBS isn't just for children. It is for minds of all ages that seek to question and learn about our world.

PBS has the best documentaries, the best programs about American history and about the new scientific discoveries which are constantly changing our world.

There is a reason that Peggy Noonan of the Wall Street Journal, an unabashed conservative, has written that, "At its best, at its most thoughtful and intellectually honest and curious, PBS does the kind of work that no other network in America does or will do."

Ms. Noonan wrote this because it's true.

And what is most important, PBS programming is free to all.

Big Bird reaches children everywhere in America, regardless of whether they are in urban or rural areas, regardless of their economic class, or whether or not their parents can afford 500 channels of cable.

But the Majority Leadership is speaking out against Big Bird here today, and other great children's programming.

They are speaking out against quality news and arts and entertainment programming that has no other place to call home on television today.

The Labor HHS Appropriations Bill we will consider today offers cuts of more than \$100 million dollars from Corporation for Public Broadcasting funding.

All told, this bill imposes a staggering 42% cut in funding for PBS this year.

Why would the Congress do this?

There is only one reason, M. Speaker, and that reason is that the Leadership of this body doesn't like PBS.

In fact, Republicans have been after PBS for years: Ronald Reagan tried to slash CPB funding. So did Newt Gingrich. And now, conservatives have redoubled their efforts.

They claim PBS is the lap dog of the left. But the notion that PBS is partisan runs against the very grain of what PBS is, and what the corporation for public broadcasting was designed to accomplish.

President Johnson stated that CPB was intended to "be carefully guarded from Government and party control. It will be free, and it will be independent--and it will belong to all of our people."

CPB and PBS shouldn't, therefore, be either liberal or conservative. It should instead be honest and objective. And it always has been.

The real problem is with our friends on the far right, who seem to confuse intellectually honest and independent programming with so-called liberal bias, simply because those programs aren't espousing their own narrow conservative world view at all times.

Most Americans, no matter their political persuasion, understand the benefit of hearing views from different perspectives.

They like the idea of truly independent, stimulating public programming.

They understand that Big Bird can't be replaced by 500 channels of cable.

That's why Roper polls taken in 2004 and 2005 found that the people of our country thought that spending money on PBS was the second best use of their tax dollars, right behind funding our military.

But the independence of PBS and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting is somehow a threat to this Republican Leadership.

Why else would Kenneth Tomlinson, the new Republican chairman of CPB, attempt to appoint Patricia Harrison as the new head of the corporation for public broadcasting?

Ms. Harrison is a strange choice for the leader of a broadcasting corporation, seeing as how she has never before worked in broadcasting.

On the other hand, she was at one time the co-chair of the Republican National Committee, and so perhaps her qualifications for the position speak for themselves.

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Are the American people going to allow these same individuals who have actively manipulated the media, who have allowed political operatives to pose as journalists in the White House, who have paid commentators and pundits to falsely pose as journalists in order to manipulate public opinion... Are we going to allow them to tell us that now, Public Broadcasting is the enemy?

I certainly hope and pray not.

If there is any doubt that this is their true intention, my fellow Americans need to look no further than this very Labor HHS bill that was approved in subcommittee, where the Republican leadership successfully eliminated funding for PBS and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

As with so many other things this Congress, they were shamed by the American people into reversing course. But, I imagine the right wing assault on PBS will continue.

President Johnson feared that if placed "in weak or even in irresponsible hands," public television "could generate controversy without understanding; it could mislead as well as teach; it could appeal to passions rather than to reason."

Let us not succumb to the misguided partisan passions of this leadership, which threaten to destroy this cherished American institution. Let us preserve public networks across our country,

M. Speaker, Sesame Street teaches children to be fair and just. We should expect no less from the members of this Congress.