



On Hypocrisy, Left and Right

One of the things that made William F. Buckley, Jr. so much fun to read in the days before National Review became a house organ for Republican propaganda was that Buckley and others in his large and fun-loving orbit took such obvious, unrestrained delight in poking fun at liberal icons without the phony sentimentalism and sham decorum that prevented most writers from saying anything that would cause more respectable establishment commentators to say "Tsk tsk." When Eleanor Roosevelt died, for example, Buckley wrote in his syndicated column: "Following Mrs. Roosevelt in search of an irrationality was like following a lighted fuse in search of an explosion." One never had to wait very long.



One might update and expand that thought. Following Democrats or Republicans in search of an hypocrisy is like waiting for the light of day at, say, five or six in the morning. The wait is not long and will soon provide more than enough illumination. Case in point: the furor over the recent firing of Juan Williams, who admitted while on "Buffalo" Bill O'Reilly's program on Fox News that he feels a certain anxiety when he is on a plane with people in "Muslim garb."

Williams was no doubt discharged from his job with National Public Radio for expressing such a impolitic thought, though NPR may have been uncomfortable merely at seeing one of its own with O'Reilly on the cable channel with the overriding mission of feeding red meat to the lions and tigers in conservative cages. The firing touched off such indignation on the political Right that you might have thought Harry Truman had returned from the dead and fired Doug MacArthur all over again. I wonder, though, if these people were not silent when the Bush administration sacked economic advisor Lawrence Lindsey for saying the Iraq War would cost \$100 to \$200 billion. They thought the estimate unacceptably high, but of course we now know that the Iraq War has cost some multiple of even the \$200 billion estimate. Called out for excessive truth telling.

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Now Republicans are making noises about defunding the Public Broadcasting Corporation. Republicans enjoy chest-pounding and prancing about while shadow boxing. When the bell sounds and the fight begins, look for them to retreat to their corner and renege on any cost-cutting measures that would offend a constituency as large and influential as Big Bird's. Think of the children, for heaven's sake!

Is it 1994, going on 1995 again? Remember the Contract With America, the tsunami, the Republican takeover of both houses of Congress? There was talk then of eliminating Public Broadcasting, but guess what. Public Broadcasting, like the poor, we have always with us. Republican majorities are less durable. And deservedly so. Why should it take the firing of Juan Williams or anyone else to awaken conservatives to the redundancy, at best, of public broadcasting? It is one budget cut and one agency



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on November 15, 2010

elimination that should be a no-brainer. I admit to being a listener of NPR and there are some programs, like *Weekend Edition*, that are informative and others like *A Prairie Home Companion*, that are reminiscent of radio before radio went brain dead for about 60 years and counting. But it is a luxury we can no longer afford if we are ever going to get serious about budget cutting and deficit reduction. And despite the howls of protest that will surely come from the friends of *Sesame Street's* Big Bird and NPR's *Car Talk*, it will be a relatively painless subtraction from the myriad demands on the public treasury. No one will miss a meal or freeze in the dark because federal funding of the Public Broadcasting System and National Public Radio has been terminated. Sure, a few journalists and program managers may be temporarily out of work, but let them compete for jobs in the private sector. Or let all the sponsors who get named as altruistic supporters of the stations and networks that pretend not to allow advertising dig a little deeper into their corporate pockets and make up for the lost federal funds. Or more listeners can dig into their wallets and pitch in. My guess is that most of the stations that now provide public broadcasting will not go out of business. Reruns of *The Lawrence Welk Show* will live on, as will programs like *Frontline*, the Ken Burns documentaries and *The News Hour* with Jim Lehrer.

And what about the National Endowment of the Arts? And the National Endowment for the Humanities and the national endowment for the endowments? What about all the stuff that is supposed to improve the quality of our lives, according to government guidelines and Washington's taste? Will that taste have to manifest itself in depravity once again before Republicans start thinking about eliminating the taxpayer funding of the culture industry? Should productions of Shakespeare's plays and Mozart's symphonies be immune from the budget cutters who will be stirred to action only by such degradations as a crucifix immersed in a jar of urine or a Madonna decorated with buffalo dung or homosexuals with bullwhips?

Stop the bleeding of the taxpayers by the special pleading for the arts. Then, if the Republicans can clear that small hurdle, perhaps they can "screw their courage to the sticking place" and get down to some serious budget-cutting — at HUD, at the Department of Education, the Department of Energy, the Office of Child Development, the National Aviation and Space Agency, the foundation for funding foundations and, who knows? Maybe even the Department of Defense, i.e. the Pentagon. Maybe that would happen in the real world. But this is not the real world. It's government.



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