



Corporation for Public Broadcasting: Trim, or Uproot?

When Rep. Doug Lamborn (R-Colo.) introduced a bill in the 111th Congress to defund National Public Radio (NPR), two things were working against him: the overwhelming collectivist mindset of that Congress itself, and the fact that NPR hadn't yet embarrassed itself sufficiently to build public opinion against the agency. In light of NPR's series of gaffes since then, as well as the more conservative tone of the new 112th Congress, Lamborn has decided to try again.



He observed:

We're running annual deficits of over a trillion dollars. With 500 cable TV channels, Internet on peoples' cell phones, satellite radio, we have so many sources of media that we don't need a government-subsidized source of media.

Before the Juan Williams issue came up, it really wasn't on a lot of people's radar screens. People said, "Oh, you can't be against Big Bird."

If Lamborn is going to make any headway at all, he is going to have to learn that NPR is a hydra-headed monster which can't be defunded instantly or directly. As Byron York [points out](#), there isn't any one single congressional appropriation that is labeled "Funds for NPR." Instead, federal money first goes from the taxpayers' pockets to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which received \$422 million in 2010. About \$90 million of that went to public radio. CPB [gave part](#) of that \$90 million to NPR, and part of it to local public radio stations, which then turned around and used that money to purchase NPR programming.

Lamborn is having trouble finding out exactly how much taxpayer money goes where. He explained:

The funding is so convoluted and opaque...We asked the Congressional Research Service to look at [their] books, and a senior analyst got back to us and said *it was like a spaghetti bowl* — those were his exact words.

False assumptions, constitutional abrogations, and collectivist ideology have permeated the CPB from the start. The CPB was created by the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, and signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson. In his self-congratulatory remarks at the signing of the bill, Johnson clearly explained the purposes and expectations of the agency about to be created:

Today our problem is not making miracles, but managing miracles. We might well ponder a different question: What hath man wrought, and how will man use his inventions?

Where do these technological "miracles" to which Johnson alluded come from? They come from the operation of the free market where entrepreneurs with risk capital and an idea attempt to provide a service that is needed and useful to customers willing to pay for it.

But Johnson says "our problem...is managing [those] miracles." From an Austrian school perspective,



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the free market will “manage” those miracles very nicely. In fact, the only thing government can do is get in the way of letting the market decide how such technologies can best be used to serve the consumer.

The essential question, however, is where does the federal government even get the power to allow it to “manage” those miracles, even if it could? Under Article I, Section 8, only 18 specifically enumerated powers are given to the federal government, with the rest reserved to the states or to the people. Interesting to note, Johnson didn’t mention the Constitution once in his lengthy remarks. He went on:

While we work every day to produce new goods and to create new wealth, we want most of all to enrich man’s spirit. That is the purpose of this act. It will give a wider and, I think, stronger voice to educational radio and television by providing new funds for broadcast facilities.

Where does the Constitution say anything about “enriching man’s spirit?” Isn’t that up to each individual, pursuing his or her own definition of happiness? What if the CPB decides to take taxpayer money (which reduces the taxpayer’s ability to pursue his own happiness) and use it to provide “enrichment” that he isn’t interested in? Is not the taxpayer then the slave to the promotion of ideas in which he has little if any interest? Again, Johnson commented:

Finally - and most important - it builds a new institution: the Corporation for Public Broadcasting...which will assist stations and producers who aim for the best in broadcasting good music, in broadcasting exciting plays, and in broadcasting reports on the whole fascinating range of human activity. It will try to prove that what educates can also be exciting.

What monstrous hubris is this? Who determines “the best” in music, in plays, in reports? Under the limits placed on government by the Constitution, individual citizens enjoying their own individual natural rights are then free to determine “the best” for them, not some mythical, magical agency of righteousness which is corrupt at its core, taking from some by force and giving to others.

To put the capper on the discussion, Johnson then applauded those who worked so hard to get the legislation passed, and named two of the most highly regarded collectivists of the time to the board: Dr. Milton Eisenhower and Dr. James Killian. Johnson commented: “Dr. Eisenhower, as you will remember, was chairman of the first citizens committee which sought allocation of airwaves for educational purposes.”

In other words, what the free market was ready and able to use according to demand, was co-opted by the government “in the name of the people” to be allocated by the likes of Eisenhower.

President Johnson continued: “Dr. Killian served as chairman of the Carnegie Commission which proposed the act that we are signing today.”

The Carnegie Commission was founded and funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, which most serious students of recent political history will recognize as [part of what has been termed “the Anglo-American establishment.”](#)

Rep. Lamborn’s efforts at unraveling the “bowl of spaghetti” and trimming the hedges of this monster are doomed to failure. The permanent solution for freedom is to pull it out by the roots: abolishing the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, and thus eliminating its funding altogether. By removing the “bowl of spaghetti” altogether, individual citizens and taxpayers will then be able to enjoy the freedom to select their own “highest and best use” of their resources rather than be spoon-fed government-selected programming designed to “enrich” their “spirits.”





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