

*CNN News Central*

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2:29:41 p.m. [TEASE]

11 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: PBS; NPR; Funding Fight]

BRIANNA KEILAR: Plus, the Senate could vote to zero out the federal funding for PBS and NPR. And ahead, we'll speak to the CEO of PBS about what this could mean for communities across the country.

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2:36:50 p.m.

5 minutes and 43 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Developing Story; PBS and NPR Fight to Save Federal Funding]

BORIS SANCHEZ: The Trump administration is also looking to cut more than \$1 billion from public media. Congress is expected to vote on the proposal to formalize a slew of DOGE cuts in what's known as a rescission request by the end of the week. If approved, PBS and NPR stations could lose federal funding that have kept them on the air for decades. The Senate voted by a razor-thin margin late Tuesday to advance debate on the package with notably several Republican senators joining with Democrats in warning that zeroing out federal support could turn many communities into news deserts. Let's get some perspective from the President and CEO of PBS, Paula Kerger. Paula, thank you so much for sharing part of your afternoon with us. In your view, what would be the immediate impact of these cuts?

PAULA KERGER: Yeah, thank you, Boris. I appreciate the opportunity to be with you this afternoon. Actually, as we speak, the Senate has started voting on this bill. Actually, they're voting on some amendments that are being issued right now and these are funds that had already been appropriated for public broadcasting for this coming fiscal year and next fiscal year, so funds that would be arriving in October and 70 percent of the money that comes from the federal government to support public broadcasting goes directly to support stations and for some stations in this country, that percentage of their funding is 10 or 15 percent. There are other stations that the percentage of funding they receive is closer to 40 or 50 percent. Many of these are small stations in rural parts of the country, and for them, this very much is an existential moment as they contemplate cuts of that scale that would happen almost overnight.

SANCHEZ: I do wonder what you would say to lawmakers who make the argument that, in the information age, with all sorts of social media platforms and streaming and any kind of information at the tip of your fingers, that PBS is expendable. What is your counter argument?

KERGER: Yeah, I mean, we were created five decades ago with the idea that the commercial marketplace was going to be able to do quite a lot in meeting the needs of the public, but there

were big areas that were in the public interest that would not be taken up by commercial media. And that is still the case today. If you look at children's programming. I was just listening to the last piece and we received money out of the Department of Education that was also cut overnight, and that not only impacted funds that went into the creation of new kids programs and the research to make sure that those programs are not just fun and entertaining to watch, but also that children are gaining the curriculum that is embedded in those programs. These programs are geared for more than half the children in this country that don't aren't enrolled in pre-K. And as part of that project, we do a lot of summer camps. All of those were canceled because of the money that that was lost. There are — there are big market failures in terms of educational children's content. There are many services that are stations that provide, including a lot of local content, some in rural parts of the country do farm reports. Many of these stations serve populations that do not get broadband and so, for them, broadcast television is important. And then finally, I would say that part of what public television, public radio does in this country that is not as seen is all of the work we do around public safety. So, not only do we broadcast alerts when storms are coming, but we use our broadcast infrastructure also to deliver content to first responders and broadcast infrastructure is important because if you've been in an emergency, you know that cell phones and cellular service often becomes overwhelmed by volume, and it's the broadcast infrastructure that allows us to send out messages one to many. All of that would be impacted by these cuts.

SANCHEZ: Those are significant points. I do want to zero in on something that you mentioned specifically about curriculum that's geared to children, because part of the argument from the administration is that public broadcasting has become politically biased. They describe it as radical woke propaganda disguised as news. How do you respond to that? And that being part of the reasoning for PBS and other public media no longer deserving taxpayer support?

KERGER: I don't think that *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* is a — is a biased program. It teaches children basic skills around letters and numbers and when you look at the — the breadth of programming that we produce, we are very much committed to serving all of America. The news programming that we do represents about 10 percent of our — of our broadcast schedule, and that includes the News Hour, of which I'm very proud of the — of the excellence of the journalism of that series. So, I would push back. I always ask [SIGNAL CUTS OUT] is biased one way or another. I asked them for examples. People often struggle to come up with examples of what really they're talking about. So I — I — we're always interested, obviously, in making sure that we're serving a multiplicity of viewpoints. You know, Bill Buckley made his home on public broadcasting with a series called *Firing Line*, which continues today with Margaret Hoover. We are interested in having different perspectives that we bring forward. But, when I look at the range of our programming on public broadcasting, I can't — I can't make any sense of an argument that we are somehow biased in any way.

SANCHEZ: Paula Kerger, we have to leave the conversation there. Very much appreciate you sharing your point of view.

KERGER: Thank you very much for having me.

SANCHEZ: Of course.