

CNN's *The Situation Room*

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10:36:43 a.m. [TEASE]

9 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: NPR CEO on Funding]

PAMELA BROWN: And just ahead, Wolf, PBS and NPR stations could soon lose the federal funding that's helped keep them on the air for decades. We're going to speak to the head of NPR up next.

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10:41:16 a.m.

5 minutes and 7 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: New This Morning; NPR, PBS Stations Face Vote That Could Drastically Slash Funding]

WOLF BLITZER: Right now, NPR faces a fight for survival. This week, the Senate votes on funding cuts that would deny millions of dollars to the public broadcaster, as well as PBS. The White House argues that NPR and PBS journalists are too biased and too woke. One Republican senator says, even if that's true, it's not a reason to tear them down.

SENATOR LISA MURKOWSKI (R-AK): When it comes to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, my colleagues know I've been a strong supporter. I will continue to be a strong supporter. Where if you don't like what's going on within NPR. NPR. You think that there's too much bias there, we can address that. We can address that. But you don't need to gut the entire Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: New This Morning; NPR CEO on Broadcast's Right to Stay Funded]

BROWN: Katherine Maher joins us live in *The Situation Room*. She is the CEO of NPR. Katherine, thank you so much for coming on. So, as we know, NPR stations across the country have been lobbying lawmakers. Do you see any signs of those efforts working?

KATHERINE MAHER: I think that the fact that we are having this conversation right now, and the fact that the Vice President had to come down to the floor of the Senate last night to break two ties to move this bill forward, to debate today is an indication that people are listening, absolutely. This bill threatens the coverage of public — public media coverage for 13 million Americans and we have heard from folks from Alaska to Nebraska, Alabama to Maine about how concerned they are about what might be to come.

BLITZER: As you know, 50 Republican senators voted with the Vice President. He's the Vice

President, the President of the Senate, so he can break a tie, voted to advance the bill, the final bill, as we've been noting, takes place later today. Are there any specific senators you're focusing on just ahead of that vote?

MAHER: Well, in fairness, we're talking to any senators that will listen, of course, because we have stations in every state in the country, 246 member stations, as well as hundreds of music stations and public television stations as well. But I think that the place where we're seeing the most traction is senators who represent communities where there are large rural communities, large tribal communities, in particular in places like Alaska, where there just isn't a lot of other options. Broadband service is not universal, and heck, even cell phone service is not universal. There's a real understanding of the need there as well as for emergency alerting, in which public media plays an extraordinarily important role.

BROWN: What do you say to Republicans who argue the funding is a waste of taxpayer dollars and consider your outlet to be a biased propaganda machine?

MAHER: Well, I would take those two things apart. Number one, 70 percent of all funding goes directly to local stations. NPR receives one to two percent of national funding on an annual basis. We're talking \$3 million, \$5 million. It's not much. I think, unfortunately, this is cutting off their constituents noses to spite his face. It doesn't help anyone to take this funding away. As far as the accusations that we're biased, I would stand up and say, please show me a story that concerns you, because we want to know and we want to bring that conversation back to our newsroom. We believe that as a public broadcaster, we do have an obligation to serve all Americans, and we need to make sure that our coverage reflects the interests and perspective and we hear from Americans across the political spectrum. That's important to us, and we want to make sure we live up to that.

BLITZER: Katherine, explain to us what happens if — to the local stations all around the country if these cuts pass.

MAHER: I mean, I think that we could see as many as 80 stations shutter. We saw a report from Senator Cantwell's office on the Commerce Committee that indicated that those are the numbers that they are looking at. These are stations that receive more than 50 percent of their funding from the federal government. Again, tribal stations, rural stations, primarily. Beyond that, you'd see a — the stations would probably start by letting go of local journalists. We already know that there's a crisis in local news in this country. 20 percent of Americans live in a place without local news other than public media. And then I think the next thing to go would be universal coverage. Right now, public broadcasting covers 99.7 percent of the country, places that commercial broadcasters just won't go or can't go because it's too expensive to maintain that infrastructure. You'd start to see that coverage degrade as well, and you'd be punching holes in a national infrastructure map that has served this nation for more than half a century.

BLITZER: What about the [NPR] stations in the bigger cities like Washington or Chicago or New York?

MAHER: Well, it's important to support those stations, too. They are independent, local journalism and at a time where we have excellent national journalism coverage. We know that. We're sitting here on one of those broadcast networks. We have excellent national newspapers, but we don't necessarily have really strong local coverage. I know this as a resident of the city of Washington, D.C. It's hard to find the person that is covering my transit map changes. Stations like WAMU here in D.C., they do that kind of work. New York? It's the same. You see that across cities in the nation, especially mid-sized cities like Kansas City Tallahassee, these are stations that fill a critical gap that don't otherwise exist.

BLITZER: Yeah. I love NPR. I — before I joined CNN, I was a regular guest on some of the NPR shows.

MAHER: We love to hear. Absolutely.

BLITZER: It's a subject close to my heart.

MAHER: Thank you.

BLITZER: Thank you very much for joining us.

MAHER: Thank you.

BROWN: Thank you so much.