



SPECIAL REPORT

AN IN-DEPTH STUDY, ANALYSIS OR REVIEW EXPLORING THE MEDIA

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No Fairness Doctrine for PBS

How Taxpayer-Funded Broadcasting Is “Surging” Left Under Democrats

The Democratic takeover of Congress in 2007 quickly made one definitive change in the national media infrastructure. For the first time since Newt Gingrich became speaker in 1995, America’s public broadcasting system didn’t have a skeptical majority party that might sporadically ask questions about PBS using the taxpayer-funded airwaves for overt liberal activism. In previous years with Democratic control of Congress, PBS has played a more activist role within the media, dragging the rest of the national media further to the left and spurring more aggression and ill will against conservative and Republican leaders. Just as 2007 has been a year for a “surge” of troops in Iraq, it’s also been a year of “surging” activism within PBS.

At the same time, Democratic congressional leaders now in the majority have been entertaining the idea of reviving a federal “Fairness Doctrine” which would require private broadcasters to comply with notions of balancing out each station’s daily schedule of news, talk, and public-affairs programming. These same Democrats have been highly offended at the idea that anyone outside or inside taxpayer-funded broadcasting would monitor PBS content for fairness or balance.

Despite taking federal money from all taxpayers, PBS stations across America often air programs and documentaries that tilt decidedly to the left. In funding filmmakers to go out and make one-sided left-wing films and talk programs, public broadcasting subsidies serve, in effect, as ideological pork-barrel spending. While conservatives like Frank Gaffney have seen their films stripped from the national PBS schedule due to his activist “day job,” liberal activism is not eschewed at PBS, but encouraged. In this analysis, the Media Research Center outlines three trends that herald an increasing misuse of public television against American conservatives:

- **Bill Moyers and His Impeach-Bush Bandwagon.** Partisanship was redefined as statesmanship when the latest reincarnation of the PBS program *Bill Moyers Journal* devoted an hour of supportive air time on July 13 to two guests who agreed that President Bush and Vice President Cheney urgently need to be impeached. Even PBS Ombudsman

Michael Getler found the show wasn't remotely balanced in its zeal to abort the Bush presidency, reporting "there was almost a complete absence of balance."

■ **Tavis Smiley Campaigns Against the GOP.** PBS authorized Tavis Smiley, who hosts a nightly national talk show out of Los Angeles PBS station KCET, to organize two presidential debates at black colleges in 2007. The Democratic debate in June was overtly friendly and barely made a national ripple. But in September, Smiley grew furious when four Republican front-runners decided to skip the GOP debate right before the third-quarter campaign fundraising deadline at the end of the month. He skewered the candidates before, after, and during the debate on PBS, and also took his anti-GOP outrage to other TV networks. On his PBS show, he asked if the no-show Republican candidates "will pay" and suggested the empty podiums he set up to dramatize their absence will be props in Democratic campaign ads in 2008.

■ **The "Independent" Television Service.** ITVS, a left-wing filmmakers' collective with its headquarters located in Nancy Pelosi's San Francisco district, draws about \$15 million a year from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting to make films supporting their statement of values that "a civilized society seeks economic and social justice." Taxpayers have funded a long list of films knocking the Bush administration's policies, celebrating leftist agitators, and promoting "progressive" sexual politics. Nurturing a new generation of liberal filmmakers, and not conservative filmmakers, is the mission of ITVS.

The report concludes with some simple recommendations for public broadcasting executives. Since public television is supported by taxpayers of all political stripes, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting ought to live up to its mandate to monitor content for objectivity and fairness. Calling for impeachment of Republican presidents with one-sided panels doesn't help make PBS look fair. If public broadcasters want to moderate presidential debates, its moderators ought to display fairness and balance toward both political parties. If the system funds liberal filmmakers, it ought to fund conservative filmmakers as well, and not just serve as a political organizing tool for one side. The nation's PBS stations should reflect the diversity of its whole audience.

No Fairness Doctrine for PBS

How Taxpayer-Funded Broadcasting Is “Surging” Left Under Democrats

By TIM GRAHAM
MRC DIRECTOR OF MEDIA ANALYSIS

The Democratic takeover of Congress in 2007 quickly made one definitive change in the national media infrastructure. For the first time since Newt Gingrich became speaker in 1995, America’s public broadcasting system didn’t have a skeptical majority party that might sporadically ask questions about PBS using the taxpayer-funded airwaves for overt liberal activism. In previous years with Democratic control of Congress, PBS has played a more activist role within the media, dragging the rest of the national media further to the left and spurring more aggression and ill will against conservative and Republican leaders. Just as 2007 has been a year of a “surge” of troops in Iraq, it’s also been a year of “surging” activism within PBS.

At the same time, Democratic congressional leaders now in the majority have been entertaining the idea of reviving a federal “Fairness Doctrine” which would require private broadcasters to comply with notions of balancing out each station’s daily schedule of news, talk, and public-affairs programming. These same Democrats have been highly offended at the idea that anyone outside or inside taxpayer-funded broadcasting would monitor PBS content for fairness or balance.

If the federal government were going to find a starting place for monitoring the content of broadcasting for fairness and balance, wouldn’t the logical starting place be the television and radio stations that are subsidized by the taxpayers?

Introduction: ‘Activists’ Inappropriate for PBS, If They’re Conservative

The establishment of a national, taxpayer-funded public broadcasting system was codified by Congress in the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967. Deep in the authorizing language was an expression of concern that the emerging system should strive for “objectivity and balance in all programming of a controversial nature.” The act created a

Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) to be the primary funder and overseer, and the agency that's asked to insure the public broadcasting bureaucracy lives up to that statutory language on the air. In actual practice, the Corporation's board of directors and staff have almost never tried to insure objectivity or balance. Instead, the CPB usually makes statements in an oppositional, anti-populist lingo of creating a "heat shield," protecting the elitist manufacturers of PBS content from the scrutiny of Congress or the people it represents.

The only CPB board chairman who has ever attempted to balance the scales of PBS content was Kenneth Tomlinson, who was widely condemned by liberal media outlets and TV writers for organizing two right-leaning half-hour shows (*Tucker Carlson Unfiltered* and *The Journal Editorial Report*, a roundtable show with the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page staff) intended for the Friday night PBS schedule. They premiered in 2004 and were removed from the PBS air in 2005.

The liberal media and turf-conscious liberal communications activists like Common Cause and Free Press went even more aggressively after Tomlinson when they discovered he had hired conservative analyst Fred Mann to conduct a behind-the-scenes content analysis of PBS and NPR programs. Ironically, Tomlinson was subjected to an Inspector General's probe and reams of bad press for attempting to do secretly what the CPB was originally ordered by Congress to perform.

The partisan nature of PBS came to a head again this year, when Frank Gaffney's documentary *Islam vs. Islamists: Voices From the Muslim Center* was stripped out of the national broadcast of a series of films called "America at a Crossroads." Gaffney and his team sought to tell the story of "courageous anti-Islamist Muslims" in the West resisting radical, totalitarian Islam and how they are "being ostracized, bankrupted, intimidated and, in some cases, threatened with death."

The "Crossroads" series was originally announced by the CPB in early 2004 (during Tomlinson's era) with an eye on airing the shows on the fifth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. Inside the public broadcasting system, entrenched liberals denounced the series for its attempt to balance out the usual liberal suspects at PBS with new (less liberal)

Fairness? A Conservative 'Jihad'

"This is one of a series of moves that can only be termed a jihad against substantive journalism by the CPB, the nongovernmental agency that provides federal funds to public broadcasting. This jihad is directed by CPB chairman Kenneth Tomlinson, but he has willing and witless allies....All the power in Washington right now is in the hands of Republicans. So speaking truth to power may appear to the unenlightened to be exhibiting bias. It is not. NPR is a beacon of light in very murky political times. We cannot let that beacon be dimmed."

– Celia Wexler on the **Common Cause** blog, reacting to reports CPB was considering a plan to monitor NPR news coverage of the Middle East, May 16, 2005.

filmmakers. Senior executives equated journalism with liberalism, and the idea of fairness and balance with questionable reporting standards. (See box.)

Counter-Balance? Not Journalism

"We've worked hard over the years to articulate what we mean by journalism standards," said a senior executive who requested anonymity. "Nowhere does it say that if we air something questionable, then we better create a different program that counterbalances it. That's not journalism."

– From a story by Jeremy Egner in the public broadcasting insider newspaper *Current*, July 11, 2005.

But once Tomlinson retired from the CPB board, the permanent liberal bureaucracy kicked into gear. The series was shipped to PBS D.C. superstation WETA. They promptly expressed horror that anyone would allow Gaffney anywhere near a PBS production because of his "day job" with his conservative advocacy group, the Center for Security Policy. They wanted Gaffney fired as an executive producer. When that didn't happen, they censored the film, refusing to air it. It was later handed over to Oregon Public Broadcasting, for scatter-shot airings on late nights and weekends, a much lower-profile airing than what the other "Crossroads" films received. In a unique arrangement, segments from the Gaffney team's interviews aired on the Fox News Channel on June 21, 2007 (a Saturday night). The original film that was edited for PBS aired on FNC on Saturday, October 20.

Gaffney explained the PBS resistance to the *Weekly Standard*: "[W]e started hearing that PBS was telling CPB that they would never air a film that I was associated with....We began hearing that there was an argument being made by PBS that if I were associated with the film in a senior role – they would allow me to be an adviser but I couldn't be, as I am, a co-executive producer – because of my day job" with the Center for Security Policy, then the program could not run. "There are guidelines that PBS adheres to, evidently selectively shall we say, that prohibit people who have association with advocacy organizations from being involved in content decisions on their airwaves."

This is a clear double standard. Exhibit A is Bill Moyers, a long-time omnipresence on the PBS airwaves. Even as he constantly produces PBS programming, he's held an activist "day job" as well, as president of the leftist Schumann Center for Media and Democracy, a very ideological philanthropy that funds a long list of environmental groups, not to mention a long list of leftist magazines and leftist media-watchdog groups. No one inside PBS has ever denied Moyers a program over that arrangement.

But there are many other exhibits. NPR's current FBI correspondent, Dina Temple-Raston, has a new book out – co-authored by Anthony Romero, the executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union. The title is *In Defense of Our America: The Fight for Civil Liberties in the Age of Terror*, and it was touted for providing a "a look at the dangerous

erosion of the Bill of Rights in the age of terror” (which coincides with the age of Bush). Despite many liberal newspapers pursuing investigations of partisanship by Tomlinson, a search of the Nexis news-data retrieval system’s newspaper database finds no other mention of the conflict of interest inherent in the ACLU leader-NPR reporter book arrangement besides a story by Howard Kurtz in the *Washington Post*.

The notion that “activist” backgrounds and “day jobs” are discouraged inside PBS or NPR is certainly not true when it comes to liberal activism. Bill Moyers can run a very political foundation. Tavis Smiley can boast of how he’s created “Brand Smiley” and fans admire how he can “build a franchise as an activist” out of his public-broadcasting shows, which includes an annual “State of the Black Union” conference and a best-selling book called *The Covenant with Black America*. Federal dollars granted to CPB by the Congress often end up subsidizing ideological filmmakers and PBS stars and their leftist agendas.

Bill Moyers and His Impeach-Bush Bandwagon

PBS omnipresence Bill Moyers, the former Lyndon Johnson press secretary, is a very famous affront to the idea that people with ideological “day jobs” are never allowed into the liberal PBS sandbox. Moyers “retired” from PBS in 2004, only to re-emerge in the last weeks of the 2006 election cycle with three programs titled *Moyers on America* attacking conservatives. “Capitol Crimes” attacked former Rep. Tom DeLay and Jack Abramoff, “the majordomo of Republican Washington.” He warned Republicans were losing their evangelical Christian base with “Is God Green?” The third was devoted to a socialist critique that corporations are ruining the Internet, a cause dear to the PBS-defending liberal groups such as Common Cause, Free Press, and the Center for Digital Democracy.

Once the Democrats recaptured the House and Senate, Moyers returned in 2007 with another reincarnation of *Bill Moyers Journal*. Its first program on April 25 was a special 90-minute show called “Buying the War,” which laid into the liberal media for not being full-throated enough in opposing the Iraq War before it began. Moyers didn't allow a single conservative to challenge the idea of a Bush-pleasing media. Moyers did feature far-left media critics like Eric Boehlert and Norman Solomon to echo his conspiracy theory that the major media were pawns of the neoconservative architects of war. But then, Moyers also added major media players, from disgraced CBS anchor Dan Rather to former CNN boss Walter Isaacson, to agree with him that they were all woefully lacking in anti-war fervor.

In a *Rolling Stone* interview, Moyers said this program underlined how the truth-tellers against the war faced a “slime machine” of conservatives. “[T]he Hannitys and the

O'Reillys and the Limbaughs and the Mike Savages would come down on them, slander them, discredit them, so good reporting lost its power to break through because of this avalanche of opposition and venom directed at them."

On July 13, Moyers aired a completely one-sided hour promoting the idea that President Bush and Vice President Cheney should both be impeached. The guests were leftist writer John Nichols of *The Nation* magazine and Bruce Fein, who Moyers identified as "a conservative who reveres the Constitution." In fact, the "conservative" Fein was a harsher opponent of Bush and Cheney than the man of the left. Fein compared Bush to the Nazi regime, the wardens of the Soviet gulag, the architects of America's Japanese internment policy in World War II, and King George III, the enemy of the American Revolution. Fein and Nichols both argued that impeachment would not be an act of partisanship, but of statesmanship. The trio harrumphed that Speaker Nancy Pelosi was failing to be statesmanlike by cutting the Bush presidency short for the good of the nation. Moyers concluded with a commentary underlining how PBS was created to disturb the peace for liberalism (see box).

Why PBS Was Born: Leftist Teach-Ins

"[T]hose of us in public television have an obligation to make sure viewers like you stay in the loop. I wish we had carried the congressional debate this week in full — all of it — in prime time. When we broadcast teach-ins on the Vietnam war, and the Watergate hearings during the trial of Richard Nixon, it was a real public service — the reason PBS was created. We should keep Iraq in prime time every week — the fighting and dying, the suffering, the debate, the politics — the extraordinary costs. It's months until September. This war is killing us now, body and soul."

– Bill Moyers offering a commentary at the end of his impeachment edition of *Bill Moyers Journal*, July 13.

Where was Moyers in the Clinton impeachment process in 1998? He was absent from television for most of the year due to an illness-related break, but on October 6, the day after Congress took up impeachment, he marked his return to PBS with a *Frontline* documentary attacking both parties from his far-left perch for not passing a leftist campaign-finance bill. He was not a voice for impeachment, and certainly not a voice for devoting more PBS air time to the impeachment debate.

PBS Ombudsman Michael Getler arrived at the obvious conclusion on the PBS website. He found "there was almost a complete absence of balance, as I watched it, in the way this program presented the case for impeachment proceedings against President Bush and Vice President Cheney."

Moyers, always sensitive to criticism, quickly wrote a letter of opposition to Getler: "I respect your work and your role, but I disagree with you about 'balance.' The journalist's job is not to achieve some mythical state of equilibrium between two opposing opinions out of some misshapen respect — sometimes, alas, reverence — for the prevailing

consensus among the powers-that-be. The journalist's job is to seek out and offer the public the best thinking on an issue, event, or story. That's what I did regarding the argument for impeachment. Official Washington may not want to hear the best arguments for impeachment — or any at all — but a lot of America does."

Moyers added that PBS was created to disturb the "official consensus" and praised his two pro-impeachment guests for making "a valuable contribution to the public dialogue, as confirmed by the roughly 20:1 positive response to the broadcast. Of course I could have aired a Beltway-like 'debate' between a Democrat and a Republican, or a conservative and a liberal, but that's usually conventional wisdom and standard practice, and public broadcasting was meant to be an alternative, not an echo."

Ironically, Moyers pointed out that Getler himself had seemed to ask for the impeachment hour in an earlier ombudsman's column opposing the Iraq War. Getler had written that "all future steps should be vigorously explored in public by an independent press in a way that goes well beyond a Republican saying this and a Democrat saying that on a talk show, or the panel discussions of a predictable on-the-one-hand/on-the-other-hand specialists."

Getler was not alone. The ombudsman of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Ken Bode, wrote an opinion piece for the *Indianapolis Star* listing "Bush administration crimes," and agreeing that "The crimes are real and probably impeachable, and the monarchical arrogance of the Bush-Cheney administration is monumental," but in political terms, "the timing is wrong."

But on his CPB blog, Bode later acknowledged "I expected to hear a debate directed toward both sides of the question proposed in the title of the program. In fact, they were clones of one another, both arguing in favor of the proposition, each ready to complete the other's sentences. The program was one-sided and devoid of balance...for those who believe PBS programming leans inexorably to the Left, it was confirming evidence."

How could anyone who looks through the jungle of verbiage surrounding this impeachment-promoting show not be struck by the left-wing tilt of the public broadcasting system? No one inside PBS would argue this is an example of objectivity in programming. Some would argue that this willingness to take the debate boldly to the left of the "official consensus" of elected officials is what makes public broadcasting worthwhile.

Tavis Smiley Campaigns Against the GOP

Tavis Smiley, who began his professional career as a political activist and aide to longtime Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley, a Democrat, was never a paragon of objectivity before gaining a national PBS talk show in 2004. In describing Smiley's tenure as host and producer of the show *BET Tonight* on Black Entertainment Television from 1996 to 2001, writer Debra Dickerson explained on the liberal Web site Salon.com that "Safe in the knowledge they'd be pelted with loving softballs, everybody who was anybody in black America did his show, including then President Bill Clinton and candidate Gore." In 2000, he jumped into the election-year debate over capital punishment on Geraldo Rivera's CNBC show by declaring that George W. Bush was "nothing more than a serial killer."

In 2007, PBS authorized Smiley, who hosts a nightly national talk show out of Los Angeles PBS station KCET, to organize two nationally broadcast presidential debates focusing on black issues on the campuses of historically black colleges. The difference between the two debates was stunning. The June 28 Smiley forum for Democrats was polite, devoid of challenging conservative questions, and barely raised a ripple in the wider media.

But the four leading Republican candidates told Smiley they could not attend the September 27 forum for Republicans, since it came right before the end of the third-quarter campaign fundraising deadline. When the front-runners told CNN they didn't want to attend a CNN-YouTube debate in September, the cable news network rescheduled their event for November. Smiley did not reschedule. He not only insisted on his date, he set up four empty podiums on the stage to underline the no-shows and declared that Republicans were both unfit for office and strategically appealing to racists by not attending his debate.

Not only was that debate loaded with liberal (and even explicitly anti-Republican) questions, Smiley began the debate by asking the Republicans who attended to denounce the Republicans who did not: "Please tell me and this audience, in your own words, why you chose to be here tonight and what you say to those who chose not to be here tonight."

This was an attempt to spur denunciation of the no-shows, and the attempt worked, and the responses were spread across the network coverage. Mike Huckabee was

Tavis Smiley, Unfiltered

"There are, there are some issues on which if you are a voter of color, certainly if you are an African-American, you have a hard time choosing. For example, both of these guys support the death penalty. As far as I'm concerned, Bush in Texas is nothing more than a serial killer."

– Then-BET talk show host Tavis Smiley on CNBC's *Rivera Live*, October 24, 2000.

“embarrassed” for the no-shows, and Sam Brownback called it a “disgrace for our country.” New candidate Alan Keyes was a lonely voice saying he thought it was “a little unfair to assume that they didn’t show up tonight” to send a negative message to blacks, since they also skipped a Values Voter debate in front of a religious-right audience. But his remarks didn’t make the network news.

Smiley did not mince words after the debate, either. He wanted to know: “How will they be held accountable? Will they be made to pay?” He hoped his decision to show four empty podiums would become a TV commercial for the Democratic Party.

On his own PBS show on September 28, Smiley asked professor Michael Fauntroy: “Today every media outlet who I saw covering this was really trying to advance the conversation to talk about what happens next. That is to say, will black folk and brown folk remember this? Has it been forgotten already since last night? How will they be held accountable? Will they be made to pay?” He then turned to Hazel Trice Edney of the National Newspaper Publishers Association and pressed the same agenda of revenge.

“Hazel, if in fact this story is not going to die, if this drama created last night by these four front-runners of Giuliani, Romney, McCain and Thompson not showing up, if that thing lives, it’s going to live, one can argue, because black media allows it to live. They’re going to make it a breathing, growing organism. If it works, it’s going to be because black media said, ‘You didn’t come see us in October; don’t look for us in November’But if in fact black and brown voters are motivated by the Democratic Party between now and next November, if the footage of those four empty podiums becomes a television commercial, as I suspect it will for the Democratic Party and for the Democratic nominee, if the troops really get rallied, they could in fact deny whoever the Republican nominee is going to be, they could in fact deny that person the White House.” Tavis Smiley used his PBS show as a partisan soapbox for Democratic electioneering, for denying the GOP front-runners the White House.

Smiley also invited Jack Kemp to his PBS program on September 24 to denounce the front-runners, and he ended by declaring: “Two things, for the record, I should say. One, nobody should ever be afraid of Tavis, that’s number one – nothing to be afraid of here. Number two, there are three journalists of color who will be joining me in asking these questions, so it’s not just me anyway.” But everything Smiley did and said clearly suggested to the GOP that they should fear the wrath of turning down a Smiley invitation.

The imbalance between the two debates was quite clear in several other notable ways:

■ **Tom Joyner's Greeting.** Smiley's friend and black-radio icon Tom Joyner greeted both sets of candidates with very differing tones. At the Democratic debate, he was enthusiastic: "I am excited and honored to be here tonight as we make not just African American history, but American history." At the Republican debate, he made it clear that the GOP made him wince: "I'm excited to be here, but I admit I'm a little bit out of my comfort zone. I'm kind of feeling like Dan Rather at CBS premiere week."

The Contest Winner's Question. Both debates began with a question from a contest winner, drawn from the audience of the Tom Joyner radio show and selected from questions posted at blackamerica.com. At the Democratic debate, Crecilla Scott Cohen asked a generic big-picture question: "In 1903, the noted intellectual, W.E.B. DuBois said, 'The problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color line.' Is race still the most intractable issue in America and especially, I might add, in light of today's U.S. Supreme Court decision which struck down the use of race as a factor in K through 12?"

But at the Republican debate, the winning questioner baldly asserted that the 17 Republican presidents since Lincoln have done nothing positive for American blacks. Lucille Victoria Rowels asked: "Even though a majority of individuals who have served as president since Abraham Lincoln have been Republican, I believe that most black Americans who will vote in the year 2008 are not able to name even one Republican president in the 142 years since Lincoln's death who have left a positive and significant legacy for black Americans. If you are elected president in 2008, what positive and significant legacy, if any, will you leave for black Americans?"

This is an obviously hostile question, even though several candidates tried to praise the question to please the audience. Amazingly, just minutes before, Smiley complained: "Finally, some of the campaigns who declined our invitation to join us tonight have suggested publicly that this audience would be hostile and unreceptive. Since we're live on PBS right now, I can't tell you what I really think of these kinds of comments." But the whole forum underlined the unreceptive hostility.

■ **Republican Obstacle Questions.** In addition to Smiley's asking the candidates to denounce no-show Republican candidates and the contest-winning Republican-bashing question, two other inquiries underlined how the GOP put obstacles in the way of what the questioners implied was progress.

There was this question from the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* editorial-page editor Cynthia Tucker: "Recently a push to give the District of Columbia voting representation was defeated because of heavy Republican opposition. In addition, many voting rights advocates are worried about rigid voter ID laws, which require photo ID, like a driver's

license. Are you concerned that some eligible voters will be denied the right to vote simply because they don't have a driver's license?"

Juan Williams of National Public Radio asked: "Today we see a decline in black and Latino enlistment because of one reason: the war in Iraq. What do you say to the one-third of the nation that's minority and overwhelmingly opposed to the continuation of this war, even as the GOP in Congress continues to block attempts to set a deadline to end this war?"

The closest question to Democrats which carried an uncomfortable implication in it was the last question on Darfur, in which DeWayne Wickham underlined that in Rwanda in 1994 "we did nothing as more than a half-million people were slaughtered there." But Wickham said "we" failed, not that help was blocked by the Clinton administration.

■ **The Smiley Media Blitz.** Before and after the GOP debate, Smiley not only denounced the front-runners on his own PBS platform, but went on a tour of privately held media outlets, condemning the people who dared spurn his invitation as conducting a "Southern strategy" of appealing to whites with racial appeals:

On CNN the night before the GOP debate, Smiley declared on *Out in the Open* with Rick Sanchez: "Well, what they said is almost every person is scheduling. The problem with that is this though, that when you say no to every black request you receive to black organizations, to black media — when you say no to every Hispanic invitation you receive to organizations and to Univision and other Hispanic media — when you say no to every black and brown request you receive is that a scheduling problem or is that a pattern? They're trying to go, these front-runners, these Republican front-runners, trying to go through this entire primary process and never have to address voters of color and never be queried by journalists of color. And I think in the most multi-cultural, multi-racial, multi-ethnic America ever, that quite frankly, is unacceptable."

On NBC's *Today* the morning after the debate, Smiley boldly cast his rejected invitation as a watershed moment in American history: "I don't think that this is hyperbole at all to suggest that last night is a watershed moment in how the Republican Party and its nominee moves forward. That old so-called Southern strategy, that dog just won't hunt any more in America."

Smiley repeated the message on NBC's *Meet the Press* over that weekend: "Everyone of them gave as their reason for not being there scheduling. The problem with that logic or illogic, as it were, Tim, is where you say no to every black request you've received, when you say no to every Hispanic request you've received, is that a scheduling issue or is that a pattern? I think it was a missed opportunity. What I'm encouraged by, though, I think

some might expect me to be discouraged this morning or bitter that they didn't show up, I think they made a huge mistake, and I think that moment the other night is going to become a watershed moment in this campaign as it goes forward because that dog won't hunt in the general election. You can, you can avoid black and brown in the primary. It doesn't work in the general."

After the Democratic debate, Smiley was much happier. On CNN's *The Situation Room* on June 29, the afternoon after the event, Smiley praised the candidates: "I thought it was a good — a good showing last night... I believe that the African-American vote in the 2008 election is going to be the most sought-after and most fought-over Democratic demographic. And, so, it was a must-attend last night to try to address issues that are important to African-Americans and people of color. They came last night ready. It was a good conversation."

Smiley appeared on the July 1 *Meet the Press*, and underlined how satisfying the event was for the blacks in the Democratic base: "What makes this conversation the other night, though, so critical is because I believe, and I think most folks — most persons, that is, who were watching this agree that the black vote this time around is going to be the most sought-after and the most thought-over Democratic demographic in the 2008 elections. And so, as goes the African-American vote on the Democratic side, certainly may go the nomination. And I must say honestly, having nothing to do with being in the media, just as an African-American voter, it does feel good for a change to be fought over, to know that there are two people really going after your vote, but that's going to be a critical fight between now and next year."

Smiley encouraged Democrats to think that increasing black enthusiasm and turnout through events like his PBS debate could be crucial to defeating Republicans in 2008: "I think, to the extent that their issues are discussed, to the issues — to the extent that they are outreached to, they're going to be very involved. In the last election, the black turnout last election went up 25 percent, went up significantly in the African-American community. And so we're going to see — I mean, 25 percent turnout. So we're going to see a huge turnout this time, to the extent that Barack Obama sticks around for a while, which obviously, with the money he has, he'll be around for a while. I think if you respond to their issues, they're tuned in. It's going to be a great race, I think."

Democrats vs. Racist Patriarchy

"But you can't talk about her just in terms of the political opposition to her [Hillary Clinton], based upon her vote, based upon who she is, without mentioning that she does happen to be a woman who is attempting to do something historic. And to the extent that we live in a society that is patriarchal, she's going to have to deal with that. To the extent that we live in a society that racism is still, I think, one of the most intractable issues, I think Mr. Obama will have to deal with that."

– **PBS host Tavis Smiley on *Meet the Press*, July 1, 2007.**

ITVS, the “Independent Television” Service

The Independent Television Service was established by Congress in 1988 with legislation directing the CPB to establish ITVS with “a national coalition of independent producer groups.” In 1991, ITVS opened its doors in Minneapolis, distributing approximately \$6 million annually to independent producers. Currently, CPB awards \$15 million a year to ITVS, a one-sided, left-wing “independent” filmmakers’ organizing center. Not every film that receives subsidies is a liberal and political documentary, but there is no doubt that ITVS funds are used to subsidize and develop an allegedly “independent” community of left-wing filmmakers marching to their own ideological drummer.

ITVS saw its purpose to be “a catalyst for change, a way for independent producers to participate in and define the cultural dialogue of public television.” Today, that “cultural dialogue” is being defined from Nancy Pelosi’s congressional district, at 651 Brannan Street in the city of San Francisco. Its “Statement of Values” not only lauds freedom of expression as a human right, it adds “An open society allows unpopular and minority views to be publicly aired,” “A civilized society seeks economic and social justice,” and “A just society seeks participation from those without power, prominence, or wealth.”

ITVS lives up to its leftist values by adding political activism. It has a community-organizing emphasis. It shows its films not just on PBS stations through the series *Independent Lens*, but also organizes free community showings in theaters. It also has hired organizers to “leverage” its leftist films to “build stronger connections” and spur on a more aggressive fight for “social justice.” (See box.)

This leads to often open partnerships with left-wing organizations. For example, a documentary about migrant workers called *Los Trabajadores* has a list of “national partners” in activism, including the AFL-CIO, the American Friends Service Committee, and the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund. On the ITVS website, filmmaker Heather Courtney was pleased that her film was a starting point for pro-illegal alien activism: “Many community-based day labor and immigrant rights groups are using *Los Trabajadores* to organize immigrant workers and as a general educational tool to help fight misconceptions. It’s also being used in high school and university classes.”

Building a ‘Social Change’ Network

“ITVS COMMUNITY is the national community engagement program of the Independent Television Service. ITVS COMMUNITY works to leverage the unique and timely content of the Emmy Award-winning PBS series *Independent Lens* to build stronger connections among leading organizations, leading communities and public television stations around key social issues and create more opportunities for civic engagement and positive social change.”
– Text from the ITVS Web site.

Unlike conservatives like Frank Gaffney, liberal ITVS grantees can be quite explicit about their partisan activism. Chris Christopher, co-producer of the *Independent Lens* documentary *July '64* about race riots in Rochester, New York, proclaimed: "I love all the work that I do and feel fortunate that people offer me interesting work – primarily advising Democratic candidates and creating social messaging campaigns for not-for-profit organizations."

In a 2002 interview with *Current*, a trade publication for public broadcasting insiders, ITVS chair Sally Jo Fifer proclaimed that diversity, and not pounding away at one single viewpoint, was the goal: "Bringing diverse opinions to the audience, creating a thriving citizens' debate – those are not the priorities of commercial media outlets. They're going after the consumer and have the pressure of selling products. Public television, on the other hand, is thinking about what Americans need to hear and bringing diverse viewpoints, and independents are a strategy to achieve those objectives."

But in reality, "independents" wasn't the right word. These filmmakers may be outside a corporate or studio system, but any glance of the ITVS grants shows there are no conservative filmmakers in America today making anti-Michael Moore films that celebrate capitalism or anti-abortion films or films against illegal immigration with government subsidies provided by ITVS. It isn't bringing "diverse opinions" or sparking anything resembling a "debate." They are funding films by left-wing filmmakers with almost zero conservative viewpoints or interview subjects contained within them. Not every film funded is an explicitly political film. But it's hard to find a political film that's been ITVS-funded with a conservative message.

In fact, ITVS is dependent on a coterie of liberal Democrats to keep the money flowing. Fifer told *Current* in that same 2002 interview: "In Congress, there's now a realization that ITVS serves a vital role by bringing independents to public television. We have a number of specific supporters on the Hill, including Nancy Pelosi, Lynn Woolsey, George Miller, Barbara Lee, Tom Lantos, Henry Waxman and Ed Markey, who's the ranking minority member of the CPB reauthorization committee." Other than Massachusetts liberal Markey, Fifer's entire list of House boosters is California liberals.

The liberal tilt has been a problem since the first ITVS grants were announced in 1991. Author and PBS historian Laurence Jarvik reported in the 1995 book *Public Broadcasting and the Public Trust* that 13 films, or 80 percent of the grants, went to projects that came explicitly from the left, including *Endangered Species: The Toxic Poisoning of Communities of Color* (environmental racism), *Black Is, Black Ain't* (racism in pop culture), *An Act of War: The Overthrowing of the Hawaiian Nation* (anti-U.S. history from the "native Hawaiian"

viewpoint), *Imagining Indians* (about negative media imagery of American Indians), and *Memory of Fire* (a “reassessing” of Columbus and his “discovery” of the New World).

Favored celebrities on the left, even obscure ones, were lionized in the first group of films, as in *Warrior: the Case of Leonard Peltier*, the Native American leftist convicted of killing two FBI agents at point-blank range; *Post No Bills*, about the left-wing poster artist Robbie Conal, who glued his ugly paintings of Reagan administration figures all over the nation’s capital; and *Passin’ It On*, the first of a pile of documentaries sympathetically exploring the radical cause of the Black Panthers.

This tradition of very one-sided filmmaking subsidies continues to the present day. Many of the ITVS films are shown on PBS stations through the series *Independent Lens*. The ITVS website is currently promoting the Ralph Nader documentary *An Unreasonable Man* as one of its highlights for December 18. One of the filmmakers, Steve Skrovan – also a longtime scriptwriter for the CBS sitcom *Everybody Loves Raymond* and a blogger for The Huffington Post – lauded Nader as an amazing American leader: “There’s a penetrating intelligence and analysis that I think history is going to show. His diagnosis is correct. I think it’s a good time to reevaluate his message and really listen to it because it’s been consistent and it’s based on a lot of experience.” Skrovan was blunt about his point of view: “We’ve been given a lot of credit for being balanced and fair-minded, and we appreciate that, but that was not actually our intent. We’re telling the story from Nader’s point of view. We’re clearly biased.”

Some filmmakers have a striking lack of objectivity in their work because they’re making films starring themselves and their personal struggles or chronicling the work of their relatives or friends. PBS officials have no public record of eschewing ties that many media outlets would find disqualifying if it were a news report instead of an allegedly “independent” film. A brief look at the ITVS catalogue demonstrates a list of films that oppose Bush administration policies, celebrate leftist agitators, and promote “progressive” sexual politics. The years listed on the films below correlate with their debut on PBS stations.

1. Opposing Bush and His Policies

■ *Counting on Democracy* (2002) was described as a tale of “race, political payback, voter fraud and justice deferred,” charging that in the presidential race in Florida in 2000, 175,000 “people of color” were banned from voting or had their ballots thrown out. ITVS funded the Gore-should-have-won film, but PBS executives blanched from airing it nationwide just before the 2002 elections, as filmmakers hoped. Many PBS stations aired

the film after the election. But, matching the usual ITVS pattern, this taxpayer-subsidized lament was shown at free screenings in the summer and fall of 2002. In Florida, screenings were hosted in July by state Rep. Hank Harper, a Democrat from Palm Beach. In October, in Detroit a town hall meeting co-sponsored by Democratic state Sen. Raymond Murphy and the National Black Caucus of State Legislators included a showing of the film.

■ *Rising Water: Global Warming and the Fate of the Pacific Islands* (2002) was hailed by the *Philadelphia Inquirer*: "It's ironic that while the leading economic countries contribute the most pollution, the effects may be first felt by countries that pollute very little. This program looks at the effects of rising water levels, due to global warming, on Pacific islands. Some of the islands are losing valuable land, and in the future entire islands may disappear." In April of 2002, the film's public screening occurred in Cincinnati, co-sponsored by the Cincinnati Film Society – and the Sierra Club. The ITVS website for the film links directly to the Sierra Club under the headline "What You Can Do."

■ *En Route to Baghdad* (2005) chronicled the life of United Nations diplomat Sergio Vieira de Mello, assassinated with a bomb in Baghdad by insurgents in 2003. But criticism of the American liberation of Iraq from the UN's point of view dominated. "I think the doctrine of preemptive action died in Baghdad," proclaimed UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. French socialist and U.N. diplomat Bernard Kouchner declared: "In the face of extremism and terrorism, which for me has nothing to do with Islam, we can no longer rely solely on the image of the U.N. flag."

As much as the film lionized its protagonist, the bombing is almost hailed. "What I see now is like a post-modern victory for Sergio because now they recognize the whole process lacked legitimacy," claimed Ghassan Salame, a UN senior adviser on Iraq. Salame demanded a "new chapter where those who went into the war recognize their error, their huge mistake, and the huge mistakes they have done since the war has ended in disbanding the Army, and disbanding the police, and de-Baathification, and comparing Saddam to Hitler and Baghdad to Berlin, all this bulls-t that we heard since the war has ended." Notions of any conflict of interest with the U.N. or filmmaker Simone Duarte didn't get in the way of ITVS support. Duarte, like Vieira de Mello, worked for the U.N. in East Timor. Her film won an award from the U.N. Correspondents Association and was shown at the United Nations Association film festival in Monterey, California.

■ *The Cats of Mirikitani* (2006) followed Jimmy Mirikitani, an elderly homeless artist in New York City. *Variety's* review explained what begins as a "straightforward" film "winds up as an indictment of U.S. internment of Japanese-Americans" during World War II, and filmmaker Linda Hattendorf makes parallels between Japanese-Americans

and post-9/11 America, when “reports on racist attacks against Muslims in the U.S. raise frightening specters of his past.”

■ *Motherland Afghanistan* (2007) is a very personal film: filmmaker Sedika Mojadidi followed her doctor father around as he tried to deliver babies in harsh conditions in Afghanistan, beginning in a maternity ward named for Laura Bush. Even *New York Times* TV critic Virginia Heffernan found the show to be an exploitative attack on the Bush administration. One scene where a pregnant woman arrived with bruises on her neck was critiqued: “Having suffered seizures caused by preeclampsia, she was taken by her family to a mullah, who beat her to end them. Now she is unconscious, and her baby has died in utero. Dr. Mojadidi pushes her head around on the examining table to show the camera the blue marks on her throat. This seems exploitative.”

Heffernan lamented: “We’re left thinking we had to look at this for our own good, that examining an unconscious woman’s private bruises doubles as — what? A searching critique of the Bush administration’s effort at post-9/11 nation-building? This is an extremely bad-faith way to structure a polemic, and it leaves the viewer stuck with nothing but unease and, worse, a sense that the unease cannot be a product of the film. It must be her own fault.”

2. Celebrating Leftist Agitators

■ *Maggie Growls* (2003) explored the life of Maggie Kuhn, founder of the Gray Panthers, and their work for causes like “peace, health care, jobs, housing, ageism, sexism, racism, media stereotyping, family security, the environment and campaign reform.” The *Philadelphia Inquirer* delighted in its interviews with “a wide range” of leftists, “from [Ralph] Nader and historian-columnist Studs Terkel to Harun Fox and Louis Thomas, inmates at Graterford who are members of the only prison chapter of the Gray Panthers.” Naturally, the film became a routine part of Gray Panther fundraisers.

■ *The Weather Underground* (2004), like the aforementioned Nader film, was slated for national broadcast on *Independent Lens* after it aired in theaters and earned a nomination for the Academy Award for best documentary film. The violent revolutionary offshoot of the student left, plotted terrorist activities like setting off a bomb at an officers dance at Fort Dix, “the idea being that there are no innocent in this war of aggression,” explained Mark Rudd, one of the Weathermen. They took responsibility for bombing two dozen public buildings, including the Pentagon and the Capitol, eventually landing on the FBI’s Most Wanted list. *The New York Times* reported that “the filmmakers raise some disturbing and highly relevant questions about the psychopathology of terrorism while maintaining

a basically sympathetic attitude toward the group's goals." The film wasn't as one-sided as some other PBS films. Ex-Weatherman Brian Flanagan confessed: "When you feel you have right on your side, you can do some horrific things." But filmmaker Sam Green also explained: "I see them as being more Boston Tea Party than al-Qaeda. I don't think it's accurate to lump those two together."

- *Negroes With Guns: Rob Williams and Black Power* (2006) dwelled on Robert Williams, one of the early Black Power activists who missed the big civil rights movement of the 1960s because he was in exile in communist Cuba and China. He fled the country after he was accused in 1961 of kidnapping a white couple during racial disorder in Monroe, North Carolina. While in Cuba, he wrote the book *Negroes with Guns*, which inspired Black Panther founder Huey P. Newton, and helmed a communist propaganda program broadcast into the United States called "Radio Free Dixie." He was called "the Negro Che Guevara." After falling out with Fidel Castro, his years in communist China earned him a return to the United States as the Nixon administration sought information on how to conduct diplomacy with dictator Mao Zedong.

- *Sunset Story* (2005) focused on two women living in a Los Angeles retirement home for radicals, complete with a bust of Soviet revolutionary Vladimir Lenin and a portrait of Stalin-defending singer and actor Paul Robeson. The filmmakers were inspired by a cheerful story in the *New York Times* on the home, which reported the home also carried "an extensive collection of books on Marxism, Trotsky, Mao, and the Rosenbergs' trial." The two protagonists in the film complain about the food and they protest against HMOs and Social Security funding cuts.

- *Trudell* (2006) glorified Native American leftist John Trudell, activist and poet, who explicitly attacked the rapacity of capitalism: "The great lie is that it is civilization. It's not civilized. It has literally been the most bloodthirsty brutalizing system ever imposed upon this planet." He added: "The issue is the earth. We cannot change the political system, we cannot change the economic system, we cannot change the social system until the people control the land, and then we take it out of the hands of the sick minority that chooses to pervert the meaning and intention of humanity." Trudell also claims asking him to celebrate Columbus Day is like asking most Americans to celebrate Osama bin Laden Day. Celebrities like Jackson Browne and Robert Redford appear to hail Trudell. Redford compared him to the Dalai Lama.

- *Granny D Goes To Washington* (2006) explored the crusade of ninety-something New Hampshire grandmother Doris Haddock, celebrated by many national media outlets for her advocacy of "campaign finance reform." The PBS press release touted Haddock's "feisty, unrelenting advocacy for participatory democracy, this five-foot-tall great-

grandmother is a character of courage and charm, toughness and humor, who has commanded the interest and respect of lawmakers and citizens alike.”

3. “Progressive” Sexual Politics

■ *Jane: An Abortion Service* (1998) chronicled an underground abortion movement in Chicago before abortion was legal nationwide, hailed for how it “powerfully documents a group of courageous women who were willing to translate their politics into action by providing safety and dignity to women of all backgrounds [seeking abortions].” According to ITVS, “was broadcast nationally on select public television stations in commemoration of the 25th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade* (January 22, 1973).” Filmmaker Kate Kirtz revealed in her feminism: “For us and others of our generation who grew up with choice, it’s hard to comprehend both the reality of living with illegal abortion and the atmosphere that fostered as direct and radical a group as JANE. This film is a way to get us talking about our past and our power at a time when feminism has become a dirty word and choice remains fragile in the extreme.”

■ *And Baby Makes Two* (1999) explored single mothers by choice. The *Independent Lens* website promoted it as “a candid and emotional documentary about a group of thirty and forty-something single women in New York City who are actively pursuing motherhood without the participation of spouses or boyfriends.”

■ *Scout’s Honor* (2001) aired in June as part of the PBS documentary series *P.O.V.* (where films are hailed for their “point of view.”) Filmmaker Tom Shepard set out to embarrass the Boy Scouts of America for failing to allow openly gay Scouts. He boasted of the political potential of his film: “The Boy Scouts could be a really useful organization in the new century. Are they going to cling to these antiquated policies of the past or jump on board with contemporary society?” In an hour, viewers saw about a minute of fleeting snippets of conservatives such as Pat Buchanan, Rev. Lou Sheldon, and anonymous talking heads opposing the film’s liberal heroes. Not even reviewers from liberal newspapers were buying the that PBS was achieving “balance” with the film. “Conservatives may bristle while watching it,” acknowledged *The Washington Post*. “This isn’t a news documentary but a sympathetic examination of the personalities involved in trying to change the Boy Scouts’ rules,” reported *The New York Times*.

■ *Daddy & Papa* (2003) promoted the cultural revolution of gay parenting, “the growing number of gay men who are making a decision that is at once traditional and revolutionary: to become dads.” PBS seemingly had no objections to filmmaker Johnny Symons being “too close” to his subject as he explored his own adoption of two boys.

Symons stressed the usual hope for liberal impact: "My filmmaking is motivated by social activism. I love the opportunity to change people's belief systems, or to reveal that something that seems clear-cut is in fact quite complex....I also hope the film will inspire more gay men to become parents, and encourage more social workers, judges, and politicians to use their positions of power to make this possible." ITVS reported the film was used by the City of Philadelphia's Department of Human Services to promote gay adoptions, and screened for three classes of juniors and seniors in a Norristown, Pennsylvania high school, followed by a discussion on adoption and families.

■ *The Amasong Chorus: Singing Out* (2004) chronicled how a "lesbian/feminist choir" in Champaign, Illinois triumphed "in an area best known for cornfields and conservatives." Filmmaker Jay Rosenstein laid out his one-sided agenda boldly: "I hope it is a link in the chain that helps continue the process of normalizing lesbians and gays as part of the mainstream." Before the film aired on *Independent Lens* and became a regular part of gay and lesbian film festivals, Rosenstein had to be voted in as the first male presence allowed at the feminist choir's rehearsals.

■ *The Great Pink Scare* (2005) chronicled an arrest of 15 men in Northampton, Massachusetts, including three professors at Smith College. The arrest was described by ITVS as "a McCarthy-like witch-hunt against homosexuals....Through interviews, archival film and commentary, audiences learn the fates of the Smith professors, who never recovered from the scandal." Once again, the subject was not only political, but personal. Filmmaker Tug Yourgrau explained "My father taught at Smith College in 1960 when Arvin was arrested; I was about 11 at the time. We'd held a fundraiser in our home for Arvin, I remember looking down the stairs with my two brothers in our pajamas as the people arrived." He hoped the film would "remind us that government does not belong in the bedrooms of consenting adults, and that we must ever be on guard against those who would demonize gays and lesbians."

■ *The Education of Shelby Knox* (2005) began the summer season of *P.O.V.* complete with a media tour touting a liberal conversion story: "Shelby, a devout Christian who has pledged abstinence until marriage herself, becomes an unlikely advocate for comprehensive sex education, profoundly changing her political and spiritual views along the way." From fighting against abstinence-only sex education, Knox then becomes an activist for gay students. The film synopsis explains she declares herself a liberal Democrat, shocking her Republican parents. "But when an organization whose slogan is 'God Hates Fags' comes to Lubbock to protest the gay kids' lawsuit, Shelby, along with her mother, joins a counter protest, carrying a sign that reads 'God Loves Everybody,' and affirming a belief that will guide her into adulthood: "I think that God wants you to question," Shelby says, "to do more than just blindly be a follower, because he can't use

blind followers.” The film was funded not only by CPB, but by the Playboy Foundation, among other foundation donors, and became a hit at Planned Parenthood centers.

■ *Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton’s Cafeteria* (2006) celebrated a San Francisco riot in 1966 when police raided a popular late-night hangout for “transgendered people in the city’s impoverished Tenderloin district.” ITVS hailed it in promotional materials as “the first known instance of collective, queer resistance to police intimidation in United States history.” Filmmaker Victor Silverman was thrilled to win a local Emmy in San Francisco for the film: “The riot really marked the beginning of a broader movement to support freedom of gender expression. ... The Emmy is a great honor for us and a real recognition by the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences of the importance of recovering the lost history of transgender militancy.”

A film about “the lost history of transgender militancy” would sound to many Americans like the definition of wasteful government spending. But taxpayers subsidize filmmakers to chronicle the most obscure and exotic topics, because their complete lack of appeal to a broader public is precisely what defines these little movies as edgy and “independent.” In funding filmmakers to go out and make one-sided left-wing films, public broadcasting subsidies serve, in effect, as ideological pork-barrel spending.

Conservatives not only have to raise their own funds if they wanted to make a film about broader movement subjects (the history of American conservatism) or narrow ones (a personal film about Christian home-schoolers) – they end up paying for the left admiring itself in the mirror instead. In reality, few of these conservative films have been made, in part because the federal government isn’t providing tens of millions of dollars to make it happen. But whether these left-wing films reach a broad audience on national television or just a narrow audience in small left-wing circles in isolated communities, ITVS is a never-ending spigot for one side of the political divide.

Recommendations

These dysfunctional programming and grant-making policies occur inside public broadcasting because of the nature of the system itself. Since conservatives see public broadcasting as an enterprise the federal government shouldn’t be involved in, few conservatives are employed in it. When conservatives do try to advocate some kind of balance in the system, the rest of the system (and liberal sectors of the private media as well) attack them like they are a virus, bent on ruining the system’s potential to liberals as

a megaphone for their leaders and causes. Since its programming is often either blandly or blatantly liberal, few conservatives watch and monitor it.

Republican oversight during their time in the House and Senate majority was usually weak, due to concerns about appearing opposed to Big Bird, or opposed to vigorous journalism. Calls to reduce funds for public broadcasting have led to blatant anti-Republican lobbying from PBS and NPR stations. Due to the Democratic majorities now in control of Congress, hopes for more fairness or balance ought to be slight. But this is what a fairer and more balanced system would look like:

1. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting ought to live up to its mandate to monitor content for objectivity and fairness. Adopting a policy of being a “heat shield” from activists and elected representatives suggests that fairness to all players in the political system and all shades of the political spectrum is not in public broadcasting’s basket of values. When activists are loud enough — such as the perceived lack of Hispanic veteran stories in the Ken Burns miniseries *The War* — the system can still look responsive to public complaints. But the ideological default position of this “private corporation funded by the American people” is that the opinion of the people doesn’t matter and the decision-making of programmers and filmmakers is a private affair.

2. The airwaves of PBS ought to be for all the people, and not solely for exotic and unrealistic crusades against Republican presidents and congressional leaders. A government-funded TV network should be allergic to scolding anchormen calling for the impeachment of presidents. On television and in his personal lectures at radical-left conventions and conferences, Bill Moyers has been a full-throated advocate of using the taxpayer-funded airwaves to destroy conservatism, pledging his “armies of the Lord are up against mighty hosts.” PBS, he has charged, needs to take on the private media, who are nothing but “sitting ducks for the war party, for government, and neoconservative propaganda and manipulation.” Under that scenario, PBS is not a nonpartisan public-affairs referee, but the center of a partisan and ideological crusade.

3. If PBS wants to serve as a moderator of our presidential debates, they need to serve both parties, not delight over one and urge the political exile of the other. If Tavis Smiley wished to serve as a nonpartisan moderator of presidential debates, he would have either postponed the Republican debate until he could secure commitments from the front-runners, or held the event with a smaller field without all the empty-podium theatrics and a talk-show denunciation tour. High-profile presidential elections are Exhibit A of journalistic fairness or unfairness. PBS

“moderators” ought to be more moderate in tone and ideology on both the public and private airwaves.

4. If CPB wants to nurture “independent” film, it ought to fund both left and right, not serve as a political organizing arm for the left. The federal government is endorsing “independent” films by subsidizing them, offering a PBS or ITVS seal of approval to them, making them more likely to be purchased by libraries and school systems – even if some of these films are also circulated and endorsed by Democratic clubs, Planned Parenthood branches, and Sierra Club chapters. CPB ought to make more of an effort like the one they tried with “America at a Crossroads” – reaching out to first-time filmmakers, even if they are conservative. If liberals with activist “day jobs” are encouraged to contribute, the same ought to apply to conservatives. If the government is going to invest in this media enterprise, it ought to invest millions in both sides, and not just the left.

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