



A Resource for Iowa's Future

6450 Corporate Drive • P.O. Box 6450 • Johnston, IA 50131

Phone: 515-242-3100 • Toll free: 800-532-1290

Web site: www.iptv.org

May 16, 2005

Board of Directors
Corporation for Public Broadcasting
401 - 9th Street, NW
Washington, D. C. 20004

Dear Mr. Chairman, Mr. Vice Chairman, and Members of the Board:

The Iowa Public Broadcasting Board is the statutorily created body that holds the licenses for Iowa Public Television. As you no doubt will recall from your visit with us in Iowa one year ago, we take very seriously our responsibilities as members of this Board for guiding the growth of our network, setting its policies, and ensuring that our services consistently are held in high regard by the public.

We know you view your responsibilities the same way.

That is why we are writing to express our concern that reported recent and prospective events at the Corporation will lessen the high regard in which public television is held, place in jeopardy its independence, and damage its credibility with our members, public and private funders, and the citizens we serve.

That credibility, we believe, is "the currency of our programming," a phrase that comes from one of the cornerstone Principles of Editorial Integrity in Public Broadcasting. Iowa Public Television helped draft these national Principles twenty years ago and was among the first public television licensees to adopt them. We have put them in practice in our policies and procedures, have defended them in the federal courts, and are affirming our commitment to them with this letter. We do so because we believe that the public must have complete "confidence that our programming is free of undue or improper influence," a phrase from the Principles that is as important today as it was when it was written.

As Iowa's stewards of this important public service and as guardians of its independence, we believe that anything less than complete confidence in the integrity of our programming will weaken the base on which our public support is built. In survey after survey – including CPB's own – viewers say they trust public television to tell the truth. Respondents to a recent Roper Public Affairs and Media Poll go even further, giving PBS (and we take that to mean public television) the highest rating of trust of seven public institutions surveyed, higher than the courts, commercial television networks, newspapers, and cable television.

Clearly, the Corporation can take great credit in those findings, in part because they are a result of years of standing strong as a shield between the whims of politicians and the needs of programmers, living true to the Congress's 1967 charge to provide "maximum protection [to educational radio and television broadcasting] from extraneous interference and control."

Des Moines 11 Fort Dodge 21 Sioux City 27 Council Bluffs 32
Iowa City 12 Mason City 24 Waterloo 32 Red Oak 36

We are concerned that the historical and critically important role of CPB as a shield between programming and a political process that seeks to influence it is being compromised – in perception by reports of board involvement in program content, or in fact by what we understand is a desire to appoint a partisan political activist to the currently vacant post of CPB President.

We believe strongly that such an appointment would be in absolute contradiction to the concept of CPB as a buffer. It would call into question the motivations of everything we do, whether funded by CPB or not. Rather than broadening our support, the appointment of a political partisan would weaken it, for it would drive away a sizable segment of our public and private supporters who turn to public television because it has been a bastion of fairness and integrity, operating without fear or favor.

A political activist of any party is a poor choice to run the operations of an institution whose mission by statute calls for an unceasing commitment to protecting the editorial integrity and independence of its product.

As members of the Iowa Public Broadcasting Board, we know well the importance of your stewardship as officers and members of the Board of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. When our Boards visited a year ago, it was clear that we had a shared commitment to the growth of our service and strengthening the bond it has with those who use it. It is because of that commitment that we ask you to maintain the credibility of the Corporation by searching the nation for and appointing as your next President someone who will, in perception and in fact, maintain the independence and integrity of public television.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

IOWA PUBLIC BROADCASTING BOARD

Betty Jean Furgerson
President
Waterloo, Iowa

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c: Iowa Congressional delegation
The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack, Governor of Iowa