

Testimony
presented to the
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
by
Loretta Sutliff
for nomination to the Board of Directors
Corporation for Public Broadcasting
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Mr. Chairman and members of the committee: thank you very much for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss my nomination to the board of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. I would also like to extend my appreciation to President Bush for nominating me to the board and to Senator Reid for selecting me for consideration.

I am a small town broadcaster with almost twenty-five years' experience and accountability to my community. The more I understand about the mission of public television and radio, the more I realize I am uniquely qualified for this position.

Our town, Elko, Nevada, is located some 160-miles away from the closest shopping mall where our 7-year-old daughter can make her own teddy bear. We are surrounded by the fragile beauty of the high desert, rugged glacier-carved Ruby Mountains and an ecosystem rich with wildlife unique to any other spot on the planet. I often tell family and friends spread across the country that we like to "make our own fun."

I think it is this desert experience that allows the spirit of individualism to take root, endure and thrive. I also believe the nation's public radio and television stations are poised to emerge as the beacons of culture, custom and creative spirit as more of our mainstream media options are further franchised and consolidated.

I work in commercial radio and television in a partnership to provide local news and programming. I host a daily radio talk show, "Elko, Live" at KELK which has been on the air for almost fifteen-years. I also hosted the morning radio show on our local AM station for more than a decade until our daughter, Olivia, started kindergarten. Channel 10 KENV is a local NBC television affiliate located on the Great Basin College campus under arrangement with Sunbelt Communications

My work at Elko Broadcasting Company is a continuation of a family-owned tradition of more than 60-years. Our radio stations KELK AM/KLKO FM, are deeply committed to community service in providing airtime and talent to almost every charitable or beneficial cause in the region for decades. I've been providing weekday newscasts my entire broadcast career. As a result, I fully understand the responsibility of balanced and accurate reporting and the accessibility and involvement of broadcasters in the community.

At KENV TV, owned by Sunbelt Communications, I'm very proud to work with and for some of the most inspiring and energetic people in our community. We craft a half-hour of local television news each weekday and Saturday that is available both online and on air. I report, edit, produce and anchor segments using technology that didn't exist when I first picked up a grease pencil and razor blade to splice tape on reel-to-reel. My colleagues and I are constantly learning and sharing, mentoring and encouraging, an attitude I recognize in the heart of public broadcasting.

As broadcasters we initiated through Great Basin College, the first Broadcast Technology Program to recruit and train future community broadcasters, producers and filmmakers. This program is in its' second year and we have already seen a diversity of applicants, from a local historian, already talented in conducting interviews, beginning her second career; to a young Shoshone student who shared her culture and viewpoint through newly-developed skills in video production and outreach.

What I hope to convey in this statement is my enthusiasm and optimism for the future of broadcasting, especially in areas that I can see public radio and television setting the standard and reaching viewers and listeners who are becoming frustrated with the loss of local voices and views in their communities. I have both vision and skill to inspire local origination broadcasting and see that service as key to the future of preserving our unique identities; the expression and soul of the place we live and the people we are.

The Public Awareness Initiative is an example of how public radio and television station leaders can increase the awareness of how public broadcasting enriches and informs daily life, whether for listeners in Owyhee, Nevada, a remote Western Shoshone reservation listening for a road report, or in Sparta, Wisconsin where my mother-in-law-Barbara Rice tunes in to hear, "what NPR says," while analyzing national politics. Many PBS viewers have sought refuge in "The News Hour," during this election cycle to make sense of the sensation found elsewhere.

The “Story Corps” project is one our community is familiar with. It is similar to a local effort by the Western Folklife Center in Elko, host to the National Cowboy Poetry Gathering now celebrating a Silver Year, in launching the “Sheep Camp for Stories.” A Basque sheep-wagon was outfitted to record oral histories during the winter event. Immigrants, grandparents, craftspeople, gold miners and sons and daughters of pioneer families have contributed their voices to this priceless archive, more valuable to the future than any trust fund.

While there are challenges and mounting costs in providing broadcast signals, especially to distant and rural populations such as those found throughout Nevada, I believe an even bigger challenge not measured in money is in recruiting and retaining talented and dedicated future broadcasters who want to serve small and medium-sized towns, covering city council meetings and airing local election results, adding and blending local voices, opinions and issues to that of national content.

I appreciate the Talent Quest mission of inspiring and motivating our replacements. I believe expanded access to local origination in communities and on campuses will foster even more talent waiting to be discovered.

I would be sorely remiss if I did not also applaud PBS for its work in continuing the quality children’s educational programming I grew up with, and now enjoyed by our daughter. From the mainstay, “Sesame Street,” with its ageless yet contemporary characters, to new and vibrant programs such as “Between the Lions” and “Maya and Miguel.” These are among children’s programming on PBS, that I know our daughter can watch.

I understand well the mission of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and I would be honored to serve on the board of directors for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Thank you for considering me and I would be happy to answer any questions.