

TESTIMONY OF LIZ SEMBER

SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE AND TRANSPORTATION

SEPTEMBER 17, 2008

Mr. Chairman and members of the Commerce Committee,

Thank you very much for the opportunity to appear before you this morning to discuss my nomination to the Board of Directors of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. I would also like to thank President Bush for having confidence in me and honoring me with this nomination.

Fifteen years ago this month, I attended my first board meeting as a new member of the Board of Directors of WEDU, my local public television station in Tampa, FL. When I was asked to serve on that board, I willingly agreed -- as a viewer, I appreciated the public affairs programming, and as the mom of three very young children, with a fourth on the way, I was dependent upon the PBS show Barney and Friends for at least a half-an-hour of calm each morning during the reigning chaos. "Yes, of course I'll volunteer for this cause," I told the board officer who recruited me. "I love public television. I *need* public television. Doesn't everyone?"

Over the past decade and a half, as my babies have grown into the teenagers sitting before you today, so too has my awe for what our nation's public broadcasters accomplish each and every day. I have witnessed first hand, as a board member of WEDU and later as its chairman, the masterfully coordinated efforts of station manager and producers, engineers and pledge drive VP's, Ready to Learn outreach directors and capital campaign fundraisers, underwriting salesman and programmers, and of course volunteers and board members, all of whom work together to provide the finest television broadcasts available in our country, programming which in my opinion far surpasses the offerings available on any other channel.

The more I learned at WEDU the more determined I became to ensure that the federal government continued to support our efforts and continued to share the burden of our expenses. Year after year, I traveled here to Washington, to visit you and your colleagues, to remind you of the value of this national asset, and to convince reluctant supporters to step up and fund our efforts. In the process, I learned about the Association of Public Television Stations and their efforts to organize us in our outreach, and they learned about me. Four years ago, I joined their national board of directors, and now work with the finest CEOs and station managers from around the country to help educate you, the Members of Congress, on the critical issues facing the public television community.

And, as I know you are aware, there are critical issues. Perhaps, looming largest, is the February 17, 2009 analog shut-off date for television broadcasts. So many are hard at work to ensure a smooth transition to digital broadcasting, yet just last week the FCC reported concerns in early testing in North Carolina. This is particularly troubling for public TV broadcasters. Of the estimated 25 million Americans who receive their television programming over the air (and who will need to do the most to transition to digital reception), a significant number are supporters and viewers of public television. The CPB and its stations must work hard with commercial broadcasters and the Congress to ensure the success of the transition and ensure that the audience for public television can find its programming.

There are other critical issues for public broadcasters, who must now compete for eyeballs and eardrums in an era of channel proliferation and emerging media and distribution platforms. My children can send a text message on their phones while they listen to their Ipods, surf the web and flip back and forth among several television shows simultaneously. Just the thought of it gives me a headache, but this young generation is adept and sophisticated in its use of technology. It behooves us to keep up with their needs.

Additionally, public broadcasters must face these challenges and accomplish their goals in an era of federal funding that, while increasing, does not keep pace with inflation.

It is indeed a critical time for CPB and the stations it supports. I believe that my background will prepare me well, if I am confirmed to serve on the CPB Board, to help the Corporation meet the challenges it now faces. My years of service as a public television station board member both locally and on the APTS board have provided me a front-row seat in the arena: I am continually exposed to the flow of ideas and issues in the world of public broadcasting, both television and radio. Also, I am a school teacher and administrator by profession. Education continues to be a core value of the public broadcasting community; indeed, the CPB's mission is to "inform, enlighten, and enrich the public." The Federal Act which created the Corporation specifically underscored the use of public media for "instructional, educational, and cultural purposes." I work with children every day in and out of the classroom, and I understand the transformative power of education.

If confirmed by the US Senate to serve on the CPB board, I will draw upon the lessons I have learned from my classroom teaching and from my association with WEDU and APTS to help me make informed and reasoned decisions. I look forward to the possibility.

Thank you again for this opportunity to appear before you today. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.