



Rep. Mary Bono Mack votes to defund public broadcasting

Written by

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WASHINGTON — Although public television and radio provide quality programming, they no longer deserve federal subsidies, Rep. Mary Bono Mack says.

Bono Mack, R-Palm Springs, voted Saturday for a government spending bill covering the remainder of fiscal year 2011 that ends federal funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the entity that subsidizes the Public Broadcasting Service and National Public Radio, as well as local public radio and television stations.

Congress has been appropriating \$450 million a year for CPB.

“While there are many worthwhile programs on both PBS and NPR, it’s time for public broadcasting to finally stand on its own two feet,” Bono Mack said in a statement.

“Federal subsidies are not warranted — nor appropriate — especially in these difficult financial times,” she said. “Digital

technology has opened up a world of new possibilities for all broadcasters, and CPB needs to be smart, creative and forward looking, instead of being forever stuck in a ‘black and white’ era of financing.”

She added: “Every single day, Americans make difficult choices. Many families are forced to pull the plug on their cable or satellite TV just to make ends meet. It’s important for Washington to finally make those same tough choices.”

The spending bill that passed the House on Saturday isn’t expected to win Senate approval, though.

Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Rancho Mirage, “has been a supporter of funding for public broadcasting because of its high-quality educational, cultural and community information programming, particularly its early childhood education programming,” her office said.

Boxer has not said how she will vote this year, however.

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A key to CPB keeping its traditional Senate allies — and having its funding preserved in that chamber — will be the final shape of the spending package and other issues that might be involved.

Chris Edwards, a budget analyst at the Cato Institute, a libertarian-conservative think tank, said he thinks Republicans have a real chance of fulfilling their 40-year goal of ending the government's involvement with public broadcasting.

"I would say there is a better chance it gets cut than at any other time in recent memory," he said in an interview.

Edwards said CPB should be able to easily replace the \$445 million with private funds, especially since many of its shows have been hugely successful.

"I think most of their programming would survive. Big Bird would survive," he said, citing the "Sesame Street" character.

And the benefit of standing on its own, he said, "is they can do what they want and tell politicians to shove it."

Officials with PBS and NPR say that if the Senate upholds the House language, the cutoff would seriously harm public broadcasting and radio and their local affiliates.

"This is the most serious threat to the future of public media in its 54-year history, and its anticipated impact would be widespread, including layoffs, cutbacks

in programming and even the potential shutdown of some radio and television stations across the country," said Charles Kravetz, general manager of WBUR, 90.9 FM in Boston, commenting on the station's website after the House vote.

PBS officials issued a statement saying: "The elimination of funding for public broadcasting approved by the House of Representatives threatens millions of citizens throughout America with the loss of services that they rely on, especially parents and children. PBS' nearly 360 member stations will be severely impacted. Smaller and rural stations, those that operate in areas with the most limited media choices, would feel the most dramatic effects."

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