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OREGON'S MID-WILLAMETTE VALLEY

Schrader, Merkley voice support for PBS, NPR

Written by

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WASHINGTON — House Republicans' weekend move to end federal funding for public broadcasting met with disapproval from Rep. Kurt Schrader and Sen. Jeff Merkley, both Oregon Democrats.

The Republican majority in the House passed a spending bill covering the rest of fiscal 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.

One of those unhappy about the outcome was Schrader.

"Congressman Schrader believes the programming produced by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting plays an important role in keeping Americans informed about their government and their world, and he does not support Republican efforts to completely eliminate funding for public

broadcasting," said his spokesman, James Atkins.

Similarly, Merkley said CPB should be one of the last areas targeted in the name of deficit reduction.

"Public broadcasting has provided valuable educational content to stations across our nation for decades," the senator said in a statement. "We face serious budget problems and must have a serious discussion about how to reduce the deficit while still investing in our communities to create jobs. ... Before we start targeting programs like Sesame Street, we should look at those tax cuts for millionaires and the more than \$46 billion in subsidies we'll be sending the oil and gas companies over the next ten years."

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.

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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 both 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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