



Public TV, Private Gain: KNME's General Manager Rakes It In [Links Fixed]

By Jim Scarantino on August 30, 2012

For a non-profit organization dedicated to public service, KNME-TV pays its general manager more than its faithful supporters might imagine. Polly Anderson, the general manager of PBS New Mexico, receives \$165,000 a year, plus benefits. Her non-profit salary is right up there with what for-profit corporations pay managers at far larger television stations. Though her staff is tiny in comparison, she makes significantly more than the people who manage the huge



workforces of the City of Albuquerque and Bernalillo County.

"I'm offended," said Bernalillo County Commissioner Wayne Johnson when he heard of Anderson's salary. "What does she do? KNME has become basically a satellite repeater. They don't do the level of original production they used to do. The station once was all about education and what was happening locally. That's not what they're doing now."

Johnson knows the station's history. His mother worked at KNME for fifteen years offering an educational program for children called "Kaleidoscope."

Johnson compared Anderson's salary and less demanding responsibilities to the duties of Thomas Zdunek, the Bernalillo County Manager. At \$148,000, he receives the highest salary New Mexico Watchdog has found so far in its survey of the payrolls of local governments. Albuquerque's City Manager makes \$144,773 for overseeing an even larger City Hall workforce responsible for public health and safety, as well as streets, roads, parks, vast real estate holdings and huge capital projects.

"The Bernalillo County manager oversees 2500 employees," Johnson said. KNME employs 49 other than Anderson, according to data obtained from the University of New Mexico's Sunshine Portal.



Polly Anderson

Anderson's salary easily eclipses the compensation of her counterparts at the other PBS affiliates in New Mexico, all of which broadcast pretty much the same programs obtained through the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. All of the New Mexico PBS affiliates do some amount of their own original programming, but the hours devoted to original offerings are not a large part of the overall schedule.

At KENW-TV, the PBS affiliate in Portales operating out of Eastern New Mexico University, the highest paid employee receives \$94,759. That station has 34 employees.

At KRGW, the Las Cruces PBS affiliate operating out of New Mexico State University, the top salary is \$92,855.70. That station operates with only 19 paid employees, according to the data the station provided to New Mexico Watchdog.

The complete payrolls for each station are provided here: [KNME](#), [KENW](#), [KRGW](#).

New Mexico Watchdog compiled KNME's payroll from information on UNM's Sunshine Portal. The other stations provided the information at our request.

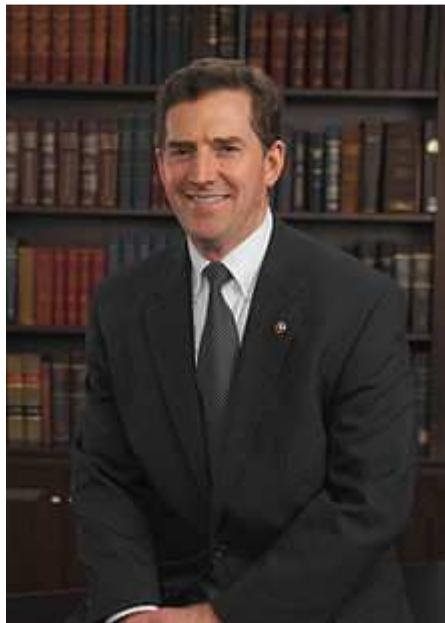
Anderson also leaves all other KNME employees far behind. Not one besides Anderson makes six figures. The closest to Anderson still makes \$67,000 less. The highest salary for the people producing KNME's orginal programming is \$56,000. The median income for KNME employees is \$42,000. Twenty-one employees make under \$40,000. The lowest receives just under \$21,000.

We gave Anderson several days to justify her level of compensation, and explain what it is she does that calls for such a generous compensation package. We asked her if she thought KNME supporters were aware of how much she was being paid, and, if so, what KNME had done to so inform them. We told her we would print her response in full, verbatim.

We never received any response from Anderson.

“Lavish Salaries” Make Public Broadcasting A Target for Fiscal Hawks

Last year, U.S. Senator Jim DeMint, Republican of South Carolina, blasted “lavish” salaries paid to top executives at the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, PBS and National Public Radio. CPB is the “steward” of the federal government’s investment in public broadcasting. Its programs are distributed through PBS and NPR. The television programs are broadcast on New Mexico’s PBS affiliates.



U.S. Senator Jim DeMint

DeMint penned [an op-ed](#) published in the Wall Street Journal in which he reported how a few select people in non-profit public broadcasting are getting rich. Paula Kerger, the President of PBS, in 2009 pulled in \$632,223 a year. The President and CEO of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting netted \$498,884 in reportable income, and another \$70,630 in other compensation. DeMint wrote, “That’s practically a pittance compared to Kevin Klose, president emeritus of NPR, who received more than \$1.2 million in compensation, according to the tax forms the nonprofit filed in 2009.”

DeMint argued that if these non-profits could pay such lavish salaries, then they should have the funds to survive as private broadcasters without annual federal subsidies.

“He doesn’t even mention how people chipping in \$25 to ‘save’ shows like Sesame Street might feel misled if they saw the salary numbers,” observed [Tim Graham](#) in reviewing DeMint’s opinion piece. Graham is director of Media Analysis at the Media Research Center.

A [review](#) by Graham of public broadcasting tax data in 2009 found even more generous salaries. NPR’s CEO received over \$1.3 million the previous year.

PBS President Kerger has enjoyed annual raises of about \$100,000 even while the nation suffered through the recent recession. In 2007 her annual salary was \$424,409. In 2008 she received a \$110,000 raise to rake in a new personal best of \$534,500. As noted above, in 2009 she topped that, taking home \$623,223. Ironically, last year PBS distributed a report entitled: [“In a Weak Economy, Why Is CEO Pay on the Rise?”](#)

In the face of criticism, Kerger has seen a small reduction in her base pay. Her reportable income in 2010 dropped slightly to \$603,403.



Paula Kerger

Anderson, according to UNM records New Mexico Watchdog reviewed in the office of University Counsel, was hired at the \$165,000 salary and has not received a raise above that level. She did not answer our questions whether she has received any bonuses above her regular pay.

KNME does not make it easy to discover Anderson’s salary now or in years past. KNME’s web page provides no financial data. Until UNM launched its Sunshine Portal this year, the information on Anderson’s salary was available only in unindexed volumes of computer payroll printouts kept in the office of University Counsel.

New Mexico Watchdog has pending a public records request to inspect KNME’s financial and other information. A [whistleblower lawsuit](#) filed last year alleges that UNM has siphoned off millions of federal and state dollars from KNME operations.

Supporters of public television may not be happy to learn that public television stations making frequent pleas of poverty pay their executives so handsomely. The publisher of the Dunkirk, New York [Observer](#) was upset to learn that he had been faithfully giving money to a public television station in Buffalo that paid its top executive \$310,000. “Why would anyone who wants people to donate their hard-earned dollars to their programming consciously earn that much money? Are they out of touch or are they just plain selfish?” he asked in an editorial entitled, “[Inflated salaries costly to PBS image.](#)”

Journalists are beginning to examine executive pay at other PBS affiliates, like [WGBH of Boston](#) where over seven people receive more than \$200,000.

Non-Profit TV Pays As Good As For-Profit TV

We consulted three individuals who work in the broadcasting industry in Albuquerque: the general manager of a large television station, a high-level executive in a large broadcasting corporation, and a producer at a local television station. The consultations were not for attribution. We wanted to know how Anderson’s public non-profit television salary compared to the level of compensation in the private profit-driven market.

First, we must note the comparison is not quite fair. Anderson manages a smaller staff and budget than local private television broadcasters. Those broadcasters turn out daily product—morning, noon, evening and nighttime news reports, along with updates and the notorious “breaking news” alerts. With those caveats, all of which favor Anderson, we made our inquiries.

The consensus was that Anderson’s \$165,000 salary at non-profit public KNME-TV was in line with what executives in similar positions make in Albuquerque’s for-profit broadcasting sector. The executive at the large broadcasting corporation was miffed that Anderson’s paycheck was larger than his. The producer shared his personal salary, and it fell below all of KNME’s salaries for its producers.

One could argue that the private companies need to treat their employees better. Or the point may be that KNME’s generous salary for its top executive shows the station really does not need public subsidies to get by.

Between 2001 and 2012, the federal subsidy of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting has increased from \$340 million to \$441.1 million, [according to Sen. DeMint](#). PBS has asked for a \$445 million advance for 2015. PBS receives only 15% of its budget from federal funding. The balance comes from donations and sponsorships.

According to [The Washington Post](#), Republican Presidential nominee Mitt Romney has said that, while he is a fan of PBS, he will end its federal subsidies if elected. He said he believes the institution can and should stand on its own. PBS CEO Kerger called Romney’s comments “very disappointing” and said any further cuts would be “crippling” because some local affiliates depend heavily on federal largesse. President Obama [has opposed](#) defunding PBS and NPR on the grounds that the \$400 million plus of federal subsidies have little effect on the nation’s staggering deficit.

On a side note, a recent paper in The Cato Institute's Policy Analysis publication makes the case that PBS and NPR would be better organizations, and provide better, more robust, more diverse and more challenging programming if they were allowed to go private. The article is entitled, "If You Love Something, Set It Free."

(*Disclosure:* Jim Scarantino, the author of this report, was a regular panelist on the KNME-TV public affairs weekly program "New Mexico In Focus" for several years until announcing in July 2010 that he was leaving for a period of extended travel. As a panelist, Scarantino had little to no contact with Anderson. He was paid \$100 for preparation and taping of the program.)