

The Future of Public Television
The Cultural Policy Center at The University of Chicago



**The Future of Public
Television**

Presented by:
Cultural Policy Center
The Harris School of Public Policy
The University of Chicago

Transcript
Day One, Session Five:
The Politics of Public Television,
by Ken Auletta
December 2, 2004

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John Callaway Author of nine books, including four best sellers, the reason he is so good is that he has experienced just about every facet of life. After all, this is a man who in another life, as he describes it, taught and trained Peace Corps volunteers, served as a Special Assistant to the U.S. Undersecretary of Commerce, worked in Senator Robert Kennedy's 1968 presidential campaign, and this, I think, is his highest honor, was the first Executive Director of the New York City Off-Track Betting Corporation. After that, he went straight and became the Chief Political Correspondent for the *New York Post*, then staff writer and weekly columnist for the *Village Voice*, and for a long time he wrote a wonderful weekly political column for the *New York Daily News*. I first encountered Ken many years ago when I interviewed him at WTTW about his book, *The Underclass*. I knew that he knew his stuff. His research was impeccable, his writing lucid, and he's only gotten better and better in the years since *The Underclass*. You can't write books like *The Three Blind Mice*, *How the TV Networks Lost Their Way*, *Greed and Glory on Wall Street*, *The Fall of the House of Laymen*, or *World War 3.0: Microsoft and Its Enemies*, unless you have a command of history, economics, psychology, law, sociology, political science, communications, theology and criminology. In other words, you must be in command of the human condition and you must gain the confidence of and gain command of the personages and worlds of Bill Gates, Rupert Murdoch, John Malone and Ted Turner. Writing about public television in June 4, 2004's *New Yorker* must have been a breeze after duking it out with those characters. And Ken Auletta knows what it's like to be on the inside of public television, having hosted several public television programs. We asked Mr. Auletta to speak today on the theme, 'The Politics of Public Television'. He may stray from that subject to provide us with a broader perspective, and that would be entirely welcome, but under any circumstances talking about

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welcome, please give a warm one to Mr. Ken Auletta.

THE POLITICS OF PUBLIC TELEVISION

Ken Auletta You left out my Nobel Peace Prize. Thank you. It is nice to be here. As Elizabeth Taylor once said of her fifth or maybe it was her sixth husband, "This won't take long." Actually, I lie. I am supposed to talk for 45-50 minutes and, hopefully, we can do some questions. Yes, I'd like that.

Several years ago I was doing a profile of Ted Turner and I encountered the following story. He went to speak before an audience in Germany and his staff had constructed an elaborate speech for him and he decided not to give it, and he stood up there, as Ted Turner often does. If you watch Turner long enough, you think you're watching live television. You never know what he is going to do next, and what he did next was he started talking about how, "You Germans are losers. I mean you lost World War I, you lost World War II. You're just a bunch of losers." And his staff is sinking under the table and the German audience is irate. And then Turner did what he often does, he kind of turned it around and he lapsed into this evangelical talk in which he said, "But you know, I owned the Atlanta Braves for years and we were losers, too. You don't have to be a loser. We went on to win the World Series." And by the end of the speech the German audience was cheering Ted Turner. So, I asked him afterwards, I said, "Ted, why did you do that?" And he said, "You know, I'm just like Zorba the Greek. I just get up there and I dance." (Laughter)

So he dug himself out of a hole, and let me dig myself in a hole by starting out the following way. Let me tell you what I don't like about public broadcasting. I don't like the constant pledge drives coupled with some offerings as the films one could find on TBS or the concerts of Peter, Paul, and Mary, or Yanni, or Michael Feinstein. I don't like public broadcasting's concern with ratings, including the very common lament, which I heard a lot last

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spring when I was reporting on public broadcasting, "we have too many public affairs programs". I don't like the growing commercialism and dependence on underwriters who often prefer safer, less controversial programs. I don't like the political activism of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, or Lynn Cheney thinking it was okay to propose that she host a show on PBS, even though it was devoted to children. She is, after all, the wife of the Vice President of the United States. I don't like the fact that many PBS stations are not ashamed to air a shout fest like the McLaughlin Group. I don't like the fact that four out of ten of the largest PBS stations in the country refuse to run the conservative *Wall Street Journal* program on Friday night. We are going to come back and talk more about that show, and Tucker Carlson, later. I don't like your cumbersome bureaucracy or that PBS still lacks, and some of its stations still lack, a digital strategy.

So now that I've dug a bit of a hole for myself in telling you what I don't like, let me try and dance out by telling you a few things that I do like. I like the *Lehrer News Hour* and the fact that they are willing to allow people who they interview to finish a sentence and maybe even a paragraph. I like Bill Moyers' program, though I don't like him mixing commentary with news. I like *Front Line* and Ken Burns, and *NPR* and Charlie Rose, and programs that don't shout, like they do on most cable and, increasingly, on the networks. I like that no one else would undertake a money-losing venture such as great performances, which cost WNET about \$1 million a performance. I like that public broadcasting provided gavel-to-gavel coverage of the Democratic and Republican conventions when the networks came up with these lame excuses why they were not what you really are seeing them for, we get better ratings with something else and, therefore, make more money. I like children's programming that is educational and not violent. I like what I heard this morning,

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or a little while ago, from the Philadelphia station about some of the interesting things they are doing with alternative programming. I like that public television at its best ignores the pressures that haunt the media for ratings or circulation, for 'infotainment and gotcha', and more OJ, more Lacey Peterson.

But since journalists don't like to wallow in good news, let me return to the ominous. Among the most ominous facts I've encountered is a recent Pugh poll showing that two-thirds of Americans believe the American media is biased. This is ominous because for the media to do its job, we must be perceived as truth seekers. People will not talk to us if they don't trust us. We don't have subpoena power. Because the Bush Administration doesn't believe the press represents the public interest, and this is the thing that shocked me in doing a piece on Bush and the press for *The New Yorker* last winter, the thing that punched me in the nose in reporting that piece, and in talking with Karl Rove and the president's chief of staff and others in that administration, and then with the reporters who covered them, the Bush people think of us, meaning people like me who are reporters and many of you, as a special interest, as people who don't have the public interest in mind; we have our own interests in mind, which is to get headlines, get a story, get on page 1, get a scoop. And that's one of the reasons, because they feel that way, that this president has held fewer press conferences than any modern president since Eisenhower.

We also subvert journalism, it seems to me, when we talk of creating a liberal counterpart to *Fox News*, be it on CNN or elsewhere, or even perhaps on PBS and public television, the idea being that it would serve as the liberal counterweight to some of the conservatives at, particularly, let's say, *Fox News*. This idea has been advanced by, among others, a fellow by the name of Jay Rosen who is the dean of the NYU Journalism School. Now Jay happens to be a very thoughtful guy and this

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happens to be a very dumb idea. For journalism and PBS to get the public support it needs, it must be seen at free of political agenda. I am not talking about fake objectivity here. I am not talking about the way we cover the **Swift boat veterans** who basically put out a bunch of lies, or mostly lies, not all of them. They had something right, it seems to me, about Cambodia, but most of what they said was a lie and it's a false even-handedness for us to say, "Well, we have to give their side and then the other side." Sometimes, not sometimes... our job, as best we can as journalists, is to try and tell people the truth, which means parsing the false claims that people make, be it the Kerry supporters or the **Swift boat veterans** and Bush supporters. But what's important is that our customers, our readers, viewers, listeners believe that the information we provide attempts to tell the truth, free of bias. I don't want half the audience saying, "I don't believe what the president says about the election in Iraq or the size of the poverty population." To build a consensus in a democracy requires a common accepted set of facts.

Today, one of public broadcasting's great assets is the trust you engender. A Roper poll found that 50 percent of American adults ranked public television first among the institutions they trusted "a great deal". By the way, Congress had 10 percent trust and, if it makes you happier, commercial networks had only 17 percent. So, that's a great asset you've got in public broadcasting, which I want to come back to.

Journalism does not need to offer the public more reason, it seems to me, to believe that we are biased. Perception matters, which is why I found Mrs. Cheney's approach to Pat Mitchell inviting the head of PBS to breakfast and having a gentleman by the name of Michael Pac, who has produced many shows for PBS and is now, as you know, head programmer at the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, propose that Mrs. Cheney would host a series on PBS for middle

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school children, history. PBS' staff was appalled-I reported this in *The New Yorker* last spring-they were appalled but they felt they had... they didn't want to bite the hand that feeds them, so they tried to be polite and string it out, and finally the idea just dissipated, but at the time Mrs. Cheney's staff was calling *The New Yorker* to complain and said this was false, this never happened. So, they said, "What do you want to do, Ken?" I said, "You just tell her they should call Pat Mitchell, they should call her producer Michael Pac, and they should call the following four people at PBS, all of whom confirmed this is exactly what had happened." But I haven't heard from Mrs. Cheney since then, which does not displease me (laughter). But a reason that I suggested that Pat Mitchell's staff was trying to be diplomatic with Mrs. Cheney was because of the support they get from the federal government and the fact that the Congress, obviously, as well as the administration, has tilted to Republican.

It seems to me that if you look at the history, briefly, of public broadcasting it has always been vulnerable to this kind of political pressure. Public television arose from a conviction that commercial was often, in the words of Newt Minow, who I got a chance to say hi to before he had to go out to a meeting but I was glad to see he looks as spry as ever, but if you remember his 'vast wasteland' remark, which I think had a big impact on the politics of this country and the desire to come up with an alternative, so President Johnson tried to come with an idea and he had a young aide by the name of Bill Moyers in the White House with him and they drafted legislation for public broadcasting, and then Johnson met with Wilbur Mills and Wilbur Mills told him, "No Lyndon, we are not going to have a separate fund for public broadcasting, we in Congress want to control the money that we appropriate." And as Bill Moyers told me, that was the end of an idea, of a kind of a trust or a fund that would allow public television to do

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here what the BBC and other countries have been able to do. But the 1967 Public Broadcasting Act did sketch some very high-minded principles and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting was set up to kind of act as a kind of a heat shield and a funding agent for PBS. Looking back, how has it worked?

Among the joys of being a journalist for *The New Yorker* is that I get to play anthropologist by visiting different planets, seeing how the natives perform and operate and then fleeing, going and never having to go back to that planet if I don't choose to. So, I did visit your planet, briefly, last winter and spring, and did that piece which you have mentioned and I have. What I learned about public broadcasting surprised me. The system was designed to avoid centralized power. The CPB has no authority to tell PBS, NPO, or local stations what to do. PBS, unlike a traditional network, owns no stations, does not produce programs and cannot tell the stations what to air. The stations produce programs, but do not control where the PBS schedules them. All parties beg from funds, from Congress to corporate underwriters, to viewers. The nine CPB board members, who generally serve six-year terms are politically appointed and always have been, though I would suggest it has become more politicized in the last several years. No more than five of these nine are supposed to be members of the same party. They are not supposed to involve themselves in second-guessing the programming, but of course, they sometimes do. The system is a camel, designed by a committee. There is no central authority. Each separate entity is a supplicant for money, for favor, for attention. Sometimes, they compete for money. Sometimes, they compete to air their own favorite program. The stations say they are close to their local community, but as of last spring, only 16 stations produced their own local public affairs program. Public broadcast has piously proclaimed that they offer programs seen nowhere else and then they air Yanni and Peter, Paul and

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Mary specials, of which they sell CDs. Public broadcasting cannot plan because its funding is, usually, short term, and it often takes as long for a decision to be made in public broadcasting as it does in government. For instance, I sat in some meetings between PBS and NPR to try and design a digital square, a new digital channel that they would jointly do. This was a year ago and it was about to happen, I was told, journalist taking notes. Almost a year later, where is that? Still on the drawing board. Politics, it seems to me, makes the system more dysfunctional. A belief that PBS was too liberal prompted Nixon to try and rein it in. When Newt Gingrich, several years later, was designated the Speaker of the House in 1995 he denounced public broadcasting as this "little sand box for the rich," and he proposed to zero out its federal subsidy. Some elected officials, that year, talked about selling part of the Public Broadcasting System to investors, and Senator Larry Pressler of South Dakota wanted to enact legislation to privatize all of public broadcasting, including NPR, but in 1996 Pressler lost the Senate seat and so did some others who opposed public broadcasting that year. Republicans soon realized that they were perceived as anti children's programming, anti Big Bird, and recently, this past year, Newt Gingrich told Pat Mitchell, "Nobody is going to take you guys on again." Gingrich told her that he and his colleagues had underestimated the support that public broadcasting had in this country and, in fact, if you look at NPR, their audiences swelled by 60 percent over the last five years, at a time when we talk about more infotainment, their audience is growing. By the way, several other places that do serious work, including *The New Yorker*, including the national edition of *The New York Times*, including *The Atlantic Magazine* have seen their audiences grow as well. Yet, nevertheless, *Common Cause* issued a statement saying "warning", that "public broadcasting was in danger and was going to be

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menaced by congressional actions and by the Bush Administration."

Yet, what happened? Instead of trying to eradicate PBS or NPR, what the Congress has done and what many people who were, otherwise, opponents of you earlier did was they tried to get their voices heard. They did not oppose you, as predicted. But lack of opposition should not be taken as synonymous with support. Support for public broadcasting, it seems to me, does remain tenuous. Lately, the CPB and its chairman, Ken Tomlinson, have been more assertive. They have pushed hard for more conservative voices on the PBS schedule. They have attacked Bill Moyers. They have helped fund new PBS programs hosted by conservatives such as Tucker Carlson and *The Wall Street Journal* editorial page. And PBS and CPB staff have begun to have weekly meetings, yet despite such collaboration, there is a schism that does exist, certainly between PBS and the CPB.

The stated mission of public broadcasting, CPB Chairman Tomlinson told me in an interview last spring is, "We serve the underserved." But Tomlinson's definition of the underserved differs, I think, from some of you in this room. He defined this audience in the following way to me. He said, "Frankly, when I think of public affairs in this era, although I think the news hour is still unique, it is no longer unique in news and current affairs programming because cable has brought just a political richness, for political junkies at least, everything from Chris Matthews to Brit Hume." Then he went on to say, "You need people to feel they are getting something on public television they don't get anywhere else. It is absolutely critical for people on the right to feel they have the same ownership stake in the public television as people on the left have." I believe that Tomlinson is correct to want an ownership stake in public television and public broadcasting for conservatives. Where I think he is wrong is that he thinks cable shout fests fill the public affairs' void.

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So, I then asked Tomlinson what is your preferred model? What would you like as your future model for public affairs? And then he said to me, "In many ways, C-Span is filling the original intent of the founders of public broadcasting. I want a neutral host." I was confused. Since Tomlinson had just told me a moment before that that he wanted more conservative hosts, how does he square the two, a neutral host versus a conservative host? He didn't. He changed the subject. So Tomlinson went on to say that public television could do what commercial television didn't do; produce programs devoted to music and children's education and programs that "preserve cultural heritages". He said he also believes that local public affairs constituted a real gap that public broadcasting needed to fill. Localism, in fact, may be the fight of public broadcasting. It may be a lengthy fight since, as noted earlier, only 16 stations air their own public affairs programs and it is also not clear that Tomlinson's concept of local public affairs would match that of many of you in this room. If one person reflects the tension between PBS and public broadcasting and the CPB, it is probably Bill Moyers, who, as you know, has produced programming since the 1970s or early 1970s for public television. Moyers' commentaries became an excuse for his critics to tar him. Three days after Republicans swept both houses of Congress in the 2002 midterm election Moyer, in a commentary at the end of his program, warned the conservatives "will force pregnant women to give up control over their own lives and will use taxes to transfer wealth from working people to the rich, and will allow corporations to eviscerate the environment." During the Senate Commerce Committee Hearing in November 2003 on Cheryl Halpern to become a new member of the CPB board, Senator Trent Lott, who was then the majority leader-this was before he had embarrassed himself with his support for racism by endorsing the good work of former Senator Strom Thurmond-called Moyers' post-election 2002 commentary the most blatantly partisan,

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irresponsible thing I have ever heard in my life, and he pressed her. He said, "Why don't you insist on having some content control at the CPB, of programs that appear on PBS?" The fact of the matter is, said Ms. Halpern, "I agree to Senator Lott." Clearly, Halpern would like to have a more assertive CPB in terms of content policing and clearly the White House would because they have turned down Democratic nominees who refused to give the pledge that they wanted to see a more activist CPB in terms of content. Pat Mitchell, fearing that she had to address this gap, met with the CPB at a breakfast late last year and tried to talk sense on this point, dancing diplomatically. They yelled at Bill Moyer, they talked about the left tilt of PBS. In the end, Mitchell was left to stammer and say, "You're supposed to be our firewall."

As a journalist, I have learned that the more time you spend looking at something, the more complicated it often gets. Good journalism, it seems to me, much accept complexity and so must public broadcasting. If the media is ignoring vital issues; poverty, an under-funded Social Security system, Islam, and nuclear proliferation that is a role for public broadcasting. If conservative voices are not represented on public broadcasting or people on the left are not represented in public broadcasting, or if people feel there is a conservative bias or a liberal bias, that becomes a real, not an imagined, problem for public broadcasting.

Public broadcasting becomes more important, it seems to me, because of what is happening in the world today - the world of journalism and the world of media in general. With notable exceptions, journalists are ruled by companies whose leaders rarely come from journalism and look upon us as aliens. They usually look at the idea of public service, of giving something back to community, of educating, as wasteful. It is the nature of corporate executives to extol things like synergy, profit margin, stock price, lowering walls between

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divisions, extending the brand, teamwork; all of these are clichés you hear more and more and, by the way, if you were a business executive you would adopt those clichés too because they have some meaning, business meaning, in the world of business. The clash comes because in the world of journalism they don't mean anything or they mean the opposite of what they meant in the business world. When we hear teamwork as a journalist, we think, 'hey wait a second, we don't want to be teamwork, we want to have independence.'" And when we hear about lowering the walls between divisions, we think "these people want to have the ad sales people in the newsroom," and when we hear things like extending the brand we say, "brand, what does brand mean? Brand doesn't mean anything, brand is credibility, that's what brand is." If you have a scandal like *USA Today* had or *The New York Times* had, what does that do to your brand, buddy? What are you talking about? And when they talk about synergy, we hear the word shilling. We think, "Aha, *The Today Show* wants to put on more stars from the NBC nightly offerings in prime time." That's synergy to them, but it's shilling to us and it's a shilling that undermines our credibility at journalist.

Business people abhor waste. I'm trying to define this difference between the two cultures. They abhor waste and they want to quantify things. Journalists, however, understand that the business of journalism is, essentially, a very wasteful business. We spend a lot of time waiting. We wait for phone calls to get returned. We wait to get a second source. We wait to set up an interview. We wait for the plane connection. It is a terribly wasteful, slow-moving business, and one that when you say something is a quality story, that is very hard for a business person to measure what quality means. You can quantify things. You can quantify circulation, you can quantify ratings, but you can't quantify quality, so it becomes... it just expands that gap between them. So you say what is it you want, journalists?

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What you want is to have a ball in the commercial world and, I'm going to come to your world in a second, but you want a boss that does say what Ted Turner did at CNN, who basically said "I'm going to do 20 hours on the history of the cold war or I'm going to do documentaries, unlike the networks which have gotten out of the documentary business, not because they are going to make me money. In fact, I may lose money," and he did by the way, "but I'm going to do it because I think it's important." And when Bill Paley was running CBS, and this is not always true of Bill Paley as Edward R. Murrow testified at the time, but he did put on 25 hours of Leonard Bernstein from the philharmonic - educational, uplifting, extraordinary. Think about a network putting on 25 hours of classical music education with a Leonard Bernstein-type figure educating people about music. I mean it's extraordinary when you think back.

It seems to me that public broadcasting has similar challenges. The same vices that beset commercial television in journalism are also the enemies of public broadcasting, and it seems to me these can be captured in four words: Synergy, brand, humility, and bias. For public broadcasting, synergy, to go to the first word, can spell death, it seems to me, or airing programs to chase ratings or to sweeten the station's fund-raising appeal, or to make nice to political officials or sponsors. There is a belief that these synergies can build a corporate brand, which brings us to the second vice. For public broadcasting, you subvert your brand when you expand commercial advertising minutes or make a deal with Comcast for a new children's digital video, on-demand channel that will carry advertising and only be available to cable subscribers who pay extra for this pay-per-view service. A synonym for credibility is trust. Think of the trust public broadcasting engenders when NPR refuses to dumb down and airs longer pieces on serious subjects. When Bill Moyers provides an alternative little-seen on the

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broadcast networks by exploring the power and reach of big media, when PBS offers a genuine mix of political voices and does not encourage mud wrestling matches we only gain trust, and this gets to the third vice, when we display humility. Humility is what CBS lacked for 12 days this fall when it said we're confident we've got the story on Bush and the National Guard, and 12 days later it turned out they didn't have the story, they didn't have the sources. They actually had half of a very good story. For the first time they let the former Lieutenant Governor Democrat of Texas go on the air and say that he used political influence to get Bush in the Air National Guard, but the documents that CBS promoted and proudly said they had and knew they had, they didn't have them, and they undermined their entire report because of that. That was a lack in humility.

Humility, it seems to me, is the back story of good journalism. It is the most important quality a good journalist has. Yes, you've got to be able to think and yes, you've got to be able to put your thoughts on paper or on the air, and yes, you should be able to write, but essentially, the most important tool of a good journalist is the ability to listen and ask questions, to really listen and really ask questions. I don't mean the fake questions where you are shouting a question at someone and it's for on-air broadcast and you're showing off: I mean real questions. That takes humility and it's something that I think is dissipating in the world of journalism, increasingly, as you get to journalists becoming celebrities and going on these cable shows, being interviewed, and, therefore, jacking up the electric fees by going out and saying sharp controversial things.

Public broadcasting also has to listen to those interviewed, to disparate elements of the community, to those who are little heard. Lack of humility often leads to hubris, and not just in the field of journalism. It was hubris, after all, that lead Newt Gingrich

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in 1995 and 1996 to think that he could decimate public broadcasting. And a worry is that with the Bush Administration winning the election, hubris could set in and they could overplay their hand in terms of pushing a political agenda in regard to public broadcasting.

Finally, a fourth vice, bias; there has been a lot of discussion about press bias and I think you sometimes can find examples. Certainly on *Fox News* you will see examples of a conservative bias, and if you read a story on, let's say, gun control or abortion in the *New York Times*, you will often see a liberal bias beneath that as the public editor of the *New York Times*, Dan Oakrun, wrote in a piece this August for the *New York Times*. I think all of us have to guard against, if we're supposed to be straight reporters-not commentators, not someone giving a speech expressing opinion, as I am now-we have to be careful to try and police that bias for some of the reasons I talked about before. But I don't think a liberal or conservative bias is the dominant bias in the press today.

I think the dominant bias is a market-driven bias, a bias for conflict, a bias for gotcha, a bias for entertainment, for ratings and circulation, for things that will get attention in a world of dwindling audiences and more choice. While we gauge who is ahead in the latest poll we often ignore what Bush's tax cuts are doing or what Senator Kerry's proposals really would have cost and what they might have done to the deficit, or what Bush's tax cuts have done to the deficit.

But public broadcasting, if it were not intimidated by ratings or the search for funders who would not shy from serious public affairs programming, would do more serious work than they do, even though a lot of what you do is quite good. And you would also not assume, by the way, there are just two viewpoints. One of the things that drives me crazy about CNN is *Crossfire*, and implicit in *Crossfire* is this belief that there are two views, either liberal or conservative, or Democrat and Republican.

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There are lots of different views and oftentimes in the *Lehrer News Hour* you don't have the full range of views any more than you do in a lot of other places, and I think there are a lot of different views and different voices that is the responsibility of public broadcasting to search for.

When they were talking to me, it was a revelation to me, at least; I was stunned to discover that they had the same view of the market-driven bias of the press, this preoccupation with gotcha, with entertainment, with headlines that you often hear critiqued on the left, which is an opportunity, if I just may pause there, for public broadcasting; because what it suggests to me is that there is a potential constituency that extends from left to right for some of the things that you often are and should more be about. We are witness, it seems to me, when you look at the media world today we are witness to two opposite trends that are colliding: On the one hand, big media, and on the other hand, more choice, particularly fueled by the internet and by the digitalization revolution. Which of these trends will triumph, big media or choice? I don't know. I could make either argument and be intellectually reasonably comfortable, though I tend to be more pessimistic, so I would probably make the argument that the dreaded big media will triumph, and I don't like that but I know that, and I know this. Big media does represent an opportunity for public broadcasting to make its argument that it provides a true alternative. The public is restive, the Congress is restive, the Bush Administration and the left are restive with some of the things that they see in big media. You saw it at the *Super Bowl* with Janet Jackson's breast. You saw it just last week with *Monday Night Football* with that stunt that was pulled. You hear it in the filth spewing out of the mouth of Howard Stern. We are not just talking about the kind of job that the press does, we are talking about entertainment values and people worried about their kids and you don't have to be

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a right-wing conservative to worry about how your kid's mind is getting polluted by some of the stuff that he or she sees or watches or hears.

But to succeed, it seems to me, you must provide a true alternative, one that is free of ratings and commercial and political pressures, that educates as well as it entertains, that provides an information oasis in a churning sea of news you can use, infotainment, Michael Jackson, the people-ization of news.

When Newt Gingrich gave the keynote address to many of you last year at a public television station manager's meeting, he said that he listens now to NPR when he drives to work, and he said that in an age of big media and more channel choices, he felt there was now an opportunity for public broadcasting to strengthen its community ties. He said, "If you take the three dumbest things done on commercial television last week, you would have an automatic pretty good argument for why we should have some alternative." All this costs money. One way to insulate public broadcasting from its annual hat-in-hand pilgrimage to Capitol Hill, its endless fund drives, its pleas to corporate funders to sponsor programs they feel might undermine their friendly product is to establish a substantial trust fund. The figure here used earlier this afternoon I heard was \$15 million. Pat Mitchell has talked about \$5 billion. Obviously, it is something, an idea that came, went, and maybe has come back again. I don't have to recite the figures, which I could, about how much the public supports public broadcasting in England, Canada, France, etc., but I just point out that when Pat Mitchell mentioned it this morning, she called for a committee to look into it, which sounded to me very much like the Committee on the Digital Future to look into *Public Square* had heard last year between NPR and PBS. One way to come up with this sum, Ms. Mitchell does suggest, would be when the Federal Communication Commission auctions the analog spectrum. I don't know whether that's the way to do it. I don't think you're going to get an appropriation from the

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Congress certainly free of the kind of restraints that they would try to impose.

There was a task force report composed by many of you in public broadcasting in June 2003, and you looked at this issue of how to fund public broadcasting, and you concluded, the task force concluded, that there was no silver bullet, that in fact the idea of a trust fund was probably a false ambition. It was not likely to happen and that is the realist school. The realist school believes that let's not aim for the moon because you're just going to hit the top of the trees and you're going to frustrate people. It's not going to succeed. There is another school, that you might call the new realist school, which says it is time to create a new reality here and that you have an opportunity, because of the power of bid media and the adverse reaction to big media, to create a new constituency. So which is the more realistic of the two schools? I don't know if there is an answer you can give, it's just a judgment you can give, but the judgment I like is the one that Albert Camus made during the French resistance. If you remember, he was not just a great leader of the French Resistance, he was also a great writer, and he was a man wracked by his own bleak moments-he did after all commit suicide later-but he also had this hopeful side, and he said to a friend, "Why are we fighting the Nazi's, we're not going to succeed. They're the local power." He said, "A good hope is better than a bad hope." Thank you. (Applause)

John Callaway We're supposed to be out of here by 5:15. Should we try to be out of here by say 5:10 so they can get in or can we take until 15? So, we now have an opportunity to ask questions. I have one question and then the floor will be yours. This is a truly naïve question, but I can't resist asking it.

Ken Auletta You notice the soft way he begins? Watch the punch he's going to throw now. Go ahead.

John Callaway No, no I'm serious about this. This is one that I thought Republicans and

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Democrats, particularly market-driven Republicans and Democrats, could have gotten together on. Even though I acknowledge that the NAB and commercial broadcasting, would you say, is one of our more powerful lobbies, big-time power...

Ken Auletta And not because of the money they give but because of the airtime they give.

John Callaway Absolutely, but I still can't understand why, particularly given... you mentioned the lack of convention coverage, which I personally think is a scandal. There used to be a tradition called special events; even though you might not make news at a convention, you cover it as special events, but I don't understand how they got away, in this day and age of options, with getting all of this for nothing. I just still, I mean... Is the answer they're just that powerful? Step back, help me with my naivety.

Ken Auletta It's not naivety. You know the answer. The answer is power. They have power and it is complicated, but it was a give-away and they took it and if you... I have always been struck at, when you watch, and I saw this even at the hearings for public broadcasting in February, when you very smartly had all of your local station representatives and general managers in the congressional hearing rooms, and all these members of Congress went into these testimonials about how great my local NPR or my local public broadcast station is, and you know they're the only ones who interview me, they are the only people who interview me. Well, you square that by the amount of interview time they get sometimes on local TV and radio stations, though they're getting less of that because of big media, but nevertheless, that's the real source of power.

John Callaway By the way, one amendment on your speech. In your *New Yorker* article you got it right, but you left out a word that I just want you to acknowledge and that is there are only about 14-15 stations doing nightly public affairs.

Ken Auletta Nightly, sorry, 16.

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John Callaway You left that out.

Ken Auletta I did, sorry.

John Callaway We've got one over here.

Art Hancock Art Hancock from Wisconsin Public Television. This is the type of thing that I wrestle with as a journalist when I'm dealing with how much accommodation to give to the Republican Party right now. You know, I was raised in the 50s in Texas public education, and I got a lot of education on the Communist Party. And I was told, yeah, they have elections over there. Those are guaranteed by the constitution, but the constitution also says that the Communist Party has primacy in all matters of state. And now we have a guy in the White House who ran the president's campaign who says his next goal is a permanent Republican majority. Now, when I'm hearing something like that, I'm saying is this something you deal with by the same rules you have always dealt with? I mean, I've talked to Republicans and Democrats over the years and I agree with things in both sides. But something tells me in my gut that we are dealing with something totally different here, and I curious to hear what you think we're dealing with here.

Ken Auletta Well I asked... Andy Carr is Chief of Staff to Bush and in *The New Yorker* from last winter on the piece I did on Bush and the press, he kept on saying, "Leaks, we don't like leaks, they're terrible, and reporters just don't call up and get second sources anymore". And I said, "Well how... You don't return your press calls. When reporters call you, you don't return the calls and yet you're sitting here and complaining to me about how reporters don't seem to check their sources?" Well, they're seeking your opinion, but you won't give it, you won't to me. And then he said a curious thing to me, he said, "My job is not to leak to the press." I said, "You're equating talking to the press with leaking to the press", and he was which I felt was very revealing. I think part of the job of journalists is to be in opposition. When I say in opposition, I don't mean to say that we take a liberal position against these conservatives. I

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don't mean that at all. I mean that we question people in power. That's our job, and we question their facts, and as long as we continue to do that job, even if they have a permanent Republican majority, I think, you help save democracy. Now, by the way, I would not be overly alarmed about talk of a permanent Republican majority. Have you ever met a baseball manager or player or football manager or player who doesn't think they're going to win every game? That's all Karl Rove was saying; he wants to win every game. He's not going to. It doesn't happen. I mean, the truth is, I was talking to a very prominent Republican last week, and this Republican said to me on the phone, "If we don't get out of Iraq in the next 15 months, we're going to get killed in the mid-term elections in two years". Republicans. Throughout history, I mean, remember Nixon was going to have a permanent Republican majority too, in '68 and '72. It didn't last very long. So, I'm not as alarmed about that. Looking at the sweep of history in this country, there are a lot of changes over the years.

John Callaway What if you were a conservative Republican and the House was in the midst of it's 40-year democratic run?

I think a lot of people forget. When I started broadcasting in the middle 1950s and 1960s to be a ***** conservative, to try to find some air time, you were thought of as a freak at that time.

Male voice PBS gave them a whole series.

John Callaway But that was eight years later. I'm just saying. This gentleman just mentioned the sweep of history. Things do turn around.

John Fortier My name is John **Fortier**. I host a show called *Mental Engineering*. We deconstruct TV commercials and my question is very straight forward. Is public television trapped between two metaphors, the metaphor of being balanced and the metaphor, which means to be the fulcrum, and the metaphor of being the counterweight to commercialism?

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Ken Auletta That's probably... and by the way, you know, newspapers deal with this problem by having an editorial page and a news page. So, that's how they divide it and one of the reasons why Dan Rather, for instance, is such a lightning rod, unlike say, Tom Brokaw or Peter Jennings, is that he is often perceived as someone who mixes two different roles. However, an anchor's role is to be your host, the maitre d', you know, taking you to your table and telling you this is the menu of new choices tonight and being neutral, saying you can have this or you can have that. But Rather you see as the guy who so oftentimes throughout his history has expressed opinions, be it challenging Nixon or challenging Bush. One of the reasons why his likeability measurements, which Larry Grossman, if he is in the audience, knows a lot more about than I do. I was stunned at all the people in the news who say they don't do these poll measurements on likeability like they do in *****. I contend that's "bullshit". They do do it and one of the things they found is Dan Rather's likeability is less than other anchors, and the reason is because he is perceived as more political. So it becomes a drag on his ratings at CBS. We're always going to have that problem and you're right. You put your finger on something that is a problem in journalism, that you just struggle with.

My argument is that Bill Moyers, instead of just coming out and saying, "I produce a liberal program once a week and a pretty goddamn good one once a week." Instead of saying that, he takes this pose that "I'm a fair and objective balanced reporter" and then he mixes it a bit and it bothers people. Journalistically, it bothers me and I admire Bill Moyers, but I think he makes a mistake on that.

Karen Bond Hi, Karen Bond, media activist and management consultant. You said that it's false to say that you have to give both sides of the story.

Ken Auletta I would say more than both sides. I think there are more than both sides.

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Karen Bond Well, okay, more than both sides of the story. Actually, your obligation is to tell the truth and that's a real issue when you're interfacing with. For example, our local PBS station, you are charged with, if you want to recommend a documentary it may be on the Afghan massacre, the documentary has to say 'the good things about the massacre and the bad things about the massacre', and that's just a really hard documentary to find so, therefore, you don't get to tell people about the massacre, which is, in effect, censorship under the guise of "we need balance." My question is, you say your obligation is to tell the truth, who is the arbiter of truth when it comes to interfacing with these broadcasting entities.

Ken Auletta Your job, as best you can, is to tell the truth. Sometimes you don't know the truth and you shouldn't pretend to, and you don't know all the facts, you don't have enough sources. It's complicated and it's speculative. If someone says to me, "If we cut taxes by 20 percent, we're going to grow the economy by 30 percent, I can't prove that this person is false. What I can do and what I should do as a journalist is go back historically and look. When we have cut taxes by a roughly comparable amount, what impact did it have on our economy? That's a way of getting/approximating the truth. But oftentimes you don't know what the truth is, so you do the best you can. Who is the arbiter of the truth? Well, hopefully, it's not the government because I have antiquated view that the first amendment would not allow that. One of the things you worry about increasingly in the world of big media is if the people above you who sign your check are adjudicating what the truth is. Will they have the same interests, journalistic interests, as you do in mind or will they do it because they want to have the least resistance from the people your report may be upsetting? What's going on in Washington and is coming through a hearing later this month with the special prosecutor prosecuting journalists and including Judith Miller of *The New York Times*

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for a story she never even wrote identifying CIA agents undercover and Matthew Cooper for a story he did write for *Time Magazine*, *thankfully*, their bosses are standing behind them. But you know, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* and *The Wall Street Journal* are different kinds of places, I would argue, than a lot of other journalistic entities in that they are family owned and they have a culture that runs through decades and a lot of these other places don't have that same culture and might cave more easily and that concerns me.

Paula Duffy Paula Duffy, Director, University of Chicago Press. Interestingly, the four words you kind of organized your talk around are also words that universities need to be very mindful of in terms of leadership and market-driven forces that, in many institutions, have become dominant in higher education. You identified what would be seen as a tremendous opportunity given the lack of public faith in big media. My question really is does the structure of public broadcasting defy the kind of entrepreneurial effort that really would be necessary to take advantage of what is a window of real opportunity, and do you really think that the entrepreneurial effort will come from the internet and a completely different platform, that trust will be built up through other channels?

Ken Auletta Well, there are two questions. The first question, do I think that the structure of public broadcasting really subverts the ability to build the kind of support it might need? The answer to that is maybe. The second question is of the internet. The internet is a wonderful model because it is really a market square for you. If anyone can get their voice out, can block, can... I mean, I as a consumer or as a journalist, I can go Google someone or Barking Dog someone and find out this wealth of information about people. I can self publish. I can talk to anyone I want. I can draw on so many different sources now. It is a wonderful democratic model, as long as we keep it

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open. So, in some ways, that's a perfect public square model for public broadcasting. I think the internet is something that works against the interests of big media and one of the things that encourages me is that every time I spend time doing a profile of a Murdock or a Gates or Turner or John Malone or Barry Diller, when you spend real time with these people, you discover that they are often, when they are candid-and after a while people loosen up and they become more candid and get away from the talking points-they are all afraid. And Bill Gates is afraid and it was a revelation. I'm seeing Bill Gates. This guy is rocking back and forth. I'm still looking at the top of his head the whole time I'm interviewing him because he's rocking back and forth, and he's drinking a Coca Cola and doesn't offer me one and I'm saying I'm really kind of getting angry because I was thirsty; but when you question him you realize he is afraid. What is Bill Gates of mighty Microsoft afraid of? He's afraid of some guy in a garage, or woman in a garage, inventing something that's going to decimate his business model. That's what he was afraid of at Netscape. That's why he was found to be a monopoly in the federal trial that I covered, because he tried to kill Netscape to ensure just that, a permanent Microsoft majority, and that's why you need the government sometimes to blow the whistle, like a referee does in a football game, and say you can't do that. The internet is a countervailing force against the big companies, and it's one of the things that gives me some hope.

Kathleen Cox Kathleen Cox, President of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. My board chair, Ken Tomlinson, was supposed to be here today, and I suspect he is going to be very sorry he wasn't. I do want to speak to and about the Board of CPB. Right now we have eight members, Republicans and Democrats who have one thing in common, and that is to work towards the benefit and expansion of public broadcasting. The two are one, that is, Democrats and Republicans alike. They will say that they have

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been operating in an extremely bipartisan way, and that is certainly how I have experienced it during my seven years there. As I spoke of earlier this morning, the CPB Board is, specifically, charged by statute to review programming for a diversity of viewpoints to make sure the needs of unserved and underserved audiences are met, and also to ensure that issues of a controversial nature are treated in a balanced and objective way. So, it's with those obligations in mind that they are also in a position to suggest to staff to fill those gaps. Bill Moyers is a very, very talented journalist. It's has been absolutely fabulous that he has been associated with our institution and he will be forever beloved, but as you have actually just described, he has a point of view and to the extent that we are about providing a diversity of views, it is incumbent upon us to make sure that there are other voices represented. And I have to say as this whole thing has played out, it has been extraordinary to me to hear the uproar from people who, I would think, would ascribe to the desire and indeed the necessity of having a diversity of voices on the air, have such an objection to the introduction of voices such as Tucker Carlson and *Wall Street Journal*. So, again, in defense of a board that feels that it is trying to do its utmost to work toward the benefit of public broadcasting, I just want to make that statement.

John Callaway Kathleen, thank you. Scott, if you want to talk, we've got about three minutes if you want to make a quick question or a quick comment.

Scott Sanders Sure, just on the last comment. My name is Scott Sanders. I am with Chicago Media Action. On the last comment, I just want to point out again, because I don't think you seem to understand. I don't believe you seem to understand very well that public broadcasting is to provide space for alternate viewpoints, not viewpoints that are already available. I don't know how better to say that. My question is...

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John Callaway Would you say that Tucker Carlson, for example...?

Scott Sanders We've already confined him. We confined him. Let's hear some minority Republican viewpoints that aren't available or some libertarian viewpoints or something else that I'm not normally exposed to. I believe that approach would be closer to your mission.

John Callaway What I was hoping we were going to get from Scott seems almost milk toast compared to this libertarian view.

Scott Sanders Anyway, my question is really not a question. It is just a suggestion or comment. What I think I'd like to see in order to get to this funding issue, this permanent trust fund... I think one of the possible solutions, and everyone in this room can help with this, first one solution I think we're fairly successful with in Chicago is organizing at the community level. We've got 700 people on our mailing list that are all interested and concerned about public broadcasting and media ownership issues. What I'd like to see people in this room address is the fact that they have the tools at their disposal to improve the situation by opening up a broader public broadcast dialogue. I'd like to see public forums about the media and about public broadcasting, and I know Bill Moyers' has tried through NOW to educate on media ownership issues, but I'd like to see this expanded. I would like to see it done on a local city-by-city basis.

John Callaway This gives me a chance to plug our event, Free Press, www.freepress.net, Media Reform Conference set for May 13-15, 2005, in St. Louis. So there is an example. Would you please give a warm applause to our speakers? Thank you.