

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell

Floor Remarks on Public Media Cuts

July 9, 2025

Sen. Cantwell Floor Remarks

[VIDEO]

Sen. Cantwell: Mr. President, I rise to join my colleagues. I want to thank the Senator from Illinois for helping to organize us today, my colleague from Oregon, my dear colleagues from the Commerce Committee, Senator Welch and Senator Baldwin.

But we're here today to talk about an essential safety issue. It's really public safety and someone is trying to masquerade it as a fiscal responsibility issue. The proposed rescission of \$1.1 billion from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting isn't just an attack on NPR and PBS -- it's a reckless, reckless endangerment of 13 million Americans who depend on these stations for life-saving emergency information.

When the floods rise in the Southwest, or wildfires rage in the West, or hurricanes barrel down on the Atlantic or Gulf Coasts -- public broadcasters are often the only lifeline connecting families in rural communities to crucial emergency information. This isn't hyperbole. These are the facts.

Consider what happened in Kentucky during the historic tornado of December 2021. When that devastating storm carved one of the longest tornado tracks in our nation's history, WKMS public radio was often the sole source of news as communities suffered widespread power and communications outages. So, families huddled in the dark, relying on battery-powered radios to receive life-saving information. Without WKMS, many would have been completely cut off.

Or look at Hurricane Helene just last year. Half a million Americans lost power across the Southeast. The internet failed. Cell phone towers went dark. But Blue Ridge Public Radio kept broadcasting, providing the most reliable information when alternative sources simply would not function without electricity.

Even in the aftermath of the unthinkable situations that happened this past week in Texas, Texas Public Radio stayed on the air to provide updates on severe weather alerts, recovery efforts, and helping a community mourn and rebuild together.

The numbers [tell] a sobering story, 79 radio stations, 33 TV stations across 34 states will probably have to shut down if these cuts are enacted. This chart shows the impacts that people are saying we have from [wild]fire, our most vulnerable fire situations coming up, I think these are this year's numbers, that's in red. Our most vulnerable tornado [regions], well, the Senator from Illinois knows this well, all of this in the light color, in the green, very high, relatively high tornado risk. And then the last, our blue coastal areas, relatively high or high risk for hurricanes.

And what do the black dots represent? What do the dots represent in each of these areas? Radio stations that will no longer exist if this rescission comes into power.

If you cut these programs, [they] are going to lose the revenue for these radio stations and risk them being shut down. Now why would we do that?

For me, in this part of the central part of our state, I guarantee you, I don't want to do it. I don't want to do it in Yakima, Washington, where KDNA serves the surrounding community that has high risk of wildfires.

Northwest Public Broadcasting maintains a 24/7 fire coverage from May through October, tracking blazes that threaten lives and property. And they've expanded coverage, especially to address wildfire communication gaps for Spanish-speaking Northwesterners. This is a big agricultural section of our state, and we want to ensure that everybody receives the alerts, regardless of language.

What the President's rescission ignores is that public broadcasters serve as the official resource in at least 20 states' emergency plans. The NPR manages, they manage the Public Radio Satellite System to receive emergency alert systems [feeds] that are fed directly from FEMA. So that means they're part of our emergency response.

PBS operates the Warning, Alert, and Response Network, which transmitted over 11,000 emergency alerts last year alone. That's a [30] percent increase from the previous year. Let me repeat that. 11,000 emergency alerts went out. That's 11,000 times that these radio stations in these areas I'm talking about warn people about the dangerous and life-threatening risk.

In Oklahoma this March, public broadcasters issued 65 fire alerts across 13 counties in just ten days. Six evacuation orders were transmitted. KOSU operates this system at a cost of \$751,000 annually, with CPB providing crucial support.

This is similar to funding [for] locally-focused media in the Alaska Rural Communications Service, Northwest Public Broadcasting, or Harvest Media in the Great Plains. It would cost local broadcasters more than double CPB's current contribution to replace these critical services. So, this isn't smart budgeting, it is definitely penny-wise and pound-foolish. These [cuts] will cost lives instead of saving dollars. Rural communities face the greatest threat. We know that, we just learned this even more this past week in these horrific tragedies.

When a severe storm knocks out power, when tornadoes approach, when cell phones fail, when battery-powered and car radios [still] work, we need to make sure that there are radio stations that do.

Since 1975, Congress has recognized that public broadcasting requires stability to serve communities effectively. So, this isn't a partisan issue. It's a practical issue. We need to say that we are going to save public radio [for] when the next disaster strikes, and trust me, it will. I live

in a very disaster-prone part of the United States with all sorts of issues, from fires to volcanoes to tsunamis to floods to lots of things, we need to access potentially life-saving information.

So, I urge my colleagues to reject these dangerous rescissions and make the investment here that is helping us save lives across the United States. I thank the President, I yield to my colleagues.