



**For Immediate Release**  
**September 26, 2005**

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*Statement of Celia Viggo Wexler, Vice President for Advocacy, Common Cause,  
Before the Board of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting*

I appreciate having this opportunity to address the board today.

This is a time of turmoil for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

- Once again, some members of Congress, in Katrina's wake, are considering zeroing out federal support for public broadcasting.
- The CPB is the subject of an investigation by its own Inspector General.
- All the intense focus on "balance" in public broadcasting has jeopardized serious reporting according to those who have been in the public broadcasting family for many years. This summer, we heard that the environment of fear is "worse than in the days of Nixon," when the President did all he could to eliminate all news and public affairs programs from the public television lineup.

Particularly in these perilous times, the public has a right to know how you reach the decisions you make to spend their money. We've called for process reforms because we believe that too much of the real work of the CPB gets done in private, behind closed doors. Public broadcasting is known for its fine mystery programs. The workings of the CPB should not be one of them.

What you do, and how you decide, matters. It has an impact on the programs that public broadcasting airs or fails to air. It also affects the morale of public broadcasting's journalists, and their level of confidence about engaging in substantive, fact-based reporting that may break some eggs in pursuit of the truth.

We at Common Cause believe your primary and most important mission is to protect public broadcasting from government meddling and to safeguard its editorial integrity. But do you? And if not, what do you perceive as the CPB's overarching purpose? How do you debate your mission?

How do you decide which programs and program concepts are worthy of CPB funds?

**Derek Bok**  
Chairman

**Chellie Pingree**  
President and CEO

**Archibald Cox**  
Chairman Emeritus

**John Gardner**  
Founding Chairman

Do you have differing views on what the term “balance and objectivity” means? How do you as a group resolve those views?

Why did you decide to hire two outside ombudsmen to review programs aired on National Public Radio and the Public Broadcasting Service for bias?

These are some of the questions the viewers and listeners of public broadcasting have a right to know.

Let me conclude with this observation. A few days ago, I had the opportunity to view new film, *Good Night, and Good Luck*, about the career of Edward R. Murrow. After the film, which focused on Murrow’s expose of former Sen. Joseph McCarthy and his red-baiting tactics, I asked myself, would Murrow find a home in broadcasting today? Certainly not at the commercial networks, driven by ratings, and inclined to view news shows merely as profit centers. But I am not sure that public broadcasting would welcome him, either. After all, didn’t Murrow weigh the factual evidence, and then come to a conclusion? Didn’t he offer commentary and not just neutral reporting? Didn’t he eschew “on the one hand, but on the other hand” approach to journalism?

Over the decades, the best reporting on public broadcasting has offended both political parties, and viewers of all ideological stripes. Journalism is supposed to do that, to offer fact-based critiques of government and other institutions to help viewers understand and participate in their democracy. If we cannot rely on public broadcasting to speak truth to power, where do we turn?