Every Republican President since Richard Nixon has tried to strip the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) of taxpayer funding. That is significant not just because it means that for half a century, Republican Presidents have failed to accomplish what they set out to do, but also because Nixon was the first President in office when National Public Radio (NPR) and the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), which the CPB funds, went on air.

In other words, all Republican Presidents have recognized that public funding of domestic broadcasts is a mistake. As a 35-year-old lawyer in the Nixon White House, one Antonin Scalia warned that conservatives were being “confronted with a long-range problem of significant social consequences—that is, the development of a government-funded broadcast system similar to the BBC.”

All of which means that the next conservative President must finally get this done and do it despite opposition from congressional members of his own party if necessary. To stop public funding is good policy and good politics. The reason is simple: President Lyndon Johnson may have pledged in 1967 that public broadcasting would become “a vital public resource to enrich our homes, educate our families and to provide assistance to our classrooms,” but public broadcasting immediately became a liberal forum for public affairs and journalism.

Not only is the federal government trillions of dollars in debt and unable to afford the more than half a billion dollars squandered on leftist opinion each year, but the government should not be compelling the conservative half of the country to pay for the suppression of its own views. As Thomas Jefferson put it, “To compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagations of opinions which he disbelieves and abhors, is sinful and tyrannical.”

A DEMONSTRATED PATTERN OF BIAS

Conservatives will thus reward a President who eliminates this tyrannical situation. PBS and NPR do not even bother to run programming that would attract conservatives. As Pew Research demonstrated in 2014, 25 percent of PBS’s audience is “mostly liberal,” and 35 percent is “consistently liberal.” That is 60 percent liberal compared to 15 percent conservative (11 percent “mostly conservative” and 4 percent “consistently conservative”).

NPR’s audience is even to the Left of that, with 67 percent liberal (41 percent “consistently liberal” and 26 percent “mostly liberal”), compared with 12 percent conservative (3 percent and 9 percent “consistently conservative” and “mostly conservative,” respectively). That may be an acceptable business model for MSNBC or CNN, but not for a taxpayer-subsidized broadcaster.
DEFUNDING THROUGH THE BUDGETARY PROCESS

Cutting off the CPB is logistically easy. The solution lies in the budgetary process. In 2022, the CPB submitted to the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Subcommittees of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees its budget justification for fiscal year (FY) 2023. In it, the CPB requested that Congress give it a $565 million advance appropriation—a $40 million increase compared to its FY 2022 funding. Unlike most other agencies, the CPB receives advance appropriations that provide them with funding two years ahead of time, which insulates the agency from Congress’s power of the purse and oversight. This special budgetary treatment is unjustified and should be ended.

The 47th President can just tell the Congress—through the budget he proposes and through personal contact—that he will not sign an appropriations spending bill that contains a penny for the CPB. The President may have to use the bully pulpit, as NPR and PBS have teams of lobbyists who have convinced enough Members of Congress to save their bacon every time their taxpayer subsidies have been at risk since the Nixon era.

Defunding CPB would by no means cause NPR or PBS—or other public broadcasters that benefit from CPB funding, including the even-further-to-the-Left Pacifica Radio and American Public Media—to file for bankruptcy. The membership model that the CPB uses, along with the funding from corporations and foundations that it also receives, would allow these broadcasters to continue to thrive. As George Will wrote, “If ‘Sesame Street’ programming were put up for auction, the danger would be of getting trampled by the stampede of potential bidders.” Indeed, “Sesame Street” is on HBO now, which shows its potential as a money earner.

PUBLIC INTEREST VS. PRIVILEGE

Stripping public funding would, of course, mean that NPR, PBS, Pacifica Radio, and the other leftist broadcasters would be shorn of the presumption that they act in the public interest and receive the privileges that often accompany so acting. They should no longer, for example, be qualified as noncommercial education stations (NCE stations), which they clearly no longer are. NPR, Pacifica, and the other radio ventures have zero claim on an educational function (the original purpose for which they were created by President Johnson), and the percentage of on-air programming that PBS devotes to educational endeavors such as “Sesame Street” (programs that are themselves biased to the Left) is small.

Being an NCE comes with benefits. The Federal Communications Commission, for example, reserves the 20 stations at the lower end of the radio frequency (between 88 and 108 MHz on the FM band) for NCEs. The FCC says that “only noncommercial educational radio stations are licensed in the 88–92 MHz ‘reserved’ band,” while both commercial and noncommercial educational stations may
operate in the “non-reserved” band.\textsuperscript{54} This confers advantages, as lower-frequency stations can be heard farther away and are easier to find as they lie on the left end of the radio dial (figuratively as well as ideologically).

The FCC also exempts NCE stations from licensing fees. It says that “Noncommercial educational (NCE) FM station licensees and full service NCE television broadcast station licensees are exempt from paying regulatory fees, provided that these stations operate solely on an NCE basis.”\textsuperscript{55}

NPR and PBS stations are in reality no longer noncommercial, as they run ads in everything but name for their sponsors. They are also noneducational. The next President should instruct the FCC to exclude the stations affiliated with PBS and NPR from the NCE denomination and the privileges that come with it.
ENDNOTES

12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., p. 16.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
20. If the agency were not an extension of U.S. foreign policy and national security goals, then its staffing positions would not be classified in their entirety as Tier 3 and Tier 5 national-security sensitive positions, which they are. See U.S. Agency for Global Media, Consolidation Report, p. 13.
31. Ibid.
34. Robbins, “More Rot at America’s Public Diplomacy Mouthpiece.”
51. Ibid.