
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Marta S. Bechtol

Budget & Advocacy

Heather Reese and I attended the annual America's Public Television Stations' (APTS) Public Media Summit with Roy Christianson (WPRA Chair) and Reed Hall (President of the Friends of PBS Wisconsin) to Washington, D.C. at the end of February. As part of the Summit, a breakfast was held at the Library of Congress where [Senator Tammy Baldwin received the Champion of Public Broadcasting Award](#). The Champion of Public Broadcasting Award is the highest given by APTS, to federal and State government leaders and others who have made extraordinary contributions to the work of public television.

As the chair of the Senate Labor Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee, Senator Baldwin recommended continuing record funding levels for the public media accounts under her subcommittee's jurisdiction, despite an overall budget agreement among the Senate, the House of Representatives and the White House that restricted spending to fiscal year 2023 levels. This funding, part of the larger LHHSED bill crafted by Senator Baldwin and ranking Republican Senator Shelly Moore Capito (R-WV), was reported out of the full Appropriations Committee by an overwhelming bipartisan vote of 26-2. Senator Capito was also honored by APTS with the same award.



Following the awards breakfast, we visited all of Wisconsin's congressional delegation, joined by Debbie Hamlett (Milwaukee PBS) and members of the MPBS audience.

The federal FY24 budget was signed into law on Saturday, March 23. Given the challenging fiscal environment and the House proposal to eliminate almost all public media funding, these final funding levels are a remarkable outcome. They demonstrate the bipartisan support for public broadcasting that all of us in the system have worked to strengthen over the last year:

- \$535 million for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) two-year advance.
- \$60 million for interconnection and system infrastructure.
- \$31 million for Ready To Learn.
- \$40 million for the Next Generation Warning System.

Advocacy for the FY25 federal budget has already begun in earnest, as the September 30 deadline is a short six months away.

The Friends of PBS Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Public Radio Association will be held on Wednesday, April 17 at the State Capitol. This is an off-budget year, so the message to legislators will be a "thank you" and a reminder of public media's value to the state in terms of education, public safety and civic engagement.

Broadband Access

Public/private partnerships were the topic of the March meeting of the Broadband Access Task Force. I am engaging in exploratory conversations to determine whether or how public media can support outreach programs that foster broadband adoption in currently underserved communities.

Equity and Inclusion

ECB's Equity and Inclusion committee has been tasked with collecting our annual employee engagement data. The aim of this effort is to ensure that we're operating in ways that meet the employment needs of all staff. While the feedback presents information that similar to last year, the voices in the narrative responses show us that folks are comfortable speaking their minds and offering constructive suggestions. The results give us confidence that we are taking appropriate actions and moving in the right direction. A summary of this year's survey is included in the meeting materials and will be discussed at the meeting.

Summer Intern

We had a terrific experience last summer with our intern from the State of Wisconsin Student Diversity Internship Program (SWSDIP) and decided to hire through it again. We found a very competitive pool with 75 applicants for one position. Balaji "Abi" Abishek will start on May 20 with our Broadcast I.T. Team.