
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

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Federal Budget

Congress narrowly passed a continuing resolution to fund the federal government for the remainder of this fiscal year (through September 30) which President Trump signed it into law on March 15. The bill contains the following:

- \$535 million for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) in FY 2027.
- \$60 million for public television interconnection and system infrastructure in FY 2025.
- \$40 million for the Next Generation Warning System (NGWS) at FEMA in FY 2025.

Funding for Ready to Learn (RtL) through the Department of Education (DOE) remains unclear as the President aims to wind down operations at the DoE. PBS Wisconsin currently receives an RtL grant, so there are questions about the potential impact here.

While funding has been approved for the NGWS program since 2021, grant operations at FEMA have been suspended. Last quarter I announced ECB's receipt of a \$1.5M reimbursement grant contract for NGWS equipment. On February 19, we received a stop work notice from CPB because FEMA has blocked access to the grant portal. Fortunately, ECB had not yet incurred any project expenses. FEMA has stated that they intend to reopen the portal at some point, but questions regarding the future of this grant program remain.

Jordan Siegler (Interim Executive Director of Wisconsin Public Media) and I went to Washington, D.C. with Roy Christianson (Wisconsin Public Radio Association Chair) and Kyle LaFond (President of the Friends of PBS Wisconsin) at the end of February to attend America's Public Television Stations' (APTS) Public Media Summit. There we were joined by Debbie Hamlett (General Manager of Milwaukee PBS) and MPBS representatives. Together we were able to visit every one of Wisconsin's federal legislators and found a range of support among the Wisconsin delegation.

There is active conversation among members of Congress regarding the continuation of federal funding for PBS and NPR, which is appropriated to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). PBS President/CEO Paula Kerger and NPR President/CEO Katherine Maher were called to hearing by Chairwoman Marjorie Taylor Greene of the Subcommittee on Delivering on Government Efficiency (DOGE). The hearing was held on March 26, 2025 and though no action was immediately taken, Rep. Greene did call for CPB to be defunded and dismantled. There is currently a bill in circulation that would bar any further funding for CPB.

ECB receives approximately 13% of its operating funds through grants from CPB. This funding is used primarily to purchase programming. CPB grants serve as seed funds that are leveraged 7 times over in private donations. Our ability to fill our schedule with high quality content that attracts audience and donors would be limited without federal support.

Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Action

In late January, FCC Chairman Brendan Carr sent a letter to Paula Kerger (PBS) and Katherine Maher (NPR) informing them that he planned to open an investigation into sponsorship practices on stations carrying PBS and NPR programming. He stated concern "that NPR and PBS broadcasts could be violating federal law by airing commercials." Thirteen member stations are currently

being investigated for their underwriting announcements; PBS Wisconsin and Wisconsin Public Radio are not among them. Our services maintain strict policies for donor acknowledgements and have always been compliant with the FCC rules governing them.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

ECB manages 28 National Weather Service radio stations across Wisconsin, 13 of which are federally owned. ECB has been managing them on renewable 5-year contracts with NOAA for the last 20 years. Our current contract was scheduled to expire on March 31. However, processes outlined in the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) Cost Efficiency Initiative now require all federal contracts to undergo a justification review, but the review had not yet happened by our contract's expiration date. Thus, NOAA issued ECB a stop work notice effective at midnight on April 1 for the federal weather sites. NOAA staff have requested a temporary 3-month extension while the process for a new 5-year contract is completed, but this has not yet been approved. The fifteen state owned sites are not affected.

State Funding

ECB's FY25-27 Biennial Budget submission requests only standard budget adjustments and a 5% increase in the appropriation line for supplies and services (\$9,100). General Purpose Revenue (GPR) funding, i.e. tax dollars, currently makes up one third of the agency's budget and covers salary for half of the staff, utilities, equipment infrastructure (via debt service) and some administrative costs, primarily state assessments. The Governor's executive budget that was released on February 18, 2025 supports the agency's flat request. ECB has operated on a cost-to-continue budget for the past four biennia. The agency is able to sustain operations due to thoughtful long-range planning, fiscal accountability and general thrift.

Political sentiments do trickle down from the federal level and have lately gained traction in some corners of our state legislature. Criticisms are aimed primarily at NPR and PBS programs. As a reminder, NPR and PBS are content providers and do not wholly represent *Wisconsin* Public Radio or PBS *Wisconsin*. Our services develop Wisconsin-focused news, education, history, and local interest content that would not be produced by any other source. This programming is created by staff at Wisconsin Public Media, ECB's statutory partner; ECB does not produce content.

Loss of state support for ECB would be devastating. GPR funding maintains the infrastructure and network functionality that enables our statewide emergency communications system. ECB is the designated broadcast relay in Wisconsin's Emergency Alert Plan and serves the backup operations center for Wisconsin Emergency Management. ECB facilities house a wide range of public safety partners, maximizing the state's infrastructure investment and creating cost-saving efficiencies for critical services. Yes, people are alerted to weather and emergency events by cell phone these days, but cellular technology is the first to fail in weather events; there must be a backup. Broadcast is a hardened, reliable system through which all Wisconsin residents have uninterrupted and cost-free access to information that can keep them safe.

I have spent a lot of time over the last six weeks introducing and explaining the value of ECB's infrastructure and operations to elected officials. They decide the priorities of the state, and they should have clear understanding of what the state has – or would lose – if our state funding were to be reduced or eliminated.

State Advocacy Day

The Friends of PBS Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Public Radio Association held their annual Advocacy Day on Wednesday, March 20 at the State Capitol. Volunteer advocates from across the state traveled to Madison to attend this event. By the end of the morning, face-to-face meetings had been held in 111 legislative offices and materials dropped off at 11 more. Advocates told the story of how the Educational Communications Board [protects, educates and connects](#) people and communities across Wisconsin and the value it holds in their own lives. We are deeply grateful for folks that are willing to use their time and energy to share their appreciation for public media.

Employee Engagement Survey

We recently completed our annual employee engagement survey. This year's results are very similar to past years. It has long been my intention to create a workplace with a culture of continual improvement and I believe that shines through. "ARTI" – Always Room To Improve – is an acronym commonly used at ECB and shows up alongside high rankings for the work environment. Notably, MISSION is once again the most selected reason for why people enjoy working at ECB. I don't believe there is any greater motivator for people to bring their best than to believe in the value of the work they are doing.