

ON THE CHOPPING BLOCK:

**State Budget Battles and the
Future of Public Media**

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November 2011

Executive Summary

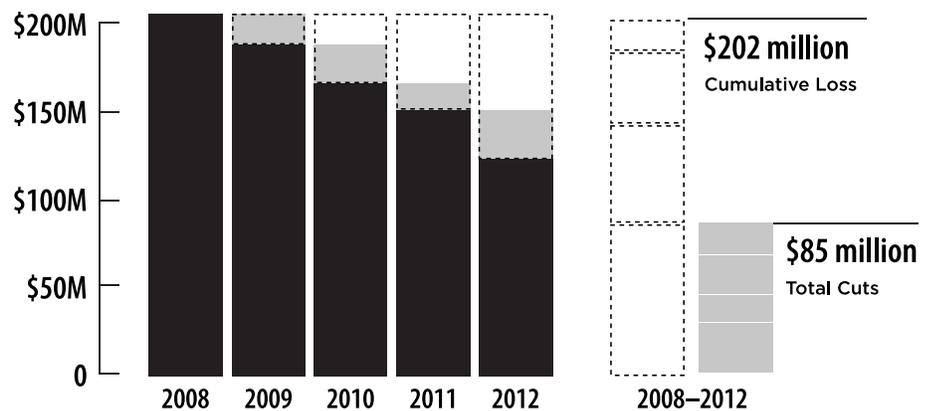
Last spring there was a flurry of media attention around the future of public broadcasting as threats mounted in Congress to end more than four decades of public funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. It was the greatest threat public broadcasting had faced in many years, but behind the headlines — which dwelled on trumped-up controversy and doctored videos — there was another story that went largely untold.

For almost half a decade, budget battles at the state level have eroded funding for public broadcasters around the country. In the past year, governors and state legislatures have dramatically reduced public media budgets and even zeroed out all state funding for local stations. In some states, this has meant ending decades of support for public broadcasting — a move that could seriously restrict stations’ ability to produce local content, threaten small and rural stations with closure, and even leave some regions without a public broadcasting station or coverage.

According to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, more than 95 percent of public TV stations and 77 percent of public radio stations receive some kind of support directly from a state government or indirectly from a state-funded college or university.¹ Across the country, state support for public broadcasting ranges from states who supply zero funding to states that provide as much as 50 percent of a station’s budget.

Since 2008, state support for public broadcasting has declined at an alarming rate. More than \$85 million in state funding has been cut from public broadcasters’ budgets since 2008. However, that is only part of the story. If we use the 2008 appropriations as a baseline, we see that the cumulative loss in state funding over the past four years in these 24 states amounts to approximately \$202 million. In other words, if the appropriations had remained level with those from 2008, more than \$200 million in additional funding would have been allocated in these 24 states during this four-year period.²

In this year’s round of state budget negotiations alone, state governments have slashed nearly \$30 million from public media budgets. Some states have even implemented aggressive phase-out plans that could mean the loss of tens of millions of additional dollars in the next few years.



¹ Dru Sefton, “Empty-Pocket States Cutting \$23 Million from Pubcast Support,” *Current*, January 25, 2010. <http://www.current.org/funding/funding1002state.shtml>

² The total appropriations for these 24 states in 2008 was \$206 million. The 2009 sum of appropriations was \$19 million below this baseline; the 2010 sum of appropriations was \$41 million below this baseline; the 2011 sum of appropriations was \$57 million below this baseline; and the 2012 sum of appropriations was \$85 million below this baseline. Thus, if the appropriations had remained level with the figures from 2008, more than \$200 million in additional funding would have been allocated in these 24 states during this four-year period.

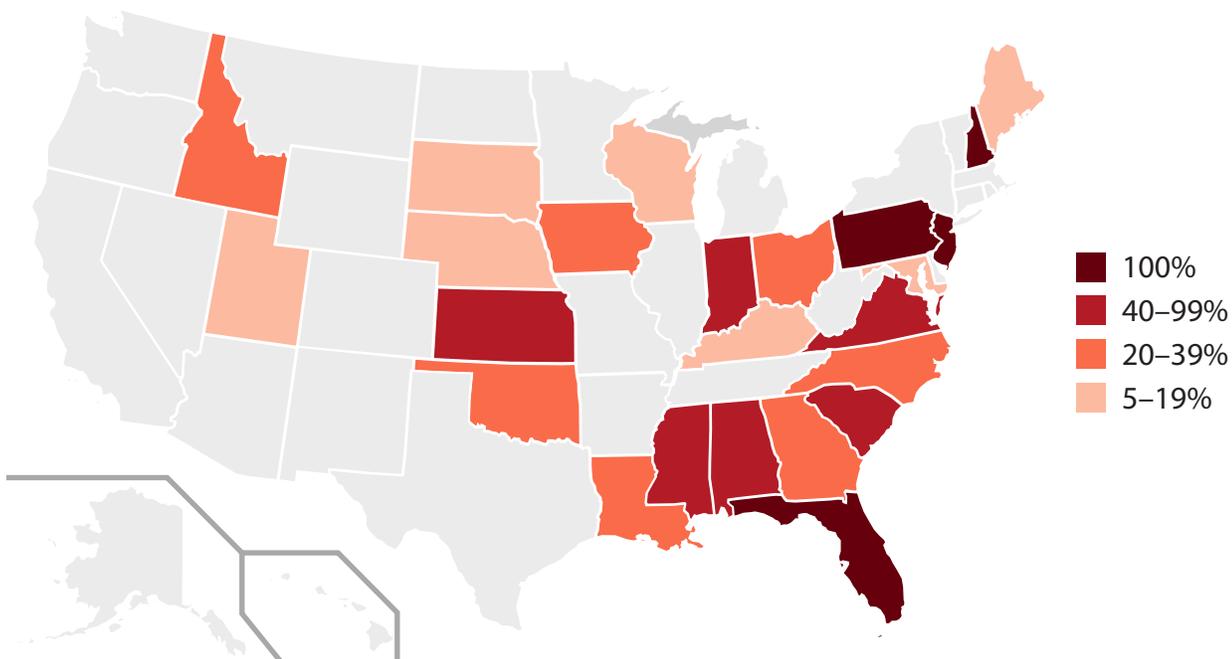
In many states, the cuts are severe:

- Florida, New Hampshire, New Jersey and Pennsylvania have cut their entire state appropriations for public broadcasting.
- Since 2008, Alabama, Indiana, Kansas, South Carolina and Virginia have experienced cuts in state support of nearly 50 percent or greater.
- Over the same four-year period, stations in Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, Ohio and Oklahoma have seen their state appropriations reduced by more than 25 percent.
- Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Maine and South Carolina have faced threats of multi-year phase-outs of all state funding.

It is a tumultuous time for state budgets and local policymakers around the country are being forced to make tough choices. In difficult economic times, it is fair to ask beneficiaries of state aid to shoulder some of the burden. Too often, however, public broadcasters are expected to weather enormous cuts that are way out of proportion with reductions in state budgets. In most cases, state general funds are seeing single-digit percent decreases, while public broadcasters are facing dramatic double-digit cuts or total elimination of their funding.

Many of these cuts apparently are being made to score political points, not to balance budgets. But the political story of state funding for public broadcasting is not a simple partisan narrative. Indeed, a close look at state budget battles reveals a deep well of bipartisan support for local public broadcasting stations. A handful of states — Idaho, Indiana, Maine, Mississippi, and South Carolina — faced total cuts proposed by their governors that were largely stopped by state lawmakers working across party lines.

Severity of State Cuts to Public Broadcasting 2008–2012



Critics of public broadcasting who primarily focus on the national brands, like NPR, lose sight of the 1,300 locally owned and locally controlled stations that make up America's public media system. These stations provide a diverse array of programs and services to local communities. Unfortunately, state funding cuts have had perhaps the greatest impact on stations' capacity to provide unique local programming, which is expensive to produce. In many rural states, the loss of state support could mean drastic reductions in locally produced programming and news. This would be especially devastating in areas that local commercial broadcasters have left unserved or underserved.

The upswing in state budget cuts comes during an already difficult time for public broadcasting. Ongoing economic challenges have meant a decrease in contributions and corporate underwriting, resulting in a loss of hundreds of millions of dollars in outside revenue since 2008.³ All the while, the audience for public broadcasting continues to grow, NPR and PBS have become the most trusted brands in news and poll after poll shows that Americans rank public media as one of the best uses of taxpayer dollars.⁴

As federal lawmakers look for places to cut, they have to understand the big picture. Public broadcasting in its many forms is an essential information infrastructure. For many communities, public radio and TV are bridges, connecting them to vital news, information and services. But dwindling state funding means that public media in America is already doing more with less. Taken together, these cuts represent a serious threat to one of our nation's most vital and independent sources of journalism and educational programming. Further cuts could be disastrous.

³"PubTV's Not Broke, but Income Fell \$262 Million in a Single Year," *Current*, Oct. 16, 2010. <http://www.current.org/economy/econ1018ptv-recession.shtml> and "CPB: System Revenue May Drop \$418 Million in Fiscal 2009." <http://www.current.org/funding/funding0903recession.shtml>

⁴"What is Public Broadcasting?" 170MillionAmericans.org. Accessed on Sept. 21, 2011. <http://170millionamericans.org/what-public-broadcasting>

Introduction

Earlier this year, public media became the focus of fierce attacks from partisan lawmakers and small-government activists. While public broadcasting has long been a lightning rod for political controversy, it has always enjoyed broad-based bipartisan support in Congress. However, last spring, at the height of a heated budget battle, a series of public relations missteps by a few public broadcasting executives brought renewed scrutiny to the entire system.

Six bills designed to defund and dismantle public broadcasting — one of which passed — were introduced in the U.S. House. While a small but vocal minority stole headlines with symbolic legislative moves designed to strip federal funding from NPR and PBS, a wave of citizen support for NPR and PBS flooded Washington.

A new coalition of public broadcasting stations began mobilizing listeners around the “170 Million Americans” campaign and public interest groups delivered a million petitions to Capitol Hill. Congressional staff reported that calls from constituents in support of public broadcasting trumped every other issue in the spring budget debates.

While the potential funding cuts at the federal level drew the most media attention, budget battles at the state level were swiftly eroding vital funding for public broadcasters around the country. In the last year, governors and state legislatures have dramatically reduced public media budgets and, in some cases, even zeroed out all state funding for local stations.

In some states, this has meant ending decades of support for public broadcasting — a move that could hinder stations’ ability to produce local content, threaten small and rural stations with closure, and even leave some regions without a public broadcasting station or coverage.

This year’s budget battles were perhaps the most dramatic, but these cuts have been an ongoing challenge for many stations over the past four years. Taken together, these cuts represent a serious threat to one of our nation’s most vital and independent sources of news and information. Any debate about further cuts at the federal level must take into account the deep cuts already facing America’s public media system at the state level.

What’s Already Been Lost

According to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, more than 95 percent of public TV stations and 77 percent of public radio stations receive some kind of support directly from a state government or indirectly from a state-funded college or university.⁵ State support can range from 10 percent of a station’s budget to 50 percent or more. In many respects, 2008 was a high point for state funding of public broadcasting, with states contributing an estimated \$270 million to public media stations that year.⁶ Since then, state funding for public broadcasting has seen continual reductions system-wide, with tens of millions cut in each budget cycle.

⁵ Dru Sefton, “Empty-Pocket States Cutting \$23 Million from Pubcast Support,” *Current*, January 25, 2010. <http://www.current.org/funding/funding1002state.shtml>

⁶ Karen Everhart, “State After State Decides How Much to Cut System Aid,” *Current*, April 18, 2011. <http://www.current.org/funding/funding1108states.html>

However, since 2008, state support for public broadcasting has declined at an alarming rate. The sum of the 2012 appropriations for the 24 states included in this report is \$85.2 million below the collective appropriations from 2008. If we use the 2008 appropriations as a baseline, we see that the cumulative loss in state funding over the past four years in these 24 states amounts to approximately \$202 million. In other words, if the appropriations had remained level with those from 2008, more than \$200 million in additional funding would have been allocated in these 24 states during this four-year period.⁷

In this year's round of state budget negotiations alone, approximately \$28.7 million has been cut — the most in any single year up to this point. Among the 24 states that have seen the most significant cuts over the past five years, the average reduction is 42 percent. If current trends continue, stations across the country, which are already struggling after years of cuts, will face further reductions or even the complete loss of state funding.

Not all of the news is bad. In South Carolina, Maine and Idaho, governors proposed to cut all state funding but state lawmakers protected much of it. These are hopeful cases, but they represent the minority, and public broadcasters in these states say the threat to their funding remains.

These dramatic cuts come during one of the most difficult times for public broadcasting, as ongoing economic challenges have meant a decrease in contributions and corporate underwriting, resulting in a loss of hundreds of millions of dollars in outside revenue since 2008.⁸ Given the unpredictable fluctuation of individual and corporate contributions, state and federal funding are essential to keeping the public broadcasting system stable. This funding serves as important leverage in securing other grants, and helps stations invest in vital local programming. In many rural states, the loss of state support could mean drastic reductions in locally produced programming and news. These cuts would be especially devastating in areas that local commercial broadcasters have left unserved or underserved.

State by State

In our review of state funding cuts, we started with 2008 since it provided a turning point in state funding for public broadcasting. While there were some slight declines in state funding earlier in the decade, the recession that began in 2008 was a catalyst for many states to re-examine their support for public broadcasting. Thus, our inquiry extends from the 2008–2009 budget cycle to the 2011–2012 budget cycle. Due to the differences in how states delineate their fiscal years and budget processes, some of the cuts proposed this year are still pending and we have noted that when relevant.

We have not included every state in our analysis, nor have we included every state that experienced cuts. Over the past four budget cycles starting in 2008, more than two dozen states have reduced

⁷ The total appropriations for these 24 states in 2008 was \$206 million. The 2009 sum of appropriations was \$19 million below this baseline; the 2010 sum of appropriations was \$41 million below this baseline; the 2011 sum of appropriations was \$57 million below this baseline; and the 2012 sum of appropriations was \$85 million below this baseline. Thus, if the appropriations had remained level with the figures from 2008, more than \$200 million in additional funding would have been allocated in these 24 states during this four-year period.

⁸ "PubTV's Not Broke, but Income Fell \$262 Million in a Single Year," *Current*, Oct. 16, 2010. <http://www.current.org/economy/econ1018ptv-recession.shtml> and "CPB: System Revenue May Drop \$418 Million in Fiscal 2009," <http://www.current.org/funding/funding0903recession.shtml>

their appropriations for public broadcasting. In this paper we focused on the 24 states that have made the most *significant* reductions.

Below are snapshots of the state of state funding in each of the 24 states we examined. Their stories are expanded on later in the report.



Alabama

Total cuts since 2008 = \$5,262,876

Percent of total state funding cut since 2008 = 49%

Public broadcasters in Alabama have seen a major decline in state funding, from \$10.8 million in 2008 to \$5.5 million for 2012, a 49 percent decrease. The most recent round of cuts forced Alabama's public television station to close studios and lay off 14 staff members.⁹ The public TV station is also planning to close its state capital office and shutter its statehouse news program, *Capitol Journal*.¹⁰



Florida

Total cuts since 2008 = \$7,800,000

Percent of total state funding cut since 2008 = 100%

All state funding for public broadcasting in Florida was cut this year. Stations in Florida had already faced a series of major cuts in funding over the past few years, adding up to a 62 percent reduction in funding between 2008 and 2011. Despite legislators' efforts to preserve state funding, Gov. Rick Scott used his veto power to cut the remaining \$4.8 million appropriation.¹¹



Georgia

Total cuts since 2008 = \$6,259,317

Percent of total state funding cut since 2008 = 33%

State support for public broadcasting in Georgia stood at \$18.7 million in 2008, and has been steadily reduced by \$1–2 million each year, leaving Georgia public broadcasting with just \$12.4 million in state funding for this year, a 33 percent reduction in funding. Despite these cuts, Georgia actually added a public television station this year, thanks in large part to donors to the University of Georgia, where the new station is located.¹²

⁹ Dana Beyerle, "Alabama Public Television Closing Montgomery Offices Because of Budget Cuts," the *Gadsden Times*, June 28, 2011. <http://www.gadsdentimes.com/article/20110628/NEWS/110629722?Title=Alabama-Public-Television-closing-Montgomery-offices-because-of-budget-cuts>

¹⁰ John Peck, "Pulling the Plug on Alabama Public Television's State Capital Operation Will Deprive Alabamians of a Vital Source of State News," the *Huntsville Times*, June 30, 2011. http://blog.al.com/times-views/2011/06/pulling_the_plug_on_alabama_pu.html

¹¹ Elizabeth Jensen, "Florida Governor Vetoes Funding," Media Decoder, the *New York Times*, May 29, 2011. <http://mediadecoder.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/05/29/florida-governor-vetoes-pbs-funding/>

¹² Walter C. Jones, "Despite Budget Cuts, Georgia Adds Public TV Station," the *Florida Times Union*, June 4, 2011. <http://jacksonville.com/news/georgia/2011-06-04/story/despite-budget-cuts-georgia-adds-public-tv-station>

Idaho

Total cuts since 2008 = \$378,900

Percent of total state funding cut since 2008 = 22%

Despite Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter's call for a four-year phase-out of Idaho's entire appropriation for public broadcasting, Idaho's legislature has stood behind the need to support public broadcasting. Stations have seen a significant 20 percent decline in state support over the past four years, from about \$1.8 million in 2008 to \$1.4 million for 2012. But Idaho Public Television General Manager Peter Morrill feels public broadcasting has not been singled out during budget negotiations.¹³

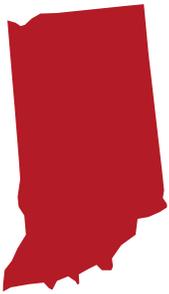


Indiana

Total cuts since 2008 = \$1,978,300

Percent of total state funding cut since 2008 = 57%

Gov. Mitch Daniels has called for a complete phase-out of state support for Indiana's public broadcasting stations, but state lawmakers rebuffed his request, even though the governor's party controls both legislative chambers. Roger Rhodes, executive director of Indiana's public broadcasting network, says, "We feel fortunate to have a great working relationship with folks on both sides of the aisle in the legislature."¹⁴ Despite this success, public broadcasters in Indiana have seen a steep reduction in funding, from about \$3.5 million in 2008 to \$1.5 million for 2012, a 57 percent reduction.

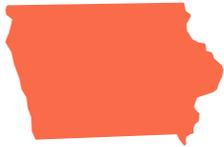


Iowa

Total cuts since 2008 = \$2,150,599

Percent of total state funding cut since 2008 = 24%

Funding for public broadcasting stations in Iowa has declined significantly over the past four years, from \$8.8 million in 2008 to \$6.6 million for 2012, a 24 percent decline. These cuts are partly due to a phase-out plan in which the public radio network in Iowa is replacing university funding with private donations.¹⁵ However, the larger trend is troubling for Iowa Public Television, a state-owned network for which state funding accounts for nearly half of its budget.¹⁶



¹³ Personal communication with Peter Morrill, general manager for IPTV

¹⁴ Personal communication with Roger Rhodes, executive director of Indiana Public Broadcasting

¹⁵ Diana Nollen, "Making Airwaves: Iowa Public Radio Dials in on Federal Funding Threats," *Eastern Iowa Life*, March 29, 2011. <http://easterniowalife.com/2011/03/29/making-airwaves-iowa-public-radio-dials-in-on-federal-funding-threats/>

¹⁶ Dru Sefton, "Empty-Pocket States Cutting \$23 Million from Pubcast Support," *Current*, January 25, 2010. <http://www.current.org/funding/funding1002state.shtml>

Kansas

Total cuts since 2008 = \$1,657,454

Percent of total state funding cut since 2008 = 48%

Gov. Sam Brownback has warned that he plans to cut all state funds that currently support public media, and has given the state's public broadcasters one year to figure out how they will transition fully off of state funding. Kansas public broadcasters have already had to absorb serious funding cuts; funding has dropped from about \$3.5 million in 2008 to \$1.7 million for 2012, a 49 percent decline. This year the governor vetoed all state funding for the Kansas Arts Commission, which helped fund some public media programs. Kansas is now the only state without an arts commission.



Kentucky

Total cuts since 2008 = \$2,301,700

Percent of total state funding cut since 2008 = 16%

In 2009 Kentucky cut about \$2.5 million in state funding to its public broadcasting network, Kentucky Educational Television (KET). Funding has remained somewhat stable, but dropped from an appropriation of \$14.7 million in 2008 to \$12.4 million for 2012, a reduction of 16 percent.



Louisiana

Total cuts since 2008 = \$2,190,489

Percent of total state funding cut since 2008 = 23%

The state funding for Louisiana Public Broadcasting (LPB) has dropped 23 percent since 2008, when the appropriation was \$9.4 million, to \$7.2 million today. *Current* reported that the chief financial officer for Louisiana called deep cuts in 2010 a chance for public broadcasting to change to self-generated means of support. "I'd have to pledge every day for the next year," LPB President Beth Courtney said, for public broadcasting to come out even.



Maine

Total cuts since 2008 = \$245,765

Percent of total state funding cut since 2008 = 11%

Since 1992, the state of Maine had committed to providing \$2.2 million to Maine Public Broadcasting each year to ensure that it can reach all the residents of Maine. However, since 2008 the state has not fulfilled that commitment. This year Maine Gov. Paul LePage called for cutting all state support for public broadcasting, only to be rebuffed by legislators. With the state appropriation now standing at \$1.9 million, MPBN has seen an 11 percent reduction in funding since 2008.



¹⁷ "Gov. Brownback Signs New Kansas Budget into Law," Story from AP, published in the *Kansas City Star*, May 29, 2011. <http://www.kansascity.com/2011/05/29/2912946/new-kansas-budget-is-signed.html#ixzz1OX6jes9C>

¹⁸ Dru Sefton, "Empty-Pocket States Cutting \$23 Million from Pubcast Support," *Current*, January 25, 2010. <http://www.current.org/funding/funding1002state.shtml>

¹⁹ Dru Sefton, "Maine Net Trims Paychecks, Delays Turning off Remote Repeaters," *Current*, January 12, 2009. <http://www.current.org/funding/funding0901maine.shtml>

Maryland

Total cuts since 2008 = \$1,863,456

Percent of total state funding cut since 2008 = 19%

Maryland has steadily decreased its state appropriation for public broadcasting, with \$10 million in 2008 reduced to \$8.1 million for 2012, a 19 percent decline. The state currently provides about one-third of Maryland Public Television's \$26 million budget.²⁰



Mississippi

Total cuts since 2008 = \$4,246,937

Percent of total state funding cut since 2008 = 41%

In Mississippi state support for public broadcasting has dropped from \$10.2 million in 2008 to \$6 million for 2012, a 41 percent decline. Out-going Gov. Haley Barbour has asked Mississippi Public Broadcasting to develop a plan to become self-sufficient within five years. According to the *Jackson Free Press*, in 2011 "half of MPB's \$15.4 million budget came from the state."²¹

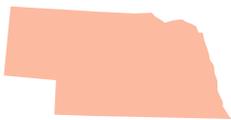


Nebraska

Total cuts since 2008 = \$577,383

Percent of total state funding cut since 2008 = 6%

In Nebraska, the state provides about 50 percent of the public broadcasting budget. This allocation represents a particularly important resource given the state's predominantly rural population.²² As in many other states, this money flows through both direct funding channels and the university system, so Nebraska Educational TV faces cuts on two fronts. While recent cuts have been relatively minor, the *Lincoln Journal Star* reports that from 2002 to 2005, NET suffered \$8.4 million in budget cuts, "resulting in the elimination of 103 positions, including 62 layoffs and a reduction or elimination of programming."²³



²⁰ David Zurawik, "Want to Buy a Public TV Station?" the *Baltimore Sun*, March 19, 2011. http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2011-03-19/entertainment/bs-ae-zontv-mpt-20110319_1_maryland-public-television-mpt-public-tv-station and David Zurawik, "Chris Christie's Take on State-Run Public TV Outlets — Like MPT," the *Baltimore Sun*, July 05, 2011. http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2011-07-05/entertainment/bal-chris-christie-staterun-public-tv-maryand-public-television--20110705_1_chris-christie-maryland-public-television-public-radio

²¹ Valerie Wells, "MPB: Public Servant?" *Jackson Free Press*, May 4, 2011. http://www.jacksonfreepress.com/index.php/site/comments/mpb_public_servant_050411/

²² See the Nebraska State Budget http://budget.ne.gov/das_budget/budget10/gfsummary0610.pdf and the annual report for Nebraska Educational Television http://www.netnebraska.org/about/pdfs/2010_annual_report.pdf.

²³ Jeff Korbeleik, "PBS Battle: Republican Plan to Cut Funding Could Shoot Down Big Bird," *Lincoln Journal Star*, Oct. 15, 2005. http://journalstar.com/lifestyles/article_786ad702-1a60-5e7d-8803-78e1cc25d928.html#ixzz1bMKZvbVE

New Hampshire

Total cuts since 2008 = \$2,977,257

Percent of total state funding cut since 2008 = 100%

New Hampshire Public Television, the state's only public television station, receives its state funding through New Hampshire's public university system. The university is facing a 45 percent budget cut and has decided to cut all funding for NHPTV. This is a serious blow to the station, which will lose \$2.7 million in funding, representing 31 percent of its entire operating budget.²⁴ As a result, the station is downsizing and cutting two of its three locally produced programs. State funding had already dropped from \$3 million in 2008 to \$2.7 million, and now has been cut entirely.



New Jersey

Total cuts since 2008 = \$5,900,000

Percent of total state funding cut since 2008 = 100%

In an unexpected move this year, New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie not only cut the entire state appropriation for the state public broadcasting network, but sold off all of New Jersey's public TV and radio station licenses to neighboring states.²⁵ State support had already declined from almost \$6 million in 2008 to \$4 million in 2010, and has now been reduced to zero. As a result, New Jersey will no longer have a state-based public broadcasting channel, and New Jersey Network's entire 130 full-time staff have been laid off.



North Carolina

Total cuts since 2008 = \$3,696,189

Percent of total state funding cut since 2008 = 29%

State funding for public broadcasting in North Carolina has dropped from \$12.8 million in 2008 to \$9 million for 2012, a decline of 29 percent. North Carolina's statewide system, Chapel Hill-based UNC-TV, has been placed on annual "continuation review" status, meaning its state money will be tied to a yearly study of its "effectiveness," as judged by state lawmakers. And some legislators have recommended cutting all state funding to UNC-TV.²⁶



Ohio

Total cuts since 2008 = \$2,068,486

Percent of total state funding cut since 2008 = 37%

State funding for Ohio's public broadcast channels is funneled through eTech Ohio, which has seen its appropriation drop from \$5.6 million in 2008 to \$3.5 million for 2012, a 37 percent decline in funding.



²⁴ "NHPTV Restructures Due to Elimination of \$2.7 Million State Appropriation," Press release from NHPTV, June 1, 2011. http://www.nhptv.org/pressroom/release_detail.asp?hp_id=1259

²⁵ Peggy McGlone, "N.J. Public Television to Undergo Name Change, Cuts in Staff," the *Star-Ledger*, June 7, 2011. http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2011/06/nj_public_television_getting_n.html

²⁶ Mark Washburn, "Charlotte's Public TV Station in Dire Straits," the *Charlotte Observer*, July 1, 2011. <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/2011/07/01/2420194/charlottes-public-tv-station-in.html>

Oklahoma

Total cuts since 2008 = \$1,342,022

Percent of total state funding cut since 2008 = 26%

Oklahoma's appropriation for the Oklahoma Educational Television Authority (OETA) has dropped from \$5.2 million in 2008 to \$3.8 million for 2012, a reduction of 26 percent. As a result of recent budget cuts, OETA eliminated four locally produced programs, as well as its nightly local newscast, the *Oklahoma News Report*, and replaced it with a program that airs only once a week.

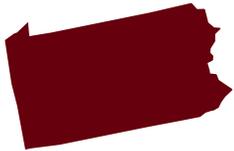


Pennsylvania

Total cuts since 2008 = \$13,498,000

Percent of total state funding cut since 2008 = 100%

In 2010, Gov. Ed Rendell announced that he was cutting 100 percent of state support for Pennsylvania's public broadcasting stations, or \$12.3 million — which had already dropped about \$1 million from the year before.²⁷ Current Gov. Tom Corbett has maintained zero funding for public broadcasting in current budgets.



South Carolina

Total cuts since 2008 = \$12,195,276

Percent of total state funding cut since 2008 = 74%

This year, Gov. Nikki Haley threatened to cut the entire state appropriation for Educational Television (ETV), the state network of public broadcasting stations. South Carolina's legislature opposed such a drastic cut and negotiated a compromise appropriation of \$4.3 million. This still represents a 38 percent cut from the previous year's \$9.7 million appropriation. Despite this compromise, Haley vetoed the remaining state appropriation when the budget landed on her desk. However, the South Carolina legislature — controlled by Haley's own party — almost unanimously overrode her veto and held the line at the compromise figure of \$4.3 million.²⁸ While many celebrated this victory, ETV has seen a severe reduction in funding since 2008, when its appropriation stood at \$16.5 million. Operating now with just \$4.3 million in state support, ETV has had to absorb a dramatic funding reduction of 75 percent.



²⁷ FY2009–2010 Governor's Executive Budget. Funding for Pennsylvania Public Television Network (PPTN) from the General Fund, seven-year summary, section A2, p.10. http://www.budget.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/past_budgets/4571

²⁸ Jim Davenport, "S.C. Legislature Overrides Gov's Public TV Veto," *the State*, June 29, 2011. <http://www.thestate.com/2011/06/29/1879348/sc-house-overrides-public-tv-vetoes.html#storylink=misearch#ixzz1QIEJVuxG#storylink=addthis> and South Carolina state budget for FY2012, summary from the Sunshine Review, a nonprofit organization that focuses on local and state government transparency. http://sunshinereview.org/index.php/South_Carolina_state_budget

South Dakota

Total cuts since 2008 = \$520,605

Percent of total state funding cut since 2008 = 13%

Over the years since 2008 South Dakota's funding for public broadcasting has expanded and contracted. However, state funding for public broadcasting has dropped from \$4 million in 2008 to \$3.5 million for 2012, a 13 percent reduction. This decrease for 2012 came at the same time that some members of the state legislature called for eliminating all state funding for South Dakota Public Broadcasting.

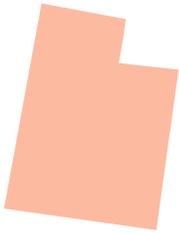


Utah

Total cuts since 2008 = \$300,000

Percent of total state funding cut since 2008 = 11%

KUED, Utah's primary public broadcasting channel, is run by the University of Utah and has seen its state funding reduced from \$2.7 million in 2008 to \$2.4 million for 2012, an 11 percent reduction.



Virginia

Total cuts since 2008 = \$4,719,022

Percent of total state funding cut since 2008 = 60%

Gov. Bob McDonnell proposed a two-year phase-out of all state funding for public broadcasting; however, legislators blocked his plan.²⁹ While they were able to save funding, Virginia public broadcasting stations have had to absorb major cuts over the past five years, from an appropriation of \$7.9 million in 2008 to \$3.2 million for 2012, a 60 percent reduction.



Wisconsin

Total cuts since 2008 = \$1,146,800

Percent of total state funding cut since 2008 = 6%

The embattled Wisconsin governor and state legislature passed a 10 percent cut in nearly all agency budgets this year, which directly impacted the state's funding of public broadcasting. State lawmakers also approved an additional half-million cut from the state's Educational Communications Board.³⁰ One state legislator said this "amounts to a double cut" for public television and radio.³¹



²⁹ Alyssa Rosenberg, "Gov. McDonnell's Public Broadcasting Cuts Actually Strip Funding from Virginia's Classrooms," ThinkProgress. <http://thinkprogress.org/alyssa/2011/05/05/163604/bob-mcdonnell/> and Michael Sluss, "McDonnell Cuts Public Broadcasting Further," *Roanoke Times*, June 27, 2011. <http://roanoke.com/news/roanoke/wb/285380>

³⁰ Dru Sefton, "Wisconsin Cuts Public Broadcasting Funding — Then Cuts Some More," *Current*, May 25, 2011. <http://currentpublicmedia.blogspot.com/2011/05/wisconsin-cuts-public-broadcasting.html>

³¹ Mary Spicuzza, "Public TV, Radio Face Big Funding Cuts in Walker's Budget," *Wisconsin State Journal*, May 23, 2011. http://host.madison.com/wsj/news/local/govt-and-politics/article_3f4fd684-8595-11e0-ad16-001cc4c002e0.html#ixzz1bM45EFAg

The Ramifications of State Budget Cuts

Public broadcasting in America was consciously developed as a networked, decentralized system. While strong national producers and distributors, such as NPR and American Public Media, have developed across the public broadcasting system, U.S. public broadcasting is still marked by dramatic decentralization and localism. Local stations are locally owned, locally programmed and locally governed. In some communities these stations are the only sources of in-depth local, regional and national news.

Local stations are as diverse as our nation — some are housed within state agencies, others are hosted by universities and still others are separate nonprofit organizations. The variation in station character and state budgets means it can be very difficult to generalize about how these cuts are impacting public media as a network nationwide.

However, there are some trends that have emerged as stations respond to systematic attacks on public media funding. In general, the cuts to public media are extreme when compared to budget cuts generally, meaning that public broadcasters are being forced to shoulder more than their fair share in these tough economic times. The result is that local public media risks becoming less local in their content and services to communities. And finally, all of this is happening as public broadcasters continue to enjoy incredible bipartisan support.

Unfair Cuts — Beyond-Average Budget Reductions

It is a tumultuous time for state budgets. Many have argued that in these tough economic times everyone has to share the pain of budget cuts. Yet in most cases state general funds are seeing single-digit-percent decreases, while public broadcasters are facing dramatic double-digit cuts, or total elimination of their funding. Using recent data from the National Association of State Budget Officers (NASBO), we can compare the percent of cuts to public broadcasting with the percent decrease in each state’s general fund for the states outlined in this report.³²

	2008–2009		2009–2010		2010–2011		2011–2012	
Alabama	-13.3	-30.5	-5.9	5.6	-1.7	12.1	-0.2	-38.7
Florida	-13.5	1.3	-8.8	-13.9	13.2	0	33.7	-100.0
Georgia	-10.2	-13.6	-8.7	-9.1	4.3	-8.3	3	-7.7
Indiana	2.3	-32.9	-1.1	-31.9	2.5	0.6	4.5	-5.5
Kansas	1.0	-37.2	-10.8	-14.3	8.7	-2.7	6	-0.8
Mississippi	0.6	-23.8	-1.7	4	5	-7.5	1.2	-20.0
New Hampshire	2.1	-8.8	-0.7	0	-3.4	0	0.2	-100.0
New Jersey	-10.6	-27.1	-6.4	-7.0	-0.3	-50.8	2.5	-100.0
North Carolina	-4.2	-0.7	-5.8	-9.9	2.9	-8.1	4.5	-13.7
Ohio	4.6	-15.7	6.4	-18.7	5.5	0	-3.4	-8.0
Pennsylvania	0.4	-8.7	-21.7	-84.7	5.6	-100.0	2.8	(none)
South Carolina	-19.6	-0.4	-7.2	-21.4	2	-26.0	-3.1	-55.4
Virginia	-7.6	-8.8	-7.3	-13.1	4.6	-33.9	5.6	-23.2

State General Fund spending, yearly percent change
 State funding for public broadcasting, yearly percent change

³² State general fund nominal percentage expenditure change for fiscal years 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012. From the annual *Spring Fiscal Survey of the States*, published by the National Association of State Budget Officers (NASBO). <http://nasbo.org/Publications/FiscalSurvey/FiscalSurveyArchives/tabid/106/Default.aspx>

The chart above includes data for only the states with the most severe reductions, of 25 percent or greater over the past five years.

As the chart shows, the percentages of cuts to public broadcasting are way out of sync with the percentage decrease in general-fund revenue. The 2008–2009 and 2009–2010 budget cycles were particularly difficult for state budgets as legislators had to deal with the effects of the financial crisis. However, the most telling trend begins in 2010–2011, as state budgets begin to recover from the financial crisis. Most notably, while general fund expenditures generally return to positive territory with spending increases in both cycles, spending for public broadcasting continues to decrease significantly. Most shocking, in 2011–2012, as state general funds recover further, state funding for public broadcasting takes a nosedive in most states. All in all, public broadcasters are bearing the brunt of both tough economic times and misguided political attacks.

Many stations have remained quiet about funding cuts, embracing the spirit of sharing the burden during difficult economic times. As cuts have continued to deepen, however, staff at some stations have expressed frustration at the unfair burden that public broadcasting has had to bear. For example, in the past five years Indiana has seen an average yearly reduction of 17.4 percent for public broadcasting, while average general-fund spending has increased yearly by 2.1 percent. In fact, the state largely weathered the economic storm, experiencing a downturn for only one cycle in 2009–2010. By this year's budget cycle, average general-fund spending increased by 4.5 percent. Yet since 2008 funding for public broadcasting in Indiana has weathered cut after cut. In an interview with the *Indiana Economic Digest*, WNIT President and General Manager Mary Pruess said, "It's not that we don't want to do our part. However, IPBS is absorbing cuts that are disproportionate to reductions that other state-funded programs are receiving."³³

Opponents of public broadcasting parrot one particular talking point in debates over state funding. They suggest that in tough economic times, states cannot afford to fund programs that aren't "core functions of government." In fact, media and communications have been a central concern of government since the dawn of the Republic.³⁴ The press is the only profession given special protections in the Constitution. Inherent to the First Amendment's guarantee of the freedom of the press is government's responsibility to promote the widest possible dissemination of diverse viewpoints.³⁵

To this end, states have provided expansive subsidies to other forms of media, subsidies that often dwarf state funding for public broadcasting. A recent report from the University of Southern California Annenberg School of Journalism and Communications found that "newspapers and magazines received state tax breaks of nearly \$800 million in 2008." However, this included only tax data from 37 states, and the authors suggest that the actual total "could well exceed \$1 billion

³³ Marilyn Odendahl, "State Funding Halved, Elkhart's WNIT Public Television Cuts Staff," *Indiana Economic Digest*, February 17, 2010. <http://indianaeconomicdigest.com/Main.asp?SectionID=31&SubSectionID=124&ArticleID=52684>

³⁴ Richard John, *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), 1995. Copyright law represents another longstanding example of government involvement in media.

³⁵ Ben Scott, "A Broad Positive View of the First Amendment." *The Case Against Media Consolidation*. Ed. Mark Cooper. McGannon Center for Communications Research, 2007: 52.

annually.”³⁶ This government support for commercial media, which has included tax breaks on newsprint and ink, among other expenses, makes arguments about cutting public media funding even more galling.

Unfortunately, the clear picture that emerges from this five-year trend is that while the financial crisis might have necessitated some of the earlier funding cuts for public broadcasting, funding cuts for 2011 and especially 2012 have been increasingly motivated by political opportunism rather than fiscal need.

Losing the Local

The compounding effect of these cuts is having a troubling effect on local stations’ ability to invest in and maintain local programs and staff. Local programming is expensive, especially for TV. Stations can purchase national programming, like *PBS NewsHour*, *Fresh Air*, *NOVA*, *Car Talk*, etc., for much less than it takes to hire local staff, buy equipment and source local stories. That said, many public broadcasters have maintained a strong commitment to local programming. But when facing such steep and immediate budget cuts, local programming is often first to go, even when it is the last thing local stations want to cut.

For example, in New Hampshire, where 100 percent of state funding has been eliminated, the state’s only public television station, NHPTV, is losing 30 percent of its budget. To keep its station running, NHPTV is cutting two-thirds of its local programming, including the award-winning *N.H. Outlook*, the state’s only local politics and current affairs TV program.³⁷ NHPTV is also losing 20 staff. This is a difficult loss for New Hampshire, the “first-in-the-nation primary state,” where politics is often called the lifeblood of the state.

In Pennsylvania, where \$12.3 million in state support was cut in 2010, public broadcast stations across the state have been hit hard. WITF in Harrisburg has reduced its staff by 20 percent, laying off local reporters and popular on-air hosts.³⁸ WITF produces *SmartTalk*, the state’s only current affairs program. Although still on the air, *SmartTalk* has reduced its locally produced episodes from 30 to less than a dozen, and cut longtime host Craig Cohen.³⁹

In Florida, the governor’s elimination of all state support has already caused one station to close. WMFE-TV in Orlando announced that it would have to shut its doors due to state budget cuts, but the University of Central Florida has purchased the station.⁴⁰ It is unclear at this point how the station will be programmed. Other stations across Florida are putting programs on “hiatus” as they desperately try to compensate for the losses.⁴¹ Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer

³⁶ David Westphal and Geoffrey Cowen, “Public Policy and Funding the News,” USC Annenberg, 2010. <http://fundingthenews.usc.edu/report/tax-breaks.html>

³⁷ “NHPTV Restructures Due to Elimination of \$2.7 Million State Appropriation.” Press release from NHPTV. http://www.nhptv.org/pressroom/release_detail.asp?hp_id=1259

³⁸ David Dunkle, “Funding Reductions Drive WITF Layoffs,” *PennLive*, June 3, 2011. http://www.pennlive.com/midstate/index.ssf/2011/06/funding_reductions_drive_witf.html

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Jensen, “Florida Governor Vetoes PBS Funding,” Media Decoder, the *New York Times*, May 29, 2011. <http://mediadecoder.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/05/29/florida-governor-vetoes-pbs-funding/>

⁴¹ Bradley Davis and Rick Outzen, “*Sesame Street* Eviction,” *InWeekly*, July 8, 2011. <http://inweekly.net/wordpress/?p=5376>

Janyth Righter of Florida Public Broadcasting says that the massive cut “will inevitably lead to the loss of programs, services and jobs in communities across Florida”.⁴²

In New Jersey, the governor has sold off the state’s flagship public media network, the New Jersey Network, to neighboring states and 130 staff members have lost their jobs. NJN produced an impressive and award-winning lineup of local programming, with more than a dozen regular shows and award-winning special features.⁴³ The new entity replacing NJN, “NJTV,” will be run by New York’s WNET and staffed by fewer than 15 people.⁴⁴ Within the context of a system built on localism, this new model of outsourced production will be one to watch.

When it comes down to the wire, local stations are often forced to prioritize the preservation of national content over local shows, wanting to preserve much-loved national programs like *NOVA*, *Morning Edition* and *Sesame Street*. But one of the reasons states provide funding to public broadcasting is to promote local content production. In many cases, state funding helps cover station expenses and operating costs, freeing other funding sources for local program production. In stripping vibrant local stations of state support, legislators are risking turning these stations into skeleton broadcasters of national content.

Statewide Coverage in Jeopardy

One of the most important rationales for state funding of public broadcasting is that it enables each state to serve *all* of its communities. Indeed, one of the founding mandates of public broadcasting is to provide universal service to all Americans. At a time when new gaps are growing in communities’ access to news and information, that mission has never been more relevant. For states with large rural regions and low-population densities, state funding is especially critical; it allows public broadcasting networks to afford statewide coverage.

In North Carolina, UNC-TV has had \$3.7 million in state budget cuts — representing a 29 percent decline in state funding since 2008. UNC-TV is currently undergoing a “continuation review” as the state decides whether or not to continue funding. State funding comprises about half of UNC-TV’s budget and the loss of this funding would severely impact its ability to reach the whole state. UNC-TV Director of Marketing and Communications Steve Volstad told us that:

Since the state appropriation accounts for roughly half of our total operating budget, we believe that it would be impossible to continue operating the statewide network now provided by UNC-TV, which includes 12 transmitters, 23 translators and carriage by all the state’s cable and satellite providers. The most likely result of the dissolution of the network would be complete loss of access to public television in most areas of the state, except for two or three of the largest urban areas.⁴⁵

⁴² “Statement by FPBS in Response to Governor’s Veto.” Press release from FPBS. http://www.wpbt2.org/pressreleases/20110526_FPBS_response_governor_scott_veto.html

⁴³ NJN’s news programming included *On the Record*, *Caucus New Jersey*, *Reporters Roundtable* and *NJN News*. NJN also produced topical programming like *Imagines* and *Another View*, which celebrated Latinos and African Americans in the state, health programming like *NJ Fresh!*, the arts program *State of the Arts*, the education program *Classroom Close-up*, and the law and policy program *Due Process*.

⁴⁴ Bob Jordan, “NJTV Viewed as Weak TV by Its Critics,” *My Central Jersey*, July 11, 2011. <http://www.mycentraljersey.com/article/20110711/NJNEWS10/307110032/1001/rss>

⁴⁵ Personal communication with Steve Volstad, UNC-TV director of marketing and communications

Without state funding, many stations and state public broadcasting networks would, like UNC-TV, be unable to provide statewide access. In **Oklahoma**, state funding for public broadcasting network Oklahoma Educational Television (OETA) has dropped 26 percent since 2008. According to Executive Director John McCarroll, the impact has been significant. He explained:

OETA has had some potentially devastating budget cuts from the state of Oklahoma over these past few years. A total of 26 percent of our budget has disappeared into thin air. ... Perhaps the first 5 or 10 percent of cuts would have been manageable for OETA had we grown excessively larger in the previous years. However, we already were operating with 13 employees less than had been authorized by Oklahoma law. We had 71 employees and were authorized for 84. Today we are operating with just 61 employees.

As a result of these cuts, OETA has had to scale back production. After the first cut, OETA put a hold on plans for several new programs and canceled maintenance of some equipment contracts. With the second cut, it had to eliminate four OETA-produced series and let go of three on-air news reporters. With the most recent cut, OETA has had to cut the *Oklahoma News Report* from five nights per week to one. This change has been particularly difficult since the show, McCarroll notes, "has been an Oklahoma staple for more than 30 years."

If, in a worst-case scenario, OETA lost all state funding, the consequences would be dire, McCarroll said:

If all state funding were eliminated it would fundamentally change the nature of OETA and have a dramatic impact on services to the state. Through the years it has been the state's responsibility to pay for infrastructure, maintenance, etc. The programming and production has been the domain of our private fundraising efforts. OETA would continue to operate if all state funding was cut but the scope of the operation would diminish. All 14 of our low-power repeater stations and two of our four full-power stations would go dark. More than 75 percent of the state would be without public television. In effect, we would strive to serve only the cities of Oklahoma City and Tulsa and hope that aggressive, directed fundraising in those two markets would be sufficient to continue operations.

The situation is similar in Maine, where the governor has called for cutting all \$2.2 million of the state's funding, which accounts for 20 percent of Maine Public Broadcasting Network's budget. MPBN President and CEO Jim Dowe described this as a "big blow" to the network that would affect local programming and staff.⁴⁶ He noted that MPBN was established in 1992 with the explicit purpose of providing free noncommercial broadcasting to the entire state. In fact, the legislature made the yearly appropriation of \$2.2 million—the cost in 1992 of transmitting programming to the entire state—a legal requirement. But while the cost of providing statewide coverage has since increased to \$3.3 million,⁴⁷ the state appropriation was never increased and actually dropped by

⁴⁶ Ray Routhier, "MPBN: Cut Would Take Big Toll," *Portland Press Herald*, May 13, 2011. http://www.pressherald.com/news/mpbn-cut-would-take-big-toll_2011-05-13.html

⁴⁷ Dru Sefton, "Maine Net Trims Paychecks, Delays Shutting off Remote Repeaters," *Current*, January 12, 2009. <http://www.current.org/funding/funding0901maine.shtml>

\$200,000 in 2009.⁴⁸ For many in this largely rural state, MPBN is their only outlet for information and entertainment, connecting isolated communities with one another.

In Idaho, when Governor C.L. “Butch” Otter called for the elimination of all state funding, Idaho Public Television began looking at how to function without state support. Without this funding, General Manager Peter Morrill told us, Idaho Public Television would likely need to take a “market-based approach,” focusing on serving the metropolitan areas of Boise and Idaho Falls/Pocatello. Losing state support, said Morrill, would compromise IPT’s ability to provide coverage throughout this predominantly rural state.

Universal service is not just a value held by staff and managers at public broadcasting stations; it is also a mandate written into the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967. If we are to ensure that public broadcasting fulfills the mandate to “make public telecommunications services available to all citizens of the United States,” we must be attentive to how these state cuts are slowly cutting off parts of America from public media.⁴⁹

Support for Public Broadcasting Is Not a Partisan Issue

Public broadcasting’s longstanding commitment to universal access to news, arts and educational programming is a key source of its broad-based support across political boundaries. In fact, many states, regardless of political leanings, fund significant portions of their states’ public broadcasting budgets. What was often lost this spring during national debates over federal funding for public broadcasting was an understanding of the local impact public broadcasting has, and the broad-based, bipartisan support it enjoys at the state level.

Each month, more than 100 million Americans engage with public media through 368 local public television stations and 934 local public radio stations.⁵⁰ In a 2010 survey, Americans rated public broadcasting as an “excellent” use of taxpayer dollars, second only to defense spending and ahead of public schools.⁵¹ Eighty percent of those polled said funding for public broadcasting is money “well spent.”⁵² In fact, 46 percent of respondents thought that there was currently “too little” federal funding for public broadcasting.⁵³ NPR and PBS routinely poll at the top of “most-trusted” news source polls, including Public Policy Polling’s most recent annual TV News Trust Poll, which found PBS its most trusted TV news source.⁵⁴ These statistics are borne out in the expansive local support public broadcasting enjoys in states across the nation.

In many states, like Indiana and South Carolina, conservative-leaning legislatures have stepped into the budget process to defend public broadcasting, even against the wishes of governors from the same party. In contrast, in Pennsylvania, Democratic Gov. Ed Rendell cut \$12 million in state

⁴⁸ Dru Sefton, “Maine Net Trims Paychecks, Delays Shutting off Remote Repeaters,” *Current*, January 12, 2009. <http://www.current.org/funding/funding0901maine.shtml>

⁴⁹ Public Broadcasting Act of 1967. <http://www.cpb.org/aboutpb/act/>

⁵⁰ “170 Million Americans for Public Broadcasting: The Numbers.” <http://www.170millionamericans.org/numbers>

⁵¹ 2010 GFK Roper Public Policy Poll. <http://www.pbs.org/roperpoll2010/>

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ TV News Trust Poll, Public Policy Polling (PPP), published January 2011. <http://publicpolicypolling.blogspot.com/2011/01/our-second-annual-tv-news-trust-poll.html>

support of public broadcasting in 2010 and his Republican successor Gov. Tom Corbett has refused to restore funding. While cutting funding for public broadcasting has become a cause-du-jour for some on the extreme edges of the Republican Party, the budget battles at the state level suggest a much more complex picture of the politics involved.

In South Dakota, Republicans have controlled the state legislature almost without break since the 1930s, when the state established one of the first educational radio programs in the country.⁵⁵ Today Republicans have a super-majority in both chambers, but have continued to advocate for state support for public broadcasting, even while making some cuts.⁵⁶ When one state senator proposed a bill earlier this year to end support for public broadcasting, she was thoroughly rebuffed, with the state appropriations board voting 9–0 against the measure.⁵⁷ Legislators like Republican State Sen. Larry Tidemann defended South Dakota Public Broadcasting. “The people I talk to have a deep love for [SDPB] and the information that’s presented to the public,” Tidemann said. “I wouldn’t be able to go back to [my district] if I voted for this.”⁵⁸

In a number of states, activist governors have used their veto power to attack public broadcasting in the face of monumental protest from their own parties. Florida is perhaps the worst case. While Republicans control the state legislature, local public broadcasting stations are extremely popular with Florida’s population — especially retired residents who depend on their services, news and cultural programming. When newly elected Gov. Rick Scott called for an end to all state support of public broadcasters, the legislature proposed a much smaller cut of about \$1 million, which would have been more in line with cuts in other parts of the state budget.⁵⁹ However, Scott overrode this smaller cut and zeroed out all funding.

This was a major blow to public media in Florida, which had already seen a 60 percent decline in state funding over the past five years.⁶⁰ In response, 25,000 Floridians signed a petition calling for restoring funding.⁶¹ State Rep. Clay Ford, a Republican, said he was “extremely disappointed” with the governor’s veto, adding “I am a regular viewer of public broadcasting and believe it brings to our area an unbiased view.”⁶² Scott made one exception, however, and actually increased funding for a single Tallahassee public broadcaster: WFSU, “the Florida Channel,” which provides live unedited coverage of activity in the legislative, judicial, and perhaps most tellingly, gubernatorial branches.

In Maine, Gov. Paul LePage is trying to eliminate all state funding for public broadcasting. LePage wants to end Maine’s \$2.2 million legislature-mandated appropriation, which came as a shock even to Maine Republican legislators who called for much smaller cuts. “In a big rural state,”

⁵⁵ FAQs about South Dakota Public Broadcasting, Dakota Pathways. <http://www.dakotapathways.com/10/faq2.htm>

⁵⁶ Guide to the South Dakota Legislature, Legislative Research Council. <http://legis.state.sd.us/General/guide.htm>

⁵⁷ David Montgomery, “South Dakota Public Broadcasting Won’t Lose Funding,” March 10, 2011. http://www.rapidcityjournal.com/news/article_b38a777e-4b3f-11e0-932a-001cc4c03286.html

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Peter Schorsch, “More about Gov. Scott’s Vetoes of Public Television,” Saint Peters Blog, May 28, 2011. <http://saintpetersblog.com/2011/05/more-about-gov-scotts-vetoes-of-public-television/>

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ “Keep Public Broadcasting Funded in Florida,” Signon.org poll. http://signon.org/sign/keep-public-broadcasting?source=c.url&r_by=274962

⁶² Bradley Davis Jr., “Sesame Street Eviction,” *Florida Independent News*. <http://inweekly.net/wordpress/?p=5376>

said State Sen. Dawn Hill, “where people are miles away from urban centers, [Maine Public Broadcasting] is crucial.”⁶³ According to local legislators, no other issue has generated more constituent emails — all but a handful of which called for continued funding.⁶⁴ The *Portsmouth Herald*, a popular local paper, opined that LePage may be cutting funding due to a personal vendetta in response to critical coverage from the state’s local public broadcast stations. “Several observers,” the editorial reads, “have speculated that LePage is demanding the cut as payback for aggressive reporting by public radio reporters, and there is likely some merit to that view, despite the governor’s comments to the contrary.”⁶⁵

In an abrupt move, New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie decided to not only cut all state support for public broadcasting, but actually sold off the entire state public broadcasting system to stations in New York City and Philadelphia.⁶⁶ Comparing New Jersey’s network of public broadcasters, NJN, with “state run-media of the Soviet Union,” Christie announced his plan to sell off all of New Jersey’s public broadcasters with almost no input from citizens or legislators.⁶⁷ In a dramatic last-minute effort to halt the sale, state legislators fell one vote short of a veto-override to stop Christie.⁶⁸ Now, after 40 years of broadcasting, NJN has been shuttered, its broadcasting license and equipment sold to WNET in New York, and all 130 staff have been laid off.⁶⁹ While WNET has promised to continue airing New Jersey-specific content, it will do so with a significantly smaller staff dedicated to the state.⁷⁰

Immediately after taking office this past January, South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley singled out public broadcasting as a target in her first “State of the State” address and called for privatizing the state’s Educational Television Commission (ETV).⁷¹ Though her own party controls both statehouse chambers, this proposal did not sit well with the state legislature. After agreeing to a compromise cut of \$6 million for ETV (representing a still-significant 38 percent cut in funding), Haley went ahead and vetoed all funding for the system.⁷²

⁶³ Debora McDermott, “Senator Says Maine Public Broadcasting Cuts Remain Likely,” *Seacoast Online*, May 25, 2011. <http://www.seacoastonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20110525/NEWS/105250382/-1/NEWSMAP>

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ “Restore Funding for Maine Public Broadcasters,” editorial, the *Portsmouth Herald/Seacoast Online*, June 1, 2011. <http://www.seacoastonline.com/articles/20110601-OPINION-106010341>

⁶⁶ Peggy McGlone, “N.J. Public TV to Undergo Name Change, Cuts in Staff,” the *Star-Ledger*, June 7, 2011. http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2011/06/nj_public_television_getting_n.html

⁶⁷ Comments made in an interview with Bob Henley of WNYC, June 26, 2011. <http://www.wnyc.org/articles/its-free-country/2011/jun/26/chris-christie-takes-new-jerseys-questions/>

⁶⁸ Peggy McGlone, “N.J. Senate Fails to Stop WNET Sale, Ending NJN,” the *Star-Ledger*, June 27, 2011. http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2011/06/post_222.html

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Governor’s executive budget for the state of South Carolina, FY2011–2012, general fund appropriation for Educational Television Authority (ETV), the state’s public broadcast network, p. 568. [www.budget.sc.gov/webfiles/OSB/Detail percent20Base percent20Budgets/Base_Budget_for_Webpage_2011-12.pdf](http://www.budget.sc.gov/webfiles/OSB/Detail%20Base%20Budgets/Base_Budget_for_Webpage_2011-12.pdf) and Otis R. Taylor, “Haley Replaces Board at ETV,” the *State*, March 18, 2011. <http://www.thestate.com/2011/03/18/1741038/haley-puts-in-new-faces-at-etv.html>

⁷² South Carolina state budget for FY2012, summary from the *Sunshine Review*, a nonprofit organization that focuses on local and state government transparency. http://sunshinereview.org/index.php/South_Carolina_state_budget

In response, the State Assembly rallied to override Haley's veto.⁷³ In a moment one reporter described as "open rebellion," House legislators joined together and started chanting the name of the single House member, Rep. Ralph Norman, who refused to join their override.⁷⁴ Outraged at Gov. Haley's veto of ETV funding, State Assembly Majority Leader Kenny Bingham gave a rousing speech condemning the governor for her actions, and calling for an override of the funding veto. Republican State Sen. Wes Hayes said, "We were trying to protect ETV and were misled."⁷⁵

In Virginia Gov. Bob McDonnell proposed cutting \$2 million, or 50 percent of state support to public broadcasting, as part of a two-year phase-out plan. State legislators pushed back, allowing only \$424,000 in cuts, and demanding that the money cut be re-appropriated toward educational television programming.⁷⁷ However, when the budget reached the governor's desk, he used a line-item veto to cut the re-appropriated funds for educational TV.⁷⁸ McDonnell claimed that the government should not subsidize things that are "not a core service of government" — yet the very next day after his veto McDonnell awarded \$4.6 million in grants, tax breaks and in-kind donations to movie director Steven Spielberg, who is planning to shoot a film about Abraham Lincoln in the state.⁷⁹

Given these challenges, it is worth considering whether state funding is worth the political challenges it has recently faced. As noted above, state funding serves a number of essential roles in the overall mix of public broadcasting budgets. State funding often helps support expensive but essential locally produced programming and educational content. State public broadcasters are much more than local news stations. They provide educational programming, emergency services and cultural programming that reflect each state's unique characteristics and communities. In some cases, state funding is critical to broadcasters' capacity to reach an entire state; it's also often needed to fix and maintain equipment. Finally, state investments help leverage other funding streams and contribute to a mixed revenue model that helps make the most of taxpayer dollars.

Free Press has outlined the need for stronger political firewalls at the federal level, to depoliticize public broadcasting and better insulate it from political influence. In our 2010 report "New Public Media: A Plan for Action," we wrote:

"Government support for public media — utilizing taxpayer dollars for public service — in and of itself is not the problem. After all, we rely on tax dollars to fund a wide range of social services that benefit the public like schools and public safety. The problem is politics. If properly insulated, through sufficient and sustained funding and democratically appointed leadership, the CPB can function properly as

⁷³ John O'Connor, "Wide Chasm Separates Haley, Legislators," *the State*, July 1, 2011. <http://www.thestate.com/2011/07/01/1881327/wide-chasm-separates-haley-legislators.html#ixzz1RKuPEHxy>

⁷⁴ Corey Hutchins, "Lawmakers Override Vetoes, Call Haley out for Dishonesty," *Columbia Free Times*, July 7, 2011. http://www.free-times.com/index.php?cat=1992912064017974&ShowArticle_ID=11010607113141057

⁷⁵ John O'Connor, "Lawmakers Quickly Override Most of Haley's Vetoes," *the State*, June 30, 2011. <http://www.thestate.com/2011/06/30/1879866/lawmakers-quickly-override-most.html>

⁷⁷ Alyssa Rosenberg, "Gov. McDonnell's Public Broadcasting Cuts Actually Strip Funding from Virginia's Classrooms," *ThinkProgress*. <http://thinkprogress.org/alyssa/2011/05/05/163604/bob-mcdonnell/>

⁷⁸ Michael Sluss, "McDonnell Cuts Public Broadcasting Further," *Roanoke Times*, June 27, 2011. Available at <http://roanoke.com/news/roanoke/wb/285380>

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

a heat shield to protect journalists, producers and other media makers from undue interference.”⁸⁰

We need to create similar solutions at the state level. No governor should be able, as South Carolina’s Nikki Haley did, to replace every member of the state board that oversees public media. Public media’s longstanding bipartisan support has helped serve as a firewall in the past. However, recent events illustrate that while our public media system still enjoys support across political affiliations at the local level, it needs new structures and policies to protect it from political meddling. Until we can craft meaningful legal barriers to ward off political influence from activist lawmakers, we have to depend on citizen watchdogs and public interest groups to hold lawmakers accountable and defend public media.

Conclusion: Fighting Back

On June 30, New Jersey Network (NJN) came to the end of its final evening news broadcast after 40 years of daily coverage. Without making much of a fuss, hosts Michael Aron and Jim Hooker thanked their viewers and said “all good things must come to an end.” With that, the lighting faded and all that was left was a shot of the empty studio, with “New Jersey Network, April 5 1971 –June 30, 2011” at the bottom of the screen.

In the weeks before, NJN covered its own demise without calling for support or making the case for the station’s continuation. “We thought about reaching into people’s living rooms and asking, ‘Please help us,’” said Aron, a 29-year employee and veteran political correspondent. “In some subtle ways we did; we reminded people how long we’d been on the air, and that we’d soon be gone ... but that was about as far as we were willing to go.”⁸¹ As journalists, they felt that they could not fight for their jobs, or the station, no matter how badly they wanted to.

This reticence to speak up, to advocate on their own behalf, recently spurred *This American Life* host Ira Glass to say of the federal debates, “we are not fighting back. We’re not saying anything back. I find it completely annoying and I don’t understand it.”⁸² As threats mount at the federal and state level, journalists and public media staff, who are so driven by their public service mission, will need to find ways to defend that mission against attacks.

There is a vast pool of support for public funding of public media, but public broadcasters increasingly need to work to engage their communities and build champions in state houses and on Capitol Hill. This doesn’t mean that stations need to start lobbying. In fact, if done right, stations should build relationships with the communities they serve, public interest groups and lawmakers so that when the time comes their champions will lobby for them. Many of the station managers we spoke with explained that often state legislators aren’t aware of the services public broadcasting provides — and that once they are they often become supporters of public media.

⁸⁰ Josh Silver, Candace Clement, Craig Aaron, S. Derek Turner, “New Public Media: A Plan for Action,” Free Press, May 2010.

⁸¹ Christopher Baxter, “NJN Signs off Today, Leaving 130 People out of Work,” NJ.com, June 30, 2011. http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2011/06/njn_signs_off_today_leaving_13.html

⁸² “The Bias Bias,” interview with Ira Glass on *On the Media*, March 11, 2011. <http://www.onthemedialife.org/2011/mar/11/the-bias-bias/transcript/>

If public media fans, advocates and champions can work together now, we can reassert public media's central role in American society, and stop the treadmill of policy fights and funding cuts.

There are some good models we can look to in places like Idaho and Tennessee — both of which were able to ward off major reductions in state funding. Stations in these states have worked hard to give policymakers and community leaders a hands-on feel for the role of public broadcasting in the community. By bringing legislators, supporters and stations together through simple acts like on-air holiday messages, arts and education events and breakfasts at the statehouse, station leadership can build meaningful relationships and capitalize on their supporters' political muscle.

Fans of public media are primed to be advocates. Local stations already reach out to their audiences a few times a year to remind them of how the community relies on public media, and how public media relies on local support. It is not that far of a leap to ask donors to become advocates, and there are a lot of people who are ready to write a letter to a local lawmaker and a check to their local station. Idaho Public Television General Manager Peter Morrill says that once the station and local journalists alerted the public to the potential loss of state funding, supporters rallied to the cause. Citizens and fans contacted legislators and started a "Save Idaho Public TV" Facebook page, which grew to more than 6,000 fans in just a few weeks. After intense public debate on the issue, the proposal to cut all state funding was shelved.

Public broadcasters have also built deep relationships with local businesses and civic leaders who support the station as underwriters. These small constituents can make a unique case for the role of public media in supporting economic growth and civic engagement. However, none of this will happen automatically; it will take smart organizing and careful strategizing to build the movement for stronger public media. We need a framework to put people's passion to work for the future of public media.

Without this kind of coordinated effort, it will be incredibly difficult in the coming years to restore state funding and advocate for increased federal funding. Budget cuts have begun to erode stations' ability to provide local news and cultural programming and have hindered their structural capacity to reach rural and low-income listeners. The effects of these cuts could be permanent. Our public broadcasting system represents a historic public trust, a commitment to ensure that all citizens have access to the news and information they need. In the face of these threats, we need to rebuild that trust together, and help usher in the next generation of public media.

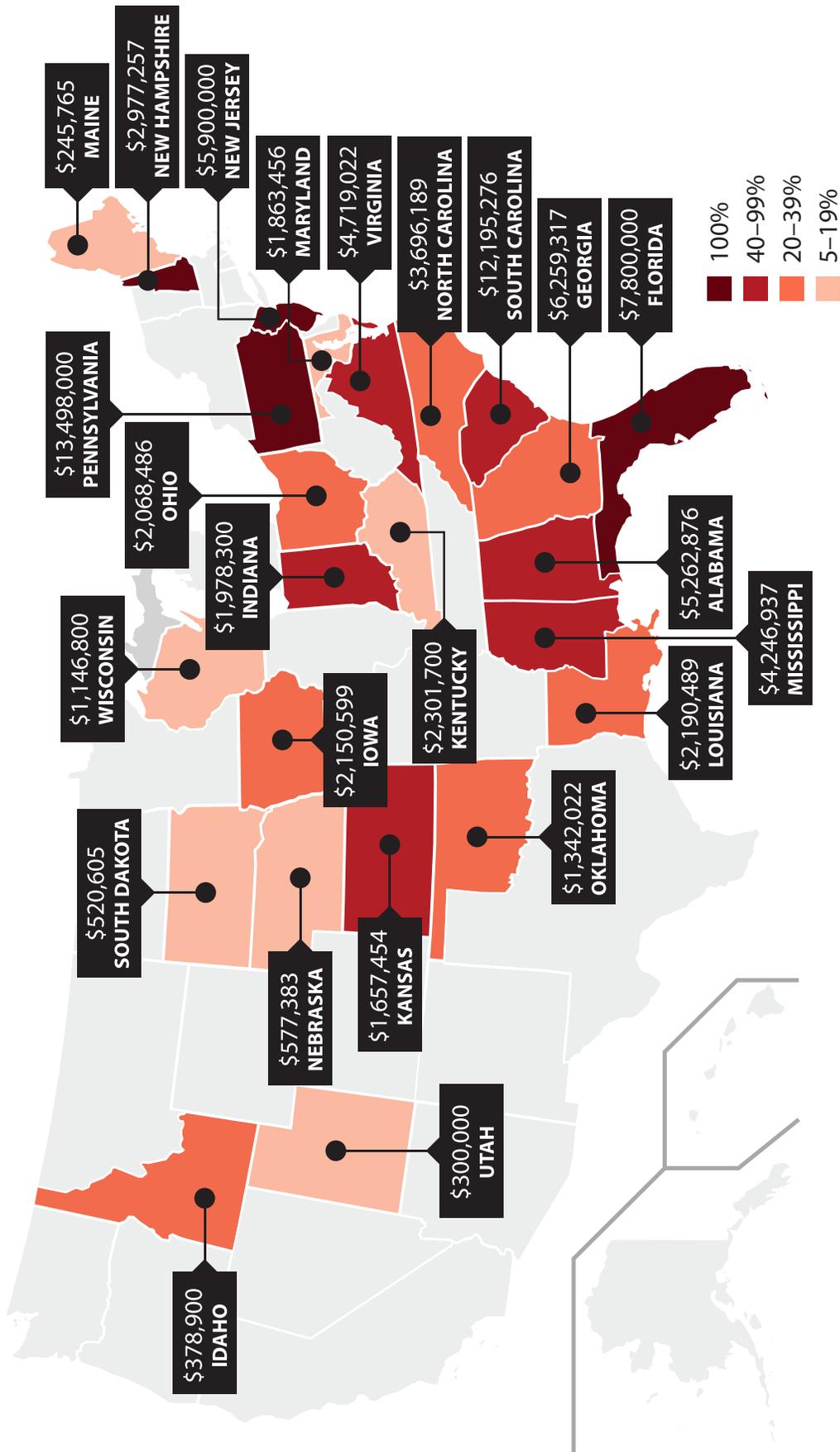
Appendix 1 — Yearly State Funding Appropriations to Public Media

STATES	YEARLY STATE FUNDING APPROPRIATIONS TO PUBLIC MEDIA					TOTAL CUTS SINCE 2008	PERCENT OF STATE FUNDING CUT
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012		
Alabama	10,813,999	7,510,373	7,959,306	9,057,424	5,551,123	5,262,876	49%
Florida	7,800,000	7,900,000	6,800,000	6,800,000	0	7,800,000	100%
Georgia	18,690,614	16,163,816	14,685,203	13,462,630	12,431,297	6,259,317	33%
Idaho	1,755,900	1,815,400	1,659,800	1,390,500	1,377,000	378,900	22%
Indiana	3,500,000	2,350,000	1,600,000	1,610,000	1,521,700	1,978,300	57%
Iowa	8,804,620	8,738,887	7,971,115	7,137,397	6,654,021	2,150,599	24%
Kansas	3,448,432	2,164,787	1,856,244	1,806,322	1,790,978	1,657,454	48%
Kentucky	14,700,900	12,141,300	12,414,300	12,381,700	12,399,200	2,301,700	16%
Louisiana	9,416,112	9,527,160	8,328,652	6,679,752	7,225,623	2,190,489	23%
Maine	2,200,000	1,954,235	1,954,235	1,921,523	1,954,235	245,765	11%
Maryland	9,992,574	9,411,258	9,420,209	8,653,985	8,129,118	1,863,456	19%
Mississippi	10,293,113	7,838,736	8,169,002	7,557,720	6,046,176	4,246,937	41%
Nebraska	10,136,091	9,718,823	9,692,602	9,499,670	9,558,708	577,383	6%
New Hampshire	2,977,257	2,713,956	2,714,000	2,714,000	0	2,977,257	100%
New Jersey	5,900,000	4,300,000	4,000,000	1,969,000	0	5,900,000	100%
North Carolina	12,756,442	12,673,446	11,420,396	10,500,000	9,060,253	3,696,189	29%
Ohio	5,593,230	4,712,352	3,832,491	3,833,148	3,524,744	2,068,486	37%
Oklahoma	5,164,350	5,164,350	4,468,468	4,200,360	3,822,328	1,342,022	26%
Pennsylvania	13,498,000	12,329,000	1,885,000	0	0	13,498,000	100%
South Carolina	16,461,106	16,432,526	12,911,437	9,556,490	4,265,830	12,195,276	74%
South Dakota	4,015,073	4,470,954	4,016,054	4,031,965	3,494,468	520,605	13%
Utah	2,700,000	2,500,000	2,500,000	2,400,000	2,400,000	300,000	11%
Virginia	7,899,022	7,204,398	6,258,878	4,138,000	3,180,000	4,719,022	60%
Wisconsin	18,095,900	18,229,800	18,784,400	18,718,600	16,949,100	1,146,800	6%
TOTAL	\$206,612,735	\$187,965,557	\$165,301,792	\$150,020,186	\$121,335,902	\$85,276,833	Average = 42%

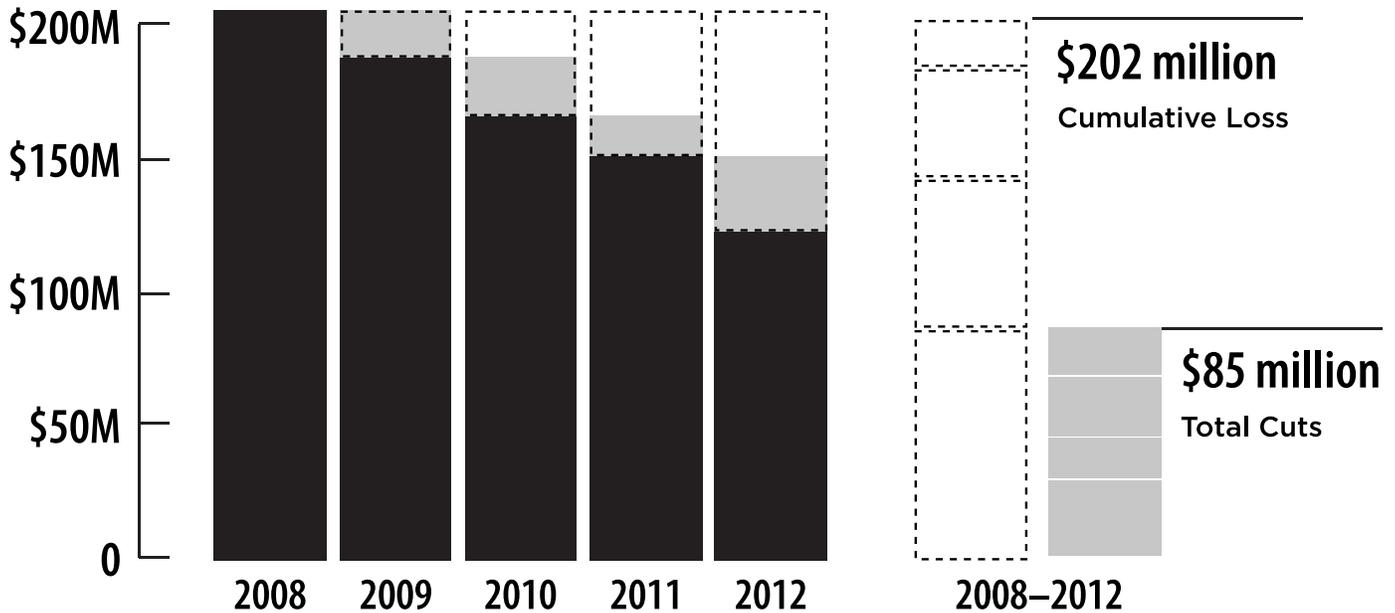
Appendix 2 — Year-by-Year State Funding Cuts to Public Media

STATES	YEAR-BY-YEAR STATE FUNDING CUTS TO PUBLIC MEDIA				TOTAL CUTS
	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	
Alabama	-3,303,626	448,933	1,098,118	-3,506,301	5,262,876
Florida	100,000	-1,100,000	0	-6,800,000	7,800,000
Georgia	-2,526,798	-1,478,613	-1,222,573	-1,031,333	6,259,317
Idaho	59,500	-155,600	-269,300	-13,500	378,900
Indiana	-1,150,000	-750,000	10,000	-88,300	1,978,300
Iowa	-65,733	-767,772	-833,718	-483,376	2,150,599
Kansas	-1,283,645	-308,543	-49,922	-15,344	1,657,454
Kentucky	-2,559,600	273,000	-32,600	17,500	2,301,700
Louisiana	111,048	-1,198,508	-1,648,900	545,871	2,190,489
Maine	-245,765	0	-32,712	32,712	245,765
Maryland	-581,316	8,951	-766,224	-524,867	1,863,456
Mississippi	-2,454,377	330,266	-611,282	-1,511,544	4,246,937
Nebraska	-417,268	-26,221	-192,932	59,038	577,383
New Hampshire	-263,301	44	0	-2,714,000	2,977,257
New Jersey	-1,600,000	-300,000	-2,031,000	-1,969,000	5,900,000
North Carolina	-82,996	-1,253,050	-920,396	-1,439,747	3,696,189
Ohio	-880,878	-879,861	657	-308,404	2,068,486
Oklahoma	0	-695,882	-268,108	-378,032	1,342,022
Pennsylvania	-1,169,000	-10,444,000	-1,885,000	0	13,498,000
South Carolina	-28,580	-3,521,089	-3,354,947	-5,290,660	12,195,276
South Dakota	455,881	-454,900	15,911	-537,497	520,605
Utah	-200,000	0	-100,000	0	300,000
Virginia	-694,624	-945,520	-2,120,878	-958,000	4,719,022
Wisconsin	133,900	554,600	-65,800	-1,769,500	1,146,800
TOTAL	-\$18,647,178	-\$22,663,765	-\$15,281,606	-\$28,684,284	-\$85,276,833

Appendix 3 — Map of State Funding Cuts to Public Media Since 2008



Appendix 4 — Cumulative Loss and Total State Funding Cuts to Public Media



The sum of the 2012 appropriations for the 24 states included in this report is \$85.2 million below the collective appropriations from 2008. The total appropriation for these 24 states in 2008 was \$206 million. The 2009 sum of appropriations was \$19 million below this baseline; the 2010 sum of appropriations was \$41 million below this baseline; the 2011 sum of appropriations was \$57 million below this baseline; and the 2012 sum of appropriations was \$85 million below this baseline. Thus, if the appropriations had remained level with the figures from 2008, more than \$200 million in additional funding would have been allocated in these 24 states during this four-year period.