

Nixon Said to Reject Public TV Funding

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By LES BROWN

A long-promised bill from the White House Office of Telecommunications Policy for the long-range financing of public television has been "flatly rejected" by President Nixon, without discussion or explanation, according to sources close to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

The sources, who learned of the decision late last week, said that the President turned down the bill with a terse statement, which suggested instead that Federal support for public television be scaled down.

The proposed legislation was sent to the President late in April by Clay T. Whitehead, as his final act before giving up his post as director of the

Office of Telecommunications Policy.

Mr. Whitehead has been described as chagrined at the President's rejection of the bill. However, when contacted, Mr. Whitehead would not comment on the report of the President's action, but said that he was "still pushing" to get a bill out for long-range funding of public broadcasting.

Meanwhile, it has been learned from the same corporation sources that President Nixon has nominated Nancy Chotiner, widow of Murray Chotiner, his long-time close friend and political adviser, for Public Broadcasting.

The nomination has aroused the resentment of several board members because Mrs. Chotiner has had limited experience in

the business or professional world and has no apparent qualifications for the post, the sources said. Board members receive no salary, but receive a per diem of around \$100 about 12 times a year.

The funding bill, which was prepared under the supervision of Mr. Whitehead, had been presumed certain to receive Presidential approval since the public television industry has reorganized itself over the last three years along the lines recommended by the White House.

In a speech in Miami on October 20, 1971, to the National Association of Educational Broadcasters, Mr. Whitehead told the managers of public stations that there would be no

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long-range financing bill for an industry that conceived of itself as a "fourth network" emanating from a central source in New York or Washington. He said that the White House did not believe Federal funds should support the production of controversial news and public affairs programs.

Deal Was Understood

"Get your house in order" if you want Federal financing, Mr. Whitehead said in 1971.

Practically everyone in public broadcasting had understood that Mr. Whitehead was proposing a deal: That if the industry decentralized and balanced its political spectrum, the White House would recommend legislation for the kind of funding that would enable the non-commercial television industry to plan beyond a year at a time.

Following Mr. Whitehead's speech, commentators identified with the Liberal point of view

—such as Sander Vanocur and Robert MacNeil—left public broadcasting. At least one representative of the conservative side, William F. Buckley Jr., became one of the mainstays of the system.

In the meantime, the Public Broadcasting Service yielded its network functions to the station program co-operative, which has attempted to decentralize the system by allowing the various stations across the country to determine, by ballot, what shall be the national programming.

Work of Mr. Whitehead

Mr. Whitehead's office began working on the bill to fulfill its ends of the bargain, after the public broadcasting industry demonstrated its compliance with the wishes of the White House.

The proposed bill, which won the corporation's approval before it was submitted to the White House, provided five years of funding, which began at \$70-million for 1976 and graduated to \$100-million by the end of 1980. All were to have been matching grants, with the public broadcasting industry having to raise \$2.50 for every \$1 it received from the Government.

A second feature of the bill, no less important than the sums involved, was that it specified the authorization of the funds as well as their appropriation.

Short of repealing the law, neither Congress nor the President could reduce the amount indicated for each year. This had been intended to insulate the funding from the Federal Government, that is, to free the broadcasting system from the fear that its future funds might be cut off in act of reprisal to its programming.

Sympathy in Congress

Lobbyists for public broadcasting in Washington had little doubt that a White House sponsored bill or the insulated five-year funding of noncommercial broadcasting could easily have been rushed through Congress this year, since the key figures in both houses appeared to be in sympathy with such a bill.

Unless the President reverses his stand, similar legislation will have to be introduced by members of Congress. In that event, the timing would make passage difficult this year although the present two-year appropriations bill runs out next June, the sourcer said.

One of the corporation sources said he believed the President had rejected the long-range funding bill because "he has never liked public television and probably never will."