

TEN MONTHS AGO, it looked as if President Nixon might finally stop picking on public broadcasting. His sharp criticisms of programs and policies had died down and he had reversed past form by signing a bill authorizing federal funds for public broadcasting over a two-year period. The action, coming as it did after a protracted war over control of public programming, gave broadcasters new hope that they might be able to turn away from political struggles and concentrate on providing quality fare for the viewers.

The understanding at that time was that the reorganization of the public broadcasting industry—a compromise reached in the wake of White House pressures over the years—would produce administration support for longer-range financing. Clay T. Whitehead, who was director of the President's Office of Telecommunications Policy, put his staff to work on legislation that would carry out the White House's end of the bargain; a bill was drafted to provide five years of federal financing under a matching grant system. Moreover, the measure would specify both the authorization and appropriation of the funds—thus insulating public broadcasting from government reprisals in the event programs displeased either Congress or the White House. The proposed bill won approval of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and

Mr. Whitehead duly forwarded it to President Nixon in late April. Meanwhile, congressional leaders in both houses of Congress indicated that such a measure, if supported by the administration, would stand a good chance of enactment this year.

But now comes word that President Nixon doesn't want the bill sent to Congress. Mr. Whitehead says he'll continue to push for presidential approval of the measure, and he should—for it would enable public broadcasting to do the long-range planning that high-quality, stimulating programming requires. The tax-paying public—the listeners and viewers—ought not be denied certain "controversial" programs merely because the government doesn't like them, or because President Nixon doesn't happen to enjoy what he sees on the public channel.

Fortunately, the present two-year authorization for public broadcasting has another year to run, which means that Congress could move on its own in 1975, even with the threat of a veto. But the President's support for this important measure now would not only enhance the chances of its enactment this year, but would greatly relieve the political pressures under which noncommercial broadcasters have had to operate throughout his presidency.