

Nixon Shifts on Public-TV Aid And Sanctions Long-Range Bill

NYTimes

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JUL 17 1974

President Nixon, reversing a position he took in June, yesterday approved a bill prepared by the White House Office of Telecommunications Policy for the long-range financing of public broadcasting by the Federal Government.

The bill was immediately forwarded to Capitol Hill by Clay T. Whitehead, director of the Office, who said he foresaw no obstacles to its passage.

Mr. Whitehead described the bill as one that provides "a workable scheme" for the future, in that it not only assures funds for the public broadcasting system on which to develop and grow but it also protects the system from any "extrane-

ous influence or control" by the Government.

The bill would provide for a Public Broadcasting Fund to be established in the Treasury, and to be administered by the Secretary of the Treasury, to which specified sums would be ap-

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appropriated for each of five fiscal years.

The amounts would graduate by year from a maximum of \$70-million for fiscal 1976 to a maximum of \$100-million for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1980. The appropriations are stated in "maximums" because the funding would be accomplished under a matching formula under which the Government would provide \$1 for every \$2.50 raised by public broadcasting entities from non-Federal sources.

The proposed bill had been submitted to the President last April. In June, on the eve of Mr. Nixon's visit to the Middle East, a terse White House memorandum was drawn indicating that the President had rejected the bill and that he preferred instead to reduce Government support of noncommercial broadcasting.

After The New York Times reported, on June 10, that the bill had been "flatly rejected," the White House staff issued a denial that a final decision had been made.

Sources close to the Office of Telecommunications Policy said that some of Mr. Nixon's aides had persuaded him to reconsider by using the argument that a rejection would have the appearance of political vindictiveness.

Members of the Nixon Administration, including Mr. Whitehead, had frequently criticized public television for displaying a liberal bias, and it was public television that had made the Senate Watergate hearings available to most of the country during the prime viewing hours last summer.

On the other hand, Mr. Whitehead said he believed the President approved the bill from the conviction that it was "good and constructive legislation" that would further the general welfare.

Mr. Whitehead said he had written a "strong letter of appeal" following the rejection of the bill in June, and he credited Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr., White House chief of staff, with persuading Mr. Nixon to reconsider.

In a letter to the Huses of Congress accompanying the White House bill, Mr. Whitehead explained that the teaching principle "assures that Fed-

eral assistance does not become a dominant force in the system." at the same time, he said, it provides an incentive for the system to increase non-Federal support through grants from institutions and contributions from the viewing public.

Under the matching formula, Federal financing would never exceed 40 per cent of the total funds for both television and radio.

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which would distribute the funds to the viewing stations and program sources, has noted that the non-Federal income for the entire public broadcasting system reached \$200-million in the current fiscal year. At that level, the system would be eligible for the maximum \$70-million devolved by the bill for fiscal 1976.

Insulation of Funding

By providing for both the authorization and appropriation of funds—so that the indicated amounts could not be reduced for any year except by repeal of the law—the White House bill would serve to insulate the financing from the Government scrutiny of programing that might otherwise occur under an annual budgeting procedure.

In addition, Mr. Whitehead noted in his letter to Congress, the five-year appropriation provision would "enable the Corporation and local stations to undertake advance program planning with assurance as to the level of Federal funding available in the foreseeable future."

A key provision of the bill is that all licensees of public television stations would receive a basic annual grant, as would noncommercial radio stations that are eligible under public interest criteria established by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

The bill would require that 40 per cent of the Federal funds be distributed directly to the stations at the \$70-million authorization level, and 50 per cent at the \$100-million level.

This is consistent with the Nixon Administration's advocacy of "grassroots localism" in public television, as had been frequently expressed by Mr. Whitehead in the past, and its disapproval of attempts in public television to assume the role of a fourth network.