

Searching for pennies: With the cut in federal funding public broadcasters are looking to cope

By Mark Thiessen and David Bauder, Associated Press, July 18, 2025

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP)—Lauren Adams, general manager for KUCB public radio in Unalaska, Alaska, didn't have much time to reflect on Congress, 4,000 miles away, stripping federal funding for public media this week. She's been too busy working.

5 Sirens blared in the Aleutian Islands community Wednesday warning of a potential tsunami, with a voice over public loudspeakers urging the community's 4,100 residents to seek higher ground immediately and tune into the radio—to Adams' station.

At the same time in Washington, the Senate was voting on a measure that would eliminate nearly \$1.1 billion that had already been appropriated for NPR and PBS—a process that didn't end until early Thursday morning. The House completed the process in time for President Donald Trump to
10 sign it before a Friday deadline.

Trump had called for the cuts, saying public media's news programming was biased against him and fellow Republicans, and threatened GOP members of Congress with primary challenges if they didn't fall in line.

15 Adams, her news director, a reporter and an intern kept broadcasting and updating KUCB's social media feed until the danger passed. Then she made time for one more task—texting U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski and urging her to vote against the bill. Murkowski was one of two Republican senators, along with Susan Collins of Maine, to publicly dissent.

“I thought that it was such a telling story of why her constituents have a different relationship to public radio than maybe some other regions of the United States,” Adams said.

20 The federal money is appropriated to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which distributes it to NPR and PBS. Roughly 70% of the money goes directly to the 330 PBS and 246 NPR stations across the country, although that's only a shorthand way to describe its potential impact.

The cuts are expected to weigh most heavily on smaller public media outlets away from big cities, and it's likely some won't survive. Katherine Maher, NPR's president and CEO, estimated as many
25 as 80 NPR stations may face closure in the next year. Some stations are already fielding offers from commercial entities to buy their broadcast licenses, she said.

“Many of our stations which provide access to free unique local programming and emergency alerts will now be forced to make hard decisions in the weeks and months ahead,” said Paula Kerger, PBS president and CEO. “There is nothing more American than PBS. Despite today's
30 setback, we are determined to keep fighting to preserve the essential services we provide to the American public.”

The measure will cost PBS and NPR stations in Mississippi roughly \$2 million, about 15% of the budget, said Royal Aills, executive director of Mississippi Public Broadcasting.

35 Maine's public media system is looking at a hit of \$2.5 million, or about 12% of its budget, for the next fiscal year, said Rick Schneider, president and chief executive officer of Maine Public.

Maine's rural residents rely heavily on public media for weather updates and disaster alerts, said Molly Curren Rowles, executive director of ACLU of Maine. Rowles said public media was a “lifeline” to her growing up off the grid.

40 NPR's Maher fears what the cuts might mean for the system's journalism, not just in rural areas where local news can be hard to come by, but in telling the rest of the country what is going on there. Less funding will also mean less support for popular television and radio programming, although it's too soon to tell which programs will be affected.

NPR stations also use millions of dollars in federal money to pay music licensing fees. Now many will have to renegotiate these deals, which could mean less music, or a more limited variety of
45 music, on outlets where music discovery is a big part of their identity. For example, Maher estimates that some 96% of all classical music broadcast in the United States is on NPR stations. “That is essentially taking an entire art form out of public access,” she said.