

ERNEST WILSON'S REMARKS
ACCEPTANCE AS CHAIR OF CPB BOARD OF DIRECTORS
September 16, 2009
Washington, D.C.

This has been a very moving moment in my life. The sentiments of support, friendship and collegiality underscore what Senator Pryor said which is that we look forward to coming to these meetings. We look forward because of the quality of the people on the board. We look forward because of the importance of the work that we do.

I want to thank my Board colleagues for their confidence and support. I want to be able to provide the effective leadership with which you have entrusted me. I want to thank especially our outgoing Chair, Chris Boskin, and Vice Chair, Beth Courtney for their open and committed leadership which sets us on an important path to innovation and to our even greater excellence. Like Chris, my watchwords will be close consultation, inclusiveness and transparency, and consultation with my fellow Board members, the excellent CPB staff and the system as a whole. I welcome suggestions and advice from any source within the building or beyond.

I know I speak for my fellow Board members and our excellent staff when I say the Corporation for Public Broadcasting as a whole is prepared to be a strong partner and consultative and collaborative leader as together we create a communications future that is worthy of the American people that we serve.

I want to thank all of you for your nominations and seconds. I especially look forward to working with Beth Courtney who brings such a wealth of knowledge about public broadcasting.

I want to suggest this morning that we have arrived at what might be called a 1967 moment. A moment like the one that happened 40 years ago when public broadcasting was first created. Public broadcasting grew out of the earlier experience of educational television. The innovators of the mid 1960s dreamed a bigger dream and pursued a broader vision of public broadcasting. They gave birth to an expansive vision, relevant to their time. Each of the stakeholders was willing to sacrifice a little bit in 1967 to gain a lot.

Public broadcasting was born in 1967 because the stars were aligned. The private foundations like Carnegie and Ford, the Congress both Republicans and Democrats, educators, local stations, and eventually the President of the United States all agreed on a new mission: to provide high quality, federally-supported, non-commercial content that went beyond educational television to something more innovative and that met the civic, cultural, informational, as well as the continuing educational needs of the American people. Over the years, this innovative advance has been hugely successful across the system.

Today in 2009, I want to suggest we are in a similar moment in history. The stars are aligned as perhaps they have never been since 1967 to really advance our cause. Then as now, we need to go beyond the present and reimagine, reinvigorate and expand our inherited vision. For example, one step to consider is the possibility of changing our name to better reflect our current reality and our future directions and ambitions to become the Corporation for Public Media.

How are the stars aligned at this moment? Allow me to rattle off a few points. Number one, as we heard yesterday, Congress has given us a budgetary increase for the first time in years and Congressional leadership is much in favor of public broadcasting. The private foundations, who played such a large role in 1967, are stepping forward dramatically in their approaches to public media. I am happy to report that CPB has held fruitful discussions with the Ford Foundation about a forward looking national conversation on public media. We have interacted on a regular basis with the Aspen Institute. We are also engaged in conversations with the Knight Foundation. I am delighted to see representatives of some of those organizations in the audience today. This marks a direction that is very valuable to us and very valuable to the American people.

The local stations are experimenting with new and exciting things. The leading institutions, NPR and PBS, have been great partners in the Aspen process. We continue to explore the idea of doing other Aspen projects. The White House appears to be genuinely interested in what we are doing. The private sector is supporting us. The public, when we do polling, says that we are the most trusted institution in the United States of America and certainly the most trusted broadcasters. In other words, we have a situation in which we have no natural predators. It's a 1967 moment.

The greatest challenge we face is not money, the challenge is that we will collectively fail to seize this unique opportunity to become better than we are to better serve the American people. If there is a

common thread to the conversations that I have had with the stakeholders that I listed, it is their great expectation that the Corporation for Public Broadcasting will work with its colleagues to provide leadership at this very critical 1967 moment. I think if we can gather around and forge a common vision, then the support from those institutions will be forthcoming.

We need big ideas that clarify the wonderful work that we are doing and point the way toward the future. This requires leadership that is committed at all levels, not only at the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, but at every level of the system. I think we have that at every level.

In order to achieve our legislative mandate, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting has identified three core issues. We discussed yesterday recommitting ourselves to dialogue, diversity, and digital. Most of you in the room have heard Pat Harrison and others define these three therefore I will not do so. They do constitute the Board's restatement of the 1967 mandate and we will apply those three criteria to our thinking, our programmatic activities and our budgetary allocations as we move forward over the next year.

In closing, we have a tremendous opportunity to serve the American people by merging our institutional interests across the system into a common interest to better serve the American people. The stars are fully aligned. We can actually achieve our common goals by recommitting ourselves to accept nothing less than success because the stakes are so high. It is imperative that we pursue and achieve these great and common purposes. There is probably nothing more noble and grand than to succeed in seizing the tremendous opportunities for public service media in the digital age and to provide our fellow citizens with the fruits of non-commercial media which they so richly deserve.

I look forward to working with all of you to make this dream a reality. Thank you so much for this singular honor.