**2025 Public Media Summit: Kate Riley, Presidential Address**

Thank you, Franz.

And thanks to all of you for being here at the 2025 Public Media Summit.

As Franz noted, I’m proud to report that we have a record breaking 389 people registered for the Summit – an all-time high.

This includes exactly 74 community leaders who are here because they deeply value the work of their local stations.

They have volunteered time out of their business and personal lives to add their influential voices to our efforts to protect public media.

We appreciate your participation in our advocacy efforts.

This is a critical time for us to be together to highlight how local public television stations are essential *Champions of Local*, providing your communities with valuable services in the areas of public safety, education and community connections.

*Introduction of Kate*

The focus on local service and the fact that public media stations are controlled locally and responsive to their communities, distinguishes them as unique and irreplaceable in the media landscape.

And it’s one of the many reasons why I am proud to work for local public television stations.

I fully understand the privilege and responsibility I have in representing you as president and ceo of America’s Public Television Stations.

Thank you to the APTS Board for placing your confidence in me and for all of your support and engagement in our work.

And we couldn’t be luckier to have a great board. Franz has been a wonderful leader, Dolores, Adrienne, Garrett King from Oklahoma and David Steward from Nine PBS who unfortunately can’t be with us today, but is just finishing his term of six years on the Board as our lay vice chair.

And as his parting gift to us, he has made a grant from the Steward Family Foundation, of 50 thousand dollars to support our work. So we are particularly thrilled to announce that today.

It is truly an honor to tell your local stories of service to decisionmakers here in Washington, D.C. to strengthen the public television system so that local stations can continue to serve their communities in innovative and profoundly important ways.

The main reason I decided to start working for America’s Public Television Stations nearly 15 years ago is that I deeply believe in our mission and your service.

As a congressional staffer for nearly eight years, serving two different Members of the House of Representatives, I handled the public media portfolio and vividly recall the 2005 funding challenge that led to a successful bipartisan amendment on the House floor to restore a funding cut to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

Of course that was not the first funding challenge to public media nor the last as we know all too well.

I am one of the millions of PBS Kids who grew up with public television.

I watched *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* as a young child and learned many important science lessons from the *Voyage of the Mimi* in school.

When I learned of a position at America’s Public Television Stations, I couldn’t imagine a cause that I would be more proud to work for and represent.

I grew up just across the Potomac River in Arlington, VA, with my home station being W-E-T-A as I thought of it then, or WETA as I think of it now.

Like many people who grew up in the D.C. area, from a young age I was fascinated with politics and what inspires people to take action.

This was in large part because I grew up with a Republican Mother and a Democratic Father.

I was fascinated by how they as citizens chose to prioritize and act on their beliefs.

I have early memories of going to pro-life marches and joining union picket lines.

This was a thought-provoking situation to grow up in and it gave me a rich understanding of the value of different perspectives.

One of the most interesting things is that as social justice Catholics, my parents agreed on most topics.

They shared the same broad principles and goals for life, but what they prioritized as their top issues led them to draw different conclusions about who to vote for and what causes to dedicate their time and energy to.

There are similar situations throughout our communities, and our country, where people share many of the same goals: to be safe and healthy and to have opportunities for their family.

But each person’s own experiences, perspectives and priorities influence how they determine the best ways to achieve those goals for themselves and their families.

And even with many of the same goals, people come to different conclusions about which is the highest priority, the actions to take to pursue these goals, what causes to spend their time and energy on, and of course, who to vote for.

Some of what we saw in this last election was that significant portions of every community came to different conclusions than their neighbors about how to achieve their goals, even though they share many of those goals.

There is a real need for a greater understanding of and appreciation for how and why people with similar goals draw different conclusions and take different actions.

Public television is uniquely positioned to reflect and share the broad range of views and experiences in each of our communities in a way that helps foster greater understanding of our neighbors and fellow Americans.

Last year, PBS North Carolina launched the *NC Listening Project*.

This series brought people together to discuss challenging subjects with a shared commitment to listen to those they disagree with.

The program demonstrated how individuals with differing points of view can engage in respectful conversation on divisive issues, often finding common ground where they least expect it.

And Nashville PBS brought us *Ear to the Common Ground.*

Each episode featured one musical artist and a diverse cross-section of their fans, representing a broad spectrum of viewpoints.

They share a meal and talk about a political issue, with only one rule: to listen and speak with compassion.

And there are many other local public television programs that support enhanced understanding within our communities and among different parts of our nation because we prioritize these types of local programs and events, filling a role that no other entities can.

No community, whether urban, suburban, rural or remote is a monolith of only one way of thinking.

We have a responsibility and a long history of reflecting and serving the broad range of thought and experience in each of our communities.

We are uniquely positioned to do this work and to continue to do it even more to serve and reflect the rich tapestry of American experience.

Diving deep on issues rather than looking for a quick sound bite,

asking the revealing questions instead of defaulting to stereotypes,

leaning into the complexity instead of glossing over it, and

treating everyone with respect and recognition of both shared and divergent goals and different visions for how to best achieve them.

This is one of the many ways that local public television stations connect their communities by providing essential service and incredible value as *Champions of Local*.

*Political Landscape*

And it has never been more important that we effectively highlight the valuable services that local public television stations provide as we face a new political landscape with significant uncertainty and growing threats, some predictable and many unpredictable.

Throughout our over 50-year history, the public television system has faced numerous challenges and we have always overcome them due to the broad support of the American people for your work, which has translated into strong bipartisan support in Congress.

We have successfully earned continued federal investment under total Republican control, total Democratic control and divided government.

With the election this past fall, we have returned to unified Republican control with President Trump winning the White House and the Republican Party having majorities in Congress, albeit small ones.

There is currently a two-vote majority in the House of Representatives and a three-vote majority in the Senate.

But the new Administration has quickly made it clear that it will not be business as usual.

There have been a plethora of executive orders and administrative actions some of which affect public media entities directly or indirectly.

It remains to be seen how Congress will choose to act on a variety of issues, and what lawmakers will be able to pass given their narrow majorities.

There is always an emphasis on notching victories in the first 100 days of a new Administration, however the pressure to deliver on President Trump’s priorities seems to be greater than ever.

To do that as quickly as possible, Congress is working towards the goal of passing a joint House and Senate Budget Resolution.

This will allow Congress to create a budget reconciliation bill – a package of policy measures that only needs a simple majority in the Senate, rather than the 60 votes normally needed.

While the scope of a budget reconciliation package is still being debated --- a process that will likely last several more months, ultimately, I believe something will move forward as reconciliation is too powerful of a tool for the majority not to use it.

We are tracking this process closely and working to ensure that it does not negatively impact public media.

Congress will also need to quickly make decisions about finalizing the Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations, or funding levels, as the federal government is currently only funded through March 14th.

It is not clear how they will move forward on that, given that the funding package will need bipartisan support to pass the Senate.

We are actively engaged to ensure continued public media funding in the final FY 2025 appropriations action.

Both of these legislative processes, budget reconciliation and the annual appropriations bills, fall into the more predictable ways that serious threats to public media funding could materialize.

Other more unpredictable threats could surface, and some already have, in the form of administration actions, social media firestorms, unexpected regulatory and enforcement issues at the Federal Communications Commission or other agencies, and congressional hearings.

We are watching carefully as some federal grants that go to public media entities have been frozen.

This includes the Next Generation Warning System reimbursement grants that many stations are counting on for critical updates to their infrastructure that delivers emergency alerts and warnings.

We are tracking actions at the FCC, including the questions raised by Chairman Carr regarding underwriting.

AT THIS SUMMIT - tomorrow we have a panel of communications experts and a former FCC Commissioner to help unpack that issue and other potential risks and opportunities at the FCC.

And the House Oversight Committee, Subcommittee on Delivering on Government Efficiency or the DOGE Subcommittee, is convening a hearing next month to examine claims of bias in public media.

And we are working hard to ensure that every member of the subcommittee, and every Member of Congress has a clear understanding of the essential local station services and community impact that the federal investment delivers through the national-local, public-private partnership.

We have been preparing for this broad range of predictable and unpredictable threats since before the election.

While this situation is unprecedented and it’s important for us to recognize that, there is a path forward to success.

*The path forward*

In order to overcome any and all challenges, we need to be unified in our messaging, consistent in our engagement and nimble in our ability to adjust and respond to threats.

We know that the strongest message is highlighting how your stations are *Champions of Local*, providing local content, information and essential public services in a way that no one else does.

The most effective case highlights the unique services your local station provides in the areas of public safety, education and community connections.

We must communicate how public media plays a critical role in local, state and national emergency alerts and warnings, helping Americans prepare for, survive and recover from disasters.

We have seen time and time again how local stations are a lifeline of local information and resources during emergencies.

That was evident during the hurricanes in Florida and the southeast in the fall, the wildfires in southern California earlier this year, and the floods in Kentucky just last week, among many other examples.

Your role as a local broadcaster, some of the last in this country, and the critical role that all public television stations play in enabling PBS WARN to deliver emergency alerts to our cell phones makes you an essential public safety service provider.

AT THIS SUMMIT - Our panel tomorrow afternoon will do a deeper dive on the critical public safety services that stations provide and should be talking to their lawmakers about.

Simply put, cuts to public broadcasting funding significantly jeopardize public safety.

Another essential service you provide is education.

This is probably the thing public television is best known for.

And we are proud of the exceptional PBS KIDS programming and the variety of local kids programming your stations air and produce.

Over half of this nation’s 3 and 4 year olds do not attend a formal preschool, but because of the federal investment in public broadcasting, over 97% of households have access to the proven educational content stations air for free, each and every day.

This work is all the more powerful and irreplaceable because it is combined with the on-the ground station outreach and partnerships that ensure that all parents and caregivers in your community have the support they need to be their kids’ first teachers and to prepare their kids for success in school and life.

Your local engagement with families, schools, teachers, and other organizations in the community is incredibly unique and valuable.

This is the power of public media. This is how you serve the nation’s children and families in a way that no other media company can or will.

And of course, our education mission extends to supporting adults seeking their GEDs, workforce training and collaborations to meet the specific needs of your local community.

Through this work, you are helping your communities thrive and ensuring that business and industry that call your communities home have a strong and stable workforce well into the future.

And then there is the importance of your work in community connections – the way that your local station shines a light on the people, places, history, stories and issues that are at the heart of your community.

As some of the last locally controlled media in the country, your stations provide local services and bring your communities together in a way that no other entities can.

Don’t be afraid to share your positive stories of service with your community and on social media.

You are the best storytellers, and we must not shy away from telling our own stories.

Proactively highlighting the positive impact your station has on the people in your community, helps build the echo chamber of positive information about the valuable services your stations provide and why federal funding is essential to that work.

And we must say that.

Federal funding is essential to the local services that each one of your stations provides.

Cutting or eliminating federal funding would have a devastating impact on local services in communities around the country and the lives of our neighbors that depend on those services.

In addition, federal funding is essential to the entire public media ecosystem, making it possible for local stations to offer the mix of local, regional, independent and national programming and services like emergency alerts and warnings that communities rely on.

AT THIS SUMMIT - Later this afternoon we will hear from communications experts, political consultants and the APTS Legislative team about the importance of maintaining unified messaging for the greatest effect, and more details about how our services in public safety, education and community connections have earned the support of the public and a wide range of lawmakers.

*Consistent in our engagement*

There is bipartisan support in Congress for federal funding for public media.

Among others, this includes the Chair of the House Appropriations Committee, Tom Cole and the Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, Susan Collins, both of whom are past recipients of our Champion of Public Broadcasting Award.

But given the unpredictable political landscape it is critical that we take no one for granted, and nor should we give up on anyone.

Our supporters, Republicans and Democrats alike, need to hear from you about the latest and greatest services you are providing in their communities, delivering value and an incredible return on investment to their constituents.

We need our champions armed with the current and most persuasive examples of your impact so that they are ready to take a stand early and often to defend public media.

And even more important, the opponents and critics of public media need to hear from you too.

The more lawmakers learn about the wide range of services local stations provide, the more likely they are to be supportive.

They need to understand the decentralized nature of our system, and how your local stations are locally controlled and operated and accountable to your local community.

They need to hear about the local work in public safety, education and community connections.

And they need to hear from a variety of messengers about the importance of your work.

And that’s why we are so happy to have a large number of community leaders here with us this year, because we know that for many more skeptical members, hearing from someone who is not station staff is more persuasive.

The voices of your local partners, public safety officials, educators, homeschoolers and others help reveal all the many ways that your station is a critical champion of your local community, providing an exceptional value and return on the federal investment.

AT THIS SUMMIT - Later today you will hear about the APTS Leadership Council, which is our initiative to engage community leaders throughout the year, in coordination with stations, to ensure that Members of Congress are hearing about the great work of their local stations from local messengers and the importance of federal funding for supporting that work.

In addition to lawmakers hearing from community leaders, it is also important for them to hear from a large number of their constituents in support of public media funding.

And that’s where the Protect My Public Media grassroots advocacy campaign, co-managed by APTS and NPR, comes in.

At key moments in the legislative process and in anticipation of threats, Protect My Public Media will activate its network of hundreds of thousands of advocates across the country to have them weigh in with their Members of Congress at just the right moment.

A well-timed influx of constituent messages and calls to the right lawmakers can have a significant impact.

Protect My Public Media has been a key part of overcoming past challenges.

And the way for Protect My Public Media to be even more effective is for every one of your stations to actively engage with the campaign and share messages and activations with your supporters at the right moments.

AT THIS SUMMIT – Later this afternoon, you will hear how you can help make Protect My Public Media more effective than ever.

*Nimble in our ability to adjust and respond to threats*

Given the unpredictable landscape and the sense that the Administration and Congress are currently in unchartered waters, we all have to recognize that unexpected threats will continue to arise and we will need to work together to effectively and quickly adjust.

At the national organization level, I am collaborating with my colleagues to ensure that we are sharing information and coordinating our efforts in advocacy and communications as much as possible.

We will continue to streamline resources for stations, while also being prepared for a wide range of scenarios that could call for nimble adjustments and changes in strategy.

AT THIS SUMMIT - Our session tomorrow morning with Pat Harrison of CPB, Paula Kerger of PBS and Katherine Maher of NPR will provide a good opportunity to discuss each of our priorities and the outlook for the path forward.

I am grateful for the partnerships with the national organizations and for all of your support for America’s Public Television Stations.

Your sustained engagement is essential to our collective success.

*APTS Service to Stations*

The APTS staff is working day in and day out to strengthen local stations make the case for continued public media funding.

Our legislative team engages directly with Members of Congress and their staff to highlight the value of public television and the impact in local communities.

And – we work with you to make it as easy as possible for you to engage with your congressional offices on a consistent basis throughout the year, ensuring they are hearing about all the great work your stations are doing.

APTS provides a host of resources to help support station outreach to lawmakers as you build those important relationships.

This past October we launched the successful advocacy bootcamp webinars which ran on a weekly basis through December to provide detailed guidance and support for stations’ lawmaker outreach.

All of those sessions are archived in the members’ only section of our website.

And we are already working on topics for the next installments of this series.

We also provide numerous templates for regular updates for your lawmakers, meeting requests, station visit invitations, and how to best highlight your local services.

And in the lead up to the Summit we rolled out a new Legislative Checklist.

You will receive a checklist at the start of every month, highlighting the highest priority actions. We hope it will be a useful consolidated tool that will help you proactively share your service and maintain consistent communication with your lawmakers.

*State funding*

In addition to our work to protect federal funding for public media, we are also committed to helping stations protect state funding.

Thirty-eight states currently provide state funding for public media which amounts to a significant investment in your work.

Over the last many years, we have worked with stations to increase state funding and we have managed the state funding survey to ensure that we have accurate information about state investments in public television.

Last year, in FY 2025, state funding for public television set a new post-Great Recession high water mark of $257 million.

This was an increase of $17.1 million or 7.1% over FY 2024.

But unfortunately, this year we have seen a growing number of threats to state funding this year.

Some of these have come as a result of budget shortfalls, but others seem to be the federal anti-public media rhetoric transferring to the state level.

APTS supports stations facing state funding challenges in a number of ways including strategy development with our staff and our consultants from 50 State who have strong relationships with every Governor.

In addition, Protect My Public media can share the list of advocates from your service area for state funding outreach efforts.

This can lead to powerful grassroots engagement in support of your state funding.

If you think you may have a state funding challenge coming up, and I know we are working with many of you already, please reach out to us as early as you can so we can best support your efforts to ensure continued state funding.

And if you are in one of the states that does not currently provide state funding, we’d be happy to explore what opportunities there may be for establishing funding.

Over the last several years, APTS has been developing partnerships with the National Conference of State Legislators and the Council of State Governments to help educate more state lawmakers about the essential services local public television stations provide, and to make direct connections between lawmakers and their stations.

We will be continuing these efforts which benefit state funding and also lay the groundwork for continued federal funding success since many state legislators go on to serve in Congress.

*Regulatory work*

In addition to our advocacy on funding issues, America’s Public Television Stations is committed to representing your interests in front of the Federal Communications Commission and other federal agencies.

This involves extensive engagement on regulatory proceedings and making the case for policies that recognize the unique role local public television stations play in their communities and in the media landscape.

We have a long history of success in this regulatory work which has a significant impact on the operations of stations.

We also work hard to make sure that stations understand the many policy developments and rule changes that impact them.

And given the challenges we have already seen from the new FCC this year, and the overall threat environment, we recognize that this work will be more important than ever going forward.

*Thank you to APTS Staff*

These are just some of the ways that the team at America’s Public Television Stations is working to serve you every day.

I’m incredibly proud of this staff and they are doing a remarkable job, particularly during this year of great change, and not just in the political landscape, but for APTS as well.

In the last eight months, we saw the retirements of several truly iconic APTS staffers, including:

Joyce Burgess Schwarz, former Director of Administrative Services and Events, who still helped with the Summit participant list and badges this year;

And then three former staff who couldn’t bear to miss the Summit:

Tammye Heatley, former Director of Human Resources and Legal Services, who we are fortunate to have helping with registration this year,

Lonna Thompson, former Executive Vice President, COO, General Counsel, and Corporate Secretary, who continues to consult with us, providing valuable insights on a wide range of topics;

and of course my long time boss, mentor and friend, Pat Butler – the longest-serving APTS President and CEO, who has committed to doing anything I ask!

We are so grateful that these beloved, long-time APTS staffers have made themselves available to provide advice and assistance during these transitions.

We have benefited from their experience, and it feels good to know they are rooting us on from retirement!

And that brings me to the current APTS staff, an incredibly efficient and skilled band of professionals who handle everything thrown their way with grace, humor and dedication.

This team has provided essential support and guidance for me over the last several months and they are working on your behalf and in the interest of the entire public media system every day.

Would every member of the APTS staff please stand.

I’m going to wait til they do it.

Join me in thanking them for all of their exceptional work.

It’s truly a joy to work with this team.

*Frame our value*

And it is a privilege to work with each one of you to protect and strengthen local public television stations and the public media system as a whole.

Each of your stations provides essential services in public safety, education and community connections, working tirelessly each day to make your communities safer, stronger, wiser and more connected.

From early earthquake warnings in California to testing datacasting for wildfire alerting in Colorado, to providing critical local emergency information in the midst of hurricanes in Florida and the Southeast, and every station’s support of emergency alerts and warnings through PBS WARN,

We are a critical part of keeping Americans safe.

From virtual field trips in Georgia, to the wide array of educational resources broadcast through the Michigan Learning Channel, to WHYY’s Pathways to Media Careers Youth Employment Project, and the tens of thousands of free, digital learning resources in PBS LearningMedia,

We provide educational content and resources that support parents, teachers and life-long learners.

From anti-drug campaigns in Idaho, to celebrating the musical traditions of South Carolina, to broadcasting high school sports championships in Arkansas, and many other states, and the wide range of locally focused programming that is not available anywhere else,

We connect communities, celebrating their hometown heroes and local history, while coming together to address present day issues and charting a course for a bright future.

This is a record of service that you should be proud of.

You are making a difference in the lives of people throughout your community, every day.

This service is worthy of the federal investment, which amounts to about $1.60 per person per day and less than one 1/100th of a percent of the federal budget.

And your work has earned the broad support of the American people:

* 76 percent of Americans think that public television is a good investment,
* 88 percent of parents think PBS KIDS is a safe and trusted place for their kids,
* 65% of people who voted for President Trump think PBS is either adequately funded or underfunded, and
* For the 22nd year in a row, public television is America’s most trusted institution

As we spend the next couple days preparing for your congressional meetings, you should feel confident, proud and empowered to take this opportunity to underscore the many unique and valuable ways you serve your communities.

While we expect to face many threats this year and the changes in the political landscape hold many unknowns,

We know that you have a strong case to make.

We know that you have the support of the American people.

We know that the American people will make their voices heard.

And we know that working together, we will be successful.

Thank you.