



MARGARET ROE

# KMUN NEEDS YOU!

BY DOUG SWEET

The new Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Newt Gingrich, has gone on record that he thinks National Public Radio is too liberal and that public broadcasting funding should be cut off because it has been wasteful and not well spent. As station manager of KMUN-FM in Astoria, I would like to address that issue from the station's standpoint and let you be the judge.

*Big Bird, Sesame Street, Barney, and The Civil War.*

None of these public television programs would be on the air today without federal funding. If that were not the case, then the network and cable commercial broadcasters would have produced them and there would be no argument that there is a need for public broadcasting on the air today. But that is TV. What does federal support mean to radio?

In 1977 when the small group of locals were working to get a local public access radio station on the air, the mountain to climb was an initial cost of more than \$150,000 for equipment to begin broadcasting. The U.S. Department of Commerce has a program called the National Telecommunications & Information Agency, Public Telecommunications Facilities Program (NTIA/PTFP) which, since the early '70s, has been helping new stations get off the ground. The reason? Economic, educational, and cultural development in the communities the broadcast station would serve. The program, however, only paid for half the amount needed to do the job. The idea was that the local community would use the federal funds as seed money and raise the rest from supporters locally. In fact, the federal money is never sent unless the local area completely supplies the remainder needed.

In 1983, KMUN began broadcasting with only an air room and a transmitter -- no place to produce programs off air. In 1984, we added a production room we used to train the all volunteer crew which to this day operates the station. In 1985, we were able to add translators serving Cannon Beach, Nehalem/Wheeler/Manzanita, and the upper Nehalem valley and the north Columbia River shore. In 1987, we were able to purchase the satellite system which enabled us for the first time

to get programs from other stations and independent producers. In 1989, we added translators in Tillamook and south Astoria to enhance our signals there. All of this was partially funded through help from the NTIA/PTFP program -- but most of the money came from local and regional sources such as member contributions, the Oregon Community Foundation, the Meyer Memorial Trust, Jackson Foundation, Burlington Northern Foundation and many more. In other words, because of the federal assistance, KMUN was able to (pardon the jargon) leverage contributions which enabled us to complete the projects.

Success in spreading the signal led to a local outpouring in 1985, when we were faced with a need to move due to crowding and increased production demand, which resulted in our buying a building to house the studios. We did this without federal funding of any kind.

But still, even with these successes, KMUN labors to raise the dollars day in and day out, year in and year out that it takes to operate the station. It is far easier to raise money to paint a building than it is to find funds to pay the electric bill. For years we operated with only one and a half staff persons to keep the enormous FCC and membership paperwork up to date, to train new programmers, and to fix broken equipment...as well as organize the outside fundraisers and community events the station sponsors.

Finally, in 1993, with the help of other stations and national organizations, KMUN became eligible for a community service grant from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). There has always been a threshold level of local support needed to become eligible for funding. But in 1993 some of the larger urban stations agreed to give up some of their funding so small rural stations like KMUN could get funding to help pay basic operating costs, help pay for local production, and purchase equipment. We will see some of the results of this in the next few months as we replace aging satellite and audio equipment in the station.

Yes, we did survive for almost a decade without this funding, but think of it like this...we are still operating with the same tape recorders, the same transmitter, mixing boards, receivers, and so on, that we started with eleven years ago. There has never been a time in the first ten years that we have been able to set aside funds for future equipment purchases.

CPB funding has made a whole range of programs available that we had no access to before such as *Talk of the Nation, Soundprint, Car Talk, Morning Edition, All Things Considered, Classical Countdown, Riders Radio, Fresh Air, Selected Shorts, Sandy Bradley's Potluck, Marian McPartland's Piano Jazz, Afropop Worldwide*, and just lately the regional news program, *Northwest Journal*. Indeed, most of these programs would not exist on any station without a contribution from CPB. These programs have helped KMUN increase local funding by matching up local programs with compatible national programs. The match-up has brought new listenability to our local programming by giving us a standard by which to measure ourselves. Federal funding has provided training opportunities for volunteers and staff to get better at what we do.

Yes, KMUN can probably survive as it did before CPB funding. But as you can see, without the Department of Commerce, the station would probably not exist. Yes, the world can probably get along without *Big Bird*, without *Sesame Street*, without *Car Talk*, without *All Things Considered*, without *Piano Jazz*. But do we want them to go away? Is public broadcast funding less important to communities than, say, military bands which receive more than twice as much funding yearly as all of public broadcasting? (When was the last time you saw a military band march down your street?) Is public broadcasting less important than providing subsidies to tobacco companies to hold down the price of cigarettes? Is all the money to be spent on all the federal arts programs (CPB, National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities, The Smithsonian Museum, etc.) for the next decade less important than buying one wing of one C-17 transport plane? (Those two amounts of money are roughly equal.)

One last thing. Critics of public radio seem to be saying that public radio has undermined "family values" by being liberal and fomenting permissive values. Consider this: KMUN has been the only station anywhere in the United States over the last decade that has a program of daily bedtime stories for children. We have been producing an "alternative to Saturday Morning Cartoons," the *Skinnamarink* show for more than ten years. And our work in getting teenagers off the streets and into the radio air room can be heard each Friday night at 9 o'clock when they play music and discuss the problems unique to young people.

Our local public affairs programs have covered city council and county commission meetings. We have interviewed pro-choicers and right-to-lifers; pro and con on ballot measures; candidates from all parties for public offices.

KMUN's programmers are a rainbow of the political spectrum from ex-county commissioner, Republican Bob Westerberg, to flaming liberal Carol Newman.\* And our policy of constantly seeking community volunteers and providing hands-on training for access to the airwaves has no caveats to admission.

So I ask you. Is KMUN worth something to you? Is it worth more than a yearly contribution? Is public broadcasting worthy of your help? Will you help KMUN and every other public station continue to be able to provide the programming we now take for granted? If the answer is yes, then please call or write our representatives, including the new Speaker of the House, and let them know that local public radio is important to you. Do it today. The sooner the better.

It is the best support you can give KMUN in this new year.

Doug Sweet's cry to save public broadcasting has been heard in Congress, part of testimony before a House committee. "KMUN's story is now in the Federal Register," he says.

Margaret Roe lives in Humptulips Valley, Washington. Her art was featured in the June 1992 NCTE.

## CAPITOL LETTERS

The U.S. Congress needs to know how you feel about community radio and KMUN in particular.

As many of you might have heard, a number of the new members of Congress are questioning whether public radio should survive. Many say that while they hear from people who disagree with what they hear on public radio, they rarely hear from constituents who support public broadcasting. KMUN needs you to be the voice of the station to let your congressional representatives know how much you value having local, community-owned and operated radio in your area.

With the financial support of thousands of people over the years, KMUN has been able to add to the cultural and educational life of the many communities we serve. The federal government has been a partner in that through the U.S. Department of Commerce with help in purchasing equipment and through the Corporation for Public Broadcasting which has helped the station become nationally connected through the public radio satellite system.

In this era of tight fiscal resources, our Congressional delegations in both Oregon and Washington have to make tough decisions about what to fund and what to cut. They need to hear from you, their constituents, about what you think is important. Please let them know that you are concerned about the future of public broadcasting.

Write your Senators and Representatives a short note or letter explaining why KMUN is important to you and ask them to support continued funding for public radio operations. The letter doesn't have to be fancy or wordy or full of numbers and figures. Just a letter like you have sent KMUN about a jazz program or a

bedtime story you heard or a *Talk of the Nation* program that made you think. A few words in your own handwriting or with your letterhead would help immensely.

Letters can be sent to:

Washington Senators Slade Gorton (R) and Patty Murray (D), U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C. 20510.

Oregon Senators Robert Packwood (R), 259 Russell Senate Office Bldg, Washington, D.C. 20510, and Mark Hatfield (R), 711 Hart Senate Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20510. Packwood can be reached by phone in D.C., (202) 224-5244, and in his Oregon office at (503) 326-3370. Hatfield's D.C. phone is (202) 224-3753, and (503) 326-3389 is his Oregon office number.

Oregon Representatives Elizabeth Furse (D), 316 Cannon Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20515, and Ron Wyden (D), 1111 Longworth Office Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20515. Her phone in D.C. is (202) 225-0855, and her Oregon office number is (503) 422-4003. His D.C. number is (202) 225-4811, and in Oregon (503) 231-2300.

Also write to Linda Smith (R-Wash), U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515.

The U.S. Capitol switchboard will direct your phone call. The number is 1-(202) 224-3121. Just ask for the office of your Senator or Congressperson.

Listener support is the most important ingredient for any community radio station and our broadcast community has been great for many, many years. You've helped us as a contributor, now we need you as a citizen.

~DOUG SWEET