November 2020

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Quote

“What an amazing undertaking! Thank you for capturing these magnificent barns and featuring them on Outdoor Idaho for all to enjoy and appreciate! Idahome!” – Terri

Join us for special programming
November 27 – December 6.

On Sunday, December 6, at 7 p.m., Outdoor Idaho features “Idaho’s 12ers.” There are people who love to climb mountains, particularly ones that are more than 12,000 feet high. In fact, there are now trails to the top of some of Idaho’s 12ers that didn’t exist even a few years ago. Producer Bill Manny and videographer Jay Krajic will try to keep up with climbers as young as 6 and 9 who have already summited them all.

At 8:30 p.m. our Idaho Experience team shares “Books, Boats & Embezzlers,” a collection of stories drawn from Idaho’s rich and varied history: a publisher maintains hands-on printing traditions; how Ernest Hemingway was influenced by his time in Idaho; the steamboats that thrived on Lake Pend Oreille at the turn of the 20th Century; New Plymouth’s beginning as an agricultural utopia; an infamous Idaho criminal from a pioneer family; and how drive-in theaters keep old-time movie-watching rites alive.
At 9:30 p.m., we present “All Is Calm: The Christmas Truce of 1914.” This program is brought to PBS by IdahoPTV Friends board director Laura Little. This beautiful musical theater production tells the story of the World War I holiday truce. The Western Front. Christmas 1914. Out of the violence comes a silence, then a song. A German soldier steps into No Man’s Land singing “Stille Nacht.” Thus begins an extraordinary night of camaraderie, music and peace.

In the Community

For 26 years, Idaho Public Television has hosted the annual PBS KIDS Writers Contest. Each year, IdahoPTV’s three regional stations — KUID/Moscow, KISU/Pocatello and KAID/Boise — encourage children in kindergarten through third grade to write and illustrate their own imaginative story.

On Saturday, October 24, virtual awards ceremonies were held online to celebrate this year’s winners and their stories. The winning stories are uploaded in full color on the IdahoPTV website at: https://www.idahoptv.org/kids/writers/.

“This year we had 154 submissions from around Idaho, and the stories were awesome. A few of them made me laugh until I cried,” says Katheryn Astle, IdahoPTV community education specialist. “Some of the writers drew from real-life experiences, others dreamed up imaginative adventures, and they all added wonderful illustrations. The PBS KIDS Writers Contest is a great way for children to engage in polishing their language skills and creativity — abilities that are vital in today’s world.”

Principal support for this year’s contest was provided by IDeal – Idaho College Savings Program.

This year’s winners are:

Eastern Idaho

**Kindergarten**
1st - The Bad Hair Day by Whitlee
2nd - The Dragon’s Heart by Clara
3rd - My Country Home by Madelaine

**First Grade**
1st – Stella’s Birding Adventure by Stella
2nd - The Space Wish by Juliet
3rd - The Diary by Briggs

**Second Grade**
1st - The Way of Pets by Bronson
2nd - Flat Stanley by Benson
3rd - Our Vacation to Thailand by Bella

**Third Grade**
1st - Rocky and Tucker by Avery
2nd - Our Adventure Under the Stars by Aislyn
3rd - Ghost Goes to the Moon by Tyler
Northern Idaho

Kindergarten
1st - Sela Went on a Walk by Maisie

First Grade
1st - Civil Rights Poems by Trinity
2nd - The Bowl and Everything That Went In It by Liberty
3rd - Checking Ginormous Round Bales by Cody

Second Grade
1st - Alex Saves the Day by Lillian
2nd - My Dog Rose by Landon
3rd - Unicorns, Dragons, and the Knights by Dixie

Third Grade
1st - My Stitches by Leah
2nd - Ripped Pants by Riley
3rd - Learning to Drive a Combine by Audree

Southwestern Idaho

Kindergarten
1st - Backyard Trouble With Pink and Kitten Watermelon by Allyse
2nd - John the Bear by Paisley
3rd – Luna’s Story by Elsa

First Grade
1st - The Toad Who Wanted to Fly by Ava
2nd - The Adventures of Water Girl by Samantha
3rd - The Invaded Town by Anabel

Second Grade
1st - Jake and Hongs in the Magical Rocketship by Evan
2nd - The Story of the Gingerbread Kitten by Nora
3rd - The Last Dinosaur by Emmett

Third Grade
1st - The Faster One by Quinn
2nd - The Different Adventure by Kenna
3rd - Her Dream by Brooklinn

Our IdahoPTV Productions

“Satellites”

In new video shorts, host Joan Cartan-Hansen navigates the globe with satellites. Discover how these spacecraft study the planet and our universe, learn about GPS and geocaching, and see where satellites go to die.

In the News

Fulcher, Soto, Evans to appear on the ‘Idaho Debates’ tonight at 8

Posted by Betsy Oct 9, 2020


Due to COVID-19, the format of the Idaho Debates has been modified this year. Instead of an in-person, live debate, each candidate was asked the same questions via video teleconferencing, and the answers are spliced together so viewers can compare.

The Idaho Debates is a collaborative effort among the Idaho Press Club, Boise State University’s School of Public Service, University of Idaho’s McClure Center, Idaho State University’s Department of Political Science, League of Women Voters’ Voter Education Fund, and Idaho Public Television.

The Idaho Debates will feature the 2nd Congressional District race on Monday, Oct. 12, at 8 p.m.; and the U.S. Senate race on Friday, Oct. 16, at 8 p.m.

Betsy Z. Russell is the Boise bureau chief and state capitol reporter for the Idaho Press and Adams Publishing Group. Follow her on Twitter at @BetsyZRussell.
Simpson, Swisher discuss ACA, Trump and more on Idaho Public Television

By NATHAN BROWN nbrown@postregister.com Oct 13, 2020

The two candidates running to represent Idaho’s Second Congressional District outlined their views on salmon conservation, the Affordable Care Act and much else in interviews aired on Idaho Public Television on Monday night.

Due to coronavirus, rather than holding traditional debates Idaho Public Television is recording and airing interviews with all of the candidates for federal office this year, and on Monday aired its interviews with U.S. Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, and his Democratic opponent Aaron Swisher. The candidates are all asked the same questions and the interviews are edited together to present their answers after each other, but the format of separately recorded interviews does not allow for the back-and-forth between candidates that a debate normally would.

Swisher argued that, given that Democrats are almost sure to keep the House and could win the Senate and presidency, it would make sense for the state to have one Democratic seat at the table. He closed the hourlong segment with a pitch to Republicans who are unhappy with their party or with President Donald Trump, comparing the year to 1980, when many lifelong Democrats unhappy with the country’s direction crossed party lines to vote for Ronald Reagan and other Republicans.

“Those Reagan Democrats knew that our country was more important than any political party,” he said. “We’re in a different situation now, but our nation is still in trouble. We have a president who is authoritarian, who is dividing our citizenry for his own benefit.”

Simpson touted his record on helping to fund Idaho National Laboratory and on public lands-related issues, such as creating the Boulder-White Clouds wilderness and securing the passage of the Great American Outdoors Act this year, which guarantees funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund of $900 million a year and increases funding for maintenance of federal lands.

“While I’ve been in Congress for a while, it is true that I have not solved every problem the federal government has,” Simpson said. “That doesn’t mean I haven’t been working on those. But I do have some solid accomplishments that I’m very proud of.”

Swisher said he favors expanding on the Affordable Care Act, not repealing it, and criticized Simpson and Republicans in general for trying to get rid of it, pointing to a lawsuit seeking to overturn the law backed by 18 Republican-led states that the U.S. Supreme Court is expected to hear arguments on in November. Swisher said 61% of Idaho voters approved Medicaid expansion in 2018, which has extended health care coverage to about 90,000 people, and that Simpson has taxpayer-funded health care as a member of Congress.

“He is trying to repeal the Affordable Care Act and take health care away from 90,000 Idahoans who are also getting health care paid for by the taxpayers,” Swisher said.
Simpson criticized the ACA, saying he expects it to “collapse of its own weight” due to rising prices and a lack of competition in the markets. However, he said he supports keeping many aspects of it, such as its ban on denying people coverage based on pre-existing conditions or discriminating based on sex and allowing young people to stay on their parents’ health insurance until they turn 26.

“There are parts of the Affordable Care Act that Republicans support, and if it is a repeal and replace with something else, that’ll all be part of it,” he said.

Simpson also said he supported Medicaid expansion in Idaho and favors keeping the federal match that pays for 90% of expansion’s costs.

“You can’t take away a benefit that you’ve given,” he said. “It’s almost impossible to do. Whether it’s the right thing to do or not, you probably can’t do it.”

The two also differed on trade policy. Swisher said he supports tariffs as a way of equalizing trade between the U.S. and countries with lower wages and less stringent worker protection or environmental laws, and said he agrees with Trump that many previous trade deals were bad for American workers, although he was harshly critical of the way Trump has handled the issue.

“He seems to have started more trade wars than working with other countries to come up with better trade agreements for the United States and for United States workers,” Swisher said.

Simpson said he is more inclined to support free trade, viewing tariffs as a cost that gets passed on to consumers.

“I’ve never been a fan of tariffs,” Simpson said. “I realize occasionally they’re necessary.”

Both candidates expressed support for efforts to help Idaho’s endangered salmon and steelhead populations recover. Both said they wouldn’t rule out removing dams on the lower Snake and Columbia rivers, although both also said this would cause other problems for electricity generation and for the farmers who use the rivers to transport agricultural products that would need to be addressed.

Both also condemned white supremacy, although Simpson made a point of also condemning anti-police rioters. He also said he doesn’t think Trump is emboldening white supremacists.

“We shouldn’t just condemn one side,” Simpson said. “Both sides need to take responsibility for those actions, and we need to condemn those actions on both sides.”

Simpson and Swisher will also meet in a debate at 7 p.m. Wednesday hosted by and broadcast on Boise TV station KTVB. This looks like it will be the only actual debate for a competitive federal office in Idaho of this election cycle. KTVB also tried to organize debates between First District U.S. Rep. Russ Fulcher, R-Idaho, and his Democratic challenger Rudy Soto, and U.S. Sen. Jim Risch, R-Idaho, and his Democratic challenger Paulette Jordan, but Fulcher and Risch turned them down.
PBS Showed TV the Future. But What Does Its Own Look Like?

It created the blueprint for what TV has become. And, while networks and streaming services reap the benefits of PBS’s successes, it is still struggling to survive.

By Elizabeth Jensen

Oct. 13, 2020, 5:02 a.m. ET

As satires go, Robert Wuhl’s “Open Season” seemed particularly far-fetched when it was released in 1996. The film’s high concept? After the television industry’s all-powerful ratings system malfunctions, a thinly disguised Public Broadcasting Service becomes the most popular network in the country. Educational programs such as “Kennedy: What’s Left to Say?” and a history of Limoges china shoot up the charts. (“What’s Limoges?” asks Regis Philbin in a cameo.)

Culture is suddenly cool; book sales and museum donations surge. So the top commercial network decides to fight back. It counters with “Greek’s Company,” “the first culture-com,” starring Alan Thicke as the counselor in a co-ed college dorm in ancient Greece. And Tom Selleck is cast as a renowned cellist who fights bad guys by day in “Rock Maninoff, Classical Crimefighter.” His catchphrase: “Time to face the music, scumbag.”

Alas, the glitch is discovered and the balance in the TV universe is restored. The public network’s ratings actually come in below those of the Weather Channel, Wuhl’s character moans. Wuhl’s satire flopped, too, taking in less than $9,500 at the box office.

But in retrospect, the movie may just have been ahead of its time. As PBS celebrates its 50th anniversary this month, it’s not ranked No. 1, but the rest of the premise doesn’t seem so crazy.

PBS’s influence is everywhere. There’s a fairly direct line from PBS’s groundbreaking reality series “An American Family” to MTV’s “The Real World” and “Keeping Up With the Kardashians” on E! Julia Child’s “The French Chef” begat the 24-hour Food Network, one million-follower YouTube cooking stars and even food porn like “The Chef’s Table” on Netflix. The DIY Network is filled with “This Old House” knockoffs. PBS made the BBC naturalist Sir David Attenborough a star in the United States, but today he is just as likely to be found on Discovery or Netflix, while the descendant of Carl Sagan’s “Cosmos: A Personal Adventure” airs on National Geographic.
PBS’s signature preschool shows have also been picked off. New episodes of “Sesame Street” air first on HBO Max. Powerhouse commercial media companies Viacom and NBC Universal have muscled in with their Noggin and Sprout cable networks. British police procedurals and costume dramas are found not just on Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hulu and HBO Max, but also BritBox and Acorn TV. Documentaries are equally ubiquitous, with HBO and Showtime and streaming services increasingly vying for titles, hefty check books in hand.

When PBS arrived a half century ago, television was essentially a three-network game, and PBS thrived by championing programming and audiences ignored by NBC, CBS and ABC. But that distinctiveness has faded in today’s world of hundreds of cable channels and seemingly unlimited streaming services, many built after rivals saw the commercial value in PBS’s embrace of food lovers, costume drama obsessives, home improvement tinkerers and other niches. PBS may still execute many of its programs better than its rivals, and its content remains free and over-the-air, crucial for reaching those with lesser means and those without broadband. But in a country where the vast majority gets their TV through a paid service, that distinction rarely registers.

This cornucopia of programming viewers can enjoy across the television landscape only intensifies the political pressures facing PBS. Why should the federal government subsidize public broadcasting, conservative politicians and others ask, when the commercial marketplace appears to be doing just fine delivering those types of programs?

From its beginnings, PBS has grappled with an existential conundrum — what it should be, and how it should distinguish itself. Thanks to its success, that quandary has become even thornier. More than ever, a thriving future for PBS will come down to how it manages an organization for the public good in a commercial environment, according to Marcia Smith, a documentary film producer (“The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution”).

“Is there still an idea of the public good that we can agree on beyond ‘Sesame Street’?,” Smith asked.

How It Came Together

PBS is an odd entity to celebrate, really. It’s a “service” not a “system,” and not a network like CBS or CNN. Officially, it distributes national programs that it does not produce, and it is charged with operating the satellite system to interconnect all local public television stations. PBS did not originate noncommercial, educational television; there were already more than 100 such stations when PBS debuted in October 1970. “The French Chef” was its first broadcast, but the program had been airing on some public stations for six years. “Sesame Street” had begun a year earlier.

But it’s an anniversary worth commemorating. PBS and public television are now widely considered synonymous, having met the goal envisioned by its founders: helping autonomous educational stations nationwide combine resources, amplifying the reach of quality programs and shepherding new ones worthy of the federal funds allotted under the 1967 Public Broadcasting Act. Those stations, while committing to a common purpose, ultimately retain control over what they air. Call it upside-down, or bottom-up, as Paula Kerger, the president and chief executive of PBS, does. “You have a lot of responsibility, but not ultimate authority,” she said of PBS’s role. That leads to what she called “the beauty and the pain of trying to keep this whole system glued together.”

The act, which created the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, laid out a broad mandate for the programs that public television (and radio) should foster. It sought media for “instructional, educational and cultural purposes,” promoting “diversity and excellence,” and addressing “the needs of unserved and underserved audiences, particularly children and minorities.”

That left room for a wide range of offerings, from the how-to shows to gorgeous costume dramas to insightful documentaries and kids shows that weren’t trying to sell toys or sugar-laced cereal, but learning.
Alternative fare did flourish. “Black Journal” looked at public affairs from a Black perspective, a first. On “Zoom,” a diverse group of children created high-energy activities for their peers, including stunts like trying to whistle after stuffing their mouths with soda crackers.

Viewers followed the break up of the Loud family in Santa Barbara, Calif., on “An American Family.” In a pre-CNN era, PBS alone broadcast taped gavel-to-gavel coverage of the Watergate hearings, in prime time, no less. And on the irreverent variety show “The Great American Dream Machine,” experimental films mixed with sometimes risqué comedy. (“Who’s the first guy you ever made it with?” Charles Grodin asks his date in one sketch.)

“It was a great time in public television; if you thought it, you could do it,” Jack Willis, one of the executive producers of “Dream Machine,” recalled.

**Elmo Goes to Washington**
The political pressure — a constant in PBS’s history — didn’t take long to arrive. One month, to be exact.

In November 1970, PBS distributed “Banks and the Poor.” It chronicled how banks perpetuated substandard housing for low-income Americans of color, ending with a scroll listing some 100 conflicted U.S. lawmakers.

Bill Moyers, who as a special assistant to President Lyndon B. Johnson had worked on the 1967 Act, remembered the reaction in 2006: “All hell broke loose. President Nixon and his director of communications, Patrick Buchanan, were so outraged that the president vetoed C.P.B.’s reauthorization bill and wouldn’t sign another until the chairman, president and director of television for C.P.B. resigned.”

After a few more years of political kerfuffles over programming, a deal was struck in the mid-1970s that executives hoped would insulate PBS from administration meddling. The federal appropriation would now go largely to local stations, rather than directly to PBS. And those stations, more than 330 currently, would funnel the money — in part — back to PBS.

“Politically, it was the right thing to do to protect the system,” recalled Stuart Sucherman, who helped broker the deal. “But in hindsight that made an inefficient system more inefficient.”

It didn’t end the political posturing, either. In 1995, Newt Gingrich, Republican of Georgia, became speaker of the House pledging to “zero out” the federal funds, calling public broadcasting an “elitist enterprise” (he suggested that the conservative radio host Rush Limbaugh better represented “public broadcasting.”) Ervin Duggan, then president of PBS, fought back with a highbrow rhetorical flourish. He began a speech to the International Radio and Television Society by reading Thomas Hardy’s 1866 poem “The Ruined Maid,” adding that if Congress cut off funding it would be playing the pimp that forced PBS into the “electronic equivalent” of prostitution.

Invoking Hardy may have helped fend off that challenge, but the cycle of outrage and political grandstanding has repeated over the decades. In 2005, an episode of the children’s program “Postcards From Buster” featuring lesbian parents set off conservative complaints. Last year, a same-sex wedding on the cartoon “Arthur,” prompted another round of criticism when Alabama Public Television declined to air the episode. And in 2012, Mitt Romney enlivened a 2012 presidential debate by declaring, “I love Big Bird,” but “I’m going to stop the subsidy to PBS.”
Barack Obama’s re-election prevented Romney from canceling Big Bird, but a different result in 2016 reignited the funding wars. The Trump administration argued in a budget proposal that “alternatives to PBS and NPR programming have grown substantially since C.P.B. was first established in 1967, greatly reducing the need for publicly funded programming options.” But Congress restored the appropriation, which this year is $445 million, of which roughly 70 percent goes to the stations, radio and television. (PBS gets a small amount of direct money from the corporation; in the 2019 fiscal year, it was about $29 million.)

The most potent weapon in these battles over the years has been the activation of Big Bird, Elmo and characters from PBS’s other children’s shows. They often make the trek to Capitol Hill and have even testified at congressional hearings.

But even as PBS has fended off these funding threats, the culture wars and the push for political balance have taken their toll. PBS never did distribute that episode of “Buster” and an ambitious series of films on America’s role in the post-Sept. 11 world was criticized for being both too conservative and too liberal.

**A Funding Model Under Constant Threat**

Politicians’ threats to slash federal funding make headlines, but that money does not come close to bankrolling PBS shows. The life of the public television producer often means spending years trying to coax backing from foundations and corporate sponsors, and local stations have come to rely on donations from their (older) viewers. And that financial state of affairs has hobbled PBS’s ability to compete, and skewed its programming choices.

Over the decades, PBS has seen many of its best programming ideas copied by its commercial competitors, who’ve nabbed some of its audience too. Particularly younger viewers.

Attempts to woo a new generation have had mixed success. When Fox canceled R.J. Cutler’s teen reality series “American High” in 2000, Pat Mitchell, PBS’s new president, brought it to public television, a bold move given PBS’s median viewer age of 55 at the time. She also tried to cut back on British drama by reinventing the venerable “Mystery!” with American dramas. But some donors, and thus stations, objecting to the raw language and sexual and drug conversations in “American High” and they forcefully pushed back against the “Mystery!” plan.

The runaway success of “Downton Abbey,” which ended in 2016, eased some of the pressure on the PBS budget and drew donations to local stations. But any boost they got was temporary. Indeed, “Mercy Street,” PBS’s first original drama in more than a decade, was abruptly canceled in 2017 after two seasons when the funding fell apart.

“We have not solved our funding model,” said Sharon Rockefeller, president and chief executive of WETA, the public broadcaster in Washington, D.C., who has been in public broadcasting for more than four decades.

PBS, under Kerger, is pushing to bolster its foundation, but that won’t be enough.

The system, Rockefeller said, is “fragile.”

**A Vibrant Past, a Future in Question**

Money woes may be a constant in the history of PBS, and the encroachment of their commercial competitors shows no sign of easing. So there have been plenty of proposals for PBS’s future, most arguing for a complete do-over — including focusing on digital-first local news, or sticking to children’s content only.
But a more expansive vision, tailored to all the places PBS remains distinctive, could provide a programming blueprint for a sustainable future (if not a financial one). A vision that connects directly to its original mission, updated for a wired world.

Smith, the documentary film producer and president and co-founder of Firelight Media, said that for independent filmmakers, particularly those of color, PBS remains vitally important. PBS films air for free and PBS invests in engagement campaigns, connecting documentary work with communities through local stations.

Lynn Novick, a collaborator with Ken Burns on “The Vietnam War” and other films, and the director of “College Behind Bars,” said no other outlet would allow a filmmaker to come up with an idea and spend 10 years getting it right. PBS, she said, is “creator driven, more than top down, not an executive saying we need a documentary on the Civil War.”

The past seven months have unexpectedly underscored another area where PBS remains unique: Education.

In March, days before 600,000 Los Angeles Unified School students were sent home because of the pandemic, PBS’s Kerger received a call from Austin Beutner, the district’s superintendent. PBS and its area stations quickly marshalled educational resources for students with limited or no broadband access. Dozens of other public stations and school systems nationwide have followed suit.

Meanwhile, PBS LearningMedia, an online educational platform for teachers and students, has seen its users more than double this school year, compared to the pre-pandemic average.

In June, as Black Lives Matter protests generated national conversations about racism, PBS dug into its back catalog so films like Firelight’s “Freedom Riders” could begin streaming again. New programs about race include “The Power of We: A Sesame Street Special.”

“It is rather stunning to see how very relevant our original mission is today,” WETA’s Rockefeller said. “In the midst of this pandemic, public television is delivering free education content right into homes, connecting people with arts and performances, giving context to our history, and providing clear news and analysis.”

She added: “When other outlets are scrambling to create programming about the complex and troubled racial history in our country, we already have a rich library of programs and educational resources already at hand because examining our history and our culture has been a part of our mission all along.”

For Kerger, the last months have provided a “clarion call around service,” which, after all is built into PBS’s name. “This is a moment when the country was looking for us and here we are,” she said.

The challenge for PBS going forward will be to sustain that focus. It means convincing donors that service and an hour of nightly news and math programs for homebound students are equally worthy causes as sending a pledge to support a favorite costume drama. Corporations will need to be convinced to underwrite difficult examinations of the country’s racial tensions, not just “Antiques Roadshow.”

Leaps of faith that the money and audience will ultimately be there will need to be taken. But for PBS to thrive another 50 years, reinvention seems a necessity.
Other stories:

**Why We Turned to PBS: 50 Reasons Over 50 Years**
Oct. 13, 2020


**‘Elmo Knows Where You Live’: A History of the PBS Pledge Drive**
Oct. 13, 2020


**PBS Is Still TV’s Best Path to Better Citizenship**
Oct. 13, 2020