

2025 *annual report*



Network



A joint service of Bradley University
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WCBU Year in Review

from Executive Director R.C. McBride



There's no sugar coating it: 2025 was a difficult year for public media, probably the most difficult in its history.

- In March, I attended a rather theatrical congressional hearing where the CEOs of NPR, PBS and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) were grilled for alleged biases.
- In May, President Donald Trump issued an executive order directing the CPB—an independent, Congressionally chartered agency—to immediately cease funding NPR and PBS and to forbid stations receiving CPB grants from using those funds for NPR or PBS programming. Additionally, the order forbade any federal agency from directing funds to NPR and PBS.
- In June, NPR—later joined by PBS—filed suit against the Trump Administration, contesting that the Executive Order was unconstitutional. (In March 2026, a District Court judge found that executive order violated the First Amendment and is therefore “unlawful and unenforceable.”)
- In July, Congress voted to rescind \$1.1 billion in funding it had already approved for CPB for fiscal year 2027. For WCBU, this meant a loss of \$125,000 in annual grant revenue, or about 15 percent of our budget. But for many stations, especially in rural areas, the percentage of their budget lost is much higher, presenting an existential threat for many.
- In September, NPR took CPB to court. The lawsuit cited CPB's sudden reversal of awarding a \$40million grant to NPR for satellite service to stations as CPB complying in advance with an expected executive order. CPB settled out of court and awarded NPR the grant.
- Shortly after rescission, CPB announced it would be forced to shut down at the end of January 2026, ending decades of service as the funding mechanism for public media in the United States.

While all these events were without precedent, I'm proud to say we were prepared. As a member of NPR's board of directors, I had a front row seat for much of what transpired. I'm incredibly proud NPR and WCBU fought aggressively to protect the First

Amendment, and that fight will continue. And the outpouring of support from our community in the form of donations and encouragement has been incredible. More on that in our *Development Report*.

R.C. McBride

Community response to defunding, coupled with our decision to hold off on filling three vacant full-time journalist positions until there's more certainty regarding the financial stability of the entire public media system, have put WCBU in as good a financial position as possible given the circumstances headed into 2026. WCBU's news team had grown significantly since 2018, and we've had to pause the growth for the time being. We're optimistic our budget will allow us to fill at least one of those vacancies in 2026, and in the early part of 2026, we were able to tackle a long overdue replacement of our studio/transmitter link. That boosted our signal reliability, greatly increased the station's audio fidelity, and allowed WCBU for the first time to place programming information on compatible automobile dashboards.

We, along with our key partners Bradley University, Illinois State University, and NPR, have our eyes squarely on ensuring this important civic institution remains vibrant serving Greater Peoria for another 56 years and beyond. Less than one percent of WCBU's audience makes a financial contribution, so if you're never given, please consider changing that. And if you are a supporter, tell your friends they can make a difference.

R.C. McBride
Executive Director
NPR Board Member



It's official: Congress defunded public media



Melissa Libert

Public media funding has overwhelmingly earned bipartisan support since 1967. That ended July 17, 2025, when Congress voted to rescind \$1.1B in advanced appropriations. As a result, WCBU faced an immediate annual budget loss of approximately \$125,000—very real dollars we invested in programming and news.

Throughout the first half of 2025 we asked our supporters to advocate for public media funding by contacting their elected representatives and

thousands of emails, phone calls, and meetings followed. THANK YOU for using your voice to support NPR and WCBU. In the weeks that followed defunding, we launched an emergency fundraising campaign to fill the gap from the loss of CPB which yielded more than half of our expected community service grant.

Additional revenue highlights:

- On the heels of a robust emergency campaign response, the Fall Fund Drive hit its \$50,000 goal! Thank you to everyone, especially the first-time donors, who stepped up for WCBU and NPR over the summer and fall.
- We received fee relief from NPR, resulting in a modest discount in our annual fees for programs like *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered*. We also received \$9,000 from the CPB as it expended leftover funds before closing September 30.
- Thanks to a large influx of individual donations to NPR, WCBU received a share of that revenue equaling approximately \$13,000.

The vote to defund devastated millions of people who rely on public media every day. NPR and WCBU moved into uncharted territory. But our commitment to serving our community did not and will not waver. Defunding challenged the station in many ways, and we continue to push forward into 2026 and WCBU's 56 year of operation knowing that with challenges come opportunity and robust community support has positioned us much more favorably than many of our peer stations. We must continue to grow our supporters and build a sustainable financial future for WCBU and the next generation of public media fans.

Onward!

Melissa Libert
Assistant General Manager and Development Director

See [WCBU.org](https://www.wcbu.org) for our 2025 Donor Roll and Underwriters



Community Advisory Board Members

Bill Shock (Chair)
Ray Baker (Vice Chair)
Becky Doubleday (Past Chair)
Jennifer Robin (Nominating Chair)
Amy Ashley
Betsy Beltran
Diane Hahn
David Headley
Lindsey Kerr

Terry Galvin Matthews
Toni Moretto
Eileen Setti
Carolyn Sloan
Yolanda Wallace
H. Wayne Wilson
WCBU staff (ex-officio): Jennifer Armstrong, Anna Chumbley, Melissa Libert, and R.C. McBride
To learn more about the board and read their 2025 year in review, visit [WCBU.org](https://www.wcbu.org).



From the WCBU Newsroom

Top stories of 2025

1. 'We felt we had to do something': Morton school board bans woman from meetings for 2 months
2. Pekin prohibits the public from going on Lutticken property
3. Peoria hospitals overwhelmed by respiratory illness amid lagging vaccination rates, strong influenza strain
4. 'Stupid' entrance into Pekin shopping center shut down
5. 'We're done': Pekin continues to seek foreclosure on Court Street eyesore
6. Illinois Sen. Dick Durbin calls Trump administration reductions of federal agencies 'unfair'
7. Pekin City Council approves banning gas-powered bicycles on city streets, sidewalks
8. Court filing shows Peoria Methodist Hospital admits to 2018 medical error
9. Tazewell County Board turns down opportunity to explore less expensive option for justice center annex
10. Former Morton nursing home is torn down: 'I hear the neighbors are very happy that it's gone'



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