

**Paula A. Kerger
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Public Broadcasting Service
Remarks
NETA Conference
Las Vegas
Thursday, Jan. 14, 2010
2:45 p.m.**

Thank you, and good afternoon.

It's good to be with you today.

As hard as it is for me to believe, this is the fifth NETA Conference I've attended since taking the job at PBS in January 2006.

In fact, NETA 2006 was held just five days after my PBS appointment was announced.

I was thinking about this in preparation for today's presentation, and it occurred to me how much the world has changed since then.

In January 2006, Barack Obama was beginning his second year in the United States Senate, while Nancy Pelosi was still minority leader in the House.

Four years ago, Katie Couric and Diane Sawyer were still hosting morning shows.

Miley Cyrus was still in middle school.

And Pluto was still considered a planet.

In January 2006, you could still order from a paper JC Penney catalog.

Today, the catalog is offered as an iPhone app.

If you wanted to download a TV show from iTunes in January 2006, you pretty much had three choices: "Desperate Housewives," "Lost," and "The Office."

It would be another 3 months before the first Tweet was sent.

Another 6 months before the first movie was released on Blu-ray.

And another 9 months before Facebook opened to the public.

How times have changed.

As in 2006, no one knows what the world will look like 4 years – or even 4 months – from now.

At the rate things are going, some of us might soon be colonists living below the moon's surface, watching TV each night while wearing our 3-D glasses.

I'm not making that up – scientists really are talking about colonizing the moon.

But even though we don't know what the future holds, we do know we had better be prepared for it.

As Americans.

And as public media professionals.

So that's what I'd like to discuss with you today.

- I want to share some thoughts on the challenges facing America today, particularly in education, an issue that concerns us all.
- I also want to discuss how PBS is helping our nation meet these challenges, especially when it comes to kids, journalism, and the performing arts.
- I'll conclude my presentation with a challenge for each of you
- And then if anyone has questions, I'll be happy to answer them.

Allow me to begin by noting this is PBS's 40th anniversary year.

The Public Broadcasting Act was passed in 1967, but PBS itself didn't take to the airwaves until 1970.

Together, we should all take great pride in our system's achievements during the past 4 decades.

Pride in all the kids who've come to "Sesame Street" to learn to read with Big Bird and count with The Count.

Pride in all the Americans who've walked into voting booths as better-informed citizens, thanks to the journalism of Jim Lehrer, Bill Moyers, and Gwen Ifill.

And pride in our many technological breakthroughs:

- *We were* was the first broadcaster to air live proceedings from the floor of the House of Representatives.

- We pioneered the use of satellites in broadcasting, and closed-captioning for the hearing impaired.
- And more recently, *we* became the first national channel to broadcast almost exclusively in HD.

Technology has changed a lot during the past 4 decades.

It's changed a lot in the past 4 years.

What hasn't changed is public television's mission:

- To serve the people – not sell to them.
- To inform while we inspire.
- To educate while we entertain.

This is why we should be deeply troubled by the state of education in America today.

Of the many challenges facing our nation, this may be the gravest.

Consider this: Every school day in America, an average of 7,200 students drop out of high school.

7,200 students *a day*.

That's 1.3 million dropouts a year – enough people to form America's 8th largest city – ahead of Dallas and San Diego.

The dropout rate is particularly alarming among minorities.

Almost half of all African-American and Hispanic students don't complete school on time.

Half.

Our literacy rates are no better.

32 million people are functionally illiterate.

This means their skills are so poor, they can't:

- Complete a job application.
- Understand a bus schedule.

- Or comprehend the possible side effects listed on a medicine bottle.

32 *million* people.

1 in 10 Americans.

And so – understandably – the emphasis in public education these days is on raising math and reading scores.

These are essential skills for our kids' future.

But too often, the focus on test scores means art and music are relegated to the sidelines.

Some 20% of school districts in the United States have cut art and music classes in the era of No Child Left Behind.

Science, history and cultural disciplines are also suffering.

As David McCullough recently told a Senate committee, public schools aren't just putting history classes on the back burner – they're taking them off the stove altogether.

This is heartbreaking.

If we continue on this path, I fear America will become a country of “less”:

- Less competitive.
- Less productive.
- Less successful.

This is why I believe – now, more so than ever – that public media has never been more needed.

After all, PBS was founded to help Americans achieve their full potential.

Our goal today is the same as it was 4 decades ago:

To empower citizens of every age and from every walk of life – and to help them to be more:

- *More* informed.
- *More* creative.

- *More* curious.

We're doing this in three critical areas.

First, we're strengthening our work with kids.

The average child sees 5,000 hours of television before reaching kindergarten.

That's more time than is needed to complete a bachelor's degree.

But as PBS has proven time and again, TV can be a valuable instrument for teaching and learning.

Look at "Sesame Street."

At PBS, we want to work with NETA and other partners to build upon that show's success with a new generation of programs that help kids exercise their minds.

I'm very proud of recent research by the Education Development Center and SRI – two non-profit research organizations – that showed how PBS helps close the literacy gap.

Specifically, the research showed how preschoolers who use PBS Kids video and games are better prepared for kindergarten than kids who don't.

I'm also proud of the success we're having reaching kids online.

Last month, we launched our new preschool video player.

Since then, kids watched 88 million videos on pbskids.org last month.

If this growth continues, we will be the nation's Number One trafficked kids video site.

And I remain incredibly enthusiastic about the work we're doing in America's classrooms.

Last week, we announced the launch of the PBS Teachers Innovation Challenge, a new program to recognize America's most innovators teachers.

We want to identify teachers who exemplify PBS's spirit of innovation, holding them up as inspirational role models for everyone who works with kids.

The Innovation Challenge is supported by PBS's partnership with the National Science Teachers Association, which aims to increase public awareness of the importance of science education.

My colleagues and I were proud that President Obama recognized the Innovation Challenge last week during a White House event to recognize excellence in math and science teaching and mentoring.

And after a great deal of collective work, I am particularly pleased that the new PBS Digital Learning Library is now available systemwide.

The DLL is a repository of educational digital content – including video, games, and interactive media.

This is public media content – created by our stations, producers, and other partners.

It will all be available as part of new or existing educational services, including WGBH’s Teacher’s Domain and Maryland Public Television’s ThinkPort.

The PBS Education team is eager to work with NETA members to demonstrate how your stations can use the DLL to strengthen your educational offerings and better serve your communities.

Think of the Digital Learning Library as “COVE for the classroom.”

It’s another example of how we’re using new media to serve our core audiences.

New platforms are also an important part of PBS’s work to strengthen journalism, our second area of focus.

Here, again, we have a strong foundation upon which to build.

Yesterday, I met with the nation’s TV critics in Los Angeles, where my colleagues and I announced “Need to Know,” a new cross-platform public affairs project.

“Need to Know” will feature reporting from five regular beats:

- The economy,
- Energy and the environment
- Security
- Health, and
- Culture.

Reporters will generate and develop their own stories, and blog about them throughout the week.

Then, on Friday night, the reporting will continue on-air, when PBS broadcasts the one-hour “Need to Know” series.

Think of “Need to Know” not as another TV show with a Web site, but as an online news service accompanied by a TV series.

“Need to Know” is just one component of the News and Public Affairs Initiative, our plan to strengthen PBS’s journalism and ensure its relevancy for today’s audiences.

Another critical component is the new “PBS NewsHour” that launched last month, as well as the revamped “Nightly Business Report” that debuted this month.

And later this year, we’ll combine all of PBS’s news and public affairs content – as well as content from our other public media partners – in a new integrated news section on PBS.org.

Our member stations are also doing exceptional work at the local level.

In San Francisco, KQED has joined forces with UC Berkeley’s graduate school of journalism to create a nonprofit news organization that will fill gaps in local coverage.

In Chicago, WTTW is helping to produce regional coverage of the Windy City for the New York Times.

And in St. Louis, KETC is strengthening local coverage by recruiting and training 150 “citizen journalists.”

The station has also formed an innovative partnership with a new, nonprofit, online newspaper that’s now housed in the KETC newsroom.

Each initiative is in the early stages.

But PBS stations have always served as media laboratories, so we’re watching these and other projects closely to see whether we may be able to adopt them nationally.

The work PBS is doing in journalism – along with the work we’re doing in education – are bound together by our effort to help Americans broaden their horizons.

We see this principle reflected in our third area of focus, which is to strengthen our work in the arts.

Yesterday, I announced plans to launch the PBS Arts Showcase in April.

Here again, our goal is to use digital media to complement the good work we’re doing on-air.

The Arts Showcase will begin online, with full funding from the NEA and a new partnership with the Anne Ray Charitable Trust.

The Showcase will offer several innovative features, including a 24-hour broadband video channel.

Users will be able to drop in whenever they'd like to experience art of all kinds, including ballet, opera, theater, and more.

The Arts Showcase will also be interactive, allowing users to engage with established and emerging artists.

Users will also be able to come to the Showcase to create their own art – whether it's a documentary, a virtual theater production, or a multimedia project.

In addition, we want to use the Arts Showcase to make the arts a more engaging experience.

The Showcase will allow users to engage with other art enthusiasts, building virtual communities across the nation.

Eventually, we want to take the Arts Showcase to the airwaves, using it to significantly expand the presence of the arts in our prime time lineup.

This is critically important.

Television remains the world's most powerful form of mass media, even in this age of the Internet.

Last year, Americans spent an average of 4 hours and 49 minutes a day watching TV – an all-time high.

So PBS remains very much committed to television.

But as new choices become available and Americans change their media habits, we must change the way we develop and distribute content.

These are the principles at the heart of PBS's new strategic plan.

The plan has three main goals:

- We want to transform our content, ensuring PBS and its member stations not only remain relevant but are seen by the communities we serve as distinctive and essential.

- We want to strengthen the financial health of our member stations, helping each station better serve its community.

- And we want to experiment and innovate, once again being willing to risk even failure in exploring new ways to make and share our exceptional content.

I'm confident the work we're doing in education, journalism, and the arts will help us achieve each of these goals.

But we can't do it alone.

That's where you come in.

I promised I would end this presentation with a challenge for each of you.

Here it is.

Help us.

As members of NETA, each of you helps ensure public media's ability:

- To serve the people, not sell to them.
- To inform while we inspire.
- To educate while we entertain.

Just as PBS strives to help America be more, NETA helps us be more.

You are invaluable partners to us.

So please, keep up the good work.

And please continue to work with us, helping us achieve our mission – your mission – and prepare for the future, no matter what it may hold.

Thank you.

Now if anyone has questions, I'll be happy to answer them.