

GUEST COLUMN SUBMISSION

Special to The Gazette

The “Other” Iowa Public Radio

-- by *Dennis Green*

The Board of Regents has recently accepted a consultant’s recommendation to consolidate its three public radio operations (KUNI, WOI and WSUI/KSUI) into a state-wide service called “Iowa Public Radio.” There’s something you should know about this plan.

“Iowa Public Radio” is only a fraction of *Iowa’s public radio*.

The report refers numerous times to “Iowa’s three public radio stations.” But public radio in our state is much more than the three University-run organizations.

In reality, Iowa is home to a number of community-supported stations which provide a rich variety of programs to serve the needs of their individual communities.

KWIT-FM, licensed to Western Iowa Tech Community College in Sioux City, airs the familiar National Public Radio (NPR) programming, but also locally-produced music shows and the state’s only Spanish-Language programs. In Council Bluffs, KIWR’s youth-oriented alternative rock format makes a significant impact in the competitive Omaha market. Waterloo’s KBBG is operated by a community board, and provides programming geared to the needs of its home town, particularly the minority population.

And locally, Iowa’s only Jazz radio station, Kirkwood’s KCKK-FM enriches young and old with programs and outreach events celebrating America’s only indigenous musical art form.

Along with several other educational and community licensees, we represent the “Other” Iowa Public Radio.

For many listeners, public radio equals NPR. Thoughtful news programs like “Morning Edition” and “All Things Considered,” as well as entertaining shows like “Car Talk” entertain and inform tens of thousands of listeners here in Iowa and millions nationwide.

Iowa Public Radio can enhance and extend public radio service in our state. But the mission of public radio in Iowa needs to be larger than news and classical music. NPR is an outstanding service, among the best in broadcasting, but it's not the *only* service public radio should be providing.

Like the community colleges that hold many of our licenses, it's the stations *outside* of the proposed Iowa Public Radio system that are fashioning entrepreneurial, local solutions to meet our educational missions. We're playing interesting music you can't hear anywhere else, creating programs to serve minority populations, providing opportunities to students, education outreach to young people and are important community resources for arts, culture and economic development.

To properly serve its listeners and communities, Iowa Public Radio will need to partner with, not seek to supplant, other public broadcasters. The new network, with the combined resources of the Universities behind it, will be an excellent vehicle to extend service to communities in western and southern Iowa that don't currently have public radio choices. And, in those areas where the new structure will create duplication, a variety of stations and formats already exist who could contribute programming currently unavailable in those locales.

Public Radio is strong in Iowa, and the attention being paid to how to make it better is good for everyone. This report should be used as a jumping-off point for new ideas in structure and programs, rather than a strict blueprint. The leaders of Iowa Public Radio should be drawn from--and listen to--the outstanding staffs already at their stations, who serve our communities well.

For our part, we in the "other" Iowa Public Radio look forward to partnering with this new service in ways that will bring diverse choices to more areas in our state, and extend the reach of *all* Iowa Public Radio.

We also hope our listeners will continue to support their favorite public stations, especially those that provide unique local service to the communities in which they live.

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