



SECOND FCC FUTURE OF MEDIA WORKSHOP: **PUBLIC AND OTHER NONCOMMERCIAL MEDIA IN THE DIGITAL ERA**

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April 30, 2010

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this FCC Future of Media Workshop

I have been involved in public radio since the signing of the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967. Most of what I will say today relates to public radio and its transformation into public media.

To begin, let me state my concern about the increasingly successful business model for some commercial media that rewards polarization regardless of facts balanced only by failing financial models of fact based reportorial journalism. We've a great deal about failing newspapers. Now we are beginning to see the impact from the profitable information models -- the polarized media. Last week, *The New York Times* reported on the role that media plays in "fomenting the public's anger", suggesting that extreme liberal and conservative cable and radio broadcasters, backed-up by a tsunami of web support, are creating unprecedented anger in America. It notes that MSNBC host Donny Deutsch, in criticizing his own network, called for "not a red voice or a blue voice but a passionate purple voice in the middle." The anger that the *Times* described is driving fear in government at all levels. Fear and anger bind government in gridlock resulting in a loss of Congressional decorum and an increasing impossibility of forging bi-partisan agendas in the face of that public anger and threat- driven single issue mandates.

This polarized content concept makes money! A recent profile of Fox News suggested that it returns a billion dollars in profit to News Corp. And an MSNBC analysis suggests it is their most profitable network business plan to date.

That won't change. We can't change it. Our regulatory system tolerates it.

America isn't the only country where this is happening. It began much earlier in England, for example, with the rise of tabloid newspapers. The difference is that England and most European nations have strong traditions of a centrist public media system. In England, the domestic BBC balances the rhetoric of the tabloids by re-centering the population on fact based, reportorial journalism. The tabloids titillate, the BBC informs.

We don't have that public media strength in America -- yet. And until we do

Congress, as well as State and local governments, will continue to be distorted by fear and partisan polarization until we create a better informed, fact driven information system and enable it to balance profit-driven alternatives. President Johnson encouraged and signed the legislation in 1967, but a combination of factors created a situation in which public media did not live up to its promise. What were they?:

- FCC regulation, which set almost no standards for the application and use of NCE frequencies other than “non-profit”;
- Colleges and universities which applied for and currently hold about 60% of the NCE FM frequencies and then often buried these community service entities deep within their university bureaucracy;
- A lack of leadership over forty years by CPB to stimulate and lead public broadcasting by failing to set tough standards demanding community service performance in return for their funds;
- and Congress' misreading of public media as a "threat" rather than seeing its potential and stimulating it with appropriate funding to "moderate" and "center" the public debate.

They are all at fault.

While we have had some success -- particularly the role of CPB and key stations in creating NPR -- Public media, especially at the local level, has vastly underperformed in executing on this critical role.

Perhaps a last failure is the greatest – failure of leadership. Failure of leadership at the local level. Failure of leadership at national regulatory and funding entities. Failure of leadership within our governing boards, within Congress and within the Administrations since 1967.

Why has it taken us forty years to focus on these mistakes and the impact of them? Clearly we are looking at the enemy and he is us.

Here are some proposals to move forward while we still have the time:

- Focus on local communities and on the top 25 markets where we have the best chance to make the biggest difference, the fastest.
- Create models to validate the potential of public media. Models that draw on existing infrastructure but flesh out the full potential of “public media” technology and engagement. Models that require an alignment of the licensee structure with community governance, strong leadership and significant philanthropic and audience based funding.
- Design the models to maximize content production on all media platforms while minimizing duplicative overhead.
- Illustrate best practices in content development efficiency, governance, and leadership.
- Use those models to help community leaders, institutional leadership, governmental funders and philanthropic funders to see the impact and potential of properly designed and governed public media.

To make those models work we need some additional foresight and regulatory change:

FCC: Initiate a new license renewal process for "CPB funded" public media companies:

- Require a demonstration of significant public service and locally originated content, moderated by market size.
- With CPB, require an accounting illustrating that all media related revenue be invested in an audited public media entity. Eliminate the practice of some colleges and parent companies of charging "overhead" fees of such significance as to cream off essential public media funding for other purposes.
- Consider stopping the NCE waiver for main studios beyond some reasonable distance from a headquarters station (for example, within a state or within a certain mileage) to encourage regional service and more local origination and discourage "national stations". The national station concept can be accomplished by satellite radio. Terrestrial radio should not be comprised of legions of transmitters fed by satellite without local studios.
- Support the development of public interest broadband capacity connecting public media centers and their audiences at affordable cost to the producers. New broadband enabled modes of distribution will require subsidization of public media for their use of that broadband capacity.

CPB: Raise the standards for CPB funding eligibility by public radio licensees, requiring higher levels of public service performance in larger communities. Update the standards to reflect "public media" as an extension of public broadcasting:

- Require a community board or advisory board for any CPB funded public radio station to connect it with community leadership. (The current standard, which requires an advisory board for a community licensee but not for a public university, is an inverse legislative error).
- Require a demonstration of significant locally-originated public service content, moderated by market size.
- Similar to the proposed FCC requirements for license renewal, require an accounting, assuring that media-related, philanthropic revenue be invested as intended in an audited public media entity and not in a university parent or other media parent.
- The CPB NCE-FM standards that call for broadcasting eighteen hours a day, requiring minimum wage employees, two full time employees and two full time equivalents as a condition of funding are standards that are actually lower than those that were set in 1970, well before the emergence of the potential and the mandate for public media. These need to be re-evaluated as standards of performance appropriate to communities of various sizes.
- Consider the concept of a rigorous "accreditation process", similar to the college and university validation process, to measure impact and continued eligibility for CPB funding.
- Consider and encourage models that reduce overhead and duplication and provide incentives for operational consolidation. APM's "core service" model has already demonstrated the economies and impact of that model in California, Minnesota and Florida.

Foundations: Coordinate a project to create, as models, a group of fully envisioned, journalistically competitive, public media companies in various regions throughout the US, funded over a multiyear

period, to illustrate the full potential of public media on all platforms:

- Demonstrate to local funding sources what the community value of a BBC-quality local public media service can be.
- Demonstrate to State legislatures and to Congress why it is in their interest and in the American public's interest to fund a more robust, fact-based, centrist media service to balance the polarized commercial models.

Congress: Form a caucus to try to understand and promote the relationship between a strong public media and a more centrist, less polarized society -- and create a plan to properly support it.

- Determine what would be required to assist public media to rise to its full potential and determine how that could best be funded and what the appropriate federal role should be.
- Increase the emphasis on strong, experienced leadership for public media in advising and consenting to appointments to the CPB Board.

In my experience, there has never been a moment of greater opportunity – and challenge – to our nation's media. We can either continue down the path of profit incited polarization balanced only by fragile and failing financial models of fact based reportorial journalism and accept the paralysis it creates in the democratic process; or we can create the centering **public media** institutions, dedicated to enabling an informed citizenry informed by facts that the President and Congress intended in 1967.

There has never been a more compelling time for action than there is now.

Thank you.

IN SERVICE OF DEMOCRACY

ACHIEVING PUBLIC MEDIA'S POTENTIAL

By Bill Kling



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THE DEVOLUTION OF COMMERCIAL MEDIA

On July 23rd, 44 people, including three mayors, two state assemblymen and five rabbis, were arrested and charged with corruption in New Jersey. In an effort to explain why such corruption persists in the state, where almost 150 public officials have been arrested in the past decade, Michael Barbaro of The New York Times stated, "... the state's news organizations, once vigorous watchdogs, have been decimated by a deep industry downturn."¹ The fourth estate, once the indispensable guardian of the guardians, no longer has the resources to ensure that our citizens are well informed and capable of making the decisions that will guarantee a successful society.

America is the success that it is because of knowledge, education, information, innovation and opportunity. A big piece of that success is based on America's "informed citizenry" – the circumstance that knowledge has been infused in the populace through formal and informal education, through media, mentors, and a wide variety of institutions. The concept has been at the heart of keeping the electorate sufficiently informed to elect a representative government that embraces freedom, that democratically governs its society, and that serves the need for knowledge and insight of its citizens as the world becomes more complex.

Now, we are witnessing the traditional media either morph into a business model that maximizes profit by appealing to liberal or conservative extremes (Rush Limbaugh, Glen Beck, Keith Olbermann, Ed Schultz) or sit on the verge of bankruptcy (*Chicago Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times*, The Associated Press). The newspapers, television news stations and information-oriented web services that remain in the business of providing knowledge, information and insight are failing to obtain a reasonable return for their investment without resorting to a "polarization" of their content. The impact on America is palpable. Our own Secretary of State, speaking in India recently, had to point out that American media do not depict the values or mores of most Americans: we do wear clothes and have thoughtful citizens in our country.

In the future, quality information, news, insight and educative content may only be able to succeed in a nonprofit environment.

Where Fox, Disney, Time Warner, NBC Universal and others have gone is where the money is – to maximize the return to their shareholders or owners. That is unlikely to change. CBS once justified its decision to produce the mindless *Beverly Hillbillies* as their way of subsidizing the critical news and information service they provided to society. Unfortunately, the successors to the Frank Stantons and the William Paleys in the industry found that more *Beverly Hillbillies* and less news raised the profit line even further – a lesson learned that will not be forgotten.

In the future, quality information, news, insight and educative content may only be able to succeed in a nonprofit environment, where revenues are reinvested in the development of content, where subsidies are justified, and where mission, vision and values drive the product and create employee enthusiasm.

If the framers of the Constitution and its key amendments were alive today, they might well advocate not only for "freedom of speech and the press", but also (and equally importantly) for some governmental or public assurances to maintain the critical information flow that such freedom is meant to guarantee.

Over the years, small initiatives and even accidents of history provided America with a public media platform. Broadcast frequencies were set aside for education by the FCC in the 1940s largely due to the efforts of one woman interested in education and several men who wanted to placate her. In the 1960s, President Lyndon Johnson was convinced of the need for a public subsidy for broadcasting to fill the void evidenced by declining commercial interest in arts, culture and credible information. With strong advocates who saw the potential of those decisions, and with significant investment from the private philanthropic world (especially the Ford and Carnegie Foundations), what we know today as public broadcasting was borne.

¹ Barbero, M. (2009, July '27). In New Jersey, Ideal Conditions for Corruption. *The New York Times*

A NEW MANDATE FOR PUBLIC MEDIA

We are unlikely to return to a time when media dedicated to serious journalism will provide acceptable returns to investors. That means that the intended benefits of a constitutionally-guaranteed free press and of the regulatory requirement that the public airwaves serve the “public interest, convenience and necessity” are in jeopardy.

Fortunately, the American public media system, with some 40 years of development under its belt, is finally in position to play its destined role. Unfortunately, the system has been allowed to underperform for decades without consequence. As a result, it is largely ineffective when measured against its mission or against its international peers. It has been unrecognized and underfunded by its government. It requires additional strength for the role it must now play if America is to continue to benefit from the quality information, knowledge and journalistic enterprise that has always existed in a functioning democracy. The balance once embraced by enlightened media barons, where a “benevolent media” played the role both of revenue generator with the *Beverly Hillbillies* and of

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public servant with CBS news (or any number of similar examples), now requires a strong nonprofit media as a counterweight to the singular profit motivation of most commercial media companies.

Our time has come in public media – particularly, we think, in public radio news and its extension into public media platforms. We have a system that excels at creativity. It leads in most areas of technology. There are award winning services and programs. We have (and have had) some great leaders. But those small achievements are not enough. We don't have consistency. We don't have a sufficient number of models where bold leaders recognize the future and grasp the opportunities it presents.

BUILDING A NEW PUBLIC RADIO SYSTEM

The current public radio system has several weaknesses that are preventing the innovation and growth needed to take on this challenge. Without redress, these weaknesses ensure that public radio cannot accept the mantle being handed to it and that many think it should embrace.

The following is an analysis of the weaknesses of public radio stations in the top 25 markets in the United States. For further analysis, see Attachment C.

Structure

The majority of public radio stations and their related public media operations are owned by other institutions including colleges, school boards, libraries or municipalities. That structure makes the mission of the public radio activity subservient to the mission of the parent institution.

Sometimes, the public radio operation reports to the head of the university speech department or the physics department. While many credit those institutions for creating the current infrastructure, it is clear that the mandate for a successful alternative to commercial media exceeds the capabilities of most of the parent institutions.

Seventeen of the top twenty-five markets have their major public radio station licensed to a multi-purpose parent organization:

- **Five are licensed to a public television station.** While public television may be a related activity, the operation of radio inside a public television organization almost guarantees that the public radio operation cannot achieve its full potential. The economies of television coupled with the diversion of finding a viable mission for their television operation causes senior management to ignore radio. There are a few examples of high levels of performance for radio inside the structure of a public

television station, but it could be demonstrated that the level of radio achievement could be considerably more dramatic if it were not trapped inside a television operation.

- **Twelve are licensed to colleges, universities, and school boards.** Generally, these radio stations operating within another “unrelated” structure fare even worse. In most of those cases, the station agenda is subservient to that of the parent institution – even though the radio operation has greater or equal mission potential.

Governance

Like almost all successful nonprofit institutions, the role of the governing board in a public media organization is critical. A strong board can raise the institutional reputation, and provide insight, oversight, access, discipline, revenue and enthusiasm. There is no factor that makes a greater difference in the health of a nonprofit public media organization than the governing board.

Of the major public radio organizations in the top twenty five markets, there are only eight that have what could be described as a dedicated, effective board with governance authority, which includes the hiring and firing of the CEO/leader of the public radio operation.

Leadership

Perhaps because of the structural issues, perhaps because of the lack of funding and clarity of a future, perhaps because of its salary scale in a twenty-year-long “hot” commercial media environment, possibly because of its inept recruiting, or perhaps because of the hidden nature of public media companies, **public media has not attracted competitive leadership.**

- Managers with ability, vision, entrepreneurial genes, community skills, and boundless energy have not generally been hired to head our public media companies. It is then no surprise that the companies underperform. Even the top performers, who are doing many exciting things and are revered by their audiences, look anemic in comparison to the kind of leadership their institutions merit.
- A university president with a public radio station has rarely – if ever – concluded that he/she may need to hire a bigger personality with greater visibility and pay a higher price than the president commands personally – like the football coach – if the institution wants to see the public media operation reach its full potential.
- Of the top public radio stations in the largest twenty five markets, there are fewer than a handful of professional leaders (in the view of some of our most successful leaders and the search firms that look for them) that have the ability to deliver the success this environment requires.
- There is no Steve Jobs, Bill Gates or Eric Schmidt in public media. No William Paley or Walter Annenberg. No Walter Cronkite or Ben Bradley. Possibly because of the compensation difference, but more likely because of a lack of understanding by potentially great media leaders of what could be accomplished in public media.

Funding

Public radio and its associated public media activities have an easily embraceable mission, one that becomes more critical by the day. It has dramatic influence if you consider those in its audience who consume its product and voluntarily fund its mission.

Yet, Lyndon Johnson’s 1967 concept for a public subsidy has resulted in a national investment of only \$1.40 per year per American or about \$420 million. Comparable systems in Europe (serving considerably smaller populations) invest as much as \$85 per person in public media. The BBC annually spends \$1.625 billion on domestic radio alone which, when projected for the population of the USA, would argue for an investment of \$8.1 billion for public radio, compared to the current CPB expenditure of about \$140 million. Whether that comparison translates directly to the United States system or not is

a bigger topic, but the extremes are so great that they easily illustrate the issue.

America has many priorities and education has been one of them. But the complement to school-based education – the dissemination of “educative” content using public media – has remained stagnant. In real dollars, public radio’s federal funding remains at its 1980 level and that level itself had no clear analytical justification other than political realities.

Of the major public radio stations in the top 25 markets, annual operating expense budgets range from \$76 million at the top to \$2 million at the bottom. That is an unacceptable differential.

Using the influence of the public media system and engaging those who admire and support it could, in the American tradition, dramatically change the federal appropriation – and it should. But the face of those making the request has to be broader, and more diverse, and must transcend the station managers who traditionally make their annual trek to Capitol Hill. An understanding by Congress, informed by influential listeners district by district and key committee by committee, could change the picture. It is time for a new approach to making the case and, more importantly, to presenting the case.

These weaknesses are not mutually exclusive. Solving one problem often contributes greatly to solving others. The following are two brief case studies in the two largest markets in the country.

In 1995, WNYC Radio in New York City changed from mayoral-appointed leadership to an independent nonprofit, with a superb governing board and excellent leaders.

In the following 14 years, the WNYC audience grew by 32% to over 1.1 million, the organization added WQXR-FM to the two stations under its control and increased its budget by 277% to \$32 million. WNYC’s individual membership gifts, an excellent measure of service provided, grew to 111,000 members contributing over \$15 million. The station has been recognized for service to the community through innumerable awards including the industry’s most prestigious, the Edward R Murrow Award presented annually by the CPB. In addition, WNYC’s capital campaigns for a new building and additional stations have raised close to \$50 million.

In 2000, Southern California Public Radio changed from a community college licensee with a faculty manager to an independent nonprofit with what is described as one of the strongest boards – for-profit or nonprofit – in the greater Los Angeles area and one of our system’s best professionals as its leader.

In the following 9 years, the SCPR audience grew by 156%, the organization added two additional stations to extend its regional reach, it increased its budget by 1,445% to \$14 million, its individual membership gifts have risen by 408% (to 37,830 members contributing \$6.5 million), and it has been recognized for service to the community through 222 content awards. It has raised an additional \$25 million in capital gifts for new stations and production facilities.

CONCLUSION

Public media may be the best alternative to a failing commercial media environment. In the 1960s, the Ford Foundation brought the concept of educational media to a level where the public and the government could see its potential. The system we have today reflects that early investment. In 2010, the Ford Foundation and others like it could make an even greater impact by helping prepare, position and restructure the existing patchwork system of local, regional, and national public media companies to reach their potential to take on the coming mandate of filling the information void; and to succeed as an industry. That may take more carrots than sticks to accomplish, but the negative inertia to change in the current structure must be confronted. (See Attachment A: Solutions) A structure embracing success can be created.

Attachment A: Hypothetical Solutions to Strengthening Public Radio | Media

Structure

Freeing public radio stations to become full potential public media companies in the top 25 markets will require a combination of incentives:

- **Acquisition:** Stations could be purchased by newly organized community boards. However, at a cost ranging from \$3.00 to \$5.00 per pop (population in coverage area), the available capital in the system is unlikely to allow acquisition of many and the debt load would significantly constrain any acquired station from moving ahead on its mission/plan. *(Likelihood of Success: Low)*
- **Peer pressure:** Recognized national leadership demonstrates to “parent” institutions how they can maintain the value to their reputation and perhaps receive some on-going revenue (rent) while facilitating a greater value to the community by enabling their station to move ahead. *(Likelihood of Success: Medium)*
- **“Accreditation”:** A professional review panel similar to those which accredit colleges and which would have the force of CPB funding behind them to audit everything from relative audience size and growth on each platform, to funds raised, digital initiatives, direct governance involvement, community engagement, regional/local news content production, relative compensation, etc. *(Likelihood of Success: Higher)*
- **Financial incentive:** Combine peer pressure or accreditation with foundation-based incentive funds to the institution, perhaps to encourage them to re-structure their academic program to focus on new media, internships, etc. *(Likelihood of Success: Higher)*
- **Regulatory:** Lobby the FCC to change their practice of not encouraging or supporting challenges to the use of broadcast licenses for the highest potential benefit for the community and thereby allow for a transfer of the control of a license to a more capable operator. *(Likelihood of Success: Very Low)*
- **Other: TBD**

Governance

Generally, it is difficult to get strong board members to join a body where they don't have traditional governance authority, including financial responsibility and the ability to hire and fire the leadership. This is currently the problem with community advisory boards at many public radio and television operations.

Great governance for public media companies in the top 25 markets requires:

- **Persuasion:** Find a strong public leader to negotiate a governance détente with the licensee institution – one that would provide pros (no need for the institution to raise funds or be challenged on the news content in the future; the decision will cause you to be seen with a “halo effect” in the community) and cons (you lose control of your station's leadership.) *(Likelihood of Success: High, if such leaders can be enlisted)*
- **Financial incentive:** Implement the “Financial Incentive” structural recommendations above (or as much as can be negotiated) by involving some strong community leadership. Then, turn to that leadership to help form the new governance entity. *(Likelihood of Success: High)*
- **Convene:** Research station data bases for donors with proven governance ability, emphasizing diversity within a community. Bring together a seed group from each of the top 25 markets to meet with community trustees from existing successful public media companies – preferably on premises at one of the strongest entities. Attempt to excite the new potential volunteers with the mission, potential and existing performance comparisons of public media in each community. *(Likelihood of*

Success: Medium.)

- **Regulatory:** Lobby to change the federal law that established “community advisory boards” at independently-licensed public radio stations to require autonomous, community-based boards at all public radio stations receiving direct financial support from the CPB. *(Likelihood of Success: Medium)*

Leadership

Strong professional leadership will flow from strong governance. However, the pool of potential applicants is shallow. Public broadcasting tends to operate like a game of musical chairs, with mediocre managers rotating among stations. Great leadership in the top 25 markets requires:

- **Strong governance:** (This is a requirement)
- **Strong applicant pool.** Professional search firms and executive coaching entities know how to create deep applicant pools, but they do not generally understand or try to serve public media. Funding for a strong advocate to explain the opportunities and needs of public media to the search firms (and compensation requirements to the governing boards) would make a difference. *(Likelihood of Success: Medium/High)*
- **Recruiting:** The industry generally, and licensees particularly, need an incentive to recruit candidates for public media from beyond the current pool, where recycling is prevalent. Most public media companies have no one assigned to recruit in any significant way, no funds to cover the cost, and no concept of how to proceed. *(Likelihood of Success: Medium)*
- **Mentor/teach:** Create a program at a successful business school in public media leadership. *(Likelihood of Success: High)*

Funding

Federal money and influence are often tied together to achieve success. Public media has significant influence and good will in the members of its audience. Harnessing that influence while systematically introducing and executing a strategy, from the White House through the Congress, should raise the level of awareness about the underfunded nature of this increasingly important activity. In the top 25 markets, that requires:

- An understanding of how grass tops and grass roots lobbying works, and perhaps a firm to lead the process. *(Likelihood of Success: High)*
- A coordinated strategy of the major national foundations to fund models of success, demonstrating the production and dissemination of knowledge, insight, information and educative materials in the face of a declining role for commercial media in their service areas. *(Likelihood of Success: High)*
- Improved local leadership to focus resources from state and philanthropic sources on the potential and performance of their public media companies. *(Likelihood of Success: Medium/High)*

CONCLUSION

These are some potential solutions. They should be understood in the context of a clear sense of the mission, vision and potential of public media.

April 21, 2010, New York Times

MSNBC Cancels Guest Anchor's Show After a Controversial Segment

By BRIAN STELTER

A television segment about angry media commentators created a furor inside MSNBC this week, one that extended outside the cable news channel after the segment's host, Donny Deutsch, found himself dismissed as a guest anchor Wednesday.

Four people briefed on the matter said the cancellation of Mr. Deutsch's weeklong show, called "America the Angry," was the result of an unflattering mention of MSNBC's No. 1 anchor, Keith Olbermann, on Tuesday.

On that day, in what was supposed to be the second day of a weeklong series, Mr. Deutsch included a segment about the role that the media plays in fomenting the public's anger. Mr. Olbermann was mentioned briefly and shown in a series of clips of media figures.

MSNBC executives were said to be unhappy with the segment, and informed Mr. Deutsch on Wednesday morning that his show had been canceled for the rest of the week.

The incident led to charges that MSNBC, a unit of NBC Universal, had stifled criticism of itself on its own channel.

"The segment did not go unnoticed and we're dealing with it internally," Jeremy Gaines, an MSNBC spokesman, said Wednesday.

Four people briefed on MSNBC's decision said that Mr. Olbermann was angered by the segment, and that his displeasure prompted the cancellation of the "America the Angry" series. But in an e-mail message Mr. Olbermann said that account was untrue; he wrote that Phil Griffin, the president of MSNBC, "phoned me yesterday enraged at what was on that show and I didn't disagree with him."

Mr. Deutsch, the well-known advertising executive, declined to comment on either version of events Wednesday afternoon, but said that "for whatever reason they decided they didn't want to go with it the rest of the week."

Mr. Deutsch, the chairman of the advertising agency Deutsch Inc., had a prime-time show on MSNBC's sister network CNBC for several years. He was scheduled to anchor the 3 p.m. hour on MSNBC for the full week, and had chosen the theme "America the Angry" because, he said, "I, like most Americans, am very concerned about the anger out there."

"I think it's time for, not a red voice or a blue voice, but a passionate purple voice in the middle," he added Wednesday.

Tuesday's attention-grabbing segment about the media included clips of Bill O'Reilly, Rush Limbaugh and Glenn Beck alongside Mr. Olbermann.

One of Mr. Deutsch's guests, the radio host Hugh Hewitt, said that Mr. Olbermann and Ed Schultz, another MSNBC host, are "the biggest hate-mongers in television," while Mr. Deutsch stayed above the fray.

The four people briefed on MSNBC's decision to drop Mr. Deutsch's show also said that the executive producer for the hour, Gresham Striegel, was sent home Wednesday. Reached by telephone, Mr. Striegel declined to comment on any of the claims.

The people who were briefed would not speak on the record because they feared retaliation by the network.

Mr. Olbermann's outsize role at MSNBC has long been a topic of conversation in the halls of the news channel. After another MSNBC host, Joe Scarborough, criticized Mr. Olbermann in January, Mr. Griffin wrote in a memorandum to staff members, "I want to reiterate my long-standing policy: We do not publicly criticize our colleagues. This kind of behavior is unprofessional and will not be tolerated."

MSNBC's chief competitors, CNN and the Fox News Channel, show media criticism programs each weekend.