

Warm Springs Radio Station Faces Cuts Amid Federal Funding Withdrawal

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WARM SPRINGS, Oregon – A wave of federal budget cuts has placed the future of small public radio stations across the United States in jeopardy, with more than 1,500 outlets affected nationwide. Among them is KWSO-91.9FM, a vital local broadcaster serving the rural and tribal communities of Central Oregon.

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), a key funding body for many public media stations, is facing a shutdown following the removal of more than \$1.1 billion in federal support. For KWSO, this means a potential 40% reduction to its \$600,000 operational budget, threatening essential programming, emergency broadcasting capabilities, and several jobs.

Founded in 1986, KWSO has long provided tailored content for the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs and nearby residents. With only a handful of staff, the station delivers local stories, state news, weather alerts, and information crucial to a community that often lacks other reliable media access.

“I like to think we contribute to the quality of life in Warm Springs,” said Sue Matters, station manager. “Not everyone has a local radio station anymore.”

The cuts could end programming such as *Native American Calling*, a nationally syndicated show focusing on Indigenous voices, and reduce access to Emergency Operating Systems (EOS), a lifeline during natural disasters and public safety incidents.

Radio journalist Will Robbins emphasized the station’s local impact. “It’s more important to share the stories of the people who live here and talk about the good things happening. This is how we connect with people.”

On a national level, the funding decision follows longstanding criticism of political bias in NPR and other public media outlets. It marks the first time in 60 years that such funding has been eliminated, sparking concern among small, community-led broadcasters who are now left to seek alternatives.

Some stations may turn to local fundraising drives, private donations, or lobbying for alternative government support. Matters hopes public support can help fill the gap. “It would be great if people rose and made those contacts,” she said, noting the presence of multiple tribal stations in affected districts.

Oregon Senator Ron Wyden, a Democrat, expressed strong opposition to the funding cut, calling it “unconscionable.” He promised to fight for restored funding, highlighting how stations like KWSO provide critical services in underserved areas.

Congressman Cliff Bentz, Oregon’s sole Republican representative, voted in favor of the cuts.

For residents like Dorothea Thurby, the station is more than just news. “Whether it’s positive events for kids, tribal best practices, or funeral announcements, this is how we get the word out.”

KWSO’s role extends beyond news, acting as a cultural and social anchor for Warm Springs, where many families live at or below the poverty line. “We’d love to do more with video and new tech, but now we have to pause,” said Matters.

As the station faces financial uncertainty, its community remains hopeful. “We definitely wouldn’t function the same way without local radio,” Thurby added.