

## **INFORMATION AND UNDERSTANDING: THE CASE FOR COLORADO PUBLIC RADIO NEWS**

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*"If a nation expects to be ignorant and free... it expects what never was and never will be...  
Where the press is free... all is safe." Thomas Jefferson, 1816*

*"Whenever the people are well-informed, they can be trusted with their own government..."  
Thomas Jefferson, 1789*

*"If you argue about public trust today, you will be dismissed as an obstructionist and a romantic."  
Unnamed newspaper editor, quoted by The Project for Excellence in Journalism, "The State of  
News Media 2006"*

### **State of the News**

We are awash in information, but that does not mean we are well informed. Marketplace economics have led to steady loss of depth and substance in America's news coverage. The Project for Excellence in Journalism, an affiliate of the non-partisan Pew Research Center, noted in 2006, "the new paradox of journalism is more outlets covering fewer stories.... And when big stories break, they are often covered in similar fashion by general-assignment reporters working with a limited list of resources and a tight time-frame."

Public radio is one of the remaining bastions of the vital, substantive press coverage Jefferson relied on to inform a self-governing public. While other news organizations downsized over the past several years, National Public Radio has added reporters, correspondents, and offices worldwide. Indeed, a 2005 Harris poll found that NPR was the most trusted news source in the U.S.

On the local front, the gap is more pronounced. Local television, still the most popular news source in the U.S., devotes more and more time to "soft" stories, with hard news coverage limited almost exclusively to visually arresting events – crimes, personal catastrophes, and the like – that may have minimal long-term impact on society. Big-city metro newspapers are approaching endangered-species status, cutting news staff as they struggle to maintain revenues in the face of declining circulation.

### **News of the State**

Colorado Public Radio News intends to fill the same critical role for Colorado that NPR serves nationally: to bring the citizens of Colorado context and perspective on the issues that have the greatest impact on the state and region. To that end, Colorado Public Radio News has increased its coverage of local news, adding exceptionally qualified reporters and producers with impressive journalistic credentials.

The staff produces hourly newscasts, drive-time features, and "Colorado Matters," a daily news interview program. Colorado Public Radio News focuses on key state issues, including government, education, health, and environment, as well as business and economics, arts, culture, science and technology. Timely issues are illuminated through thoughtful discussion with knowledgeable and articulate sources. Colorado Public Radio's news staff researches stories extensively to bring focus and broad perspective to interviews designed to elevate public discourse. This preparation prompted one prominent Colorado politician to comment, "[Colorado Public Radio News] really did the best job at letting people know the difference between the candidates." Hearing experts discuss important topics in their own words gives Coloradans insight that is not available anywhere else.

A small sampling of recent Colorado Public Radio News stories includes:

- The Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) test
- Monthly interview with Governor Ritter
- At War and at Home: One Family's Story
- State health care reform
- Green business
- Pine beetle epidemic
- Uninsured Coloradans
- Guest worker visa debate

### **More Light than Heat**

In its pursuit of journalistic excellence, Colorado Public Radio News resists the shouting matches that dominate national and local talk radio in favor of thoughtful interaction that contributes to civic discourse. Rather than act as ringmaster and agitator, Colorado Public Radio works to provide meaning and depth. Through its Public Insight Network, Colorado Public Radio News invites Coloradans to contribute to its coverage. Public Insight sources tell news staff about their work, education, and expertise. As they research stories, reporters merge this personal intelligence with information from traditional sources to produce richer, more compelling coverage.

It is a demanding, labor-intensive mission, and a vital one. By delivering intelligent, substantive news coverage, Colorado Public Radio is performing a service essential to the survival of an informed citizenry, and to the continuing health of our community.