

## 'Prairie Home Companion'

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By RHODA MARX

**A**S YOUR Dec. 10 Viewpoints article noted, "A Prairie Home Companion" listeners in your area will no longer be hearing the news from Lake Wobegon on public radio station KUOP, Stockton. The station recently sent a letter to its listeners to inform them of the decision to discontinue this popular radio series.

As its producers, we are concerned about the errors the letter contains. It is important for listeners to know the facts regarding the costs and funding of this program.

The KUOP letter states "A Prairie Home Companion" is produced by a new source, American Public Radio. The fact is, the show has always been, is now, and will continue to be produced by Minnesota Public Radio — a station-based public radio entity similar to KUOP.

The letter states that "the program production is covered by a grant from private industry." The fact is that, throughout the program's two and one-half years of national broadcasts, Minnesota Public Radio has absorbed the primary costs. This year, production costs will total more than \$600,000, and the producers will continue to absorb more than half. The other half are covered through underwriting grants and station fees.

From 1974 to May 1980, "A Prairie Home Companion" was transmitted only on Minnesota Public Radio stations, and MPR funded the program through general revenues and grants from Cargill, Inc. and the National Endowment for the Arts. When public radio stations around the country became familiar with the series and asked that the program be made available nationally, Minnesota Public Radio made arrangements to

distribute "A Prairie Home Companion" via the public radio satellite system. Rather than expect listeners in Minnesota to pay the additional costs for 201 other radio stations to broadcast "A Prairie Home Companion", the producers asked the stations to pay a share. KUOP's share for "A Prairie Home Companion" this year would total \$1040 — or \$20 per week.

The KUOP letter states the program could be produced for one-fourth its cost. But having no experience in production and national distribution, KUOP may be unfamiliar with the costs.

The KUOP letter compares the annual dues the station pays to National Public Radio (\$5,500) to the annual affiliation fee the station has been asked to pay to American Public Radio (\$850). Fees allow stations to carry any or all of the programs offered. If KUOP decided to carry only one from National Public Radio, its dues would be the same. The mechanics of allocating overhead expenses on a per program basis, as KUOP suggests, are unmanageable.

In addition to "A Prairie Home Companion", nearly 60 other programs and series are available from American Public Radio, including "The Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival", the full broadcast season of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, "A Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols", to name just a few. The average APR affiliate uses nearly half of the offerings. Therefore, it would be misleading to generalize that the fee is for "one" program.

We are sorry that, despite substantial audience interest, the program can no longer be heard there. We hope some of the listeners will be able to continue to enjoy "A Prairie Home Companion" Saturdays at 6 p.m. on KQED-FM (88.5) from San Francisco.