

# Robert Sachs '70

Robert Sachs '70 sits behind his desk in an office building near the White House. The floor, desk, and all other furniture surfaces are cluttered with papers, most of them dealing with the Carter Administration's stance on public radio and television broadcasting.

Sachs worked 16 hours the day before, a Sunday. Tomorrow he will appear with Henry Geller, Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Communications Policy, before the House Communications Subcommittee. Within a few weeks, he'll also appear before the Senate Communications Subcommittee.

It is a complex issue, involving nearly one billion dollars in federal funds over a five-year period, stipulations on program funding and affirmative-action hiring procedures, and a clearer definition of the administrative roles of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), and National Public Radio (NPR).

It's also an invigorating situation for Sachs, and he likes it that way.

"You know," he says, "I trace it all back to the University's Washington Semester program. Had it not been for that, I probably would have gone from Rochester to law school, and today be frustrated with a law practice in New York City. It gives me great delight each time I run into one of the Rochester interns—as I just did the other day in Congressman Wirth's office—because I know how useful and exciting the experience was for me."

Sachs has a particular reason to take pride in the perpetuation of the Washington Semester program: he was its charter member.

In 1968 Sachs met Charles Goodell, then a Senator from New York, while Goodell was speaking on the River Campus. Sachs decided he wanted to work for Goodell in Washington for a semester. The political science department and the College of Arts and Science agreed that with appropriate faculty guidance Sachs could earn academic credit for the project, and off he went.

Since 1968 the Washington Semester has been a regular program at the Uni-

versity, with Richard Fenno, William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of Political Science, in charge. "I have kept in touch with Dick Fenno," Sachs says. "Even though I've been away from the University for eight years, he's remained interested in my career."

When Sachs graduated from Rochester, he decided that "unlike some of my friends, I wouldn't go to graduate school or to law school right away. Rather, I thought I'd go back to the best experience I'd had in my life to that point, which was working on Capitol Hill. So I got a job on Goodell's staff and stayed with him after he left the Senate. It was through that job that I met Daniel Ellsberg."

Ellsberg was a consultant to Goodell on Vietnam at the time. Later, when Ellsberg was indicted in the "Pentagon Papers" case, Sachs worked for him, often "doing press relations by day and legal research by night."

"After the trial," Sachs says, "I went to work for the *Boston Globe* for a summer, then spent a year in journalism

school at Columbia University. Having worked for nine months on a steady basis with a group of trial reporters in California, I became intrigued with their work and saw for myself a career along those lines. On (CBS reporter) Fred Graham's advice, I went to law school. He said I could spend five years on a city desk somewhere, or I could spend a comparable period getting a law degree and have more flexibility when I finished.

"The only thing I didn't contemplate at the time was that in going to law school at night in Washington (Georgetown University), I would get sidetracked. I took a job on Capitol Hill with a Congressman from Colorado who was on the House Communications Subcommittee, and I found myself very interested in communications policy issues—television violence, regulation of cable television, competition in domestic common carrier industry, and so forth. So, as I was finishing my law degree, I was spending most of my days working on communications matters. That provided an obvious tie-in with my earlier goal of pursuing a career in journalism, because both are concerned, for example, with First Amendment issues. Around the time I was finishing at Georgetown, however, I was offered a job with the White House Office of Telecommunications Policy. I knew the Office was to be reorganized into the National Telecommunications Administration within the year, but it seemed like a good opportunity for me. Within a month I found myself sitting at a table in a meeting with the President, and within two months I was put in charge of the Administration's day-to-day efforts in the area of public broadcasting. It's been a lot of work, but a lot of excitement as well."

The job has allowed Sachs "to get a good view of how the executive branch of government works. All of my other experience was at the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue. When people talk of bureaucracy, I've now learned what they mean."

The job also has afforded Sachs the opportunity to work with "a lot of good people in public broadcasting," he says, including University of Rochester Chancellor W. Allen Wallis, who is chairman of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.



Sachs

One of the major policy questions in public broadcasting concerns the roles of CPB and PBS, which is an organization representing and servicing the public television stations. One problem, for instance, is what kind of role, if any, CPB should have in making specific programming decisions. CPB was established essentially as a funding board for public broadcasting—a liaison between PBS, NPR, and Congress—and some PBS people have taken exception to the fact that CPB has, in recent years, been involved in program selection instead of allowing PBS to be the sole judge of programs.

The Administration proposal limits CPB's role in programming to setting priorities and making bloc program grants to stations or independent producing companies, and Sachs visited Wallis in Rochester to discuss this particular aspect of the proposal.

"Chancellor Wallis was supportive of the notion that the board of CPB not be involved in individual programming decisions," Sachs says. "He likened it to the situation with the University's Board of Trustees. He said it would be inappropriate for the University's Board to make curriculum decisions, because that is the job of professionals, not of board members. For

the same reason, he does not believe the CPB Board should be reviewing scripts or pilots. In fact, he said he was very surprised at one of his first CPB meetings to be watching a pilot for a program. He said he had a personal opinion, of course, but that it was not the opinion of a program production professional."

Wallis has made it clear, however, that he does not believe that PBS should make all of the programming decisions. "PBS would like control of all public broadcasting programs," says Wallis. "Nobody ought to have a monopolistic control. If someone walks in with a brilliant idea, I feel we should provide the funds. Our responsibility is to the public, not to PBS."

The CPB has a responsibility to insulate public broadcasting against political influence and to serve the public, Wallis says. "If one group ever takes over, we could get into a situation like the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), which can keep anything away from the public that it wants to."

Viewers of public television who have enjoyed "Masterpiece Theatre"

and other BBC productions might be inclined to object to such harsh words about the BBC. But Sachs agrees with Wallis.

"We see a lot of programs on public television from Britain," Sachs explains, "although not all are produced by the BBC. I think most people would say that we seem to have an inordinate number of imports on public television. The reason it seems that way is that this amounts to about 25 percent of PBS' prime-time schedule, and the programs are frequently repeated. It's very cheap for public television in America to buy programs from Britain, because the British already have paid most of the production costs."

Public broadcasting in the United States also produces high quality programs of its own, Sachs says, and its capability to distribute them soon will be increased when its planned satellite becomes operative. "With the satellite," he says, "PBS will be able to transmit to the stations four channels of programming at any one time. The stations will be able to record that programming for later use, or use it live. But they will have more choices than they had before."

As for the future of Robert Sachs, it might be hard to make a long-range prediction. With a University of Rochester degree in psychology (with distinction), a master's degree in journalism, and a law degree, plus his Washington and *Boston Globe* experience, it would seem that a number of career paths could open to him. But one might be safe to assume that, in the near future, any such path wouldn't lead too far away from Capitol Hill. ■



*"Masterpiece Theatre" (above) and "Sesame Street" are two of the most popular series on public television.*

