

Report on meeting with Arlene Engelhardt & Andrew Phillips on 3-15-11

Margy Wilkinson, chair of the KPFA local station, and I (KPFA board member Pamela Drake) were given a meeting yesterday with Arlene Engelhardt, Executive Director of Pacifica, and the new interim KPFA General Manager, Andrew Phillips. We had been requesting such a meeting for over a month so we were surprised to finally get one. As it was a two-hour session, I'll limit my report to a few issues of particular interest.

First off, we expressed our dismay about Engelhardt's announcement via an email to KPFA listeners that the Morning Show would not return before the replacement show had even been evaluated. Engelhardt stated that the Morning Show cannot come back in its original form since she has reduced the slot to one hour (8-9AM), and feels that listeners would be "upset" if anything were to be changed now.

Engelhardt further explained that it would be up to new interim GM Phillips and new interim Program Director Carrie Core -- both of whom Engelhardt hired without any input from the local station board -- to evaluate the 8 to 9 AM slot that now features revolving hosts. We explained the long tradition of the Morning Show to the new GM, and told him that we had received thousands of complaints from listeners about its abrupt removal, which we have forwarded to local and national board members, as well as management. Arlene did not dispute what we said but asserted that she has received "hundreds" of emails in support of the new 8 AM Morning Mix. She also stated that she felt three months was not enough time to evaluate a new program.

Phillips said he would ask a new Program Council, once it is situated, to review the morning shows and advise him of their findings. He said the interim Program Director will make the final decision, but noted, "the program council will help decide."

Engelhardt, and to a lesser extent, Andrew Phillips, said that it was "appropriate" to prevent the on air staff from airing any news about KPFA's problems or program

changes. Andrew said that "it was not news" but agreed that it is a very difficult issue. We made clear our position that the News Department must be completely independent of management. We gave them a copy of the resolution adopted by the KPFA LSB in March 2010: "The KPFA LSB calls on the Pacifica National Board to 1) defend the right of journalists within Pacifica to protect the confidentiality of their sources; and 2) extend to Pacifica news staff covering internal issues the same editorial autonomy they enjoy when reporting on external issues."

On a similar issue, we demanded to know the point of reprimanding staff for raising more money during the pledge drive with the stated hope that it might prevent more layoffs. There was no satisfactory answer to this question or others involving management's attempted imposition of a gag rule, other than referring us to some documents with limited applicability. Since these documents were not in front of us at the time, we could not respond.

Engelhardt stated that KPFA is in financial trouble and running over \$30,000 dollars behind - that that was the reason for laying off the Morning Show's staff, who brought in 3 times what they cost in salaries, and killing the show as a venerable institution at KPFA.

When we asked why she had spent at least \$30,000 of KPFA money on an "employment" law firm, Engelhardt said that it was necessary to perform many duties that the in-house lawyers couldn't perform, including issues of contract compliance, labor handbooks/procedures, and lawsuits. When pressed, she promised not to spend "more than \$5,000 to \$10,000 more" of KPFA's money on this law firm this year.

Another question we asked concerned the over-budget expenditure of \$10,000 on the salary of new interim program director Core, which Engelhardt described as "a little over budget." She responded that they decided to give Core a raise "due to the higher cost of living in this area." We pointed out that many of KPFA's laid-off staff had been receiving \$25k to \$30k per year and had already been living in the area. She said that the interim

GM Amit Pendyal (who quit after one month) had insisted that he needed Core and took a cut in salary so that the issue was a "wash."

We asked Engelhardt how she saw the functions of Pacifica and whether she agreed that the Foundation should participate directly in fund raising. She agreed but said that she had been too busy to do that. And finally we pressed her about whether the new iGM would be independent and allowed to make decisions concerning the station. She said that he would and that she wanted nothing more to do with "programming decisions at KPFA."

-- Pamela Drake