



MEMORANDUM

To: Members and Staff, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

From: Majority Committee Staff

Re: Hearing titled “Examining Accusations of Ideological Bias at NPR, a Taxpayer Funded News Entity.”

On Wednesday, May 8, 2024, at 10:00 a.m. (ET) in 2123 Rayburn House Office Building, the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations will hold a hearing titled “Examining Accusations of Ideological Bias at NPR, a Taxpayer Funded News Entity.”

I. WITNESSES

- Howard Husock, Senior Fellow, American Enterprise Institute
- James Erwin, Federal Affairs Manager for Telecommunications, Americans for Tax Reform
- Tim Graham, Executive Editor, NewsBusters.org, Media Research Center
- Craig Aaron, Co-CEO, Free Press

II. OVERVIEW

Since 1970, the National Public Radio (NPR) has broadcasted programs to serve as a “source of information of consequence,” “celebrate the human experience,” and help citizens be “enlightened participants” in society.¹

¹ Julie Rogers, *A Timeline of NPR's First 50 Years*, NPR (Apr. 28, 2021), <https://www.npr.org/2021/04/28/987733236/a-timeline-of-nprs-first-50-years>.

III. BACKGROUND

For 54 years, NPR has filled the U.S. airwaves connecting millions of Americans across geographic boundaries “to create a more informed public—one challenged and invigorated by a deeper understanding and appreciation of events, ideas and cultures.”²

NPR’s History and Incorporation

In 1967, Congress enacted the Public Broadcasting Act, which created the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB).³ The CPB is the “steward of the federal government’s investment in public media,” promoting public television and radio stations as well as their programs, which reach every U.S. household.⁴ The CPB is “the largest single source of funding for public television and radio programming” and is fully funded by the federal government.⁵ When the CPB incorporated NPR in 1970, the media organization featured “88 original member stations representing non-commercial, educational[,] and community radio stations across the country.”⁶ Today, NPR’s extensive network of local member stations broadcasting NPR run into the thousands and reach a weekly national and international audience of 42 million people across platforms (radio, smart speakers, website, social media, live events, apps and podcasts).⁷ While NPR Inc., the administrative headquarters of the media organization, is located in Washington, DC, NPR “is authorized to produce radio programs for its members as well as to provide, acquire, and distribute radio programming through its satellite program distribution system.”⁸

Funding for NPR

Funding for NPR primarily comes from member stations, distribution services, underwriting and institutional grants, and individual contributions.⁹ However, funding for NPR’s 17 international reporting bureaus and for the infrastructure that distributes content from NPR to public radio stations across the U.S. comes from the CPB.¹⁰ Public radio stations that choose to partner with NPR must apply for NPR membership. To do so, they must meet NPR’s membership criteria (including mission, 18-hour-a-day broadcast operations, and minimum number of staff) and pay membership dues.¹¹ According to NPR, more than half of stations are licensed to, or

² NPR, Our Mission and Vision, <https://www.npr.org/about-npr/178659563/our-mission-and-vision> (last accessed May 6, 2024).

³ Corporation for Public Broadcasting, CPB Frequently Asked Questions, <https://www.cpb.org/faq#1-1> (last accessed May 6, 2024).

⁴ Glenn J. McLoughlin & Lena A. Gomez, Cong. Research Serv., RS22168, The Corporation for Public Broadcasting: Federal Funding and Issues (2017), [https://www.crs.gov/Reports/RS22168?source=search#Content; https://www.cpb.org/faq#1-1](https://www.crs.gov/Reports/RS22168?source=search#Content;https://www.cpb.org/faq#1-1).

⁵ See *supra* note 2.

⁶ Julie Rogers, *supra* note 1.

⁷ NPR, Who We Are, <https://www.npr.org/about> (last accessed May 6, 2024).

⁸ See *supra* note 4.

⁹ See *supra* note 3.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ NPR, NPR Stations and Public Media, <https://www.npr.org/about-npr/178640915/npr-stations-and-public-media>, (last accessed May 6, 2024).

affiliated with, colleges or universities. The remaining half include local or community-based boards, school boards, state agencies, and in some cases, joint operations with public TV stations.¹²

Although member stations determine their own formats and broadcasting schedules, they may choose to select from NPR programs such as *Morning Edition*, *All Things Considered* or *Wait Wait...Don't Tell Me!*. In addition to paying membership dues, member stations that choose to broadcast NPR programs must pay fees for each individual NPR program that is broadcast.¹³

In 2023, NPR received approximately \$7 million from the federal government through grants and contracts with CPB.¹⁴ NPR claims federal funding accounts for only approximately one percent of its annual operating budget from grants through CPB and other federal agencies and departments.¹⁵ However, in reality, this number is much higher owing to NPR's reliance on complicated revenue streams through its extensive network of member affiliates.

Criticism of NPR

On April 9, 2024, Uri Berliner, a now-former but then-senior business editor at NPR, publicly criticized NPR for losing sight of independent journalism, that is, one that “lets evidence lead the way.”¹⁶ Berliner rebuked NPR for “the absence of viewpoint diversity,” which impacted coverage of major news stories of national security and importance.¹⁷ He would not be the only employee to criticize NPR.

Since Berliner's piece was published, former employees have called NPR “a mess,” adding it has been this way “for a long time.”¹⁸ Over the years, the network has been riddled with controversy, some of which has become public, such as sexual harassment complaints against NPR executives and treatment of its temporary workers.¹⁹ Last year, NPR announced it would lay off 10 percent of its current workforce to close revenue gaps of approximately \$30 million—its largest

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ National Public Radio, Consolidated Financial Statements NPR, (Jan. 22, 2024), [https://media.npr.org/documents/about/statements/fy2023/National%20Public%20Radio%20-%20Consolidated%20Financial%20Statements%20-%20S2322%20FINAL%20\(S\).pdf#page=33](https://media.npr.org/documents/about/statements/fy2023/National%20Public%20Radio%20-%20Consolidated%20Financial%20Statements%20-%20S2322%20FINAL%20(S).pdf#page=33).

¹⁵ NPR, Public Radio Finances, <https://www.npr.org/about-npr/178660742/public-radio-finances> (last accessed May 6, 2024).

¹⁶ Uri Berliner, *I've Been at NPR for 25 Years. Here's How We Lost America's Trust.*, Free Press (Apr. 9, 2024), <https://www.thefp.com/p/npr-editor-how-npr-lost-americas-trust>.

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ Alicia Montgomery, *The Real Story Behind NPR's Current Problems*, Slate (Apr. 16, 2024), <https://slate.com/business/2024/04/npr-diversity-public-broadcasting-radio.html>.

¹⁹ See Paul Farhi, *New Report Says NPR News Chief Continued Inappropriate Behavior Despite Repeated Warnings*, Washington Post (Feb. 20, 2018), https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/new-report-says-npr-news-chief-continued-inappropriate-behavior-despite-repeated-warnings/2018/02/20/2aab4c10-1691-11e8-8b08-027a6ccb38eb_story.html; Paul Farhi, *At NPR, an Army of Temps Faces a Workplace of Anxiety and Insecurity*, Washington Post (Dec. 9, 2018), https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/at-npr-an-army-of-temps-resents-a-workplace-full-of-anxiety-and-insecurity/2018/12/07/32e49632-f35b-11e8-80d0-f7e1948d55f4_story.html.

layoff since the 2008 recession.²⁰ Aside from falling revenue, NPR is also facing declining listenership. Between 2017 and 2022, NPR’s average weekly broadcast audience declined by 6.6 million listeners.²¹

Amid so much internal disarray at NPR and criticism that NPR suffers from intractable bias, it is time Congress investigates how federal dollars are being used at NPR and what reforms may be necessary.

IV. KEY QUESTIONS

The hearing may include discussion around the following key questions:

- What is NPR’s organizational structure and relation to affiliate member stations?
- How truly “national” is NPR? How well does NPR reflect the country?
- How long has NPR fostered a culture that lacks viewpoint diversity in its reporting?
- What are NPR’s funding streams? How much of this is taxpayer funded?
- How can Congress develop solutions to address criticism that NPR suffers from intractable bias?

V. STAFF CONTACTS

If you have any questions regarding the hearing, please contact Anudeep Buddharaju or Joanne Thomas with the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations Majority staff at (202) 225-3641.

²⁰ David Folkenflik, *With Layoffs, NPR becomes Latest Media Outlet to Cut Jobs* (Feb. 23, 2023), <https://www.npr.org/2023/02/22/1158710498/npr-layoffs-2023>.

²¹ Naomi Forman-Katz, *For National Radio Day, Key Facts about Radio Listeners and the Radio Industry in the U.S.*, Pew Res. Ctr. (Aug. 17, 2023), <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/08/17/for-national-radio-day-key-facts-about-radio-listeners-and-the-radio-industry-in-the-us/>.