

Opening Remarks
Chair Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations Hearing:
“Examining Accusations of Ideological Bias at NPR, a
Taxpayer Funded News Entity.”
May 8, 2024

OPENING

Good morning and thank you Chairman Griffith.

Like everyone here in this room, I am an adamant supporter of the First Amendment to the Constitution and the freedom of the press.

As Thomas Jefferson once said, “Our liberty depends on the freedom of the press, and that cannot be limited without being lost.”

Every news outlet and network should be free to express viewpoints, even those I may disagree with.

It is a fundamental principle under the First Amendment for news agencies to report on stories however they see fit.

It is not, however, a fundamental principle for news organizations to receive public funding to express their viewpoint.

We are holding this hearing today to discuss accusations from within National Public Radio, or NPR, that the organization’s DC

bureau is actively censoring viewpoints—all while enjoying funding from Americans’ hard-earned tax dollars.

Following the accusations, Speaker Johnson and I fully agreed that Congress needed to quickly investigate.

I will note for the record, we invited NPR’s CEO, Ms. Maher to participate in today’s hearing. She has declined to do so stating that she needed more time to prepare and that she had a conflict with an NPR board meeting.

ACCESS TO TAXPAYER FUNDING IS NOT A RIGHT

It is especially offensive that an organization funded with taxpayer dollars has mocked, ridiculed, and attacked the very people who fund their organization.

As if the problem wasn’t self-evident, a 25-year veteran of NPR’s national news desk outlined it in an op-ed just a few weeks ago.

Uri [UH-REE] Berliner [BERLIN-ER], a longtime journalist and senior business editor for NPR since 1999, has described a troubling culture at the organization stating...

QUOTE “An open-minded spirit no longer exists within NPR, and now, predictably, we don’t have an audience that reflects America.” END QUOTE¹

¹ Uri Berliner, NPR Editor: How NPR Lost America’s Trust, Free Press (Apr. 9, 2024), <https://www.thefp.com/p/npr-editor-how-npr-lost-americas-trust>

Berliner [BERLIN-ER] also explained how tax-funded NPR never admitted to its audience how off its reporting was on the debunked Russia collusion story stating...

QUOTE “What’s worse is to pretend it never happened, to move on with no *mea culpas*, no self-reflection. Especially when you expect high standards of transparency from public figures and institutions, but don’t practice those standards yourself. That’s what shatters trust and engenders cynicism about the media.”
END QUOTE

It was quite revealing from Mr. Berliner [BERLIN-ER] that NPR did not want to report stories that could help President Trump’s chances of winning the 2020 Presidential Election—no matter how evidently true or important to the public conversation they were...

According to Mr. Berliner: QUOTE “I listened as one of NPR’s best and most fair-minded journalists said it was good we weren’t following the laptop story because it could help Trump.” END QUOTE.

Moreover, according to Mr. Berliner, he could not find a single registered Republican editor at NPR headquarters.

Since many journalists don’t affiliate themselves politically so they can remain objective, this might not sound abnormal...

...except that Mr. Berliner was able to identify 87 editors in NPR’s newsroom who were registered Democrats.

Founding NPR Board Member Bill Siemering put into the original mission statement that NPR should... among other things.. “speak with many voices and many dialects.”

According to what we’ve learned from Mr. Berliner’s insight, today’s NPR has strayed from their core mission.

CONCLUSION

When an entity that was created by Congress, and that receives taxpayer funding, strays from their core mission there needs to be accountability and oversight.

The Energy and Commerce Committee will fulfill its responsibility to investigate the allegations against NPR and take appropriate action based on what we find.

That process takes a step forward with today’s hearing.

I thank our panel of witnesses, who bring to the table a variety of viewpoints about the matter, and I look forward to the conversation.

I yield back.