

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE,
AND TRANSPORTATION

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6125

WEBSITE: <https://commerce.senate.gov>

LILA HARPER HELMS, MAJORITY STAFF DIRECTOR
BRAD GRANTZ, REPUBLICAN STAFF DIRECTOR

July 12, 2024

Katherine Maher
President & Chief Executive Officer
National Public Radio
1111 North Capitol Street, NE
Washington, D.C. 20002

Dear Ms. Maher:

As a recipient of federal funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), National Public Radio (NPR) is required by law to adhere to “objectivity and balance in all programs or series of programs of a controversial nature.”¹ The organization is falling short of that mandate.

Recent public reports, including an exposé by NPR’s former senior business editor, Uri Berliner, have highlighted NPR’s dwindling viewpoint diversity and reluctance to cover newsworthy stories, such as Hunter Biden’s laptop, that fail to align with the organization’s extremist liberal views.² But this is only part of the story. As it turns out, NPR’s selective reporting may be driven not only by preexisting political bias within the organization but also by its private donors. The timing and content of certain NPR articles align with earmarked, multi-million-dollar donations from left-wing nonprofits looking to advance their own narratives in the press. In other words, NPR may be engaged in a Payola scheme to leverage its dwindling credibility as a nonpartisan news organization to “help” partisan, left-wing mega-donors.

The U.S. taxpayer provides both direct and indirect taxpayer funding to NPR. In Fiscal Year 2022, less than two percent of NPR’s revenue came directly from CPB, totaling about \$5.54 million out of its \$309.09 million in revenue for the year.³ However, the Public Broadcasting Act also directs CPB to allocate a set amount (\$24.58 million in FY 2022)⁴ to local radio stations

¹ See 47 U.S.C. § 396(g)(1)(A); cf. Letter from Patricia de Stacy Harrison, President and CEO, Corp. for Pub. Broad. to Sen. Cruz, Ranking Member, S. Comm. on Commerce, Science & Transp. 4–5 (Dec. 22, 2023), [https://www.cpb.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/CPB Response Letter to Sen Cruz 12-22-2023 Final_0.pdf](https://www.cpb.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/CPB%20Response%20Letter%20to%20Sen%20Cruz%2012-22-2023%20Final_0.pdf) (CPB “includes the Act’s objectivity and balance requirements in CPB-funded program production grant agreements” and “reminds producers and distributors of public media content of the Act’s requirements.” “[N]ews reporting,” in particular, “strives for the objectivity contemplated in Section § 396(g)(1)(A) of the Communications Act of 1934.”)

² 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>.

³ Grants and Allocations: District of Columbia, CPB, <https://www.cpb.org/aboutcpb/financials/funding/2022/dc> (last visited July 12, 2024); Marie Charlotte Gutting, *Revenue of National Public Radio (NPR) in the United States from 2015 to 2023*, STATISTA (Feb. 6, 2024), <https://www.statista.com/statistics/706290/npr-revenue/>.

⁴ GRANT THORNTON LLP, COMBINED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS AND REPORT OF INDEPENDENT CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANTS, CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND AFFILIATE 6 (Feb. 13, 2024), https://www.cpb.org/sites/default/files/Fiscal_Year_2023.pdf.

through grants solely “for acquiring . . . programming that is to be distributed nationally.”⁵ Local stations—which depend on NPR’s content—use these programming grants to pay fees to NPR, effectively serving as pass throughs to launder taxpayer dollars moving from CPB to NPR. Without revealing the total amount it receives from local stations, NPR has admitted that “[t]hese station programming fees comprise a significant portion of NPR’s largest source of revenue” and that “[t]he loss of federal funding [from CPB] would undermine the stations’ ability to pay NPR for programming.”⁶ Despite NPR’s assertion that it is not “government-funded media,” the hidden flow of taxpayer dollars suggests otherwise.⁷

NPR relies on more than taxpayer dollars, however; it also receives *substantial support from left-leaning foundations*. In 2022 and 2023, these foundations awarded grants to NPR ranging from \$100,000 to \$4 million.⁸

A disturbing pattern followed. After pocketing these hefty sums, NPR churned out content mirroring its donors’ agendas. Coincidence? Unlikely. Take, for instance, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which committed \$4 million “[to] support NPR’s ongoing coverage of global health and development issues” in November 2023.⁹ Come January 2024, NPR published an article highlighting “buzzwords in the world of global health and development,” such as “climate mobility,” and quoting Bill Gates as saying that the “2024 elections will be ‘a turning point for both health and climate.’”¹⁰ Similarly, in November 2023, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation gave \$2.75 million to NPR for coverage “address[ing] the fundamental inequalities of health and healthcare in America” and the “social determinants of health,” such as structural racism.¹¹ In January 2024, NPR released a laudatory and uncritical interview of a physician who said, “Race cannot be a risk factor [for diabetes or high blood pressure] because it’s a social construct.”¹² In March 2024, NPR’s *Code Switch* asked how it could be that race is “still used to help diagnose certain conditions” because “biological race is not a real thing,” something the hosts had supposedly “said [] a hundred times” on the show.¹³ These and other examples show that NPR

⁵ 47 U.S.C. § 396(k)(3)(A)(iii)(III).

⁶ Public Radio Finances, NPR, <https://www.npr.org/about-npr/178660742/public-radio-finances> (last visited July 12, 2024).

⁷ See David Folkenflik, *NPR Quits Twitter After Being Falsely Labeled as “State-Affiliated Media,”* NPR (Apr. 12, 2023), <https://www.npr.org/2023/04/12/1169269161/npr-leaves-twitter-government-funded-media-label>; cf. Matt Bruenig, *Is National Public Radio Actually National Private Radio?*, MATTBRUENIG.COM (Apr. 12, 2023), <https://mattbruenig.com/2023/04/12/is-national-public-radio-actually-national-private-radio/>.

⁸ See Appendix: NPR GIVES ITS PRIVATE DONORS WHAT THEY PAY FOR.

⁹ Grant to National Public Radio, BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUND., <https://www.gatesfoundation.org/about/committed-grants/2023/11/inv-055779> (last visited July 12, 2024).

¹⁰ Andrew Connelly, *From ‘Gender Apartheid’ to ‘Climate Mobility,’ Here Are Buzzwords to Watch This Year,* NPR (Jan. 19, 2024), <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2024/01/19/1224289339/global-buzzwords-for-2024-gender-apartheid-climate-mobility-mega-election-year>.

¹¹ Awarded Grants, ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUND., <https://www.rwjf.org/en/grants/awarded-grants.html?amt=1000001&start=2023&end=2023> (last visited May 14, 2024).

¹² Tonya Mosely, *Following in Her Mom’s Footsteps, a Doctor Fights to Make Medicine More Inclusive,* NPR (Jan. 2, 2024), <https://www.npr.org/2024/01/22/1226047324/uche-blackstock-legacy-racism-medicine>.

¹³ Gene Demby et al., *In the World of Medicine, Race-Based Diagnoses Are Still Very Real,* NPR (Mar. 13, 2024), <https://www.npr.org/2024/03/13/1197955918/race-in-medicine-andrea-deyrup>.

has strayed far from its ethos of “independent journalism in the public interest” by allowing its liberal donors to buy desired “news” coverage.¹⁴

If the American taxpayer is going to finance a public broadcaster, then they deserve nothing less than fair and unbiased reporting. The Standing Rules of the Senate provide the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation the authority and duty to “review and study, on a continuing basis” all matters relating to communications, including public media and federal funding thereof.¹⁵ To assist the Committee in that endeavor and provide an understanding of NPR’s sources of funding, both public and private, please provide the documents requested below and written responses to the questions below no later than July 26, 2024, and in accordance with the attached instructions:

1. For each fiscal year, beginning with fiscal year 2019, list all money paid by each public or “member” station to NPR, segregated by individual station and including:
 - a. The total revenue the station provided NPR.
 - b. A breakdown of national programming fees paid by the station, including:
 - “the core fee for the NPR newsmagazines (Morning Edition, All Things Considered, Weekend Edition), as well as an array of digital content, tools and platforms, and a suite of services designed to drive audience engagement and support”; and
 - “license fees for a portfolio of broadcast programs other than the NPR newsmagazines.”¹⁶
2. List each grant, donation, or award of \$5,000 or more that NPR received from a private entity since the beginning of FY 2019.
3. What precautions does NPR take, if any, to ensure that financial contributions from its donors do not impact its editorial decisions?
4. How does NPR’s centralized tracking system for interviewees’ race, gender, and ethnicity influence its editorial decisions?¹⁷
5. What steps did NPR take, if any, upon learning on May 3, 2021, that 87 of its D.C. newsroom employees working in editorial positions were registered as Democrats and none were registered as Republicans?¹⁸

¹⁴ See *NPR Ethics Handbook*, NPR, <https://www.npr.org/about-npr/688405012/independence> (last visited July 12, 2024).

¹⁵ S. Rules XXV(1)(f), XXVI(8).

¹⁶ Public Radio Finances, *supra* note 6.

¹⁷ See Berliner, *supra* note 2.

¹⁸ *Id.*

6. Provide documents sufficient to show that NPR adheres to “objectivity and balance in all programs or series of programs of a controversial nature.”¹⁹
7. For Fiscal Years 2019 to present, provide all documents and communications referring or relating to NPR’s “objectivity and balance” or the infrequency of content representing diverse ideological perspectives, including right-leaning views, that NPR broadcasted or produced.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact [REDACTED] of my Committee staff at [REDACTED].

Sincerely,



Ted Cruz
Ranking Member

¹⁹ 47 U.S.C. § 396(g)(1)(A).