

Testimony of Tim Graham, Executive Editor of NewsBusters, Media Research Center
House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
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Good morning, I represent the Media Research Center, America's preeminent conservative media watchdog organization. It was founded in 1987, and I joined the center in 1989. We monitor national media outlets on a daily basis and provide daily coverage of the media's tilt at NewsBusters.org. We are eager to testify with many examples on this hearing's intention to examine accusations of bias on National Public Radio. NPR and PBS have for their entire existence made a mockery of language in the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 that mandated "objectivity and balance in all programs or series of programs of a controversial nature."

On its website, NPR has a statement of principles, including this: "We know that truth is not possible without the active pursuit of a diversity of voices, especially those most at risk of being left out." I would say after decades of listening, the voices most at risk of being left out are the conservatives. They are talked about, but they don't get to do much talking. We would make the same argument about PBS, from the *NewsHour* to the *Frontline* documentaries. Roughly half the taxpayers of America donate to a public-broadcasting system that considers them unworthy of inclusion. NPR never lives up to their evening newscast title, *All Things Considered*.

After senior editor Uri Berliner recently testified about NPR's bias on the internet, NPR chief news executive Edith Chapin proclaimed, "We believe that inclusion — among our staff, with our sourcing, and in our overall coverage — is critical to telling the nuanced stories of this country and our world." The obvious rebuttal to that is: So why did Berliner write his expose? And why did he resign after NPR employees refused to work with him?

Berliner suggested this bias became more pronounced when Donald Trump ran for president. We can tell you NPR has demonstrated a leftist bent much longer than that. NPR legal reporter Nina Totenberg destroyed the Douglas Ginsburg nomination to the Supreme Court in 1987, then tried again with Clarence Thomas in 1991. They energetically channeled the accusers of Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh in 2018, and when a man arrived in an Uber on Kavanaugh's street two years ago with weapons and plans to assassinate Kavanaugh, NPR failed to file a single feature story on it. Nina Totenberg could not be found. NPR, a supposed source of civility, didn't demonstrate that she cared one bit about this potential political violence. But in March, between *Morning Edition* and *Fresh Air*, Kavanaugh accuser Christine Blasey Ford was granted an hour of taxpayer-funded air time to reproduce her unproven charges of teenaged sexual assault.

This kind of pattern underlines Berliner's recent statement on NewsNation: "NPR has a lot of soul searching to do about representing the country at large. Being a publicly funded news organization and really trying to represent this country in all its great diversity and viewpoints."

NPR isn't soul searching. NPR isn't seriously trying to achieve a diversity of sources or an independent news agenda. Instead they are serving their own left-leaning donors, major and minor. As Berliner reported, by 2023, 67 percent of listeners said they were very or somewhat liberal. Apparently, you don't want to upset them with an opposing view. This network lives in an airless bubble, or a silo, pick your metaphor.

Both PBS and NPR repeat the leftist media's resistance to an opposing side on contentious issues like climate change and transgender ideology. Our study of seven months of *PBS NewsHour* found they gave over 90 percent of the air time to the Left on gender ideology stories. NPR displayed its take in 2022 by interviewing transgender Biden HHS appointee Adm. Rachel Levine to argue "There is no argument about the value and the importance of gender-affirming care. There is no argument." NPR reporter Selena Simmons-Duffin underlined: "Gender-affirming care is not harmful. It's lifesaving, she explains." No dissent was allowed.

NPR clearly doesn't fear congressional oversight of its aggressive biases, on air and online. They had a fit when Elon Musk defined them on Twitter as "state-affiliated," like somehow taxpayer funding doesn't affiliate you with the state. They know Congress isn't going to want to police their content. It doesn't just upset the public broadcasters. It infuriates the so-called "mainstream media." But the only thing that seems to concentrate the attention of public broadcasters on this subject is the threat of defunding. Even then, it might cause a "course correction" for a few weeks or months, before returning to the mean-spirited mean against Republicans. I would suggest NPR should have to come to Congress and defend its content choices at least once a year.

Their choices can be very questionable. A glaring Exhibit A is the *New York Post* series on Hunter Biden's laptop in October of 2020. Most of the so-called "mainstream media" tried to dismiss this story – falsely – as Russian disinformation. But NPR stood out.

NPR's Public Editor Kelly McBride quoted Terence Samuel, NPR's Managing Editor for News. "We don't want to waste our time on stories that are not really stories, and we don't want to waste the listeners' and readers' time on stories that are just pure distractions." He dismissed the *Post* stories as a "politically driven event." That's interesting, since you could argue Nina Totenberg's hostile reporting on Supreme Court nominees created "politically driven events."

Instead of seeking to investigate the Biden family's influence-peddling, NPR's *Morning Edition* broadcast a story titled "Experts Say Attack On Hunter Biden's Addiction Deepens Stigma For Millions." There wasn't one word in it about Hunter Biden's business practices involving his father, which was the point of the *Post* stories.

The pattern continues today. When the House Oversight Committee had a hearing in March where Hunter Biden was supposed to appear, NPR's *All Things Considered* wouldn't consider a feature story on it. NPR covered the Pelosi-picked House January 6 Committee live for every minute, and then ignored the Biden impeachment inquiry.

Instead, NPR's homepage was topped the next morning by their hot story: new details on Rupert Murdoch's British phone-hacking scandal of 2011. NPR had a Biden mention on their homepage. White House reporter Deepa Shivaram had a TikTok-like video shoot on President Biden grabbing a trendy boba tea in Las Vegas under the headline "Food stops can tell you a lot about a campaign."

There are other egregious examples of imbalance that encourage chaos and disorder in society:

On August 27, 2020, NPR's blog "Code Switch," with the slogan "Race In Your Face," posted an interview promoting a new book titled *In Defense of Looting*. Natalie Escobar promoted author Emily Osterweil's view that "looting is a powerful tool to bring about real, lasting change in society."

On The NPR Politics Podcast on July 17, 2021, NPR reporter Danielle Kurtzleben brought on Yale law professor Elizabeth Hinton to promote her book on the acceptability of violence as a protest tactic against police. Kurtzleben called this book "excellent" and explained: "You talk about these clashes as rebellions -- and quite pointedly, not as riots. It's a very meaningful choice."

On NPR's *Fresh Air* on April 15, 2023, their movie critic John Powers praised the movie *How to Blow Up a Pipeline*, hailing it as "hugely timely" when "people are frustrated by society's inability, indeed unwillingness to even slow down ecological disasters like climate change."

Notice no one is presented in these segments to object to these advocates of criminality and violence. So when people think NPR is that place for civility on the radio, they would be wrong. They can devote their resources to getting behind looting, rioting, and blowing up pipelines.

But NPR presents the Republicans as uniquely extreme. They were quite the welcome wagon in this Congress. On January 18, 2023, the NPR interview show *Fresh Air* headlined their show, "How will the hard-right Republicans in Congress wield their newfound power?" Gross began: "Now that Kevin McCarthy has assumed his new role as speaker of the House, a position he won after making concessions to the far right of his party, what can we expect?" Between host Terry Gross and her guest, *New York Times* reporter Catie Edmondson, they labeled the House Republicans as "far right" or "hard right" 32 times. Democrats apparently don't have an extreme.

Nine days later, on *Morning Edition*, host Steve Inskeep laid out the red carpet for House Democrat leader Hakeem Jeffries to announce on the debt-ceiling debate, "We are not going to pay a ransom note to extremists in the other party." Republicans were suicidal in their opposition, Inskeep suggested: "You'd say to Republicans, 'Drive the car off the cliff. We are not going to grab the wheel.'" Jeffries replied: "We're not going to let the car go off the cliff even though there are people who are willing to do it."

On *the PBS NewsHour*, NPR White House reporter Tamara Keith said last October “what's happening in the House is a reflection of a broader divide in the Republican Party, where there's maybe like 20 percent or 30 percent of Republicans who don't want to burn it all down.”

To NPR, the only “election deniers” are Republicans, and they won't remind anyone that Hakeem Jeffries and the star Democrats on the January 6 Committee argued Trump wasn't actually elected, that maybe he was installed with the help of the Russian government. Berliner pointed out how Congressman Adam Schiff was on 25 times to push the Democrat line. Fox News found the number of segments was actually 32.

NPR offered live coverage of every minute of the House January 6 Committee, in daytime and in prime time, a committee where Speaker Pelosi would not allow the opposing party to choose their own committee members. This year, hearings of the Biden impeachment inquiry or the Mayorkas impeachment received zero live coverage, despite Democrats being allowed to choose their own committee members. It suggests Democratic-run hearings are “historic” and “newsworthy” and even nonpartisan, while Republican-organized hearings should be buried as serving no public purpose whatsoever.

NPR is a hub of the leftist argument that the current election is all about the survival of democracy, and that electing Republicans is the end of democracy. This leads to a serious tilt in the media. On the NPR-distributed weekly talk show *Left Right & Center*, the alleged “Center” of the show, former NPR anchorman David Greene, proclaimed: I think the bind that a lot of journalists are in is, how can we be passionate believers in democracy and not be biased in a presidential election?” Greene said he knows “voters get to decide,” but “Can you believe in democracy without being pro-Biden?”

At least in this case, Republican voice Sarah Isgur answered Yes. I would also answer yes, that in a democracy, conservatives and Republicans deserve to be half a debate, and the so-called defenders of democracy sound like the squashers of debate and democracy. They silence opposition by claiming every one of us conspires to end democracy.

The people who are opposed to independent, fact-based journalism in this debate are not the conservatives. It is NPR itself that refuses to operate in a nonpartisan manner that allows both sides to speak and is willing to cover stories and hearings that the Democratic Party would rather avoid. They take our money, and use it to smear us without rebuttal.