

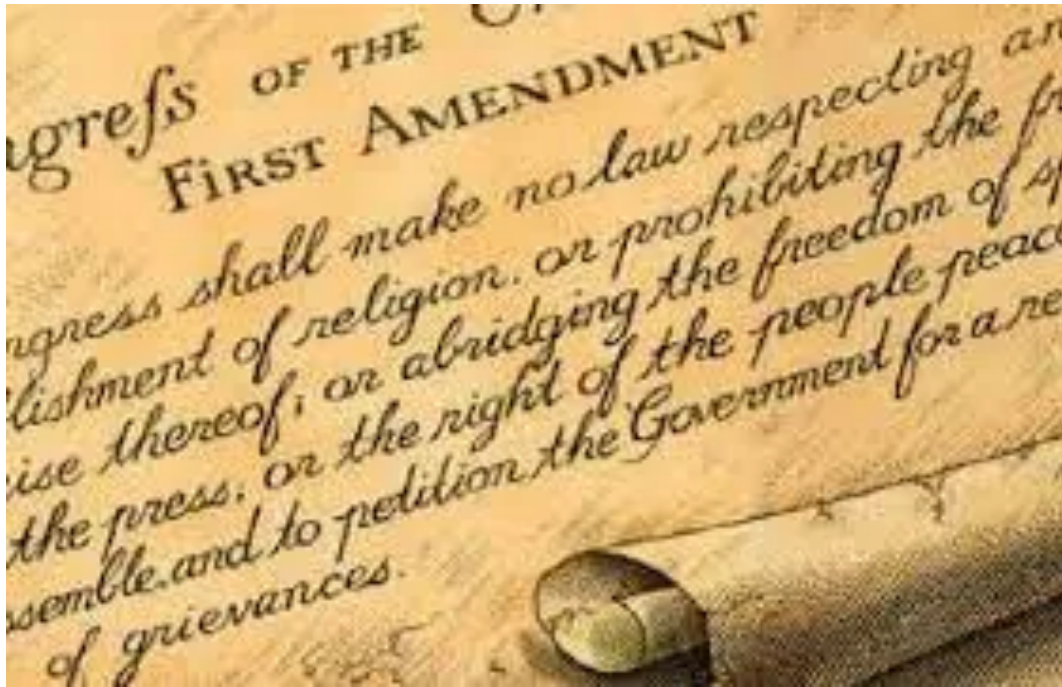


What's Up With NPR?

Should Taxpayers Pay for It?

By

Mark McGee



I'll be the first to quote the First Amendment —

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.
Congress.Gov

Congress should not make any law that would abridge (reduce) the freedoms of American citizens regarding the freedom of speech or the freedom of the press. I wholeheartedly agree with that. I may not agree with what a citizen says, but I agree they have a right to say it. If what they say is not factual, other citizens should have the right to disagree and point out discrepancies. I may not agree with what another journalist reports, but I agree they have a right to report it. If what they report is not factual, other journalists and citizens have the right to disagree and point out discrepancies.

That said — should citizens of the United States financially support a 'press' that receives taxpayer money?

NPR History

I was a young journalist when National Public Radio (NPR) was founded in 1970. It came about because of the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967. Here are some of President Lyndon Johnson's remarks prior to signing the act into law —

Today our problem is not making miracles--but managing miracles. We might well ponder a different question: What hath man wrought--and how will man use his inventions?

The law that I will sign shortly offers one answer to that question.

It announces to the world that our Nation wants more than just material wealth; our Nation wants more than a "chicken in every pot." We in America have an appetite for excellence, too.

While we work every day to produce new goods and to create new wealth, we want most of all to enrich man's spirit. That is the purpose of this act.

From that 'Act' came NPR, Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB).

The Vietnam War was a huge topic of the time and NPR demonstrated its potential through live coverage of the U.S. Senate deliberations about the war in 1971. I did take notice of that at the time and found it helpful as I drove to and from my own radio job. It was timely news.

I remember listening to *All Things Considered* and found the coverage in the early years to be interesting and thought-provoking. However, my perspective as a journalist changed as the years went by as I became aware of a left-of-center viewpoint being broadcast on NPR and PBS. I could see some of the same bias in commercial media, but one difference was that NPR and PBS received government support — taxpayers were helping fund them.

How Much Funding?

The amount of federal funding for NPR, PBS, and CPB is a bit complicated. The Act described funding through fiscal 1995, but funding continues to this day. You can read [the entire Act](#) to learn more about the original funding particulars.

The Hill published an article about a year ago that explained NPR funding issues and the cost to taxpayers now —

NPR may receive little direct federal funding, but a good deal of its budget comprises federal funds that flow to it indirectly by federal law. Here's how it works: Under the terms of the 1967 Public Broadcasting Act, funds are allocated annually to a non-governmental agency, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, overseen by a board of presidential appointees. That corporation, in turn, can choose to support original programming produced by public television or public radio — but, by law, must direct much of its \$445 million funding (scheduled to top \$500 million next fiscal year) to local public television and public radio stations

across the country, via so-called “community service grants.” [The Hill](#)

While this may not seem like a lot of money in light of the federal government’s spending on other line items (often into the billions of dollars), it’s still taxpayer money and should be of concern to citizens and journalists. Given the wording of the Public Broadcasting Act and the remarks by President Johnson, is NPR living up to the expectations of the legislative and executive branches of government? Is NPR living up to the expectations of taxpaying citizens?

Real Journalism?

As a journalist and former news manager I want journalists to be 'real' journalists. There is a specific code of conduct that professional journalists should follow. That's what this newsletter, Real Journalism, addresses each week. Are the news programs on NPR and PBS 'real journalism' or 'biased' journalism? If biased, then it's just a matter of turning to another channel. Except — taxpayers are helping support NPR and PBS whether they personally listen to or watch the programming. That concerns many taxpayers who believe that both are biased in their reporting.

The majority of American taxpayers do not trust the news media to report accurately and objectively. Why? Because the majority of news media are not reporting news accurately and objectively. I don't say that with any sense of pleasure. It makes me very sad that the profession I've poured my life into for almost 60 years has become so biased for one side or the other. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at Oxford found that — “The United States ranks last in media

trust — at 29% — among 92,000 news consumers in 46 countries.”

This concern about ‘bias’ in the news media also extends to NPR. Not only do vast numbers of Americans distrust NPR’s news coverage, so does at least one former senior editor at NPR.

The New York Times recently ran this headline about NPR —

- NPR in Turmoil After It Is Accused of Liberal Bias

An essay from an editor at the broadcaster has generated a firestorm of criticism about the network on social media, especially among conservatives.

- An opinion piece in USA Today reads - NPR editor quit after telling the truth about liberal bias in media. It's time to defund them.
- NPR also reported about what happened with their senior editor — NPR suspends veteran editor as it grapples with his public criticism.

Uri Berliner was an NPR veteran with 25 years experience there. He was a senior business desk editor and writer. Berliner wrote an article for The Free Press titled, "I've Been at NPR for 25 Years. Here's How We Lost America's Trust." He wrote that NPR 'lost its way when it started telling listeners how to think.'

If you haven't read Berliner's article, I recommend you do because it addresses some important issues about how your taxpayer dollars are being spent.

Here are a few highlights (or lowlights, depending on how you view it) from the article —

It's true NPR has always had a liberal bent, but during most of my tenure here, an open-minded, curious culture prevailed. We were nerdy, but not knee-jerk, activist, or scolding.

In recent years, however, that has changed. Today, those who listen to NPR or read its coverage online find something different: the distilled worldview of a very small segment of the U.S. population.

Persistent rumors that the Trump campaign colluded with Russia over the election became the catnip that drove reporting. At NPR, we hitched our wagon to Trump's most visible antagonist, Representative Adam Schiff.

Schiff, who was the top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, became NPR's guiding hand, its ever-present muse. By my count, NPR hosts interviewed Schiff 25 times about Trump and Russia. During many of those conversations, Schiff alluded to purported evidence of collusion. The Schiff talking points became the drumbeat of NPR news reports.

But when the Mueller report found no credible evidence of collusion, NPR's coverage was notably sparse. Russiagate quietly faded from our programming.

Russiagate was not NPR's only miscue.

In October 2020, the New York Post published the explosive report about the laptop Hunter Biden abandoned at a Delaware computer shop containing emails about his sordid business dealings. With the election only weeks away, NPR turned a blind eye. Here's how NPR's managing editor for news at the time explained the thinking: "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."

When the essential facts of the Post's reporting were confirmed and the emails verified independently about a year and a half later, we could have fessed up to our misjudgment. But, like Russia collusion, we didn't make the hard choice of transparency.

Berliner also addressed concerns about the way NPR handled (or mishandled) coverage of the origin of the worldwide 'pandemic.' He wrote that 'people at every level of NPR have comfortably coalesced around the progressive worldview. And this, I believe, is the most damaging development at NPR: the absence of viewpoint diversity.'

What was NPR's response to Berliner's article? They suspended him for five days without pay and told him they would fire him 'if he violated NPR's policy' about getting approval for outside work with other news outlets in the future. Berliner responded by resigning from his job at NPR.

Berliner wrote that he "cannot work in a newsroom where I am disparaged by a new CEO whose divisive views confirm the very problems at NPR I cite in my Free Press essay." [New York Post](#)

NPR's new CEO and the chief news executive were quick to respond —

Embattled NPR chief executive Katherine Maher shrugged off criticism of her “woke” social media comments and pushed back on internal turmoil after a veteran staffer called out the public broadcaster for its left-leaning bias.

Maher, the former head of Wikipedia parent Wikimedia who grabbed the reins as NPR's CEO in March, faced backlash over past comments she made on everything from the First Amendment to misinformation to the idea that written history is tilted toward the worldview of white men.

“All of this, frankly, is a bit of a distraction relative to the transformation our organization needs to undergo in order to best serve our mandate,” Maher told the Wall Street Journal on Wednesday. [New York Post](#)

"We're proud to stand behind the exceptional work that our desks and shows do to cover a wide range of challenging stories," NPR's chief news executive, Edith Chapin, wrote in a memo to staff. "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." [NPR](#)

You Decide

I've always believed that the job of a journalist is to find the truth and tell it accurately and objectively. It's not the job of the journalist to make decisions for readers, listeners, or viewers. The decision about what to do about any story is yours, not mine. I simply bring you the news — truthful and without bias. That's what journalists do — or at least should do.

Unfortunately, too many news media outlets slant the news to reflect the personal views of journalists and/or their managers. That's one of the reasons that a majority of people don't trust the news media today. While it's a simple thing to not read, listen to, or watch a news outlet that you think is biased, it's another thing to know that a news outlet is supported by your tax dollars. You decide.



1960s Radio News, © Mark McGee