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

April 25, 2024

Patricia de Stacy Harrison
President & Chief Executive Officer
Corporation for Public Broadcasting
401 9th Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20004

Dear Ms. Harrison:

I write today to express deep concern about National Public Radio's (NPR) departure from its stated mission "to create a more informed public" and to "distribute programming that meets the highest standards of public service in journalism."¹ NPR markets itself as a longstanding beacon of independent journalism, which is a critical component in fostering an informed and engaged public. Yet recent developments reveal a deeply entrenched culture of political bias and partisanship that stands directly at odds with the purported mission of this taxpayer-funded media organization.

Award-winning 25-year NPR employee, and former Business Editor, Uri Berliner's April 9th essay in *The Free Press*—which NPR suspended him for publishing and ultimately led to his resignation—reveals a gradual, but marked, transformation at NPR from an open-minded media outlet to one almost entirely beholden to partisan journalism. Notably, NPR's coverage has skewed significantly towards liberal perspectives, alienating moderate and conservative audiences alike. Indeed, the drastic change in the ideological makeup of NPR's audience reflects this shift. For example, in 2011, NPR's audience was 26 percent conservative, 23 percent middle-of-the-road, and 37 percent liberal. By 2023, however, these numbers had shifted dramatically, with only 11 percent conservative and 67 percent liberal.²

Particularly, Mr. Berliner highlights specific instances where NPR's coverage was not only overtly biased toward pre-determined progressive storylines, but dismissed prominent counter-narratives, such as the COVID-19 lab-leak theory, a theory which was later vindicated. As Mr. Berliner explains, this pattern is demonstrated in how NPR handled other significant political stories, such as Trump-Russia collusion and the Hunter Biden laptop stories. In both instances, NPR was reluctant to adjust its narrative even when faced with countervailing evidence. For example, after NPR obsessively covered the alleged Russian collusion for years, it significantly

¹ *Our Mission and Vision*, NPR (last visited Apr. 19, 2024), <https://www.npr.org/about-npr/178659563/our-mission-and-vision/>.

² Uri Berliner, *I've Been at NPR for 25 Years. Here's How We Lost America's Trust.*, THE FREE PRESS (Apr. 9, 2024), <https://www.thefp.com/p/npr-editor-how-npr-lost-americas-trust/>.

downplayed the conclusions of the Mueller Report, which found no credible evidence that supported any collusion claims. Similarly, NPR at first dismissed the Hunter Biden laptop story's legitimacy and called it a "waste [of] listeners' and readers' time" and "a pure distraction."³ After the mainstream media ultimately confirmed the *New York Post's* explosive reporting on the laptop, NPR admitted no wrongdoing.⁴

Above all, NPR's persistent refusal to acknowledge its myriad journalistic errors, much less correct them, reveals a deep-seated partisanship. It also eviscerates the foundational trust and integrity expected of a public broadcaster. Such pervasive political bias not only fails the audience NPR purportedly aims to serve, but it also actively misleads them by promoting narratives that lack merit. By focusing on specific stories that align with the liberal agenda and ignoring or downplaying significant, verifiable information, NPR steers public perception away from informed, balanced viewpoints, exacerbating the country's polarization.

This partisanship is all the more concerning because NPR benefits from federal funding allocated through the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB).⁵ Such funding obligates NPR to a higher standard of journalistic integrity that represents the American public's diverse perspectives. Unfortunately, NPR's current trajectory signifies a stark deviation from these principles, facilitated by an internal culture that stifles viewpoint diversity, as well as management with a history of overt partisanship.

What is more, Uri Berliner documented his concerns about NPR's lack of viewpoint diversity for years. For example, Berliner discovered that in NPR's headquarters in Washington D.C., 87 registered Democrats held editorial positions, yet not a single registered Republican did.⁶

Additionally, during a conversation between Berliner and a senior NPR news executive, this executive confided that she had been "skewered" for bringing up the notion of "diversity of thought" when she arrived at NPR.⁷ Berliner presented his findings at an all-hands staff meeting on May 3, 2021, only to be met with "profound indifference."⁸ Mr. Berliner's later attempts to address this imbalance through emails and one-on-one meetings with senior leaders yielded no substantive changes. For instance, on March 10, 2022, he challenged use of the term "Don't Say Gay" for a Florida education bill and questioned the use of "Latinx," a term unpopular among many Hispanics.⁹ Despite his efforts, the response was consistently non-committal. Berliner even contacted John Lansing, the former CEO of NPR, as a last resort on November 6, 2022. Although a meeting was initially scheduled, it was abruptly canceled and never rescheduled.

³ Joe Concha, *Hunter Biden, the protected third rail of journalism*, THE HILL (Mar. 23, 2022), <https://thehill.com/opinion/campaign/599245-hunter-biden-the-protected-third-rail-of-journalism/>.

⁴ Berliner, *supra* note 2.

⁵ *Public Radio Finances*, NPR, <https://www.npr.org/about-npr/178660742/public-radio-finances/>.

⁶ Berliner, *supra* note 2.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ Natalie Colarossi, *Just 2 Percent of Hispanics Use the Term "Latinx," 40 Percent Find It Offensive: Poll*, NEWSWEEK (Dec. 11, 2021), <https://www.newsweek.com/just-2-percent-hispanics-use-term-latinx-40-percent-find-it-offensive-poll-1656412/>.

The culture of political bias at NPR is perhaps best demonstrated by the unapologetic partisanship of the newly-appointed CEO, Katherine Maher, whose social media activity is rife with politically charged and partisan statements. For instance, in 2020, Maher referred to then-President Donald Trump as a “deranged racist sociopath” and later, in 2021, celebrated Trump’s banishment from social media, referring to him as a fascist.¹⁰ In May 2020, during the height of the George Floyd riots, Maher suggested that looting represented a form of reparative justice for historic wrongs, and remarked how “white silence” is tantamount to complicity in violence.¹¹ Maher has also posted statements of support for Democrat politicians, including Hillary Clinton, Elizabeth Warren, Kamala Harris, and Joe Biden.¹² These statements from Maher, who now leads NPR, pose a significant risk of perpetuating similar biases. Thus, given her history of partisanship, it is hard to imagine a return to unbiased journalism at NPR under her guidance. As a private citizen, Ms. Maher is entitled to be an angry, Left-wing radical, but it is not clear why the American taxpayer should fund her partisan propaganda.

Besides NPR’s viewpoint bias, NPR’s union’s collective bargaining agreement explicitly mandates that NPR management follow various “journalism affinity groups’ language and style guidance.”¹³ Specifically, the current contract for NPR’s union, SAG-AFTRA, in a section on DEI, requires NPR’s management to “keep up to date with current language and style guidance from journalism affinity groups”¹⁴ and to inform employees if language differs from the diktats of those groups. This requirement binds NPR to external standards set by activist entities and subjects NPR management to potential disciplinary actions by a DEI Accountability Committee if these guidelines are unmet. Such conditions make it clear that NPR’s content and language are significantly influenced by the priorities and perspectives of these far-left activist groups, thereby contradicting the organization’s claim to editorial independence.

By continuing to allocate funding to NPR, the CPB is complicit in perpetuating political bias and misinforming the American public at taxpayer expense. Accordingly, for oversight purposes, I request that you comprehensively reply to the questions below and requests by May 9, 2024:

1. Is it important that public broadcasters endeavor to serve the broadest possible swath of the American public?
2. Does the CPB believe it is important to disseminate news and reporting free from partisanship or political bias?
3. How does CPB justify continued funding for NPR when documented evidence shows a deep-seated culture of partisanship that contradicts the requirement for balanced and fair reporting?

¹⁰ Christopher Rufo, *Quotations from Chairman Maher*, CITY JOURNAL (Apr. 17, 2024), <https://www.city-journal.org/article/quotations-from-chairman-maher>

¹¹ Berliner, *supra* note 2.

¹² Rufo, *supra* note 11.

¹³ Berliner, *supra* note 2.

¹⁴ *Id.*

4. When did the CPB learn about the ratio between registered Republicans and registered Democrats serving as editors for NPR?
5. Please detail what steps, if any, the CPB has taken to audit NPR's adherence to the standards expected of a recipient of federal funding, especially in light of recent exposures.
 - a. If the CPB has taken no steps, why has it not?
6. If the CPB claims to lack sufficient authority to audit the organizations it funds, what steps will it take to increase its auditing capacities?
7. How will the CPB hold NPR accountable for its demonstrated political bias?
8. Please detail the specific measures the CPB will implement to incentivize NPR to return to independent journalism.
9. In light of the significant shift in NPR's audience demographic towards a more liberal base, what precise actions will CPB take to help ensure that NPR serves as much of the American public as possible, including non-liberals?
10. How much funding per year did CPB provide directly to NPR each year during the last 10 years?
 - a. What percent of NPR's total annual budget does this constitute?
11. How much funding per year did CPB provide to local stations during the last 10 years?
 - a. How much of that funding, in total, did local stations then direct to CPB?
 - b. What percent of NPR's total annual budget does the figure provided in response to (a) constitute?
12. Please provide a copy of all of Maher's emails, both sent and received, during her employment at NPR.

Given the serious allegations and the corroborating evidence presented, I urge the CPB to either implement corrective measures or reassess NPR's funding. Should these significant issues remain unaddressed, I am prepared to pursue further action regarding distributing federal funds to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, or other appropriate legislation. Given Ms. Maher's demonstrated history of partisan bias, if it hopes to continue receiving public funds, NPR should terminate her immediately as CEO. This situation demands immediate attention to restore the integrity of public broadcasting funding.

I look forward to your response and am eager to see CPB address this issue.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ted Cruz', written over a horizontal line.

Ted Cruz
Ranking Member