

**Committee on Energy and Commerce**  
**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery**  
**of**  
**Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations Ranking Member Kathy Castor**

*Hearing on “Examining Accusations of Ideological Bias at NPR, a Taxpayer Funded News Entity”*

**May 8, 2024**

Public radio plays an invaluable role in communities across America. Our local public radio stations deliver objective reporting on current events—local, national, and international—that is essential to understanding the complex world today. Much of the reporting and features often are not covered by other outlets. National Public Radio and local public radio stations also are indispensable at a time when many local newspapers have gone defunct and the consolidation of media into large, corporate conglomerates raises questions of objectivity.

Public radio reporting is particularly crucial in my home state of Florida. Florida public radio stations have a long history of providing critical information to residents and visitors during hurricanes and times of crisis. Just this morning the Tampa Bay area’s WUSF station was advising neighbors how to best prepare for the dangerous storm season ahead. Radio is a top, trusted choice for receiving local news, weather alerts, traffic updates, community opportunities and so much more. According to a Nielsen report published in June 2023, “radio continues to reach more American consumers than any other platform, linear or digital.”

Journalists who work for public radio stations are often the only reporters covering local stories important to their communities, and frequently are working on a shoestring budget. They are the eyes and ears to monitor local and state government.

NPR and its affiliate stations produce high-quality programming for a national audience that these local affiliates can choose to air. Shows like Up First, Morning Edition, All Things Considered, Fresh Air, and Tiny Desk keep millions of Americans informed about national news, provide entertainment, and keep our communities connected. National broadcasts regularly feature reports from affiliate stations across the country and provide listeners on-the-ground perspectives on events of national importance through the eyes of the community where those events unfold.

I cannot help but think of the critical Off the Base series by public radio reporter Bobbie O’Brien at WUSF back home. Off the Base told the stories of various active duty, retired military, and family members to give the civilian community a better understanding of the challenges of military life. The public radio reports reached most of central Florida, with many airing nationally during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan when the need for civilian understanding of the dynamics around military deployments and care at home was great. Bobbie O’Brien told poignant stories of military families dealing with multiple deployments to

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Afghanistan and Iraq and how families at home dealt with their life when their service member was in harm's way, and the adjustments after service member returned home.

Despite the clear benefits of public radio, Committee Republicans have brought us here to discuss an alleged bias at NPR. Republicans say that NPR is biased against conservatives, but what they point to are just examples of objective journalism. Disagreeing with reporting does not mean the information is biased. Members may want to, instead, step outside of rightwing echo chambers—which have been found to routinely peddle lies and conspiracy theories.

This Congress will unfortunately go down in history as the least productive in modern times: shutdown threats, showdowns, and wasted time and taxpayer dollars on witch hunts. A better use of time of this esteemed Committee would be spent on asking why guns are the leading cause of death among America children, or finding out whether or not America is prepared for the next pandemic as the Avian flu spreads among dairy herds, or how we build on the successes of the Inflation Reduction Act to lower health care and drug costs, or how we can solve the costly climate crisis ... the list goes on.

The valuable time of this Committee absolutely should not be spent on investigating the backgrounds of reporters. As one of our witnesses stated in his written testimony, "Threats to defund NPR, based on any perceived failure to cover certain topics or imbalance of political representation in the newsroom, strike[s] at the heart of ... journalistic freedom." Foreign adversaries like the Chinese Communist Party, Russia's Putin and Iran's violent theocrats certainly enjoy it when American politicians undermine our own objective journalists. This committee shouldn't do their dirty work for them.

Instead, we need to invest in public broadcasting, NPR, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Without federal support, many of the stations serving rural and low-income communities would be forced to shut down. Congress decided to invest in public radio more than 50 years ago in part to serve as a lifeline for underserved communities. Even a moderate increase in our investment in public broadcasting would allow local public radio stations and NPR to produce the high-quality content millions of us turn to daily. A strong America depends on the freedom of the press and objective public radio stations should be celebrated in all corners of our great country.

I yield back.