

May 14, 2004

Dear Ombudsman,

On "Weekend Edition" on Sunday, May 2, NPR ran a story by reporter Kathy Witkowsky about a purported effort to introduce intelligent design into the Darby School District in Montana. In fact, the actual policy proposed in Darby does not deal with intelligent design; its words are taken almost verbatim from the Montana state science standards, and it only deals with the critical analysis of evolutionary theory.

Although the NPR reporter glancingly mentions this fact, her entire report is framed to obscure this point. Indeed, NPR's own official summary of the story falsely says the story is about a "New science program in Montana [that] introduces public school students to the concept of intelligent design," and NPR's anchor also falsely stated that the story is about efforts to teach intelligent design.

Additionally, this new NPR report continues to spread misinformation about the recently adopted Ohio State Board of Education curriculum on evolution, repeating (without contradiction) the false charge that Ohio's curriculum "incorporates elements of intelligent design." If NPR is genuinely concerned about "balanced" reporting, why did it not make clear that the Ohio Board of Education has denied that its curriculum deals with intelligent design?

Furthermore, the new NPR report shows egregious bias in the selective way in which it deals with people's religion, and the way in which it attacks the credibility of one side of the debate but not the other side. The parent who initially proposed the objective origins policy in Montana is marginalized in the report as a "born-again Christian," and NPR's own summary on the internet claims that "religious fundamentalists" are the ones pushing the policy in Darby. But NPR is completely uninterested in presenting the religious or anti-religious motives of those on the other side of the debate. For example, NPR puts forward philosophy Professor Barbara Forrest as a neutral commentator on the controversy. In fact, she is a longtime activist and leader in a group called the "New Orleans Secular Humanist Association," which describes itself as "an affiliate of American Atheists, and [a] member of the Atheist Alliance International." Forrest is allowed to present an extensive attack on the motives, intentions and credibility of those affiliated with Discovery Institute. But no one is allowed to question Forrest's motives or credibility. And NPR censors any mention of Forrest's own anti-religious activism. This is blatant bias.

Attached is a detailed listing of the errors and distortions in this latest NPR report.

We ask that the misstatements in this report be corrected and that Discovery Institute be allowed to respond to this report in an on-air commentary.

Sincerely,

Rob Crowther