

May 29, 2004

Dear Mr. Dvorkin,

I am writing you yet again in the hope that as the Ombudsman for National Public Radio you will investigate this issue and report back to me.

NPR's reporting of the controversy over Darwinian evolution has become what can only be called a crusade. Its coverage has consistently misreported the issues of the debate, and NPR has actively suppressed critics of Darwin. In short, NPR's reporting on teaching of evolution consistently misleads, misrepresents and misses the point.

Is there an effort at message suppression going on here? We have contacted NPR reporters and producers on numerous occasions to provide them with access to our Fellows, scientists and policy experts for reporting on this issue. They almost never respond. And, when they do deal with us, they inevitably get the facts wrong and mischaracterize the Institute's position.

Here are the most recent examples:

- In February, NPR's "Science Friday" aired a "dialogue" covering the debate over evolution in Georgia. However, the dialogue was really a one-sided monologue with only Darwinists participating. The entire discussion focused not on the scientific issues under debate, but on whether or not this was an attempt to get religion into the classroom. The segment also covered what was happening in Ohio and completely misrepresented the issues, allowing guests to completely, and falsely, misstate what is happening there. Specifically, the guests claimed as a fact that the board of education has taken the model lesson plans and "turned them into intelligent design or creationist diatribes." Not true, intelligent design is not a part of the model lesson plan that was under discussion, and later adopted. That has been stated time and again by the state board of education, as well as the scientists on the advisory committee that reviewed the lesson. But, these and other such claims went unchallenged because of the completely unbalanced nature of the program.
- In April, NPR's "Day to Day" show aired a report by Janet Babin that misrepresented the pivotal issue in Ohio's continuing debate over how to teach evolution. The report, "Analysis: Recent decision by the Ohio School Board to approve a new high school course that provides an alternative to Darwin's theory of evolution" led listeners to believe that the issue in Ohio is intelligent design – though that is not the case. The model curriculum adopted by the Ohio Board of Education provides that students learn

Darwin's theory of evolution, as well as scientific evidence critical of it. It does not provide for teaching any alternative theory, such as intelligent design, and the NPR reporter was told this repeatedly by Discovery staff and Fellows as well as by other scientists and Ohio state board of education members. (see attached letter to NPR detailing the errors and inaccuracies in this report.) In addition, Ms. Babin completely misrepresented the focus of her story to me when she called asking for an interview with a Discovery Fellow. I asked her what the story would be about, and she said it would focus on the legal issues surrounding the adoption of the lesson plan and the rumor that lawsuits would be filed. When I learned she had already interviewed philosopher Lawrence Krauss, I suggested she speak to the scientists—specifically biologists—who wrote and advised on the lesson plan. She told me her story was not about science, and again reiterated that it was about the constitutionality of the lesson plan, the related legal issues and the possibility of a lawsuit. That being the case I arranged an interview for her with Dr. John West, a constitutional scholar qualified to comment on such legal issues. In her interview with Dr. West she never asked a single legal question, and it was Dr. West who had to bring up the issue and tell Ms. Babin what the Institute's position is in regards to the constitutionality of the lesson plan. She lied about the focus of her story to get an interview. To make matters worse, in the story itself she refused to report any of Dr. West's comments about the constitutionality of Ohio's lesson plan, only presenting the viewpoint of liberal groups who question the plan's legality. Is this the sort of journalistic integrity that NPR represents? (see attached documentation)

- Just days later NPR's "Weekend Edition" on Sunday, May 2, ran a story 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. Indeed, NPR's own official website 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." 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 challenge or contradiction) the false charge that Ohio's curriculum "incorporates elements of intelligent design." (see attached documentation)
- On May 9, NPR aired yet another inaccurate report on a proposed policy about the teaching of evolution in Darby, Montana. This "update" of the earlier erroneous report claims that there is an effort in Darby to include "intelligent design" in the local school district curriculum, and that "two proponents of this intelligent design curriculum" lost a recent election. Again, the proposed policy in Darby does not even mention intelligent design nor does it ask for an "intelligent design curriculum." The proposed policy merely encourages teachers to teach students how to critically analyze scientific theories, including the theory of evolution. Even NPR's earlier biased report mentioned the fact that the proposed policy in Darby does not even mention intelligent design,

although it obscured the point by placing it in a misleading context. The new report, however, presents a complete fabrication.

- Finally, last Friday May 21, NPR's "Science Friday" struck again. It aired a discussion of the history of evolution. However, the show again presented only one side of the debate. This is all the more outrageous because the producers for the show originally invited Roger Dehart, a biology teacher who is critical of Darwin's theory, to be on this program along with a pro-evolution teacher and an historian. But just a few hours before air time they e-mailed DeHart to cancel his appearance. So here NPR censored its own guest! The planned segment still aired, but only with the Darwinist guests. Making matters worse, the pro-evolution biology teacher who appeared on the show specifically attacked Discovery Institute and misrepresented its position on the issue of errors in biology textbooks. In describing the 2003 debate over textbooks up for adoption in Texas the teacher said: "And this year, we had--biology books were up for adoption in the past summer, and there were 11 books up for adoption and there was an active campaign on the part of the Discovery Institute and their several intelligent design proponents to weaken the coverage of evolution in the books, is how they put it." This is completely false. We never tried to weaken the presentation of evolution and never advocated removing evolution from textbooks or classrooms. In fact, we have always advocated for more evolution, not less – including presenting the scientific evidence that challenges Darwin's theory as well as that which supports it.

It has become obvious that a pattern of willful misrepresentation of the debate is underway at National Public Radio. The NPR ombudsman states on the organization's website: "*NPR is committed to the presentation of fair, accurate and comprehensive information and selected cultural expressions for the benefit of, and at the service of our democracy. NPR is pledged to abide scrupulously by the highest artistic, editorial, and journalistic standards and practices of broadcast programming.*" Is this merely lip service? We believe that the reporting at NPR has risen to the level of a crusade against anyone who challenges the Darwinist's materialist dogma.

Finally, we would appreciate the courtesy of a reply to this message. During the past several weeks, we have sent you three specific, documented complaints about inaccuracies in NPR reports. We have yet to hear from you once. We are beginning to wonder whether you even really exist!

Sincerely,

Rob Crowther
Discovery Institute