

# US: National Public Radio chief quits in new surrender to extreme right

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Vivian Schiller, president and CEO of National Public Radio (NPR) in the US, resigned March 9 in the wake of another “dirty tricks” incident staged by extreme right operatives.

Schiller, who had held the posts since January 2009, was forced out by the organization’s board after a hidden-camera videotape aired showing NPR fundraiser Ronald Schiller (no relation) expressing disapproval of the Republican Party and the Tea Party movement. The latter Schiller was immediately suspended by NPR, although he had already given notice he would take a position with the Aspen Institute, a job he has now announced he will not take.

The video operation was organized by James O’Keefe, a right-wing activist, who has previously targeted Planned Parenthood and ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now), among others. O’Keefe’s modus operandi is to set up liberal organizations by arranging fake meetings or telephone calls in which he or his colleagues attempt to induce the victims into agreeing with extreme or embarrassing views and behavior. He then misleadingly edits the tapes, and via the right-wing media, engineers a scandal.

In the present case, two of O’Keefe’s confederates secretly recorded a conversation with Ronald Schiller and another NPR executive, pretending to be members of the fictitious Muslim Education Action Center Trust and offering a \$5 million donation to NPR. (The fundraisers turned down the money.)

In the course of the conversation, Schiller first commented that he felt that hearing “Muslim voices in our schools, on the air” in the US was as vital today as making sure “female voices” were heard once had been.

Turning to the American political scene, Schiller

continued: “The current Republican Party, particularly the Tea Party, is fanatically involved in people’s personal lives and very fundamental Christian. I wouldn’t even call it Christian; it’s this weird evangelical kind of movement.

“The current Republican party is not really the Republican party, it’s been hijacked by this group; that is, not just Islamophobic, but really xenophobic. I mean, basically, they are, they believe in sort of white, middle American, gun-toting—I mean, it’s scary. They’re seriously racist, racist people.

“Now, I’ll talk personally—as opposed to wearing my NPR hat. It feels to me that there is a real anti-intellectual move on the part of a significant part of the Republican Party. In my personal opinion, liberals today might be more educated, fair and balanced than conservatives.”

The NPR fundraiser went on to observe that, due to the constant attacks from the Republican right in Washington, “we would be better off in the long run without Federal funding.”

The fake Muslims attempted to coax anti-Semitic comments from Schiller, but he professed to find no “Zionist or pro-Israel” influence at NPR, suggesting that the organization was “really looking for a fair point of view” on the Middle East.

These innocuous comments have now caused a sordid media storm.

The expression of views critical of the Republican Party and the Tea Party movement was enough to result in the departure of two executives at NPR.

First, Ronald Schiller abjectly apologized in a statement released Tuesday: “While the meeting I participated in turned out to be a ruse, I made statements during the course of the meeting that are counter to NPR’s values and also not reflective of my

own beliefs. I offer my sincere apology to those I offended.” He did not explain how he had uttered views “not reflective” of his own ... views.

Vivian Schiller, who still had her job at the time, chimed in, denouncing the fundraiser’s statements as “an affront to NPR as a news organization; those comments were really contrary to what we stand for, everything we do.” She was so intimidated by the potential criticism from the right, the *New York Times* noted, that she declined “to single out specific comments because she did not want to repeat them.”

She was then made to offer her resignation the following day by NPR’s board of directors. Board chairman Dave Edwards issued a hypocritical statement to NPR staff and stations in which he referred to the “deep regret” he had in informing them that the board had accepted Vivian Schiller’s resignation, “effective immediately.”

Edwards asserted that “the CEO of any organization is accountable for all of the operations of that organization,” and that although Schiller wasn’t personally responsible for the disparaging comments about the Tea Party and Republican conservatives, the board “determined that it was the wise move for us to accept her resignation and move on.”

The extreme right has had it in, in any case, for Vivian Schiller because she dared to fire longtime Fox News commentator Juan Williams from his job at NPR in October 2010 for openly anti-Muslim comments.

What precisely does NPR “stand for” at present? Centrally, as the present episode reveals, groveling to the extreme right wing of the Republican Party.

Particularly since the events of September 2001, the public radio network has shifted farther and farther to the right, embracing the criminal wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and accepting the “global war on terror” as good coin. It has earned the disgust of many erstwhile listeners.

Republicans in Congress, who are attempting to defund NPR (along with other leading cultural organizations that receive federal funding), jumped on Ronald Schiller’s comments and asserted that the NPR executives on the video demonstrated “condescension and arrogance.”

Rep. Doug Lamborn, Republican from Colorado, declared that it was now time to remove all funding for public broadcasting “based on the simple fact that we

can no longer afford to spend taxpayer dollars on non-essential government programs.” House Majority Leader Eric Cantor, a Virginia Republican, explained “Our concern is not about any one person at NPR, rather it’s about millions of taxpayers.” This is from the people who handed over trillions of the “taxpayers’ money” with no strings attached to rescue the biggest financial institutions in the country.

According to the Public Media Association, some \$89 million in federal money goes to public radio stations each year, a few hours—or less—of spending on the Afghanistan war.

The Schiller affair further demonstrates that, for all intents and purposes, criticism of the semi-fascist right is outlawed in the US mass media. The resignation of the two Schillers is part of the lurch to the right by the political and media establishment.

Furthermore, it reveals the almost bottomless cowardice of the liberal officialdom that runs NPR, the Public Broadcasting Service, the National Endowment for the Arts and such organizations. These are people who carry out their daily activities with one principal goal in mind: *not offending* the Murdoch-owned news outlets and the right-wing media in general. As a consequence, virtually everything they produce is mealy-mouthed, half-hearted and insincere.



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