



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on May 1, 2011

## NPR Brings Rock Stars to Washington

While grasping for bricks to fill the breaches, former NPR senior vice president for development, Ron Schiller, suggested that not only did the organization not need taxpayer dollars, but in fact it would be “better off in the long run” if the subsidy spigot was closed permanently.



The notion that this insider’s comments might actually stymie the flow of federal funds compelled those dependent on the legislative largesse to catapult Schiller over the walls of the NPR citadel.

The concept that a broadcast service deserves to be propped up, or that such an expenditure of funds from the national treasury is authorized by the Constitution, is laughable. Although admittedly not quite as laughable as an overly chatty NPR executive greedily grabbing for a \$5 million check cut by a couple of ersatz members of the Muslim Brotherhood.

National Public Radio features a few programs that are arguably “popular.” Namely, *Morning Edition*, *All Things Considered*, and *Car Talk*. According to reports there is a new show, however, that is attracting a growing audience: *All Songs Considered*. As the [story](#) goes:

For the uninitiated, All Songs Considered is NPR’s new music portal, featuring music from up and coming artists like Josh Ritter, the world music emphasis one would expect from an NPR program, and long established artists like Bob Dylan, Elton John, Brian Wilson and R.E.M. All Songs Considered gives exhaustive coverage of music centric events such as the SXSW conference and the Bonnaroo festival, while featuring a 24/7 online music station and an archive of concerts.

So, while *All Songs Considered* may be pulling listeners from a younger, hipper demographic than the network’s other offerings, the real issue for those desirous to keep the funding flowing is how can they convert this cache into cash.

An idea has emerged and has already been implemented. For the White House Correspondents Dinner on Saturday, media types scrambled to score tables down front and fill the seats with notable and noticeable celebrities to rub elbows with the unrecognizable reporters and pundits already on the payroll.

NPR jumped into the fray in a big way. These prize tables go for \$2,500 a seat and the taxpayer-subsidized radio group reserved a seat for a few *All Songs Considered* favorites: Annie Clark (who performs under the name St. Vincent); the iconic vocalist for R.E.M., Michael Stipe; and the frontman of the influential band Talking Heads, David Byrne.



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This kind of star power sitting around the NPR table could make one wonder how an organization under so much scrutiny and whose entire operation is on the verge of being defunded can afford to blow so much money on one event.

And furthermore, is the promotion of up and coming music acts (and their flogging by established artists) the type of thing that citizens of this Republic should be paying to support? The government has manipulated the supply of money and the interest rates to a degree that rotating cycles of economic booms and busts make economic slaves of Americans and yet somehow it yet opens the treasury for the marketing of music.

Is there a way, short of the influence of the sort of hubris that comes from unassailable financial support, that such a scheme makes sense and seems like an appropriate expenditure? As a *U.S. News & World Report* [story](#) posed the question:

Over the past few months we've seen little from NPR other than unforced errors and embarrassments, such as the Juan Williams firing and resignation of top staff due to admissions of anti-conservative bias. Those alone have made the selling of future NPR funding to a Republican Congress intent on cutting unnecessary spending a hard sell. But as NPR lobbyists make their case on Capitol Hill in the coming weeks and months, perhaps they'll have a harder time explaining how promoting music artists is in the public interest (All Songs Considered-related sales spikes have been compared to those of Starbucks, who does not take government subsidies) and why the company has the largess, in a time of austerity to fete those artists it promotes.

In defense of its curious course of dealing, NPR claims that it is not a publicly funded venture and thus taxpayers have no beef. In response to inquiries into its purchase of prime White House Correspondents Dinner table placements, NPR provided the following [explanation](#):

Our guests are paying their own way. And our tables were made possible by a generous donor to NPR who felt it was important for NPR to have a visible presence at this major event.

NPR is also not "tax-payer funded," despite the rhetoric and misinformation perpetuated by some.

First, *NPR receives no direct appropriation from the federal government*. Less than 2 percent of our annual operating budget (approximately \$2 million in a budget of \$160 million) comes from competitive grants sought from federally-funded organizations, such as the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the National Endowment for the Arts. Those grant funds aren't appropriated to NPR by Congress, nor are they used to support NPR's general operations. NPR must apply and compete for the grants, and use the funds only for the specific project covered by each grant.

Federal funding from the CPB goes directly to local stations to serve *local* communities, *NOT* to NPR. Stations on average receive approximately 10 percent of their budgets from grants from the CPB. [Emphasis in original.]

That's a bit of fuzzy math. In an [article](#) published by *The New American*, the precise funding scheme is cast in a different light:

Though NPR has stiffly maintained that only five to six percent of its funds come from the federal government, that is a deceptive figure. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which provides 10 percent of NPR funding, is almost wholly paid for by the federal government. Public universities — which receive large chunks of their budget from the federal trough — "subscribe" to NPR, providing 14 percent of its funding. State and local government public radio provide



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much additional help.

In the eyes of committed constitutionalists, the exact amount of federal funds spent on supporting radio and television networks is irrelevant. The Constitution does not authorize Congress to spend a single penny on any such programming and thus they should be immediately cut off and forced to sink or swim in the open waters of the free market.



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