

“HINKY:” NPR PERMITTED BILLY BARR TO LIE MORE THAN ONCE

The other day, NPR’s public editor did a piece exploring how the NPR allowed itself to spread Billy Barr’s lies about vote by mail uncontested. It reviews the exchange, noting where Steve Inskeep did not ask obvious follow-ups.

Inskeep had 20 minutes to do the Barr interview, which was conducted at the Justice Department. In the portion of the interview on election security, Inskeep sounds, to my ear, off his game. His follow-up questions don’t reflect the facts that NPR had already reported, and are therefore ineffective at holding Barr accountable for his statements.

The transcript is [available here](#). When Barr conflates the broad issue of foreign interference with the specific claim of ballot tampering, Inskeep does not call him out.

[snip]

When Barr compares the ballots to paper money, to suggest they can be easily duplicated, Inskeep asks: “Do they not also go through procedures like that with mail-in ballots?” Barr answers: “You’ve seen them. They’re pretty primitive.”

A journalist specializing in election security would have pressed Barr more firmly, by asking again whether intelligence of ballot tampering exists, and getting him to explain exactly how he imagines outsiders would attempt to circumvent the numerous safeguards in

place, including barcodes, enumerated ballots, duplicating the specific paper stock and printing methods and signature verifications. *Suggested question: How would a ballot counterfeiting scheme work at scale, to get around the well-established and tested controls, including the individual codes on each ballot and the signature comparisons?*

It talks about the decision to include Barr's lies (about vote-by-mail) rather than take more time and edit them out.

Inskeep worked with a show editor and producer to prepare the package. Together, they chose to air the bulk of Barr's claims rather than truncate the statements to air only those not widely disputed as false. He could have decided to delay the air date of that particular segment in order to do more reporting and bring additional voices into the conversation, an internal or external expert to say that Barr is making a false statement.

Running an extensive portion of the exchange could only be a good option if Inskeep was willing to add more context, as you are about to see below.

And it described how NPR could have made it far clearer that Billy Barr lied to NPR.

There are many techniques to prepare listeners to hear false information. You can straight-up tell the audience the upcoming statements are inaccurate – while also explaining that part of our job is to sometimes allow public officials to make such statements so that the listener can hear it for herself. Stewart said he was grateful Inskeep got Barr on tape falsely claiming mail-in ballots will jeopardize

the election. "This looks like pure, unadulterated Barr," he said. "And I'm really glad the country got to hear that."

I wish Inskip would have spent a little air time making clear in the set-up that state election officials use several well-tested methods to ensure the integrity and security of mail-in ballots, and that transparency of those checks and balances is baked into the system.

Given that Barr primarily does interview with old friends from the Poppy Administration or propaganda outlet, I'm grateful that NPR reviewed this interview and laid out how Barr has successfully, relentlessly lied to the American people.

But they should have gone one step further, and noted all the other times Barr lied to Inskip. And even before he lied about vote-by-mail, he falsely claimed that his interventions in both the Mike Flynn and Roger Stone case was proper. In the Stone case, for example, he explained his intervention in the sentencing recommendation because there was a dispute.

I was the decision maker in that case because there was a dispute. And usually what happens is, disputes, especially in high profile cases, come up to the attorney general.

To the extent there was a dispute, it was only because he had removed the Senate confirmed US Attorney and put in someone he told to dispute the sentencing guidelines. NPR also let Barr claim that his recommendation is what Amy Berman Jackson adopted, which is not at all true (she adopted most of the prosecutors' guidelines sentence but gave Stone a lenient sentence on her own).

Worse still, NPR let Barr claim as fact that

there was a lot hinky with Flynn's case.

There was a lot of hinky stuff in the Flynn case. Everyone knew that. Everyone was wondering why was this case ever brought?

That's not only false, but both DOJ Inspector General and Judge Emmet Sullivan had reviewed it and found nothing "hinky." Effectively, Barr put in a flunkie to override the judgement of those people who are supposed to assess whether something is hinky.

Importantly, only people who haven't consulted the public record believe that – which is why it is so dangerous for NPR to let the claim go unchallenged. So here, as with the vote-by-mail, Inskeep simply gave Barr the opportunity to provide false excuses for unprecedented abuse of power.

And the public editor should note that.