

Corporate Media Finances GOP: News Corp. Million Dollar Donation Sparks Ethics Concerns

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Journalism ethics experts and news veterans are criticizing News Corp. for its \$1 million [contribution](#) to the Republican Governors Association, saying it is the height of conflict of interest.

Some also said the company's news outlets at *Fox News*, Dow Jones and the *New York Post* will likely not be able to offer the amount of disclosure needed to clearly inform the public on related stories.

"In an ideal world, they would be transparent about that," said *NPR* Ombudsman Alicia Shepard. "But I think it would be really cumbersome. I don't think they should be giving money to this group in the first place."

Shepard said for the parent company to give such a sizeable contribution undermines news ethics: "I can't imagine *NPR* or *The New York Times* giving money to a particular political group. Your job is to be neutral and to not take positions and this is supporting one political party over another."

Kelly McBride, an ethics instructor at The Poynter Institute, agreed: "It reinforces the notion that the media organization itself has a political bias. For the consumer who wants non-partisan news, they are less-likely to seek out that source."

Asked about the need for greater News Corp. disclosure because of this contribution, McBride said: "to be perfectly ethical, they should not make the donation - you are compromising the appearance of fairness. Transparency doesn't erase the act itself."

Calls for comment to the *New York Post* and *Fox News* today have not yet been returned. Dow Jones & Company, which oversees Dow Jones Newswires, *The Wall Street Journal* and *Barron's*, offered a one-line statement when asked about the potential conflict: "The donation has no impact on our journalists or their reporting."

Still, the donation raised concerns among those who critique news fairness and teach young journalists.

"They try to say they aren't that partisan, but things like this only confirm that suspicion in the public's mind," said Fred Brown, vice chair of the Society of Professional Journalists ethics committee. "If you are going to call yourself fair and balanced, you can't really do this."

Brown, who lives in Colorado, noted that the RGA has produced numerous “attack ads” in his state this year: “We have seen a lot of them.”

Tim McGuire, an ethics and business instructor at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University, said such donations hurt the company’s image.

“By the ethical standards we operated by for the past 40 or 50 years, it is outrageous,” said McGuire, a former editor of the *Star Tribune* in Minneapolis. “One of the issues this raises is what do you want the press to be in the future?”

Chuck Baldwin, faculty member at the Al Neuharth Media Center at the University of South Dakota, agreed: “We draw the line at the appearance of impropriety. When you do that, you give people cause to question you. It matters what the public thinks. What the average person on the street thinks. That is what is wrong with this.”

But most of those who spoke with me said it is not practical to offer disclosure on each related news cast or in stories related to the Republican Party because there are so many.

“I don’t think it is possible to do it in an appropriate fashion,” Baldwin stated. “Transparency is a marvelous thing. But it would be kind of silly to say it at the top of each story.”

McGuire added: “They should be disclosing. But Fox has changed all of the rules: They disclose (their Republican ties) every time they open their mouth.”

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