Why Does Michigan Radio Refuse to Talk to Me?

This has been going on for months, and they just can’t get their story straight.

Last fall the Flint chapter of our organization, which provides facts on Israel-Palestine, contacted Michigan Radio about becoming a sponsor of the station. (This consists of giving the station $1,000, and in return they air a number of spots announcing your organization and additional information.)

This was moving forward, until suddenly the Michigan Radio representative emailed that they would not allow us to be a sponsor. (They did eventually allow a different organization to sponsor an announcement for us, but this group was not allowed to include our organization’s name in their spot).

When we asked why Michigan Radio would not allow our organization to be an “underwriter” (their term for sponsors), their representative sent an email claiming that this would violate their guidelines, quoting the following paragraph:

“Michigan Radio reserves the right to refuse any request for underwriting that would violate an FCC rule or policy, violate station policies or adversely affect the reputation or financial condition of the station. No announcements will be aired on behalf of political organizations, political candidates or their committees, or that express a view on issues of public importance or interest or religious belief.”

The fact is, however, that we are a 501c3 educational organization. We do not lobby, endorse candidates, or take stands on bills before Congress. Our mission is to educate the American public on issues of significance that are unreported, underreported, or misreported in the American media.

Michigan Radio’s rationale that we are “too political” is quite a stretch given that among the station’s underwriters are numerous sponsors that advocate for various causes.

One of their sponsors, for example, is the Jewish Federation of Detroit, whose website proclaims that it “advocates for Israel.”
Nevertheless, this same claim, that If Americans knew was “too political” to be a sponsor was also given to their own news department when an editor inquired about it.

I tried to contact Michigan Radio to clarify the situation. However, no one was ever “available,” a situation that continues today. I left numerous voice mails and sent emails to a wide variety of individuals, all to no avail. I graduated from the University of Michigan many years ago, as did my mother before me. I had remembered a civility that I’m sad to find appears to have disappeared.

Finally, when I realized that Michigan Radio management had evidently decreed that no one was to talk to me, our organization finally issued a public announcement describing what was going on.

**The public is given a different story**

Soon, Michigan Radio, which was then in full fundraising mode (though it refuses to take *our* money), began to receive numerous emails and phone calls from individuals telling the station that they would not donate because of Michigan’ Radio’s censorship of If Americans Knew.

Finally, the station was forced to give a response. Director of Development Larry Jonas (most likely at the direction of Michigan Radio head Steve Schram) finally began to send out an official reply to emails on this matter. (Oddly, he never sent this to us. In fact, Jonas has yet to respond to my email and phone messages; a mode of behavior shared by the station’s entire development staff).

Perhaps realizing that Michigan Radio’s original objection was insufficiently defensible, Jonas instead claimed a different rationale, writing to the public:

“This issue has been miscast by Ms. Weir… Michigan Radio was initially contacted by a gentleman in the Flint area who indicated that he was interested in establishing an underwriting schedule of announcements that would include information about Ms. Weir’s talk. The gentleman initially asked that the sponsorship be attributed to an organization to which he appeared to have no apparent affiliation. Michigan Radio is required by FCC rules to identify the sponsoring entity in an underwriting announcement and not a third party. For that and other reasons, we were concerned that accepting the sponsorship may put us afoul of FCC regulations.”

However, the reality is that although there was originally confusion over this, the gentleman did, indeed, represent our organization, and had a letter from us stating that fact. If Michigan Radio had questions about this, all they needed to do was return my calls.

Members of the public remained outraged at Michigan Radio’s behavior and the phone calls and email complaints continued.

Finally, Director Schram telephoned me. Also on the phone was Rick Fitzgerald, from the University of Michigan Office of Public Affairs. Schram told me that they were now willing “to consider” a sponsorship from us. I told him the likely content of such a spot – basically, what we had requested before – and he agreed “to consider it.”

I said that I would submit this before the end of the day, and he replied that he would respond quickly. I asked that this be by the end of the week, and he agreed that he would respond “soon.”

It is now almost five months later and I have yet to receive a response. I have phoned Mr. Schram and emailed him repeatedly. I have phoned numerous others at the station. I phoned Mr. Fitzgerald, who explained that Mr. Schram had only said he would reply “soon,” he didn’t say when.

**It occurs to me that Mr. Schram again needs to hear from others. If you oppose censorship, believe that publicly sponsored radio should not discriminate, and affirm the importance of a “free marketplace of ideas” – or if you simply dislike arrogant rudeness by powerful organizations – please contact Michigan Radio:**

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