

October 6, 2011

Arthur Brisbane, Public Editor  
The New York Times  
620 Eighth Avenue  
New York, NY 10018

Dear NY Times Public Editor Arthur S. Brisbane:

We are writing to call to your attention a growing problem in American journalism and to ask your support to help stop it.

There is a disturbing trend of special interests surreptitiously funding “experts” to push industry talking points in the nation’s major media outlets. When these expert commentaries appear in media outlets, their special interest ties go unreported.

Let us give you an example of how this happens. Robert Bryce is a senior fellow at the *Manhattan Institute*, which has received millions of dollars in funding from the fossil fuel tied organizations including ExxonMobil and Koch Industries. Masquerading as an unbiased expert, Mr. Bryce writes opinion pieces and provides commentaries that often promote fossil fuels and dismiss renewable energy. His commentary has been featured recently in the *New York Times*, *CNN* and *NPR*.

Unfortunately, when media outlets quote or publish op-eds from “bought and biased” pundits, the conflict of interest goes unmentioned. Instead, Mr. Bryce and others are simply identified as a “senior fellow” or an “energy expert.” As a result, these pundits mislead media outlets and leave readers in the dark about their true ties. Surely, these outlets can’t expect their readers to know about these connections.

We are asking the *New York Times* to lead the industry and set the nation’s standard by disclosing financial conflicts of interest that their op-ed contributors may have at the time their piece is published. By simply asking a few standard disclosure questions, the *New York Times* can avoid any confusion and ensure better transparency.

We believe that pundits like Mr. Bryce have the right to share their views, but we believe media outlets have the responsibility to inform their readers of opinion writers’ true ties and conflicts of interest.

(over)

We fully support this effort and believe this is necessary to ensure that readers are informed when reading the opinion pages.

As our nation's paper of record, we hope the *New York Times* will set the standard by revealing the true ties of these "experts" and ensuring that their readers get the whole story.

Sincerely,

Abby Henkel, Society of Professional Journalists  
Abby Kleckler, Society of Professional Journalists  
Alessi Johnson, Radio Television Digital News Association  
Andrea Whatcott Content Editor, Deseret News  
Andrew Shenkel, former reporter, KCWY  
Ashley Henny, North Florida Herald  
Barbara Reed, Rutgers University  
Brenda Keegan, Retired  
Brian Donegan, Assistant Editor, Triple Threat TV  
Caleb Tellez, Multimedia Journalist  
Cara Shenkel, former reporter, Loveland Reporter Herald  
Christine Cakulo, Photojournalist  
David Cohn, Founder Spot.us, professor at UC Berkeley  
Donna Guidry, L'acadien  
Ed Perry, Owner, WATD FM  
Evan Peters, Editor  
Gene D'Garaa, Reporter  
Gideon Grudo, University Press  
Jane Singer, University of Iowa  
January Jones, News Director, WFHB  
Jeff Kiel, Former publisher, San Jose Mercury-News  
Jennifer Sullivan, Journalist  
Jordan Carney, Reporter  
Jordan Gribble, News editor, The Contraband  
Kathryn Lynch-Morin, Reporter, the Saginaw News  
Kevin Washington, St. Petersburg Times  
Kevin Ashley, Traffic Manager, Univision  
Kirby Franze, Photojournalist  
Krystal Nimigian, Society of Professional Journalists  
Lauren Evans, Radio Television Digital News Association  
Maggie Calmes, The Lens NOLA  
Margaret Randazzo, Former publisher, Modesto Bee

Michele Ashley, Former producer, NBC 11  
Paul Bush, Professor, Franklin Pierce University  
Paul Sherno, Agence France Presse  
Rosalee Getterman, Society of Professional Journalists  
Sammy Mack, Miami Herald/HealthyState Collaborative  
Sandy Frost, Investigative Journalist  
Steve Buttry, Director of Community Engagement & Social Media, Journal Register Co.  
Steve Outing, University of Colorado Boulder, Digital News Test Kitchen  
T'ERICA French, Radio Television Digital News Association  
Tabitha Hurley, Society of Professional Journalists  
Tanara Bowie, St. Petersburg Times  
Trent Brown, Photographer  
Vanecia Carswell, University of Florida  
Vinti Singh, Connecticut Post  
Vinti Singh, Reporter, Connecticut Post  
Wayne Stafford, Rocky Mountain Student Media Corporation  
Yolanda Vazquez, Maryland Public TV