NYT's Eric Lipton Is a Science Birther

By Alex Berezow, PhD — October 26, 2017

The New York Times has some of the worst science coverage [1] in the nation, its Tuesday section notwithstanding. The Times shamelessly promotes alternative medicine and organic food while scaremongering over "chemikillz" and trashing scientists who work in biotechnology.

There's a reason for that. Not only is the paper trying to appeal to its elite, Upper West Side clientele, but the New York Times's publisher, Arthur Sulzberger Jr., is married to Gabrielle Greene [2], who is on the board of Whole Foods. In May 2017, she was made chairwoman of the board [3]. It shouldn't be a surprise, therefore, that the Times uses its influence to spread organic food industry propaganda about the supposed dangers of pesticides and GMOs. It helps keep the boss rich.

In any rational universe, that would be considered a gigantic conflict of interest. But the NYT exists in one of its own creation. That's why it is unable to see its own conflicts of interest while it fabricates others when they don't actually exist. And the paper hires smear merchants to do its dirty work.

Experience

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The Times allows Eric Lipton -- who has worked his entire professional life as a journalist and has no knowledge of either business or science -- to write about the biotech and chemical industries. His academic background is in history and philosophy, which means that the New York Times is happy to have its journalists cover subjects they don't understand, as long as they have a political agenda of which the newspaper approves.

The results have been entirely predictable. When given the opportunity to advance the NYT's long-standing anti-GMO agenda, Lipton intentionally distorted a story about biotech scientist Kevin Folta. Dr. Folta responded by suing both Lipton and the New York Times for defamation [4].

That doesn't appear to have slowed Lipton down. His latest dreck [5] targets Nancy Beck, who was tapped by President Trump to be the Deputy Assistant Administrator of the Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention at the U.S. EPA.

A deputy assistant in the little-known Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention? This is a rather obscure bureaucratic post in a gigantic EPA bureaucracy [6]. It defies belief to assume that one person is capable of poisoning the planet. Apparently any scientist is worth smearing, as long as it advances the New York Times's agenda to sell more organic food for its boss. But it gets even more bizarre.

According to her LinkedIn profile [7], Dr. Beck has expertise in microbiology, toxicology, and a PhD in environmental health. Additionally, she has worked in the Washington State Department of Health and has extensive policy experience in DC. In other words, Dr. Beck has forgotten more about science and health policy than Lipton ever knew, so she's precisely the sort of person who should be working at a high level in the EPA.

But not according to philosophy major Eric Lipton. In his opinion piece, which masquerades as objective reporting, Dr. Beck is contaminated because she spent five years at the American Chemistry Council, a trade association founded in 1872 that lobbies on behalf of chemical companies. To hammer the point home, Lipton uses the term "chemical industry" 17 times in the article. As is typical, the article doesn't discuss science to any appreciable extent; instead, it just assumes that any chemical with a scary-sounding name is evil, and therefore so is anybody who favors using it.

This is obscene. It's the journalistic equivalent of "guilty until proven innocent." It would be like writing an article about how a Middle Eastern scientist shouldn't work for the U.S. government because that's where terrorists come from. It's an absolutely outrageous smear, yet that's what passes for journalism at the New York Times.

The notion that working for industry makes a person dishonest is one of the biggest lies circulating in America today. (Angela Logomasini has more [8] on this.) About 2/3 of all research and development funding in America comes from industry [9]. If industry vanished, America's leading role in science would vanish with it. That doesn't mean that industry should be allowed to do whatever it wants without regulatory oversight; but it does mean that an objective journalist should approach industry scientists with an open mind. If a philosophy major can't even do that, then what exactly are they good for?
Given Lipton's track record, there is little reason to assume he'll ever do his job properly. Instead, like an Obama birther, he'll continue spouting conspiracy theories about scientists despite the evidence, ensuring that his boss stays wealthy.