

Drone TV Propaganda Financed by Lockheed Martin

By [FAIR](#)

Global Research, February 04, 2013

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Region: [USA](#)

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PBS ombud Michael Getler ([1/31/13](#)) responded to FAIR activists who wrote to him about the recent Nova special on drones ([1/23/13](#)) that was underwritten by Lockheed Martin, a major military contractor and drone manufacturer.

FAIR (Action Alert, [1/28/13](#)) pointed out that this connection violates PBS's guidelines concerning sponsorship and conflicts of interest.

Getler agreed, explaining that "the Lockheed funding does present a perception and commercial test problem for PBS. My feeling is that this particular program would have been much better off without Lockheed support."

There was a further lack of disclosure. Getler noted that he

saw no mention of Lockheed when I watched the program online or when I looked at the Nova website. And there was never any mention of Lockheed in the body of the program, even though that huge defense company is heavily involved in drone development, which I didn't know and I'm sure vast numbers of online viewers-unless they are in the Air Force or CIA-also probably did not know.

That lack of disclosure left Getler feeling "deceived by Nova"-though he noted that "Lockheed Martin was clearly identified on screen" as a funder in the broadcast version of the program.

Getler concluded by writing, "I think Nova handled this situation poorly and did not comply with the spirit, at least, of the guidelines when it came to being upfront with viewers."

Nova thought otherwise. Its statement began:

WGBH fully adheres to PBS funding guidelines and takes our public trust responsibility very seriously. With regard to Nova "Rise of the Drones," Lockheed Martin's sponsorship of Nova is not a violation of the PBS underwriting guidelines.

Nova's defense is that Lockheed "had no editorial involvement in the program." But as the PBS guidelines make abundantly clear, this is not a defense at all. The fact that a funder's interests exist is a problem-not just whether the funder interfered in the editorial content of the program:

When there exists a clear and direct connection between the interests or products or services of a proposed funder and the subject matter of the program, the proposed funding will be deemed unacceptable regardless of the funder's actual compliance with the editorial control provisions of this policy.

Since it is indisputable that Lockheed manufactures drones, the guidelines as written say this is "unacceptable." Since Nova does not believe the underwriting guidelines mean what they say mean, the real issue here is whether PBS itself believes in its rules. As FAIR has pointed out (Press Release, [4/3/02](#)), PBS has historically found certain funding arrangements problematic-when the funder is a labor union, or a producer of a film about domestic violence is the leader of a battered women's support group. Major corporate funders, though, get a pass.

Nova also argues that including a guest who has a business relationship to the funder "has no relevance to the story." But basic journalistic ethics-for any medium, not just public television-tell you that such disclosures are important.

Nova seemed to prefer that viewers not know Lockheed's connection to the subject of the program at all. The program's response to the FAIR alert did mention that they "will include Lockheed Martin in the list of funders on the Nova website for full transparency."

FAIR thanks the hundreds of activists who wrote to PBS, and to ombud Michael Getler for writing a thoughtful response.

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