Sinclair's National Desk, which frequently airs conservative misinformation, is expanding to a nighttime broadcast

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Since Sinclair Broadcast Group's *The National Desk* launched in mid-January, its anchor, reporters, and guests have regularly misinformed their viewers about important topics such as the COVID-19 pandemic, immigration, the economy, education, and U.S. democracy. With the recent announcement of a nighttime expansion of the program beginning in late September, Sinclair's local TV viewers should know what to expect.

When *The National Desk* first launched, Sinclair said that it "will be available on 68 Sinclair stations, including all Sinclair's MY and CW Network channels" and some of its Fox affiliates. The mid-July Sinclair press release announcing the nighttime expansion says the new program, anchored by Meagan O'Halloran and Eugene Ramirez, will have a slightly smaller audience of "64 stations in 60 markets" when it launches on September 27. Sinclair had also promised that *The National Desk* would "provide audiences with commentary-free news coverage from both a local and national perspective," but frequent appearances by right-wing commentators have proved that to be false.

Since its premiere, *The National Desk* has repeatedly spread conservative misinformation. In several instances in March and April, anchor Jan Jeffcoat and guests of her program pushed Republican talking points claiming that government efforts to pass improved background check laws and extreme risk protection order laws were a cover for, as Jeffcoat suggested, taking "guns and rights away" from everyone. In mid-April, two news reports from Sinclair national correspondents that aired on the show hid Republican abuses of Supreme Court nominations while reporting on Democratic actions to address those abuses. Later that month, a guest on the program from the conservative Heritage Foundation used antisemitic language to attack progressive prosecutors, which anchor Jeffcoat responded to by thanking him for his appearance.

And there are many, many more examples of *The National Desk* spreading conservative misinformation, which we can also expect to see on the nighttime edition of the program.

COVID-19

- During the premiere episode of *The National Desk* on January 18, Jeffcoat and her guest, Dr. Jeffrey Singer of the Cato Institute, <u>falsely suggested</u> that lockdowns are ineffective in slowing the spread of COVID-19.
- Later in January, Jeffcoat <u>twice repeated</u> this false assertion that lockdowns didn't work, but this time her guests rebutted her misinformation.
- In mid-June, Jeffcoat <u>allowed</u> Sen. Ron Johnson (R-WI) to push debunked COVID-19 treatments hydroxychloroquine and ivermectin as "potentially life-saving drugs."

- During two appearances in July, Singer <u>pushed skepticism</u> of vaccinating children against COVID-19 and <u>criticized</u> mask mandates as the delta variant surged throughout the country. He claimed mask mandates would discourage vaccinations and called the idea of mask mandates for children in school "controversial."
- On August 24, Singer <u>downplayed</u> the COVID-19 fatality rate while discussing booster shot recommendations. (The fatality rate among confirmed COVID-19 infections in the U.S. is actually four to five times higher than what Singer claimed.)
- In September, Singer <u>twice</u> <u>pushed</u> the <u>dubious claim</u> that surviving a COVID-19 infection provides better immunity than vaccination.

Immigration

- On January 29, *National Desk* reporter Angela Brown <u>pushed a long-debunked myth</u> linking immigrants to increased crime.

- During its early weeks, *The National Desk* <u>repeatedly</u> interviewed or cited Mark Morgan, a former Trump administration immigration official, in its coverage of immigration. The interviews and citations continued even after he joined the extremist <u>anti-immigrant group</u> <u>Federation for American Immigration Reform</u>, which the Southern Poverty Law Center has <u>designated as a hate group</u> due to its leaders' ties to white supremacists and their own racist statements opposing immigration.
- *The National Desk* <u>continued</u> to allow Morgan to lie about immigration policy in more February appearances.
- In August, Morgan used his *National Desk* appearances to <u>spread fear</u> that migrants are spreading COVID-19 throughout the U.S. (Fact-checkers <u>determined</u> that migrants <u>aren't</u> responsible for the widespread infections.) In mid-September, he also <u>falsely</u> <u>claimed</u> that migrants aren't being tested for COVID-19 before being released.
- Also in August, Morgan used the program to <u>repeatedly fearmonger</u> that Afghan refugees evacuated by the U.S. military may be terrorists. Morgan first did this just a day after *The National Desk* <u>celebrated</u> the successful evacuation of Afghan ally Mohammad Khalid Wardak, a national police officer who <u>spent years</u> working with U.S. forces there.

Economy

- In late March and early April, news segments on *The National Desk* <u>aired misleading criticism</u> of President Joe Biden's infrastructure proposals from organizations that are corporate front groups or push an anti-spending austerity agenda.
- In late April, two guests on the program <u>dubiously claimed</u> that Biden's infrastructure spending would lead to lower wages and fewer jobs.
- In late May, *The National Desk* hosted a guest from the right-wing National Taxpayers Union who <u>falsely blamed</u> Biden for the scheduled expiration of some of Trump's tax cuts.
- <u>Throughout</u> <u>May</u> and <u>June</u>, *National Desk* guests repeatedly claimed enhanced unemployment benefits were preventing people from seeking jobs. In reality, <u>recent</u> <u>reporting</u> and <u>commentary</u> from economists have shown that states which cut these benefits early saw less job growth than states which retained them.
- In mid-July, a guest from the Cato Institute <u>dubiously</u> <u>claimed</u> the $3.5 trillion infrastructure reconciliation bill could ultimately lead to a recession.
- On August 10, the show's anchor <u>told a whopper of a lie</u> when she mis-cited a right-wing organization to claim that the bipartisan infrastructure bill would add $400 *trillion* to the national debt.

- Since May, the program has <u>repeatedly pushed Republican lies</u> about so-called "critical race theory." It has <u>repeatedly</u> <u>hosted</u> activists who oppose teaching the history of racism and promoted efforts by <u>right-wing</u> <u>organizations</u> to counter anti-racist education. On August 23, Jeffcoat interviewed a conservative pundit and activist from Colorado over his opposition to critical race theory, introducing him as merely a local "dad" while <u>hiding</u> his history of punditry and activism. And there are <u>many</u> <u>other</u> <u>examples</u> of *The National Desk* promoting <u>Republican</u> attacks on anti-racist education.

Democracy

- On May 12, Jeffcoat <u>interviewed</u> insurrection-supporting congressional Reps. Lauren Boebert (R-CO) and Jody Hice (R-GA) over their efforts to oust Rep. Liz Cheney (R-WY) as the GOP conference chair because of her opposition to former President Donald Trump's efforts to overturn the 2020 presidential election.
- In June, Jeffcoat allowed two <u>Republican</u> <u>senators</u> to lie about the contents of Democrats' For the People Act, which would streamline federal election rules and make it easier for voters to participate.
- On June 29, Jeffcoat interviewed a longtime right-wing conspiracy theorist to <u>promote</u> his event to overturn and replace the U.S. Constitution. More than a week later, the show followed up with another report about the event, misleadingly portraying the attendees as mainstream conservative political figures and downplaying the extremism of its agenda.
- On July 22, *The National Desk* <u>helped</u> Rep. Jim Jordan (R-OH) smear House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) after she kicked him off the January 6 select committee because of his efforts and statements in support of Trump's attempt to overturn the 2020 election and the January 6 insurrection.

- And on August 19, Jeffcoat interviewed Linda McMahon of the America First Policy Institute to promote its new "Center for Election Integrity," while failing to mention Republican attempts to overturn the 2020 election or the GOP's widespread voter suppression efforts this year.