



## **NPR Acknowledges It Misfired on Local Economic Developers**

Dear IEDC Member,

We are pleased that National Public Radio has publicly acknowledged that one of its reporters unfairly smeared the economic development profession during a recent episode of the radio show *This American Life*. (For background on this issue, read "[National Radio Program Misrepresents the Economic Development Profession: A Response from IEDC](#)", from our June 6 newsletter.)

In a post last night titled "[Planet Money Misfires on Local Economic Developers](#)", NPR ombudsman Edward Schumacher-Matos recounts multiple problems with the show. Among his comments, he notes the following:

- Ira Glass, *This American Life* host and one of its editors, agreed that the tone of the segment "was a bit snarky" and said that "in fifteen years on the air there's only one other story where I think we dropped the ball like we did here. We all regret this, and we've communicated that to the IEDC."
- The reporter, Adam Davidson, agreed that the story had an "unbalanced negative tone," acknowledging "a relentlessness in our criticism untempered by moments of sympathy for the hard challenges that economic development people face."
- Aside from the tone of the piece, Schumacher-Matos zeroes in on the fact that many of the reporter's conclusions - e.g., that economic developers simply move jobs around, and that the practice is a race to the bottom - "were left unproven" and that "the analytical support for many of the main points comes up way too short."
- In addition, he writes that the reporter's use of the word "lying" to describe how economic developers talk about their communities "cross[ed] the bounds of civility." He also writes that the reporter "turned personal in tarring the developers" by suggesting that they have ulterior motives for trying to figure out how many jobs they have created.

"I congratulate Jeff Finkle for jumping on this issue quickly and forcefully and succeeding in getting NPR to set the record straight," said Denny Coleman, chairman of the IEDC board of directors and President and CEO of the St. Louis County Economic Council. "Second, I want to thank board members and other IEDC members who not only voiced their opinions but were

patient in waiting for this response from NPR. We achieved our goal of recognition from NPR that they badly missed the mark on this story, and we appreciate the fact that they have owned up to the many weaknesses and misrepresentations in the report."

"I think one of the more compelling observations in the NPR response was the role of economic developers as change agents in their communities," added Jay Moon, vice chairman of the IEDC board of directors and President and CEO of the Mississippi Manufacturers Association. "Their role is not only to attract or retain jobs, but more importantly, to educate the communities they represent regarding the improvements necessary to be competitive and successful."

We are reassured that NPR has taken the issue seriously. NPR interim president Joyce Slocum met with Denny Coleman and me, and the reporter, the show's editor, and NPR staff all have responded to our complaints. We encourage you to [read the ombudsman's full post](#). Our hope is that in the future, we can expect fairer representation of the hard work that you do for your communities every day.

Sincerely,

Jeff Finkle  
IEDC President and CEO

Links for more information:

- Listen to the segment on *This American Life*: Episode 435, "[How to Create a Job](#)". The segment is titled "Act Three: Job Fairies" (original air date: May 13).
- [National Radio Program Misrepresents the Economic Development Profession: A Response from IEDC](#) (*Economic Development Now*, June 6)
- [Jeff Finkle's letter to reporter Adam Davidson and producer Julie Snyder following the show's airing](#) (PDF)

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