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### TSAstroturf continued

Posted Friday, November 26, 2010 10:47 AM | By [David Weigel](#)

Mark Ames [e-mails me](#) about my post criticizing some of the findings [in his article "TSAstroturf."](#) For example, I wrote:

*The rest of the connections here are pretty damn tenuous. I have known [Pete Eyre](#) for four years, and he is less an agent of the Kochs and more an anarchist (or voluntarist, as he calls himself) who seeks out ways to drop out of society and [get arrested](#). To run into Pete Eyre and the Free Keene movement is not to sync up with the Koch machine. It is to frolic with affable goofballs.*

He e-mails:

*How is Eyre's connection to the Kochs "tenuous" when he has been on the direct Koch payroll for so much of the past five years? I'll repeat again what's in the article: intern at the Koch-founded Cato Institute, a "Koch Fellow" at the Drug Policy Alliance and nearly three years as director for the Koch-funded Institute for Humane Studies at George Mason University, home also to the Koch-funded Mercatus Center. And of course his tours are partly sponsored by Koch-backed groups. Your only argument against this "tenuous" connection is that you know him and you know he's a wild and crazy guy. How is that a counter-argument?*

Ames is right, but I didn't mean that Eyre's relationship to institutions that take Koch funding is tenuous. That's indisputable. I singled out Eyre because he's well known in the D.C. libertarian scene, and his [cross-country liberty tours](#) are understood less as successful libertarian recruitment/activism and more as oddball stunts that produce occasionally-entertaining videos. They try and meet up with libertarians wherever they go, so I thought the fact that one of Ames's subjects met with Eyre was overplayed in the story.

"The rest of the connections" I referred to were the connections between the subjects of Ames's article -- Eyre played a bit role -- and the Kochs. It's the proof for the Ames/Levine thesis that the much-hyped TSA backlash was dreamed up by "Koch-related libertarians, Washington lobbyists and PR operatives posing as 'ordinary citizens,' and suspicious fake-grassroots outrage relentlessly promoted in the same old right-wing echo chamber."

Like I wrote in my post, I think Ames and Levine did valuable work by naming and tracing the libertarian organizations that had been trying unsuccessfully to stoke a rebellion against the TSA. Few people even try to explain this stuff. The mainstream media runs with stories that jump the climb from WorldNetDaily to Drudge without really questioning them. But *TSAstroturf* is problematic for the way it stacks the names and stories of people who have never taken Koch funding or been lobbyists with the people who have. "Everywhere you look," they write, "the alleged victims' stories often turn out to be false or highly suspicious, promoted by lobbyists posing as 'ordinary guys.'" Everywhere? Really? [Cathy Bossi?](#)

Here's another thing Ames wrote to me which raises this issue.

*Also, you don't address the fact that Free Keene was founded by and funded by a Koch-ite from Mercatus, Jason Sorens, from both Institute of Humane Studies and Mercatus.*

So, [Jason Sorens](#). In 2001, as a grad student at Yale, Sorens [published the essay](#) that launched the Free State Project, after which Free Keene was founded by other activists. In 2002, he [won a Human Studies grant](#) from the Institute of Humane Studies; in 2003 he won a summer graduate fellowship from IHS; he's now an affiliated scholar at Mercatus. How do we get from here to "Free Keene was founded and funded" by him? Apparently we get there by misunderstanding things. The *City Paper* article that Ames cites in his article claims that Sorens wrote a secessionist essay, then took Koch money, then rebranded his movement "the Free State Project." But his [original 2001 essay](#) clearly

me and asked [made](#) to email him at [freestateproject\\_com@yahoo.com](mailto:freestateproject_com@yahoo.com).

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I like that Ames is writing these articles. Libertarians don't like admitting how much of what they do is made possible not by the ghost of Adam Smith, but by self-interested grants; the grant-givers, like the Kochs, don't like it when this is covered. But *all political movements work like this*. Self-interested political actors make donations; activists use them. Most of Fox News's 5 p.m. hour is devoted to proof that grants from 1996 from George Soros that went to organizations that later hired Obama staffers explain why unemployment is at 9.6 percent. It doesn't make sense on there. Why apply the same heavy breathing tactics to libertarians?

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