



Koch brothers behind the curtain in American journalism scandal?

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So, last week, a strange story broke in *The Washington Post*. It concerned a woman who posed as a victim of Alabama senate contender Roy Moore and had gone to the *Post* with a made up tale about how he impregnated her as a teen. Turned out she worked for an organization with a misnomer, "Project Veritas" and her goal was to make *The Washington Post* reporters look like they will fall for any old tall tale. But it didn't work, because like any good journalists, the *Post* reporters checked the facts and discovered the truth. *Vanity Fair* asked in its story on the matter if 'the Project Veritas Effect will poison journalism.'

Let's be clear about how far into the gutter we've fallen: a self-styled "journalism" outlet, Project Veritas, was caught red-handed trying to discredit the news media by shamelessly posing as a victim of sexual assault in order to bolster the election campaign of a child molester.

"Project Veritas, a tax-exempt public charity, purports to expose what it calls dishonesty and corruption. An operative working with the group in recent weeks falsely claimed to two *Washington Post* reporters that U.S. Senate candidate Roy Moore impregnated her as a teenager. *The Post* did not publish a story based on her account, which collapsed under reporters' scrutiny." ---*Washington Post*, December 2, 2017, Robert O'Harrow, Jr.

Project Veritas is not what it seems. Founded by James O'Keefe, the mission of Project Veritas purports to: "Investigate and expose corruption, dishonesty, self-dealing, waste, fraud, and other misconduct in both public and private institutions in order to achieve a more ethical and transparent society." This is what its website says.

It's now very clear this is code for: undermine the last remnants of civility.

The institutions he's targeting are journalistic, and, in what is for me the most worrisome rhetoric on a website is that he calls his undercover pretenders 'journalists.'

The Kochs behind the curtain

Yes, it's them again. The brothers from Wichita, Kansas — Charles and David Koch.

The Washington Post reviewed tax returns and found that the right-wing oil-igarchs Charles and David Koch sank \$1.7 million last year into Project Veritas.

As I have written in previous columns, the Koch brothers have worked diligently for decades, investing millions into the Tea Party, think tanks and far-right websites. Their long game — and these two have been at this for decades — is to remove regulatory obstacles so that corporations in America get even more freedom and less government oversight. This has been speeding up thanks to the complicity of their fellow billionaire, President Donald Trump.

That \$1.7 million in Koch brother donations can go a very long way in building a powerful flow of digital content. Especially so if it can all be amplified by the web of Breitbart, conspiracy radio, Macedonian trolls, bots, Fox News and Facebook "dark posts." I highly recommend the excellent article in Rolling Stone magazine published last month by Amanda Robb, who also writes for *National Observer*, called Pizzagate: Anatomy of a Fake News Scandal if you want to better understand how this gallery of smoke and mirrors works.

Only next year's tax returns will reveal just how much additional funding the Kochs have pumped into Project Veritas, but the charity is hiring. Although "all other positions are closed at this time," the site advertises one category that still remains open: "journalist."

The Koch's ultimate goal, de-regulate, de-regulate, de-regulate. I'm sure they're very pleased about the sweeping tax bill that benefits the wealthiest Americans that made it through the U.S. Senate last week, the reward for Republican campaign donors like the Kochs. The Kochs sat out on Trump's presidential campaign but donated in 2014 alone through Koch Industries \$1.7 to helping Congress people and Senators get elected, according to Open Secrets.org. Two percent went to Democrats and 98% to Republicans. This year, so far, Koch arms have spent \$7.6 million on lobbying.

And this year so far, Koch Industries have spent \$7,670,000 to lobby on behalf of the oil and gas industry.

But Koch Industries is just one of the arms of the Kochtopus.

Other Koch political organizations include: Americans for Prosperity, the Cato Institute, Koch family foundations, Citizens for a Sound Economy, Generation Opportunity and more. And, famously, in 2016, the Koch brothers budget of \$889 million was on par with the spending of the Democrats and the Republicans, according to the *New York Times*.

Real Fake News

Is that thing?

It sure is.

Project Veritas is turning 'Real Fake News' into an art form, characterizing itself as the David to the news industry's Goliath, but that's all just showbiz.

"We've had dozens of successes," they claim. "The pattern is clear: Project Veritas launches an investigation with the placement of our undercover journalists. The rollout of our findings creates a growing and uncontrollable firestorm of press coverage. Corruption is exposed, leaders resign, and organizations are shut down. We get immediate, measurable and impactful results, and our return on investment is unparalleled."

But then they got busted by actual fact-checking journalists at the *Washington Post*. Astoundingly, this outfit is a recognized American charity. "Project Veritas is a registered 501(c)3 organization. Project Veritas does not advocate specific resolutions to the issues that are raised through its investigations, nor do we encourage others to do so. Our goal is to inform the public of wrongdoing and allow the public to make judgments on the issues."

Or, as we now know, *to finance and orchestrate the wrongdoing themselves.*

It all stands in such stark contrast to real journalism. Over the weekend, ABC News suspended investigative reporter Brian Ross for four weeks without pay for his erroneous report on Trump and Michael Flynn.

Ross reported that Trump had directed Flynn to make contact with the Russians while he was a candidate in the election. His source actually said that Trump was President-elect at the time of the reported direction to Flynn.

NBC has apologized, saying its credibility is more important than ever to them. Others are saying how unfortunate it is that this would happen, and how much ammunition it will give to the journalism destruction machine. And that's sad. But NBC did put him on leave. They made Ross accountable.

Meanwhile, back to the real fake news, I believe that, as we near the 2019 federal election, Canada will see its own new Project Veritas-es emerge.

Watch for them.

Efforts to erode Canada's common understanding of the truth will intensify and fierce independent journalism like *National Observer's* will be more critical than ever. Also, last week, David and Charles Koch bought a large interest in one of America's most respected media brands, taking one more piece of democracy into their fold.

Where is this all going?

I don't know. I've been asking myself that same question since Trump was elected. Every weekend, I write a letter to National Observer's subscribers with a draft of my weekly column

and I ask what's on their minds. I ask for feedback on what I've written to them, as well. The responses are always interesting.

Yesterday, after reading much of what I've written above, a builder from Cortes Island, British Columbia, wrote me. "Obviously there's a concerted effort by the pluto-kleptocracy to redesign the mass media landscape these days - various 'controlled demolitions' tossed off as 'market forces,' and too many journalists willing to endure the consensus trance."

An Ottawa reader said, "It's a worry... seems the bad guys have doubled down on their badness." "It's a bit of a wake up for journalist professionals to be ever vigilant, vet, vet and vet again. And dig deep," another reader mused.

Yes, it's a bit of a wake up call.