

June 21, 2012

Dan Cook: 'Facts' from the right

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- Before I comment on the fallacies in Andrew Young's June 15 diatribe against the business climate in West Virginia, let's first look at those antecedents following his column: "Associate Professor of Economics at West Virginia University and a 2009 recipient of the Charles G. Koch Charitable Foundation Mentorship Program."

Google that. Charles G. Koch is the older of the two infamous Koch brothers who head a \$110 billion-a-year oil, gas and chemical empire started by their father. The family founded the libertarian Cato Institute. Brother David was once the Libertarian Party vice presidential candidate.

They have contributed hundreds of millions of dollars to political front organizations which finance right-wing candidates or undermine the candidacy of those who do not believe oil, gas and chemical companies possess an inherent "freedom" to pollute, poison and destroy our environment with even more wild abandon than they have done in the past. Much of their money filtered through those fronts goes for "swift-boat" type TV commercials that repeat a lie often enough for the simple-minded to believe it. Their billions also award tax-free "academic grants" so their patsies/protégées/patronage recipients like Young can parrot their greed-driven extremist propaganda.

The Supreme Court has ruled that corporations are "people entitled to make political comment" so that, with their deep pockets buying slanted "opinion-makers," they can drown out the tiny voices of those who know better than their big lies. But, as Launcelot told us in *The Merchant of Venice*: ". . . at the length truth will out."

Now, on the trail of Chamber of Commerce types and others whose personal prosperity is tied to big business backsides, here comes Andrew Young to repeat that West Virginia is "50th in economic freedom" because "individuals and businesses face a maze of onerous regulations by a bloated government and funded by unwieldy tax structures." Yet, he and his ilk never mention specifically how our individual freedoms are affected. After reading the same hogwash over and over for years, sometimes outspoken me remains unable to come up with even one remote instance.

I have been in very competitive businesses in West Virginia since 1968, full-time since 1975, employing as many as 36. Consistently profitable since 1982, I have always handled the "paperwork burden" myself, which at the state level has required about 15 minutes monthly except perhaps 30 minutes at the end of each quarter. Four hours per year for all the several corporations into which my business interests are divided.

When one of my corporations does zero business during a year, it pays only \$95 in license fees and minimum taxes to the state. In 2014 that will drop to \$45 due to a tax repeal. In California, my daughter had to pay nearly \$1,000 the year her consulting firm did zero business. When there is a profit, I pay no more than 8 percent on the net gain.

My property taxes now on a commercial building (double the residential rate) in Hurricane are about one-fourth what someone I knew was paying for a dinky ranch-style with carport in Montgomery County, Md., in 1967. They are less than a friend pays for a little white house and few acres in rural Virginia.

General sales taxes in neighboring Ohio are 7.5 percent. Here they are 6 percent.

Perhaps it is really the spreading of lies about West Virginia by allies of polluting industries that holds back our economic growth? Site-seeking teams read newspapers too.

Cook is a semi-retired author, artist and inventor who lives in Hurricane.