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The Plum Line

By Greg Sargent



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Posted at 1:33 PM ET, 03/9/2011

Right-leaning think tank says Rove group "misrepresented" its data in ad attacking public employee unions

By Greg Sargent

As you may have heard, Crossroads GPS, the group founded by Karl Rove, has gone up on the air with a new 60-second ad that attacks public employees and the Democrats who support them as greedy thugs. The spot, which is backed by a [\\$750,000 buy](#), represents a national, high-profile effort to turn around a public opinion war the right seems to be losing as the Wisconsin standoff drags on.

But now the fiscally conservative think tank that the ad itself cites as the source for one of its central claims is accusing Crossroads GPS of misusing the think tank's data. The author of the Cato Institute study cited in the ad tells me the spot "misrepresents" his study's findings.

One of the core claims in the ad, which you can watch below, is that unions and Dems are trying "to protect a system that pays unionized government workers 42 percent more than non-union workers." To back up this claim, the ad cites a Cato Institute study from March 2010 that is generally critical of public sector unions. That study is [right here](#).

But the author of the study, Cato director of tax policy studies Chris Edwards, tells me the ad's claim distorts his data in two key ways. The ad says that unionized government workers get paid 42 percent more than *non-unionized workers in general*, a charge that seems intended to turn non-unionized workers of all kinds against unionized public employees.

In fact, Edwards points out, Cato's study compared unionized government workers only with *non-unionized government workers*, not with non-union workers overall, and found the first group doing better. In other words, even if the study's overall thrust is critical of public unions, Cato's actual finding on wages would be likely to persuade workers that unions are a *good* thing -- if you're unionized, you make more than those in the same sector who are not unionized. Instead, the ad misrepresented the finding.

That's not all. Edwards points out that the ad rips the 42 percent figure out of context, further distorting what his study actually found in another way. The study did claim the 42 percent number, but it went on to state specifically that this difference can be partly explained by "general labor market variations across states," because "states with generally higher wages tend to be more unionized."

The study concluded that once you factor in that variable, public sector unions can be said to increase pay levels by approximately 10 percent - not 42 percent, as the ad claimed.

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ABOUT GREG SARGENT

My first foray into journalism -- as a reporter at a small Manhattan weekly in the 1990s -- wasn't terribly auspicious.

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"The ad misrepresents the gap between union and non-union government workers, and it appears to misrepresent the 42 percent statistic as if it were between government and private workers," Edwards told me.

Crossroads GPS's willingness to use data supplied by a fiscally conservative think tank in a way that *even the study's pro-free market author finds objectionable* tells you all you need to know about the lengths some conservatives will go to in order to turn public opinion in this fight to their advantage.

By Greg Sargent | March 9, 2011; 1:33 PM ET
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So how are these budget votes going to go today? Who's going to defect? Which plan gets more votes? I know Ben Nelson and McCaskill are voting no on Dem plan and GOP plan.

Posted by: Truthteller12 | March 9, 2011 1:43 PM | [Report abuse](#)

@Greg: "The ad says that unionized government workers get paid 42 percent more than non-unionized workers in general, a charge that seems intended to turn non-unionized workers of all kinds against unionized public employees."

OR...

Perhaps it will motivate non-unionized workers to try to unionize their workplace, and vote in union-friendly legislators in right-to-work states, so that they can get better wages and benefits, too.

Posted by: suekzoo1 | March 9, 2011 1:51 PM | [Report abuse](#)

Not my favorite reporter of all time, but RIP to the Dean of the Press Corps, David Broder.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/03/09/AR2011030902912.html>

Posted by: ronnieandrush | March 9, 2011 2:01 PM | [Report abuse](#)

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David Broder dies; Pulitzer-winning Washington Post political columnist
1,385 people shared this.

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Federal judicial vacancies reaching crisis point
976 people shared this.

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326 people shared this.

Obama creates indefinite detention system for prisoners at Guantanamo Bay
6,521 people shared this.

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Hey, if the first lies don't work, just wait -- they'll come up with more.

Posted by: jprestonian | March 9, 2011 2:03 PM | [Report abuse](#)

OT:

Michele Bachmann's 'bombshell' on a 'hidden' \$105 billion

FOUR PINNOCHIOS!

There is no "bombshell" except Bachmann's bombast.

She is correct that Congress already has appropriated some spending in future years, but her claim that this money was "hidden" does not have credibility. The money for these programs was clearly described and analyzed by the Congressional Budget Office before the legislation was voted into law.

She needs to get a new sign.

Four Pinocchios

http://voices.washingtonpost.com/fact-checker/2011/03/bachmanns_bombshell_on_a_hidde.html

Posted by: ronnieandrush | March 9, 2011 2:04 PM | [Report abuse](#)

When is the media going to ask Michele Bachman about those huge Federal Farm Subsidies her family claimed?

Posted by: Liam-still | March 9, 2011 2:18 PM | [Report abuse](#)

VIDEO Union Goon Threatens to Break TEA Teen's Neck
<http://blog.eyeblast.tv/2011/03/union-member-threatens-to-break-cameramans-neck-language-warning/>

"If you don't that f**cking phone out of my face I'm going to break your g**damned neck."

[Ironically, the guy walks over and puts his head into the camera, then threatens to break the kids neck.]

*so progressive!

Posted by: KaddafiDelendaEst | March 9, 2011 2:18 PM | [Report abuse](#)

Hmmm... no "Democrats misrepresent statistics" posts, yet?

It seems like this ad will be awfully hard to defend.

Posted by: ashotinthedark | March 9, 2011 2:20 PM | [Report abuse](#)

Here is what this tells me Mr Sargent: the right is adopting the tactics of the left.

This is war, as I have said repeatedly. And in war truth is the first casualty. The left, including you Mr Sargent, have been well, the most charitable term for it is "disingenuous".

Now you want the right to abandon your style? Why should we? If this kind of ad works for your movement, what prevents others from adopting it? Nothing that I can see.

if the left's operating paradigm is "by any means necessary" why would the opposition not take the same position?

Would like us to forget the "700,000 jobs loss" lie that you bruted about just a few short days ago? That report, now called zandinomics by the right, was hotly argued, yet the left repeated its claim as if it were gospel.

What this really says is that the Cato guy, Chris Edwards, has a stronger sense of ethics than Mark Zandi does. That's hardly surprising. Zandi comes off as a liberal and let's just look at the ethical stand of that movement as exhibited by this blog.

How about the "watchdog group" you tried to pass off as objective Mr Sargent? The fact that they were funded by unions didn't make it into your blog entry. Funny how that happened.

Posted by: skipsailing28 | March 9, 2011 2:20 PM | [Report abuse](#)

Idaho Legislature Passes Wisconsin-Style Bill Limiting Teachers Union Collective Bargaining Powers
http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20110309/ap_on_re_us/us_teachers_union_idaho

A bill that would phase out tenure for new teachers and restrict collective

bargaining on their salaries and benefits is on its way to the Idaho governor.

TEA-haw!

Posted by: KaddafiDelendaEst | March 9, 2011 2:22 PM | [Report abuse](#)

Peter King really needs to hold congressional hearings on this:

"Arrest in attempted MLK Day bombing in Spokane"

The FBI has made an arrest in connection with the attempted bombing along the route of the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day parade in downtown Spokane.

An FBI source in Washington, D.C., said one man was arrested east of Spokane. Agents, including a bomb expert from Quantico, Va., were preparing to search a house where others associated with the suspect were living, the source said.

The suspects are apparently affiliated with white supremacists."

http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/localnews/2014443763_spokanebomb10m.html

Posted by: suekzoo1 | March 9, 2011 2:22 PM | [Report abuse](#)

It seems that the propaganda, smoke bomb tossed out there by the Democrat media has obscured the fact that Wisconsin and many other states are slowly being sucked dry by the union socialists.

Too many little piggies sucking too hard.

The little oinkers!

Posted by: battleground51 | March 9, 2011 2:22 PM | [Report abuse](#)

With this revelation can we get those stations who agreed to run the ads to pull the ads?

Posted by: kindness1 | March 9, 2011 2:23 PM | [Report abuse](#)

The seven states with no public service unions, have the biggest state deficit problems.

Posted by: Liam-still | March 9, 2011 2:24 PM | [Report abuse](#)

bwaahhhahaha....right on cue, skip.

Posted by: ashotinthedark | March 9, 2011 2:26 PM | [Report abuse](#)

ON AIR WITH KARL ROVE

Last week, I had the opportunity to appear live on air with Mr. Rove. Being on air with Mr. Rove confirmed in my thinking that he indeed is a master of rhetoric.

As Mr. Sargent implies, Mr. Rove is what some might call a "slick operator". He made Mr. George W. Bush a governor then a president. Subsequently, during Mr. Bush's terms in the Oval Office, he remained a chief architect of presidential policies until 2007. Given his current resurgence, it seems reasonable to ask, What exactly were Mr. Rove's past behaviors, and what were their consequences?

Here are some facts. To begin, President Bush failed to veto even one piece of legislation from a Republican Congress during his first term. The consequences of the Republican, congressional legislation and the Republican ex-President's behavioral deficit in vetoing were an economic deficit the likes of which never previously had been suffered outside all-out wartime and an economic reversal second only to the Great Depression of the 1930's . . . a deficit against which other recovering Republicans and Mr. Rove now bray.

Then, there was the Republicans' attack against our constitutional rights while Mr. Bush was referring to the aggressive, Mohammedan religion (See "Repentance" in the Koran.) as a "religion of peace". The Bush/Rove attack now has expanded from wiretaps without warrants and imprisonment of American citizens denied habeas corpus to Americans having their genitalia groped daily at airports in the name of security.

Militarily, Bush/Rove led us into two, expensive, military conflicts using money borrowed from China . . . the first dwindling into a violence-ridden, disorganized Iraq; and the second continuing with a combat-ridden, chaotic Afghanistan. Meanwhile, Mr. Bush neglected to ask Congress for declarations of war pursuant to the U.S. Constitution.

In this context and after his previous showing, Mr. Rove lately is lecturing Americans on the benefits of returning the G.O.P. to full power. With others, he founded Resurgent Republic in 2009 then, more recently, he added American Crossroads.

One might ask, What is the single, most critical variable controlling Mr. Rove's

behavior? Apparently, not great personal riches but another variable of much greater import to the American people (www.nationonfire.com).

As the video on this website demonstrates, what Mr. Rove has going for him is his being an intelligent, skillful, indefatigable, political operator who knows how to win. What he has going against him would seem to be his past record. The question arises, Will Karl Rove be a valuable asset to the Republican Party or a fatal liability?

Posted by: mossgr | March 9, 2011 2:29 PM | [Report abuse](#)

Skippy is Kochlov's Dog. Ring the Tea Party Bell, and he starts salivating.

Posted by: Liam-still | March 9, 2011 2:30 PM | [Report abuse](#)

[suekzoo1 crowed: "The FBI has made an arrest in connection with the attempted bombing along the route of the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day parade in downtown Spokane."]

Why does America need Congressional hearings to investigate one (1) isolated incident by a lone wolf Leftist? Or does this Leftist-fascist get lumped with the Black Panther voter intimidation scandal?

Notwithstanding your illogical (tu quoque) reasoning, the King hearings remain justified on their face.

+16K deadly Islamo-supremacist attacks since 9/11 don't lie
<http://www.thereligionofpeace.com/>

Fry Mumia

Posted by: KaddafiDelendaEst | March 9, 2011 2:30 PM | [Report abuse](#)

suekz post is very important (disclaimer, I heart Spokane); that bomb was big and covering the lead pellets with anticoagulant/rat poison provides a signature, the mind of the right wing terrorist.

Posted by: shrink2 | March 9, 2011 2:33 PM | [Report abuse](#)

On April 20th it will be 97 years since Exxon-Conoco-Mobil-Chevron founder, John D. Rockefeller's mobile death squads he had moved from West Virginia to strike-break to Ludlow, Colorado, began machine-gunning and firebombing to death 19 children, women and men in a coal strikers camp there.

This forgotten history is called the Ludlow Massacre because it hasn't been expunged completely from memory yet.

On that exact same day Rockefeller employee Samuel Bush was working his men 12 hours per day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, work-til-you-drop-dead Buckeye Steel Castings Company.

This is where the Exxon heirs want to "Take the Country Back" to: no pensions, no weekends, no healthcare, no vacations, no sunlight for your entire adult life.

The Koch Tea Party was co-founded by Rupert Murdoch (remember when Glenn Beck met the Americans Against Prosperity for 9-12 project), who worked together before killing Americans with R.I.C.O. Tobacco Frauds.

The Tobacco Companies have been convicted in court of RICO Felony Fraud, but not one person spent even one day in jail.

This is Organized Crime in a Hostile Corporate Takeover of America.

Even David Koch's own twin brother Bill called Koch Industries "Organized Crime" on CBS 60 minutes TV show.

Posted by: Liann | March 9, 2011 2:34 PM | [Report abuse](#)

Karl Rove...architect of the lowest presidential approval rating in modern history.

Posted by: danw1 | March 9, 2011 2:35 PM | [Report abuse](#)

Kaddafi, the gangs MS-13 and La Cosa Nostra, who's membership are 100% Christian, are responsible for thousands of deaths, rapes and prostitution across the U.S.

Do you think we should investigate Christians and persecute ALL Christians for not coming out and condoning their fellow Christians hideous acts?

Posted by: mikefromArlington | March 9, 2011 2:36 PM | [Report abuse](#)

Har-de-har-har!!

White supremacists. Those guys are boy scouts compared to the worldwide,

Islamofascist conspiracy.

Muslim fanatics murder more people daily than white kooks do in ten years.

The Islamic type fanatics were terrorizing the known world when white guys were hunting mastodons in northern Europe.

For murder and mayhem, Islam has no equal.

America is very fortunate to have a vast ocean between it and the big, Muslim nations.

Posted by: battleground51 | March 9, 2011 2:39 PM | [Report abuse](#)

I don't know what game is being played here, but Cato Institute is founded and directed by the Koch Brothers of Koch Industries, the same guy who co-funded this current anti-union movement and who helped pay for this ad. The Koch Brothers have been pouring money into Karl Rove since they were on the brink of going to prison in 1980, when they gave nearly \$1,000,000 to Bush, whose attorney general Ashcroft dropped the prosecution as one of his first acts on the job.

Posted by: Liann | March 9, 2011 2:44 PM | [Report abuse](#)

The Mexican drug "war" is nothing but terrorism. Tens of thousands dead, no end in sight. Islam sure is violent, but the Catholics are trying to keep up.

Posted by: shrink2 | March 9, 2011 2:47 PM | [Report abuse](#)

FYI --

Michael Moore is going to be on Rachel Maddow tonight

Posted by: ronnieandrush | March 9, 2011 2:48 PM | [Report abuse](#)

"suekz' post is very important (disclaimer, I heart Spokane); that bomb was big and covering the lead pellets with anticoagulant/rat poison provides a signature, the mind of the right wing terrorist."

hi shrink! I agree with you. Anybody who could think this up, along with any supporting organization, should be annihilated, wouldn't you agree?

Posted by: TrollMcWingnut | March 9, 2011 2:51 PM | [Report abuse](#)

Liam- I am a little confused by your last post. You mention they gave money to Rove when they almost went to prison in 1980 so that they could give Bush \$1 million and Ashcroft would let them off the hook. The timing just doesn't work for me, though I'm sure I'm missing something.

Maybe the prosecution began in 1980 and was still working its way through the system by 2000s when they saw an opportunity to "pay for justice"? Just seeking clarification.

Posted by: mobrien83 | March 9, 2011 2:51 PM | [Report abuse](#)

The big three issues that effect a presidents re-election prospects are as follows:

1. Prosperity
2. Peace
3. Gas prices

If two of these are out of whack during an election cycle, the party in power suffers great harm.

George Bush was finally done in by Iraq war fatigue and high gas prices. Prosperity only turned on him at the last second.

Obama now has a war, a poor economy and gas prices headed for \$5 a gallon.

If he doesn't get two of these fixed by 2012, he is toast. The thing is, all three will get worse before they get better.

2012 rings in less than 10 months.

See Obama run. Run, Obama, run!

Posted by: battleground51 | March 9, 2011 2:55 PM | [Report abuse](#)

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