



HBO's 'Newsroom' Cherry-Picks Soros-Funded Think Progress Video to Smear Koch Brothers

By [Noel Sheppard](#) | July 23, 2012 | 21:35

As NewsBusters previously [reported](#), HBO's *The Newsroom* has used information for its scripts from material provided to it by the far-left, George Soros-funded propaganda outlet Think Progress.

On Sunday, the show cherry-picked six seconds - yes, I said six seconds! - from a highly-edited TP video to smear conservative businessmen Charles and David Koch (video follows with transcript and commentary):

JOHN GALLAGHER, JR., AS JAMES HARPER: The answer is yes, the Koch brothers had money in Citizens United. A number of Koch-funded groups submitted amicus briefs to the court, including the Cato Institute which the Kochs funded. They submitted a brief calling for unfettered corporate speech.

ALISON PILL AS MARGARET JORDON: So did the Institute for Justice, also funded by the Kochs. Their brief said that finance laws prohibiting unlimited corporate contributions trumped the First Amendment. And after the court ruled in their favor, these groups spent a lot of money to oppose efforts to provide transparency.

GALLAGHER: Here's an interview with David Koch and his lawyer. Koch's asked about Citizens United and he seems to pretend he's never heard of it.

PILL: Koch is in the foreground in the grey herringbone coat.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

LEE FANG, THINK PROGRESS: What do you think of Citizens United? Has it helped your influence?

DAVID KOCH: Citizens United?

(END VIDEO CLIP)

[Pill plays clip again]

FANG: What do you think of Citizens United? Has it helped your influence?

KOCH: Citizens United?

(END VIDEO CLIP)

THOMAS SADOSKI AS DON KEEFER: One more time.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

FANG: What do you think of Citizens United? Has it helped your influence?

KOCH: Citizens United?

(END VIDEO CLIP)

So, David Koch in January 2011, at the end of a surprise, unscheduled [interview](#) with Fang, answered a question about Citizens United by incredulously saying, "Citizens United?"

From that the writers at HBO concluded "he seems to pretend he's never heard of it."

Maybe he thought this was a stupid question and he had enough of this surprise, unscheduled interview.

Of course, you can't tell that from the six seconds HBO decided to share with viewers. Maybe if they played more of the interview, it would have been clearer.

Unfortunately, the folks at TP never published the whole discussion. Instead, they highly-edited it into three different sections for three different articles.

But the three edited segments have been spliced together on YouTube to give readers significantly more context to this surprise interview:

FANG: Hi sir, my name is Lee Fang. I'm with the blog ThinkProgress. I'm just asking what you're expecting from the new Congress under Speaker Boehner?

KOCH: Well, cut the hell out of spending and balance the budget and reduce regulations and support business.

TIM PHILLIPS, PRESIDENT AMERICANS FOR PROSPERITY: Hey David, Lee here is a good blogger on the left, we're glad to have him—

FANG: Just a quick interview. Are you proud of what Americans for Prosperity has achieved this year?

KOCH: You bet I am, man oh' man. We're going to do more too in the next couple of years, you know.

FANG: What are you planning on doing. What are your goals?

KOCH: I just told you what we hope the Congress will do and AFP is going to support that. [...]

FANG: I'm curious to know, Mr. Koch, are you proud of what the Tea Party movement and what they've achieved in the past years?

KOCH: Yeah. There are some extremists there, but the rank and file are just normal people like us. And I admire them. It's probably the best grassroots uprising since 1776 in my opinion. [...]

FANG: Why does Americans for Prosperity focus so much on the science of climate change? I'm just curious why they spread so much information that denies the existence of climate, of global warming?

KOCH: Well... I think it's, regulating CO2 excessively is going to put, really damage the economy.

FANG: Do you believe in climate change yourself? [...] Do you believe in climate change yourself, Mr. Koch?

KOCH: Climate does fluctuate. It goes from hot to cold. We have ice ages.

FANG: But do you believe carbon pollution affects climate change? [...]

FANG: What do you think of Citizens United? Has it helped your influence?

KOCH: Citizens United?

FANG: The Supreme Court decision.

KOCH: Oh.

PHILLIPS: Now, Lee, are you really going to try to do a jump interview? Are you going to keep doing this, seriously? You're better than this. [...]

FANG: I know you had a meeting last summer with Glenn Beck and several other conservatives. Could you tell the public what you discussed at that meeting?

PHILLIPS: You're really going to do a jump interview right here? Come on. Lee, you're being disappointing. I'm disappointed in you. I'm very disappointed that you're doing this. It's disappointing. You had a chance to do an interview. The interview's over. I'm sure you can respect someone's right to be able to say, "You know what?"

KOCH: Why don't we walk down the hill and find our car?

Even with all the edits, Koch and Phillips spoke with Fang for at least three minutes. This included about 40 additional seconds after the six seconds HBO showed Sunday.

Yet *The Newsroom* writers had the nerve to imply that Koch was pretending as if he didn't know what Citizens United was.

But the falsehoods didn't end there, for as NewsBusters [reported](#) earlier Monday, the program had more attacks on conservatives including the Kochs:

GALLAGHER: Justices Thomas and Scalia have both been frequent guests of the Kochs. And between 2003 and 2007, Virginia Thomas, wife of Justice Thomas, was paid \$686,589 by the Heritage Foundation, which was funded by David and Charles Koch.

PILL: For whatever reason, Justice Thomas didn't disclose the 686,000 on his Supreme Court financial disclosure form.

EMILY MORTIMER AS MACKENZIE MCHALE: Is it very unusual that Scalia and Thomas didn't recuse themselves from the case?

JEFF DANIELS AS WILL MCAVOY: If they had, Citizens United would have lost 4-3. All right, the Citizens United decision allowed corporations to donate unlimited amounts of money to any political

candidate without anyone knowing where the money was coming from.

SAM WATERSTON AS CHARLIE SKINNER: But it also did the same thing for the unions, and they knew that.

DANIELS: So wouldn't the next step be to get rid of the unions?

MORTIMER: If you're rigging the game, yes.

A bit later, Daniels logged the following report "on air":

DANIELS: Thursday night, it was 75 teachers in Appleton. Tonight, the number of protesters in Madison is estimated at 30,000. Governor Walker's office is feeding inside information about their intentions to friendly groups who in turn are paying to fill hearing rooms with supporters of Walker's plan. American's for Prosperity, Charles and David Koch's front group, sent an email to its members at 8:45 this morning informing them of the public hearing providing public transportation to the capital. The Wisconsin budget crisis [unintelligible] since the newly-re-elected governor gave \$140 million in tax breaks, is being balanced on the backs of public sector workers who, organizations like Americans for Prosperity believe, are overpaid.

The propaganda, likely aided by the folks at TP, was being spread on thick Sunday, so much so that the folks at the Cato Institute [responded](#) Monday:

Actor Jeff Daniels misstates the holding of the case, claiming that Citizens United "allowed corporations to donate unlimited amounts of money to any political candidate without anyone knowing where the money was coming from." [...]

[I]f reporters were crystal clear that Citizens United cleared the way for all manner of groups to use "corporate treasury funds" to fund broad and overtly political statements about candidates, they would inevitably conclude that their own right to make those kinds of statements would be jeopardized by much of the campaign finance regulation on the books prior to Citizens United.

The folks at Reason also felt the need to [comment](#):

The rather inaccurate description of *Citizens United* and the Koch-funded groups involved came directly from [this Think Progress piece](#) from January 2011. This, by the way, seems to be *News Night*'s system of gathering information. Despite these self-described media elites saying they're going to change the way news is reported, a significant amount of their coverage is based on what they've read from other news outlets and blogs.

Indeed. In a previous episode, one of the lead characters paid [homage](#) to propaganda outlets Media Matters and Think Progress. This was the same installment written by a man that [thanked](#) TP for its "vital" research.

Not only that, the Kochs were an integral part of that episode making it clear that the producers are going to continually target them using bogus information supplied by the most biased and left-leaning organizations in the country.

In TP, HBO is getting exactly what it wants. According [to](#) the folks at Powerline, TP is legendary for its false attacks on the Kochs, especially Fang who the Weekly Standard [reported](#) in April 2011 "has a long history of [being spectacularly wrong](#)."

Meanwhile, back at Reason, Scott Shackford had more on this matter:

[A]s an alleged arm of the Kochtopus (David Koch sits on the board of trustees for the Reason Foundation, which publishes this site), it's annoying and frustrating to be reduced to mere tools with no ability for personal agency. We see this with any invocation of the rich's involvement with politics, be it the Koch brothers or George Soros. The argument is that they pay the money for us to hold these positions. It doesn't seem to occur to folks like Sorkin that it's because we hold these positions that

draws in the money. The Kochs wouldn't have much political clout at all with their millions if there weren't so many other people out there who agreed with them.

Taking that further, folks that contribute to organizations such as the Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute don't necessarily agree with everything those entities do.

Koch Industries lead council Mark Holden made this [case](#) to MSNBC's Martin Bashir in May when that cable network smeared the Kochs for contributing to The American Legislative Exchange Council.

In the wake of the Trayvon Martin shooting in Florida, ALEC found itself the target of liberal media outlets as a result of support it had given to stand your ground laws across the country.

When it was discovered the Kochs were ALEC contributors, they too came under fire.

On May 5, Salon [revealed](#) a list of companies that contribute to ALEC. Comcast and General Electric, the owners of MSNBC, were on it.

As such, it's preposterous to hold benefactors accountable for every piece of legislation organizations they fund support. If that was the standard, there'd likely be no such contributions.

But there's more to the *Newsroom's* nonsense Sunday.

Dan Abrams, the owner of the liberal website Mediaite [observed](#) in February about Citizens United, "[I]t's hard to imagine that, in this day and age, the mainstream media could repeatedly misstate the holding of one of the most significant Supreme Court decisions without being roundly excoriated. Not a matter of opinion or a partisan viewpoint, but, simply parroting a mistake or lie about the holding in that crucial ruling."

Matt Bai, New York Times Magazine's chief political correspondent, largely [agreed](#) with Abrams just this past Sunday: The oft-repeated narrative of 2012 goes like this: Citizens United unleashed a torrent of money from businesses and the multimillionaires who run them, and as a result we are now seeing the corporate takeover of American politics.

As a matter of political strategy, this is a useful story to tell, appealing to liberals and independent voters who aren't necessarily enthusiastic about the administration but who are concerned about societal inequality, which is why President Obama has made it a rallying cry almost from the moment the Citizens United ruling was made. But if you're trying to understand what's really going on with politics and money, the accepted narrative around Citizens United is, at best, overly simplistic. And in some respects, it's just plain wrong.

What might really shock liberals, in particular the skills involved in *The Newsroom*, is that Bai actually blamed the explosion in wealthy individual and corporate campaign contributions on - wait for it! - the left's beloved McCain-Feingold:

The new law stamped out soft money for good, but it also created a vacuum in political fund-raising. The parties could no longer tap an endless stream of soft money, but thanks to the advent of the 527, rich ideologues with their own agendas could write massive checks for the purpose of building what were, essentially, shadow parties — independent groups with their own turnout and advertising campaigns, limited in what they could say but accountable to no candidate or party boss. Wealthy liberals like Soros and Lewis, along with groups like MoveOn.org, were the first to spot the opportunity. All told, wealthy liberals spent something close to \$200 million in an effort to oust George W. Bush in 2004, setting an entirely new standard for outside spending. [...]

The level of outside money increased 164 percent from 2004 to 2008. Then it rose 135 percent from 2008 to 2012. In other words, while the sheer amount of dollars seems considerably more ominous after Citizens United, the percentage of change from one presidential election to the next has remained pretty consistent since the passage of McCain-Feingold. And this suggests that the rising

amount of outside money was probably bound to reach ever more staggering levels with or without Citizens United.

As such, all the finger-pointing at Citizens United - including by HBO Sunday! - is a bunch of nonsense spewed by the left and most of their media minions parroting far-left propaganda outlets such as Think Progress.

If HBO actually wanted to be honest about this decision, it might have informed viewers that the ACLU [supports](#) the Court's ruling on Citizens United, and much the same as the Cato Institute, submitted an [amicus brief](#) in favor of free speech.

Of course, they couldn't just point fingers at the Koch brothers then, could they?

As for *The Newsroom's* contention that Justices Scalia and Thomas should have recused themselves from ruling on Citizens United, even the perilously liberal Ben Smith [disagreed](#) with that in January 2011.

And about the program's claim the Koch brothers want to "get rid of the unions," the aforementioned Smith on March 30, 2011, [cited](#) a blog posting from the United Steelworkers website that quite refutes this:

A number of organizations are advocating a boycott of the products that come from companies owned by the Koch family. This is problematic for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that it could potentially hurt the wrong people.

The Koch brothers own Georgia Pacific. It is an American consumer goods company that makes everyday products like facial tissue, napkins, paper towels, paper cups and the like. Their plants are great examples of American advanced manufacturing. Incidentally, GP makes most of its products here in America. The company's workforce is highly unionized. In fact, 80 percent of its mills are under contract with one or more labor union. It is not inaccurate to say that these are among the best-paid manufacturing jobs in America.

This presents a dilemma and a paradox. While the Koch brothers are credited with advocating an agenda and groups that are clearly hostile to labor and labor's agenda, the brothers' company in practice and in general has positive and productive collective bargaining relationships with its unions.

That from the United Steelworkers.

Sadly, something that will never make it into *The Newsroom*.

Why should those involved start letting facts interfere with their agenda now?