

The Washington Post

John Oliver strikes again

By [David Post](#)

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It does seem to me that John Oliver is in the process of inventing some interesting new kind of political/social commentary – the 20-minute single-issue rant that is both hilariously funny, well put-together, and often quite devastatingly effective, as argument. I find that when he deals with something I happen to know something about — [net neutrality](#), say, or the [governance of FIFA](#), or the so-called “[right to be forgotten](#)” — he gets to the heart of the matter pretty quickly, and that’s not something I often find to be true, and it’s not an easy thing to do (though of course, like all good performers, he makes it look easy). He is quite good at isolating the outrageous and then looping us for a while around the slippery slopes that surround it, and then bringing the conversation back to another bit of outrageousness and doing it again. It’s like an amusement park ride, but it has an argumentative purpose. There’s a line between simplifying (which he does, brilliantly) and over-simplifying (which I find he generally does not do), and it’s a very hard one to walk, and he does it quite well.

I particularly recommend [his recent piece on the truly outrageous “civil asset forfeiture” regime](#) that prevails in many local law enforcement agencies around the country these days. I’ll have more to say shortly about the [strictly legal issues involved in the IJ’s recently-filed action in Philadelphia](#) challenging the practice on constitutional grounds. But sometimes, legalisms aside, the issue really is simple – this is legal extortion by people with guns and the power to imprison against innocent people, and Oliver’s addition to the mounting chorus of outrage (see especially [Sarah Stillman’s wonderful article in the New Yorker](#) and [an excellent series of Washington Post articles](#) about the practice) against it is very welcome.

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