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## The Double Standard About Journalists' Bias

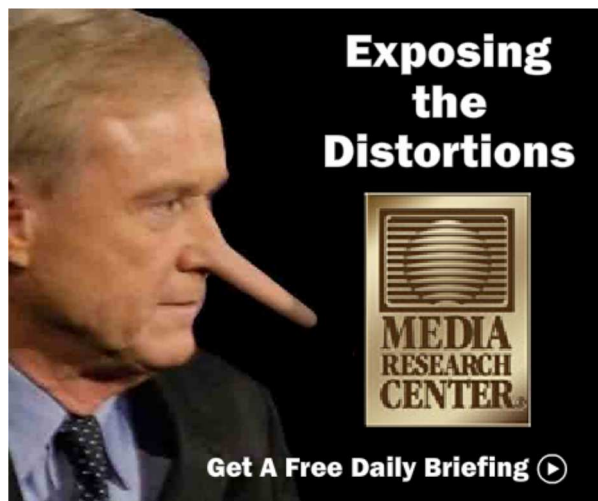
John Stossel

Wednesday, November 04, 2009

I made The New York Times last week. It even ran my picture. My mother would be proud.

Unfortunately, the story was critical. It said, "Critics have leaped on Mr. Stossel's speaking engagements as the latest evidence of conservative bias on the part of Fox."

Which "critics" had "leaped"? The reporter mentioned Rachel Maddow. I wouldn't think her criticism newsworthy, but Times reporters may use MSNBC as their guide to life. He also quoted an "associate professor of journalism" who said my speeches were "'pretty shameful' by traditional journalistic standards." All this because I spoke at an event for Americans for Prosperity (AFP), a "conservative advocacy group."



It is odd that this is a news story. In August, AFP hired me to do the very same thing. I give the money to charity. The Times didn't call that "shameful."

But in August, I worked for ABC News. Now, I work for Fox. Hmmm.

It reminds me of something that happened earlier in my career.

I was one of America's first TV consumer reporters. I approached the job with an attitude. If companies ripped people off, I would embarrass them on TV -- and demand that government *do* something. (I now regret the latter -- the former was a good thing.)

I clearly had a point of view: I was a crusader out to punish corporate bullies. My colleagues liked it. I got job offers. I won 19 Emmys. I was invited to speak at journalism conferences.

Then, gradually, I figured out that business, for the most part, treats consumers pretty well. The way to get rich in business is to create something good, sell it for a reasonable price, acquire a reputation for honesty and keep pleasing customers so they come back for more.

As a local TV reporter, I could find plenty of crooks. But once I got to the national stage -- "20/20" and "Good Morning America" -- it was hard to find comparable national scams. There were some: Enron, Bernie Madoff, etc. But they are rare. In a \$14 trillion economy, you'd think there'd be more. But there aren't.

I figured out why: Market forces, even when hampered by government, keep scammers in check. Reputation matters. Word gets out. Good companies thrive, and bad ones atrophy. Regulation barely deters the cheaters, but competition does.

It made me want to learn more about free markets. I subscribed to Reason magazine and read Cato Institute research papers. Then Milton Friedman, Friedrich Hayek and Aaron Wildavsky.

My reporting changed. I started taking skeptical looks at government -- especially regulation. I did an ABC TV special, "Are We Scaring You to Death?" that said we TV reporters often make hysterical claims about chemicals, pollution and other relatively minor risks. Its good ratings -- 16 million viewers -- surprised my colleagues.

Suddenly, I wasn't so popular with them.

I stopped winning Emmys.

I was invited on CNN's media program, "Reliable Sources," to be interviewed by The Washington Post's Howard Kurtz and an indignant Bernard Kalb. They titled the segment, "Objectivity and Journalism: Does John Stossel Practice Either?" It was in big letters over my head.

Apparently, I had broken the rules.

On the air they told me that I was no longer objective. I was too stunned to defend myself effectively. I said something like: "I've always had a point of view. How come you had no trouble with that when I criticized business?"

In hindsight, I wish I'd said: "Look at the title on the wall, you hypocrites! It shows you have a point of view, too. Many reporters do. You just don't like my arguments now that I no longer hew to your statist line. So you want to shut me up."

But I didn't.

So I'll say it now: Reporters who think coercive government control is generally good and I, who thinks voluntary market forces are generally better, *both* have a point of view.

So why am I the one called biased?

I *like* what "Americans for Prosperity" defends. I'm an American, and I'm for prosperity. What creates prosperity is free and competitive markets. That means *limited* government.

And I will speak about that every chance I get.

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