

Transparency equals credibility

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In politics there are sometimes coincidences that are not all that coincidental. But whether a coincidence rises to the level of a “conspiracy” is debatable. Most institutions, because flawed and fallible humans are involved, are just not capable of pulling off conspiracies. This is especially true of the federal government. Incompetence, ineptitude and ignorance can create the appearance that a conspiracy is underway, but an appearance is usually all it is.

Recent events in Idaho, though, are causing me to question this “conspiracy” premise.

Exhibit A: Lobbyist and activist Wayne Hoffman. Hoffman, a former newspaper reporter and Bill Sali mouthpiece, masquerades as a journalist and runs a so-called independent news bureau. In truth, this “news bureau” is nothing more than a front for Hoffman’s advocacy organization that, in all probability, is funded by libertarian billionaires David and Charles Koch. They own Koch Industries, an incredible conglomerate operating out of Wichita, Kansas.

And Hoffman’s actions and influence certainly raise questions about who he is working for, not to mention who is paying his bills.

Hoffman’s claim to run a real news organization is disputed by the Capitol Correspondent’s Association, the group that accredits legitimate reporters, and which refuses to characterize either he or his three researchers as reporters.

Secondly, one uses the word “probable” regarding his sugar daddy because Hoffman refuses to divulge all donors to the Freedom Foundation that pays his salary and those of his support staff. True journalists (and most registered lobbyists) have either an ethical or legal requirement for transparency. The public has a right to know who is paying for lobbying and advocacy. Such disclosure permits individuals to draw their own conclusions as to why a particular group is trying to influence the legislature or the governor.

Wayne Hoffman thumbs his nose at this thought, despite touting transparency and the public’s right to know in a post-legislative report. He says some of his donors prefer anonymity, and under our tax code they have that right. Touting transparency for government, but refusing to be transparent as you work to influence government is simple hypocrisy. Hoffman’s activities belie any claim to his being a journalist. He is a lobbyist and an advocate of right-wing, libertarian causes funded by someone with deep pockets and without the courage of their convictions. Hoffman and his foundation were up to their eyeballs this legislative session, pushing for the discredited and bizarre notions of a

supposed right of a state to nullify federal law a state does not agree with. (The Civil War settled that one)

This is a quintessential example for how to waste time and resources. In a recent column Hoffman tries to turn a lemon into lemonade (And shame on the thinking voter if he gets away with it). First, Hoffman takes credit for getting a bill passed forbidding any state employee or agency to engage in any activity that might end up assisting the implementation of so-called "Obama-Care" in Idaho. He brags about leading an effort to "nullify" the federal legislation.

Nowhere, though, does he own up to the fact that Idaho Attorney General Lawrence Wasden authored an opinion concluding that a billion dollars in federal Medicare funding n funding to take care of 220,000 Idahoans n was in jeopardy as a result of the legislation, Hoffman also fails to acknowledge that Idaho's top lawyer doubted the legislation would survive a federal court challenge. Then Hoffman, in some of the more arrogant, self-serving language one will ever read, takes ALL the credit for Governor Otter vetoing the bill and putting in its place a more restrictive and punitive executive order, an executive order that permits only exemptions authorized by Governor. In Hoffman's telling, Governor Otter comes across as putty in the hands of the skillful lobbyist who displays zero common sense in making Butch look like one of his toadies.

No coincidence either that Hoffman's Idaho agenda is largely the same agenda rolled out in Wisconsin, Indiana and Ohio in recent months.

The August 30, 2010 issue of The New Yorker magazine carried a fascinating piece on the Koch Brothers, who one has to conclude must provide some of the funding for Hoffman and his Freedom Foundation. Early in the article, this paragraph emerges:

"The Koch's are long-time libertarians who believe in drastically lower personal and corporate taxes, minimal social services for the needy, and much less oversight of industry---especially environmental regulation. These views, naturally, dovetail with the brothers' corporate interests."

Surprised to find out that Koch Industries is one of the top ten air polluters in the country? Or that between 2005 and 2008, the Koch's vastly outspent ExxonMobil in donations to fight organizations concerned about climate change?

The brothers have poured vast sums of money into underwriting foundations like Hoffman's, as well as think tanks, political front groups, and candidates like Koch toady, Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker.

One of their avowed goals is the defeat President Obama in 2012.

It's their money and the Supreme Court has sanctioned as their free speech right the ability to spend it almost any way they wish. From an organizational, lobbying standpoint the Koch brothers have done a brilliant job of becoming effective at what they do,

including underwriting most of the considerable expenses entailed by the supposed grassroots movement called the Tea Party. In reality, these grassroots efforts more resemble Astroturf--they are unnatural, manufactured and appear to be something they are not.

Libertarians like to point to billionaire financier George Soros, on the political left, as having designed this new model of political activism. A fair characterization as far as it goes. At least Soros is honest in acknowledging that his money is advancing his agenda. Hoffman and his ilk insist on being held to a much different standard in secrecy. I trust the public to figure out, with the proper scorecard, who is really acting in their best interests.

Wayne Hoffman obviously does not trust the people. Or perhaps exposure of his sources of funding would be so damaging to his effectiveness that he can't risk the sunlight and therefore hides behind a convenient law that runs counter to what he professes to be and to what he stands for. Until Wayne Hoffman is honest and transparent about what he is about, and who pays him to have his ideas, he shouldn't be published in any newspaper, anywhere.

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