

The Push for State-controlled Media

For years the Left has fought to increase regulation of the news

By Barbara Joanna Lucas

Summary: *Earlier this year, the Federal Communications Commission was slapped down when the public learned it had begun an investigation of decision-making in newsrooms. The agency claimed it meant no harm to press freedoms, but in fact for years the Left has agitated for greater governmental control of the media. Obama administration officials have said as much for years, as did the president when he first ran for the office.*

If only enlightened central planners could have greater control over the mass media, they would ensure that the masses receive the correct information and prevent the wrong people from delivering political messages that might influence the public improperly.”

That’s the kind of thinking behind the “media reform” movement, which hopes to put the most benign spin on the idea of letting government supervise the press and forget about the First Amendment’s guarantees of free speech and a free press. Even more Orwellian: the group leading this effort is called “Free Press,” by which they mean a press free of corporate control. Free Press is allied with various other left-wing groups that claim to have the same hope to strengthen democracy and freedom by simultaneously weakening corporate control and strengthening government’s control.



Readers will recall the Federal Communications Commission’s notorious Multi-Market Study of Critical Information Needs (CIN), which sparked so much controversy in early 2014. The scheme was supposedly killed after public outcry from conservatives and journalists alike.

It’s absurd on its face to claim the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has any business determining what content the nation’s news media should or should not provide, but the Left’s invasion of newsrooms was simply a test to see how far they could

push. Progressives do not give up; they simply regroup.

Progressives have long feared competition in the marketplace of ideas and, not surprisingly, they believe America simply has too

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much speech. To fix this perceived problem, the Left has agitated for campaign finance “reforms.” It has produced campus speech codes. It has demanded “Net Neutrality.” And as we’ll see, fear of speech motivates Progressives who want to ensure the media reports only news stories they find appropriate.

By contrast, conservative groups vigorously criticize liberal bias in the mainstream media, but they do not advocate for government intervention to make the media more balanced.

While the media reform movement isn’t plotting a full-fledged state-run media—even the most ambitious statisticians know that’s not currently achievable—the movement is fighting for an incremental agenda. In fact, the media reform movement is itself an incremental advance in left-wing speech control. The group Free Press was launched by a small group of left-wing funders shortly after they’d succeeded in a previous incre-

ment, namely, passing the McCain-Feingold campaign finance reform law of 2002.

As John Fund explained in the *Wall Street Journal* (Dec. 21, 2010), “Of the eight major foundations that provided the vast bulk of money for campaign-finance reform, six became major funders of the media-reform movement. (They are the Pew Charitable Trusts, Bill Moyers’s Schumann Center for Media and Democracy, the Joyce Foundation, George Soros’s Open Society Institute, the Ford Foundation, and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.)” (For more on this history, see “Pew and the Gang Ride Again,” *Foundation Watch*, April 2011.)

The media reform movement has everything a Progressive could want: government subsidies for media, identity politics, anti-corporate and class warfare rhetoric, and George Soros money supporting a who’s who of left-liberal nonprofits. The movement has four main stars, all of whom articulated the goals of the CIN long before it gained notoriety:

* Mignon Clyburn is an FCC Commissioner and the daughter of Rep. James Clyburn (D-S.C.), the House Majority Whip when Democrats last had control of Congress. She was acting FCC chairman for a time.

* Michael Copps, a former FCC Commissioner now spearheading the effort on media reform being made by the liberal group Common Cause. (For more on Common Cause, see *Organization Trends*, May 2014.)

* Robert McChesney, a radical professor at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, is the co-founder of Free Press; he’s a self-described socialist who’s “hesitant to say I’m not a Marxist.”

* Mark Lloyd, a former FCC chief diversity officer now in charge of the liberal New America Foundation’s Media Policy Institute.

“Angry, Hateful, Often Racist” Talk Shows

President Obama named Mignon Clyburn an FCC commissioner in 2009; she served as acting chairman of the FCC for most of 2013. A longtime advocate for government rules requiring minority ownership for broadcast licensees, Clyburn told the National Association of Black Owned Broadcasters conference in October 2013 that the FCC needs better “hard and fast” data to establish a policy that will force increases in the number of minority-owned broadcast stations. She called for more data collection, because “A complete picture of the media landscape is necessary to entertain ... any major policy adjustment in the short term” (*Washington Examiner*, Feb. 24, 2014).

In a speech delivered in February 2012, well before the CIN study became public, Clyburn said, “We are especially interested in whether the critical information needs of all Americans are being met. Does limited participation in the communications industry by women and minorities have an impact on whether all Americans have their critical information needs met? [The FCC] is committed to answering this question” (*RBR.com*, Feb. 7, 2012).

Implicit in these demands for “media diversity” is the Left’s belief that if minorities and women own more media companies, then conservative media voices will have less influence.

Clyburn added in her February 2012 speech that the FCC “must emphatically insist that we leave no American behind when it comes to meeting the needs of those in varied and

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vibrant communities of our nation—be they native born, immigrant, disabled, non-English speaking, low-income, or other.”

Earlier, in December 2011, she had complained that “The FCC needs more data,” because “the factual information that the Commission currently has is incomplete if developing policies to promote greater female and minority ownership is still a priority” (Broadcasting and Cable, Dec. 22, 2011).

During her 2009 confirmation hearing, Clyburn claimed to believe that “the Fairness Doctrine,” which for decades had been used by government officials to suppress conservative views on the airwaves, “should not be reinstated in any form, any way, shape or form.” She added, “The FCC, I believe, is not in the business of censoring speech or content on the basis of political views and opinions” (Washington Examiner, Feb. 24, 2014).

And yet Clyburn and others clearly want to use the power of government to shape what messages are reaching the public. Keep in mind that the words “Fairness Doctrine” have become toxic. But some on the left have sought to enact the same kind of policy through backdoor channels—such as ownership rules requiring “localism” or affirmative action quotas—in hopes that new requirements will effectively reduce the number of stations that air Rush Limbaugh and other conservative talk radio shows.

Advocates for media diversity say the number of African-American-owned broadcast stations has declined by 30 percent since 1998, and that today racial minorities own just 2.2 percent of commercial TV stations.

“I understand the Fairness Doctrine is not coming back, but why has the FCC sat by and

allowed angry, hateful, often racist talk show hosts, 95 percent of whom are conservative, to poison the supposedly public airwaves?” Clyburn asked when speaking at the 2011 National Conference for Media Reform, sponsored by Free Press (Washington Examiner, Feb. 24, 2014).

Among those attending that year’s media reform conference were House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and Copps of Common Cause, who at the time was still an FCC commissioner.

Clyburn also talked about imposing a new tax on corporate media and using the revenue collected “to create another ecosystem that would have more voices, independent voices.” The term “ecosystem” is frequently used to call for remaking the American media.

Obama Too Moderate for Activists

For conservatives, this entire movement may seem puzzling. Except for Fox News, talk radio, and some popular websites, the news media are still dominated left-leaning voices. Why is the Left desperate for still more left-wing media?

The answer lies in part in several aspects of the media reform movement that appeal to the Left. For example, the movement calls for blocking all mergers among media companies and talks endlessly about “fairness,” “diversity,” and “justice,” using rhetoric about “us against them,” “the people vs. the powerful,” and so on. This makes great bumper sticker language and could be a rallying point for low-information voters the Left hopes to drive to the polls.

For his part, President Barack Obama hasn’t impressed the leaders of the movement that much while in the White House, but he did champion their cause as a candidate for

president. “I believe that the nation’s media ownership rules remain necessary and are critical to the public interest,” said candidate Obama, then the junior senator from Illinois, in September 2007.

“We should be doing much more to encourage diversity in the ownership of broadcast media, promote the development of new media outlets for expression of diverse viewpoints, and establish greater clarity in the public interest obligations of broadcasters occupying the nation’s spectrum.”

The following month, candidate Obama said of the FCC, “I object to the agency moving forward to allow greater consolidation in the media market without first fully understanding how that would limit opportunities for minority, small business and women-owned firms.”

In February 2008, Sen. Obama and senior Illinois Sen. Dick Durbin even wrote a letter together to the FCC demanding action (Moyers and Company website, Dec. 4, 2012). “Broadcast ownership rules directly implicate core American values such as diversity, localism, representation, and a competitive marketplace of ideas,” Durbin and Obama said.

Just words? Media reform advocates seem to think so. An April 4, 2013 letter to Obama by Copps, the head of Common Cause’s media reform effort and a former FCC commissioner, was signed onto by numerous other advocacy groups, many notably left-wing and all calling for Obama to make his next nominee to chair the FCC an aggressive reform advocate.

The letter, in fact, used the term, “critical information needs,” a mantra of the movement: “the critical information needs of many communities, including people who

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are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, or visually impaired, remain underserved.”

The letter also highlights other policies the Obama administration should pursue. “The FCC must review all telecommunications and media mergers critically,” the letter said. It called on the FCC to enforce ownership rules and require all political ads to state who paid for the ad. “Those policies shape our commercial markets, our political discourse, our educational opportunities, and our social interactions.”

In addition to Common Cause, signers included: Alternate ROOTS, Center for Media Justice, Chicago Media Action, the Free Press Action Fund, Communications Workers of America, and United Church of Christ Office of Communications Inc. To give the letter a shroud of non-ideology, a few disability advocacy groups were also included.

Journalists Jumping Aboard

The fact that Progressives are frustrated by the lack of government control over political discourse is not surprising. What is rather surprising—and disheartening—is the number of journalists who support this movement. Liberal or not, you may think someone in the First Amendment business would object to the idea of government interfering with the media.

For example, during the 1980s battle over whether to restore the Fairness Doctrine, liberal CBS anchorman Dan Rather took the side of freedom and declared, “Not only the station manager but the newspeople as well were very much aware of this government presence looking over their shoulders. I can recall newsroom conversations about what the FCC implications of broadcasting a particular report would be. Once a newsperson has to stop and consider what a government agency will think of something he or she

wants to put on the air, an invaluable element of freedom has been lost.”

Rather was right. Of course, he went on to disgrace, ousted from CBS after defending the network’s phony story on President George W. Bush’s National Guard record. Last year, he joined the bandwagon of leftists appearing in the documentary *Shadows of Liberty*, which premiered at the National Conference for Media Reform in Denver in April 2013. The film claims that corporations have taken control of the media, keeping important news away from Americans.

Progressive talk radio host Amy Goodman, co-host of “Democracy Now,” also attended the Denver conference. In 2008, Goodman used her show as a platform for Bill Ayers and Bernardine Dohrn, leaders of the terrorist Weather Underground group, to claim they never committed terrorism (Accuracy in Media website, April 5, 2013).

Another hero of the Left who supports media reform is Bill Moyers, a former press secretary to President Lyndon Johnson who became a talk show host on PBS. Speaking at the media reform conference of 2008, Moyers claimed the movement was born on his program when he interviewed McChesney and John Nichols, authors of *Our Media, Not Theirs*. He explained that the movement seeks “to build alternative and independent sources of news and information that people can trust.”

That idea sounds like it came from the conservative movement, which has worked for decades to establish alternative and independent sources of news in the face of the liberal mainstream media. But unlike Moyers and company, conservatives don’t seek an FCC on steroids to make their vision a reality.

“You represent millions of Americans who see media consolidation as a corrosive social force,” Moyers continued. “It robs them of their voice in public affairs, pollutes the political culture and turns the debate over profound issues into a shouting match of polarized views promulgated by partisan apologists who trivialize democracy while refusing to speak the truth about how our country is being plundered.”

Glenn Greenwald of Britain’s *Guardian* newspaper and Katrina vanden Heuvel of the *Nation* magazine have also attended the media reform conferences and voiced their support.

The Movement’s Architect

At the movement’s center is McChesney, the co-founder of Free Press, which sponsors the media reform conferences. He may have revealed the real motive of the movement when he wrote in the Marxist journal *Monthly Review*, “Our job is to make media reform part of our broader struggle for democracy, social justice, and, dare we say it, socialism.”

McChesney is the author of *Digital Disconnect: How Capitalism Is Turning the Internet Against Democracy* and, with John Nichols, *Dollarocracy: How the Money and Media Election Complex is Destroying America*.

One of his first orders of business is “net neutrality,” a scheme to have the federal government regulate the Internet. McChesney told SocialistProject that net neutrality is part of an incremental agenda whose “ultimate goal is to get rid of the media capitalists.”

“The benefits of the Internet economy accrue to a very small number of gigantic firms that all enjoy what economists traditionally characterize as monopoly status,” he griped in the *Monthly Review* article. “Three of the four

most valuable publicly traded corporations in the United States are Internet-related firms, and thirteen of the thirty-three most valuable firms are primarily Internet firms. Several more of the thirty-three largest firms have significant digital operations ... What that means is that these Internet giants control the outcomes on all policy debates that affect them, which increasingly covers most issues of fundamental importance, like taxation, regulation, labor and consumer rights, and trade.”

McChesney also demands that the movement work to elect far-left politicians at every level, as was done in successful campaigns waged to elect avowed socialist Kshama Sawant (now on the Seattle City Council) and leftist Bill de Blasio (now mayor of New York).

“In view of the centrality of communication to the political economy, media reform activists have to pull their heads out of the beltway and start talking to the people who elected Sawant to the Seattle City Council and voted Bill de Blasio the mayor of New York City,” McChesney wrote. “We need to capture the imaginations of people such that they believe politics can lead to radical improvements in their lives, and the lives of those they know and love. Then we can build an army that can shake the foundations of this rotting system.”

He went on to argue that journalism must be treated as a public good—sort of like a utility, subject to subsidies and regulation. “When advertising disappears, journalism’s true nature comes into focus: it is a public good, something society requires but that the market cannot provide in sufficient quality or quantity,” he wrote. “Like other public goods, if society wants it, it will require public policy and public spending. There is no other way. The marriage of capitalism and journalism is over. If the United States is to

have democratic journalism, it will require massive public investments.”

Leftist Groups and Funders Behind the Movement

McChesney’s Free Press, the organization with the creepy Orwellian name that has been the primary voice pushing the agenda forward, has been funded by George Soros through two of his philanthropies, Open Society Foundations (formerly known as Open Society Institute) and Foundation to Promote Open Society. Together they have funneled \$2,060,000 to the group since 2004.

Free Press was also one of 33 groups that drafted a 25-page petition asking the FCC to “initiate an inquiry into the extent and effects of hate speech in media and to explore non-regulatory means by which to mitigate its negative impacts.” The request continued, “Hate speech thrives, as hate has developed as a profit-model for syndicated radio and cable-television programs masquerading as ‘News’” (WND, July 18, 2010). To leftists, of course, hate speech is speech they don’t agree with.

Free Press is also funded by the Ford Foundation (\$3,260,000 since 2004), Park Foundation (\$2.4 million since 2004), Glaser Progress Foundation (\$200,000 since 2004), Joyce Foundation (\$80,000 since 2005), Nathan Cummings Foundation (\$145,000 since 2005), Overbrook Foundation (\$423,000 since 2003), Rockefeller Brothers Fund Inc. (\$155,000 since 2004), Tides Foundation (\$122,882 since 2005), Schumann Center for Media and Democracy Inc. (\$4,883,000 since 2003), Sandler Foundation (\$1,650,000 since 2008), and Surdna Foundation (\$600,000 since 2005).

Free Press teamed with the left-wing think tank Center for American Progress (CAP) in 2007 to publish a report entitled, “The Structural Imbalance of Political Talk Radio.” The report’s dire assessment was that “right-wing talk reigns supreme on America’s airwaves,” and that government regulation should be used to “close the gap.”

Mark Lloyd, then a CAP senior fellow, attributed the “imbalance” to “the breakdown in the Federal Communications Commission regulatory system during the Reagan administration in the 1980s and the elimination of caps on ownership in telecommunications during the 1990s.” He called not for a return to the Fairness Doctrine, but for ownership caps (CNSNews.com, June 26, 2007).

Lloyd went on to serve as the “diversity czar” at Obama’s FCC. In addition, Obama’s first

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FCC Chairman, Julius Genachowski, hired Free Press spokesman Jen Howard to be the FCC spokesman.

After leaving the Obama administration, Lloyd went to work for the Media Policy Initiative at the New America Foundation, another Soros-funded group that has also been bankrolled by the Ford Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and Eric Schmidt, executive chairman of Google (Accuracy in Media).

Common Cause, in the meantime, has declared media reform part of its “good government” agenda and established the Media and Democracy Reform Initiative, led by former FCC commissioner Michael Copps. “American media’s failure to provide diverse viewpoints and unbiased information is undermining the strength of our democracy and acting as a barrier to many needed reforms,” says the Common Cause website.

Common Cause has also been tough on Obama for failing to keep promises. “When President Barack Obama ran for his first term, he opposed further media industry consolidation, stressed the importance of a free and open Internet, and supported increased minority and small business media ownership,” Common Cause declares. “Yet his first term has come and gone with little progress on these fronts.”

“Huge media conglomerates have gobbled up hundreds of independent newspaper and broadcast outlets, more often than not cutting the newsroom staffs in order to finance the heavy costs of the merger or purchase transaction,” Copps adds in an Oct. 4, 2013 blog post.

“To make a bad situation worse, years of wrong-headed decisions by government—especially by the Federal Communications

Commission (where I served for more than a decade, often as a dissenter)—blessed this merger-mania and went on from there to eliminate most of the public interest obligations that broadcasters were expected to carry out in return for their free use of the public airwaves.”

“A great place to begin real media reform would be to say no to some of these merger deals,” Copps continued. “To my way of thinking, we won’t get very far in meeting those other three challenges—big money, gerrymandering, and the filibuster—until we have a news and information infrastructure that presents these challenges to all of us in meaningful way—not as stories of personalities, horse-races, polling, who’s up and who’s down, but as substantive challenges to our ability to perform the practical art of self-government. Indeed, we may well have avoided the current government shutdown if the media had done a better job of explaining why the country was heading there in the first place.”

Almost CIN-ful

The media reform movement has desperately sought a broad-brush way to use the FCC for impose its agenda, and it nearly succeeded with the Multi-Market Study of Critical Information Needs, which initially attracted little controversy. The model for the study itself grew out of two Soros-funded institutions, the University of Southern California Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism and the University of Wisconsin-Madison Center for Communication and Democracy, which together have received \$3.7 million from Soros since 2000. The FCC asked the two Soros-funded schools to come up with criteria for what information is “critical” for Americans to have (FrontPageMag.com, Feb. 25, 2014).

The pilot region selected was Clyburn’s home state capital, Columbia, South Carolina. The idea was to examine “the process by which stories are selected,” the “perceived station bias,” and the “perceived responsiveness to underserved populations.”

“I’m not crazy about the federal government questioning reporters and editors about their news judgments,” said Bill Rogers, director of the South Carolina Press Association, which represents the state’s newspapers. “What is the relevance of news decisions as to whether small businesses can enter the broadcast industry? Viewers evaluate coverage for content and fairness, and the marketplace responds accordingly” (*Columbia Journalism Review*, Feb. 17, 2014).

The FCC planned to survey journalists with very intrusive questions, including:

- * What is the news philosophy of the station?
- * Who is your target audience?
- * What are the demographics of the news management staff (HR)?
- * What are the demographics of the on air staff (HR)?
- * What are the demographics of the news production staff (HR)?
- * How much news does your station (stations) air every day?
- * Do you have any reporters or editors assigned to topic “beats”? If so how many and what are the beats?
- * Who decides which stories are covered?

* How much does community input influence news coverage decisions?

* How do you define critical information that the community needs?

The study was to include newspapers and the Internet, neither of which is regulated by the FCC—at least not yet. (As we went to press, FCC chairman Tom Wheeler threatened he is “seriously considering” the possibility of regulating Internet service providers like phone companies.) The CIN study was to examine eight “critical information needs” in the newsrooms it investigated, all of which could open up dangerous opportunities to bully the free press:

1. Emergency. This area of inquiry was the least dangerous, because only so many ways to cover police or fire/EMS stories exist. But even here one can imagine pressure to push a public union agenda into the news.

2. Health. This is clearly an area where coverage of Obamacare could be affected, as FCC bureaucrats look over the shoulders of reporters and editors.

3. Education. This area has endless possibilities for government bullying, ranging from the Common Core debate to demands from liberal teachers’ unions.

4. Transportation. Liberals strongly prefer other people (usually not them) take public transit.

5. Environment. Here one can be sure pressure would grow even more intense to tout the global warming agenda.

6. Economic opportunities. In this area government bureaucrats could push “inequality” and “one percent vs. the 99 percent” type stories.

7. Civil info. This area would permit local debates to be muscled into narratives that fit the progressive agenda.

8. Political info. The danger here is self-explanatory.

FCC Commissioner Ajit Pai short-circuited this plot when he warned the country of the “study” in the *Wall Street Journal* (Feb. 10, 2014). “The American people, for their part, disagree about what they want to watch,” he wrote. “But everyone should agree on this: The government has no place pressuring media organizations into covering certain stories.”

Pai added that the “FCCs queries may be hard for the broadcasters to ignore. They would be out of business without an FCC license.”

Media critic Howard Kurtz, no conservative, said the study is a “trojan horse that puts federal officials in the newsroom, precisely where they shouldn’t be.”

The outrage spilled out of the media and into Congress when the House Energy and Commerce Committee demanded to know more about the FCC’s scheme. After the uproar, the agency decided to halt the newsroom invasion. FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler assured the public the agency had “no intention of regulating political or other speech.”

Recall Bill Moyers’ claim that the media reform movement aims “to build alternative and independent sources of news and information that people can trust.” Ironically, what Moyers says he wants has actually happened, thanks to talk radio and new media outlets like TheBlaze, Breitbart, CNSNews.com, Daily Caller, Fox News, Newsmax, Washington Free Beacon, and others, which have begun to challenge the monolithic media narrative.

If the country is more polarized, it is largely because Americans are allowed to hear more than the one side of issues that CBS, NBC, and ABC were willing to provide. As a result, the Left wants to strike back in the only way they know how: government regulation. The First Amendment be damned.

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At the urging of an atheist group called the **Freedom from Religion Foundation**, the **IRS** has decided to investigate 99 churches for allegedly illegal electioneering activities, National Review Online reports. The churches merit “high priority examination,” claims the tax agency that has been under withering attack for unfairly targeting Tea Party and conservative nonprofits. Churches have been allowed for decades to do all but endorse candidates, although that prohibition has not been enforced against left-leaning churches in minority communities. The Foundation openly states it is attacking churches for daring to take conservative and pro-life positions, regardless of whether they stop short of endorsing candidates.

Meanwhile, U.S. District Court Judge **Emmet Sullivan** has ordered the stonewalling officials of the embattled IRS to prepare new answers after IRS employees contradicted sworn testimony about disgraced former IRS nonprofit chief **Lois Lerner**'s computer hard drive, Daily Caller reports. A congressional panel was told Lerner's hard drive, which is thought to contain proof of her animus against right-leaning nonprofits, was “scratched” and then “shredded,” but documents **Judicial Watch** recovered via the Freedom of Information Act make that claim doubtful. The government cover-up continues.

Conservative hero **James O’Keefe III**, founder of nonprofit **Veritas Visuals**, used some levity to demonstrate how porous parts of the U.S.-Mexico border are. The guerrilla journalist engaged in a performance piece by donning an **Osama bin Laden** costume and walking back and forth across a shallow portion of the Rio Grande River, setting foot in Mexico and then walking back over to U.S. soil. “And I’m here today to ask you, do you feel safe,” O’Keefe says in a video. O’Keefe said no U.S. Border Patrol agents could be seen for miles. Gimmicky? Sure, but effective in underscoring the importance of the issue.

Former journalist **David Brock**, founder of **Media Matters for America** (where working conditions are so bad workers voted to join the **SEIU**), is expanding his empire of fake watchdog groups that harass conservatives while intimidating liberals into moving even farther left. Last month Brock was elected chairman of the **George Soros**-funded **Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)**, a nominally non-partisan group that routinely attacks Republican lawmakers but leaves all but the most corrupt Democrats alone, *Politico* reports. Under a new so-called accountability program CREW will target state-level politicians and harass those who give money to conservatives. CREW, a 501(c)(3) public charity, will create a 501(c)(4) nonprofit arm that will have greater leeway to conduct partisan attacks.

Brock is also creating **The American Democracy Legal Fund** which will attack Republican candidates for office. The new 527 group will be run by **Brad Woodhouse**, a Brock crony who heads **American Bridge 21st Century**, a political action committee that lies about conservatives and distorts their records in order to help Democrats.

Global warming fabulist **Al Gore**, who has been using nonprofits for years to further his radical agenda, is suing the Qatar-based news network **Al Jazeera** for fraud and breach of contract, Bloomberg News reports. Gore sold his network, **Current TV**, to the Qatari royal family-owned network for almost \$500 million and now claims \$65 million in escrowed funds is being improperly withheld from him and a business partner. Gore was criticized by environmentalists two years ago when the deal came to light, because Qatar is a major oil producer. He blew off the criticism, saying Al Jazeera has “the highest quality, most extensive, best climate coverage of any network in the world.”

The leftist group **MoveOn** is asking supporters to contribute to a new voter turnout system that it claims increased voter turnout in the 2012 elections. The “breakthrough” is “a simple voter report card letting people know how often they’ve voted in recent elections ... It’s a little guilt-trippy but it works,” the group boasts in a mass email.