

NY TIMES ADMITS GRUBER PROBLEM, FAILS TO MENTION KRUGMAN PROBLEM

✖ In a full throated *mea culpa* by the New York Times Public Editor, Clark Hoyt, appearing in the Sunday edition, the Times officially describes the critical and material implications that arise when readers are misled by undisclosed interests of sources and authors in their paper of record.

These examples have resulted in five embarrassing editors' notes in the last two months – two of them last week – each of them saying readers should have been informed of the undisclosed interest. And on Thursday, the standards editor sent Times journalists a memo urging them to be “constantly alert” to the outside interests of expert sources. The cases raised timeless issues for journalists and sources about what readers have a right to know and whose responsibility it is to find it out or disclose it.

That is exactly right. One of the prime examples the Times' Public Editor bases his proper conclusion on is that of Jonathan Gruber:

Jonathan Gruber, a prominent M.I.T. health economist, wrote an Op-Ed column and was quoted frequently in other Times columns, news articles and blogs on health care reform before it came to light that he had a contract worth nearly \$400,000 to analyze health proposals for the Obama administration.

....

Gruber, the health care economist, wrote

an Op-Ed column in July supporting an excise tax on so-called Cadillac health plans. Not long before, he had signed a contract with the Department of Health and Human Services to analyze the economic impact of various health care proposals in Congress. He did not tell Op-Ed editors, nor was the contract mentioned on at least 12 other occasions when he was quoted in The Times after he was consulting for the administration. After a blogger reported on Gruber's government contract on the Daily Kos Web site, Gruber did volunteer it to Steven Greenhouse, a Times reporter interviewing him for an article on the excise tax. Greenhouse said he included the fact in a draft but struck it because the article was too long. Greenhouse said that Gruber's views on the tax were so well-known that he did not think they would be influenced by a consulting contract. But had he realized how large the contract was, Greenhouse said, "I would have stood up and paid lots more attention."

While it is nice the Times has admitted its problem with Gruber, and his wantonly serial failure to disclose material facts and appearances of conflict, it is extremely curious and convenient they dodge the most recent, and in many regards most glaring, example of their damage from Gruber's omissions. Namely, the scurrilous attack on Marcy Wheeler by New York Times columnist Paul Krugman, where he petulantly defended his friend and colleague Gruber by tarring Marcy and the entire Firedoglake blog with the statements:

This has led some people, mainly Marcy Wheeler at Firedoglake, to question Gruber's objectivity. What the folks at Firedoglake should ask themselves is this: do you really want to become just like the right-wingers with their

endless supply of fake scandals?

This was an unjustified and unconscionable slash by Mr. Krugman. Both Mr. Krugman and the Times were fully apprised of the complete absence of factual basis for Krugman's remark; I know, because I wrote a blog post to that effect and personally sent it to Krugman and the Times. I will not reprint the contents of my email forwarding the same to Krugman and the Times, as I indicated in it I would not make it public. Suffice it to say I suggested Mr. Krugman owed Marcy Wheeler a retraction and/or apology. He still does.

But there has been no response from the esteemed Mr. Krugman, and the Times' Public Editor Hoyt decided to completely, and conveniently, ignore the matter by declining to discuss it. Instead, Mr. Hoyt chose to disingenuously refer as follows:

After a blogger reported on Gruber's government contract on the Daily Kos Web site....

Actually, there are several terms beyond disingenuous to describe this contemptuous soft sell; but I will leave it there. First off, Mr. Hoyt does not have the decency or professionalism to even name the Daily Kos author he is referring to. Her name is Mcjoan Mr. Hoyt, and she is very good. Secondly, Hoyt willfully refuses to address the individual blogger, Marcy Wheeler, who was responsible (see: [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)) for fleshing out, over several days, the full extent of Gruber's disclosure failings and laying the evidentiary foundation for the same. Lastly, of course, Hoyt fails to address the baseless attack his paper, via Paul Krugman, wrongfully made on Marcy Wheeler and Firedoglake.

What Hoyt does make crystal clear though, and provides robust documentation of, is that

Jonathan Gruber's disclosure failings were no "fake scandal", nor were they in any way analogous to the spurious antics of "right wingers" as Paul Krugman callously alleged. After all, it is right there in the "paper of record".

I guess avoidance means never having to say you are sorry; but it is a pretty unsavory tact for the New York Times, paper of record and home of "all the news fit to print". All the news maybe, but certainly not all the truth, honesty and chivalry.

UPDATE: To clarify, and properly so as Marcy points out in a comment, the original reporting of Jonathan Gruber's contract giving rise to the issue of disclosure came from a blogger by the name of Mote Dai in a comment to Mcjoan's Daily Kos post on the excise tax Paul Krugman linked to in his article.

I would also like to agree with the sentiment expressed by Professor Foland in his comment:

Krugman has earned the presumption from us that he's acting in good faith and happens to disagree; and we should honestly try to understand where he's coming from otherwise we'll never convince him.

I think that is a more than fair point as to Mr. Krugman's position on Jonathan Gruber; it is Krugman's lashing out at Marcy Wheeler, and Firedoglake as an entity, I take issue with. It is in this regard Mr. Krugman painted with an excessively broad, harsh and false brush.