

## Progress Michigan Accused of Plagiarism In Report On Mackinac Center

A handful of passages in a report the liberal group Progress Michigan released this week about the conservative Mackinac Center for Public Policy were lifted nearly verbatim from other sources without attribution, prompting the Mackinac Center to accuse the group of plagiarism.

Progress Michigan later edited the report to say it “inadvertently left out two citations.”

There were three passages in question.

In one section, the Progress Michigan report said: “Since 2005, the Mackinac Center has promoted changes to Michigan law giving more power and protection to emergency financial managers, state-appointed officials who take over cities or struggling school districts and have broad powers to fix budgets on the brink of collapse. In 2011, the Mackinac Center published four recommendations, including granting emergency managers the power to override elected officials (such as a mayor or school board) and toss out union contracts. All four recommendations ended up in Snyder’s legislation.”

A 2011 Mother Jones article contained this: “Since 2005, the Mackinac Center for Public Policy has urged reforms to Michigan law giving more power and protection to emergency financial managers, state-appointed officials who parachute into ailing cities or school districts and employ drastic measures to fix budgets on the brink of collapse. In January, the free-market-loving center published four recommendations, including granting emergency managers the power to override elected officials (such as a mayor or school board member) and toss out union contracts. All four ended up in Snyder’s legislation.”

The same Mother Jones article also contained this passage: “In 2009, Amway and Wal-Mart were among the 3,100 businesses that signed a letter opposing the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA), which would’ve made

it easier for employees to unionize.”

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Those were the two passages Progress Michigan updated with citations.

However, there was another passage about the Mackinac Center and the American Legislative Exchange Council’s “shared corporate agenda” that essentially duplicated language in a report from the related Progress Now organization about ties between ALEC and the Goldwater Institute in Georgia, suggesting something of a cookie-cutter approach in the Progress organization’s studies of conservative organizations in different states.

The Goldwater report said: “The Goldwater Institute is a member of the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), a corporate-funded bill mill. Over the years, Goldwater staffers have proposed numerous bills at ALEC task force meetings, where elected officials and private sector members (like corporate lobbyists and special interest groups) vote as equals behind closed doors on templates to change the law. Under ALEC’s public bylaws, its state legislative leaders are tasked with a “duty” to get those bill introduced into law.”

The report on the Mackinac Center said: “The Mackinac Center is an active member of the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), a corporate bill mill. Over the years, Mackinac staffers have proposed numerous bills at ALEC task force meetings, where elected officials and private sector members (like corporate lobbyists and special interest groups) vote as equals behind closed doors on templates to change the law. Under ALEC’s public bylaws, its state legislative leaders are tasked with a “duty” to get those bill introduced into

law.”

In response to questions about whether Progress Michigan committed plagiarism in its report, Progress Michigan Executive Director Lonnie Scott said in a prepared statement, “A previous version of our report inadvertently left out two citations. We regret this oversight and have corrected it, and we stand by the concerns raised about Mackinac in our report.”

Progress Michigan officials would not directly respond to whether the issues in the report amounted to plagiarism.

Spokesperson Jessica Tramontana said, “We have admitted an error, we have fixed the error and I find it interesting the Mackinac Center is fixating on quotation marks instead of disputing the content of our report.”

The report overall sought to detail the Mackinac

Center’s ties to conservative funders in an effort to undermine the Mackinac Center’s claims of nonpartisanship. It also questioned reported contributions from the organization to Republican causes (See Gongwer Michigan Report, November 13, 2013).

But Mackinac Center spokesperson Ted O’Neil said the plagiarism in Progress Michigan’s report undermines it and the entire organization.

Mr. O’Neil said the Mackinac Center ran the Progress Michigan report through a program the Mackinac Center uses to check its own products against plagiarism.

“It’s just flat-out plagiarism. They think they fixed it, but it doesn’t meet muster,” he said of the updated version. “If people hadn’t started looking into this, they never would have done this on their own.”