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18:00

October 30, 2003 Thursday

TRANSCRIPT: # 103000cb.463

SECTION: NEWS; DOMESTIC

HEADLINE: BUCHANAN & PRESS For October 30, 2003

BYLINE: Bill Press; Pat Buchanan; Larry Weidman

GUESTS: Chris Horner; David Heymann

HIGHLIGHT:

Are environmental laws to blame for those devastating wildfires in California?

BODY:

ANNOUNCER: The smartest hour on television, BUCHANAN & PRESS.

[...]

BUCHANAN: Could the California wildfires have been prevented? Congress is about to pass the president's plan to prune federal forests to prevent future fires, but environmentalists say the Bush plan is a sellout to the timber and logging industry.

Joining us now is Carl Zichella of the Sierra Club and **Chris Horner** of the **Competitive Enterprise Institute**. Welcome, gentlemen. Let me start with you, Carl. Carl, as you know, there are a number of individuals who are saying that groups like the Sierra Club, environmentalists, prevented the clearing of this brush and sagebrush and the cutting of trees and the clearing of all this timber on the ground and these dead trees, and as a consequence, we got a holocaust in southern California for human beings in terms of loss of life and loss of property and loss of homes. How do you answer them?

CARL ZICHELLA, SIERRA CLUB: Well, first of all, Pat, let me just say that tonight our sympathy goes out to the families that have lost loved ones and property, and it's just tragic what's occurred. But in answer to your question, I think these people who are making these claims, they're entitled to their own opinions, but they're not entitled to their own facts. And the facts are very clear. Not one fire fuel reduction sale or project in any of the four southern California national forests have been opposed by any environmentalist.

Not one environmentalist has opposed clearing of brush or prescribed burning in southern California, which most of the problem is in chaparral, as you probably know by now, if you have been following this story, and I know you have been. This is chaparral. This is something that burns explosively. These are fire-dependent ecosystems, and with a set of weather conditions like this, nothing could have prevented this fire at this time. We are pushing communities farther and farther out into fire-dependent ecosystems, and to blame environmentalists is really silly, frankly.

PRESS: So Chris Horner, let me understand this. At least two of these fires were set by arsonists, and you're blaming environmentalists?

CHRIS HORNER, **COMPETITIVE ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE**: I haven't yet, but I might get there. The specifics of this...

(CROSSTALK)

HORNER: ... hold on Carl...

(CROSSTALK)

PRESS: But doesn't that show how ridiculous your argument is?

HORNER: Well, you haven't even heard it yet, but I appreciate you admitting the presumption that our argument is ridiculous. But I'm going to disprove that because the fact of the matter is fire happens. Man did not invent fire. Man has learned how to control it, and we've learned how to control it in forest fires, the catastrophic nature of it. Could the fires have been prevented? I don't know. The question is could the catastrophic nature of the fire have been prevented?

And the answer is yes in all accounts because they are blocking 133 out of 180 efforts to clear out the fuel in the last two years, the general accounting office just reported, were blocked or attempted to block by the green groups, and they are defeated on these counts three-quarters of the times. The question is not whether the fire could have been prevented, the catastrophic nature...

PRESS: Well...

HORNER: I think all you need to know really was found in the votes even by Senate Democrats last night and tonight seeking to get around these environmental legal requirements. Why would they do this if they aren't in the way?

(CROSSTALK)

ZICHELLA: You know that's just -- I'm sorry. I just can't let you get away with that. That's simply fallacious. Not one single fuel reduction cell on any of the forests on the California national forests was opposed by anybody. No environmentalists...

(CROSSTALK)

ZICHELLA: ... opposed any of those...

(CROSSTALK)

ZICHELLA: ... excuse me. That is incorrect and I'm not going to let you get away...

(CROSSTALK)

ZICHELLA: That was the question. I'm sorry...

(CROSSTALK)

HORNER: I guess the question is...

ZICHELLA: Nationwide...

(CROSSTALK)

ZICHELLA: Nationwide...

(CROSSTALK)

PRESS: One at a time...

(CROSSTALK)

HORNER: ... everything we all need to know that these catastrophic fires do not occur, do not begin on privately-owned lands because these people have the interests, the property interests in taking care of their property and NEPA, this National Environmental Policy Act does not apply there. They're not prohibited. Their hands aren't tied. These breakout -- it's called the tragedy of the commons. The public lands, when everyone owns them, no one has the property interest in protecting them, and they don't. They're the worst pieces -- worst managed pieces of land in the country. They are the source of all catastrophic fires...

BUCHANAN: All right, how do you answer that Carl...

(CROSSTALK)

ZICHELLA: First of all...

BUCHANAN: ... that it starts on public lands, not private.

ZICHELLA: It's absolutely untrue. And let's look at the fires we're talking about...

(CROSSTALK)

ZICHELLA: ... today. Excuse me. I let you speak.

HORNER: Name one catastrophic fire that started on a private land.

PRESS: One at a time...

ZICHELLA: The ones we're watching today. The southern California forests are all started on private lands. You have your facts...

(CROSSTALK)

ZICHELLA: You have your facts incorrect again, and it doesn't surprise me that you'll harangue us about these incorrect facts. According to federal statistics, only seven percent of all fire projects across the country have been appealed. Most of those are resolved within 90 days. It's a red herring to say that anybody is blocking them.

(CROSSTALK)

ZICHELLA: It's not true.

(CROSSTALK)

ZICHELLA: It's simply...

BUCHANAN: Let's go...

ZICHELLA: ... not true.

BUCHANAN: Let's go to the president's plan, Carl. Democrats are supporting the president's plan to cut these forests, to clear them out. Dianne Feinstein is for it, and all the Sierra Club and these other groups are

against it, but didn't that Yellowstone monster, all these fires prove the president is right. You've got to manage this stuff and do some logging in there?

ZICHELLA: Well, listen, Pat. I think the point is everyone agrees we need to do some thinning, but the difference of opinion comes with where and how much money you put into it. We think that there's not enough resources being put into protecting communities, and too much resources being put into taking out fire resistant trees far from those communities, which helps no one. All that does is make...

(CROSSTALK)

ZICHELLA: ... fire conditions in those forests worse.

PRESS: I want to come back...

(CROSSTALK)

PRESS: ... with a question because first of all, I want you to agree that the president's Healthy Forest Initiative has nothing to do with these fires in southern California. This is...

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Absolutely nothing...

PRESS: ... these are not forests.

HORNER: I'm curious why the California Democratic senators who oppose all the forms are seeking to get this through, although they're trying to curb it because of their base.

PRESS: Senator Feinstein has vastly improved the president's bill. She's redirected where the funds are going to be spent. But I want to point out to you that the *L.A. Times* reported this morning the United States Forest Service, because of budget cuts by the Bush administration this year, was only able to reduce fuel in the chaparral...

HORNER: Don't throw me in that briar patch. It might catch on fire with facts here.

PRESS: I'm sorry. I'm sorry. The fact is 56 percent of their program was done this year. They had to reduce their fuel reduction by 44 percent because of Bush budget cuts.

(CROSSTALK)

PRESS: I ask you, again...

HORNER: If I may...

PRESS: ... do you blame the environmentalists for that?

HORNER: Now the question -- to answer both of your allegations...

ZICHELLA: It's a lot easier to blame...

HORNER: Hey, Carl, put a sock in it for a second. The question is...

(CROSSTALK)

HORNER: ... whether the fire starts on public land or private land. That's not the question. It's the catastrophic nature. You can start -- you can have an eco-arsonist start a fire on (UNINTELLIGIBLE)...

PRESS: I'm asking you about the budget...

HORNER: ... the question is and I'm going to specifically answer it...

(CROSSTALK)

HORNER: ... if that stop...

(CROSSTALK)

HORNER: ... if they would stop suing. Two hundred fifty million dollars up to 45 percent of their budget, the Forest Service says, the career say up to 45 percent of their budget that should be dedicated to fire prevention is spent to defending and defensive paperwork on these lawsuits...

BUCHANAN: All right...

HORNER: ... seeking to block fuel thinning.

BUCHANAN: ... all right, let me bring Carl back in here. Carl, what about the point that Chris is making that, OK, the arsonists started the fires, but, look, you have all this fuel out there that made them these gigantic holocausts and all of that or much of that could be cleared out if you folks would only cooperate and let people go in and clear it out.

ZICHELLA: Well, it's a great argument if it were true, Pat, but it simply isn't true. In fact, the reason that there hasn't been a lot of clearing of brush is because it's on private land. The complication was as large as it was because of weather conditions that were abnormally harsh, 70-mile-an-hour winds. Let's be realistic. This fire was jumping 10-lane freeways -- the most perfect firebreak ever developed by man. To blame that on anybody is absolutely ridiculous. In southern California it's difficult to do prescribed burning...

(CROSSTALK)

ZICHELLA: ... in habitats like this...

HORNER: Publicly fueled fire...

ZICHELLA: Let me finish please...

HORNER: ... private land. No.

ZICHELLA: That is incorrect.

HORNER: Publicly fueled fires do jump to private land. Now, but the question is...

PRESS: All right...

HORNER: ... whether they seek to block them...

PRESS: Guys...

(CROSSTALK)

PRESS: ... guys...

(CROSSTALK)

ZICHELLA: This is...

(CROSSTALK)

ZICHELLA: ... I'm not...

(CROSSTALK)

ZICHELLA: ... look, you're wrong about that...

(CROSSTALK)

PRESS: Thank you Carl...

(CROSSTALK)

PRESS: Thank you...

(CROSSTALK)

PRESS: ... this fire is over. We thank you both.

PRESS: That's it for us tonight folks. Thank you for watching. Good night.