

KOCH BROTHERS EXPOSED

Why We Must Act — And How

“Koch Brothers Exposed” chronicles the damage being done to individuals, communities and our democracy by two billionaires who are using their vast wealth to rewrite the rules of government to suit their ends. But the Koch brothers are a symbol of a greater problem of the power of money in politics—in particular, the ability of some über-rich people and large corporations to put their massive thumbs on the scale of democracy in ways that manipulate and ultimately overwhelm the will of the people.

That is the reason the Campaign for America's Future has been longtime critics of the “Citizens United” ruling and have supported a multi-pronged strategy for bringing the scales of political influence back into balance, in which “We, the People,” not the One Percent, determine the direction of the country.

Koch Brothers: Obstacles To Broad Prosperity

Charles and David Koch, billionaire businessmen, are the founders of a group they call “Americans for Prosperity.” But what the group actually does is support extreme right-wing candidates who actively fight against the economic interests of workers and their families. The Koch brothers have been behind:

- **A \$45 million effort to buy control of Congress.** That's the amount of money Forbes magazine says Americans for Prosperity spent in the 2010 elections. That money helped Republicans control the House with the most extreme group of conservatives elected in modern history. With this group firmly in control, every effort by the Obama administration to move legislation to revive the economy has been thwarted and previous successes in health care and financial reform have come under unrelenting attack. The stream of anti-regulation, anti-labor legislation passed by the Tea Party-besotted House is pretty much lifted straight from the Koch brothers legislative agenda.

- **The destructive efforts of the American Legislative Exchange Council to co-opt state and local governments.** Rather than promoting state and local governments as entities that are particularly equipped to respond to the public interest because of their proximity to the people, ALEC mounts campaigns that leave state and local governments facilitating private greed rather than serving the public good. In August The Nation's Lisa Graves explained that “of all the Kochs' investments in right-wing organizations, ALEC provides some of the best returns: it gives the Kochs a way to make their brand of free-market fundamentalism legally binding.” Examples include legislation that allows energy companies to avoid fines for polluting, that push privatization of public

education, and that prevent states and localities from regulating the rogue behavior of financial institutions.

- **ALEC's efforts to suppress voter turnout.** The Koch brothers' fingerprints are all over the efforts by various Republican governors and legislatures to pass voter ID laws that use trumped-up allegations of voter fraud to deliberately disenfranchise voters most likely to oppose their agenda. “It was ALEC's draft legislation that inspired a spate of recently passed voter ID laws that, if allowed to stand, are expected to marginalize the impact of students and people of color at the polls in Texas, South Carolina, Wisconsin, Tennessee and Kansas,” Adele Stan reported for the AFL-CIO blog. Patrick Caldwell at the American Prospect wrote that “the rules are often configured specifically to favor the Republican base at the expense of excluding likely Democrats.”

- **Their assault on public workers.** Scott Walker won the governorship of Wisconsin and the ability to execute his attack on public workers there with the help of \$43,000 in direct contributions from the Koch Industries political action committee and indirectly through the \$1 million that Koch's PAC gave to the Republican Governors Association. The Kochs are also major supporters of Ohio Gov. John Kasich, who earlier this year credited “the strong support” of Americans for Prosperity for his now faltering attempt to strip Ohio state workers of their bargaining rights.

- **The dominance of extremist candidates in the 2012 presidential race.** Koch brothers money can be found in the pockets of at least three of the most extreme Republican presidential candidates: Minnesota congresswoman Michele Bachmann, Texas Gov. Rick Perry and, especially, Herman Cain. Rachel Maddow reported that the Cain connections include a campaign manager from the Wisconsin chapter of Americans for Prosperity, a now ex-spokesperson from another Americans for Prosperity affiliate, and the economic advisor who came up with Cain's infamous “9-9-9” tax plan, who was a member of Americans for Prosperity's advisory board. This is no surprise, because, as the Associated Press has reported, Cain has historically been a shill for the Americans for Prosperity legislative agenda.

- **A planned multimillion-dollar effort by the 1 Percent to determine the outcome of the 2012 presidential election.** The Koch brothers and a core group of super-rich conservatives earlier this year commandeered a hotel near Palm Springs, Calif., and together pledged \$100 million to oppose President Obama's re-election, with the Koch brothers pledging \$60 million of the total. That's just the start: POLITICO reported that the billionaire Koch brothers alone have announced their intention to spend more than \$200 million on elections this fall and “potentially much

more” through Americans for Prosperity and other fronts. That money, along with hundreds of millions more from other Wall Street and corporate titans, will prop up a Republican opponent who has so far failed to generate the levels of grassroots financial support the party’s candidates received in 2008. We’ve already seen how a single billionaire can keep a failed campaign on life support. Imagine a general election in which the voices and contributions of millions of people can be trumped by the bankrolls of a handful of moguls in a single hotel meeting room.

Unregulated, unaccountable corporations. Extremist elected officials who disdain the concept of a government serving the common good. Workers stripped of the ability to negotiate collectively for fair pay, working conditions and benefits. Hundreds of millions of corporate dollars drowning out the voices of working-class and middle-class people. Voters forced to jump over ever-higher obstacles to vote for candidates who represent them, assuming those candidates can even get on ballots. This is the Koch brothers’ dystopia. What they are defending is indefensible.

1 Percenters United

Adelson. Friess. Kovner. Simmons. Thiel. The breadth and power of the super PACs is due in large part to the power of billionaire backers like these men. Their money has given life to campaigns and candidates that might not have gotten far just on their ability to attract rank-and-file voters. The way these benefactors spread their considerable wealth around — a few hundred thousand dollars here, a million there — you could be forgiven for thinking it looks like they are betting on politics the way one might bet on horse races. In fact, Campaign for America’s Future co-director Robert Borosage compared super PACs to the Wall Street derivatives buyers. As they spread vast sums of money among their favored candidates and shift their loyalties between candidates, that makes it clear that these guys aren’t gamblers. They’re investors, which means they expect returns.

Their behavior has already lowered the bar for candidates who would rather run campaigns without the taint of shadowy, big-money donors. Their dollars have unleashed a tsunami of negative ads that all too often play fast and loose with the facts. It all is helping to erode public trust in our democracy. After the Citizens United decision, 79 percent of respondents to a survey for Common Cause and other groups believed that members of Congress are “controlled” by those who finance their campaigns. Just as

the excesses of Wall Street undermined faith in our economy, the excesses of super PACs are undermining the public’s faith in democracy.

What You Can Do

Petition the SEC to End Secret Campaign Donations

Add your voice to the thousands calling on the Securities and Exchange Commission to require all publicly traded corporations to disclose their campaign spending to the public. Today, corporate executives of publicly traded companies don’t have to tell the public, or even their shareholders, when they use corporate money to fund political campaigns. The Supreme Court’s majority opinion in *Citizens United* assumed a world in which informed citizens knew whose money was being used to influence an election. This SEC requirement is the bare minimum we should do to turn that assumption into a reality.

Get Your Member of Congress to Support the DISCLOSE Act

The DISCLOSE (Democracy is Strengthened by Casting Light on Spending in Elections) Act would require organizations involved in political campaigning to disclose the identity of their large donors, and to reveal their identities in any political ads they fund. It would also bar foreign corporations, government contractors and certain other corporate recipients of federal aid from making political donations. Predictably, a long list of corporate and right-wing interests are allied against the bill, from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to the American Conservative Union.

Help Build Support For A Constitutional Amendment

Corporations are not people, and money is not speech. What is obvious to all of us should be explicit in the United States Constitution. Organizations and concerned individuals around the country are laying the groundwork for a constitutional amendment this spring with a push for 100 resolutions by local and state governments supporting the overturning of *Citizens United*. You can join with such groups such as Move to Amend and Democracy Is For People to restore democracy to We, the People.

Stay informed on the Koch brothers and the effort to rein in the influence of money in politics at ourfuture.org/kochexposed.