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Grant Bosse: Obsession with the Koch brothers clouds the left

By GRANT BOSSE
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If you want to drive liberal activists nuts, mention the Koch brothers. If you want to really make their heads explode, say something nice about the Kochs.

David and Charles Koch own Koch Industries, the second largest privately-held company in the United States after Cargill, according to Forbes. The sprawling conglomerate grew out of the oil business but now runs companies doing everything from ranching and paper mills to finance and venture capital. Koch Industries employs 70,000 people in 60 countries.

David and Charlie Koch are also the most active and influential libertarians in the country. David Koch was the Libertarian candidate for vice president in 1980, but the brothers have since avoided party politics and concentrated on nurturing libertarian ideas. Charlie Koch helped found the Cato Institute, and the brothers are major donors for free-market think tanks across the country. The Koch Family Foundation also supports cancer research, The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the New York City Ballet. Those monsters!

Somehow the modern left has drawn itself deeper and deeper into a conspiracy theory that the Koch brothers are secretly controlling the entire Republican Party in an effort to bring about some sort of anarchist utopia. This despite thousands of articles about the Koch brothers' political activities and copious evidence that the Republican Party isn't that serious about sticking to the principles of limited government. It's the least effective, most well-publicized secret plan you've ever seen.

Liberals don't seem to have a problem with the billionaires who give them money. They aren't worried about George Soros corrupting democracy. And they certainly don't turn down grants from the Tides Foundation, the juggernaut behind every left-wing cause since the 1960s. Washington Examiner Executive Editor Mark Tapscott found that despite handing out nearly six times as much money as the Koch brothers, Tides has gotten just a fraction of the coverage from the New York Times, Washington Post and Common Cause.

Surfing through the dozens of websites obsessed with the Koch brothers is a deep dive down the rabbit hole. You see, the incredibly well-known facts that the Koch

brothers support places like the Heritage Foundation and Americans for Prosperity isn't enough. They don't believe that the Kochs just want lower taxes, smaller government and broader personal freedoms. They insist it's all part of a plot to get rid of government, make more money or somehow punish poor people.

In New Hampshire, a group called Granite State Progress is currently obsessed with the American Legislative Exchange Council, or ALEC.

ALEC invites members of state legislatures to go to conferences, eat hotel food, sit through PowerPoints, and share legislative ideas. They also publish model legislation based on successful bills. If the 50 states are laboratories of democracy, ALEC is where scientists compare their results. ALEC is the right-leaning counterpart to the National Conference of State Legislatures, which caters to state bureaucrats as well as elected officials. I attended three NCSL conferences during my two years working at the State House, one of which was quite informative.

Representatives should probably pay their own way to go to ALEC or NCSL events, but the information they provide is valuable. We should learn from what other states have tried. I've often argued against being early adopters. But the theory that the Koch brothers and evil corporations are using ALEC to take over the New Hampshire General Court is laughable.

Ironically, Granite State Progress is currently using its webpage to attack the "Tin Foil Hat Caucus" for opposing Agenda 21. As I wrote last week, Agenda 21 opponents have lost the track. But GSP's

main objection seems to be that they're wasting the tin foil on the wrong enemy. Their fixation with the Kochs and ALEC is just another flavor of conspiracy.

The anti-corporate paranoia that fuels Koch conspiracy theories came into bloom in the Occupy Wall Street Movement. Fortunately for Democrats, OWS fizzled well before Election Day because it highlighted radical liberalism at its worst. The insidious notion that corporations are out to get us has crept into our culture, and it's got to stop.

Of course, I could be so wrapped up the Kochs' web that I don't even know it. I asked Charlie Arlinghaus, president of the Josiah Bartlett Center – where I worked for the past four years and where I'm currently helping research New Hampshire budget issues – if he was part of the vast, secret Koch Empire.

"They don't give us money, but I wish they would," Arlinghaus responded. ■

(Grant Bosse is editor of New Hampshire Watchdog, an independent news site dedicated to New Hampshire public policy.)

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