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The recent protests in Madison, Wis. over newly-elected Gov. Scott Walker's proposed budget bill have taken a predictable but unfortunate turn in the past few days.

Instead of debating the pros and cons of the Governor's plan, some prefer to focus on the possible role in this dispute of two wealthy brothers from Kansas. This culminated earlier this week with a prank phone call to Walker by a blogger claiming to be a billionaire campaign donor.

According to this trumped-up non-scandal, because a group called Americans for Prosperity (AFP) is helping to organize support for Gov. Walker's budget bill and rally counter-protesters, and because AFP is funded in part by brothers Charles and David Koch, the support for Governor Walker is "Astroturf," i.e. fake—simply part of a nefarious scheme by the Koch brothers to enrich themselves using "front groups."

This is just the most recent assault on the Kochs, who are longtime libertarian philanthropists. They favor the cause of limited government and free markets, and give accordingly to groups like the Cato Institute, Americans for Prosperity, and Reason Foundation.

The freedom of the Koch brothers to contribute to causes and organizations that they believe in causes intense aggravation among many that don't share their views. The left-wing group Common Cause, for example, referred to the Koch brothers giving "...millions of dollars through shadowy organizations to advance a policy and political agenda..." as a "crisis" for democracy, and they actually protested a meeting hosted by the Kochs with like-minded philanthropists.

One of the central complaints about the Koch brothers' giving is that their funding will "drown out" the voices of "average citizens" and turn government into a plaything of the rich. By contributing generously to advance their views, opponents of the Koch's support for free market and limited government causes claim, the brothers are unfairly shaping America's political and public policy debate.

But a quick review of the last 100 years in America shows that rather than "drowning out" the

views and voices of non-wealthy Americans, support from the wealthy actually gives a voice to those who would otherwise be silenced.

Perhaps the most obvious example is the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Founded in 1909, the NAACP relied early in its existence on a handful of wealthy donors like John D. Rockefeller and Julius Rosenwald to fund its activities.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) likewise depended on a single donor, Albert DeSilver, to fund over half of their annual budget in their early years.

In more recent years, wealthy financier George Soros has contributed to support the creation of the Center for American Progress and other left-leaning groups, joined through the Democracy Alliance by scores of likeminded wealthy Americans.

And Common Cause, which regularly rails against wealthy people funding political causes and groups for fear that it might “distort” the process, was founded with generous support from the Rockefeller family. The Common Cause hysteria is even more amusing—and hypocritical—considering that the Rockefeller Foundation was funded with the money of two wealthy brothers who made their fortune through a Midwestern oil conglomerate. Sound familiar?

In each of these cases, and countless others, the voices of American citizens have been amplified, not “drowned out,” by the generous contributions of wealthy donors. The funds given by Charles and David Koch to Americans for Prosperity and like-minded groups have helped give a voice to citizens who share a belief in libertarian and conservative views, just as funding from George Soros helps give a voice to a liberal view.

Instead of condemning these and other supporters of causes and organizations, Americans should all be grateful that whatever their ideology, there are philanthropists willing to share their wealth to help citizens organize and speak out on politics and public policy.

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